

LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENTS' REPORT
TO THE 2023 HLPF

7th REPORT

#HLPF2023

#Listen2Cities

TOWARDS THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SDGs

From local action to global impact:
How localizing SDG 11 empowers communities for
sustainable transformation



Facilitated by:



2023 UCLG



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Abbreviations

A

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

ACoR: Asociația Comunelor din România (Association of Communes of Romania)

ACVN: Association of Cities of Viet Nam

ADCCN: Association of District Coordination Committees of Nepal

AECM: Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities

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

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

AIDS: acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

ALAL: Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania

ALAT: Association of Local Authorities of Tanzania

AL-LAs: Alianza eurolatinoamericana de cooperación entre ciudades (Euro-Latin American Cities Cooperation Alliance)

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

AMCA: Association of Mayors of the Central African Republic

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

AMR: Asociația Municipiilor din România (Romanian Municipalities Association)

ANAFRE: Associação Nacional de Freguesias (National Association of Parishes of Portugal)

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

ANMC: Association Nationale des Maires des Comores (National Association of Mayors of the Comoros)

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

APLA: Association of Palestinian Local Authorities

APW: Association des Provinces Wallonnes (Association of Walloon Provinces)

AR6: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report

ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ASPAC: Asia-Pacific

B

BALA: Botswana Association of Local Authorities

C

C40: C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group

CEMR: Council of European Municipalities and Regions

CIB: UCLG Capacity and Institution Building Working Group

CLLD: Community-Led Local Development

CLT: community land trust

COAMSS-OPAMSS: Consejo de Alcaldes del Área Metropolitana de San Salvador - Oficina de Planificación del Área Metropolitana de San Salvador (Council of Mayors of the San Salvador Metropolitan Area - Planning Office of the San Salvador Metropolitan Area)

CoG: Council of Governors of Kenya

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

COSLA: Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

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

CSO: civil society organization

CUF: Cités Unies France (United Cities France)

D

DLT: Deutscher Landkreistag (Association of German Cities)

DST: Deutscher Städtetag (German County Association)

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

E

EU: European Union

EUDEL: Euskadiko Udalen Elkarte (Association of Basque Municipalities)

EUR: euro (currency)

F

FAM: Federación Argentina de Municipios (Argentine Federation of Municipalities)

FAMSI: Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity

FCM: Federation of Canadian Municipalities

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

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

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

G

GDP: gross domestic product

GIZ: Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)

GSNUP: *Global State of National Urban Policy* report

GTF: Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments

H

HIC-HLRN: Habitat International Coalition's Housing and Land Rights Network

HIV: human immunodeficiency virus

HLPF: High-Level Political Forum

I

IALA: Icelandic Association of Local Authorities

ICLEI: ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

ICT: information and communication technology

INTERLACE: International Cooperation to Restore and Connect Urban Environments in Latin America and Europe Programme

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

ISO: International Organization for Standardization

ITI: Integrated Territorial Investments

IUDF: South Africa's Integrated Urban Development Framework

K

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

L

LBSNN: Landelijk Beraad Stedenbanden Nederland-Nicaragua (National Town-Twinning Council Netherlands-Nicaragua)

LDC: least developed country

LGA: local government association

LGAZ: Local Government Association of Zambia

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

LRG: local and regional government

M

MEWA: Middle East and West Asia

MMU: Marmara Municipalities Union

N

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

NGO: non-governmental organization

NLC: National League of Local Councils of Cambodia

NUA: New Urban Agenda

NUP: national urban policy

O

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

R

RALGA: Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities

RDP: regional development plan

S

SALAR: Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions

SCTM: Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

SDI: Shack/Slum Dwellers International

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

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

U

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

UCL: University College London

UCLG: United Cities and Local Governments

UCLG Africa: UCLG's regional section in Africa

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

US/USA: United States of America

USD: US dollar (currency)

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

V

VLR: Voluntary Local Review

VNG Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten (Association of Dutch Municipalities)

VNR: Voluntary National Review

VSR: Voluntary Subnational Review

VVP: Vereniging van de Vlaamse Provincies (Association of Flemish Provinces)

VVSG: Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten (Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities)

Z

ZMOS: Združenje mestnih občin Slovenije (Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia)

Joint Statement to the 2023 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development of the organized constituency of local and regional governments

I. Preamble

1) We, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF), gathering over 35 global city and regional networks worldwide, adopt the present political declaration, which captures our perspectives, insights and experiences as key elements for accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels. This declaration will feed into the 2023 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, which will focus on the mid-term review of the 2030 Agenda, and also feed into the second SDG Summit, to be convened under the auspices of the General Assembly on 18–19 September 2023.

2) We represent the diversity of united voices gathered within the self-organized constituency of local and regional governments from across the globe, representing the populations of metropolises, peripheral cities, intermediary cities, regions, rural areas and small municipalities, gathered as an organized constituency convened by the Global Taskforce's member local and regional governments and facilitated by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). We come as members of coalitions and platforms, regional networks, national consortiums and local, regional and international associations.

3) In this year of mid-term review of the SDGs, we renew our resolve to fulfil the targets, actions and commitment of the 2030 Agenda and the principles enshrined in it, including to leave no one behind. We welcome, in this sense, this HLPF as a milestone in the preparation for the SDG Summit and the theme of its general debate "Building momentum towards the 2023 SDG Summit: Transformation for accelerating implementation of the SDGs." We recognize the positive role of the HLPF as a central platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and a space with an unparalleled potential to become a worldwide reporting platform for all the actors working towards implementation, including local and regional governments.

4) We recognize the substantive role of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in the preparations for the thematic reviews of the 2023 HLPF, and in ensuring and coordinating the input of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) to the HLPF and other intergovernmental processes on sustainable development as underlined by the 2030 Agenda.

5) We appreciate the holding of the Local and Regional Governments Forum (LRGF), facilitated by UCLG on behalf of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments in collaboration with UN DESA, UN-Habitat, UNDP and Local2030, as part of the official programme of the HLPF.

6) We stress the importance of the LRGF since 2018 as a collective political forum to accelerate the SDGs and pledge to continue working with the organizing partners to further consolidate it as a space that embodies and strengthens the engagement of the constituency with the HLPF and the 2030 Agenda, and commit to ensure it is multistakeholder and multilevel.

7) We acknowledge the continued process of in-depth review of the SDGs, with this year's review of SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation; SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy; SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities; and SDG 17 on partnerships for the Goals. We understand these goals as articulators of the 2030 Agenda as a whole, building on the principle of interconnectedness between all the SDGs that provides a blueprint for a global partnership for the goals, overcoming silos in their implementation.

8) We reclaim SDG 11 as an indispensable accelerator of the 2030 Agenda as it represents the opportunity to place urban and territorial equality at the heart of all actions to achieve the SDGs from a human rights perspective. This is fundamental for ensuring that the trade-offs between the different SDGs are navigated and enables the urban dimension of the 2030 Agenda.

9) We call on the HLPF to reflect the bold recommendations of the UN Secretary General's report, *Our Com-*

mon Agenda, to create a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system within the United Nations, with the role of cities and other subnational authorities, in particular, being recognized.

10) We welcome the final report of the UN High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, *A Breakthrough for People and Planet*. It dedicates a full section to cities and regions, recommends a special status for them in the renewed multilateral system, and proposes that the Summit of the Future serves to identify relevant institutions and processes in which local and regional governments are offered a formal and permanent status, including in the area of sustainable development. We further welcome the recommendation contained in the report that localization should be an explicit part of national commitments on the 2030 Agenda.

11) As we reaffirm our commitment to actively contribute to the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda, we underline the central role for local and regional governments in advancing sustainable development, working in synergistic relationships across the rural-urban continuum. We note that an estimated 65% of SDG targets must be implemented in urban areas with engagement of local and regional governments.

12) As the SDGs are based on “reducing inequality within and among countries” and “achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls,” women’s rights, gender equality and women’s empowerment must be strategically at the centre of efforts for the implementation of all UN development frameworks.

13) We recall the Political Declaration of the 2019 SDG Summit, which calls for bolstering local action to accelerate implementation and empower and support local and regional governments and communities in pursuing the 2030 Agenda while recognizing their critical role in implementing and realizing the SDGs. We further appreciate the draft political declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit, which recognizes the important contribution of local and regional governments, among other constituencies of the UN, to the 2030 Agenda and to enhancing global, regional, national and local partnerships for sustainable development.

14) We further appreciate the 2019 *Global Sustainable Development Report* (GSDR) with its call for national governments to adapt “knowledge and technologies to specific local and regional contexts to maximize synergies between the Goals and pre-emptively accommodate emerging challenges beyond the 2030 horizon.” We welcome the efforts by the independent group of scientists in charge of the 2023 GSDR to extend consultations with the organized constituency of local and regional governments as part of the report drafting process.

15) Reaffirming our commitment to achieving the universal development agendas, understanding that they need to be realized in unison through enhanced cooperation on critical challenges and gaps in global governance, we look forward to the SDG Summit, the Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit as part of a same process towards a reinvigorated multilateral system in which all the global development agendas are acknowledged and implemented as one.



II. Voluntary Local Reviews and Voluntary Subnational Reviews as policy tools for localizing transformation

16) In recalling the Political Declaration of the 2019 SDG Summit, we reiterate that local and regional governments and their networks have been at the forefront of transformative action to localize the universal development agendas. In recent years, monitoring and reporting processes related to this action have evolved, becoming tools for policy development and co-creation.

17) The total number of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) available worldwide has been growing exponentially, with over 240 reports representing a total of 579 million inhabitants. Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) have also been experiencing a rapid increase with 37 reports produced since 2020, representing 170,000 local governments and 1.4 billion inhabitants. In turn, Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) progressively mention these subnational reporting efforts, and some countries include local government associations in the drafting of the reports – although recognition is still not systematic enough. Overall, there has been a slight increase in local and regional governments’ participation in Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes since the first VNRs were published in 2016: LRG involvement was medium to high in 32% of countries that produced one in 2016, compared to 39% in 2023. However, progress is not steady and marked by important regional disparities.

18) With VLRs and VSRs proving to have positive impacts on local governance – by increasing transparency, accountability and ownership of the SDGs – and on influencing national dialogues and mechanisms for SDG implementation and VNRs, we reiterate our commitment to fostering the development of VLRs and VSRs and the strengthening of national coordination mechanisms, with a focus on raising awareness on the importance of localizing the SDGs.

19) We pledge to support the work of the Local2030 Coalition; the preparation of VLRs and VSRs; and the mobi-

lization of local and regional governments, their associations and other local stakeholders for the integration of plans, policies and programmes at the local and subnational scales.

20) We call for the acknowledgement of VLR and VSR processes as policy tools integral to fostering achievement of the universal development agendas and creating more traction for the Goals. We further call for enhanced involvement of local and regional governments and their associations in national reporting processes, in particular through VNRs, the promotion of the development of VLRs and VSRs and the full recognition of local and subnational monitoring and reporting processes in official HLPF deliberations.

III. A next generation of local public service provision for SDG localization

21) Within the context of the in-depth SDG 11 review, we stress the direct interconnection between this goal's localization and quality and equitable local public service provision as well as the 2030 Agenda as a whole. Local public service provision is a precondition for the achievement of the SDGs and the backbone of our cities, towns and territories, ensuring that all communities, regardless of administrative status or any other condition, can live healthy, fulfilling and sustainable lives, through the provision of water and sanitation, housing, food security, education and health care, among other services.

22) In line with the theme of this HLPF on "Accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels," the dramatic social effects of the pandemic catalyzed the need for the next generation of public service provision, one that puts care for our communities and the planet at the centre.

23) Ahead of the SDG Summit, and the 2023 High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage, we call to include local and regional governments in the decisions around healthcare at all levels. Health-related governance needs to be a catalyst to the rest of the goals, with local provision of health as the cornerstone of local public service delivery.

24) This next generation of public service provision is based on reinforced social protection systems, where care services no longer fall on women, racialized persons and/or migrant persons. Where accessibility is at the heart of rights-based policy-making and planning. Where access to the internet and technology for all is considered a baseline. Where mental health care and social counselling for people of all ages is available, and where the upskilling of people is prioritized to empower communities and foster human creativity.

25) We stress the need for this next generation of public service provision to be recognized, fostered, supported and mainstreamed at all levels, including by renewing the understanding of the commons as both resources and social practices that interconnect the local, national, regional and global spheres of action. We further stress the need to acknowledge the key role that local and re-

gional public service provision plays in caring for people and the planet and protecting the commons, as well as its direct link to the implementation of SDG 11, the 2030 Agenda as a whole and all the other development agendas. We further stress the need for this next generation of public service provision to be strengthened through a new way of financing development.

26) We call for including local and regional governments that have demonstrated the power of solidarity-based policy in decision-making at all levels and in the management of complex emergencies, where local and regional governments have proven to be at the forefront of guaranteeing rights and equitable access to local public service provision.

IV. A new social contract for equality and democracy

27) Acknowledging the first of the 12 key proposals contained in *Our Common Agenda*, "leave no one behind," we are committed to put at the centre of public action at all levels the urgent need to repair the impact of the pandemic among those who already had less opportunities. Workers and persons living in informality, mostly migrant and displaced communities, together with women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons and other structurally marginalized groups, have been among the hardest hit.

28) In order to address inequalities and their multidimensional roots, we commit to place at the core of our efforts the development of a rights-centred, values-driven new social contract based on justice and local democracy, which recognizes the needs and aspirations of the historically marginalized and fosters gender equality and the participation of local feminist leaders in decision-making as core to democracy. We further commit to work towards ensuring that all people live healthy and fulfilling lives as the key to developing demographic resilience and facing the overlapping crises.

29) We pledge to work in partnership with national governments and other stakeholders to retool the current system to mainstream a right-based approach to safe and affordable housing for all people, everywhere, acknowledging the value of common goods such as water, healthcare and sanitation, and placing care for our populations at the centre, reducing gaps in income and service access while enhancing the political participation of all.

30) For this new social contract to effectively address current inequalities to leave no one behind, we call for building on the voices and experiences of local communities and enhancing the participation and representation of women and girls and any other disadvantaged group, addressing accessibility barriers and the discrimination facing structurally marginalized groups to ensure all voices are at the decision-making table and to rebuild trust.

31) We further call for recognizing the right to water and sanitation as a global common good to be collectively protected through local to global actions; promoting ade-

quate housing and equitable access to all common goods as a human right, including accelerating the upgrading of informal settlements; and paying closer attention to the needs and aspirations of communities regardless of administrative status.

32) We recognize that culture (intercultural dialogue, heritage in all forms, cultural diversity, creativity, transmission of knowledge) remains undervalued and underutilized in the push for SDG progress. We will act to analyze the role of culture as a global public good, including greater consideration of culture's role in supporting SDG achievement now, and analyze a potential stand-alone Culture Goal post-2030.

V. A regenerated relationship with nature

33) Echoing the theme of this HLPF of driving transformation for accelerated implementation of the SDGs, we recall the pressing need to acknowledge that effective change at scale will only be possible by rethinking our relationship with nature and our ecosystems, adopting a rights-based approach through a re-naturing lens to put care for our planet and social justice at the core of our joint action.

34) We commit to contribute to this transformation through localization processes that are nature-positive, bringing to consideration big and intermediary cities, small towns, regions, territories and rural areas and reinforcing urban-rural linkages and integrating proximity, biodiversity preservation and resilience approaches in policy-making and planning. This approach will, in turn, promote meaningful change in our patterns of transport, work, habitat, culture, health, higher education and consumption that are central to preserving our planet, developing urban and territorial quality of life and harnessing inclusive innovation and value creation while addressing climate change adaptation.

35) We further pledge, as the closest level of government to communities and as the protectors of territories' biodiversity, to embody a vision for a better relationship with nature. We call for concrete articulations with the official Member-States deliberations on loss and damages, taking place at COP28 this year, where we have put climate justice between the Global North and South at the core.

36) We call for the recognition of the key role of local and regional governments, cities and territories in the protection and promotion of local and global commons that contribute to regenerating livelihoods and protecting our planet and ecosystems, and their direct link to the achievement of SDG 11, all SDGs and other international development agendas, such as the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

37) We further call for supporting and fostering the transformation of our consumption and production patterns towards models grounded in proximity and circularity that are sustainable, accessible, inclusive and environmentally sound and that create ecological, cultural, economic and social value for communities. We also call for including local and regional governments in global discussions as they have consistently shown their innovative

action in addressing biodiversity loss, building resilience and granting access to water and sanitation and to affordable and clean energy, including through local public service provision.

VI. A revitalized multilateral system, high-impact partnerships and a new financial system

38) As we welcome the final report of the UN High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, *A Breakthrough for People and Planet*, whose six transformative shifts stress the importance of rebuilding trust in multilateralism and of broad representation of all spheres of government, we reaffirm our commitment to a revitalized multilateral system that is inclusive, networked and anchored in human rights for all. Such a renewed multilateral system must build on localization, local democracy and strengthened local self-government as a means to ensure peace, unity and trust in our institutions and to build a new social contract, with co-responsibility and active participation of all citizens at the centre of global governance.

39) We commit to partnering in the building of a multilateral system characterized by multistakeholder engagement, multilevel governance and decentralized sharing of power and responsibilities, in which all actors are invited to the decision-making table, including through a stronger, more inclusive HLPF that institutionalizes dialogue with local and regional governments, and by renewing the notion of partnerships based on intergovernmental coordination as well as cooperation among key actors and sectors to foster innovation and achieve the impact needed to close the gap in SDG implementation.

40) We commit to work hand in hand with Member States and other stakeholders to identify and address the principal challenges local and regional governments face in working to achieve the SDGs and other global agendas, including weak capacities, limited support and financial transfers from national governments, limited local interest and/or awareness and limited coordination with other levels of government.

41) We urge the HLPF and the ECOSOC Presidency to take note of the growing consensus calling for greater presence of local and regional governments in multilateral governance processes for the achievement of the SDGs and the global development agendas, and to continue supporting the engagement of local and regional governments in light of the SDG Summit, the Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit.

VII. A new economic and financial system to rethink development

42) We call for a profound change in the values that underpin development; we need to rethink it through the lenses of redistribution, decentralization, reappropriation of the commons and redefinition of care. There is an urgent need to transform our current economic and financial systems to achieve just, inclusive and sustainable societies. Furthermore, the current economic interdependence weakens subsistence economies by threatening food sovereignty, among others, but also impedes local resilience during crises and therefore calls for a re-territorialisation of our economies and a more resilient and sustainable production to fulfil everyone's basic needs.

43) Building on the call from *Our Common Agenda*, which highlights how a true global economy needs adequately resourced public sectors for the delivery of global public goods, we recall the critical importance of promoting a more distributive economic system as well as fairer financial and commercial practices to protect and improve local service provision, address inequalities and develop green and social infrastructure throughout territories.

44) We further call for rethinking financing and revenue streams to achieve the global agendas through a renewed fiscal architecture by directly targeting financing mechanisms empowering local and regional governments to strengthen their own resources and to localize and accelerate the SDGs.

VIII. Our expectations

45) We request Member States to acknowledge the commitment and pledges of the constituency of local and regional governments through this declaration and to support the processes mentioned in the above sections.

46) We request Member States to strengthen dialogue with and involvement of local and regional governments in the preparation of HLPFs.

47) Fundamental, transformative and urgent change at all levels and by all stakeholders is needed to overcome the crises and obstacles facing our world. Only by fostering co-creation and working together can we achieve the 2030 Agenda and build a more just, peaceful and sustainable world for all.



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

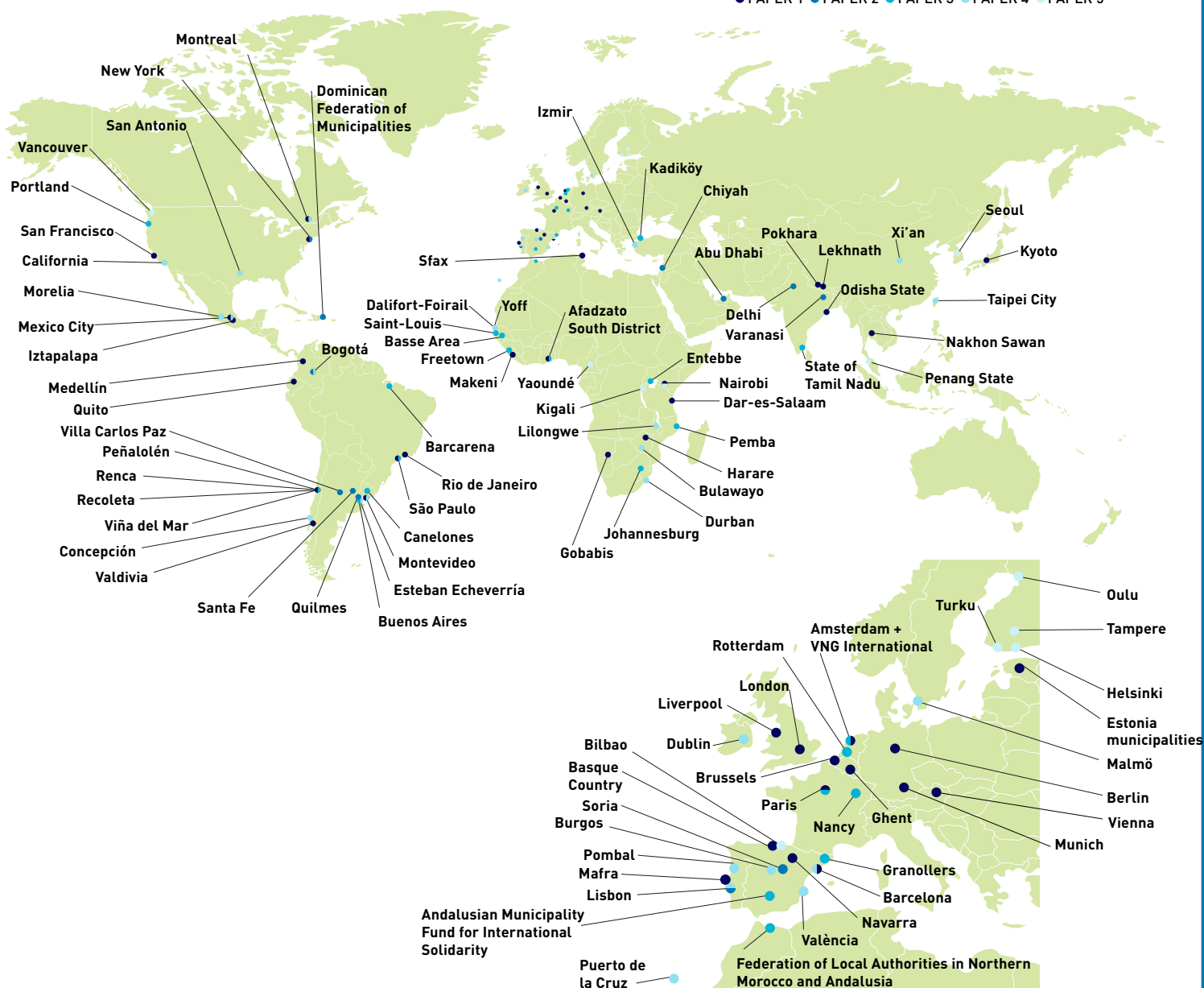


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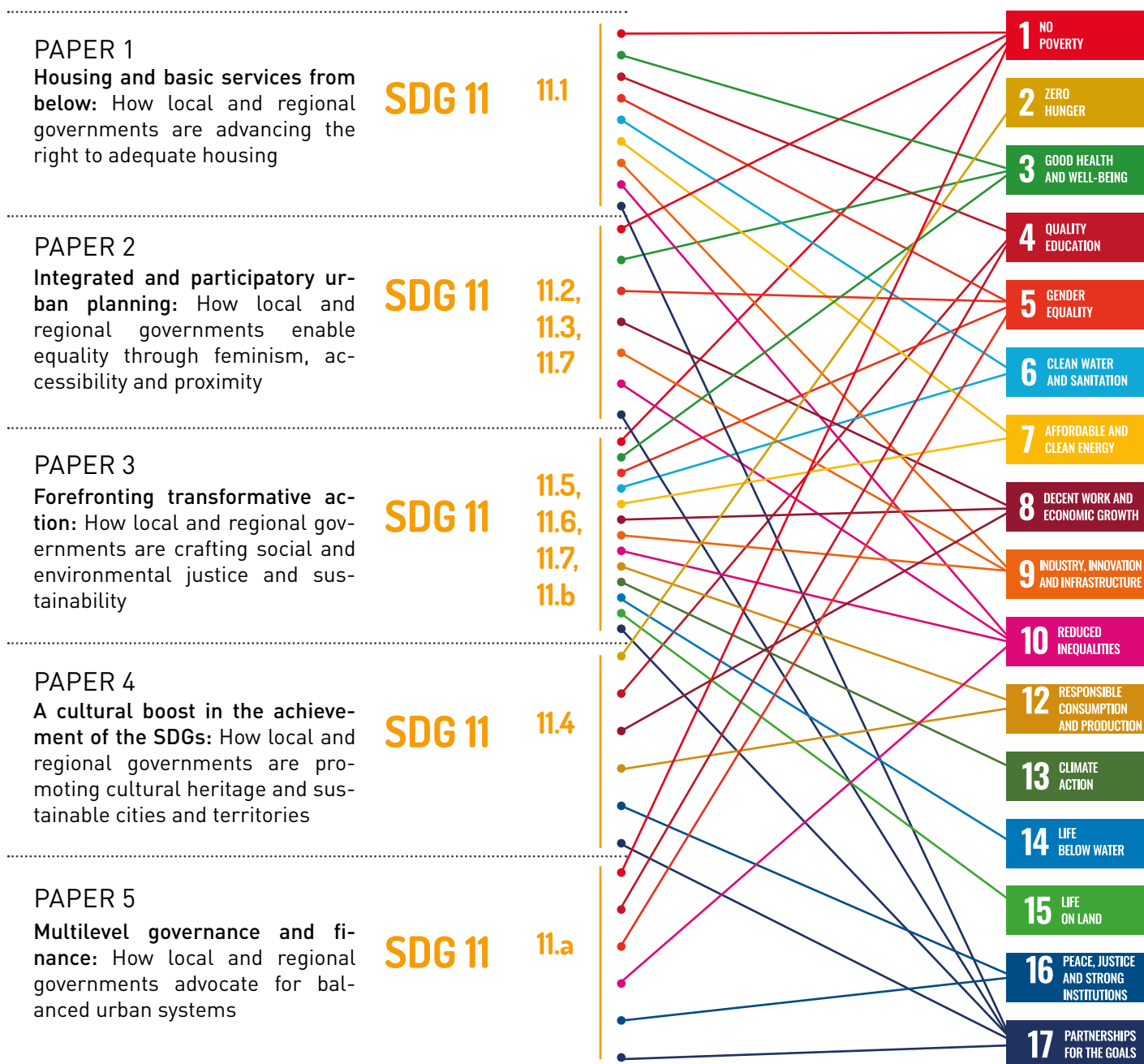
1.4 bn people
170,000 LRGs



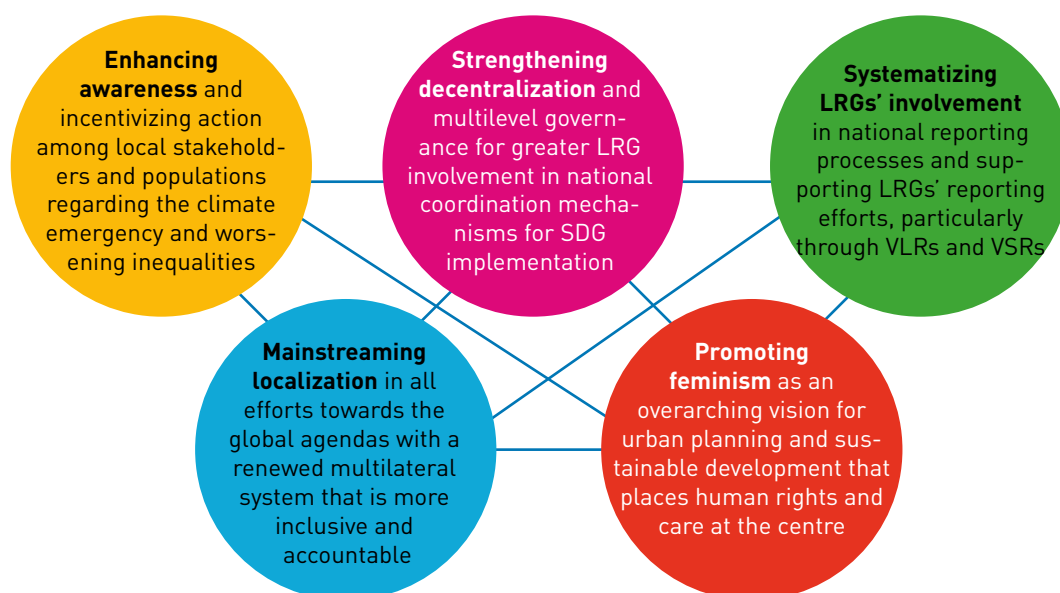
● PAPER 1 ● PAPER 2 ● PAPER 3 ● PAPER 4 ● PAPER 5



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



Ways forward for SDG localization



1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The COVID-19 pandemic, along with the growing repercussions of climate change and geopolitical conflicts, has laid bare the existing vulnerabilities of our global systems while unearthing new ones. **The world stands at a turning point in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).** According to the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's 2023 progress report on the SDGs, only 12% of the roughly 140 targets with data are on track, while 30% have seen no movement or regressed below the baseline set in 2015.¹ The situation for sustainable development worldwide is critical: as of 2022, 2.2 billion people lack safe drinking water and 1.9 billion lack basic hygiene services. According to estimates, 575 million people will still be living in extreme poverty by 2030. Current food prices are persistently higher in more countries than in the 2015–2019 period,² and over 345 million people face severe food insecurity in 2023, twice the number in 2020.³ Moreover, 1.6 billion people live in inadequate housing conditions without access to basic services or sanitation, while grappling with unaffordable housing costs.⁴ Data from UN Women shows that 45% of women have been exposed directly or indirectly to at least one form of violence against women since the pandemic began.⁵

This year's edition of the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is a decisive milestone, a stepping stone towards renewing the multilateral system to ensure that it remains fit for addressing these complex challenges by enabling a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to sustainable development. **In the face of the current complex and interconnected crises and emergencies, local and regional governments (LRGs) remain at the forefront of public response.** In particular, since the COVID-19 outbreak, many LRGs worldwide have led a transformation in the way public services are understood, delivered and governed. They have recognized some public services, such as mental health services, public spaces and care, as "new essentials" and emphasized the importance of adaptability, responsiveness, citizen participation and prioritization of structurally discriminated populations' needs.⁶ This is a critical shift that needs to be put at the forefront of this year's HLPF, in particular as this forum will review the progress towards SDG 11: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable." **SDG 11 sheds a particularly glaring light on the critical role that LRGs, in collaboration with communities and partners, play in achieving the 2030 Agenda as this goal focuses not just on cities, but rather takes a place-based approach to sustainable development.**

Moreover, centring SDG 11 allows for placing urban and

territorial equality at the heart of all actions to achieve the SDGs. This is fundamental for ensuring that the trade-offs involved in achieving the SDGs are navigated from a human rights perspective. SDG 11 proves to be essential for realizing all other SDGs, particularly those under review this year, all of which are inextricably tied to the sustainable development of human settlements: SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation; SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy; SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure; and SDG 17 on partnerships, which are essential to adopt a whole-of-society approach to urban development.

The present report focuses on providing the most comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the state of SDG localization worldwide. It places particular emphasis on how LRGs are contributing to the achievement of SDG 11 and, through it, to the SDGs under review and all other SDGs in the 2030 Agenda. To do so, this report provides an analysis of elements that are key to enabling localization for the 39 countries presenting their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) this year, together with an overview of innovative and bold local actions by LRGs in territories across the world.⁷ Moreover, with respect to the analysis of SDG 11 in particular, this report contains five papers that illustrate how LRGs, often in partnership with their local communities, are promoting pathways to meet the different SDG 11 targets and, through them, accelerate the shifts required to co-construct more sustainable and just futures. These papers include pathways related to the different instruments that LRGs leverage to advance populations' right to adequate housing and environmental justice, as well as pathways related to how they are adopting feminist approaches to planning, promoting a broader approach to culture as a pillar of sustainable development and advocating for effective multilevel governance.

BOX 1.1

Localization⁸

SDG localization encompasses the definition, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies by LRGs to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Localization is, therefore, the process of implementing the SDGs in different territories, taking into account their specific contexts from an inclusive perspective. The process for localizing the SDGs includes setting goals and determining targets and means of implementation, as well as using various indicators to track progress towards the realization of the goals.

BOX 1.2

Pathways for SDG localization⁹

LRGs act through different institutional mechanisms to galvanize policies, programmes, planning, finance, organizational tools, processes, arrangements and local multistakeholder partnerships, which allow them to find ways to advance towards making cities and territories more sustainable. These pathways reflect trajectories for change. Creating pathways that promote more equitable futures involves taking strategic decisions that include both material and discursive practices. Pathways help define the collective criteria required for decision-making and working towards a common vision. The focus on pathways acknowledges that SDG localization requires collectively constructing alternative channels for action.

In general terms, SDG localization has not evolved steadily since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. On the one hand, LRGs' commitment to localizing the SDGs has consistently been on the rise, as shown by the increasing number of subnational reporting processes undertaken by LRGs and their associations and the increasingly impactful global advocacy of the international municipalist movement. Between 2020 and 2022, 26 local government associations (LGAs) conducted a Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR), which analyzes the state of SDG localization throughout their countries. Through VSRs, LGAs also strengthen dialogue with their national governments and member LRGs. This year, eleven new VSRs were developed by the LGAs of Cambodia, Chile, Comoros, Ecuador, Flanders (Belgium), Iceland, Kenya, Romania, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia. With the addition of these new VSRs, a total of 37 VSRs have been developed since 2020, representing the local and territorial realities of approximately 1.4 billion people and 170,000 LRGs. Meanwhile, at the local level, more than 170 LRGs from 44 countries have conducted over 240 Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) since 2016, with some of them producing several VLRs to keep track of the evolution of localization over time. These VLRs represent 579 million people.¹⁰

On the other hand, notwithstanding regional disparities, LRGs' involvement in national reporting processes and national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation has been rising too slowly to achieve the SDGs. From 2018 to 2022, their involvement in these processes and mechanisms increased from 43% to 48% and from 26% to 34%, respectively. This report's findings show how this trend has changed this year. LRGs have been involved in VNR preparation in 39% of reporting countries whose VNRs had been published at the time of writing this report, a decrease in comparison to the previous period. In addition, LRGs have participated in the coordination mechanisms of 35% of the countries that had made their VNRs available at the time of writing, a very slight increase from the previous period. However, this figure masks large regional differences, whereby participation increases concentrate in Europe and Africa.

While ensuring LRGs' meaningful participation in both reporting processes and coordination mechanisms is

increasingly acknowledged as a necessary condition for accelerating SDG implementation, the extent to which such participation is possible is determined by national contexts for self-governance. Table 1.1 below provides a glance of the different subnational governance arrangements in the 39 reporting countries. As seen in the table, the local realities of the reporting countries vary greatly: there is no local self-government in five countries, while the number of existing regional, intermediate and municipal levels of government ranges from one regional level of government in Saint Kitts and Nevis to over 35,000 LRGs in France, including regional, intermediate and municipal levels.



Table 1.1 Local self-government in the countries reporting to the HLPF in 2023¹¹

Country	Type of state	Regional/ state level	Intermedi- ate level	Municipal level	Total LRGs
Bahrain ¹²	Unitary	-	-	4	4
Belgium	Federal	6	10	581	597
Barbados*	Unitary	-	-	-	-
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Federal	3	10	141	154
Brunei Darussalam*	Unitary	-	-	-	-
Burkina Faso	Unitary	13	-	351	364
Cambodia ¹³	Unitary	25	-	208	233
Canada	Federal	13	-	3,905	3,918
Central African Republic	Unitary	7	-	175	182
Comoros ¹⁴	Unitary	3	-	54	57
Chile	Unitary	16	-	345	361
Croatia	Unitary	21	-	555	576
Democratic Republic of the Congo ¹⁵	Quasi-federal	26	-	-	26
Fiji ¹⁶	Unitary	-	-	-	-
France	Unitary	18	101	34,955	35,074
Guyana	Unitary	10	-	146	156
Iceland	Unitary	-	-	64	64
Ireland	Unitary	-	-	31	31
Kuwait*	Unitary	-	-	-	-
Liechtenstein	Unitary	-	-	11	11
Lithuania	Unitary	-	-	60	60
Maldives	Unitary	21	-	188	209
Mongolia	Unitary	22	339	1,710	2,071
Poland	Unitary	16	380	2,477	2,873
Portugal ¹⁷	Unitary	2	-	308	310
Romania	Unitary	42	-	2,965	3,007
Rwanda ¹⁸	Unitary	-	-	28	28
Saudi Arabia ¹⁹	Unitary	-	-	285	285
Singapore*	Unitary	-	-	-	-
Slovakia	Unitary	8	-	2,927	2,935
Saint Kitts and Nevis ²⁰	Federal	1	-	-	1
Syrian Arab Republic ²¹	Unitary	14	-	1,341	1,354
Tajikistan ²²	Unitary	4	68	368	440
Timor-Leste ²³	Unitary	-	-	13	13
Turkmenistan*	Unitary	-	-	-	-
United Republic of Tanzania ²⁴	Unitary	-	-	195	174
Uzbekistan ²⁵	Unitary	14	294	9,168	9,476
Viet Nam	Unitary	63	707	10,614	11,384
Zambia	Unitary	-	-	116	116

*There is no elected local government in five countries: Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore and Turkmenistan. In Barbados, local governance is delivered through appointed councillors. For administrative purposes, Barbados is divided into 11 parishes plus the capital city of Bridgetown. These are further divided into 30 electoral districts or constituencies, each of which has a constituency council. In Brunei Darussalam, local administration takes place through the four districts and three municipal boards responsible for urban areas. In Kuwait, there are six appointed governorates at the regional level. There is no local government in Singapore. There are, however, five community development councils that provide local administration. Turkmenistan is administratively divided into five provinces, 50 districts, 24 towns, 76 villages and 553 rural councils. *Source: own compilation*

The different number of LRGs in each country reflects the different subnational governance arrangements, which are in turn linked to each country's decentralization process. **In general, while decentralization based on the principle of subsidiarity empowers LRGs to deliver pub-**

lic services effectively and to shape local sustainable development policies, limited resources can constrain their SDG localization efforts, impacting global progress and jeopardizing the 2030 Agenda's achievement.

Beyond legal recognition, effective decentralization entails the actual distribution of power, capacities and resources based on the principle of subsidiarity. In this line, policy coherence, based on effective multilevel governance, is critical to leverage synergies between the actions of different levels of government. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has had differentiated impacts on LRGs and the extent to which institutional environments enable local action. The pandemic's impacts have varied widely across the world's regions, further reinforcing pre-existing regional inequalities in the pace of SDG localization.²⁶ Albeit to different degrees across regions, the general trend is that three years after the COVID-19 outbreak, there is still a great need for innovation in local finance to enable financing the public investments that are critical for advancing urban and territorial equality and thus fulfilling the global commitments. These necessary investments include not only basic public services but also the commons and new essentials.²⁷

Taken together, these factors yield institutional environments that may either foster or challenge actions aimed at SDG localization. **The extent to which the institutional environments of this year's reporting countries foster or hinder SDG localization varies widely across countries and regions.** More specific information on how these institutional environments particularly affect the extent to which LRGs do or do not participate in national reporting processes and SDG coordination mechanisms can be found in Section 2. Country-specific analyses of the institutional environments and modalities of LRG involvement in SDG implementation of all previous reporting countries can be found in the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Country Profiles on SDG localization (see Box 1.3). The updated profiles of the 39 countries reporting this year will be available in July 2024.²⁸

BOX 1.3

Country Profiles on SDG localization

The profiles provide information at national and local levels for all the countries that have produced VNRs during the 2016–2022 period. They present a brief analysis of each country's national strategies, coordination mechanisms and reporting processes related to the 2030 Agenda. They also analyze LRGs' involvement and initiatives and highlight areas of progress and challenges to localize the SDGs. These country profiles share the goal of this report: to recognize LRGs' leading role in the implementation of the SDGs.

This report's structure follows that suggested by the UN *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews*.²⁹ Following the joint statement to the HLPF of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF), the highlights and this introduction, Section 2 analyzes the institutional framework for SDG localization. It focuses on LRGs' involvement in national reporting processes and coordination mechanisms and highlights bold initiatives advanced by LRGs, LGAs and global LRG networks to advance SDG localization around the world. Section 3 examines how LRGs and LGAs are advancing towards the achievement of SDG 11 (and through it, the 2030 Agenda and other global development agendas). Lastly, Section 4 presents the conclusion, highlighting the key challenges to overcome and bringing to the fore concrete recommendations to accelerate progress towards the localization of the SDGs.

This report combines desktop research and surveys as the main methods of data collection. **By comparing locally and nationally sourced data, and building on the cumulative analysis of the past six editions of the *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* report, this seventh edition puts forward a robust understanding of the current status of SDG localization, identifying trends and tracking its evolution since 2017.**

Section 2 of the report, which focuses on the policy and enabling environment for SDG localization in this year's reporting countries, draws mainly on the analysis of the GTF/UCLG 2023 Survey on SDG localization (see Box 1.4). It also draws on a comprehensive analysis of the 39 VNRs³⁰ presented this year at the HLPF, as well as of all the VLRs and VSRs published to date. A particular focus is placed on the VLRs and VSRs produced between 2022 and 2023. Desktop research for this part of the report also draws on the *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews* ([Volume 1](#) and [Volume 2](#)) developed in partnership between UCLG and UN-Habitat, as well as the *Guidelines for Voluntary Subnational Reviews* produced by UCLG and the UCLG Capacity and Institution Building Working Group (CIB). These reviews provide crucial insights into progress on SDG localization in various cities and countries. Complementary information comes from the Country Profiles on SDG localization, based on the VNRs published in 2016–2022; past survey responses; and research publications.



BOX 1.4

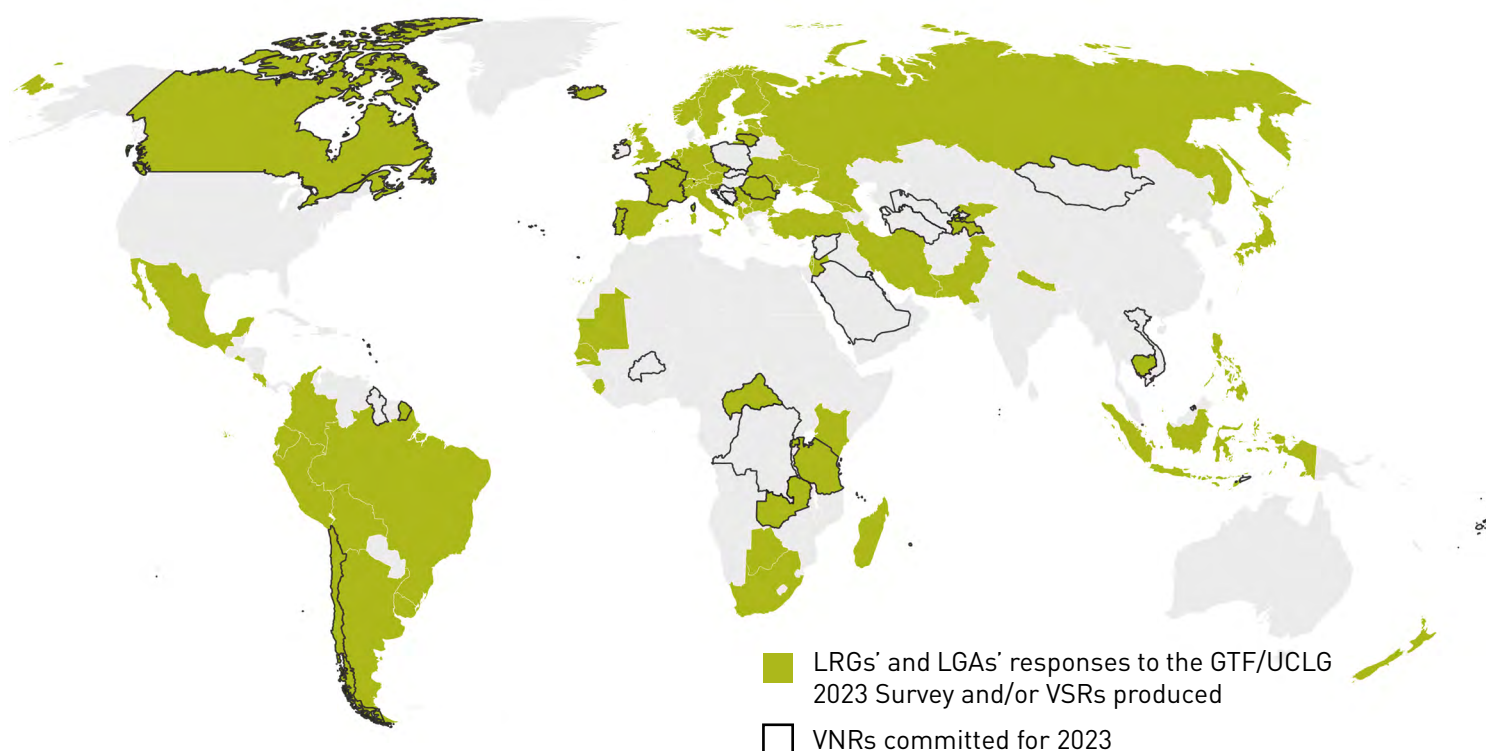
Survey responses collected by the GTF/UCLG in 2023

To prepare this year's edition of the *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* report, the GTF/UCLG conducted a survey, ultimately collecting 199 responses from around the world. The responses came from 70 different countries, 13 of which are reporting to the HLPF this year. Of the total responses, 56 correspond to LGAs (12 from reporting countries), 135 to LRGs (including from four reporting countries not covered by LGA responses) and eight to other partner institutions (including, amongst others, the Local Government Division of Bangladesh, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, the Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities and NALAS, the subregional network from South-East Europe). Most LRG/national LGA re-

sponses came from Europe (113), followed by Latin America (24), Africa (17), the Middle East and West Asia (15), Asia-Pacific (11), Eurasia (10) and North America and the Caribbean (1).

The distribution of responses from LGAs and LRGs varied across regions. In Africa, responses were balanced: seven came from LGAs and 10 from LRGs. In Asia-Pacific, there were four responses from LGAs and seven from LRGs. In Eurasia, most responses came from Russian LRGs (8 out of 10), while no LGA sent in a response. In Europe, 40 LGAs responded as well as 73 LRGs, including 47 from Portugal. In Latin America, the majority of the responses came from LRGs (21), particularly from Argentina (6). In the Middle East and West Asia, where two responses from LGAs and 13 from LRGs were received, most responses came from Turkish local authorities (9). In North America and the Caribbean, the only response came from an LRG.

Figure 1.1 LRGs' and LGAs' responses to the GTF/UCLG 2023 Survey and/or VSRs produced, and VNRs committed for 2023



Source: own compilation

For its part, Section 3 and its five thematic papers address key dimensions of SDG 11. Concretely, Paper 1 explores local pathways being advanced to promote adequate housing and basic services, supporting SDG target 11.1. Paper 2 showcases feminist, often explicitly intersectional, approaches in planning policies to promote inclusivity, accessibility and proximity, addressing SDG targets 11.2, 11.3 and 11.7. Paper 3 discusses LRGs' pathways to environmental justice, relating to SDG targets 11.5, 11.6, 11.7 and 11.b. Paper 4 proposes pathways for including culture and heritage as key levers for fulfilling the SDGs, aligning with SDG target 11.4. Finally, Paper 5 highlights the need for more balanced multilevel governance to achieve SDG target 11.a.

The five papers are substantiated by data gathered from the GTF/UCLG 2023 Survey, and they are further enriched by the specific consultation processes that each paper has undergone. These have included surveys, interviews and written feedback from both LRGs and LGAs and have brought together the complementary expertise of the different members of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments and partners of the network. More information about the participants in the concrete consultation processes for each thematic paper can be found in Section 3. The five papers can also be found as stand-alone publications.

2. POLICY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR SDG LOCALIZATION

2.1 STRENGTHENING OWNERSHIP: LRGs' PARTICIPATION IN VNR PREPARATION

Between 2016 and 2023, 188 countries will have submitted a total of 331 VNRs. In 2023, 39 countries have committed to presenting a VNR: two are doing so for the first time, 36 for the second time and one for the third time.

Table 2.1.1 highlights that since 2016, LRGs' overall involvement in national reporting processes has slightly increased: this year, medium to high levels of LRG involvement were observed in 39% of the countries that produced a VNR. In comparison, between 2016 and 2022, only 38% of the countries that produced a VNR demonstrated this level of involvement. However, progress is not steady, as last year 48% of the VNRs were produced through active LRG participation. Moreover, VNRs with moderate LRG involvement are fewer this year than in previous years. In the years to come, greater coordination and inclusion efforts in national monitoring and reporting mechanisms will be very much needed to enable truly transformative processes that harness SDG localization innovation and initiatives from the bottom up.

A region-by-region analysis reveals important differences in LRGs' degree of involvement in VNR preparation and contrasting changes in LRGs' participation. Europe shows the strongest LRG involvement: in 2023, 70% of reporting countries involved LRGs to a high or medium degree in VNR preparation, compared to 64% in the 2016–2022 period. Some polarization is nevertheless identified, as 30% of the European VNRs did not involve LRGs. In addition, progress is not steady and has, for example, regressed compared to 88% in 2022. In Africa, medium to high levels of involvement were observed in 43% of the countries that prepared a VNR this year, compared to 32% of the countries that presented VNRs between 2016 and 2022. On the contrary, trends in Asia-Pacific (ASPAC) are quite worrying this year. LRG involvement has strongly decreased: of the six reporting countries of the region, in some of them involvement is only moderate or limited, while in others there is no LRG participation. The four countries from the Middle East and West Asia (MEWA) region, as well as Chile in Latin America, boost regional results this year. Meanwhile, in Eurasia and North America, LRG participation in the three VNRs analyzed this year is still much more limited.

Table 2.1.1 LRG participation in VNR preparation by regions in 2023 and 2016–2022

2023	Total VNRs	Medium to high degree of LRG participation		Moderate degree of LRG participation		Limited or no LRG participation		No elected LRGs/no information	
Region	VNRs per region	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%
World	31	12	39%	5	16%	10	32%	4	13%
Africa	7	3	43%	3	43%	1	14%	0	0%
ASPAC	6	0	0%	2	33%	2	33%	2	33%
Eurasia	2	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
Europe	10	7	70%	0	0%	3	30%	0	0%
Latin America	1	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
MEWA	4	1	25%	0	0%	3	75%	0	0%
North America	1	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%

2016–2022 average	Total VNRs	Medium to high degree of LRG participation		Moderate degree of LRG participation		Limited or no LRG participation		No elected LRGs/no information	
		No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%
Region	VNRs per region								
World	291	112	38%	64	22%	89	31%	20	7%
Africa	87	28	32%	19	22%	31	36%	3	3%
ASPAC	52	17	33%	17	33%	11	21%	7	13%
Eurasia	12	2	17%	3	25%	6	50%	1	8%
Europe	66	42	64%	9	14%	14	21%	1	2%
Latin America	42	16	38%	12	29%	14	33%	0	0%
MEWA	20	2	10%	4	20%	9	45%	5	25%
North America	12	5	42%	0	0%	4	33%	3	25%

Source: own compilation

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

This year, LRGs and LGAs had a medium to high degree of involvement in reporting processes in 39% of the countries that produced VNRs.¹ This means that LGAs directly contributed by drafting a section of the VNR and/or that representatives of LGAs and LRGs were part of the national reporting unit, actively participating throughout the VNR preparation process. This group also includes countries that held regular working sessions or consultations with LRGs to discuss the content of the reports.

In **Iceland**, the Sustainable Iceland platform, which consists of a National Sustainability Council and a government steering committee, led the VNR process. Representatives of the regional municipal federations and of the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities (IALA), respectively, participate in these structures. The reporting process also benefitted from a collaborative SDG platform previously established between the national government and LRGs. Moreover, IALA, which also prepared a [VSR](#) this year, was formally asked to contribute to the VNR by drafting a section on the localization of the SDGs. Similarly, in **Belgium**, LRGs and their umbrella associations – the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VMSG), the Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia (UVCW), Brulocalis, the Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP) and the Association of Walloon Provinces (APW) – contributed to the VNR by drafting a chapter on SDG localization. In **Zambia**, the Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ) was a member of the multisectoral technical committee and was invited to write a section of the VNR. LRGs participated in the VNR through a survey, consultations and dedicated town hall meetings. In **Lithuania**, the Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania (ALAL) contributed to the overall content of the report by participating in the Monitoring Working Group, marking a step forward. This group was responsible for monitoring and approving the VNR. LRGs, represented by ALAL,

contributed beyond the specific parts related to their activities, which had been the case in previous years. The Association of Communes of **Romania** (ACoR) was invited by the Department of Sustainable Development to participate in the working groups for the VNR process, and LRGs were engaged in an active dialogue and collaboration throughout the drafting period. In the same vein, in **Poland**, regional representatives participated in the working group established for the VNR process. In this group, they were able to discuss and describe their challenges and achievements. In **France**, LRGs were involved in the ad hoc working group established by the National Council for Development and International Solidarity as part of the reporting process leading to the VNR. They were also invited to a national conference to discuss the VNR's content. However, the VNR missed an opportunity to reference the [note](#) co-produced by the French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AFCCRE), Cités Unies France (CUF) and Comité 21, with the support of UCLG, which identifies good practices by LRGs.

Portugal has been making increasing efforts to assess progress towards the SDGs from a subnational perspective. During the VNR process, collaborative working sessions were conducted with the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities (ANMP), the National Association of Parishes (ANAFRE) and the five regional coordination and development commissions. The two autonomous regions of Portugal were also involved through a survey. These initiatives aimed to identify good practices and evaluate LRGs' contribution to the implementation of the SDGs. In the **Central African Republic**, LRGs participated in the VNR. Consultations were held with local authorities, civil society and other stakeholders in the municipality of Bambari to collect data and prepare a local report on SDG implementation, which was included as a box in the VNR. The city of Bangui and other LRGs also participated in the national coordination process in charge of developing the VNR. In **Chile**, the Chilean Association of Municipalities (ACHM), which prepared a [VSR](#), actively contributed to the VNR. Local authorities also had the opportunity to share their good practices through a survey. In the **Syrian Arab Republic**, the VNR process involved the establishment of supervisory committees in five governorates to prepare sustainable development

reports. Local authorities were engaged in the working group for sustainable development. In **Burkina Faso**, the VNR resulted from a collaborative effort that involved many stakeholders, including LRGs and LGAs.



2.1.2 Countries with moderate LRG involvement in the VNR process

In 16% of the countries that presented a VNR in 2023, LRGs and LGAs had a moderate degree of participation in the VNR process. In this group, LRGs often participated through surveys or ad hoc consultations, but their contributions were not always adequately taken into account. The Association of Local Authorities of **Tanzania**, which also prepared a [VSR](#) this year, highlighted its contribution to the VNR, although it recognizes that its participation was not yet sufficient. Mwanza City, Kibaha Town and Emboreet Village produced VLRs to contribute to the VNR.² In the **Comoros**, although representatives of the three islands and the National Association of Mayors of the Comoros (ANMC) were part of the National Council in charge of the VNR, the [VSR](#) developed by the LGA this year expresses regret over LRGs' limited participation. In

Rwanda, according to the [VSR](#) produced by the Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA), although the majority of LRGs were unaware of the VNR process, their participation has increased since 2019. Over 20% of LRGs have been involved through surveys or meetings, giving them the opportunity to contribute to the process. In addition, some LRGs were contacted by the national government or submitted activity reports. In **Timor-Leste**, as part of the reporting process, subnational consultations were held with representatives from municipalities, as well as local leaders and communities. In the **Maldives**, representatives from city, atoll and island councils took part in consultations to prepare the VNR. However, the final VNR does not include references to LRGs' actions or best practices.

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

Finally, in 32% of the countries reporting to the HLPF this year, there has been very little or no LRG involvement in the VNRs. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Fiji**, LRGs are not mentioned among the many stakeholders that participated in the countries' respective VNR-related consultations. Similarly, the VNRs of **Ireland** and **Bahrain** incorporate contributions from different stakeholder groups but did not involve LRGs. Lastly, there is no evidence of any LRG involvement in the VNR processes of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, **Tajikistan**, **Mongolia**, **Saudi Arabia** and **Slovakia**.

2.1.4 How are LRGs and localization mentioned in the VNRs?

In addition to the concrete participation of LRGs and LGAs in national reporting processes, **the way in which VNRs mention LRGs and SDG localization says a great deal about the recognition of LRGs' role**. References vary, both in number and in how they recognize (or do not) the leading role of LRGs in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Many VNRs highlight the contributions of LRGs and/or multilevel coordination for the SDGs in their countries in specific sections. **Zambia's** VNR contains a section written by LGAZ that provides an overview of LRGs' efforts to contribute to SDG implementation. Similarly, IALA contributed to **Iceland's** VNR by drafting a section that highlights LRGs' actions to create local ownership and localize the SDGs. Meanwhile, umbrella organizations of LRGs wrote a section on the "implementation of the SDGs at the local level" for **Belgium's** VNR. **Portugal's** VNR emphasizes good practices by, progress of and remaining challenges for LRGs in a section titled "Pursuit of the SDGs at Regional and Local Levels."

The VNR of the **Central African Republic** includes a subsection on the outcomes of consultations conducted dur-

ing the reporting process in the municipality of Bambari. **Slovakia** dedicated a subsection of its VNR to Bratislava and its commitment to sustainability. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Saudi Arabia** have introduced a subsection on SDG localization in their VNRs. One of the conclusions of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo's** VNR is that promoting SDG localization is a means to attain tangible progress.

Aligning reporting initiatives conducted at local and national levels is also crucial as a lever to foster better coordination and multilevel governance in favour of SDG localization. In VNRs, references to VSRs and VLRs are key signs of political commitment to joint action. This year, the VSRs of **Iceland** and **Flanders (Belgium)** are mentioned in the countries' respective VNRs. In **Romania's** VNR, a subsection is dedicated to the **VSR**, which introduces a summary of the process and its main findings. In the case of **Zambia's** VNR, the chapter prepared by the LGA is presented as a **VSR**, evidencing how local authorities are localizing the SDGs, with the aim of strengthening LRGs' initiatives and visibility in sustainable development. **Chile's** VNR briefly states that it includes information shared by AChM and mentions its **VSR**. In contrast, the VNRs of the **Comoros** and **Rwanda** do not mention the VSRs prepared this year by the **ANMC** and **RALGA**, respectively.³ **Fiji's** VNR mentions the Suva City Council's VLR, currently being developed, in a subsection titled "Local SDG Action Begins with Voluntary Local Reviews." **Slovakia** mentions Bratislava's forthcoming VLR, while **Saudi Arabia** has dedicated a subsection to Al Madinah's recent VLR. **Portugal's** VNR includes a box on the commitment of the municipality of Mafra and its VLR.

Overall, the VNRs of **Belgium, Ireland, Poland, Portugal** and **Zambia** include a very significant number of references to LRGs. Indeed, many countries frequently reference LRGs in their VNRs, including **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Chile, Democratic Republic of the Congo, France, Iceland, Lithuania, the Maldives, Mongolia, Romania, Slovakia, Tajikistan** and **Timor-Leste**. Other countries make a few limited references to them, such as the **Central African Republic, the Comoros, Fiji, Kuwait, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia** and the **Syrian Arab Republic**. **Bahrain's** report does not mention LRGs at all.

Some countries' reports reference decentralization, including the **Maldives, Timor-Leste** and the **Syrian Arab Republic**. In some cases, such as in the VNRs of **Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Ireland** and **Kuwait**, LRGs are mentioned from a top-down perspective, in reference to local-level initiatives led by national governments. On the contrary, the VNRs of **Belgium** and **Chile** effectively showcase numerous examples of locally led initiatives, while **Bosnia and Herzegovina's** and **France's** reports dedicate boxes to the municipalities of Bijeljina and Strasbourg, respectively, highlighting their innovative initiatives.

Fiji's VNR considers localization a fundamental approach to addressing sustainability challenges. Similarly, **Saudi Arabia's** report recognizes the localization process as essential for building capacity on the SDGs among LRGs and facilitating solutions tailored to the challenges faced at the local level. The VNRs of **Burkina Faso** and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** mention that in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030, actions should be anchored at the local level, while the **Comoros's** VNR highlights SDG localization as an objective in the coming years. Overall, there is still a need for progress: although many VNRs regularly mention LRGs, a large number do not or provide too few concrete examples showcasing LRG initiatives.

As highlighted in this section, an increasing number of countries are integrating LRGs and LGAs in the reporting processes leading to their VNRs, showing a growing recognition of these entities' role in SDG implementation, monitoring and reporting. However, the unequal involvement of LRGs in VNRs across countries reflects disparities in national governments' acknowledgement of the critical role that LRGs can play. It also hampers tracking progress of the impact of various core local policies and of SDG localization on the ground. **It is urgent for LRGs to have a clearer role and voice in national reporting processes related to their responsibilities in localizing the SDGs.**



2.2 LRG PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

As the world approaches the halfway mark towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, the VNRs submitted to the 2023 HLPF reaffirm the global commitment of national governments to the SDGs. The following section provides an overview of the extent to which reporting countries have adopted the 2030 Agenda as a framework for sustainable development. It offers a schematic analysis of the types of strategic development documents adopted by reporting countries and the coordination mechanisms that have been set up for SDG implementation, focusing on the extent to which LRGs are included in both these strategies and mechanisms. This general overview is complemented by highlighting examples from certain countries where LRG involvement in strategies and mechanisms can be of inspiration for other countries. In its final part, this section provides a statistical regional analysis of LRG involvement in coordination mechanisms in reporting countries, examining the evolution of this involvement since 2016.

2.2.1 National strategies for SDG implementation in reporting countries

As in previous years, most reporting countries have aligned their long-term development strategies with the SDGs. These strategies include national visions, such as Brunei's Wawasan Brunei 2035, Kuwait's Vision 2035, Mongolia's Vision 2050, Rwanda's Vision 2050, Slovakia's Vision and Development Strategy 2030 and Zambia's Vision 2030. They also include national sustainable development plans, such as Cambodia's National Strategic Development Plan (aligned with the 18 Cambodian SDGs), the Comoros' Emerging Comoros Plan for 2030, Croatia's National Development Strategy 2030, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's National Strategic Development Plan 2019–2023, Lithuania's National Progress Plan 2021–2030, Portugal's 2030 Strategy, Tajikistan's National Development Strategy 2030 and Timor-Leste's Strategic Development Plan 2011–2030.

Some countries' SDG-aligned long-term development strategies prioritize dimensions of sustainable development that are particularly relevant to their national contexts. Examples of this include the **Central African Republic's** National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan 2016–2021, which was extended to 2023; **Singapore's** Green Plan 2030; and the **Syrian Arab Republic's** National Development Programme for Post-War Syria, adopted in 2020.

A few reporting countries are still developing national development strategies aligned with the SDGs. For instance, **Iceland** will deliver a national strategy for sustainable development to Parliament before the end of 2023, while the **Maldives'** eighth National Development Plan (2019–2028) has not been adopted yet. However, this does not necessarily translate into less of an enabling institutional environment for SDG localization: in **Iceland**, although the national strategy has not yet been adopted, important efforts have been made to promote SDG localization, as will be discussed further below.

In a considerable proportion of reporting countries, long-term development strategies are complemented by shorter-term development plans, roadmaps or action plans. For instance, in **Bahrain, Kuwait, Romania, Rwanda** and **Zambia**, development plans complement the countries' long-term visions. **Bahrain's** Economic Vision 2030 is coupled with four-year development plans broken down into six pillars. In turn, these are associated with targeted plans aligned with the SDGs. In **Kuwait**, two national development plans have already been implemented, and the country is currently implementing a third development plan focused on the private sector. In **Romania**, the National Action Plan 2030 guides the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030. **Rwanda's** Vision 2050 is complemented by the National Strategy for Transformation 2017–2024; LRGs were consulted for this strategy's development. Meanwhile, in **Zambia**, eight medium-term development plans have been implemented to operationalize its Vision 2030. For its part, **France** has adopted the Roadmap for the 2030 Agenda.

Some countries are also making efforts to mainstream monitoring tools within their plans and actions to implement the SDGs. In **Romania**, the National Action Plan sets 291 national indicators for sustainable development. In **Ireland**, the National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022–2024 sets out five strategic objectives and 51 actions with 119 individual measures.

It is also common for countries to align mid-term and sectoral development plans and other kinds of strategic development documents with the SDGs. Examples include the following: **Central African Republic's** National Energy Policy Document; **Cambodia's** Rectangular Strategy – Phase IV, National Social Protection Policy Framework, economic recovery programmes, Digital Government Policy 2022–2035 and Integrated National Financing Framework; **Fiji's** Ministry of Health and Medical Services' Strategic Plan 2020–2025; **Iceland's** Climate Action Plan for 2018–2030 and National Plan on the Circular Economy 2021–2025; and the **Maldives'** Strategic Action Plan 2019–2023 and National Resilience and Recovery Plan.

In several countries, the SDGs have been aligned with high-level planning instruments, as is the case in **Portugal**. Accelerating recovery also remains a key priority in aligning national plans with SDG implementation. For example, **Bahrain's** 2023–2026 Government Plan, titled “From Recovery to Sustainability,” aligns recovery actions with the SDGs.

Importantly for SDG localization, national strategies for SDG implementation are also being developed at the subnational level in several reporting countries, including instances of aligning local and regional plans and budgets with the SDGs. Such efforts promote more comprehensive multilevel governance frameworks. In some countries, these efforts are more nationally led, while in others, the stronger push comes from LRGs. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** adopted its SDG Framework after presenting its 2019 VNR, and key development strategies at all levels of government are being brought into line with it. Moreover, local governments’ development strategies are being developed based on the formulation of three-year and annual work plans by institutions at all levels of government. **Poland** has set out a comprehensive framework for SDG implementation with eight integrated sectoral strategies and a National Strategy for Regional Development 2030. Meanwhile, in the **Syrian Arab Republic**, the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment initiated a project to prepare a decentralized national plan and develop local development plans for each governorate. **Viet Nam** has mainstreamed the SDGs into its National Action Plan, socio-economic development strategies and sectoral policies at the national and local levels. In **Belgium**, the five-year Federal Plan for Sustainable Development was adopted at the national level. Simultaneously, the country’s different regions have adopted regional development commitments aligned with the SDGs. Namely, the Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development was adopted, with Vision 2050 as its long-term compass and Vizier 2030 as its focus. The Walloon Government adopted the Second Walloon Sustainable Development Strategy in 2016. The Regional Development Concept (Ostbelgien Leben 2025) serves as an SDG implementation framework in the German-speaking community, while the Brussels-Capital Region has adopted its Regional Strategic Plan for 2040.

2.2.2 National coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation in reporting countries

In most countries, different mechanisms – often led by the highest level of national government – have been set up to ensure coordination for 2030 Agenda implementation and reporting. In some countries, SDG implementation is overseen at the presidential or the prime ministerial level. In several, these high-level national coordination mechanisms only include national-level actors. For example, **Brunei's** prime minister oversees the Special National Coordination Committee on SDGs, while his counterpart in **Burkina Faso** leads the National Steering Committee of the National Plan for Social and Economic Development. **Tajikistan's** president oversees the National Development Council. All three bodies from these countries are multistakeholder committees comprising senior officials from various ministries and agencies. A similar process is underway in **Timor-Leste**, where the Agency of National Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in the Prime Minister’s Office has initiated a medium-term plan to streamline governmental programmes and enhance coordination across government entities.

In other cases, oversight remains at the highest national government level, while also integrating other stakeholders beyond national government. In **Uzbekistan**, the deputy prime minister heads the Interagency Coordination Council. The **Comoros** has put in place a coordination mechanism comprising a High Strategic Council chaired by the head of State, a technical steering committee for supervision and coordination, a technical secretariat and thematic dialogue groups. This council brings together stakeholders such as the ministries, civil society and the private sector. Local authorities are represented by the three governors of the islands and the president of the national LGA.

In other reporting countries, responsibility for coordinating SDG implementation falls on one or several ministries. This case includes countries in which mechanisms include only national-level actors, as well as other countries where efforts have been made to include other stakeholders. In **Mongolia**, the National Committee on Sustainable Development in charge of steering sustainable development between 2016 and 2022 was dissolved and its functions transferred to the Ministry of Economy and Development. In **Poland**, the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology coordinates 2030 Agenda implementation at the national level, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for the external dimension of development cooperation. In **Turkmenistan**, the Ministry of Finance and Economy is in charge of coordinating SDG implementation. The case of **Bahrain** deserves special attention, as a Ministry of Sustainable Development has been set up to coordinate efforts to achieve sustainable development. The Ministry of Sustainable Development of **Saint Kitts and Nevis** is charged



with coordinating the National Sustainable Development Coordinating Committee, with the participation of representatives from the private sector and civil society organizations (CSOs).

In **Cambodia**, the Ministry of Planning oversees the National Council for Sustainable Development. Indeed, ministries of planning often oversee national-level coordination mechanisms. Examples include the **Democratic Republic of the Congo's** Congolese Observatory for Sustainable Development, the **Maldives'** SDG Coordination Division, **Kuwait's** National Sustainable Development Committee, **Saudi Arabia's** Council of Economic and Development Affairs and **Zambia's** National Development Coordinating Committee. These mechanisms are often composed of representatives from key government agencies and different stakeholders, including the private sector, academia, CSOs and international organizations, usually structured in working groups.

In some countries, national coordination mechanisms have been created based on the explicit establishment of cooperation between different ministries. These mechanisms are sometimes chaired at the prime ministerial level. In **Belgium**, national coordination takes place at the Interministerial Conference on Sustainable Development. This conference resumed activities in 2022 after five years and brings together the members of the governments responsible for sustainable development at the federal, regional and community levels. In the **Central African Republic**, an interministerial committee, coordinated by the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and International Cooperation, has been set up to include focal points in the various sectoral ministries, Parliament, universities, CSOs, the private sector, research centres and religious denominations. In **Portugal**, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers is the high-level internal coordination body for supervision and monitoring, and the Foreign Affairs Ministry leads external coordination. The Interministerial Commission on Foreign Policy is responsible for coordinating implementation between the domestic and external areas, as well as heading monitoring and reporting work. The Interministerial Committee on Cooperation ensures coordination and the incorporation of 2030 Agenda principles in development cooperation. **Romania** and **Ireland** created, respectively, the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development and the SDG Senior Officials Group. Both include all ministries and are chaired by the prime minister.

Frequently, coordination mechanisms combine high-level national representation with technical working groups. Creating dialogue mechanisms at the sub-national level, in which LRGs participate, is also common. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, a council has been set up to bring together representatives from multiple government ministries and departments with strategic development planning expert networks in working groups to facilitate knowledge exchange for SDG implementation. Nearly one third of all LRGs have participated in a working group through regional meetings. For its part, in **Burkina Faso**, 14 frameworks for following up on SDG implementation have been set up, including 13 regional dialogue frameworks. In **France**, the General Commission for Sustainable Development, which is part of the Ministry of Ecological Transition, coordinates national

SDG implementation via the Regional Directorates for the Environment, Planning and Housing. Some LRGs participate once or twice a year in the regional consultations organized by the directorates. In **Portugal**, the Economic and Social Council includes representatives from the two governments of the autonomous regions, the local authorities and CSOs.

Less frequently, countries repurpose other coordination mechanisms or working groups and assign them SDG implementation competences. This is the case of **Fiji's** Maritime Affairs Coordinating Committee and the National Ocean Policy Steering Committee. In this country, the technical groups established to draft the VNR will be repurposed to focus on collaboration and SDG implementation.

Some countries are mainstreaming the SDGs within their budget allocation processes, such as **Belgium**, the **Maldives**, **Timor-Leste**, the **Syrian Arab Republic** and **Zambia**. In **Belgium**, all federal government members have to indicate how they will contribute to the SDGs in the public notes they must submit to Parliament for the preparation of annual budgets. In the **Maldives**, an Integrated National Financing Framework articulating an SDG financing strategy on climate change and the social sector has been formulated.

Other countries are leveraging their national planning systems to facilitate SDG implementation across levels of government. For instance, **Portugal** is increasingly incorporating the 2030 Agenda into municipal planning and budgeting instruments, including strategic plans, activity plans and council budgets, and promoting the creation of municipal technical teams responsible for SDG promotion. At the regional level, five regional coordination and development commissions have been established. They envisage developing SDG-oriented intercouncil regional development plans. Additionally, in **Timor-Leste**, the mid-term planning process is facilitating SDG localization, and a Municipal Public Financial Management law currently under discussion will require municipalities to align their development plans with the SDGs.

A few countries do not have dedicated coordination mechanisms, such as **Mongolia**, where multistakeholder coordination takes place through consultations, limiting potential for fostering SDG localization and, thus, SDG achievement. **In other countries, forums for engaging multiple stakeholders are being set up**, such as **Ireland's** SDG National Stakeholder Forum, convened for the first time in January 2023.

In a few cases, the coordination mechanisms initially established were not functioning and restructuring is underway. This is the case of **Lithuania**, where the Ministry of the Environment has absorbed the functions of the National Commission for Sustainable Development established in 2017. Although there is currently no effective interinstitutional coordination mechanism nor LRG participation, LRGs do conduct individual localization activities with the support of their national association.

2.2.3 Regional analysis of LRGs' role in national strategies and coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation

In some countries, the established SDG governance frameworks enable LRG involvement and, thus, SDG localization. These frameworks include national coordination mechanisms and LRGs' involvement in national development strategies, as discussed above. Oftentimes, robust LRG involvement is due to a wider understanding by the national government of LRGs as key actors with a decisive role to play in achieving the SDGs. This section analyzes LRG involvement in national strategies and coordination mechanisms by region. It also highlights some inspiring cases of countries that consider LRGs to be key actors in SDG achievement and that support and encourage localization.

Overall, this year's analysis reveals that LRG involvement in national coordination mechanisms is highest in report-

ing countries from Europe, followed by those from Africa. Although Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and West Asia, Asia-Pacific, Eurasia and North America show varying degrees of LRG involvement, these results cannot be considered statistically significant: the number of reporting countries whose VNRs had been published at the time of writing is too low for the sample to be representative. All in all, it is important to consider that the following data are based on the 31 VNRs available at the time of writing (out of the 39 VNRs committed for 2023). Moreover, the concrete selection of countries that commit to report each year largely influences regional figures.

Figure 2.2.1 LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms in 2023 and 2016–2022

2023	Total VNRs	Medium to high degree of LRG participation		Moderate degree of LRG participation		No LRG participation		No elected LRGs/no information	
Region	VNRs per region	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%
World	31	11	35%	2	6%	14	45%	4	13%
Africa	7	4	57%	0	0%	3	43%	0	0%
ASPAC	6	0	0%	0	0%	4	67%	2	33%
Eurasia	2	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
Europe	10	7	70%	1	10%	2	20%	0	0%
Latin America	1	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%
MEWA	4	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%	0	0%
North America	1	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%

2016–2022 average	Total VNRs	Medium to high degree of LRG participation		Moderate degree of LRG participation		No LRG participation		No elected LRGs/no information	
Region	VNRs per region	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%
World	291	85	29%	64	22%	122	42%	20	7%
Africa	87	22	25%	20	23%	42	48%	3	3%
ASPAC	52	11	21%	9	17%	25	48%	7	13%
Eurasia	12	1	8%	3	25%	7	58%	1	8%
Europe	66	36	55%	11	17%	18	27%	1	2%
Latin America	42	10	24%	17	40%	15	36%	0	0%
MEWA	20	2	10%	2	10%	11	55%	5	25%
North America	12	3	25%	2	17%	4	33%	3	25%

Source: own compilation

In Europe, the proportion of national coordination mechanisms with a medium to high degree of LRG participation has increased from 55% in 2016–2022 to 70% in 2023. This corresponds to seven of the 10 countries whose 2023 VNRs were available at the time of writing this report. In the remaining three European countries, LRGs had a moderate degree of participation in one reporting country, while they did not participate at all in the other two reporting countries.

Some inspiring cases include **Iceland** and **Romania**, where LRGs are acknowledged as key partners for achieving the SDGs: they are partaking in the revision of national strategies, dedicated cooperation platforms have been created and LRG representatives have been invited as part of the national delegations to the HLPF. In **Iceland** specifically, the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities (IALA) reports close cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office, which supervises the implementation of the SDGs. Since 2018, the association has been represented in the National Steering Group for the SDGs. The collaboration has been further strengthened by the 2020 establishment of a special SDG cooperation platform, which supervised publication of an SDG toolbox for municipalities in 2021. Additionally, the Sustainable Iceland platform was set up in 2022 to formulate a new national development strategy aligned with the SDGs. The platform includes the National Sustainability Council, a multistakeholder coordination mechanism that includes all government ministers, representatives from each party in Parliament, the business sector, social partners, CSOs and one representative of each of the eight regional municipal federations.

In **Romania**, the governance structure that has been set up includes multilevel decision-making and cross-sectoral collaboration. To promote policy coherence and policy continuity in the implementation of the national strategy, 22 hubs have been established in all ministries, with specialists who do not change with electoral cycles. A number of Romanian municipalities have made use of the Integrated Urban Development Strategies planning tool to produce local development plans aligned with the national vision. Romania piloted a programme to train "sustainable development experts" for public administration, which contributes to professionalizing 2030 Agenda expertise within government. Furthermore, the Consultative Council for Sustainable Development, which includes experts from academia, research organizations and CSOs, provides guidance on implementation and monitoring to the national coordination mechanism: the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development. A private initiative, Coalition Sustainable Romania, provides a dialogue platform to bring together representatives from more than 145 organizations, large companies, small and medium-sized enterprises and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Since 2022, the Romanian Code of Sustainability has promoted the involvement of the whole society and the whole of government in the journey towards sustainable development.

Other European reporting countries that acknowledge LRGs as indispensable partners are Slovakia, Portugal and Poland. In **Slovakia**, national coordination is led by the Government Council of the Slovak Republic for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, chaired by

the Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization. This council includes key line ministers as well as representatives from other relevant State institutions, regional administrations, cities and municipalities, employers, trade unions, academia, NGOs and relevant government advisory bodies. One strategic objective outlined in the country's vision is to promote integrated regional and territorial development and infrastructure, while the methodology for the Programme of Economic and Social Development prepared by LRGs integrates the 2030 Agenda at the local level. The VNR highlights how the capital city of Bratislava is preparing its first VLR, pointing to the need to encourage other cities to do so as well.

LRGs in **Portugal** are recognized by the national government for their particular importance in localizing the SDGs. As specified above, LRGs take part in strategic planning as well as multilevel implementation of the SDGs through a whole-of-government approach. The VNR devotes a chapter to SDG implementation at the regional and local levels, emphasizing local ownership of the SDGs. In multiple sections, it showcases LRGs' active involvement in planning for national strategies. National strategies have emphasized the importance of local implementation, evidenced by the creation of a section of municipalities for the SDGs, which currently has 79 members, within the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities (ANMP).

In **Poland**, the Joint Commission of Government and Local Self-Government ensures institutional dialogue between central and regional and local authorities. Commission members jointly define regional and local development priorities. Moreover, the 2020 amendment to the Act on the Principles of Development Policy introduced new forms of cooperation between the national government and LRGs through programme contracts, sectoral contracts and territorial agreements. As mentioned above, most regional governments have prepared strategies aligned with the medium-term national development strategy through 2030, while municipalities have the option of implementing development strategies independently or jointly with other municipalities.

In Africa, the percentage of reporting countries with a medium to high degree of LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms has increased from 25% in 2016–2022 to 57% in 2023. Meanwhile, the percentage of reporting countries with no LRG participation slightly decreased from 48% in 2016–2022 to 43% in 2023. Although only seven reporting countries have published VNRs as of the time of writing, these figures appear to indicate a positive trend in the region.

Zambia is an inspiring case. The country acknowledges LRGs as catalysts for national development and [an avenue for increased local democracy](#), given that LRGs enable communities' participation in local decision-making processes. LRGs were consulted for the formulation of the Eighth National Development Plan, and they are now undertaking integrated district development plans to localize the national plan. In addition, reforms were made in 2020 to establish a governance framework based on a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Adopting the National Planning and Budgeting Act, as

well as establishing provincial-, district- and ward-level development coordinating committees throughout the country, has anchored the National Development Plan by outlining a process for the involvement of State and non-State actors in the planning and monitoring of SDG implementation at each subnational level.

In the **Central African Republic** and the **United Republic of Tanzania**, LRG involvement is relatively strong, albeit at a consultative level. In the latter, a 2020 revision of the national decentralization framework has contributed to the President's Office on Regional Administration and Local Government regularly consulting LRGs and their national association on SDG monitoring and implementation matters. By improving the Opportunities and Obstacles to Development participation tool and the communal assemblies, the government aims to reflect communities' development aspirations in council plans and budgeting. The tool has been disseminated in all 26 regions and 184 municipalities. In **Rwanda**, the development of the Vision 2050 and the national development strategy included large consultations with LRGs. LRGs also participated in evaluating their achievements through the National Leadership Retreat and the National Dialogues, which take place annually. A quarterly forum between LRGs and the national government, chaired by the prime minister, is also held. During it, both levels of government discuss progress on different areas of national strategy implementation. The post-2024 national strategy vows to further strengthen LRG involvement.

In Latin America, only the Chilean VNR was available at the time of writing. The VNR indicates moderate involvement of LRGs in the coordination mechanism. With LRGs' participation, **Chile** recently adopted the National Strategy for Sustainable Development. The country's National Council for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which includes representatives from five ministries, includes a technical secretariat; the National 2030 Agenda Network; social, economic and environmental working groups; and a sectoral technical group on indicators. Chile's VNR acknowledges the challenges regarding decentralization and the participation of regional governments and municipalities in the SDG implementation process.

At the time of writing this report, the remaining regions showed limited or no LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms. In Asia-Pacific, 67% of the six countries with published VNRs had limited or no LRG participation. The remaining 33% have no elected LRGs. In the Middle East and West Asia, there was no LRG participation in any of the four reporting countries with VNRs available at the time of writing. In Eurasia, there was limited or no LRG participation in one of the two reporting countries, while the other has no elected LRGs. The only reporting country from North America from which a VNR was available at the time of writing does not have elected LRGs.



2.3 LRG ACTIONS FOR SDG LOCALIZATION

LGAs and LRGs have led determined efforts to localize the 2030 Agenda in their territories. Some have also mainstreamed the values of the SDGs in their decentralized cooperation projects. All these actions demonstrate broadly the local commitment to achieve more just, inclusive and sustainable territories.

This subsection offers an overview of the efforts made by LGAs and LRGs in the different world regions towards SDG localization. First, it reviews the VLRs produced so far by region, in addition to thoroughly analyzing the situation in the countries where VSRs have been produced: Cambodia, Chile, Comoros, Ecuador, Flanders (Belgium), Iceland, Kenya, Romania, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia.

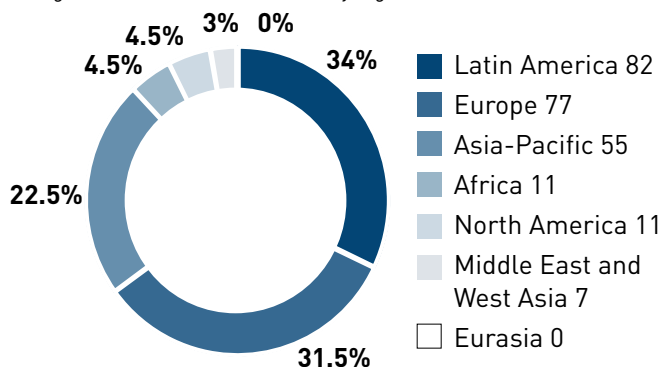
Second, for each world region, the subsection provides a more in-depth analysis of the local initiatives in countries reporting to the 2023 HLPF. This is complemented by further local actions implemented by LGAs and LRGs from non-reporting countries. The analysis is based mainly on the responses to the GTF/UCLG 2023 Survey, as well as on additional information contained in the most recent VLRs, VSRs and VNRs.

2.3.1 Perspectives from VSRs and VLRs

VLRs and VSRs are extraordinary efforts undertaken by LRGs and their organizations to contribute to monitoring the SDGs, bringing a bottom-up perspective. While [VLRs](#), produced by LRGs, show the situation in one city or region, [VSRs](#), produced by LGAs, represent a broader country-wide analysis of subnational efforts and challenges to localize the SDGs.

Since 2016, more than 240 VLRs have been published (see Figure 2.3.1), involving regions and big, middle and small cities from 45 countries. Collectively, these locations represent more than 600 million inhabitants. Section 2.3.2 provides more details on the VLRs published in each region.

Figure 2.3.1 Distribution of VLRs by region (2016–2023)



Source: own compilation

Between 2020 and 2022, 26 VSRs were published in 24 countries. In 2023, eleven additional VSRs have been developed in eleven countries, nine of which are reporting to the HLPF this year. In total, these VSRs represent more than 170,000 local governments and 1.4 billion inhabitants around the world. The majority show that awareness of the SDGs at the local level is still insufficient, even though many LRGs are developing initiatives that contribute to localization. In many countries, local actors mainly call for multilevel collaboration between national governments and LRGs as well as national support. The following boxes summarize the eleven 2023 VSRs.



BOX 2.3.1

Cambodia's VSR

Cambodia has a three-tier subnational government system: the capital and 24 provinces at the highest level; 31 municipalities, 163 districts and 14 khans at the intermediate level; and 267 sangkats and 1,385 communes at the lower level.

The Government of Cambodia has made strong SDG localization efforts. It has adopted all 17 SDGs, 88 SDG targets and an 18th localized goal about ending the negative impact of mines and explosive remnants of war. The Cambodian SDGs have been widely integrated into the Rectangular Strategy Phase IV, as well as the National Sustainable Development Plan for 2019–2023. The Ministry of Planning and the National Council for Sustainable Development coordinate SDG implementation in the country. In 2020, Cambodia completed the first phase (2010–2019) of its National Programme on Subnational Democratic Development, leading to some progress in decentralization and deconcentration governance. LRGs' budgets increased by 42% on average per year in the last eight years. In 2020, subnational revenues corresponded to 3.6% of gross domestic product (GDP) and 15.7% of total public revenue at the national level.

Cambodia's National League of Local Councils (NLC, the **National League of Local Councils LGA**) is very active in capacity building and awareness raising on localization (e.g. 38 key activities were carried out between March and April 2019). However, 40 out of 60 LRGs (67%) that responded to a questionnaire for the VSR process still have limited awareness of SDG localization. Only 15 LRGs (25%) consider that the majority of their staff are aware of and use the SDGs as a reference or in local plans and strategies. A review of the Five-Year Provincial Development Plan and the Public Investment Programme found city-owned initiative programmes and innovative practices by municipalities that contribute to localizing the SDGs in Cambodia, even if these cities and municipalities do not associate these initiatives with the SDGs. Most LRGs have prioritized eight SDGs: **SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9**. Respondents to the VSR questionnaire – particularly LRGs that benefitted from financial and/or technical support from the national government, development partners or NGOs – also acknowledged progress on SDG 11. The VSR highlights seven local good practices.

According to the participants in a VSR validation workshop (including LRGs, ministries and partners), there is a need for awareness raising and training on SDGs localization. They also called for guidance, backstopping, the production of localized data and sound monitoring and evaluation systems (involving private sector and civil society in data gathering), and technical assistance from the national level, the LGA and development partners. Financing remains a major challenge: moving forward, the government-led subnational investment fund should focus on the SDGs to accelerate implementation.



BOX 2.3.2

Chile's VSR

There are 16 regions and 345 municipalities in Chile. When updating the Chilean Strategy for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in recent years, the central government committed to creating a Regional Table that will involve local governments in territorial planning for sustainability. However, this strategy still does not clearly indicate the responsibilities of local governments, thus hindering closer linkages between local agendas and the SDGs.

Chile's VSR, produced by the **Association of Chilean Municipalities** (AChM) analyzes, for the first time, the state of progress of SDG localization in the country. To develop it, primary and secondary sources were reviewed, and direct contact was established with many municipalities. The VSR identified an enabling context in the country to promote sustainable development together with citizens. Collaborative networks among municipalities, international organizations and civil society organizations have opened the way for municipalities to implement necessary and urgent policies to respond to the demands of their communities. Municipalities are making efforts to mainstream sustainable development into their plans, as shown in a few examples in the VSR, by including the SDGs or sustainable approaches in community development plans. Even if there are no national consolidated figures, many municipalities in Chile have developed planning approaches that integrate economic sustainability, local development, environmental protection and sustainable tourism, among other areas.

The report also analyzes SDG progress at the local level, based on a questionnaire filled out by a sample of municipalities (10% of the country's total). The VSR also collected information on 218 experiences in 75 municipalities, highlighting in particular actions related to **SDGs 6, 9 and 11**. In their responses, municipalities indicate that their main challenges are limitations in human resources or technical capacities, insufficient interest and/or awareness at the local level, and weak coordination between levels of government.

Noting how legislation and, overall, LRGs' own initiatives have facilitated progress, the report reveals the progressive expansion of municipal initiatives for territorial development on urgent matters such as climate change, health, urban development and the reduction of inequalities. In short, municipalities prove themselves to be relevant actors in the implementation of the SDGs despite the difficulties inherent in the current institutional framework.

Finally, the VSR advances recommendations within the following core areas: direct integration of LRGs in governance for implementing the 2030 Agenda in Chile, a greater effort to raise awareness and provide training and effective technical assistance for the localization of the SDGs, and acknowledgement and dissemination of LRGs' good practices. In addition, it places emphasis on the need to increase resources allocated to the localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.



BOX 2.3.3

Comoros's VSR

The **National Association of Mayors of the Comoros** (ANMC) has produced its first VSR amidst a difficult context for local action. The VSR analyzes the integration of the SDGs into the national development strategy, the Emerging Comoros Plan for 2030, which reveals weak inclusion of local governments. SDG budgeting has not sufficiently integrated municipalities' needs, and the national indicator system has been localized to a very limited degree.

According to the VSR, the national government promotes the alignment of municipal plans with the SDGs and prioritizes 10 targets in each of the 54 municipalities. It supports priority projects within the Emerging Comoros Plan for 2030, particularly projects for roads, waste management, local markets, water supply, early childhood care centres in urban areas, rural electrification and school infrastructure. Their implementation requires strengthening the powers of municipalities in accordance with the laws on decentralization. However, the work of national offices and agencies undermines municipal powers. Transferring resources, within the framework of the legal mechanism, should be a priority to provide municipalities with the means necessary to localize the SDGs.

The projects directly developed by the municipalities and the governments of the islands focus, in particular, on **SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 14 and 15**. Municipalities have varied experiences in providing their populations with drinking water, supporting municipal markets and developing the circular economy through waste management, as well as biogas and compost production, to promote ecological agriculture and support the local economy. The VSR documents good practices promoted by the communes of **Moroni, Mitsamiouli and Fombouni** on the island of Ngazidja (Grande Comore); **Fomboni** and **Moimbassa** on the island of Mohéli; and **Mutsamudu, Domoni, Moya, Bandrani and Ongoujou** on the island of Anjouan. Resources for local-level SDG implementation come from the municipalities themselves and their diasporas, from partnerships with NGOs and development partners and, to a certain extent, from decentralized cooperation.

The VSR suggests certain ways forward, including forming an SDG commission within the ANMC to support advocacy and local ownership. This commission could promote a more inclusive institutional framework for municipalities so their actions contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Actions would include training local staff, providing municipalities with the necessary human and financial resources, setting up a fund for municipal development, integrating the needs of municipalities into national budget plans and better organizing cooperation to leave no territory behind. Without a doubt, putting the principle of subsidiarity at the core, supporting municipalities to respond to local community demands, would contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda.



BOX 2.3.4

Ecuador's VSR

Ecuador's VSR, produced by the **Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments of Ecuador** (CONGOPE), offers an analysis of provincial governments' SDG progress and the challenges they have encountered. It includes qualitative information from 16 provincial governments and quantitative information from the Information System of Decentralized Autonomous Governments, which monitors investment against each SDG. The VSR includes the experience and efforts of **Manabí** as the first province in Ecuador to develop a VLR.

In their responses to a dedicated survey, provincial governments mentioned several restrictions for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. For example, these included difficulties in coordination between territorial planning and national planning, financing, the availability of information and insufficient technical support from the central government. Furthermore, although six out of 10 provinces are aware of the different agendas and international agreements that contribute to the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda, most do not have specialized technical teams nor have they developed SDG-related policies, plans or ordinances. Citizen participation in implementing the 2030 Agenda is still weak, as eight out of 10 provincial governments do not carry out concrete actions with citizens.

The instruments that most integrated the SDGs were territorial development and planning plans, followed by annual operating plans and multi-year investment plans. According to the budgetary analysis, the provinces prioritized investments in the following order:

- **SDG 9** (infrastructure, including roads, irrigation systems, health and education equipment)
- **SDG 1** (mainly programmes to protect the rights of and respond to priority groups and women)
- **SDG 11** (risk management, housing and basic services, cultural and natural heritage and territorial planning)
- **SDGs 8 and 2** (economic growth, livelihood promotion with sustainable agriculture programmes, and support for small-scale producers and local food systems)

Environmental management with climate action strategies and the management of terrestrial and maritime ecosystems (SDGs 13, 14 and 15) mobilized fewer resources.

Among the main recommendations, the VSR calls for strengthening training on the 2030 Agenda and sharing information with citizens, reinforcing planning departments, encouraging strategic alliances, enhancing collaboration between different levels of government, and improving monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through annual reports. Likewise, it recommends increasing assistance from entities such as CONGOPE and the central government, as well as promoting the use of new methodologies and conceptual frameworks based on learning and exchange of good practices for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.



BOX 2.3.5

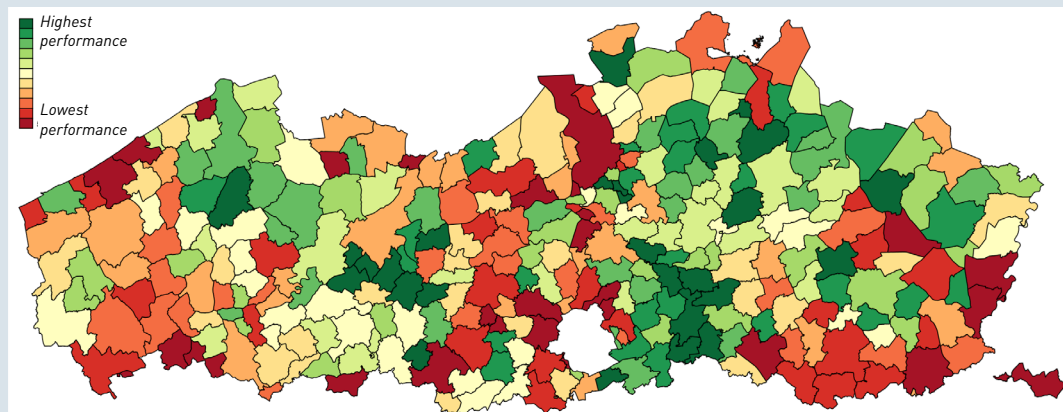
Flanders's VSR (Belgium)

The VSR of the **Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities** (VVSG) and the **Association of Flemish Provinces** (VVP) represents five provinces and 300 municipalities. The process ensured proper data collection and analysis, as well as staff involvement, and enabled weighing in on the 2023 Belgian VNR. For replicability purposes, the VVSG and the VVP have thoroughly documented their approach and communication plan, included as annexes in the VSR.

The VSR discusses how Flemish provinces, cities and municipalities deploy the 2030 Agenda as a strategic and moral framework for their policies. It also assesses the achievement of the 17 SDGs through an extensive data analysis of more than 200 indicators and an examination of good practices. The VSR observes clear progress towards the achievement of the SDGs in general. Based on the data analysis, SDGs 1, 8, 9 and 10 show the strongest improvement. Progress on SDG 15 has consistently deteriorated since 2010, mainly due to a constant reduction in open space (paving) and a reduction in green space in 87% of municipalities. Several other SDGs have improved since 2010 but declined in recent years. In education (SDG 4), for example, both satisfaction with child care and participation in adult education decreased. Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) also experienced a small downward trend due to an increase in waste. Public services (SDG 16) came under pressure due to COVID-19, which resulted in a decrease in satisfaction with counter services.

The analysis also registers significant differences across cities and municipalities according to, among other factors, inhabitants' median income, inhabitants' age structure and municipal size and location. The VSR also sees clusters of high-performing municipalities and low-performing municipalities. The 12 largest Flemish cities – **Aalst, Antwerp, Bruges, Genk, Ghent, Hasselt, Kortrijk, Leuven, Mechelen, Ostend, Roeselare** and **Turnhout** – have recovered significant ground in recent years, but they face greater challenges in the areas of poverty, climate, safety and public services. At the same time, they are pioneers in certain areas, such as organic agriculture, sustainable food, environmental consciousness and innovation.

Figure 2.3.2 SDG progress in Flemish municipalities



To ensure that local and provincial governments continue to fulfil their pioneering role in the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda and make further progress in achieving the 17 SDGs, several key factors are crucial: innovative forms of collaboration, full and equal partnership and space, flexibility and resources for local and provincial governments; improved data collection and data accessibility; and greater alignment between the 2030 Agenda and existing policy processes, programmes and activities.



BOX 2.3.6

Iceland's VSR

To support Iceland's VNR, the **Icelandic Association of Local Authorities (IALA)** produced a VSR in 2023. During the spring, it undertook a comprehensive survey on SDG and sustainability efforts, facilitated by collaborative work among municipalities in the Nordic region. Moving forward, IALA and its partner associations aim to implement the survey across all Nordic countries, providing a standardized framework for the preparation of joint Nordic VNRs and VSRs in 2024. The survey encompasses essential aspects related to SDG localization and addresses key factors in assessing progress at the local level.

IALA achieved an exceptional response rate, with nearly all municipalities, except for three small ones, submitting survey responses (accounting for 99.77% of the country's population). Analysis of the responses reveals that 61% of the municipalities have already established a connection between their sustainability efforts and the SDGs. Additionally, 25% of the municipalities express an interest in integrating the SDGs into their work but have not yet initiated the process, and 37% of the municipalities report actively working on sustainability without explicitly referencing the SDGs. About one third of the respondents are working strategically on SDG localization, most of which have adopted an overall SDG-related strategy for all municipal sectors. As a positive side effect, this work has encouraged overall reform of municipal policy planning.

When examining the challenges faced by municipalities in the process of localizing the SDGs, the survey highlights several notable obstacles. A significant 74% of respondents identify a lack of financial and human resources as a major hindrance to their SDG-related work. In addition, 40% of respondents view a lack of processes or tools as a substantial impediment to their SDG efforts. This indicates that municipalities require appropriate frameworks and resources to effectively implement and monitor their sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, 30% of respondents express that a lack of State support is a notable challenge. This finding serves as a valuable lesson for the State, as municipalities are not only implementing the SDGs but also voluntarily participating in various State-initiated reform programmes but without the necessary allocation of funding. As a result, this situation has placed significant strain on smaller municipalities, which are the majority in the country (only 11 out of 64 municipalities have more than 5,000 inhabitants).

SDG 3 on health and wellbeing is the most prioritized SDG, which can likely be traced back to the fact that most municipalities are taking part in a voluntary Health-Promoting Community programme connected to the SDGs. Municipalities also prioritize **SDGs 5, 8, 11 and 13**.



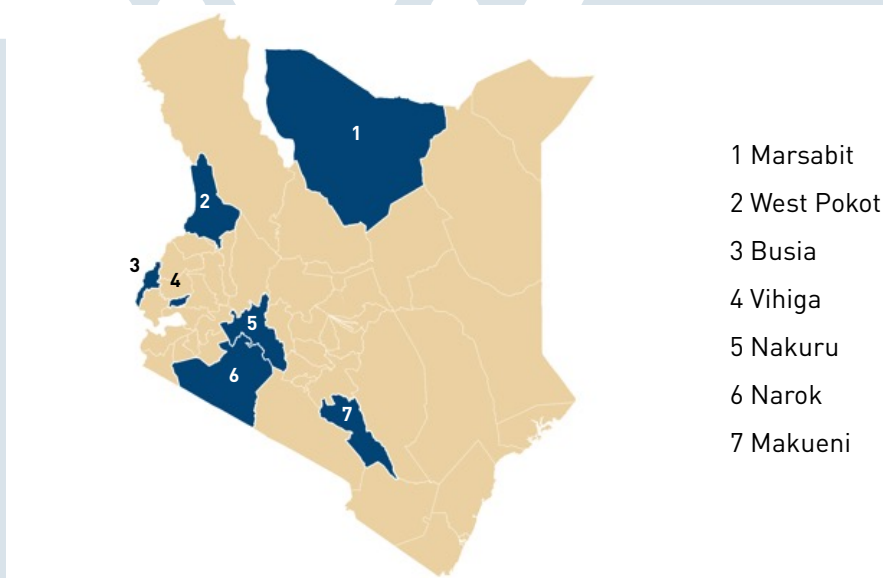
BOX 2.3.7

Kenya's VSR

Kenya implements a devolved system of governance comprising the national government and 47 county governments. County governments represent the level of government closest to the people and are therefore best positioned to directly address their needs.

This year, the **Council of Governors (CoG)** undertook its second VSR to assess LRGs' level of SDG localization. Seven county governments (**Busia, Marsabit, Makueni, Nakuru, Narok, Vihiga** and **West Pokot**) participated in the process. The VSR confirms that counties have mainstreamed the SDGs into their county integrated development plans, strategies and budgets. Nevertheless, SDG implementation is not homogeneous across all the 47 county governments. The findings indicate that each of the reviewed counties places emphasis on specific SDGs that help them respond to the immediate needs of their populations.

Figure 2.3.3 Counties that participated in the 2023 VSR process in Kenya



Makueni County has put in place an elaborate public participation model, which is an inclusive bottom-up system that involves the public from the village level to county headquarters. The public engages through elected development committee members representing villages, clusters of villages, subwards, wards, subcounties and the county.

In **Vihiga County**, wards were experiencing unequal development owing to the absence of a county-level formula to distribute resources. To address this, the county established a Geo-Technology Services Laboratory, which uses a geographic information system to support prioritizing underserved wards and clusters of disadvantaged communities. This system helps allocate resources to improve services such as education, health, water and sanitation, vocational training centres and roads.

Nakuru County has enacted new waste management legislation, operationalized through zoning of waste operational areas. The county headquarters was recently upgraded to the status of a city, bringing key urbanization challenges such as waste management. In response, the county now prioritizes promoting appropriate production processes and advocating for change in consumption behaviour and patterns. The county has also ensured effective and appropriate waste handling, storage and separation. The efficient, responsive and coordinated countywide waste collection services system has resulted in almost 90% of waste being collected.

All targeted counties have reported on their processes and results of their interventions related to five **SDGs: 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17**. Notably, all counties have deliberately allocated resources to support SDG implementation, as demonstrated by data on allocation and expenditure broken down by county departments (required by the budgeting and reporting procedure). The VSR also includes best practices for documenting lessons learned and possibly scaling up efforts in other territories.



BOX 2.3.8

Romania's VSR

Romania is divided into 103 municipalities and 2,862 communes. The **Romanian Municipalities Association** (AMR) and the **Association of Communes of Romania** (ACoR) developed the country's 2023 VSR. The VSR analyzes the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 and the institutional framework for sustainable development in Romania, as well as the degree of localization of these strategies. Furthermore, it explores communes' and municipalities' contribution to the implementation of a selected set of SDGs (**1, 3-7, 9-13 and 16**). It also documents the structural territorial inequalities that characterize the country.

The data, collected through a survey, indicate that over half of the responding institutions still have a relatively low degree of understanding of the SDGs and the national and European strategies regarding sustainable development. Integration of the SDGs in strategic planning varies significantly at the local level. On one end, a significant proportion of communes (almost two out of five) and municipalities (over a quarter) do not have a local strategic plan in force; at the opposite end, SDGs are an integral part of local strategies for about a fifth of municipalities and communes.

The VSR identifies good practices for almost all SDGs. However, as basic needs are still not covered satisfactorily, LRGs are prioritizing SDGs 6, 7, 9 and 11, as well as SDG 4 (modernization of schools), SDG target 11.6 (waste collection and management) and SDG 1 (social assistance). Projects related to SDGs 12 and 13 have been prioritized to a lesser degree.

Urban or local development strategies are designed according to the guidelines or requirements of national or European financing instruments, which are not always well-aligned with the SDGs. It is important to increase the number of municipalities and communes that adopt integrated urban and local development strategies and plans aligned with the SDGs, especially climate change mitigation and adaptation. At the same time, the country has reduced regional inequalities very little in the last decade. The lack of disaggregated data at local levels makes it difficult to plan and assess the progress of municipalities and communes.

In its recommendations, the VSR calls for joint actions by AMR and ACoR, as well as the national Department for Sustainable Development, to disseminate the national strategy and the SDGs. It proposes urgent actions to strengthen LRGs' finances and capacities, integrate the SDGs (including SDG 11 and environmental SDGs) into local plans, and reduce territorial inequalities. To do so, AMR and ACoR should be effectively involved in the different phases of public consultation and development of the national investment programmes or the strategic documents related to the European Commission's programmes (e.g. partnership agreements, operational programmes for the European funds).



BOX 2.3.9

Rwanda's VSR

Rwanda's first VSR was conducted by the **Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA)**. It aims to support local governments in their efforts to localize the SDGs and promotes RALGA's and local governments' advocacy strategies.

In Rwanda, central and local governments are two layers of one government, according to the decentralization policy. SDGs are mainstreamed into the Vision 2050 and National Strategy for Transformation 2017–2024. This allows the country to simultaneously monitor progress towards national targets and SDG targets. At the local level, the district development strategies and Kigali's City Development Strategy are both aligned with the national strategy and Vision 2050.

Different SDG coordination roles are assigned to institutions and bodies within the central and local governments. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning coordinates the planning and monitoring and evaluation functions, and the SDG Secretariat within this ministry's Planning Department coordinates with other institutions. The Cabinet of Ministers approves the financing and implementation of plans and budgets with prior endorsement by Parliament. Umushyikirano (the National Dialogue Council) and Umwiherezo (the National Leadership Retreat) conduct monitoring and are responsible for accountability to citizens. At the local level, district councils and districts' joint action development forums engage stakeholders and monitor SDG implementation. Finally, at the lowest level of local administration, community assemblies meet once a week to assess the state of governance and development in order to take remedial actions.

Notwithstanding these mechanisms, LRG awareness of SDGs is low. While LRGs concentrate on meeting their responsibilities and targets, they lack information on how this contributes to reaching SDG targets. There is a need for clearly monitoring and quantifying LRGs inputs in meeting SDG targets to stimulate commitment. Despite provisions on institutional arrangements, almost no LRGs have working SDG coordination mechanisms. This results in a lack of ownership and coordination to reach the targets.

Rwanda's VSR reports a number of best practices by LRGs on different SDGs:

- **SDGs 6 and 7:** LRGs have been instrumental in providing the local population with improved access to drinking water and electricity.
- **SDG 9:** Special industrial economic zones in Kigali and secondary and satellite cities' districts are a nursery for promoting investments and innovations.
- **SDG 11:** Important innovations include "model villages" to provide adequate shelter for marginalized populations and those relocated from high-risk zones and slums; cities' cleanliness, greening and beautification efforts; promotion of a connected city; modern e-waste and solid waste treatment; "car-free days" to improve urban dwellers health; and "car-free zones" for socialization.
- **SDG 17:** District joint action development forums are important for joint planning and implementation between districts and partners.

Next interventions in localizing the SDGs should include raising awareness at local levels, putting in place a user-friendly mechanism for data collection and analysis on LRGs' contribution to the SDGs, developing an innovative SDG coordination system at the local level and enhancing access to SDG financing and capacity building.



BOX 2.3.10

Tanzania's VSR

In the United Republic of Tanzania, there are 195 local councils operating in 150 districts. Of the councils, 53 are urban (47 on the mainland, 6 in Zanzibar), and 142 are rural (137 on the mainland, 5 in Zanzibar; these are also called district councils).

In its first VSR, the **Association of Local Authorities of Tanzania (ALAT)** reviewed the state of SDG localization in the country and the institutional enabling environment. The methodology involved literature review and a survey based on a sample of 16 LRGs, complemented by a validation meeting and physical and virtual meetings and interviews to collect information and data from reliable sources. The VSR focuses on **SDGs 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15**. It also includes summaries of the VLRs of **Mwanza, Emboreet and Kibaha Town**.

LRGs are aligning their plans with the Tanzania Development Vision 2025. Ongoing government initiatives to devolve sectoral projects and programmes to LRGs contribute to the localization of the SDGs, for example, on roads, health and education facilities, water supply, electricity services and administrative buildings. More than 30 experiences show how SDG localization in Tanzania is advancing, with appreciable impetus from ALAT and the government through the Regional Administration and Local Government of the President's Office.

Funding to implement local initiatives is based on LRGs' own source revenues and on government subsidies. The Annual Plan and Budget Guideline requires LRGs to allocate and contribute between 20% and 70% from their own source revenues for development projects. Between financial years 2018/2019 and 2022/2023, the average allocation and contribution of the 16 LRGs was 31%.

Based on principles of the forthcoming National Decentralization Policy 2023, the government is re-thinking its strategy to support ALAT in localizing the SDGs. However, the VSR also reveals that different ministries and national agencies still control multiple responsibilities that directly affect LRGs, somewhat denting coordination, policy cohesion and effective service delivery.

The VSR calls on the national government to support and strengthen the SDGs and the devolution framework for proper deployment and localization of SDGs with meaningful involvement of LRGs and stakeholders. To accelerate local-level SDG implementation, the VSR recommends enhancing SDG coordination mechanisms and developing capacity-building programmes to strengthen ALAT's and LRGs' financial, technical and human resource capacities to better mainstream SDGs into their functions. In addition, grassroots institutions require technical and financial training to uptake and implement the SDGs.



BOX 2.3.11

Zambia's VSR

Zambia's 2023 VNR includes a chapter consisting of the VSR prepared by the **Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ)**. This VSR provides an overview of the different locally led actions for SDG localization in the various territories, as well as LGAZ support. It also outlines key challenges faced by SDGs to accelerate and scale up such actions.

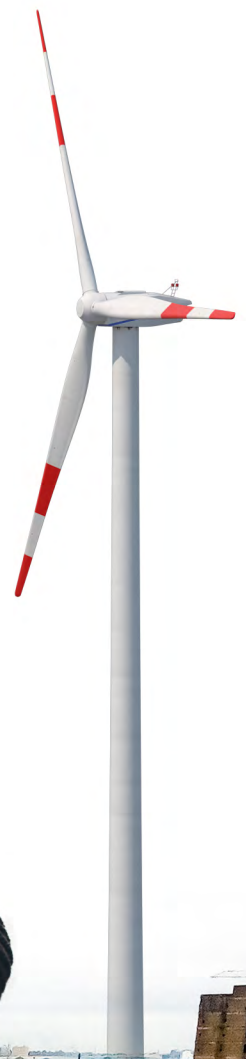
According to the VSR, LRGs in Zambia have supported food security and income generation by creating inclusive trading spaces and market shelters, as is the case of **Kalumbila, Solwezi, Sinazongwe, Livingstone** and **Sikongo**. For their part, **Lunga, Mambwe, Mpulungu, Mongu, Kafue** and **Samfya** have taken steps to curb forced and child labour through the UNICEF-supported Single Window Initiative for social protection. The VSR also indicates that all Zambian LRGs have gender focal points, which promote inclusive education through the Constituency Development Fund. They also promote gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women's participation in governance structures.

In support of these localization actions, LGAZ has implemented the Women in Local Leadership programme (2021–2026) in collaboration with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. LGAZ, through its Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders Initiative for Community Action on AIDS programme, has also been supporting LRGs in community management of HIV, AIDS and tuberculosis.

Regarding LRGs' role in protecting Earth's life-support systems, 11 LRGs in **Lusaka Province, Copperbelt Province** and **Northern Province** have created integrated development plans that integrate social, economic and spatial development, supported by LGAZ guidelines. **Muchinga Province, Luapula Province, North-Western Province, Central Province** and **Western Province** are involved in the Transforming Landscapes for Resilience and Development project to foster natural resource management and climate action.

Different LRGs, such as **Livingstone, Chipata, Ndola** and **Lusaka City** are establishing partnerships with other LRGs and the private sector to bolster initiatives related to recycling infrastructure; urban planning, research and tourism; agriculture and commerce; responsible alcohol consumption; and reduction of charcoal consumption.

The VSR also highlights key challenges faced by Zambian LRGs. These include limited resources, inadequate technology, reliance on cooperation partners and external support, lack of policies promoting gender-equitable representation, data gaps in rural areas, uneven economic growth, lack of integrated planning and delays in government clearances. Overcoming these challenges and strengthening localization are critical for ensuring the achievement of the SDGs in the country.



2.3.2 Summary of LRGs' actions

In addition to the efforts made by the LGAs producing a VSR this year, other LGAs and LRGs from around the world, whether from reporting countries or not, are resolute in their quest towards the 2030 Agenda. This subsection offers a region-by-region analysis of their main efforts, as collected by the GTF/UCLG 2023 Survey and other sources. Although some trends can be established, significant contrasts exist across regions and countries. Analysis of the survey responses finds that:

- **In a very high percentage of LGAs (93%) and LRGs (70%), staff are well-acquainted with the SDGs.**
- **Respectively, 64% and 88% of LGAs and LRGs have developed some kind of strategy or action plan to implement the SDGs** within their institution and through their policies, be it by prioritizing several SDGs or aligning their plans and budgets to the SDGs. From this group, in 53% of LGAs and 42% of LRGs, such strategies and plans are in an advanced stage of implementation or have even been updated to expand their objectives.
- **Most responding LGAs (98%) and LRGs (87%) have promoted some kind of awareness raising among their staff, local stakeholders and population**, as seen in the numerous examples from all around the world showcased below. However, only 41% and 29% of these institutions, respectively, report these actions as strong and regular.
- **Worldwide, 43% of LGAs and 59% of LRGs have developed or are in the process of developing an indicator system aligned with the SDGs.** In most cases, they are working with other institutions such as national governments (statistical offices in particular), the UN or the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and/or are taking advantage of systems produced by international organizations such as UN-Habitat's Global Urban Monitoring Framework or the *European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews* by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre.

This analysis shows an encouraging path as more and more LGAs and LRGs are committed to the SDGs and acting accordingly. Nevertheless, efforts need to be accelerated, and institutions need to enhance and galvanize the knowledge of their staff and local stakeholders around the SDGs. This will allow them to move forward and strengthen the links of their strategies and plans with the SDGs, as well as to track progress and report on it in a more systematic and generalized way.

According to the survey, **LGAs and their members identify difficulties in accessing funding, limited coordination across levels of government and a lack of human resources and capacities, as well as limited support from national governments, as the main challenges of localizing the SDGs.** LGAs and LRGs also reported additional difficulties to achieve the SDGs due to geopolitical conflicts, the still ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and financial pressure experienced by the different

territories. On the other side of the coin, improving multilevel relations is a critical opportunity, along with the possibility to improve planning mechanisms at the local level through the SDGs and to reinforce local awareness and interest in sustainable development by LRGs and local stakeholders.

Africa

[Urbanization in Africa keeps growing](#). With the proportion of the population living in urban areas expected to increase from 44.4% as of 2022 to 58.9% by 2050, poverty is shifting towards urban areas. Combined, the world's three main overlapping shocks (war in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic's ongoing effects and the increasing frequency and intensity of global natural disasters) are leading more and more people into extreme poverty and deepening inequalities throughout the world, but particularly in Africa. [Access to clean water](#) is under threat and access to electricity is still very limited.

However, there is still hope. Managing the urban transition through deliberate policy responses is "[essential for structural transformation](#) and the wellbeing of African urban and rural populations." In this respect, there have been several positive experiences regarding SDG localization in the African continent. The LGAs from four reporting countries – [Comoros](#), [Rwanda](#), [Tanzania](#) and [Zambia](#) – have developed VSRs this year.

In Rwanda, the city of **Kigali** is collaborating with the University of Rwanda as part of UNESCO's [Local Challenges, Global Imperatives: Cities at the Forefront to Achieve the Education 2030 Agenda](#) project, which focuses on SDGs 4 and 11. In 2022, the project partners organized a dissemination webinar, attended by around 50 representatives from the city, CSOs and schools, to share the [main lessons learned](#) from the on-the-ground work with the local government and partners. **RALGA** is working with the Flemish association VVSG to foster bilateral "SDG partnerships" between LRGs from both countries. So far, **Bugesera** and **Karongi** will each be working with one Flemish municipality on citizen participation in urban planning. With a focus on joint contribution to the 2030 Agenda, the partnerships will entail colleague-to-colleague exchanges, paying extra attention to making the learning process visible in both municipalities. By working intensively on specific themes with a select group of peers, the SDG partnerships are expected to produce local ambassadors for international cooperation and, in a few cases, can be a stepping stone for long-term collaborations.

In Tanzania, in addition to producing the [VSR](#), **ALAT** has continued to produce a yearly handbook on SDG localization and information about each local government to promote investments and local economic development in the country. It has created an awards programme for mayors to promote and monitor SDG localization. Its Annual General Assembly – the forum involving all 168 districts and urban councils in the United Republic of Tanzania, 25 members of Parliament and other members – has been enlarged to include non-governmental stakeholders and become a critical forum to raise awareness on SDG localization and jointly shape policies and strategies. **Mwanza** has received support from Tampere, the Finnish govern-

ment, the Association of Finnish Municipalities, UN-Habitat and other partners to produce its [first VLR](#). The VLRs of **Emboreet** and **Kibaha** were produced with the support of the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy and the University of Dar es Salaam.

In Zambia, the **Local Government Association of Zambia** (LGAZ) disseminates information on the SDGs at its annual conferences. The municipalities of **Kalulushi** and **Kalumbila** have aligned their integrated development plans with the SDGs, while the municipality of **Kazungula** has focused its attention on actions to achieve SDG 6.

Despite this progress among the African reporting countries, progress towards an enabling environment for cities and LRGs to localize the SDGs requires major reform efforts in Burkina Faso, which is experiencing a critical situation. The institutional environment is also generally unfavourable to the action of cities and LRGs in Comoros, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the Central African Republic, where no elections have taken place for 30 years, the **Association of Mayors of the Central African Republic** (AMCA) reports insufficient financial resources as one of the main challenges in supporting SDG localization, which explains the rather limited progress.

LRGs and LGAs from countries that are not reporting at the 2023 HLPF have also been active in SDG localization. The **National Association of Municipalities of Benin** (ANCB) will be working, like Rwanda, with VVSG in order to foster local ambassadors for international cooperation and SDG localization. In Botswana, the **Botswana Association of Local Authorities** (BALA) is currently implementing its SDG strategy adopted in 2022 together with its [VSR](#). This has included raising awareness among its members and prioritizing actions to tackle the challenges of the informal economy.

In Madagascar, **Fort-Dauphin** is working on explicitly using the SDG framework in the implementation of its 2020–2024 Local Development Plan, and it has prioritized SDG 11 with projects related to sanitation and waste management. The [second edition of the “City’s Up Madagascar” Days](#), organized by the **Association of Mayors of Major Cities of Madagascar** (AMGVM), used an SDGs-oriented approach to build capacities and partnerships of Malagasy cities and face the country’s socio-economic crisis.

The city of **Saint-Louis** (Senegal) carried out training sessions for elected leaders and cultural actors with the support of the CSO Enda ECOPOP and UCLG Africa. Finally, in South Africa, **Johannesburg** is working with the national government, other municipalities and global partners to produce a localized SDG indicator system.

BOX 2.3.12

Multilevel and multistakeholder collaborations in Kenya

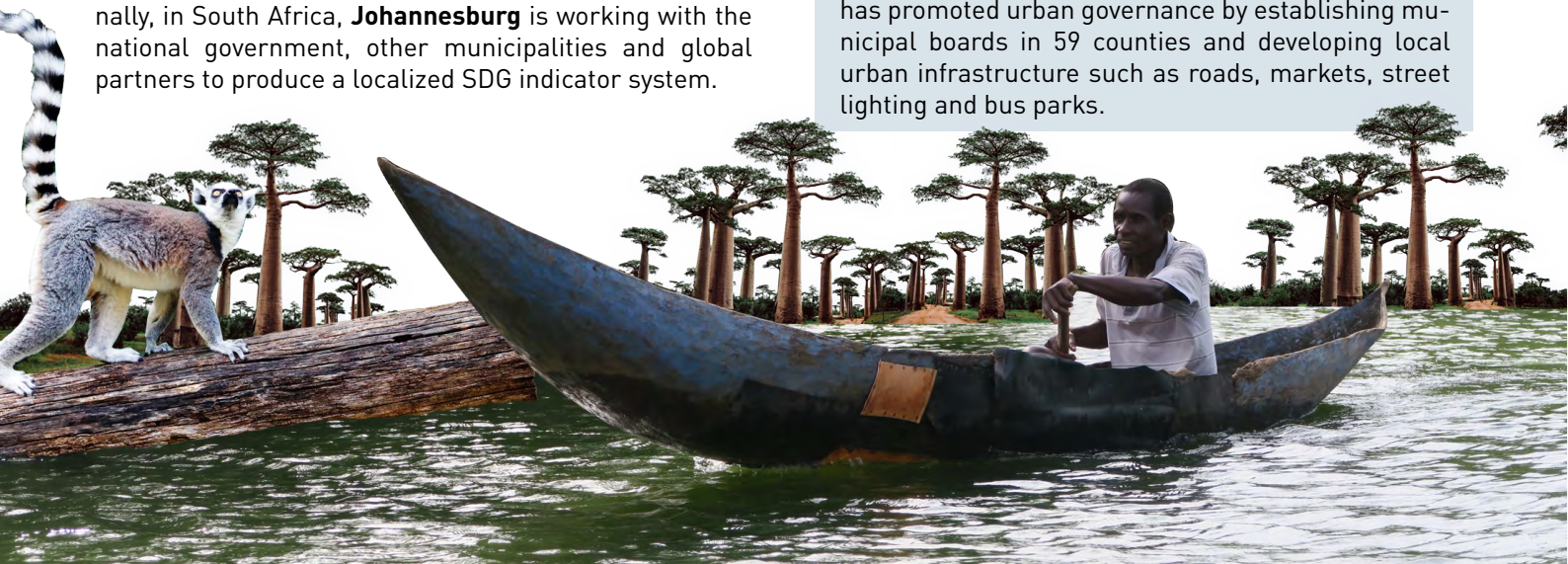
Kenya’s Roadmap to Sustainable Development Goals identifies the development of a stakeholder engagement and SDGs coordination framework as one of its broad thematic areas. It recognizes that the implementation of the SDGs will depend on strong partnerships that actively engage government (both national and county levels), as well as civil society, the private sector, other partners and the United Nations system.

The **CoG** has joined the national SDGs coordination structure led by the Interagency Committee and the Interagency Technical Working Group, both responsible for coordinating SDG implementation. The CoG coordinates SDG implementation, tracking and reporting at the subnational level and facilitates LRGs’ participation in national processes such as VNR production.

The CoG has also facilitated dialogue among county governments, civil society and other stakeholders on the implementation of the SDGs. The dialogues have resulted from the development of an institutional framework for engaging county governments through county SDG champions and from strengthening partnership with the [SDGs Kenya Forum](#), which is the national civil society umbrella organization on SDGs. The CoG has also co-organized various events such as the [People Dialogue Festival](#) (and its [SDG Village](#)), which provided a platform for citizens to debate with county government leaders.

Several guidelines have been developed, such as those for SDG acceleration, those for identification and documentation of SDG best practices and those for SDG awards. All these guidelines have facilitated peer learning in the country. To support local tracking and reporting, the national government has prioritized 136 of the total 231 global SDG indicators. Furthermore, Kenya has developed norms and standards to include civil society-generated data.

The [Kenya Urban Support Programme](#) is implemented by the national government and the county governments, with support from the World Bank and coordination support from the CoG. The programme has promoted urban governance by establishing municipal boards in 59 counties and developing local urban infrastructure such as roads, markets, street lighting and bus parks.



Asia-Pacific

In Asia-Pacific, progress around the SDGs has [decelerated and even regressed](#) in some countries. Little or no progress has been made in the area of sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). There is thus a pressing need to accelerate action in this region. This points to why initiatives such as Phase 2 of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) SDGs Frontrunner Cities Programme are so critical. The initiative, which supported 24 cities from Asia-Pacific in Phase 1, now aims to support the planning and implementation of multibenefit model projects, in addition to developing the capacity of next generation cities and sharing experiences and knowledge.

Regarding reporting countries in 2023, the **NLC** (Cambodia) has participated in meetings with local governments to discuss the SDGs. It has also produced a [VSR](#) that tracks progress on SDG localization. The city-state of **Singapore** has a [SingStat website](#) that provides access to statistics on SDG targets and indicators, some of which were identified by the ASEAN Statistics Division.

In 2022, the **Association of Cities of Viet Nam** (ACVN) supported an [exchange of experiences](#) among Vietnamese cities, the Stuttgart region in Germany and the Colleferro-Latina functional area in Italy. Participants discussed sustainable urban development, flood control and climate adaptation. In Brunei and Fiji, there are no elected LRGs, while there is no information available about SDG localization in the Maldives and Timor-Leste.

Beyond the situation in the reporting countries, several LRGs from Asia-Pacific have produced VLRs. This is the case of **Melbourne** (Australia; [first VLR](#) in 2022), **Singra** (Bangladesh; [first VLR](#) in 2022), **Yangzhou** (People's Republic of China; [first VLR](#) in 2021), **Dhulikhel** (Nepal; [first VLR](#) in 2022) and **Toyota** (Japan; [first VLR](#) in 2022).

In Japan, as part of the Hamamatsu SDG Promotion Platform, the city of **Hamamatsu** has organized many symposiums and training workshops to join forces for SDG localization with the platform's 523 members (87 CSOs, 375 private sector and 61 individuals). **Yokohama** provides advice and capacity development to local stakeholders through the [SDGs Design Centre](#) and encourages private companies to comply with the SDGs through the [Y-SDGs certification system](#).

In Nepal, the **Association of District Coordination Committees of Nepal** (ADCCN) plans to assess progress in localizing the SDGs through a study of a sample of LRGs from the different provinces, but it identifies a lack of resources. It is also planning to offer financial and technical support to 77 district coordination committees for SDG localization in cooperation with the National Planning Commission and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In Pakistan, the district of **Narowal** has aligned its development agenda with the SDGs. However, the district government states that an unfavourable institutional environment for LRGs and a lack of financial resources hinder the expansion of the localization movement. In the Philippines, **Baguio** has aligned several plans, programmes and budgets to the SDGs. It is also monitoring its "catalytic projects" against SDG-related indicators.

In **Taipei**, as part of implementing its vision of becoming a "liveable and sustainable Taipei," the local government monitors the city's sustainability achievements through different means: first, through the ISO 37120 indicator system (including 17 dimensions and 100 indicators) and, second, through 70 indicators related to the SDGs. It tracks and reviews the priority 11 core target-related indicators. Although some indicators overlap, the city still discloses progress on more than 100 sustainable indicators each year, published on the Taipei Open Data Platform. In 2021, **New Taipei City** created a [website dedicated to the SDGs](#) to track actions implemented by its departments and raise awareness. In 2022, it organized a [dialogue](#) with the private sector to discuss how to promote sustainability by businesses and LRGs. **Taoyuan** has integrated the SDGs into its municipal structure and policy guidelines. Since the first VLRs were produced by Taipei ([2019](#), [2020](#) and [2021](#)) and New Taipei ([2019](#) and [2021](#)) a total of 31 VLRs have been produced by 22 LRGs in the area, such as those of Taoyuan ([2020](#) and [2022](#)) and, in 2023, the second VLRs of the [Changhua](#) and [Lienchiang](#) counties.

Eurasia

In most of Eurasia, localizing the SDGs is still a pending matter, and most progress has followed a top-down logic. Current armed conflicts continue to determine most of the region's priorities at the moment. In Tajikistan, the city of Dushanbe is one of the cities working with UN-Habitat as an SDG localization accelerator; it adopted its **Dushanbe** Green City Action Plan in line with the SDGs and is taking advantage of UCLG Eurasia's training sessions for local action. With regards to the three other reporting countries – Mongolia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – no information on SDG localization is available.

As far as the non-reporting countries are concerned, the city of **Jalal-Abad** (the Kyrgyz Republic) has formulated a socio-economic development programme for the 2023–2026 period that incorporates the SDGs. It has also actively conducted awareness-raising campaigns to inform its citizens about the 2030 Agenda.

In the Russian Federation, the city of **Rostov-on-Don** has developed a socio-economic development strategy that aligns with the SDGs and supports companies to work towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, including in the current situation of sanctions. Progress towards these goals is reflected in an annual report. **Moscow** also focuses on the business sector in particular. It has provided support, guidance, knowledge sharing and exchanges to single-industry cities across Russia in their efforts to achieve the SDGs. In particular, Moscow supports mitigation and adaptation to climate change. The city participated in the pilot project "A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals" led by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The project's [final report](#) shows that, although they are not explicitly mentioned, the city uses the SDGs as a checklist to assess its sectoral programmes' contribution to sustainable development. Moscow's assessment system uses diverse sources: open sources, official statistics and the OECD database. Also in Russia, the city of **Perm** uses various media channels, social networks and official accounts to inform residents about the SDGs and the implementation of projects. It collaborates with so-

cially oriented non-profit organizations, community centres and neighbourhood associations to promote socially significant projects and initiatives related to the SDGs through diverse competitions. However, strategic development plans at the local level are only partially aligned with the SDGs.

BOX 2.3.13

UCLG Eurasia's support to its LRG members

UCLG Eurasia has offered training sessions on the SDGs and reporting processes for the municipal staff of **Dushanbe** and **Khujand** (Tajikistan). It also shares SDG-related best practices and news through its magazine, *Eurasia Local Governments*. UCLG Eurasia encourages equal opportunities for leadership at the local level and conducted a survey on women's participation in LRGs in Eurasia.

Europe

Europe continues to be the region where LRGs are most active, taking bold steps towards SDG localization, even though the European Commission's [EU Voluntary Review on SDG progress](#) only acknowledges this reality tangentially and, in particular, through the role of VLRs. Of the 12 countries reporting this year, very proactive action from both LRGs and LGAs has been identified in six: Belgium, France, Iceland, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania.

In Belgium and, more concretely, in **Flanders**, during the 2022 edition of the yearly Week of the Sustainable Municipality, 110 out of 300 LRGs raised the SDG flag to increase citizens' understanding of the SDGs. The association VVSG has produced a [methodological guide](#) to support other organizations' efforts to promote the SDGs. In addition, VVSG has aligned several strategic documents (e.g. its 2019 [memorandum](#)) with the SDGs. Through the SDG Academy, the SDG-Check self-assessment tool and a [guide on SDG monitoring and reporting](#), LRGs' staff are being trained and supported in their quest towards SDG localization. These actions will be reinforced in the face of the 2024 local elections. The [VSR](#) (see Box 2.3.5) provides an overview of these and many other actions carried out by VVSG and its member municipalities, along with an analysis of 200 selected indicators gathered through the [SDG Monitor](#) and the municipal monitor. Also in Belgium, associations such as **Brulocalis** and cities such as **Bruges** and **Mouscron** have centred their efforts on raising awareness. Brulocalis published an informative brochure for its municipalities. Bruges organized a live radio broadcast on the SDGs, along with different articles on its internal communication platform, to promote interest among its own staffers. It also continues to participate in the national "Sustainable Municipalities Week" campaign. Building on the outcomes of a dedicated tour and the work of several appointed ambassadors, Mouscron has disseminated the importance of the SDGs through a "Catalogue of Sustainable Actions Towards 2030." Based on its [2020–2025 Strategic Plan](#), **Harelbeke** has adopted a [set of indicators and a dashboard](#) aligned to the SDGs. **Ghent** produced its [third VLR](#) in 2022.

In France, the city of **Strasbourg** and its **metropolitan area** have been committed to the 2030 Agenda since 2018 and raise awareness on its importance at the local level. Today, they are aiming to update their existing 469 indicators for sustainable development to align them to the 2030 Agenda, and they expect to produce a VLR in the coming months. Further west, the **metropolitan area of La Rochelle** participated in the EU-funded [Global Goals for Cities project](#), under the URBACT programme. The project aimed to localize the 2030 Agenda through an integrated action plan that includes, among other components, [awareness-raising activities](#), training and monitoring of progress. Together with the cities of **Metz**, **Niort** and **Bagneux** and led by the consultant firm Interactions Durables, the two metropolitan areas participated in a joint project to develop an open-source SDG indicator set that is adapted to their own territories and that builds on the indicators set by the national government and the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities. **Angers** and the **Angers Loire Métropole** have aligned their strategic and action plans to the SDGs, even though they label this effort as "ecological, social and solidarity transition." The city's sustainable development [reports](#) ensure explicit visibility of the SDGs. See Box 2.3.14 for more information on France.

BOX 2.3.14

The SDG localization report produced by AFCCRE, CUF and Comité 21 in France

In France, the **French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions** (AFCCRE) and **Cités Unies France** (CUF), as well as **Comité 21**, with the support of UCLG, have produced a [report](#) to ascertain the level of SDG localization in the country. The report gathers information from three regions, 10 departments and 33 cities – territories representing nearly 21 million inhabitants. According to the 46 responses received, most French LRGs (70%) have adopted commitments in favour of the SDGs. This has involved adopting declarations (25%, e.g. Commitment 2030 in **Alfortville**), action plans (e.g. department of **Loir-et-Cher**) and roadmaps (e.g. **Niort**, **Nouvelle-Aquitaine** region), as well as integrating the SDGs into their territorial policies (e.g. **Brittany**, **Grand Est**, **Paris**, **Lyon**, **Marseille**). Many LRGs understand their SDG commitments are part of the continuity of the Agenda 21 (e.g. **Cannes**, **Bourgogne-Franche-Comté**) or of their territorial plans on climate, air and energy (e.g. **Châtelleraut**, **Neuville-en-Ferrain**) and report on the progress made in sustainable development according to the national laws. Among the 17 SDGs, SDG 11 is prioritized by 81% of respondents, followed by SDGs 6, 7, 13 and 12. However, 42% of the responding LRGs have not yet defined specific SDG monitoring indicator systems to assess their progress.

In addition to producing a [VSR](#), the **Icelandic Association of Local Authorities** has been organizing activities with its members to raise awareness and knowledge of the SDGs. It created a toolbox for SDG localization under the coordination platform with the national government. In 2019, 44 out of the 69 municipalities signed a declaration to work together on climate matters and SDG local-

ization. In 2021–2022, almost half of the municipalities participated in a specific six-month support programme. A set of localized indicators has been developed in co-operation with the Prime Minister's Office and Statistics Iceland; however, financing constraints have not allowed them to put the monitoring system into practice yet. [Kópavogsbær](#) (Iceland's second largest municipality with 39,000 inhabitants) and [Sveitarfélagið Hornafjörður](#) (2,500 inhabitants, with very visible effects of climate change in the territory) are implementing special SDG action plans. [Kópavogur](#) has totally integrated the SDGs into their steering mechanism and budgets, has developed SDG indicators and has obtained an ISO certification for sustainable cities. In the [Reykjanes](#) peninsula, municipalities have collaborated with the state-owned aviation company to achieve the SDGs.

In Lithuania, the **Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania** (ALAL) organized several conferences to raise awareness on the SDGs: one targeted Eastern Partnership countries, and another targeted local stakeholders. **Klaipėda** created an [SDG story](#) composed of a series of infographics explaining how the SDGs link to the city's main strategic development plan, Klaipėda 2035.

BOX 2.3.15

Portugal's subnational efforts for achieving the SDGs

One country reporting this year to the HLPF is Portugal, and 47 of its LRGs responded to this year's GTF/UCLG Survey. According to the survey, 62% of the respondents state their institutions have made progress in SDG localization and now have a medium-to-high level of understanding of the SDGs. Furthermore, 81% of LRGs have adopted a strategy or an action plan, and 28% of these documents are in an advanced stage or have even been updated to expand their objectives.

A high number of municipalities have invested in raising awareness on SDG localization, including the following:

- **Odemira**, through its [newsletter](#) and specific activities with "social network partners"
- **Seixal**, by focusing on municipal staff, children and youth
- **Óbidos**, by raising awareness in schools
- **Pombal**, through an exhibition, the local press and social networks, as well as the appointment of an SDG ambassador for each local department
- **Mafra**, by focusing on youth through [video clips](#), board games, visual materials, park parties and meetings with local companies and workers
- **Oeiras**, by focusing on companies through a [guide](#) and campaigns in collaboration with the Intermunicipal Network for Development Cooperation
- **Torres Vedras**
- **Águeda**

In terms of monitoring local action, the [LocalSDG Platform](#) has proven to be effective in mobilizing municipal decision-makers and technicians, local agents and citizens in relation to the SDGs. Partners include the National Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development, the University of Lisbon, the New University of Lisbon and the consultant firm 2adapt. The [online portal](#) allows visualizing and monitoring the contributions of 91 municipalities, such as **Cascais**, **Loulé**, **Oeiras** and **Torres Vedras**, towards the SDGs.

In 2020, **Cascais** produced its [first VLR](#). The municipality of **Loulé**, building on its clear commitment to the SDGs, on the LocalSDG Platform and on the generation and analysis of [its own data](#), is currently preparing its first VLR. In addition, the platform promotes the Best Set of Good Practices award and the LocalSDG Seals for municipalities that demonstrate a high level of commitment to local sustainability, such as **Oeiras**. This city is developing its Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development aligned with the SDGs and has several decentralized cooperation programmes flagging the SDGs. It has also launched the [Oeiras Solidarity Programme](#), through which it has involved over 200 companies in the community and [encouraged them](#) to develop actions that contribute to the municipality's sustainability.

Another initiative is the Municipal Sustainability Index. As of 2022, it included 133 indicators aligned with 66 SDG targets. Based on this index, the Centre for Studies and Opinion Surveys at the Catholic University of Portugal publishes yearly [reports](#) that monitor the state of SDG localization. These reports include municipalities such as **Abrantes**, **Águeda**, **Almada**, **Braga**, **Cascais**, **Chamusca**, **Fundão**, **Grândola**, **Guimarães**, **Horta**, **Lagoa**, **Lagos**, **Loures**, **Mação**, **Mafra**, **Palmela**, **Porto**, **Santo Tirso**, **Sintra**, **Torres Novas**, **Torres Vedras**, **Valongo**, **Vila Franca de Xira** and **Famalicão**. The city of **Pombal**, mentioned above, is using both indicator systems (the LocalSDG Platform and the Municipal Sustainability Index) and has recently created an observatory to follow SDG progress more closely. **Mafra** has joined UN-Habitat's global SDG Cities initiative and has become an [SDGs Urban Lab](#). It researches and shares relevant knowledge and best practices on implementing the SDGs in cities, based on the Municipal Sustainable Index and the UN Global Urban Monitoring Framework, which can be replicated by participating cities. Mafra is also producing its first VLR.



In Romania, in addition to producing a [VSR](#) together with the AMR, the **ACoR** has placed its attention on improving financial aspects of the policies related to education, health and social protection (SDGs 3, 4, 6 and 11), with particular emphasis on multilevel relations.

Steady progress is being made in non-reporting European countries as well. The **Austrian Association of Cities and Towns** (Austria) has been active in raising awareness, primarily using brochures, tools and events. Through two surveys (in 2017 and 2021), the SDG Labs and the activities organized around the Kommunale Nachhaltigkeit platform, the LGA is fostering networking, exchange of knowledge and best practices, and reporting. However, according to the LGA, the alignment of members' daily work with the SDGs is still very heterogeneous; most do not carry out SDG monitoring.

The **Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic** (SMOCR) is undergoing systemic changes: it now includes sustainable development among its strategic priorities, has established a new working group for sustainable development, and educates and supports municipalities in implementing SDGs in a more intensive and systematic way.

In Denmark, **Gladsaxe** published its [second VLR](#) in 2022. The VLR illustrates how the vision and goals of sustainable development can be translated into practice in various ways when a clear strategy is set. It also shows how to systematically implement such a strategy through governance structures and, at the same time, give municipal employees "license to act" on sustainability within their organization and with local actors, who share the vision and goals.

In Estonia, the **Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities** (AECM), along with the municipalities of **Elva**, **Põltsamaa** and **Rakvere**, are part of the Council for the Assessment of Service Levels of Municipalities. This council directs the [Minuomavalitsus](#) platform, which evaluates public services of all local governments in 18 areas. It draws on over 100 indicators aligned with the SDGs.

In **Finland**, a pilot, dialogue-based project aimed at finding synergies between the SDGs and decision-makers' work has been co-developed and implemented by the six largest cities, including **Oulu**. **Vaasa** has strengthened training for political leaders and local staff. **Tampere**, like other cities, has benefitted from central government funding and the Ministry of the Environment's Sustainable City programme to strengthen its SDG-related strategy. This has allowed the city to coordinate action with the Prime Minister's Office and several ministries, and to publish a [VLR](#) that gathers and analyzes local data around both strategic and tactical indicators.

In Germany, the **Association of German Cities** (DLT), the **German County Association** (DST) and the **German Association of Towns and Municipalities** (DStGB), along with other partners, are part of the working group that created the [SDG-Portal](#). This portal analyzes the state of SDG localization through over 100 centrally collected indicators in all municipalities with over 5,000 inhabitants. The city of **Bonn** published its [second VLR](#); **Düsseldorf** produced its [first VLR](#), just like **Dortmund**; and **Kiel** launched its [first VLR](#) in 2022, aiming for a second one in 2024.

The **Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions** (AICCIRE), in Italy, organized the fifth edition of the knowledge- and innovation-exchange platform [Venice City Solutions 2030](#). In addition, it is continuously feeding and improving its [SDG portal](#) for monitoring achievements. Importantly, the 2022 Italian VNR included an annex fully focused on regions and metropolitan cities, including the VLRs of the regions of [Abruzzo](#), [Marche](#) and [Umbria](#); the region of [Emilia Romagna and the Metropolitan City of Bologna](#); the region of [Lazio](#); the region of [Liguria](#); the region of [Lombardy and the Metropolitan City of Milan](#); the region of [Piemonte and the Metropolitan City of Torino](#); the region of [Puglia and the Metropolitan City of Bari](#); the autonomous region of [Sardinia](#); and the metropolitan cities of [Genova](#), [Messina](#), [Reggio Calabria](#) and [Rome](#). In the country, 24 LRGs from the Sustainable Municipalities Network have tracked progress through their new monitoring framework based on a set of 101 indicators dedicated only to cities. They have achieved "good results" according to a [2023 report](#), particularly regarding SDGs 7 and 8.

In the Netherlands, given the general lack of awareness and knowledge of the SDGs in the different departments of **VNG** and among its members, the institution has worked to mainstream the SDGs into all departments, strategies and activities. VNG also continues to raise awareness among its members, local stakeholders and citizens through the SDG Flag Day, the SDG Action Day and the Global Goals Meet-Up, among other events. VNG and several municipalities have jointly created a localized SDG monitoring system based on the data already available on the [Waarstaatjegemeente.nl](#) website. The **National Town-Twinning Council Netherlands-Nicaragua** (LBSNN) raises awareness among school students through the World Citizenship project and by helping introduce the SDGs in school curricula and teachers' training. With the support of VNG and LBSNN, **Tilburg** organized the Tilburg Ten Miles: an event to "run to the 17 global goals." In 2022, 10,000 runners took part, and 20 local organizations communicated to the general public (over 75,000 participants) what they do for the SDGs. **Schiedam** has created an indicator system that is connected to the municipality's yearly budget, and **Amsterdam** has produced a [VLR](#).

In Norway, the **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities** (KS) coordinates, together with the national Sustainability Network, monthly webinars on SDG-related topics, in addition to an ongoing dissemination campaign on social media and other forums. KS develops SDG e-learning modules, tools and methods for SDG implementation. Together with the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions and other labour organizations, KS has developed a national sustainability pledge to strengthen progress on fulfilling the 2030 Agenda, which has strengthened collaboration and boosted innovation. KS, which produced a [VSR](#) in 2021, will produce a joint Nordic VSR with the other Nordic LGAs and the research institution Nordregio. After adopting an indicator set (or taxonomy) with Statistics Norway, KS and the national government are collaborating to develop new localized indicators.

In Serbia, the **Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities** (SCTM) has been active in raising awareness among its members through multiple events; offering [training](#) and support to localize, finance and monitor the SDGs; and supporting the appointment of an SDG contact point in each of its members. It has done so in co-operation with the national government. For example, it worked with the Public Policy Secretariat to publish the 2020 [guidelines](#) to help LRGs align their development plans with the SDGs, and it cooperated with the Statistics Office in charge of creating an [SDG-related indicator system](#), including the localization of SDG indicator 11.3.2 on participatory planning. It has also collaborated with civil society (e.g. through the [SDGs for All](#) platform), as well as the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities, South-East Europe (NALAS; see projects below), among others.

In Slovenia, all municipalities of the **Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia** (ZMOS) have integrated the SDGs into their sustainable urban development strategies as a result of the association's support.

In Sweden, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has continued to make tangible its 2016 commitment to the 2030 Agenda. Through its [Open Comparisons](#) mapping initiative, webinars, lectures and conferences, the LGA is fostering networking and knowledge exchange among its members. Finishing in 2023, the [Glokala Sverige](#) project launched by SALAR, in collaboration with the United Nations Association of Sweden and the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy, will have assisted more than two-thirds of Sweden's municipalities' and regions' representatives and officials in gaining awareness and receiving training around the 2030 Agenda. Together with the other founding institutions (the non-profit Council for the Promotion of Municipal Analyses and the national government), SALAR is currently reviewing the local SDG-aligned indicators of the [Kolada](#) database, which enables municipalities to retrieve key indicator data on sustainable development. SALAR released its first [VSR](#) in 2021 and is currently working on a joint VSR with the other Nordic LGAs.

In Spain, the **Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces** (FEMP) is working hand in hand with the national government to align the global indicators with local needs and capacities. It has also requested that the national government align the expenditure budgets with the SDGs. The **Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity** (FAMSI) has launched the [Practising the SDGs Toolkit](#) with key guidelines for understanding the potential of the 2030 Agenda and aligning strategies and plans to the SDGs and indicator systems. Through its "Committed to the 2030 Agenda" campaign, the solidarity and cooperation fund **Fons Mallorquí de Solidaritat i Cooperació** has organized online training for elected officials and staff from municipalities and NGOs in Mallorca, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Nicaragua and Peru; short video contests across several secondary schools; roundtables on specific SDGs with various stakeholders; exchanges around SDG 6 in Tunisia and Burkina Faso; and an assessment of the situation of SDG target 5.5 in Kairouan (Tunisia). The **Navarra** region is collaborating with the existing sustainability alliances between local

NGOs and the private sector, including an agreement between government-owned enterprises and the NGOs' network. In addition to creating [its own indicator system](#) and working with the national statistics institute to homogenize the SDG indicators system at the local level, the region is working with the Joint Research Centre's [REGIONS2030: Monitoring the SDGs in the EU regions – Filling the Data Gaps](#) pilot project to explore the synergies of SDG monitoring, policy-making and sustainable regional development. The city of **Madrid** has also created a specific indicator system to monitor the implementation of its SDG localization strategy, and it has recently produced its first [VLR](#).

In **Euskadi**, the region's high-impact localization practice aims to create a new social contract around the SDGs through the [Basque Multistakeholder Forum for Social Transition and the 2030 Agenda](#). Under a common strategy, the forum brings together representatives from all levels of government in Euskadi (region, provinces and municipalities – in the latter case, through the **Association of Basque Municipalities**, EUEDEL), along with the three Basque universities, the third sector and several research centres. Led by the President of Euskadi, the forum is composed of a Plenary, in which the highest representatives of these institutions meet twice a year; a Permanent Commission that meets monthly; five working groups; and the Guneak platform, which involves myriad local stakeholders. The Governance Working Group involves public stakeholders from all three levels. It is developing a set [of 50 SDG-related indicators disaggregated at the municipal level](#) and is working on aligning the institutions' budgets to the SDGs. The Basque Government has also focused on offering training to citizens, companies and organizations; in 2022, 1,300 trainees participated in the courses. It has also provided training on mainstreaming the SDGs into the government's different departments and fostering collaboration among them. Remarkably, in 2023, Euskadi produced its [sixth VLR](#) in a row. The Basque Agency for Development Cooperation and Euskal Fondoa have linked their priorities and projects with the SDGs, as shown in the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation's [2021 report](#). Finally, in March 2023, the Basque Government presented to the UN and other international organizations the [Now, 2030 Proposal](#). This proposal reflects on the need for a major international consensus making 2023 a global and local turning point in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and fulfilment of the SDGs. In a joint effort among the Basque Government, the city of **Bilbao**, the Spanish government and the UN, the Local2030 Coalition Secretariat was established in Bilbao. The LGA, EUEDEL, is leading four of the [15 emblematic projects for the 2021–2024 period](#). These are on supporting elected women leaders, fostering equality and promoting good governance and democratic innovation through the [ELoGE seal](#) (see Paper 5, Box 3.5.5, for more information on the Basque Country).

The [Catalonia 2030 Alliance](#) includes 75 public and private organizations that aim to accelerate SDG localization, and the Statistical Institute and the Sustainable Development Advisory Committee keep track of the progress made through two different SDG-related indicator sets. In July 2022, the Urban Assembly of Catalonia adopted the [Agenda of Towns and Cities Catalonia 2050](#)

roadmap, based on the work of over 700 participants and several working groups. **Barcelona** continues to involve the main local stakeholders through the 2030 Agenda Roundtable and has organized two editions of the SDG Annual Conference and one edition of the SDG Awards. The city has also created a new SDG indicator system. **Terrassa** is collaborating with the educational sector to mainstream the SDGs in the management of local, mostly public schools. **Manresa** was a member of the URBACT Global Goals for Cities network and participates in the Global Goals working group of the Eurotowns network. The city has carried out a strong SDG dissemination campaign, including live and online surveys, workshops with schools and citizens, and exhibitions, and it has created a working group with over 50 local stakeholders. The **Barcelona Provincial Council** offers [financial, technical and material resources](#) to the 311 municipalities within its territory and beyond to promote SDG localization. These include visual materials and games, a [video](#) summarizing all actions carried out by the Council so far, a specific [webpage](#), a [handbook](#), [training](#) for public employees (441 employees were trained in 2022; 848 from 102 LRGs have been trained since 2020), the fourth edition of the international [online course on SDG localization](#) organized with UCLG, a [conference](#) on local leadership and SDGs organized with the FEMP and [many other actions](#). In line with its [2021–2030 SDG strategic plan](#), the [Council's 2020–2023 Action Plan](#) is aligned with the SDGs. Monitoring is ensured both [qualitatively](#) and quantitatively through the [Visor 2030](#) platform (which shows the situation for each municipality through impact indicators) and a specific outcome indicators set.

In Switzerland, the [Coord 21](#) network, which includes 78 LRGs from seven Francophone cantons, developed a [guide for SDG localization in cantons and municipalities](#).

Finally, in the UK, the **Convention of Scottish Local Authorities** (COSLA) and the **Scottish Government** co-signed the National Performance Framework to ensure all public sector activities are guided by the 2030 Agenda. COSLA, however, has expressed concerns about the framework's indicators not being well aligned to SDG 11 indicators, as well as about the need to strengthen multi-level governance in Scotland. In 2020, COSLA contributed to the Scottish supplementary review, provided as a submission to the UK VNR. **Bristol** published a [VLR](#) in 2022.

NALAS has also played a notable role. The association has implemented, together with LGAs from five Western Balkan countries, NGOs and civil society, the following projects: Regional Learning for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe (2020–2021), Enhancing Local Capacities to Implement the 2030 Agenda and the “Leave No One Behind” Principle (2019–2022) and Regional Cooperation for Better Social Inclusion at the Local Level (2022–2025). NALAS's new 2023–2027 Strategic Plan is aligned with the spirit of the SDGs.

BOX 2.3.16

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions' (CEMR's) and Platform's commitment to mainstreaming the SDGs in development policy

Sustainable development has always been a key component of development policy. However, the 2030 Agenda proposed a new approach in these efforts, shifting away from the North-South donor-recipient model of cooperation towards more win-win partnerships between all countries, all levels and all stakeholders. To reflect what role LRGs can play in this new paradigm shift, CEMR and Platforma manage a new SDG cluster to gather partners around this topic and reflect on how to adapt and respond to new global and European priorities for sustainability. In addition, CEMR and Platforma have been contributing to the HLPF through yearly reports since 2017. The 2023 report can be found [here](#). In addition to highlighting the crucial role of decentralized cooperation and partnerships to achieve the SDGs, the report emphasizes the need for European states and the European Union to strengthen their support to LRGs in monitoring and reporting progress. It also calls for supporting LRGs in the international arena by including them in relevant high-level delegation meetings.



Latin America

In Latin America, the available country data shows mixed progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. Currently, [75% of the SDGs risk not being achieved](#) unless innovative and transformative actions are put in place. The COVID-19 pandemic, an economic slowdown, geopolitical conflicts, forced migration and displacement and high levels of inflation have deepened gross inequalities in the region.

At the local level, however, the LRGs of several countries continue to lead the way towards SDG localization, with strong actions reported in Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico and Uruguay. While at the beginning of SDG implementation, LRGs made great efforts to align their strategies and development plans with the SDGs, now, they are increasingly focusing on establishing strong indicator sets and producing VLRs and VSRs to track progress and propel local policy-making.

With regards to reporting countries, in Chile, the **AChM** has produced a [VSR](#), as seen in Box 2.3.2, and prioritized training the municipalities' staff. In **Peñalolén**, the [2021 Local Development Plan vision](#) includes the values of the 2030 Agenda. For the other reporting country in the region, Guyana, no information is available.

Moving on with non-reporting countries, in Argentina, the **Federation of Argentinian Municipalities** (FAM) produced its [VSR](#) in 2022. It also created the Observatory for Sustainable Local Development, which is in charge of strengthening relations with the regions and other stakeholders, offering training sessions on the SDGs, coordinating the national mechanism of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy and creating a set of local indicators to keep track of progress. **Lincoln** has continued [pioneering](#) SDG localization through awareness-raising campaigns and monitoring of progress via a specific set of indicators. The Matanza-Riachuelo River Basin Authority, to which **Esteban Echeverría** belongs, has aligned its policies and strategies to the SDGs. Several VLRs have been recently published: namely, those of [Yerba Buena](#), [Tierra del Fuego](#), [Río Grande](#), [Partido de La Costa](#), [Villa María](#), [Buenos Aires](#) (its fourth VLR since 2019), [Córdoba province](#) (which expects to publish a second VLR in 2023), [Salta](#), [San Justo](#) and [Santa Fe city](#). In **Buenos Aires**, the BA Volunteering initiative, with the support of UN Argentina, has been fostering the population's participation and commitment since 2021. It has increasingly focused on the innovation and co-creation of solutions for the city. **Villa María's** SDG board game is used in schools and promotes the understanding of sustainable development among the youngest. Together with the OECD, the **Córdoba province** mainstreamed the SDGs into local policies related to four priority areas to leave no one behind: (a) reducing the digital gap in urban and rural municipalities, (b) improving the habitat and access to services in the localities, (c) including women in labour markets and recognizing the care economy, and (d) providing employment training to youth. **Rosario** has gathered information directly from neighbourhoods and schools and through participatory budgeting exercises to prioritize its work around the SDGs.

BOX 2.3.17

Mercociudades's capacity building and funding for the SDGs

Mercociudades is leading several initiatives to help localize the SDGs in Latin America. [Enlace Sur](#) is an interactive platform for city-to-city technical exchanges on sustainable development and the fight against climate change. Other initiatives include the [City-University Cooperation Observatory](#), in partnership with the regional network of public universities (Montevideo Group Association of Universities, AUGM); the Resilience School; and the funding of regional projects aligned with the SDGs through the [South-South Cooperation Programme](#) (this year, around SDGs 5, 6, 10 and 11).

The **Association of Municipalities of Bolivia** (AMB) has joined forces with several actors (e.g. the Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Local Government Associations, FLACMA), UNDP, the national government) to promote the alignment of municipalities' strategic plans with the SDGs. Also, together with FLACMA and the Fundación Arnaiz, it is working with the municipalities of **Cobija**, **Trinidad**, **Potosí**, **Tarija** and **Sucre** on the SDG Digital Mapping project. This project focuses on raising awareness among the population, with a particular emphasis on youth, about the 2030 Agenda. Among other activities, it includes training sessions, the creation of a municipal geoportal called "SDG Maps," meetings with local communities, and TV and radio dissemination. [Cochabamba](#), [El Alto](#), [La Paz](#) and [Santa Cruz de la Sierra](#) published VLRs in 2022 with the support of UN-Habitat. As part of the joint decentralized cooperation strategy with its partner Brasschaat (Flanders, Belgium), **Tarija** participated in the 2022 Week of the Sustainable Municipality to raise awareness on SDG localization. As a follow-up to three key strategic documents (the [first VLR](#) that established the basis for SDG localization in the municipality, a document on adequate housing and SDGs and the [second VLR](#) in 2022), the city of **La Paz** gave birth to the "[Barrios de Verdad de Mil Colores](#)" programme to improve the livelihoods of people living in peripheral neighbourhoods.

In Brazil, the state of **São Paulo** launched a [VLR](#) in 2022, as did its municipality [Barueri](#). The state of **Pará** also published a [VLR](#) – its third since 2020. As part of its [Horizonte 2030](#) programme, **Belo Horizonte** carries out awareness-raising activities among different sectors of society and provides technical training to the municipal public administration. The municipality and other stakeholders contribute through the [Millennium Observatory](#) to monitor the city's sustainability achievements through regular reports (such as the [2022 VLR](#)) and the [SDG Indicators Panel](#) including 162 indicators. The city's [SDG Thematic Budget](#) provides ongoing monitoring of resource allocation by SDG.

In Colombia, VLRs are blooming. The [second VLR](#) of **Antioquia** tracks progress on SDG localization against the Departmental Development Plan (specifically aligned to the five pillars of the 2030 Agenda) and the 2040 Strategic Plan. Antioquia uses a monitoring system based on

UN-Habitat's indicators, adapted to the country's needs by the national government. [Manizales](#) and [Pereira](#) have also each published a VLR. In the latter case, the city has received support from the Stockholm Environment Institute, Pereira Cómo Vamos, Global Shapers Community Pereira, the Fundación Universitaria del Área Andina and the national government. The city of **Bogotá** has recently prioritized actions around SDGs 1, 5, 8, 11 and 13 through the [To Do List project](#). Its [VLR](#) showcases the progress made on these SDGs. This work has been a collaborative effort that has strengthened ties across city departments and with the other six participating organizations representing the public and private sectors, civil society and academia (see Box 2.3.18 for more information).

BOX 2.3.18

Bogotá's indicator system

Bogotá's specific indicator system has been key to produce and monitor reliable and quality information that informs policy-making and contributes to public accountability. It uses statistical information that is produced at both national and local levels and updated periodically with the support of strategic local stakeholders. The whole matrix is updated every six months, which enables the publication of two monitoring reports every year in compliance with the city's 2020–2024 District Development Plan.

Of all the indicators, 112 directly relate to the 2030 Agenda's goals and targets. As a result of the work of the Urban-Regional Dynamics Observatory, the monitoring work covers not only the city of Bogotá but also 20 other municipalities in the Cundinamarca department (Bojacá, Cajicá, Chía, Cota, El Rosal, Facatativá, Funza, Fusagasugá, Gachancipá, La Calera, Madrid, Mosquera, Sibaté, Soacha, Sopó, Subachoque, Tabio, Tenjo, Tocancipá and Zipaquirá). Understanding the city's SDG strategy as an umbrella for all other local policies has contributed to structuring the city's political agenda and offering stability to all actions contributing to the SDGs.

Sarchí (Costa Rica) has aligned its strategic plans to the SDGs, offered training to both municipal staffers and the population and published its [first VLR](#) in 2022. [Belén](#), [Escazú](#), [Goicoechea](#) and [Puriscal](#) also published VLRS in 2022. In Ecuador, the **Manabí** province's Territorial Development Plan includes indicators aligned with the SDGs and the Territorial Prosperity Index developed with UN-Habitat. The province is disseminating its [SDG progress dashboard](#) and bold [monitoring methodology](#) for purposes of replicability. All this work has led Manabí to produce its [first VLR](#) in 2023. The **Santa Elena** province has raised awareness among the population and local stakeholders around the 2030 Agenda. The country's LGA, **CONGOPE**, has produced its [fourth VSR](#) in four years, as seen in Box 2.3.4. In El Salvador, the **San Salvador Metropolitan Area (COAMSS-OPAMSS)** has a [Metropolitan Observatory](#) that tracks progress against 49 City Prosperity Index indicators and 51 SDG-related indicators. It has also produced one of the first three [Voluntary Metropolitan Reviews](#) on green public space with the support of UN-Habitat.



In Guatemala, **Mixco** produced its [first VLR](#) in 2022.

In Mexico, **Zapopan's** SDG strategy was developed in the context of reforms to the city's Participatory Planning Regulation. The multistakeholder Municipal Council for SDG Implementation and Monitoring will define actions for SDG localization. The state of **Oaxaca** produced its [second VLR](#) in 2022.

The department of **Canelones** (Uruguay) is preparing its first VLR based on the outputs of workshops held with the different area directors. These workshops identified the main development factors linked to the 2030 Agenda. The department is also producing an indicators system together with UNDP and other international stakeholders. **Montevideo** received support from the Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities (UCCI) and UNDP Uruguay to promote awareness about the SDGs through four different actions: (a) an experience exchange workshop with the municipalities of São Paulo (Brazil), La Paz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) and Barcelona (Spain); (b) a training session with the city's public staff; (c) a multistakeholder activity about migration; and (d) a [guide on SDG awareness raising](#) resulting from these activities. The city published its [second VLR](#) in 2022.

In Paraguay, **Filadelfia** published its [first VLR](#) in 2022.

BOX 2.3.19

UCCI's mapping of SDG localization strategies, initiatives, indicator sets and progress made by LRGs

UCCI has created an [atlas](#) to deepen its technical co-operation work on SDGs 11 and 17, among others. This atlas includes indicators aligned with the SDGs and that build on the indicators proposed by the Joint Research Centre's *European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews*, UN-Habitat's Global Urban Monitoring Framework, SDSN's work and other sources. The MapeODS initiative, still in development, will showcase UCCI cities' SDG localization strategies around the three core areas of UCLG's Pact for the Future: people, planet and government. Such strategies include civil society awareness raising, monitoring and VLR production. The [Ibero-American Best Practice Databank](#) includes 50 initiatives around sustainability promoted by 27 cities from the network. With UCCI's support, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Bogotá have implemented a project on [the circular economy as an innovative mechanism for SDG implementation](#).

Middle East and West Asia

From the reporting countries in the Middle East and West Asia region, Saudi Arabia has made the most notable progress. The city of **Al Madinah** has published the [first VLR](#) in the country, covering SDGs 1 to 8 and 11 and monitoring SDG achievement under the city's Vision 2030.

However, the situation in the region is [not encouraging in terms of SDG achievement](#). This stems from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing percentage of the population living in urban areas as well as in [urban slums](#) (among other reasons, broadly due to migration and displacement), limited levels of decentralization and the already tangible effects of climate change, which has had a stronger impact in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

LRGs and LGAs from other parts of the region have continued pursuing the SDGs, particularly in Jordan, Turkey and Palestine. The city of **Amman**, in Jordan, published its [first VLR](#) in 2022 in a joint effort with the national government to report on the city's and the country's state of SDG localization.

In Turkey, the **Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU)** [Statute](#) was amended in 2018 to include sustainable development as a core value, as does the [2020–2024 Strategic Plan](#). The MMU has promoted several awareness-raising initiatives: the Mentor Programme, which has entailed seven knowledge- and experience-sharing events among MMU municipalities and other national and international peers; the [Urban magazine](#)'s and *City & Society* journal's articles on localizing the SDGs; the MMU's own [VLR](#) and [launch event](#); workshops with a university; and the [Golden Ant award](#) for sustainable urbanization best practices on SDG achievement. **Karatay** published its [first VLR](#) in 2021 based on a multistakeholder approach that involved training, interviews and coordination meetings. It has also restructured its directorates to ensure the SDGs are mainstreamed into the different plans and projects. **Avclar** also published its [first VLR](#) in 2022. The city of **Mezitli** has focused on promoting citizen awareness by connecting the SDGs to local actions on active aging, support to agricultural employment and women's empowerment. It has also been awarded prizes on urban innovation (2018 Guangzhou Award) and food sovereignty (2019 Milan Urban Food Policy Pact award). The Tropical Butterfly Garden in the **Selçuklu** district of the city of Konya has been recognized as an exemplary project in achieving SDG 11.

The **Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA)**, very active since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, has adopted an SDGs Localization Plan to strengthen ownership of the SDGs and improve policy-making through its own work and the work of its LRG members. With the support of GIZ and the European Union, this LGA has fostered municipal technical exchange hubs for LRGs to localize the 2030 Agenda; raised awareness among the population and local stakeholders through the SDG Portal, several videos and the social media campaign "170 Actions for Achieving the SDGs"; and organized training workshops for local government employees and engineers. An SDG Platform will be launched in 2023, serving as a main point of reference for all local SDG initiatives, an exchange forum and a data management system to monitor and report progress at the local level.

North America and the Caribbean

In Canada, one of the three reporting countries from North America and the Caribbean this year, the **Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)** has mainstreamed the SDGs into its work across the world, for example, into its projects on crisis management and support of women leaders. **Montréal** integrated the SDGs into its first post-COVID strategic plan: Montréal 2030. No information is available on SDG localization in Barbados nor in Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Beyond the reporting countries, in the USA, the city of **Los Angeles** is committed to localizing the SDGs through its 2019 [Green New Deal](#). It has also developed a [Green New Deal Neighborhood Council Toolkit](#) to support neighbourhood councils to accelerate sustainable action in their communities. Several city departments integrated the SDGs into their strategic plans. The city monitors the implementation of the SDGs via more than 170 indicators using the [Open SDG platform](#) and via the [SDG Activities Index](#). It has published two VLRS: in [2019](#) and [2021](#). In **Orlando**, the Green Works Orlando plan, updated in 2018, is aligned with the SDGs. The city published its first [VLR](#) in 2021.



3. 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 3.1 List of cities, regions, LGAs, GTF networks and partners contributing to the papers

Paper	Contributors
<p>Paper 1. 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>LRGs: Afadzato South District (Ghana), Barcelona (Spain), Bilbao (Spain), Esteban Echeverría (Argentina), Iztapalapa (Mexico), Montevideo (Uruguay), Montréal (Canada), Municipio B (Uruguay)</p> <p>GTF networks: Euro-Latin American Cities Cooperation Alliance (AL-LAs), Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Mercociudades, UCLG, UCLG Africa</p> <p>Partners: Habitat International Coalition, World Blind Union</p>
<p>Paper 2. 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>LRGs and LGAs: 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>GTF networks: C40, CEMR, Metropolis, UCLG, UCLG Africa</p> <p>Partners: 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>Paper 3. 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>LRGs and LGAs: Afadzato South District (Ghana), Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI), 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), Peñalolén (Chile), Pombal (Portugal), Rosario (Argentina), Rotterdam (the Netherlands), Terrassa (Spain), Villa María (Argentina), Viña del Mar (Chile)</p> <p>GTF networks: CEMR, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Local Governments Associations (FLACMA), UCLG, UCLG Africa</p> <p>Partners: World Blind Union</p>
<p>Paper 4. 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>LRGs: 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>GTF networks: Global Parliament of Mayors, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, Resilient Cities Network, UCLG, Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities (UCCI)</p> <p>Partners: 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>Paper 5. 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>LRGs: Basque Country (Spain)</p> <p>GTF networks: Metropolis, UCLG</p> <p>Partners: World Blind Union</p>

The five papers included in this section build on extensive desk research. In particular, they draw on experiences and policies reported by cities, regions, local government associations (LGAs), Global Taskforce (GTF) networks and partners via the GTF/United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) 2023 survey, several written consultation processes and interviews (see Table 3.1).

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.¹ 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.

PAPER 1. HOUSING AND BASIC SERVICES FROM BELOW:

HOW LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS ARE ADVANCING THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING



3.1.1 Introduction

Local and regional governments: Expanding the range of housing actions

The current housing crisis is a human rights crisis,¹ 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.² 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.³ 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 3.1.1 summarizes the kinds of experiences and instruments that this paper explores for each of these pathways.

Table 3.1.1 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"> • Democratizing data collection • Monitoring housing conditions and organizing housing demand • Monitoring housing rights violations
LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR THE <i>PROTECTION</i> OF HOUSING RIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to evictions and addressing exclusion and discrimination • Establishing and enforcing regulations of land and housing markets • Promoting more inclusive and responsive forms of land tenure
LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR THE <i>FULFILMENT</i> OF HOUSING RIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling direct provision of housing (public rent and private ownership) • Enabling different forms of community-led and co-produced housing and basic services – including informal settlement upgrading

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.



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.⁴ 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.⁵ Table 3.1.2 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 3.1.2 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
Enabling other socio-economic returns (SDGs 1, 10, 5, 4, 3) <i>Human rights frameworks:</i> Right to education and training Right to health Right to work	By increasing visibility of housing needs and rights violations, housing initiatives can enhance the likelihood of responsive actions to tackle poverty and inequalities.	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.	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.
Enabling environmental sustainability (SDGs 6, 7, 9) <i>Human rights frameworks:</i> Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment Right to water and sanitation	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.	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.	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.
Enabling more democratic governance (SDGs 16, 5, 6) <i>Human rights frameworks:</i> Right to public participation Right to equality and non-discrimination	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.	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.	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.

Source: own compilation

3.1.2 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.⁶

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-19,⁷ 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."⁸ The local implications of the process of global financialization for housing rights are widely documented.⁹ 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.¹⁰ In Europe only, 6.7 million households were in arrears with mortgage or rent payments in 2021.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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).

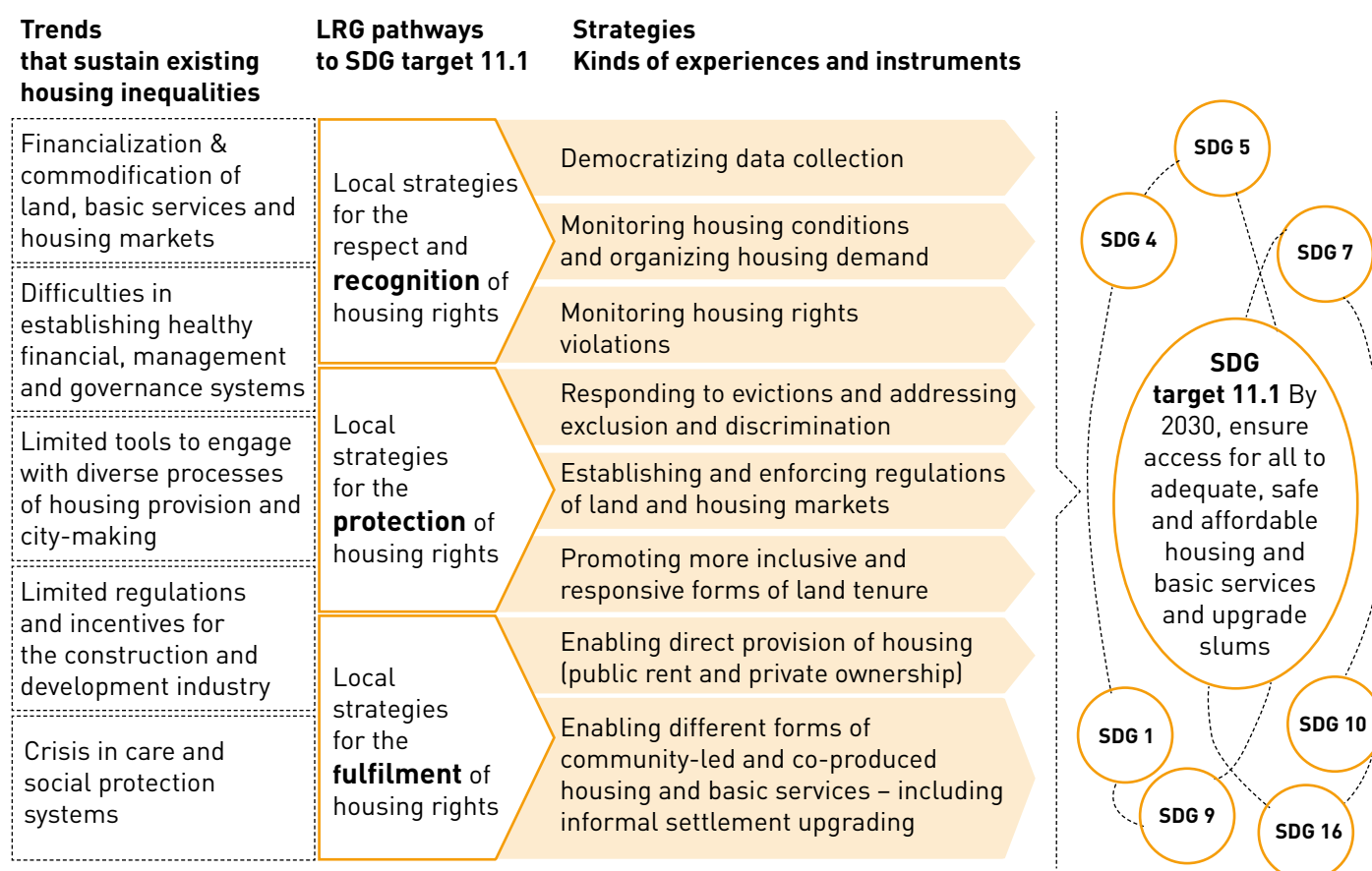
Finally, an overall trend that frames current challenges related to SDG target 11.1 is the general **crisis in care and social protection systems**, which became particularly acute in the context of COVID-19. Current calls for recog-

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

Figure 3.1.1 Trends, pathways and strategies led by LRGs to advance SDG target 11.1 and related goals



Source: own compilation

3.1.3 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,¹⁶ and the "Cities for Adequate Housing" session at the latest UCLG World Congress.¹⁷ 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.**

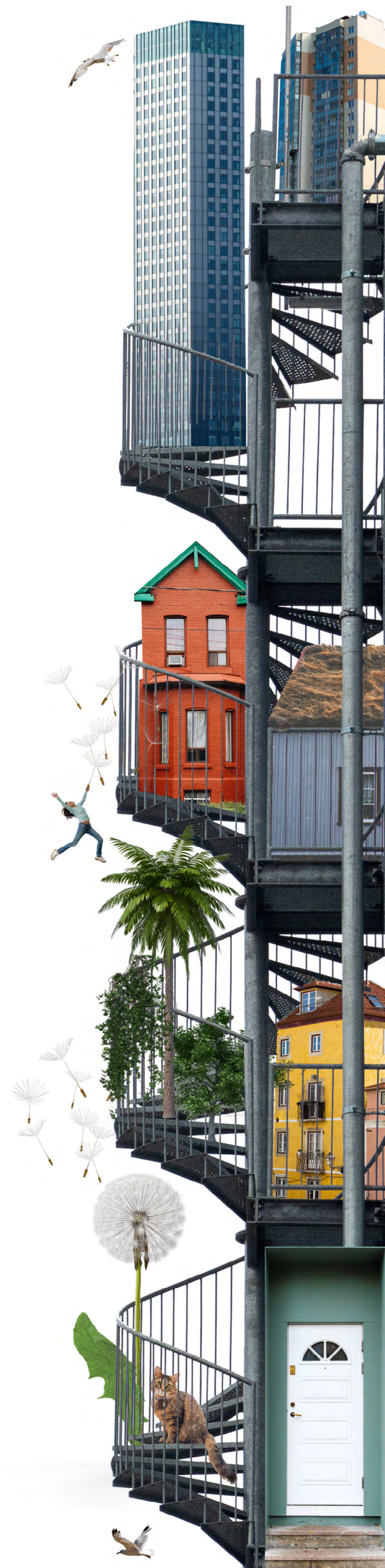
Pathway 1: Local strategies for the respect and recognition of housing rights

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.¹⁸ **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)¹⁹ or by members of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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.²²

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.²³ Likewise, HIC-HLRN has established an Urgent Action System,²⁴ 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.²⁵ For example, **Seoul** (Republic of Korea) has established an agreement with Seoul's Bar Association to prevent and monitor eviction-related violence.²⁶ 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).

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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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).²⁹ Cities such as **Brussels** (Belgium) managed to extend such moratoria to winter times.³⁰

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).³¹

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.³² **Mexico City** (Mexico) gives incentives, such as tax deductions, to developers that reserve 30% of units for affordable housing.³³

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.”³⁴

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.³⁵ 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.³⁶

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.³⁷ 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).³⁸ 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).³⁹

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.

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.⁴⁰ **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.⁴¹ 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-19.⁴² 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."⁴³ 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)⁴⁴ and an older LGBTQIA+ affirming urban community in the case of **London** (UK).⁴⁵ 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)⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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.⁵³

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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷

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 **Lekhnath** 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.⁵⁸ 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.



3.1.4 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.

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."⁵⁹ 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.

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”⁶⁰ 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, co-operatives 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”).

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.

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.⁶¹ 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.

3.1.5 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.



PAPER 2. INTEGRATED AND PARTICIPATORY URBAN PLANNING:

HOW LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS ENABLE EQUALITY THROUGH FEMINISM, ACCESSIBILITY AND PROXIMITY



3.2.1 Advancing action towards integrated and participatory approaches to urban planning and management

The 2030 Agenda emphasizes equitable access to opportunities, public services, infrastructure, connectivity and public spaces as prerequisites for building sustainable and inclusive communities.¹ This paper focuses on three key dimensions of this aspiration. The first is the focus on accessibility through transport equity, as framed in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 11.2: “provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.” The second is linked to mobility in and access to public spaces, as stated in SDG target 11.7: “provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.” The third cuts across all SDG 11 targets and recognizes that achieving this goal and all inhabitants’ right to the city and territory is fundamentally interlinked with SDG target 11.3: “enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.”

The paper also contributes to reviewing progress towards SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). **Reviewing these SDGs together, the paper is concerned with integrated and participatory approaches to urban planning. It focuses on accessibility and proximity, seeing feminist approaches to urban planning as the foundation.**

The paper elaborates on these strategies and their implications based on two premises. First, local and regional governments (LRGs) possess significant capacities to intervene in critical aspects of urban development to foster sustainable trajectories. LRGs have been instrumental in driving innovations in urban planning across the Global North and South, addressing priorities for integrating accessibility across strategies, plans and practices while recognizing the diversity of needs and aspirations of people with different social identities and lived experiences.² **An integral transformation of urban development patterns requires co-creating territorial and urban systems through a human rights-based and feminist approach: one that enables cities and territories to respect, care for and empower all inhabitants without discrimination.**³

This relates to the second premise, namely, that integrated urban planning strategies need to be anchored in an inclusive and accessible city, defined as:

“a place where everyone, regardless of their economic means, gender, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual identity, migration status or religion, is enabled and empowered to fully participate in the social, economic, cultural and political opportunities that cities have to offer.”⁴

At the core, this premise recognizes that the “global feminist municipal movement will be central to ensuring that women and girls are not left behind.”⁵ An intersectional feminist approach to planning addresses the rights, needs and aspirations of all city inhabitants with a justice-oriented focus. **By embracing feminist and democratic planning approaches and centring on accessibility and care, this paper elaborates on the impact of urban and territorial planning and development policies. It examines their impact on access to essential elements of a meaningful life, such as employment, education, health care and public spaces.**

Section 2 outlines three global trends related to inclusion, accessibility and participation in urban planning, examining how they have influenced access to socio-economic, cultural and political opportunities. Addressing these trends, Section 3 proposes three reinforcing pathways to strengthen inclusive access in integrated and participatory urban planning. Section 4 highlights the challenges that LRGs face in achieving these pathways and documents the capacities they are building. In conclusion, Section 5 summarizes the key messages to advance LRGs’ role in accelerating progress towards SDG targets 11.2, 11.3 and 11.7.

3.2.2 Trends: Fragmentation, inequalities and planning

Targets such as SDG 11.2 are commonly associated with transport and mobility. However, this paper seeks to expand on the definitions of mobility and accessibility as guiding concepts for reframing urban and territorial planning grounded in feminist principles. The paper recognizes that the dynamics of human mobility, encompassing travel as well as migration and displacement, are intrinsically woven into the societal tapestry. Such dynamics catalyze innovation and are a fundamental driver of urbanization. Movement is a necessity for many individuals but also a source of discrimination and a trigger for territorial imbalances. Structural changes are necessary for human mobility to signify opportunities.⁶

At the local scale, urban mobility can be (re)framed as the freedom and right of all citizens and residents to move in public space with safety and security – and without censure and social control.⁷ This definition considers the role of power relations in public space and the differentiated social positions that govern the ability to move freely across the territory. In doing so, it enables reflections about the role of planning and developing public spaces that cater to the diversity of practices and experiences of diverse inhabitants in navigating urban environments.

The following trends will inform reflections on planning based on feminist principles that focus on and reassert the importance of everyday life. This includes consider-

ing the different uses of spaces, the way in which they are experienced and invested, the time spent there and social relations. This approach notably calls for the recognition and revalorization of all life's spheres – productive, reproductive, personal, public or political. In seeking integrated and participatory planning approaches, it is important to note that in our modern urban spaces, the execution and organization of daily care activities and relations for the reproduction of life and our societies are rendered invisible and complex. Women and racialized persons bear the brunt of this responsibility and experience multiple constraints due to societal and physical barriers in our cities and territories.⁸ **Drawing upon intersectional feminism means, in urban planning, recognizing and responding to the needs and aspirations of inhabitants in all their diversity, taking into account the specific processes of intersecting discrimination and inequalities they experience.**

Access to land and spatial inequalities

Urban growth presents unique challenges and opportunities for LRGs. Understanding the drivers of and links between cities' physical growth and urban demographic changes is critical in localizing the SDGs and developing integrated and inclusive urban planning approaches.⁹

An estimated 4.4 billion people (56% of the world's population) lived in cities.¹⁰ Although the proportion of land that cities occupy is small (0.5% of the global land mass in 2020), as the population has increased, so has the demand for land. The rate of urban land consumption currently outpaces population growth by as much as 50%. This trend is projected to add 1.2 million square kilometres of newly urbanized area globally by 2030.¹¹ Between 1990 and 2015, the urban land area in industrialized countries grew by 80%, even though the urban population only increased by 12%. In contrast, countries in the Global South saw urban land occupation grow by 350%, with a corresponding urban population increase of 100%.¹² In low-income countries, the amount of land covered by cities doubled between 1975 and 2020. Differences in urban expansion rates are markedly larger since the second part of the 2010s, with African and Asian cities growing at a much higher proportion than cities in other regions. While, on average, cities have grown at 1.5 times the population rate in the past two decades, some regions are experiencing even faster urban sprawl at average annual expansion rates of 6.9% in East and South-East Asia, 5.1% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 4.3% in Central and South Asia.¹³

The New Urban Agenda and recent global analyses suggest that megacities and large cities grow economically faster than their smaller counterparts, leading to more localized development rather than encouraging more evenly distributed spatial development across territories. This disproportionate growth further exacerbates the urban spatial divide. This issue is particularly pertinent to intermediate cities, where populations – especially in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa – frequently grapple with multiple deprivations related to income and employment, water and sanitation, health, transport and housing (see Paper 1). Low-income countries have also experienced the largest growth in the number of cities (270%), with 4,300 new cities added between Central

and South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Today, cities of less than one million inhabitants account for 55% of the urban population in rapidly developing world regions.¹⁴ This trend calls for institutional strengthening of rapidly growing intermediate cities, as well as the consolidation of planning strategies tailored to the challenges and scale of such cities.

Despite current trends in territorial expansion, cities in low-income countries remain the most densely populated worldwide, with the highest densities in Central and South Asia, Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2015, low-income countries' average population density was 11,000 residents per square kilometre, compared to 7,000 in 1975. Meanwhile, cities in upper-middle-income and high-income countries maintained lower population densities of approximately 5,000 and 3,000 residents per square kilometre, respectively, with minimal changes observed over time.¹⁵ The slower population growth in these countries has mitigated the challenges of providing sufficient housing and infrastructure, although marked racial and income-driven divides persist.

Historical urban and territorial planning, including sector-specific plans such as transport and infrastructure, is often rooted in colonial planning approaches, exacerbating existing inequalities, including spatial segregation. These planning approaches have contributed to sprawled and fragmented urban structures by fuelling urban expansion based on the presumed correlation between infrastructure development and economic growth. This explains the near-constant capital investment observed in recent statistics for countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, averaging 0.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) on inland transport infrastructure.¹⁶

Furthermore, the historical lack of consideration for the needs of women and girls and the predominance of problematic gender norms in urban and transport planning have frequently resulted in urban layouts that segregate residential and commercial zones, prioritizing the productive sphere over the reproductive one. They do so, for instance, by encouraging the use of private automobiles, historically predominantly used by men, over public transport in many cities. Correspondingly, entrenched gender inequalities in the division of labour and the persistence of wage discrimination often exacerbate difficulties for women, particularly those with low incomes, to secure adequate and affordable housing in desirable locations or access personal vehicles, among other issues. These systemic barriers further underline the need for feminist urban planning and policy-making to ensure more equitable cities.¹⁷ Moreover, cities, often shaped by ableist approaches, have been built without considering the needs of persons with disabilities or older individuals, leading to exclusionary environments that impede access, mobility and independent living for these populations.

In 2020, approximately one in four urban residents worldwide were found to be living in informal settlements, a figure exceeding 1 billion individuals. As informal settlements are a key response to predatory markets and restrictive neoliberal policy-making, it comes as no surprise that 85% of these settlements' residents are locat-

ed in three primary regions where systemic inequalities, market-driven development patterns and inadequate financing systems have led to widespread housing unaffordability: 359 million people in informal settlements live in Central and South Asia, 306 million live in East and South-East Asia and 230 million live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, an increase of 1% in urban population growth can escalate the prevalence of informal settlements by 2.3% in Africa and by 5.3% in Asia.¹⁸

Informal occupation of territory is intrinsically related to the lack of access to formally recognized land rights.

Approximately 70% of the world's population is excluded from formal land registration systems and only 30 nations have an effective, nationwide land administration system that acknowledges local land tenure systems. In Africa, only 10% of the land has been formally documented.¹⁹

Adding to the complexity are gender inequalities: often, women are only granted indirect land and tenure rights, typically assigned by male relatives. Despite the rising proportion of female-headed households globally, women continue to face greater obstacles than men in securing housing credit. This disparity stems from gender-based discrimination, wage inequality and a higher percentage of women engaged in the informal sector, among other factors. Tenure security and appropriate housing directly impact women's livelihoods; for example, 47.6% of women workers in Nepal, 40% in Pakistan and 31.7% in India are home-based workers.²⁰ Gender disparities are also prevalent in global agricultural land ownership, with less than 15% of landholders being women. This imbalance is notably pronounced in regions such as North Africa and the Middle East, where a mere 5% of all landholders are women,²¹ due to factors such as inheritance laws, cultural norms and customs that continue to infringe upon women's land and property rights in many jurisdictions.

Additionally, cities feel the pressure of rising conflicts and the ongoing climate emergency. Over half of forcibly displaced people now inhabit urban areas. A decade ago, 42.7 million people were forcibly displaced. By the end of 2021, conflicts, violence, fear of persecution and human rights violations had pushed the count to 89.3 million people compelled to abandon their homes.²² The number of internally displaced people has doubled since 2012, reaching over 50 million inhabitants worldwide. Moreover, extractive projects, infrastructure projects and market-led real estate development can engender development-induced displacement. As a result, communities endure the loss of their homes, traditional livelihoods, access to basic services and land rights as well as disadvantaged conditions for access to land and housing in the new territories they inhabit.²³

Trends of rapid urban expansion, unequal land access and informal territorial occupation carry significant environmental and socio-economic implications. They can negatively impact ecosystem services and escalate energy consumption. Urban sprawl also encroaches upon large expanses of valuable agricultural land, contributing to food insecurity. It threatens natural habitats and biodiversity, further exacerbating environmental concerns (see Paper 3). When urban expansion lacks sufficient planning, poor households suffer the most, particularly those led by women. These households are often located

in precarious neighbourhoods with scant connection to public transport networks. For example, women in peripheral neighbourhoods in Latin America face a daily commute of two to three hours and are compelled to travel during early or late hours, when public transport services are sparse, heightening their vulnerability to sexual violence.²⁴

Inclusive and safe access to infrastructure and public spaces

In addressing the global trends of rapid urbanization and urban sprawl, it is crucial to consider the state of public transport as a critical component of sustainable urban development, aligning with the objectives of SDG target 11.2. Data drawn from 610 cities across 95 countries for 2019 suggests that only half of the world's urban population (49.5%) has convenient access to public transport.²⁵ While access to high-capacity public transport in Europe and North America is, on average, 32%, in the rest of the world, this figure is below 12%, with residents of cities in Sub-Saharan Africa having the lowest levels of access to this type of transport. However, there are considerable positive increases across regions.²⁶ This can be explained by a relative increase in capital investment in public transport development, particularly high-capacity systems, and the high prevalence of informal transport systems in many cities. There is growing recognition of these informal transport systems' critical role in filling gaps in connectivity, enabling opportunities for livelihoods and providing a tailored solution for many transport challenges.

Beyond physical access to transport, affordability remains an important barrier for most urban residents worldwide. In the Global South, a substantial proportion of the urban poor, particularly women, relies on walking or non-motorized transport, especially for distances under 5-8 kilometres. This is largely due to the unaffordability or unavailability of motorized public transport. Evidence shows that public transport costs are unaffordable for 20% of the poorest households in cities such as **Cape Town** (South Africa), **Buenos Aires** (Argentina), **Mumbai** (India), **Mexico City** (Mexico), **Manila** (Philippines) and **São Paulo** and **Rio de Janeiro** (Brazil). Public transport can represent up to 38% of the poorest individuals' income in cities such as **Nassau** (the Bahamas) and **Tegucigalpa** (Honduras). The urban poor spend 3.3 times the average expenditure of people with incomes closer to the mean in these cities; in extreme cases of inequality, this ratio can be six times the average expenditure.²⁷

Accessibility represents another significant challenge in providing adequate and reliable means of transport, designing public spaces and enabling access to opportunities for all. Accessibility is a fundamental right and a precondition for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, older persons and other marginalized groups in society.²⁸ A more accessible physical, digital and social environment has universal benefits for all of society. It is a key enabler for achieving human rights and fundamental freedoms for all individuals.²⁹ Today, persons with disabilities make up 16% of the total urban population, with 80% of individuals with disabilities living in low- and middle-income countries. The demographic landscape

is witnessing an unprecedented shift towards an ageing population. Projections for 2050 show that older individuals will represent 21% of the total population, with over two-thirds residing in low- and middle-income nations.

Moreover, the digital transformation has expanded the digital divide for women, older persons and persons with disabilities globally. Most of today's smart cities are not accessible, and accessibility and universal design standards are often overlooked in "build back better" strategies or climate adaptation policies. This oversight leads to new, inaccessible infrastructure that further exacerbates discrimination and deepens inequalities.³⁰

Distinct travel patterns can be observed between women and men, with women generally depending more heavily on public transport and making multiple-purpose trips more often. These multifaceted travel patterns of women are often linked to their roles in domestic work and caregiving, which necessitate coordinating school runs, travel to child care facilities, health care centre visits and shopping trips within daily commutes. Furthermore, women frequently travel accompanied by other family members, such as children and older persons. Cultural and socio-economic factors also limit women's access to automobiles and explain their use of public transport. In Latin America and the Caribbean, women constitute over 50% of public transport users on average, and in Buenos Aires, Argentina, they represent over 60% of public transport users. Despite this, most public transport systems in the region are not designed with the specific needs of women in mind.³¹

The entrenched cultural norms and gender stereotypes behind women's travel patterns have historically confined women to domestic spaces. This, in turn, has limited their employment opportunities in the transport sector and their ability to participate in decision-making processes, which would allow for the design of more inclusive mobility solutions for all. Thus, in addition to recognizing the differences in travel patterns between men and women, including those ages 60 and older and those living with disabilities, inclusive mobility policies should also incorporate preventive measures against gender-based violence in public transport as women are disproportionately affected by different forms of this violence, including sexual harassment.

Biases in design and configuration of public spaces can obstruct women, girls and individuals of diverse gender identities from fully engaging or feeling at ease in public spaces. This occurs despite evidence that women utilize streets and public areas more frequently and for a broader range of activities than men. For example, the absence of sanitation facilities such as toilets in public spaces is a problem especially for women, including those living with disabilities, older persons and individuals with children. LGBTQIA+ people often experience intense unease in public spaces due to discrimination and violence. Evidence from South-East Europe and Latin America suggests that the regular discrimination these groups experience often leads them to avoid public places.³² This systemic, yet often overlooked, discomfort and feeling of insecurity within public spaces renders many women and LGBTQIA+ people, particularly those with disabilities, invisible and silenced within the public realm.



Access to political participation in planning

SDG indicator 11.3.2 gauges civil society engagement in urban governance, with the primary modes of citizen participation being elections, public hearings and consultations. Given that this indicator relies on subjective interpretations of "direct participation" structures that "operate regularly and democratically," proxy indicators are used. These include participatory budgeting, local referenda, protests, demonstrations, neighbourhood ad-

visory committees, town hall meetings, formal petitions and social media campaigns.³³

Biases based on gender, age, disabilities and other aspects of identity in urban planning and design often result from an androcentric perspective of the urban realm. This becomes apparent in planning approaches with the tendency to homogenize residents based on dominant demographics. Intersecting structural biases and discriminating processes distort urban planning and the provision of infrastructure and services for mobility, favouring the interests of dominant social identities. These biases, driven by generalizations of specific needs and interests as “universal,” establish the needs and preferences of the dominant class(es), men, adults, able-bodied citizens and dominant racial groups as the norm for designing, planning, delivering and governing urban systems.

Beyond their underrepresentation in planning and design professions, women and girls, regardless of age or disabilities, are routinely excluded from public and community planning and design processes. This exclusion stems from various factors, many of which are tied to deficiencies in the urban environment. Other contributing factors include economic pressures and both externally enforced and internalized social norms, leading to women’s limited presence in real decision-making processes in planning. **This persistent lack of representation means that women, girls and other structurally marginalized groups struggle to have their voices heard, their priorities acknowledged and their needs met in planning and design decisions worldwide. The consequences of these longstanding inequalities are far-reaching, impacting nearly every aspect of daily life for these groups.**

3.2.3 Feminism, accessibility and proximity as pathways towards integrated and participatory approaches to urban planning

This section discusses three transformative pathways – grounded in feminist analysis, revindications and concrete practices – for LRGs to advance equality through participatory, integrated and sustainable planning policies, supporting inclusive, sustainable and caring urban communities. Each pathway will be illustrated with cases informed by the documentary research and consultation process of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments’ membership and partners. To compile this information, practitioners engaging with planning, advocacy and research concerned with feminist planning, accessibility, proximity and participation in urban development shared relevant experiences, challenges and insights. **Pathways are presented and discussed drawing on a human rights-based and feminist approach to planning, supporting the right to the city for all.**

Reshaping urban planning for inclusion through feminist approaches

As a first pathway, urban planning should be reshaped to support sustainable and just practices for all citizens and inhabitants, guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities while respecting and celebrating diversity. Feminism and, in particular, intersectional feminism³⁴ can be a solid basis in this regard. As shown throughout the trends section, territorial and sector-specific urban planning are influenced by biases that tend to render invisible women’s diverse needs, preferences and experiences. Structurally marginalized groups, such as older persons, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, children and adolescents, require targeted policies to address urban insecurity and foster a sense of safety, belonging and autonomy (see Box 3.2.1). Another area frequently overlooked and/or systematically persecuted is informality in transport, housing and livelihoods.

BOX 3.2.1

Safety improvements for women and girls in Lisbon (Portugal)³⁵

Led by **Lisbon City Council**, the Safety and Perception of Safety of Women in Public Spaces and Access to Public Transport programme set out in 2017 to assess safety and accessibility challenges for women and girls in public spaces and public transport, using participatory action research. The project further piloted infrastructure changes such as the relocation of bus stops and an increase in pedestrian spaces. Through collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including the municipal bus provider, school, local youth associations and care facilities, the programme managed to put women’s and girls’ safety on the municipal agenda, contributing significantly to the municipality’s inclusive urban strategy.

This pathway highlights ways forward in challenging, reframing and reshaping the practice of built environment disciplines with an inclusive focus inspired by intersectional feminism. It builds on ideas and initiatives by LRGs and international organizations to prioritize historically marginalized and discriminated voices and to promote new spaces for recognition and cooperation with diverse communities, guided by a human rights-based approach.

This pathway also challenges the practice of rendering persons with disabilities invisible and the ableist approach to urban development, practice and design. It builds on the obligations, commitments to and principles of accessibility as a precondition to the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities and older persons. This inclusion is at the heart of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2030 Agenda, New Urban Agenda and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. In line with these global agendas, LRGs pledge to:

“facilitate universal access to basic services and the redefinition of essential services by incorpo-

rating the right to the city as universal citizenship with renewed sets of cultural rights such as the right to discover, create, share, enjoy and protect the local community's cultural roots, expressions and resources as a building block of peace and wellbeing in all cities and regions."³⁶

Feminist movements and municipalism coincide in their critique of traditional and hegemonic institutions and modalities that predominate in social, political and economic life.³⁷ **Feminist municipalism promotes new forms of leadership rooted in care, empathy and equality.** This includes equity in leadership, ensuring that women and gender-diverse groups are ensured an active voice when historically they have been structurally excluded. Feminist municipalism also recognizes the multiple roles women and diverse groups play in developing sustainable and inclusive cities and territories.³⁸

By addressing these aspects in urban planning, feminist approaches can create more equitable and inclusive cities that recognize the diverse contributions of all inhabitants and promote equal participation in city-making processes. They refuse and address the traditional rupture and hierarchization between the public-productive and private-reproductive spheres and the inequalities created for people assigned to the latter. Rather, feminist approaches highlight the relationships among everyday activities. They revalorize caring practices and relations – in the domestic sphere and for the wider city – addressing structural forms of discrimination that traditionally assigned and limited women, racialized persons and persons with disabilities to certain work areas.³⁹

Addressing the fear that makes people avoid certain spaces, services and routes is essential for creating inclusive cities. Initiatives such as the Charter for Women's Right to the City (2004),⁴⁰ as well as regional context-specific responses such as the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life (2006)⁴¹ and the Local and Regional Governments' Charter for Gender Equality in Africa (2022),⁴² provide valuable guidance.

Rethinking planning from a feminist perspective, particularly with cities and territories implementing public care policies as part of an inclusive future, requires adopting a life cycle approach to the safety and wellbeing of structurally marginalized groups. This approach requires infrastructure improvements to better respond to these groups' rights and address their specific needs and aspirations. The city of **Santa Fe** (Argentina) – like many others – had to confront discrimination and high levels of socio-economic inequalities that particularly affected low-income groups' access to services. Re-designing public space for recreational and non-recreational use with a feminist lens towards inclusion has been one of the cornerstones of its planning policy to address structural inequalities.⁴³

Viewing urban street design through a child-friendly lens can lead to enhanced road safety and mobility for all users.⁴⁴ Infrastructure improvements should address

fundamental needs; apply, develop and enforce minimum safety, accessibility and mobility standards; manage vehicular speeds (since child traffic fatalities can be prevented through safer speed design); and extend the street experience to encompass adjacent spaces. Safe and enjoyable streets foster a nurturing and inspiring environment for children, caregivers and the wider community, ultimately contributing to children's cognitive development and educational achievement.

In **Quilmes** (Argentina), the municipality committed to integrate a cross-cutting feminist perspective into its work. It implements the municipal plan for infrastructure works following the objective to strengthen diverse and accessible public spaces and reduce gender gaps in the district through strengthening economic, physical and social autonomy of women and gender-diverse people. One concrete initiative was designing murals with the perspective of "feminizing everything," using themes and phrases (such as "*Ni una menos*") to recover public space in the neighbourhoods. It transformed neighbourhoods into spaces for encounters, exchange and participation.⁴⁵

From the perspective of feminist urbanism, urban planning needs to recognize gender (and racial) inequalities in the distribution of care work, as well as their consequences for mobility and use of public spaces and infrastructure. Both unpaid and paid care work are largely shouldered by women – often socio-economically disadvantaged, racialized and/or migrant women, who represent the city's most vulnerable segments. Many care workers hail from low-income backgrounds, have no education beyond secondary school, live with physical and mental health conditions and experience a lack of free time for self-care. **Caring needs to be considered a public responsibility. LRGs can play a key role in guaranteeing the right to care and be cared for, and in breaking with the unequal organization of cities.**⁴⁶

The Care Blocks (*Manzanas del Cuidado*)⁴⁷ initiative within the District Care System of **Bogotá** (Colombia) addresses the demand for care services by involving the local and national governments, the private sector, communities and households. The District Care System aims to develop local communities' capacities, promote women's rights and train men in caregiving to address structural inequalities in the distribution of care work, among other actions.⁴⁸ Led by the Secretariat for Women, the system coordinates various services across 13 sectors of the District Administration to address caregiving needs in a co-responsible manner.⁴⁹ Care blocks are one example of implementing an approach to "caring cities and territories," in which the city cares for those who care for us, others and their environment.⁵⁰

For migrants, national policies play a significant role and LRGs often have to address the local repercussions of decisions made by national authorities, for example, around budgets and accommodations. In any case, LRGs are crucial in providing initial contact and basic services, promoting integration and implementing policies (see Box 3.2.2).

BOX 3.2.2

Municipality of Chiyah (Lebanon) cares for migrant children and youth⁵¹

Although children account for approximately 10% of all migrants globally,⁵² their experiences are rarely considered in policies to care for newcomers. An exception is the Municipality of **Chiyah** in Beirut (Lebanon). In a pilot project, the municipality brings together migrant youth from various religious, cultural, political and migration backgrounds in inter-community exchanges. The project not only shows the power of peacebuilding through developing mutual understanding but also the active role migrant children play in shaping their lives in cities.

One of the major biases in transport and urban planning is against informality. As discussed in Section 2, **informal transport forms an integral component of urban mobility systems in many rapidly expanding metropolitan regions of the Global South**. These regionwide, privately-run transport modes cater to the demand for affordable, flexible mobility options. They facilitate the movement of millions of people and employ hundreds of thousands of workers, thereby bolstering the substantial informal sector in urban economies. Despite its near omnipresence, informal transport is often relegated to the status of a local issue.

Inconsistent and discriminatory policies and regulations beleaguer the sector, and urban and transport planning discussions by policy-makers often overlook informality. LRGs can rectify this trend by recognizing and cooperating with popular transport operators. A recent effort by the United Nations Development Programme's Accelerator Labs aims to highlight these local mobility systems' critical role in urban settings and economies and position informal transport at the forefront of the global sustainable and equitable development agenda.⁵³ **LRGs have the potential to challenge traditional planning approaches that have ignored and persecuted informality by recognizing its role in addressing essential needs for large parts of the population. They can also establish partnerships for the co-production of a sustainable and inclusive system, enabling access to opportunities for all.**

In conclusion, LRGs are implementing, and should further promote, specific lines of action to reshape urban planning to support sustainable, just practices that guarantee equal rights and opportunities while celebrating diversity. Adopting an approach that builds on LRGs' ongoing efforts to build an urban paradigm shift, embodied in the model of the "caring city," places people at the centre of decisions. It considers the diversity of experiences and breaks away from the standardization of subjects, bodies, experiences and desires. Such an approach aims for spaces, infrastructure and services to adapt to individual rights and needs rather than requiring people to adjust to a space's conditions, which often present barriers, including lack of accessibility. **There is a need to move away from producing cityscapes based on a productive logic that is socially and politically restrictive. Instead, cities may start thinking about environments that pri-**

oritize the people who will use them, radically changing the order of priorities when considering urban spaces and times.

Key lines of action include:

- Challenging the invisibility, embedded into traditional urban planning and development approaches, of certain experiences and needs by recognizing those of historically marginalized groups, such as women, older persons, persons with disabilities, and recognizing informal systems of housing, connectivity and livelihoods
- Prioritizing safety and wellbeing across the life cycle by catering to the specific lived experiences of diverse populations
- Designing integral local policies for planning systems and public services that recognize, redistribute and reduce the care burden on women (and socio-economically disadvantaged and/or racialized persons) and promote their rights
- Reconciling public-productive and private-reproductive spheres in urban planning to support everyday activities, revalorizing caring practices and relations and eliminating inequalities in access to and use of public space and public services
- Ensuring that accessibility is an integral part of urban planning and practice by making use of accessibility standards and universal design principles in urban design and implementation, including establishing meaningful mechanisms for LRGs to engage with persons with disabilities and older persons and inform practices according to these people's expertise and lived experiences
- Developing planning training, tools and initiatives grounded in feminist principles



Reducing inequalities in access to and use of land, public spaces and public services

As a second pathway, the potential of urban and territorial planning should be leveraged to reduce inequalities concerning access to and use of land, public spaces, public services and urban regeneration. This will give populations access to opportunities and significant improvements in their daily lives and environments. It will also operationalize accessibility, as defined in the New Urban Agenda,⁵⁴ in all areas of planning, considering the complex, specific and relational experiences of persons with disabilities. Accessibility, as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, includes:

“measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.”⁵⁵

Accessibility underpins all other rights, including the right to an adequate standard of living, to live independently and to be included in the community. This approach goes beyond demanding access to care infrastructure and instead fosters the empowerment of people with disabilities and provides support for paid and unpaid care work.

LRGs play a pivotal role in ensuring accessibility, fostering the full inclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons, and operationalizing accessibility across governance, policy and practice. This is key to moving away from the historical “special needs” approach, allowing LRGs to champion inclusion based on human rights. Historically, policies have focused on providing technical guidance and performance standards for accessible transport, urban infrastructure and public facilities. While beneficial in expanding access for persons with disabilities and older persons, this approach carries limitations, such as the risk of creating separate, inequitable spaces and services and the potential financial burden of retrofitting existing infrastructure. Many national-level policies continue to provide only minimum technical guidance for accessibility, typically framed within a non-discrimination context. LRGs can counteract this by mainstreaming accessibility across strategies, policies and planning to create places, spaces, goods or services within their jurisdictions (see Box 3.2.3) that will not only benefit persons with disabilities but also society as a whole.

Bottom-up approaches prove to be effective. Local initiatives, which identify functional requirements and minimum accessibility standards suitable to local conditions and capacities, provide valuable lessons for promoting accessibility on a larger scale. Furthermore, applying the principle of universal design, which combines both top-down and bottom-up approaches, is imperative. **Universal design, putting human diversity at the centre, is a concept that aims at making life easier, healthier and friendlier for all. Universal design helps to understand and recognize the wide spectrum of human abilities.**⁵⁶

By incorporating accessibility as a core principle in their planning and design processes and by learning from and promoting local initiatives that have successfully improved accessibility, LRGs can help ensure that urban environments are truly accessible and inclusive for all (read about the example of Villa Carlos Paz in Box 3.2.4).

BOX 3.2.3

Designing an inclusive city in Varanasi (India)⁵⁷

The city of **Varanasi** (India) understands inclusive design as much as mindset and methodology as adherence to technical standards. Hence, community participation and consultation are fundamental, particularly recognizing people with disabilities not merely as beneficiaries, but as leaders and protagonists in making cities inclusive and accessible. Thinking about, and designing for, user experiences with diverse needs is essential across infrastructure and services – from water and sanitation to health and education. In a city with important cultural heritage sites (e.g. ghats), urban design thinking should go beyond physical access towards inclusive experiences.

BOX 3.2.4

Planning for accessibility in Villa Carlos Paz (Argentina)

The municipality of **Villa Carlos Paz** is implementing an urban accessibility programme that includes the installation of access ramps, the construction of accessible public toilets and the creation of reserved parking spaces for people with disabilities.⁵⁸ Additional initiatives include the following:

- The tourism department has installed tactile signage for city visitors at the main points of attraction, using plates with information in braille. Every year, the local government staff in charge of tourist orientation receive training in adequate treatment and in sign language.
- The city aims to survey and promote hotels and restaurants that implement accessibility measures, such as menus in braille, adapted rooms or appropriate staff training.
- In 2022, a public passenger transport system was implemented with 60% of its units adapted for the use of people with reduced mobility. To guarantee easy access to the buses, ramps were built at the stops to raise the level of the sidewalks.

These initiatives in Villa Carlos Paz illustrate how the city is improving accessibility in all aspects of life for people with disabilities, to ensure their inclusion in the community in the spirit of becoming a city for all people.

Principles of accessibility and universal design should be situated at the core of planning-led territorial transformations towards compact inclusive development. A proximity-based urban and territorial model operates on three levels – city, neighbourhood and individual scale – to enhance community health, liveability and wellbeing and accelerate climate actions. **The 15-minute city model and its counterpart in medium/low-density areas, the 30-minute territory, are holistic approaches that generate systemic impacts at both neighbourhood and city scales.**⁵⁹ Key elements of urban and territorial proximity include developing polycentric cities or territories with multiple “complete neighbourhoods” to reduce daily commutes and enable individuals to access their daily needs within a short distance from their homes. Thriving cities or territories that adapt to people’s needs and aspirations and engage them in urban decision-making processes through participatory mechanisms are essential.

Also, cities or territories should view access to natural and collective resources, including air, water, green spaces, biodiversity and culture, as commons. They should support collective commoning practices that protect, govern and use these and other resources in ways that resist commodification and exclusion.⁶⁰ Linking social services, such as education and urban health care, and implementing policies that support the right to live independently and be included in the community advance social inclusion and contribute to a more equitable urban environment. Drawing upon feminist proposals for more inclusive planning policies, proximity is key for integrating productive and reproductive spheres in urban development.

A precondition for transforming urban areas based on the principles of 15-minute cities is ensuring inclusive access to land. Reflecting on the first trend presented in Section 2, a mechanism for empowering women and persons with disabilities, for instance, to construct an inclusive city is to enable and guarantee their access to land. Women with home ownership or some form of tenure security can more readily access bank loans, thus potentially enabling them to establish and grow their businesses. In Brazil, changes in the legal framework at the national and municipal levels intend to uphold women’s housing and land rights.⁶¹

LRGs have the potential to enable and monitor inclusive access to land by producing actionable information not only about land ownership documents but also about how individuals interact with and perceive the systems that govern land tenure. More detailed information about who holds land ownership documents can significantly contribute to enabling access to land. However, data on legal documentation alone is insufficient. Ensuring tenure security requires the effective and fair operation of several systems, regardless of one’s gender, race, ethnicity, ability or income. These systems encompass dispute resolution, tenure rights enforcement and land administration mechanisms, which can follow formal or customary protocols.⁶² Monitoring perceptions of tenure security provides a straightforward yet valuable indicator to identify whether these systems are functioning adequately and equitably.

Transforming planning through a feminist lens requires localized decision-making informed by data that recognizes tenure security can differ significantly within families. In fact, the head of a household often has the most secure tenure. LRGs also need to recognize the gender-biased societal norms that frequently link a woman’s tenure security to the state of her relationships with male family members such as husbands, in-laws, sons or brothers. In addressing these norms, LRGs can reduce women’s fear of being evicted from their land if they become widowed or divorced.⁶³

Understanding that transport is not an end but a means for accessing opportunities, cities are encouraged to adopt transit-oriented development strategies. These strategies should synchronize transit investments with land use plans, incorporating various functionalities such as day-care centres, offices and shopping areas around public transport hubs. This cross-sectoral approach can enhance mobility efficiency and offers a chance to address the inequalities inherent in urban spatial structures, as discussed in Section 2. Further integrated approaches involve linking development initiatives that enhance health care, education or job training for disadvantaged populations with investment in and subsidies for transport services. Within a broader policy framework, these projects can bolster coordination among transport, land use planning, housing and other sectors that share priorities of reducing poverty, inequalities and social exclusion.

Transit-oriented development projects could explore value-capture mechanisms and cross-housing subsidies for inclusionary housing measures near transit systems. These could help overcome affordability barriers for low-income groups, who often live far from formal transit networks on the outskirts of urban areas. Importantly, LRGs are formulating, and should continue fostering, transit-oriented development policies. They are initiating pilot projects based on thorough research on real estate, land and housing market dynamics. These should be part of a long-term planning process that includes citizen participation. Additionally, there is a need for more diverse, accessible and innovative affordable housing initiatives (see Paper 1). For instance, developing a range of affordable housing options connected to mass transit and other infrastructure investments could increase the availability of these projects to lower-income residents.

Improving equitable access to infrastructure and public spaces requires enhancing consideration of gender, age and disabilities within transport systems. Planners need to design and construct infrastructure that facilitates trips related to care and reproductive work. Recommendations encompass the installation of child- and adult-friendly changing stations in both male and female public transit station restrooms, digital kiosks for processing utility payments and completing bureaucratic tasks, accessible signage and maps for care-related resources, and resting areas and playgrounds near stations. **Moreover, concerted efforts should be undertaken to reduce crime and sexual harassment on public transit, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation or abilities, feel secure while utilizing public transport.**⁶⁴

Additionally, fostering inclusive and cohesive communities means combatting gentrification by integrating a large range of housing options, community-based activities and services that resonate with people's needs. Implementing a compact development approach requires a roadmap that includes establishing the city-scale vision and guaranteeing representative, meaningful and constructive public participation. Coordinated actions might include prioritizing people-centred streets to encourage active, shared and low-carbon mobility options; revising zoning plans to favour mixed functions; decentralizing public services; ensuring access to decent livelihoods in each neighbourhood; supporting adequate housing; promoting open public spaces; encouraging sharing of equipment; developing smart and innovative solutions to minimize transport; and adopting and reinforcing accessibility in territorial, master and city plans.

The 15-minute city framework highlights the social, economic, health and environmental advantages of proximity-based and dense development supported by sustainable personal mobility. However, existing debates tend to concentrate on areas where urban densities and essential infrastructure exist for efficient and sustainable collective and personal mobility. Insufficient attention has been given to the structural transformations required to apply the concept, together with a strong focus on accessibility, to peripheral and disadvantaged areas, particularly in cities in the Global South.

Typical car-oriented urban models have led to long commutes, unsustainable lifestyles and poor air quality in many neighbourhoods that need more amenities and services. This highlights environmental injustice and inequalities in accessing pleasant and healthy urban environments. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report published in April 2022 underlines the importance of proximity-based spatial planning to foster socio-behavioural change, radically transform lifestyles and habitats and reduce emissions. The distribution of education facilities within reasonable walkable or cycleable distances mitigates social care-related divides. It can do so through policies that reduce educational segregation, promote care-based education, integrate educational policy into community social action, develop critical citizenship and extend educational opportunities beyond formal settings.

By the same token, providing localized urban health care can ensure that primary care and innovative prevention methods are accessible to various urban population groups, improving the health and wellbeing of all communities. **Guaranteeing health involves prioritizing water and sanitation, urban planning and design for proximity and equitable access to health services. It also involves promoting non-motorized transport in safe and non-polluting conditions.** Furthermore, addressing the challenges of rural territories, such as remoteness and lack of coverage, is also essential.

In summary, LRGs advance, and should further promote, a holistic approach that combines proximity-based urban and territorial models with feminist urbanism, accessibility and targeted policies to address inequalities experienced by historically discriminated groups. Key lines of action include:

- Integrating productive and reproductive spheres in urban planning to enhance day-to-day life experiences, through urban planning policies fostering proximity (e.g. the 15-minute city model)
- Prioritizing the equitable provision of social services, such as education and urban health care, to advance social inclusion and create equitable urban environments
- Fostering safe and healthy communities through an urban environment more resilient to climate risks
- Implementing policies that care for and empower women and other marginalized groups, such as workers in the informal economy, migrants, people with disabilities, older people, LGBTQIA+ individuals, children and adolescents, mainstreaming feminist and accessibility approaches in all plans and policies
- Ensuring access to primary health care, innovative prevention methods and non-motorized transport options for all urban population groups

Promoting informed and sustained citizen participation and representation in public life and decision-making

As a third pathway, informed and sustained citizen participation and representation in public life and decision-making should be further promoted. This can be achieved by shaping more participatory, accountable and transparent governance systems that incorporate various participatory mechanisms according to local communities' needs and aspirations, fostering a systemic, place-based and long-term democratic approach.

Anchoring planning for an inclusive city in the recognition of access to land for women, older persons, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups can inform participatory planning approaches across urban interventions. Active involvement ensures that LRGs are better positioned to utilize local communities' expertise and experiences in co-designing plans and projects. Such engagement will lead to solutions that align more closely with communities' needs and priorities, fostering greater impact, equality, sustainability and a sense of ownership by the communities (see Box 3.2.5 and Box 3.2.6).



BOX 3.2.5

Multistakeholder local governance in the Dominican Republic

As shared by the **Federation of Municipalities of the Dominican Republic** (FEDOMU), strengthening municipal development councils and participatory budget monitoring committees has improved collaboration with civil society, residents and private sector entities.

The Dominican Republic has a participation mechanism, linked to strategic territorial planning processes, that supports the coordination of participatory budgets in the country. FEDOMU is the governing entity for this mechanism's evaluation in the Public Administration Monitoring System. Since its inception, the participation mechanism has promoted gender parity in the committees' teams in charge of monitoring and controlling the community-defined project investments.

Efforts have also been made to define milestones for a gender-responsive approach and protect structurally marginalized groups in all stages of public action. This applies to the internal functioning of local governments, as well as the planning, civic participation and execution of a project investment. For example, efforts have included strengthening purchasing and contracting processes focused on female entrepreneurs and consolidating permanent gender commissions as part of designing municipal development plans.

BOX 3.2.6

Plan Integrar in Santa Fe (Argentina)

Santa Fe's *Plan Integrar*⁶⁵ is an innovative policy intervention that focuses on activities in marginalized neighbourhoods with city-wide impacts. It works in three core areas: (a) territory and environment, (b) participation and social life and (c) proximal institutions for wellbeing. The plan is integral to improving the city and its environment, strengthening community social ties and improving resources and access to care and social services for families. The plan is fundamentally feminist, as its cross-cutting interventions include removing barriers for people with disabilities, fostering new masculinities, addressing all forms of violence, building up collective memories of the city and creating cultural identity.

Neighbourhood (re)development strategies grounded in inclusive, participatory planning can ensure equitable access to, and ownership of, completed projects for women and girls participating in planning development by offering non-traditional financing mechanisms such as microfinance. By introducing microfinance opportunities such as adequate housing credits, community-based savings and loans, or long-term collective leases or land titles to community cooperatives, LRGs can enhance

women's financial independence. Initiating such micro-finance mechanisms early in the project planning phase is crucial so that resources can be immediately utilized following project completion. These resources can serve as safeguards against market forces and promote the establishment of collective community structures and mechanisms that increase resilience. This strategy also fosters long-term community stewardship of project outputs, contributing to overall project sustainability.⁶⁶

Fostering open, accessible and verifiable information and data ensures transparency and promotes inclusion in urban planning. If some groups cannot equally use information provided for or in consultations, it will impact how they can contribute meaningfully. It is critical to ensure that accessibility and reasonable accommodations are provided across online platforms or venues. Many times, accessibility is seen as the end goal of a practice or action. Yet, accessibility should also be ensured as a core part of any process that seeks to be inclusive and participatory. Participatory planning allows for co-creating multisectoral interventions with residents, addressing various inequalities that structurally discriminated groups and marginalized territories face (see Box 3.2.7).

Embracing formal and informal sources of information enhances the inclusivity of planning processes. To design socially inclusive transport and urban systems that recognize and celebrate diversity, it is essential to comprehend the diverse needs of various population groups in urban and rural settings. Mobility planning that fosters social inclusion necessitates collecting and analyzing data disaggregated by distinct population groups, including women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. Such data should encompass aspects such as choice of transport mode, travel times and trip distances and purposes while being disaggregated by socio-economic factors such as sex and gender identity, age, disabilities, ethnicity, household composition and income. It is crucial to examine how users respond to existing mobility services and their specific needs and to include detailed information on various trip purposes, including chained trips related to care practices.

To ensure that the process of designing and managing projects is inclusive of and responsive to local needs and realities, steps should be taken to foster the full participation of communities. This can be facilitated through participatory budgeting, interactive dialogue and local representation in project appraisal and evaluation processes.

Moreover, monitoring tools, such as satisfaction surveys designed to enable comparative analysis of perceptions of a range of groups (including disadvantaged and low-income populations), are necessary during public transit systems' preparation and operation phases. These tools make it possible to provide and adjust infrastructure and services that respond to the needs prioritized by communities, thus contributing to the development of more inclusive and equitable transport systems.

For instance, in **Abu Dhabi** (United Arab Emirates), a recent initiative targeting accessibility for structurally marginalized populations involved training "inclusion champions" within government agencies to collaboratively design disability-inclusive monitoring and evaluation

BOX 3.2.7

We Are Able! Stimulating dialogue and knowledge exchange between people with disabilities and authorities

VNG International, the international department of the Association of Dutch Municipalities, is part of the consortium that implements the We Are Able! programme.⁶⁷ The programme is implemented in six African countries (Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda) and the Netherlands.

Highly in line with SDG 11, the main goal of this five-year programme is to increase the accessibility of basic services for people with disabilities and to strengthen the position of people with disabilities in local governance. The programme aims to achieve this by actively stimulating dialogue and knowledge exchange between people with disabilities and authorities, both formal and informal, at the local, national and international levels. We Are Able! focuses on empowerment, amplifying voices and creating resilience among people (including men, women and youth) with disabilities and other excluded groups, particularly those facing food insecurity in areas of protracted crises.

indicators. This empowered local officials to monitor the progress of their policies and programmes effectively. By integrating these disability-inclusive indicators into their monitoring and evaluation systems, the Abu Dhabi government is better equipped to identify shortcomings in policies, programmes and initiatives and make necessary adjustments to enhance accessibility for and participation of individuals with disabilities. Consequently, this will lead to the development of more inclusive and accessible policies, services, public spaces and transport systems and the increased involvement of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes.

The cases of **Soria** (Spain; Box 3.2.8) and **Bhi Dilli** (India; Box 3.2.9) illustrate the role of participatory planning that builds on the recognition of diverse user needs and promotes flexible engagement through data collection. They also show how participatory planning can recognize residents' lived experiences and address colonial legacies.

BOX 3.2.8

Soria's Urban Agenda action plan⁶⁸

The municipality of **Soria** (Spain) initiated its urban agenda in line with the Spanish Urban Agenda. With support from the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda, which sought to establish Soria as a pilot case for other municipalities, the action plan for Soria's Urban Agenda was developed in a participatory manner. Its development included political and technical staff of the City Council and citizens. Through working sessions and online surveys conducted in 2022, they worked to jointly build the city in alignment with achieving the SDGs by 2030. The action plan identified 450 actions and 10 programmes, which are aligned with specific SDGs and whose implementation is monitored accordingly.

LRGs and their leaders have the agency and resources to open frequent dialogues with historically marginalized communities and integrate their inputs into government functions and policy development processes. For example, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities of **New York City** (USA) meets with civil society organizations once a month in the form of conference calls.

BOX 3.2.9

The Main Bhi Dilli campaign in Delhi (India)⁶⁹

In **Delhi** (India), a diverse coalition of civil society organizations campaigned to challenge the modernist and colonial approach reflected in the city's proposed 2021–2041 Master Plan. The Main Bhi Dilli campaign instead promoted an inclusive and more just process and outcome that reflected different lived experiences, aspirations and needs, not only of the urban elites but also of informal workers, slum dwellers and activists.

For example, the campaign underscored the importance of public space for (informal) livelihood generation and proposed a more flexible approach to land use and zoning. The process resulted in high levels of participation and innovative solutions. At the same time, it strengthened participants' capacities to engage in urban planning processes, including technical aspects of master planning.

Participatory planning is key to inclusive cities. Informal workers, dwellers and mobility providers understand their work best and are best placed to propose ways for infrastructure to support them. In summary, to promote informed and sustained citizen participation and representation in public life and decision-making, LRGs are shaping, and should further commit to, more participatory, accountable and transparent governance systems that empower citizens and inhabitants; foster active and meaningful participation; and facilitate the development of inclusive, responsive and equitable urban environments. Key lines of action include:

- Collecting and analyzing data disaggregated by distinct population groups to design socially inclusive and equitable transport and urban systems
- Ensuring open, accessible and verifiable information and data that foster transparency and inclusivity in urban planning
- Embracing participatory planning approaches that allow for co-creating multisectoral interventions with residents, addressing barriers and inequalities faced by structurally discriminated groups and marginalized territories
- Fostering the full participation of communities through participatory budgeting, interactive dialogue and local representation in project appraisal and evaluation processes
- Implementing monitoring tools such as satisfaction surveys, which enable comparative analysis of perceptions across diverse groups, and improving public transit systems accordingly



3.2.4 LRG challenges and capacities

Institutional environment

Enhancing vertical and horizontal policy coherence is paramount to implementing the actions outlined throughout the three pathways in this paper and promoting the transformative change envisaged in the SDGs. This will require institutional capacities that can effectively support such coherence.

Efforts should aim to establish effective, accountable and participatory institutions. **Part of this process entails systematically improving LRGs' involvement in national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes related to SDG implementation.** This involvement should not be limited to mere consultation but should extend to regular participation and decision-making power, thus advancing more inclusive multilevel governance.

Successful decision-making for transformative actions – such as integrated and participatory approaches to urban planning and management in pursuit of more caring, inclusive and accessible cities and territories – as well as implementation, monitoring, and reporting on these actions, will require the development of mechanisms at

both national and local levels to ensure effective alignment. Strengthening LRGs' capacities and resources to contribute to crisis mitigation, adaptation and recovery is vital. Decentralized cooperation, participatory planning, transparent reporting and inclusive decision-making processes can all amplify the positive effects of these efforts. Moreover, robust financial and legal frameworks alongside effective participation mechanisms can significantly enhance LRGs' institutional capacities.

Furthermore, in light of urbanization trends and the rapid growth of new small and intermediate cities, fostering stronger networks and alliances is imperative to build and transfer capacities among LRGs. Existing global efforts should facilitate sharing challenges, policy recommendations and best practices among LRGs worldwide.

Resources

One of the main challenges for LRGs in transforming urban planning and implementing actions geared towards urban transformations for accessibility, proximity and the co-production of a caring city are resources, particularly financial. The success of equitable urban development hinges on a multifaceted approach. This involves making both mainstream and targeted investments in infrastructure and public services, retrofitting existing infrastructure for universal accessibility and implementing targeted subsidies, all while ensuring an equitable distribution of interventions across all regions and social groups. This approach is intimately tied to the need for more decentralized governance, which implies decentralization of financial resources. Subnational spending, which includes spending by LRGs, plays a significant role in the public expenditure of many countries. This underlines the critical role of LRGs as public employers and as key actors in service delivery across the urban and regional spectrum.

With the pursuit of equitable and sustainable urban development, the need for targeted investments in infrastructure and public services has never been more critical. Investments in high-capacity public transport, such as bus rapid transit, are highly capital- and resource-intensive interventions. It is vital to retrofit existing infrastructure and services for universal accessibility. These efforts' scale and resource demand in certain cities entail key challenges, as the historical focus was primarily on increasing efficiency, neglecting the needs of marginalized groups.⁷⁰ There is also a crucial need for targeted subsidies that reduce the economic burden of access to transport for residents with diverse travel needs and preferences. Successful experiences have shown that targeted subsidies can reduce inequalities among social groups and offset some of the trade-offs residents make to access transport. These subsidies require appropriate regulatory and legal frameworks that enable differentiated pricing for specific services and facilities.

LRGs also face the challenge of testing and localizing flexible, low-cost and often short-term interventions and strategies to enact changes to the built environment. Frequently coined "tactical urbanism," this action has proven to be an effective way to achieve long-term goals related to street safety, walking and public spaces. However, like other forms of infrastructure, these positive

demonstrative interventions also tend to focus on central areas with a high concentration of commercial and business activities. LRGs have the challenge of redistributing investment to develop and promote targeted interventions in segregated and disadvantaged areas, which is critically important.

Capacities

Reflecting on the need for capacity building for LRGs, there are three areas of concern: technical capacity and training, inputs for planning and evaluation, and institutional spaces for representation and meaningful engagement mechanisms. While there is a wealth of resources available for practitioners in the form of handbooks, guidelines and best practices, these are often available only in English or are not widely accessible, particularly in intermediate cities and LRGs with limited staff and resources. Networks of LRGs can address the need for resources for technical and operational practitioners in local governments. They can also develop training for administrative staff in the design of procurement processes grounded in the reframed planning principles and priorities of care, accessibility and proximity outlined in this paper. LRGs also face the challenge of breaking entrenched paradigms and practices of detachment in planning, particularly among technical staff. They can do so by exposing practitioners in the public sector to the realities of diverse groups of residents and local realities in different neighbourhoods where different areas of municipal and regional planning operate.

Data collection stands out as a key area of focus. LRGs' approach to data collection should be bottom-up rather than top-down. There are significant gaps in data disaggregated by gender, disabilities, age and other social identities and experiences, particularly in relation to access to land, participation and access to public transport and public spaces. These gaps underscore the need for LRGs to enhance their institutional capacities to address key challenges, such as standardizing measurement tools across all local governments and ensuring that national reports accurately reflect local realities. It is important to develop harmonized approaches to data collection and replicable protocols that reflect the needs for access to land, transport, public space and spaces for participation. In monitoring and designing for accessibility, it is critical to map user experiences, which requires more training in collecting qualitative data. This will help identify existing accessibility barriers in communities, which can inform the planning and prioritization of actions that best respond to the rights and needs of persons with disabilities and groups at the intersection of marginalized identities.

In addition to data collection, monitoring capacities are critical for successfully implementing the outlined strategies for integrated and inclusive planning grounded in feminist perspectives. Local statistical capacities to collect, monitor and evaluate data are all crucial components. **Such monitoring initiatives can provide a platform for broad stakeholder engagement, enhancing the inclusive implementation of actions.** Working with stakeholders can promote public-private alliances; facilitate evidence-based stakeholder dialogue; and poten-

tially provide more resources for monitoring, implementing and evaluating. Moreover, it helps bridge knowledge gaps.

Finally, implementing strategies aligned with the principles of the 15-minute city, universal design and accessibility also requires investment in diverse human resources, particularly public sector employees. It requires the creation and constructive utilization of committees or advisory bodies on strategies, policies, practices, projects and interventions, while providing for the perspectives of women, LGBTQIA+ people, persons with disabilities and older persons. Inclusive recruitment, retention and capacity building can strengthen the quality and diversity of LRGs' teams, thereby improving service delivery. Conversely, a lack of financial and human resources can contribute to increasing challenges in coordination, data collection and acquisition of other forms of funding.

Participation

LRGs face challenges, but also have opportunities, to improve participation in planning. Many LRGs are already at the forefront of this movement, revising their policies and development plans to integrate the SDGs and foster more participatory approaches. This alignment of city plans with the SDGs has effectively dismantled existing silos, encouraged collaboration through consultative processes and fostered sustainable paths. Planning and participatory tools need to be backed up by a robust legal framework to enhance participation. Instruments that mainstream gender and accessibility in participatory planning and initiatives to widen representation in planning, such as planning education mechanisms, are essential.

Participatory budgets can act as a transformative tool, reshaping relationships and responsibilities among actors and institutions in the public domain. Participatory budgeting, which involves citizens in prioritizing the spending of public resources, can lead to measurable improvements in citizens' quality of life, as it fosters responsiveness, inclusiveness and representative decision-making. Research indicates that projects derived from participatory budgeting are often cheaper and better maintained due to community control and oversight, contributing to sustainable human settlement planning and management.⁷¹

However, there are challenges to be addressed in implementing participatory budgeting and other strategies for participation in planning. For instance, while it is a powerful tool to include everyone through many innovative solutions, it demands greater financial decentralization and local government resources. The need for bottom-up proposals can also pose a challenge, as it requires enhancing people's autonomy and involving civil society in every phase of the public policy cycle. Additionally, increasing the participation of structurally marginalized communities in participatory budgeting processes and channelling more resources towards them necessitates the creation of a supportive network among LRGs to share experiences and learnings.

3.2.5 Conclusions

Addressing the systemic challenges that urban, peri-urban and rural communities face across various global regions, LRGs are critical in co-creating sustainable, inclusive societies. This involves developing strategies explicitly targeting these challenges. **A vital initial step for LRGs is reimagining urban planning, fostering more sustainable and equitable practices for all citizens and inhabitants. This necessitates guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities while respecting and celebrating diversity, with planning approaches that place feminism and accessibility at the heart.**

Key actions include challenging the “invisibility” of marginalized identities, experiences and needs that is often embedded in traditional development models. LRGs need to recognize those who have been historically sidelined, such as women, persons with disabilities, older persons, racialized persons and informal dwellers. Concurrently, there is a need for reconciling public-productive and private-reproductive spheres in urban planning. This perspective supports everyday activities, revalues caring practices and relations and helps eradicate inequalities in access to and use of public spaces and services. In this vein, prioritizing safety and wellbeing is critical across the life cycle, catering to the specific needs of diverse populations. This approach requires the development of planning training, tools and initiatives grounded in a human rights-based approach. Comprehensive local policies for planning systems and public services should also be designed. These policies should recognize, redistribute and reduce the care burden on women (especially those socio-economically disadvantaged and/or racialized), promoting their rights.

LRGs should harness the potential of urban and territorial planning to reduce inequalities collectively. This includes addressing gaps in access to and use of land, public spaces, public services and urban regeneration. By providing populations with access to opportunities, significant improvements can be made to their environments and daily lives. Social services such as education and urban health care should be prioritized to advance social inclusion and create equitable urban environments. LRGs can foster safe and healthy communities through more resilient urban environments, thus protecting the human rights of women and other marginalized groups, such as workers in the informal economy, migrants, people with disabilities, older people, LGBTQIA+ individuals, children and adolescents. Moreover, access to primary health care, innovative prevention methods and non-motorized transport options for various urban population groups should be ensured. Vertical coherence, which refers to financial and legal frameworks, is essential to ensure the successful implementation of these strategies.

Additionally, LRGs need to champion informed and sustained citizen participation and representation in public life and decision-making. This involves shaping more participatory, accountable and transparent governance systems and aligning participatory mechanisms with local communities’ varying needs and aspirations. This

sustains a systemic, place-based and long-term democratic approach. Such horizontal coherence and participation are key to successfully localizing the goal of building sustainable and inclusive communities. Key actions include ensuring open, accessible and verifiable information and data that foster transparency and inclusivity in urban planning. Participatory planning approaches should be adopted to co-create multisectoral interventions with residents, addressing various inequalities that structurally discriminated groups and marginalized territories face. To design socially inclusive transport and urban systems, LRGs should collect and analyze data disaggregated by distinct population groups, including data on the barriers they face. Communities should be encouraged to participate fully through participatory budgeting, interactive dialogue and local representation in project appraisal and evaluation processes. Lastly, monitoring tools such as satisfaction surveys should be implemented, enabling comparative analysis of perceptions across diverse groups; public transit systems can be improved accordingly.

LRGs have a crucial role in promoting participation in monitoring and evaluating SDG 11-related policies and incorporating the results at the national level. A key challenge is to standardize measurement tools across all local governments, ensuring a standardized methodology at the national level and enabling comparable results. LRGs can also effectively promote and support each other in the context of existing platforms and collaborations. For example, they work together through the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, identifying and sharing policy challenges and recommendations tailored to their specific contexts. This promotes decentralized cooperation, allowing for more efficient use of resources and enhanced development (see Paper 5). LRGs can play a key role in encouraging participation from other LRGs and stakeholders for collaborative SDG 11 localization.

PAPER 3. FOREFRONTING TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION:

HOW LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS ARE CRAFTING SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY



3.3.1 Accelerating action towards socially and environmentally just cities and territories

The global municipalist movement is at a pivotal moment for accelerating progress towards planetary goals while addressing intersecting systemic crises, including climate change and biodiversity loss. Local and regional governments (LRGs) are key actors in a wider process of societal transformation due to their role as stewards of socio-environmental justice across urban, peri-urban and rural territories. They also play a key role in the implementation of policies and interventions based on a deep understanding of the **interdependency between human and non-human rights**.

Recent reports confirm that progress towards achieving the aims outlined in global conventions for sustainability, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere programme, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and in those on human rights, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is too slow, unevenly distributed or even regressing. For example, although global CO₂ emissions fell by 5.2% in 2020 due to lower energy demands during the COVID-19 crisis, they have bounced back to their highest level ever, increasing 6% in 2021.¹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC's) Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) clearly states that human-induced climate change is already causing adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people across all regions, while disproportionately affecting those who contribute the least to the current climate crisis. Furthermore, the report corroborates the limits of current commitments and actions to tackle localized loss and damage. It argues that the greatest gains in wellbeing in urban areas and wider territories can be achieved if localized finance to reduce climate risk prioritizes low-income and informal communities.²

Calls to confront social and spatial inequalities in human-nature relations resonate with this paper's core position: **socially and environmentally just cities and territories can be defined as those in which all human residents and non-human species in their interdependence have an equal opportunity to thrive**. This implies that health outcomes and environmental benefits are shared equitably, regardless of class, gender, race, ethnicity, origin, age, sexual orientation, religion and disability, while also considering the intersection of different forms of discrimination based on these identities and experiences. LRGs, together with civil society organizations (CSOs) and everyday city-makers whose practices are often dismissed as informal, have a key role in crafting just cities and territories.

This paper builds on the Renaturing pathway of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) GOLD VI report.³ It also builds on the adoption of a rights-based approach to "just re-naturing," that is, tackling processes of maldistribution and misrecognition in cities and territories

while, at the same time, seeking to achieve greater inclusion and parity-oriented political participation in decision-making. In doing so, the paper examines trends and LRGs' experiences in realizing **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 targets** related to environmentally sustainable and socially just urban and territorial development. Specifically, it analyzes LRGs' capacities and interventions addressing the climate emergency (**target 11.b**), protecting people in vulnerable situations against disaster risk (**target 11.5**), reducing negative environmental impacts of cities (**target 11.6**) and providing access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces (**target 11.7**).⁴

Section 2 outlines four global trends increasingly compromising the realization of just and sustainable cities and territories (see Figure 3.3.1). Addressing these trends, Section 3 proposes four corresponding pathways for LRGs to spearhead innovative and bold actions. Section 4 identifies key capacities LRGs are building as well as the common challenges they are facing in embarking on the identified pathways. Section 5 synthesizes key messages to advance LRGs' role in accelerating progress towards just and sustainable cities and territories.

Figure 3.3.1 Trends, SDG targets and pathways

Trends and SDG targets	Pathways
Urbanization, extractivism and ecological overshoot (11.6)	Decoupling urban development from extractivist approaches
Demographic trends and their infrastructure implications (11.6)	Planning infrastructure with nature for current and future cities and territories
The climate change emergency, loss and damage and slow-onset risk (11.b, 11.5)	Localizing climate justice across mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage mechanisms
The unequal impacts of privatizing common environmental assets (11.7)	Commoning environmental assets and services

Source: own compilation



3.3.2 Trends

Urbanization, extractivism and ecological overshoot

About 75% of global natural resources are currently consumed in cities.⁵ Pressure on land, water, energy, rare and forest materials and other resources in the commons is expected to further increase under highly unequal conditions. Over the past 100 years, global material consumption has grown eightfold and is projected to triple again by 2050.⁶ Under a business-as-usual scenario, the annual resource requirements of the world's urban settlements will increase from 40 billion tonnes in 2010 to 90 billion tonnes by 2050. Furthermore, the negative impacts and resulting scarcities of this material footprint will continue to be highly unequally distributed. Domestic material consumption, for example, has seen a 65% increase between 2000 and 2019, totalling 95.1 billion metric tonnes, 70% of which come from East and South-East Asia, Europe and North America.⁷ In terms of per capita footprint, most of Africa as well as India account for 1–5 tonnes, while North America, Europe and Australia use 20–50 tonnes.⁸

Resource scarcities are increasingly driven by the financialization of nature and life-support systems and widespread extractivism. Cities and territories in the Global South are the primary targets of global extractive practices by corporate private interests. Thus, while consumption trends are largely similar across regions, the capacity of LRGs in the Global South to control these practices is severely limited, leading to heightened environmental depletion and degradation. This reality – and the underlying debates on who gets to grow their economy, how, and with what benefits and costs to whom – requires critical and people-centred perspectives on green growth, de-growth and post-growth transitions to ensure a sustainable and good quality of life for all. It also requires a critical assessment of the transactional inequalities embedded in mechanisms to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation,⁹ carbon and biodiversity offsetting and habitat banks, among others. All these mechanisms put a price on nature, turning it into a financial asset. Yet, if embedded in more equal power relations and negotiations mediated by LRGs, they could, for example, potentially enable local Indigenous communities to maintain their way of life.

To reduce material consumption in alignment with net zero 2050 targets, urban settlements would have to cut their consumption by at least 50%.¹⁰ This requires **addressing resource inefficiencies which contribute significantly to this ecological overshoot.** For example, globally, about 14% of food produced is lost between harvest and retail, with higher losses in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹ Additionally, an estimated 17% of food (equivalent to 121 kg per person per year) is wasted by consumers, retailers and producers, with particularly high numbers in the Global North. This reality points to the responsibility of big food corporations and the impact of conventional globalized food systems, which are currently responsible for around 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions. They

are also major drivers of land degradation, biodiversity loss and water, air and soil pollution. Food loss and food waste impact not only the right to food in cities and regions, but food in landfills also generates an estimated 8–10% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Increasing resource efficiency, consequently, would reduce extractive and unfair relationships between urban systems and nature and contribute to the mitigation of their negative impacts as well as contributing to more sustainable and inclusive urban food systems.

Moreover, **reverting ecological overshoot requires significant steps towards resource sufficiency, challenging current patterns of resource ownership and embedded inequalities.** Resource scarcities and abundances are intimately tied to long-term structural and intersecting inequalities, making visible how racism and patriarchal relationships, ageism and ableism, colonialism and the commodification of land and nature continue to shape social-spatial divisions. More equal access requires structural change including the redistribution of global resource consumption, for instance, lowering consumption to 6–10 tonnes per capita for wealthy dwellers and increasing it to 5–8 tonnes for poor dwellers.¹²

Considering that 80% of the global energy supply is consumed in cities, the energy sector has emerged in recent years as a key opportunity for LRGs to simultaneously address efficiency as well as sufficiency.¹³ As fossil fuel energy sources are becoming increasingly unaffordable, renewable energy supply attracted over 300 billion USD in investment in 2020, twice the combined investments in fossil fuel and nuclear power in that year.¹⁴ The initiative for Energy Compacts recognized the underutilized role of LRGs in the energy transition and leveraged commitments from the private sector and NGOs, as well as LRGs and national governments, for more integrated energy systems. Launched in 2021, its signatories invested 46 billion USD to this end, improving access to clean cooking for 14 million people and enhancing electricity access for 6 million people.¹⁵



Demographic trends and their infrastructure implications

Globally, over the past 30 years, cities have physically expanded much faster than actual population growth, averaging an annual land consumption rate of 1.7% between 2010 and 2020 vis-à-vis a population growth rate of 0.6%. However, there are significant regional differences in land consumption, with the highest levels recorded in East and South-East Asia as well as Sub-Saharan Africa. In terms of population growth rates, East and South-East Asia have seen drastic declines while Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the highest level. Although the drivers of growth are diverse, particular attention should be paid to the 89.3 million forcibly displaced people (as of the end of 2021) worldwide, many of whom moved to cities to seek opportunities but are forced to live in poor housing without basic infrastructure and services.¹⁶ In addition to population growth, it is essential to consider further demographic characteristics for planning more sustainable and just cities. For example, 25% of today's global population are persons with disabilities and older persons. Current estimates expect there to be about two billion older adults and people with disabilities by 2050, making it paramount to re-think how building "cities for all" can dismantle current barriers, including access to the commons and public services and infrastructure.¹⁷

In the Global South, it is estimated that material infrastructure for an additional 3.4 billion new urban dwellers will need to be produced by 2050, equivalent to almost 50% of the existing urban fabric.¹⁸ This estimate stems from reducing infrastructure deficits such as those visible in the sanitation sector (e.g. across Sub-Saharan Africa, only 22% of inhabitants have access to safe sanitation)¹⁹ as well as projected growth in small, intermediary and large urban centres. The projected de-densification of urban settlements would increase urban land use from 1 million km² to 2.5 million km² by 2050, with a large share of this expansion happening on productive farmland, notably in Asia and Africa, with devastating consequences on food supply and food sovereignty.²⁰

Modern planning principles have, in many countries, promoted a separation of activities and land uses, shaping how LRGs approach the infrastructure requirements of urban centres, industrial sites, peripheries and their connectors.²¹ The socio-spatial dynamics of mixed land uses and coherence across different planning approaches are discussed in Paper 2, while this paper focuses on environmental drivers and impacts of current and future grey, green and blue infrastructure developments. For example, the cement industry is annually responsible for 11% (2,200 tonnes) of global anthropogenic mercury emissions. The expected acceleration of construction works and local cement supplies, particularly in Asia and Africa, will further increment emissions, impacting humans and ecosystems.²²

Nature-based solutions, in combination with strategies to restore the social and environmental function of the commons (see the pathway on "commoning environmental assets and services"), have been promoted in many cities as enabling environmentally friendly, multifunctional urban spaces, recovering ecosystems while provid-

ing health and economic benefits. However, in highly constrained spaces and dense areas, ecological restoration through blue and green infrastructure often comes at the expense of socio-economic losses.²³ There is no simple answer to what form urban growth should take to achieve the SDGs – for example, how much to densify and when sprawl should be allowed.²⁴ Although not a panacea, the general tendency is to promote policies of densification and agglomeration to reduce infrastructure costs and related resource use and to foster social benefits through enhanced accessibility to basic services and neighbourhoods with social proximity.

The climate change emergency, loss and damage and slow-onset risk

Climate change contributes to severe adverse impacts on urban areas, including hot extremes, negative impacts of disasters on basic infrastructure and service disruptions that affect particularly marginalized urban dwellers. Vulnerability is concentrated specifically in informal and rapidly growing smaller settlements and on the lands of Indigenous peoples, whose lives and livelihoods depend directly on the functioning of ecosystems.

There are many formal and informal initiatives pursuing a long-term vision and actions towards low-emission societies. These initiatives craft urban and territorial resilience through concerted action on adaptation and mitigation, while tackling loss and damage. By the end of March 2023, 2,323 jurisdictions and local governments in 40 countries have declared a climate emergency, covering one billion citizens.²⁵ The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy brings together over 12,700 LRGs representing over 1.1 billion people – equivalent to one out of every eight people living in a city. Moreover, the number of countries with local disaster risk reduction strategies almost doubled between 2015 and 2021, from 51 to 98 countries.²⁶ These initiatives postulate tackling climate change as a human rights challenge and consider its severe repercussions, for example, on the right to adequate housing and on marginalized groups such as people with disabilities. They further foreground inequalities between inhabitants, cities and regions in the way these human rights violations are experienced, while acknowledging that local disaster risk reduction plans often lack in data disaggregation, implementation and monitoring.²⁷

While the scale and scope of the climate crisis have long been known, the past years have demonstrated this crisis's profound intersections with other crises, such as pandemics, conflicts and the cost-of-living crisis.²⁸ For example, dramatic price increases by 65% in natural gas, 21% in oil and 126% in coal over the course of 2022 are inextricably linked to the war in Ukraine and its impacts on European natural gas markets; disasters like the heat-wave and subsequent floods in Pakistan disrupted energy supplies and damaged power stations.²⁹ These compound global-local crises demand LRG responses in terms of mitigation – reducing emissions as well as dependency on non-renewable resources; adaptation – actions to improve liveability while facing impacts of climate change on diverse environments; as well as loss and damage – transferring and allocating reparation funding for ir-

reversible negative impacts, particularly to low-income populations who are most severely affected yet contribute least to the crisis. The latter has been a milestone achievement promoted by LRGs at COP27 in Egypt.

The past years have also seen the unprecedented commitment of governments and the private sector to mitigation, especially to decrease the volatility of energy markets by investing at a higher and faster rate in renewables compared to fossil fuels, and to localizing energy generation. Nonetheless, the IPCC AR6 synthesis report emphasizes that **global efforts, particularly those from the Global North and emerging markets, are far from realizing the Paris Agreement commitment to limit global warming to 1.5°C**.³⁰ Moreover, the report critiques that many mitigation and adaptation actions have been fragmented, sectorial and unevenly distributed across regions. The core message is that of a narrowing window for governments, the private sector and civil society to act and secure liveable and sustainable futures.

The unequal impacts of privatized common environmental assets

The fourth trend concerns inequalities in access to and control over environmental benefits such as green spaces and healthy food inside and outside of cities. **These inequalities are deepened by the privatization and commodification of land and environmental assets and services by urban elites**, including property developers, financial institutions, owners and operators. They **manifest in green gentrification, further excluding and displacing those who have historically suffered disproportionately from environmental burdens and green space deficits**.

As LRGs are revitalizing downtowns, re-developing post-industrial sites and planning for more climate-resilient cities, they are challenged to find modes of urban governance that are more socially inclusive as well as ecologically sustainable. The notion of “life systems” has hereby been useful, as it emphasizes care and healthy living, through more inclusive and accessible basic services (e.g. food, health, housing) and sustainable working patterns. Paper 4 examines how these ambitions are linked to culturally sensitive and appropriate modes of planning.

A survey of 962 cities in 2020 showed that only 37.8% of residential neighbourhoods and 45.2% of their population were located within 400 metres walking distance to public green spaces. This issue has been picked up by LRGs and urban planners, particularly in the context of post-pandemic planning and in light of the pandemic’s impact on physical and mental health (see Paper 2 on accessibility, proximity and the concept of the 15-minute city).³¹ For example, the importance of proximity has been recognized by UCLG’s Intermediary Cities forum.³² However, challenges such as the need for disaggregated data remain, in particular to capture the impact of the new measures on the inclusion of people with disabilities, among other groups.

Privatization has long been advocated as a solution to the management of scarce common-pool resources based on arguments for increased efficiency and control over

resources. Yet, in practice, critical questions have been raised regarding externalized negative environmental impacts and operative risks, as well as monopolistic pricing and reduced service provision against surplus value increase. Privatization encapsulates a variety of forms through which the governance, use and distribution of resources are transferred to private entities – including the privatization of governance processes and physical resources, as well as intellectual property.³³ An example of the latter is the case of patenting seeds. Held in the public domain, crop varieties gave farmers the possibility of adapting their production systems and livelihoods to local conditions. Genetically modified crop varieties, in contrast, were promoted by the private sector as superior to traditional seeds, increasing farmers’ dependency on private seeds as well as the machinery, fertilizers and pesticides they require. This massively eradicated biodiversity through mono-cropping and contributed to the loss of traditional agricultural knowledges.

In response to different forms of privatization, there is an increasing re-municipalization of outsourced assets and services, often supported by labour unions and CSOs. Furthermore, **LRGs are spearheading the development of new forms of urban governance that see democratization processes and principles of justice, sustainability and proximity at the core of public service provision**. An example is the alignment of public procurement with more sustainable, proximity-based and inclusive practices.³⁴ Although re-municipalization has been predominant in Europe, it has extended to a documented 1,600 cities in 45 countries.³⁵

3.3.3 Unpacking the pathways: Decoupling, restoring, localizing and commoning

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In conjunction with long-term challenges, cities and territories have recently faced significant external shocks, crises and complex emergencies. These include the COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, energy crisis, cost-of-living crisis, decline of democratic practices, the climate emergency and the African food crisis. LRGs have focused on how to tackle the unfolding multilevel crises and complex emergencies, seeking recovery and transformative transitions. The uncertain times in which we live call for constant reassessment of how people, work and human activity are taking place in and across urban regions, as well as for renewed efforts to steer the urban regions’ social and environmental functions now and into the future. These efforts are examined below across four interconnected pathways.

Decoupling urban development from extractivist approaches

The first pathway examines the actions required to tackle current and projected resource scarcities. While LRGs are not yet fully engaging with ways of fighting the multiple expressions and material impacts of extractivism,

incipient initiatives to decouple urban development from intense resource use have arisen that promote systems within cities and their wider hinterlands.³⁶

Beyond the risks of prevailing business-oriented approaches to the creation of circular cities,³⁷ the sidelining of social factors and the emphasis on the optimization of physical resource flows instead of environmental preservation,³⁸ many cities are engaging in substantial efforts to adopt a more transformative approach to the circular economy. This includes the experience of **Johannesburg** (South Africa), where a circular economy plan proposes increased investment in green manufacturing and job creation, renewable energy, energy efficiency initiatives, next generation mobility, alternative waste management and sustainable agriculture and food security. The initiatives are framed under Johannesburg's Integrated Development Plan, titled "The People's Plan," which aims to deepen the local authority's effective intervention in the city's political economy of space and services, while broadening participation in the local economy by removing barriers across class, race, gender and ability, particularly for the urban poor.³⁹

Another example is **São Paulo's** (Brazil) Connect the Dots programme to create a food system network that tackles social inequalities and supports regenerative farming in the peri-urban zone and surrounding metropolitan area.⁴⁰ The programme provides technical assistance, training and equipment to local farmers through Houses of Ecological Farming, supported by a digital platform for managing technical assistance. Through these means, the municipality promotes the conversion from conventional to organic farming and supports and purchases produce from local farmers to provide healthy food for structurally discriminated people.

A common feature among these pioneering experiences is their **reimagination of how resource flows moving through urban and territorial economies can be "closed,"** whether through regenerating, sharing, optimizing, looping, virtualizing or exchanging, or using a combination of these approaches.⁴¹ **Amsterdam** (the Netherlands) clearly demonstrates this multidimensional approach (see Box 3.3.1).



BOX 3.3.1

Amsterdam's approach to circularity

Amsterdam's experience in building a circular city relies on experimentation with multiple initiatives. These include the introduction of legislative "free zones" and a "Manifesto for a Circular Buiksloterham" implemented in a decaying post-industrial area, which enable partners to trial circular and bio-based approaches to waste collection and water and sanitation management. In 2016, Amsterdam adopted a Fab City label to explore geographically distributed urban production systems through the adoption of new technologies to support more efficient mobility and food systems. The city also harbours a fully circular and self-sufficient community called "De Ceuvel" that pioneers a participatory approach to circular living. There, residents construct self-built homes from recycled materials and manage the community's material, energy and food flows.

Creating networked capacities to support circular cities is another approach widely adopted by LRGs. For example, the **Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity** (FAMSI) and the **Federation of Local Authorities in Northern Morocco and Andalusia**, in collaboration with the **Andalusian Association of Renewable Energies** (Spain), have spearheaded a circular mobility scheme among young professionals in the green economy and renewable energy sector. The scheme promotes the co-development of entrepreneurship and networks for innovation and employment, thus contributing to retaining talent in the country of origin and generating employment and active entrepreneurship opportunities among young Moroccans.⁴² Similarly, in partnership with the French Agency for Ecological Transition, the **UCLG Africa Academy** is preparing a Training of Trainers programme on circular economy, adapting and contextualizing the pedagogical content to the specific African local context, hence promoting African expertise and sharing of resources and tools.

In many cases, LRGs reinforce environmental systems and standards adopted long ago but place a renewed emphasis on more circular approaches that go beyond command and control. In the case of **Canelones** (Uruguay), such an approach saw the implementation of a monitoring unit for industrial effluents that controls the installation of industries and businesses. The unit takes actions that minimize water, air and soil contamination, taking special care of the final disposal of effluents as a key step in community disease control.

The circular economy approach makes use of LRGs' knowledge of their territories, self-governance and autonomy in urban planning with regard to waste, water and public transport, among other areas.⁴³ In many city strategies, municipalities position themselves as facilitators and see investments to replace unsustainable infrastructure systems as too high to be tackled alone, therefore relying on public-private partnerships and business investors. Thus, radical aspirations are often curtailed and shaped in practice by either limited avail-

able resources or LRGs' capacity to attract and control private investments.

The circular cities movement encompasses approaches that seek accommodation strategies via green growth – therefore keeping extractivist trends unchallenged – and more radical approaches that look into how diversifying and de-growing urban regions' economies can enable radical transformations in a resource-scarce world.⁴⁴ The latter emphasize the role of grassroots communities and citizens in the co-creation and co-governance of pathways towards more equal and sustainable societies, involving community-driven energy programmes and maker, repair and reuse networks, among others. **Radical approaches to the circular economy still need to take root in the most vulnerable cities and territories, which are often highly dependent on natural resources extractivism.** Under these conditions, the challenge is how to advance alternative systems that allow LRGs to gain autonomy in the face of entrenched trends of resource exploitation and mass dispossession.

Planning infrastructure with nature for current and future cities and territories

This pathway sheds light on how **fulfilling historical, current and future infrastructure needs requires a paradigm shift towards revitalizing and restoring urban ecological infrastructure through inclusive citizen engagement.** Urban infrastructures are interrelated socio-technical systems that provide energy, water, waste, mobility and communication services. While regulating resource flows and emissions, they can enable or restrain access to critical services and socio-spatial inclusion, they can be sources of resilience or vulnerability to hazards and technical disruptions, and they can support resource-intensive linear management flows or circular ones. As such, urban infrastructures play an essential role in enabling, sustaining and enhancing urban living conditions and vital systems. The way in which they are conceived, planned, managed and governed can thus open or close different pathways towards more equitable and sustainable urban futures. Investing in the ecological restoration and rehabilitation of ecosystems such as rivers, lakes and woodlands is not only ecologically and socially desirable, but also economically advantageous.⁴⁵

Infrastructure transformations are at the heart of structuring sustainable long-term urban processes. Therefore, they require LRGs to consider political rather than just technical questions, matters of statehood, corporate interests and the common good, path dependency and vested interests, land use patterns and social practices, and biases in finance and investments among the hegemonic ways in which infrastructure decisions and transitions are negotiated. Therefore, a key consideration is that **infrastructure change often occurs through dynamic, incremental and relational processes** through which ordinary citizens build, maintain and manage urban infrastructures and services.

Across the Global South, urban infrastructures are typically broken, incomplete, poorly regulated, underfunded and often reliant on vernacular and incremental approaches and improvisations that are still systematically

dismissed as inadequate and inefficient from the viewpoint of Western infrastructure models. Take, for instance, the sanitation grid versus off-grid debate across Asian and Sub-Saharan African cities, where most of the population relies on on-site sanitation facilities.⁴⁶ These systems typically generate faecal sludge, yet faecal sludge management still constitutes an underfunded and overlooked stage within the sanitation service chain. An integrated approach to faecal sludge management is critical to secure the health and environmental protection of large sectors of urban dwellers, as exemplified in an ambitious programme by the **Tamil Nadu State** in India (see Box 3.3.2).

BOX 3.3.2

Advancing just sanitation through faecal sludge management

The **Tamil Nadu** Urban Sanitation Support Programme⁴⁷ in India tackles sanitation problems head on. Since 2016, the programme has focused on scaling inclusive faecal sludge management across all the urban local bodies in Tamil Nadu. The programme is led by the state government with the support of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements to advance total and inclusive urban sanitation across the state. Its approach to urban sanitation requires a full consideration of the workers that manage sanitation flows across the service chain and those engaged in emptying and transport services. The programme further highlights the often-invisible role of women as sanitation providers, not just users.⁴⁸ Thinking about urban infrastructures as living and hybrid systems based on a broad spectrum of knowledge, social innovations and relational practices, is essential to produce more inclusive infrastructure systems.

The principle behind many ongoing interventions by LRGs is to focus infrastructure investments where historical deficits and contemporary needs are higher. For example, over the last 10 years, the local government of the municipality of **Esteban Echeverría** (Argentina) has strongly invested in the construction of basic infrastructure networks. As a result, it increased water and sewerage coverage from less than 25% to more than 80% of the population. In the Gambia, the **Basse Area** Council has developed a strategic plan to reconstruct the town's drainage system and the Gujuguju Bolong canal to mitigate flood risk. This canal is the main waterway for sustaining effective drainage around and within the city. The council's initiatives include urban mapping to guide the approval of settlements and housing development in the Upper River Region.⁴⁹

Working with nature is an old urban design concept. However, it is only in recent years that acknowledging and revitalizing the ecological infrastructure of a city has become popular among LRGs, as demonstrated by the experience of **Granollers** (Spain) in Box 3.3.3.

BOX 3.3.3

The recovery of the Congost River in Granollers

Since the 1990s, the city of **Granollers** in the metropolitan area of Barcelona (Spain) has been tackling the legacy of poorly planned past interventions that led to the degradation of the city's river basins and Mediterranean forests. The city's actions have involved the social and natural recovery of the Congost River, the restoration of the abandoned site Can Cabanyes into a wetland for biodiversity, water reclamation and public use, and a city-wide system of water reuse. The strategies adopted included increasing the river's natural hydromorphology to promote new microhabitats and biodiversity and improving the river's longitudinal ecological connectivity by removing concrete blocks across the riverbed.

Under the auspices of the International Cooperation to Restore and Connect Urban Environments in Latin America and Europe (INTERLACE) Programme, the city is now exploring methodologies for measuring the impact of implemented nature-based solutions, using more inclusive and ecologically coherent planning and governance mechanisms, and sharing its experience with other intermediary cities in Europe and Latin America.⁵⁰

Straddling this and the following pathway is the need to advance a just transition to clean energy and affordable energy (SDG 7), a key priority for many cities across the world. Across the urban Global South, the energy mix is dominated by coal-fired power, which negatively and especially affects women in informal settlements due to their disproportionate role in caretaking activities such as cooking. Among other cities, **Johannesburg** (South Africa) is transitioning to a cleaner energy mix that includes natural gas and renewable sources such as solar and wind power. To realize its commitment to the Paris Agreement, the city aims to source 25% of its electricity from renewable energy by 2030, while entering into long-term purchase agreements with independent power producers and installing small-scale embedded generation facilities to supplement the energy supply.

Localizing climate justice across mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage mechanisms

This pathway explores LRG actions to advance climate justice, with specific consideration of policies and practices to tackle mitigation and adaptation challenges and to localize loss and damage financial mechanisms. As the climate emergency demands the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, cultural policies become central to LRGs' responses. Their responses address intangible and tangible cultural heritage, creativity, Indigenous peoples' and local communities' languages, wisdom and knowledge systems, and traditional crafts and materials. Although some of these aspects are discussed in Paper 4, this section investigates LRGs' responses to both climate-related extreme weather events and slow-onset disasters with a specific emphasis on citizen engagement.

Cities and territories require preventive and responsive actions to act upon a wide spectrum of risks. Intensive, large-scale disasters such as floods and droughts are expected to become even more severe and frequent, an issue that is clearly on the radar of LRGs. Extensive risk – that is, risk associated with low severity, high-frequency and localized events – affects humans on a recurrent basis, with significant implications for their health, prosperity and wellbeing, as well as for the environment. While LRGs do not have the power to make all the necessary changes alone, they can play a pivotal role, working upwards with national governments and international organizations and downwards with grassroots organizations and the communities they represent and serve.

The experience of **Rotterdam** (the Netherlands) exemplifies some of the complexities encountered by LRGs to respond to the climate crisis. This city has launched the WeatherWise programme, bringing together local government actors, social entrepreneurs, the private sector, NGOs and citizens to climate-proof the city in an inclusive way. Each of the city's 42 neighbourhoods has its own approach to ensure that context-specific needs are at the forefront of climate adaptation. LRGs in **Barcarena** (Brazil), **Afadzato South District** (Ghana), **Nancy** (France) and **Freetown** (Sierra Leone) are committed to ambitious tree planting and urban reforestation programmes



that simultaneously reduce the impact of heatwaves and strengthen local capacities and livelihoods. **Kadıköy** in Istanbul (Turkey) aims to increase its green spaces and reduce urban temperature through zoning plans and the rehabilitation of streams.

While the initiatives undertaken by metropolitan areas and large cities are well-documented, it is worth remembering that **the bulk of the transition towards an urban world is taking place in intermediary and small cities, a reality often overlooked.**⁵¹ A recent review of participatory budgeting practices includes several examples from smaller and mid-sized cities such as **Dalifort-Foirail** (Senegal) and **Pemba** (Mozambique), demonstrating the power of engaging citizens and communities in climate mitigation and adaptation responses.⁵² The review shows that citizen participation can and should be a transformative tool in tackling climate change, while building trust in government through direct democratic practices.

As highlighted before, climate finance is a critical concern for LRGs, which explains why some cities have started to develop a portfolio of financial mechanisms to complement their own investments. **Paris** (France) is a pioneer in this regard. Its local government launched the first-ever city “climate bonds” in 2015, raising 336 million USD for mitigation and adaptation projects, while instilling confidence in suppliers of green products and services. However, worldwide, there is a persistent and strong divide between the Global North and the Global South in terms of financing local development. Out of the total flows raised in 2015 in the green bond market, approximately 2.2 billion USD were directed towards cities in the Global South, compared to 17 billion USD in the Global North.⁵³ The financial flows available to cities in both contexts are further skewed by their respective sources. Cities in the North typically use their own municipal issuance power, while benefiting from development finance institutions (DFIs) by linking city-based projects to their green bonds. In contrast, the smaller financial flows available to cities in the Global South for climate responses come almost entirely from DFIs. In combination, **multilateral and bilateral DFIs send more green bond flows to city projects in the Global North than in the Global South.**

The 2022 UNFCCC COP27 advanced international commitment to a dedicated fund for loss and damage. However, most initiatives underway still rely on finance through adaptation, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian funds. Furthermore, although there is a long genealogy of climate-induced loss and damage impacts, **initiatives tend to focus on easily quantified and monetized losses and damages**, at the expense of non-economic and less tangible ones. In 2016, the Pacific Islands’ leaders endorsed the region’s first Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific,⁵⁴ a comprehensive policy for governing climate change and disaster-related risk towards the realization of the SDGs. In contrast with the 2015 Paris Agreement, this initiative covers a wide range of climate- and disaster-induced loss and damage mechanisms.⁵⁵ For example, Fiji developed a Climate Relocation Fund and Planned Relocation Guidelines with funds earmarked for more than 30 at-risk communities’ future relocation.⁵⁶ Box 3.3.4 examines the range of initiatives undertaken in this regard in the archipelago of Kiribati.

BOX 3.3.4

Advancing loss and damage mechanisms in the Pacific Islands

Kiribati is formed by 32 atoll islands and has a fast-growing population of around 110,000 spread over an area of more than five million km². As a member of the Alliance of Small Island States, Kiribati has campaigned for loss and damage mitigation mechanisms within the UNFCCC since the early 1990s. It is one of the first nations in the world seeking to advance climate justice through a climate migration strategy entitled “migrate with dignity.”⁵⁷ This initiative includes regionally negotiated labour programmes (such as the Recognized Seasonal Employment scheme with New Zealand and the Seasonal Worker Programme with Australia), coupled with large investments by the national government and international donors in education and English skills to enhance people’s chances to migrate. Since 2014, the government has purchased land in other Pacific Islands for planned relocation. While these initiatives were taken at the national level, they open a new framing for LRGs to engage in migration-friendly international politics and concrete local, social and connective solutions to support climate migrants’ self-determination, yet also calling for simultaneous action to prevent and adapt to climate change impacts.

Current debates identify the need for a human rights-based approach to ensure that duty bearers such as local and national governments fulfil their responsibility to meet the needs of citizens and communities affected by climate change. Such an approach should also enhance duty bearers’ responsiveness to ever-changing emerging challenges within their territories and beyond their administrative boundaries, as well as localize loss and damage financial mechanisms with due consideration of non-economic losses from climate change.

Commoning environmental assets and services

This pathway examines how **LRGs find ways of commoning privatized, unequally distributed or degraded environmental common assets and services, while preventing green gentrification resulting from the mismanagement of land markets.** Commoning involves restoring the environmental and social functions of cities and territories to advance everyone’s wellbeing and the liveability of live-in environments. In a programme by the municipality of **Entebbe** (Uganda), migrants, refugees and other people living around the Namiro Wetland receive training and employment opportunities in wetland restoration, while the city on Lake Victoria is promoted as a destination for ecotourism. The programme follows a multifunctional approach to income generation through sustainable employment while protecting wetlands and providing incentives for local inhabitants to prevent further settlements in a high-risk area. Similarly, and

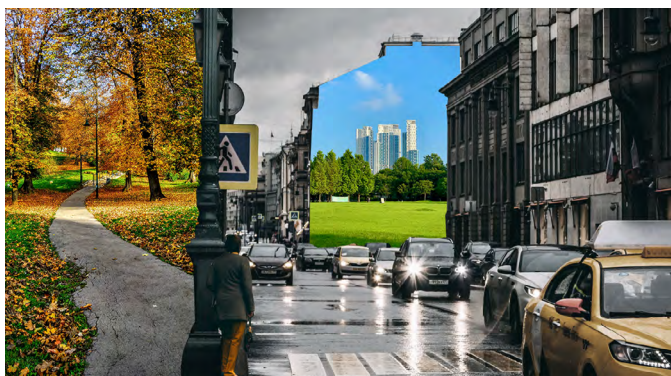
ranking high in terms of political commitment to value nature, the efforts made in **Peñalolén** (Chile) prioritize citizens' quality of life and reduced exploitation of natural resources (see Box 3.3.5).

BOX 3.3.5

Peñalolén's CSO-driven approach to land use planning

In **Peñalolén**, in 2009, an investment-friendly municipal land use plan triggered widespread resistance. CSOs feared that its approval would further increase land prices, lead to the displacement of low-income communities and make significant changes to the commune's landscape and ecological infrastructure. After the initial plan was refused in 2011 after a no-vote in the communal plebiscite, a civil society-driven platform –the Council of Social Movements of Peñalolén– promoted a new land use plan and took actions towards the social integration of migrant communities, together with the development of accessible public spaces and social housing in strategic areas to improve access to housing and basic services to reduce social segregation in the commune. In addition, efforts were made to sustain green and wild areas over time and protect them from being commodified. An assessment of the ecology of the commune's landscape is currently being carried out to propose biological corridors that respond to challenges such as heatwaves and to enhance aquifer recharge. This proposal was mobilized under a "right to the city" framing, in which the preservation of the commons played a key role.

LRGs are also confronting green gentrification and its consequences, such as the displacement of the very residents meant to benefit from green and recreational assets. Tools commonly used to combat green gentrification include eco-district zoning, interim green spaces on vacant lots, green amenity planning in large-scale developments and opening of private green spaces to the public. Other tools used are developer requirements (e.g. developer fees directed to green funding), financial schemes (green bonds, green climate-resilient infrastructure in vulnerable neighbourhoods) and other regulations on green space management and food security and sovereignty. The following example from **Portland, Oregon (USA)** shows how a combination of those tools can protect housing rights and produce environmental benefits (see Box 3.3.6).⁵⁸



BOX 3.3.6

Combatting gentrification in Portland, Oregon

Portland's history of racial discrimination in housing is tightly linked to major infrastructure developments that displaced residents. Since the late 1980s, the city implemented revitalization programmes that produced gentrification, disrupting African American neighbourhoods. After another development was proposed in 2013, community leaders demanded investment from the city and managed to mobilize 20 million USD in urban renewal funds to support affordable housing in the area.

Moreover, through an extensive community outreach process, the Portland Housing Bureau developed a Neighborhood Housing Strategy that included, for example, loan assistance for house repairs and the building of new affordable housing. In 2019, rent caps were introduced to protect tenants from evictions. In the Cully neighbourhood, local NGOs have started a project to build affordable housing and businesses with residents. They also trained 200 residents in environmental management and landscaping. Hence, Portland demonstrates a model of tackling gentrification through measures to increase affordability, protect the most marginalized populations and create capacities and opportunities for income generation.

3.3.4 LRGs governing and managing complex legacies, trajectories and emergencies

The four pathways have shown how LRGs are at the forefront of urban innovations towards environmentally and socially just cities in a context of multiple and intersecting crises. This section identifies the remaining challenges as well as capacities built, drawing on reflections from LRGs involved in the cases above, as well as others.

Enabling institutional environment

LRGs have used multiple tactics and strategies to increase their room for manoeuvre and actively drive the four presented pathways. In the absence of, or complementary to, national mechanisms, several LRGs and community groups have developed **local rules and incentive structures** to advance the implementation of environmental strategies. In **Afadzato South District (Ghana)**, local bylaws were enacted to reduce disaster risk by preventing practices such as bush burning and unauthorized land uses. Importantly, LRGs have developed not only rules but also local regulatory compliance mechanisms, such as in the case of **Peñalolén (Chile)**. Moreover, local prohibitions are closely linked to incentive structures provided by LRGs. In **Viña del Mar (Chile)**, a municipal environmental certification system acts as a driver to improve

waste management, protect ecosystems and encourage responsible human-animal relationships.

A second key strategy relates to the **creation and institutionalization of LRG agencies and departments** that work across relevant sectors with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This has been particularly useful considering that LRGs increasingly perform the role of a facilitator and interlocutor in promoting just urban and territorial development together with a range of other stakeholders. **Buenos Aires** (Argentina), for example, followed a process of allocating responsibilities across a wide range of units and departments to fulfil differential roles in environmental agendas – including land use planning, finance, human resources and community relations. LRGs take a **systems approach to territorial planning and management**, which cuts across sectorial and administrative divisions (see Paper 5 on multilevel governance). However, they face several administrative governance challenges that are and will continue to be exacerbated under complex emergency situations unless bold governance arrangements at all levels are made.⁵⁹

Resources

The trends and pathways have demonstrated that LRGs are challenged to identify and leverage regular as well as exceptional and flexible resources to be responsive to slow, rapid, anticipated and surprising changes. The **mobilization and (re)distribution of financial resources through innovations in existing funding mechanisms, as well as the localization of new and emerging funds**, are fundamental, as has become apparent in discussions around financing climate change mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. The Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility is a noteworthy example of how shortcomings in funding – for non-economic loss and damage, as well as for displaced people, migrants and those evicted and relocated – need to be addressed in the design of inclusive and sustainable policies.

In **Peñalolén** (Chile), the mobilization of resources has been possible due to a management model that established public-private alliances and actively pursued attracting regional funds. Being part of pacts and collaboration networks such as the Race to Zero or the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, as well as participating in international monitoring and evaluation processes, thereby helped to increase visibility and recognition of the municipality's environmental programmes.

The mobilization of resources often goes together with ongoing **decentralization processes**, as has been seen in **Basse** (the Gambia). Here, an increase in local autonomy and fiscal control, as outlined in the Basse Area Council's Strategic Plan 2019–2022, is expected to benefit necessary investments in climate-resilient development through reforestation programmes and the construction of adequate drainage systems. The importance of decentralization processes is relevant not only in terms of access to, and control over, financial resources but also to land use and planning decisions. In **Afadzato South District** (Ghana), the Physical Planning Department, for example, is a key enabler of the Green Afadzato Project, which plants trees to reduce heat impacts. The department leads local planning of farmlands and industrial, commercial and residential land uses – capacities required to use resources to produce public value.



Capacities

The challenges and pathways presented in the previous sections require different staff capacities from those often existing in LRGs. This makes **formal and informal learning and training** essential. LRGs have invested in strengthening skills and techniques, such as dedicated training in tree planting in Ghana or remote sensing and urban wetland declarations in Chile. They have further participated in special training organized by national entities, such as disaster risk management and risk profiling. Moreover, LRGs have also facilitated learning on the job, such as during the implementation of the river rehabilitation and re-naturing project in **Granollers** (Spain).

LRGs have also shaped their recruitment strategies to attract professionals with the required skills and competencies. For instance, the government of **Peñalolén** (Chile) has rapidly expanded local capacities by creating an Environment Department with more than 60 professionals working in four areas (climate change, waste and environmental education, responsible animal ownership and conservation). It continuously strengthens staff capacities through in-house workshops and training.

Citizen engagement

Linked to the previous three areas, there are several mechanisms and strategies through which LRGs engage with and support CSOs' processes to advance the SDGs and work towards socially and environmentally just cities. Many LRGs take seriously their mandate to prioritize citizen participation in environmental planning, beyond consultation processes, through public councils among other citizen engagement mechanisms.⁶⁰ For instance, the municipality of **Viña del Mar** (Chile) has a dedicated Department of Citizen Participation, while other LRGs delegate decision-making powers through processes such as participatory budgeting, which has been a par-

ticularly productive mechanism in addressing immediate local needs.

The quality of engagement refers to the collaborative production and follow-through of strategic action plans to foster the **institutionalization of LRG-CSO relations**. Considering the critical role of the private sector – often in reproducing unsustainable production and consumption patterns – it is key to explore how LRGs can establish productive and effective dialogue and action to tackle business-as-usual and greenwashing practices.

In this regard, several LRGs follow **networked approaches**, in which they collaborate with private sector and/or CSOs on issues related to the renewable energy sector, labour market inclusion and migration policies, among others. The UCLG Town Hall is an example of a space for dialogue and interaction between different internationally organized civil society constituencies and LRGs to jointly define global policies. Driven by civil society, it allows different international stakeholders to collaborate in defining policy priorities and localizing global agendas. However, in general, it remains challenging for LRGs to assume their roles as facilitators, as they often rely on public-private partnerships and business investors. This, in turn, brings a bias towards investment-friendly partnerships, which rarely advance radical aspirations for structural change.

3.3.5 LRGs forefronting transformative action towards just and sustainable cities and territories

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Ongoing intersecting crises have shown that **prioritizing and fulfilling LRGs' commitments to a radically different pathway than business as usual is no longer an option but imperative**. As discussed throughout the paper, this requires LRGs embarking on four interrelated pathways: **decoupling, restoring, localizing and commoning**. These pathways highlight why and how cities and territories can transcend their economic dependence on natural resource extraction, carbon-intensive development, climate-induced risk and loss and damage, systemic damage to their ecological infrastructure and the erosion of their social and ecological functions, and instead work for the benefit of all human and non-human species.

The negative trends described in this paper are increasingly exacerbated by the financialization of urban life and the material processes that support it, the obduracy of technological systems that disregard environmental processes and the colonial and patriarchal legacies that produce and reproduce socio-environmental injustices. As a result, vast majorities of people who are treated as dispensable minorities due to their gender, class, race, age, disabilities or location in politically overlooked cities and territories are bearing environmental burdens while being excluded from environmental benefits.

This paper has shown the range of mechanisms that LRGs are pioneering and mobilizing to advance just transitions that leave no one and no place behind. Such mechanisms are typically concrete and strategic attempts to develop new imaginaries and boldly reinvent planning processes. Yet, the task at hand is of such a magnitude that local policies and actions need to be constantly assessed, considering their transformative aspirations and power. This requires bearing in mind the following considerations:

- **Commitments towards just and sustainable cities and territories, including SDG 11, have long been in the hands of negotiations mediated by international organizations and national governments. LRGs need to deepen and expand their critical engagement with such processes, pushing their boundaries through new forms of multilateralism and spearheading more ambitious and anticipatory actions** (see Paper 5). LRG capacities, resources and mandates need to be urgently enhanced to fully enable LRGs to play a transformative role. Such a role can only be supported by expanding and deepening a new social contract that treats ordinary citizens, local communities and organized civil society as critical allies in the exercise of direct democracy.
- **Transformative change is not the outcome or aggregation of isolated responses.** It requires thinking not only outside the box of municipal governance and planning, but also beyond jurisdictional boundaries by seeking networked approaches and drawing on the power of the municipalist movement.
- **Commoning cities and territories means restoring their collective social and ecological functions.** Efforts to do so require political commitment and bold interventions in the property market, which are often in opposition to the interest of well-organized urban property-owning classes and speculative gains (see Paper 1). Adopting a rights-based approach is essential in this regard. It requires engaging with the full cycle of collective redistribution, recognition and protection of diversity and equality, while building parity-oriented political participation and fulfilling fundamental citizen rights.
- **Finally, the importance of adopting a forward-looking perspective cannot be emphasized enough.** LRGs are intervening in today's cities and territories and, in doing so, they are shaping our common urban future in fundamental ways, either by reinforcing path dependency or by unlocking new possibilities and trajectories that in turn impact the right of present and future generations to social and environmental justice.

Forefronting transformative action towards just and sustainable cities and territories ultimately requires re-embedding them into their life-support systems, while tackling simultaneously questions of sufficiency, efficiency and equality.

PAPER 4. A CULTURAL BOOST IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGs:

HOW LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS ARE PROMOTING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND TERRITORIES



3.4.1 Introduction: Global and local trends in the localization of Sustainable Development Goal target 11.4

Culture (and heritage) in the localization of sustainable development

This paper recalls and explores the important links between culture and sustainable development, and the crucial role of culture in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 11, “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.” It also examines projects, programmes and policies developed by local and regional governments (LRGs), civil society organizations (CSOs), informal groups, heritage professionals and other relevant stakeholders.

SDG 11 includes the most important entry point for heritage and culture in the SDGs, with target 11.4 devoted to “strengthen[ing] efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage.”¹ In a generous reading, this target seeks to enhance the role of cultural heritage in society; promote sustainable development; support cultural heritage approaches that place people at the core of public policies in a more forward-looking, inclusive, integrated and intersectoral way; and encourage the emergence of new models of cultural heritage management and participatory governance.² Other SDG targets that are seen as entry points for heritage and culture are target 2.5 (genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge), target 4.7 (education to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development), target 8.3 (creativity and innovation in job creation and entrepreneurship), targets 8.9 and 12.b (local culture and products in sustainable tourism), target 16.4 (recovery and return of stolen assets) and target 16.10 (public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms).

This logic on entry points (and the instrumental use of culture it entails), in fact, can be seen as contradictory to the words in the Preamble of the 2030 Agenda:

“We pledge to foster intercultural understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility. We acknowledge the natural and cultural diversity of the world and recognize that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development.”

(paragraph 36)

This cultural vision of the Preamble was not duly unfolded, and the negative, yet logical consequences are that cultural policies are almost forgotten in both goals and targets and that cultural actors play a marginal role in national plans for their achievement. With these key cultural aspects absent from its 2015 development, the Agenda was not suited to “leave no one behind.”

Reality is stubborn. The 2016–2023 period has witnessed the impacts of interrelated crises, complex emergencies

and pressures threatening the protection of cultural and natural heritage, as well as the free exercise of cultural rights and freedoms. Such crises have included the COVID-19 pandemic, which demonstrated how cultural practices are fundamental to individuals and communities.

Culture is an intrinsic dimension of human dignity and, therefore, of development. Research shows that culture is both a driver and an enabler of sustainability.³ Global cultural networks represent “the richness and diversity in all manifestations of culture – from heritage sites, museums, libraries and archives to traditional practices and contemporary cultural expressions.”⁴ Yet, even if fully committed to deliver the SDGs, these networks confirm the impossibility of achieving sustainable development (in its current framing) unless the cultural dimension is explicitly acknowledged and becomes truly operational.⁵ LRGs, also committed to delivering the 2030 Agenda, witness daily that cultural aspects inform and are fundamental to the achievement of objectives in all areas of sustainable development.⁶

Cultural policies are needed to localize the SDGs, enable sustainable development and embody people-centred development. In the words of the UN Secretary-General in his most recent progress report on the SDGs, dated May 2023:

“Culture and respect for cultural diversity [...] remain undervalued and underutilized in the push for SDG progress. Greater consideration of culture’s role in supporting SDG achievement – including within relevant SDG indicators – would generate an important boost for SDG implementation between now and 2030.”⁷

Building on this affirmation, this paper is a push for SDG progress. It combines a focus on cultural heritage, as formulated in target 11.4, and the broader scope of culture and its relation to the achievement of the SDGs, with an analysis of key challenges and illustrative examples addressing this relation. Its final section uses the “analysis of the interaction” technique to show in synthesis and eloquently how strongly cultural actions and policies influence the achievement of the SDGs. **This paper summarizes the cultural boost needed to achieve the SDGs between now and 2030.**

Upcoming UN events will discuss the current stage of SDG implementation. Namely, these include the High-Level Political Forum (July 2023), the UN SDG Summit (September 2023) and the UN Summit of the Future (2024). These constitute opportunities to discuss a new generation of global policies for the future of humankind, with a better understanding of the role of culture and heritage and valid indicators to track progress or setbacks in cities and territories.

A rights-based approach

The right to take part in cultural life, recognized as a human right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, has several implications related to cultural heritage. In recent years, the successive UN Special Rapporteurs in the field of cultural rights have described the specific implications of a human rights-based approach to cultural heritage. Farida Shaheed stressed that cultural heritage is dynamic, diverse and people-centred.⁸ Subsequently, Karima Benounne placed particular emphasis on the impact of the intentional destruction of cultural heritage on a range of human rights, including the right to take part in cultural life.⁹ Moreover, Alexandra Xanthaki addressed the role of cultural resources and cultural rights in the pursuit of more sustainable development, and the potential contribution of cultural awareness to achieve the SDGs in the second half of the timeline to implement the 2030 Agenda.¹⁰

Since the 2004 adoption of the Agenda 21 for Culture, a solid narrative that affirms cultural rights as part and parcel of sustainable development has been developed at local and global levels. This has been detailed in the [Rome Charter](#)¹¹ and in the toolkit [Culture 21: Actions](#),¹² which provides a detailed and concrete framework that systematically addresses (in 100 actions) the importance of the relationship between culture, citizenship and sustainability. Culture 21: Actions also advocates for an understanding of sustainability that includes a wide range of cultural, ecological, social and economic factors that are closely interconnected. Their interdependence should be recognized in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, which need to take into account everyone's rights and responsibilities, paying particular attention to disadvantaged and structurally discriminated groups.¹³ Moreover, addressing inequalities in the right to participate in cultural life is important to ensure democracy and sustainable development. **Without ensuring the right to access, participate in and contribute to cultural life, any development process runs the risk of not being fully sustainable.**¹⁴ This needs to be added, firstly, to the role of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development¹⁵ and, secondly, to innovative approaches such as the concept of "circular culture", presented in the final [declaration](#) of the 4th UCLG Culture Summit in Izmir, which unfolds as "Harmony with nature, Harmony with the past, Harmony with each other and, last but not least, Harmony with change." Put together, this global vision strengthens the potential of cultural rights to meet the challenges of humankind, and makes a stand-alone Culture Goal indispensable for moving forward.

LRGs and other stakeholders active at the local level are particularly well-positioned to identify obstacles to the exercise of cultural rights and to build the necessary capacities to fulfil such rights. This is particularly significant in the [Pact for the Future of Humanity: The Daejeon Political Declaration](#) for people, the planet and government, adopted by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in October 2022 at the UCLG World Congress in

Daejeon. This pact, mandated and inspired by LRG leaders from around the world, states that LRGs must guarantee the right to discover, create, share, enjoy and protect the local community's cultural roots, expressions and resources as a building block of peace and wellbeing in all cities and regions. A multidimensional rights-based perspective, including an intersectional approach, is acknowledged as indispensable to boost a cultural transformation that helps address actions, beliefs, traditions, customs and rituals which can legitimize exclusion, discrimination, marginalization and violence, preventing effective consideration of all experiences, needs and aspirations, and which also can curtail and limit meaningful engagement in cultural life, climate action and urban planning, among other areas.

The following examples in Box 3.4.1 illustrate how cities around the world align with this approach.

BOX 3.4.1

The rights-based approach in Barcelona (Spain) and Bogotá (Colombia)

In Catalonia (Spain), the [Survey of Cultural Participation and Cultural Needs of Barcelona](#) included the right to participate in the cultural life of the city, examining existing inequalities and focusing on cultural practices beyond product consumption and events attendance.¹⁶ The survey was a key component of the municipal [Cultural Rights Plan](#).

In Bogotá (Colombia), the [Inhabiting Community Culture](#) project operates through small-scale interventions related to public spaces and community relations. It targets the outskirts of the city, where access to culture and cultural infrastructure is considerably limited.

The COVID-19 pandemic and growing inequalities

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought mobility and physical distancing restrictions, provoked the massive closure of museums and heritage sites and the general breakdown of urban daily activity, including tourism. LRGs around the world led efforts to overcome these unprecedented and universal challenges, working together with other spheres of government while strengthening collaboration with civil society.

In this global situation, the impossibility of taking part in heritage and cultural activities in conventional ways drove the emergence of new policies and programmes focusing on people's cultural needs. Many municipal, national or international institutions designed and facilitated platforms and communication tools to make cultural content accessible online despite lockdowns. **LRGs have been at the forefront of guaranteeing access to and participation in cultural life for all citizens,**¹⁷ with initiatives such as the facilitation of digital library resources; virtual visits to museums and visual arts exhibitions; and online

performances, namely concerts, theatre, dance and opera. Through a wide range of online resources dedicated to culture, heritage and education, these actions were aligned with target 4.7 in terms of offering knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development and lifestyles. Also, this context of a global pandemic presented new opportunities to design forward-looking ways of building resilient infrastructure and fostering innovation (target 9.1), as well as to address the need to ensure access to basic services for all, specified in target 1.4, especially for structurally discriminated groups.

The following cities in Box 3.4.2 were awardees in the 5th edition of the [International Award UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21](#). This award recognizes cities and individuals who excelled in the promotion of cultural rights during the COVID-19 crisis and post-pandemic recovery or who have promoted culture in innovative ways as an important part of the caring system.

BOX 3.4.2

Culture, engagement and reduction of inequalities in Dublin (Ireland) and Buenos Aires (Argentina)

In **Dublin** (Ireland), [AWE](#) is a cultural engagement project based on accessibility, wellbeing and evidencing of outcomes. It was initiated as a sustainable response to the challenges of COVID-19. With the aim to protect and promote the cultural rights of Dublin's citizens, the project actively engages with them and responds culturally to their needs.

In **Buenos Aires** (Argentina), the [Abasto Barrio Cultural programme](#) focuses on comprehensive urban regeneration based on the transformation of public space. It draws on a model of participatory governance of culture that effectively promotes the collective creation of identity and social integration, enhancing the activity of local independent cultural spaces.



3.4.2 Challenges and pathways

Cultural rights are a key element for an enhanced response to global and local crises, namely those related to the areas of diversity and inclusion, gender equality, local economic development and tourism, and climate change. From a cultural rights perspective, this section will offer an overview of critical trends, showing how current interrelated crises and pressures intersect with the aforementioned areas, protection of cultural and natural heritage, and processes of urbanization and urban development. It will also provide pathways to further advance towards sustainable cities and territories, seen through a cultural lens and guided by local actions and responses from LRGs.

Diversity and inclusion

Global debates in the 21st century have recognized the importance of cultural diversity in shaping our world. **Culture and heritage constitute enabling factors to construct and redefine human identities and differences, as well as a key factor for social harmony and peace.**

To achieve local sustainable development, it is crucial that local cultural policies consider heritage, diversity and creativity.¹⁸ More specifically, the integration of multicultural, intercultural and intergenerational strategies – with special attention to Indigenous peoples, minorities and migrant communities – contributes to creating an enhanced social fabric that is more diverse and bonded, in which communities and individuals can freely construct their own selves.

In order to develop a more pluralistic and multisided understanding of the past free from prejudices and to collectively construct the present and the future, **heritage needs to foster and bring to light all the different voices and stories of citizens and residents.** In this regard, collaborations between countries of origin and migrant communities could contribute to interpreting heritage and museum collections under the light of diversity, thus offering space for fostering the narratives of migrant voices, as well as increasing their care and ownership of this heritage.¹⁹

Heritage and cultural valorization processes are often permeated by a colonial perspective. In light of this, addressing the legacy of colonialism in contemporary times is also key, including its ramifications in economic and political spheres. The imperative of equity will play an undeniable role in the future. It will require cities and regions to make sacrifices and to review their current values as they are not departing from the same starting line. Many cities bear the imprint of coloniality in urban planning, public art, museums and socio-cultural programming, as well as in economic and governance structures inherited from the past.

Therefore, in order to fully encompass cultural heritage, an intersectional approach with a cultural rights-based perspective is emerging around the world. Reconsidering collectively the hegemonic narratives and imaginaries of colonial times; taking into account the different perspec-

tives constructed on the margins of official cultural discourses; and acknowledging and valuing lesser-known stories, often marked by conflicts, terror, genocide and oppression, are key components of achieving multiple SDG targets. Namely, these include promoting equity and non-discrimination of disadvantaged and traditionally excluded individuals and groups (target 10.3) and protecting fundamental freedoms and ensuring public access to information for all (target 16.10). Therefore, necessary measures in legal, social, economic and cultural spheres should be adopted as appropriate. The following Box 3.4.3 illustrates some examples of relevant actions by LRGs.

BOX 3.4.3

Promoting diversity and inclusion in Malmö (Sweden) and Mexico City (Mexico)

In **Malmö** (Sweden), the [Malmö City Archive and the Malmö Art Museum](#) constitute solid examples of the shift of local cultural policies towards full inclusion and diversity. They exemplify the role of city cultural facilities, together with citizens, in co-creating cultural heritage and combating racism.

In **Mexico City** (Mexico), the Innovation, Freedom, Art, Education and Knowledge Points ([PILARES](#)) programme seeks to reduce social, cultural and economic inequalities in each of the city's districts. Its main objectives are to promote peace, rebuild the social fabric and keep marginalized populations and young people away from violence through education, art, sports and job training.

A gender lens

Culture is not to be understood merely as hermetically sealed manifestations of recognized artistic or architectural achievements. Rather:

*"[C]ulture is a prism through which we perceive – and are perceived – understand, respond to, and engage with our human, natural and manufactured environment. It is how we assign meaning to our lives and, importantly, what we think progress means, and what constitutes development."*²⁰

In this view, **a gender lens inspired by intersectional feminism is also strongly linked to the effective promotion, protection and preservation of heritage based on human rights, including cultural rights.** Heritage is at the core of every city's narrative, which is understood as "a lexicon conveyed in the names of streets, plazas, buildings, in who is reflected/included and [...] excluded in public imagery and events, museums, cultural venues, guidebooks, and teaching materials; in how public spaces are designed."²¹ Municipalities and local bodies in charge of cultural policy are already transforming gender roles and urban lexicons, often in partnership with civil society, cultural actors, academics, gender experts and the private sector. They are thus acknowledging that

women play an essential role in the intergenerational transmission and renewal of many forms of intangible cultural heritage in local contexts, as well as in the promotion of cultural diversity.

Worldwide, in partnership with LRGs, cultural heritage institutions are actively catalyzing a revision of gender perceptions and relations, thus contributing to achieving SDG 5 and particularly target 5.1 on ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. Heritage may be harnessed "to achieve gender equality, eradicate bias and violence based on sexual orientation, and empower all genders, recognising that heritage is constantly changing and evolving."²² In particular, **libraries and museums have a crucial role in transforming narratives of gender inequality and exclusion in support of the realization of rights for everyone without exception, creating new shared knowledge.**²³ Within local governance, and through a feminist perspective that goes beyond a gender-responsive approach, care needs to be understood as a key responsibility for LRGs. Placing care at the centre leads to the inclusive and equitable provision of social protection, education and health services; accessible urban infrastructure and spaces for all; and, ultimately, urban and territorial equality.²⁴ This is coherent with the recent shift of the notion of care, first analyzed by feminist theoretical frameworks in the domestic and reproductive spheres, to being a public responsibility. The following Box 3.4.4 includes some examples of the connection between gender equality and the radical cultural transformation that LRGs, together with CSOs, are undertaking.

BOX 3.4.4

Radical cultural transformation and gender equality from the bottom-up in Montevideo (Uruguay), Taipei and Durban (South Africa)

Montevideo (Uruguay) is promoting a cultural shift through [cultural policies with a gender perspective](#). Shaped by in-depth discussions with cultural actors, specific programmes and projects include capacity-building workshops for the culture department on gender-related issues, the use of gender-neutral language and sexual harassment on the workplace.

The [Gender Equality Office of Taipei City](#) is acting to alter the cultural landscape to be more gender-equal and inclusive. For example, it has promoted innovations in terms of religious/cultural rituals, encouraged the participation of women and girls in sports and science, and promoted and financially supported LGBTQIA+ rights and visibility.

In **Durban** (South Africa), [Empatheatre](#) is an artistic project that sculpts new social spaces as amphitheatres for reflexive deep listening and empathy around issues of public concern.

Local economic development and tourism

In recent decades, one of the main factors that has driven attention towards cultural heritage is its potential contribution to local economic development. Culture allows building the future of societies based on values, knowledge, diversity and creativity, and it is one of the main sources of a territory's attractiveness. Tangible cultural heritage sites and monuments, as well as cultural expressions related to intangible heritage such as crafts, festivals and traditions, can attract tourism and investment and may provide new sources of income and employment generation.²⁵ For this reason, successful and innovative governance instruments have been created to effectively manage the sustainable safeguarding and development of historic urban areas and their cultural heritage. Many of these instruments rely on participatory approaches, thus enabling the construction of attractive, competitive and multifunctional places that are meaningful to all.²⁶

Yet, as a result of implementing unsustainable narratives of progress, **many cities worldwide have experienced an increase in tourism flows and have called into question previous growth-oriented models and the management of heritage sites and tourism attractions.** In this regard, the pandemic offered a much-needed opportunity for reflection, in terms of both avoiding the instrumentalization of heritage through tourism and advocating for inclusion of communities. Overcrowding, pressure on public services and infrastructure, uneven access to public spaces and income-generating activity and fair working conditions, as well as the increase of centre-periphery and urban-rural gaps, are some of the negative impacts of tourism that especially affect the most marginalized people.²⁷ In addition, the utilization of cultural facilities and narratives to connect cities with global markets has increased the hollowing out of cultural meaning and the fragmentation of culture.²⁸

Other challenges for the preservation of cultural heritage and its place in sustainable development include the neglect or destruction of tangible and intangible heritage elements in the context of urban regeneration, infrastructure development and other economic development initiatives, as well as armed conflicts and natural disasters. In order to avoid this, **local urban planning instruments should explicitly recognize the importance of cultural issues and resources, and cultural impact assessment tools should be established and used in all relevant contexts.** In addition, the inclusion of cultural heritage in disaster risk reduction policies and existing mechanisms is advised, as is the inclusion of cultural aspects in conflict management and peacebuilding efforts to contribute to the preservation of heritage in risk contexts.

The following examples in Box 3.4.5 address the survival and revitalization of heritage spaces. These actions further enable the achievement of target 8.3 on supporting creativity and innovation; target 8.9 on promoting sustainable tourism, local culture and products; and target 12.b on monitoring the impacts of sustainable tourism on sustainable development.

BOX 3.4.5

Preservation, promotion and revitalization of heritage spaces in Lisbon (Portugal), San Antonio (USA) and Pombal (Portugal)

In **Lisbon** (Portugal), [Lojas com História](#) is a project that addresses the conservation and revitalization of urban heritage spaces that significantly contribute to the cultural and economic development of the city.

In **San Antonio** (USA), the city has endeavoured to protect the quality of life, pride of place and sense of community by preserving [local cultural landmarks](#).

The [Limestone Villages Network](#) in **Pombal** (Portugal) values, develops and promotes local populations and resources (primarily limestone). It focuses on tourist areas, global marketing, the study and optimization of various cultural and heritage dimensions, creation of market opportunities and small investments.

Addressing the climate crisis

In recent years, climate change has become central to global agendas, which aim to address its long-lasting and irreversible effects on people and the planet. Climate change has also been present in relevant policy discussions, programmes and specific measures at local, regional and national levels. These spaces have been marked by the urgency for cross-cutting and coordinated efforts across different areas and spheres of government, as well as the involvement of other actors and civil society.²⁹

Heritage is at the core of the debate on culture and the climate crisis. The inclusion of creative, cultural and heritage voices is critical to imagine new futures neither wedded to the carbon economy nor dependent on unsustainable narratives of progress.³⁰ Culture has been so far defined as “everything besides nature.” From now on, it is necessary to consider nature-and-culture as an entanglement (“natureculture”), and to address this in the activities towards cultural heritage in response to the climate emergency. However, the immense potential of cultural heritage to drive climate action and support communities’ just transitions towards low-carbon, climate-resilient futures often goes untapped.³¹ The cultural and cultural rights dimensions of the climate emergency have also been frequently overlooked, despite their potential as crucial tools for addressing the climate emergency.³² That notwithstanding, culture and heritage are the great missing force, an omission the world cannot afford. **Heritage safeguarding, building reuse and the protection of traditional knowledge (e.g. knowledge related to the sustainable preservation and management of natural and cultural heritage by Indigenous peoples) are crucial for addressing climate change and building more resilient cities and human settlements.**³³

LRGs are particularly well-positioned to support reconciling trade-offs across sectors and spatial scales; trans-

forming “petrocultures” and related “carbonscapes” through cultural policies; connecting culture, climate and disaster risk reduction; planning to prevent the loss and damage of Indigenous and local knowledge systems; and centring cultural rights.³⁴

The following Box 3.4.6 includes concrete examples of local culture-based strategies that address the dual goals of transformative climate action and strengthened sustainable development. They contribute to addressing the challenges that climate change poses to the protection of cultural and natural heritage (target 11.4). Furthermore, they focus on reaching target 13.3 to “improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning,” as well as target 12.8 to ensure all people have relevant “information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.”

BOX 3.4.6

Local culture-based strategies for transformative climate action in Morelia (Mexico), California (USA), València (Spain) and Montréal (Canada)

In the [Historic Centre of Morelia](#) (Mexico), a project has focused on enhancing the circular economy of the region by promoting the reuse of existing buildings, urban landscapes and monuments for new purposes, without losing their heritage values.

In **California** (USA), the state conducted a [cultural heritage and climate action integration analysis](#) as part of a comprehensive effort to understand how culture intersects with the climate change-related work of its boards, departments and agencies. The initiative analyzed areas where culture or heritage was already playing a role and areas where it could add new value.

The [Tourism Sustainability Strategy of València](#) (Spain) is focused on implementing an environmental strategy focused on decarbonization, reduction of the city’s water footprint and circularity. To this end, a digital system allows footprints to be calculated and certified in real time, interacting with managers and users to drive reduction and off-setting.

In Quebec (Canada), the [Montréal culturelle, verte et résiliente project](#) aims to mobilize the cultural community and residents in an effort to promote community resilience in the context of the climate emergency through a call for projects.

3.4.3 Actual and potential contributions of culture to meet the challenges of humankind

The localization of the SDGs related to culture has been thoroughly analyzed (despite – or because of – the non-existence of a stand-alone Culture Goal). Reports that follow SDG implementation at local, regional and national levels, such as the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) and Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), have also analyzed the presence of culture.

To measure progress on culture in the 2030 Agenda, some indicators have been proposed to connect culture and heritage to sustainable development challenges and their localization.³⁵ It is widely accepted that these indicators should not be only quantitative. The approach taken by the *SDG 11 Synthesis Report 2023*³⁶ – which will inform analysis of the SDG 11 targets, particularly target 11.4, at the 2023 High-Level Political Forum – reflects the evolving discussion on indicators. **A more qualitative perspective could better reflect the extent to which a focus on heritage and cultural rights within local policies is important, and it could enable the urban shifts and far-reaching, human rights-based impacts needed.** Indicators on heritage cannot refer only to public expenditure since, for example, urban, economic, environmental and social policies cannot be effective without the explicit consideration of cultural policies and cultural rights.

At the local level, a practical example of SDG localization and implementation with a cultural perspective is the [Seven Keys](#) workshop, developed by the UCLG Committee on Culture. This participatory workshop connects cultural assets, activities, and local policies to municipal challenges and leads to the consensual identification of “seven keys.” These keys are local-level actions for SDG localization through the implementation of cultural policies and programmes. The Seven Keys has been carried out in different cities across the world, namely **Bulawayo** (Zimbabwe), **Burgos** (Spain), **Concepción** (Chile), **Izmir** (Turkey), **Lilongwe** (Malawi), **Lisbon** (Portugal), **Puerto de la Cruz** (Spain), **Saint-Louis** (Senegal), **Xi’an** (People’s Republic of China) and **Yoff** (Senegal). It demonstrates that a cultural perspective within SDG localization is indispensable in all countries and contexts (see Box 3.4.7).

BOX 3.4.7

The Seven Keys workshops in Saint-Louis (Senegal) and Xi’an (China)

The discussion held during the [Seven Keys workshop in Saint-Louis](#) (Senegal) led to a series of cultural actions agreed by consensus, which were considered key to localizing the SDGs. These actions mainly focused on environmental issues, capacity building and cultural governance. As an illustrative example, Key 3 was “Using cultural events to raise awareness on urgent local development challenges.”



The [Seven Keys workshop in Xi'an](#) (People's Republic of China) presented concrete commitments made by local actors to localize the SDGs through culture policy-making. It highlighted the need to strengthen the understanding of and education on intangible cultural heritage and traditional culture as one of its seven keys.

The #Culture2030 Goal campaign: Towards SDG 18

The [#Culture2030Goal](#) campaign was developed by global cultural networks that advocate for the role of culture in sustainable development. The campaign has analyzed in depth the cultural elements in VLRs and VNRs. In September 2019, it published the report [Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda](#), which examines the VNRs submitted to the High-Level Political Forum since 2016 and makes evident the (still marginal) presence of cultural factors and actors in implementing the SDGs. In 2021, the campaign published the report [Culture in the Localization of the SDGs: An Analysis of Voluntary Local Reviews](#). This report finds that a good majority of VLRs, as shown by their substantive narratives, have included the cultural dimension in their implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Cultural topics can be found at any level: as part of high-level policy frameworks and practical examples of implementation, as separate sectoral headings under which LRGs have dedicated “cultural plans,” or as supporting aspects of other policy headings throughout different goals and targets. In this regard, evidence from VLRs shows that LRGs identify **the need to strengthen cultural action to address the challenges related to the 2030 Agenda, as well as the need to mobilize the power of culture to place cities and human settlements on the path towards achieving sustainable development**.³⁷

An interesting step forward was taken at the MONDIA-CULT 2022 conference, organized by UNESCO and the Government of Mexico. As a result of the conference, the [Declaration for Culture](#) affirms the need “to firmly anchor culture as a global public good, and to integrate it as a specific goal in its own right in the development agenda beyond 2030.” It also features a set of cultural rights that must be at the core of public policies, including the social and economic rights of artists, artistic freedom, the right of Indigenous communities to safeguard and transmit ancestral knowledge, and the protection and promotion of cultural and natural heritage.

At this conference, the #Culture2030Goal campaign presented the document [A Culture Goal Is Essential for Our Common Future](#),³⁸ a “zero draft” of a stand-alone Goal to “ensure cultural sustainability for the wellbeing of all.” The draft includes 10 specific cultural rights-based targets.



Evidencing the potential of culture: An analysis of the interactions between culture and the SDGs

As a contribution to the efforts towards the achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, this paper presents research based on the “analysis of the interaction.”³⁹ This work, carried out by the UCLG Committee on Culture, aims to obtain an exhaustive understanding of the contribution of cultural policies, programmes and actions to other dimensions of sustainable development, and to capture the results in a simple picture. The analysis includes both positive and negative aspects of cultural policies, programmes and actions and their relationship to each SDG. Thus, it provides a **holistic overview of the role of culture in sustainable development**, not just the positive interactions; in other words, the analysis also includes areas in which cultural actors need to be challenged in order to achieve the SDGs.

To begin its analysis work, the UCLG Committee on Culture first collected statements that illustrate real (existing) **interactions** (synergies and trade-offs) between cultural policies, programmes and actions and the achievement of the SDGs. This process was informed by an in-depth literature review to gather the statements,⁴⁰ as well as by further discussions among experts in the field. Statements, as discussed above, are short sentences that represent the impact of cultural policies, programmes and actions (explicit or implicit) on the achievement of the SDGs. Efforts have been made to ensure that all statements are unique and unequivocal.⁴¹ A total of 147 statements were collected and synthesized. These were subsequently divided and linked to the SDG to which they primarily referred. Finally, an analysis was conducted using the framework developed by the International Council for Science⁴² and Nilsson *et al.*⁴³ to classify the interactions between culture and the SDGs through a seven-point ordinal scale.⁴⁴ The values of the scale range from -3 to +3 to indicate the extent to which the relationship is negative or positive (see Table 3.4.1).⁴⁵ The evaluation was based on expert judgement and supported by the literature review.

Figure 3.4.1 synthesizes the research findings. It shows cases the synergies and trade-offs of cultural policies, programmes and actions within each SDG, evidenced by each of the 147 statements that were included in the exercise. The graphic displays the statements layered over each other at different heights.

Table 3.4.1 Interaction scoring

Interaction scoring	
Score	Categories
+3	Indivisible
+2	Reinforcing
+1	Enabling
-1	Constraining
-2	Counteracting
-3	Cancelling

Figure 3.4.1 An analysis of the interactions between cultural policies, programmes and actions and achievement of the SDGs⁴⁶⁶

Source: own compilation

The following are examples of statements from the analysis:

“Recognition of cultural diversity as a goal in cultural policies, and integration of intercultural dialogue and active participation to address migration, refugee and internal displacement” interacts with SDG 10 as “indivisible” (with a score of +3).

“Cultural tools to build early childhood programmes that help to promote peace and justice, non-violence, solidarity and human coexistence” has a “reinforcing” interaction with SDG 4 (with a score of +2).

“Consideration of cultural rights and cultural contexts, as well as cultural and traditional knowledge related to health (especially from Indigenous peoples) in the provision of appropriate health services” is considered “enabling” for the achievement of SDG 3 (with a score of +1).

“Massive cultural events (festivals, concerts, etc.) offered for economic development, with impacts on local heritage, the local cultural sector, and overuse of local infrastructure” has a “constraining” interaction with SDG 8 (with a score of -1).

“Existence of cultural narratives by some social groups that argue against the use of clean energy and jeopardize green energy actions and strategies” is assessed as “counteracting” the attainment of SDG 7 (with a score of -2).

“Cultural narratives and practices that go against human rights and democratic processes and that legitimize the violation of the rights of women, girls and other people for their sexual orientation and gender identity (e.g. LGBTQIA+ identities)” interacts with SDG 5 as “cancelling” (with a score of -3).

Finally, the total number of statements assigned to each SDG was counted, along with the highly positive and negative scores for each SDG. The [results](#) show, not surprisingly, that SDG 11 is the goal with the strongest interaction with culture. On the one hand, positive interactions include the role of culture and heritage as enablers and key conditions of sustainable development and the uniqueness of each city, the relevance of cultural landscapes to enhance the relationship between humans and nature, and the importance of cultural plans to revitalize neighbourhoods and promote decentralization. On the other hand, negative interactions include the need for both the cultural sector and cultural policies to better address issues related to gentrification and the resulting loss of identity in cities and territories, as well as the environmental impact of mobility for cultural purposes.

SDG 16 also has a high number of statements. Some of them reflect cultural policies or practices as factors limiting the achievement of this goal; the most representative example of this is how cultural factors may become a source of conflicts and war, misunderstandings, discrimination, exclusion and racism. It is crucial to emphasize that not taking cultural policies and practices into

account undermines SDG 16 achievement in two ways: first, by missing an opportunity to address any identified culture-related constraints; and second, by failing to include cultural components that could enhance and boost the achievement of this goal. Examples of positive interactions in SDG 16 include the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding through local cultural knowledge and cultural policies, or the recognition of differences and dissent as contributors to addressing conflict and crime.

The main conclusion drawn from this analysis lies in the consideration of **cultural policies, practices and actors as pivotal for the achievement of all SDGs**. Their specific positive and negative interactions with each of the 17 goals may be seen either as priority areas or as areas in which actors may be better prepared to include cultural considerations.

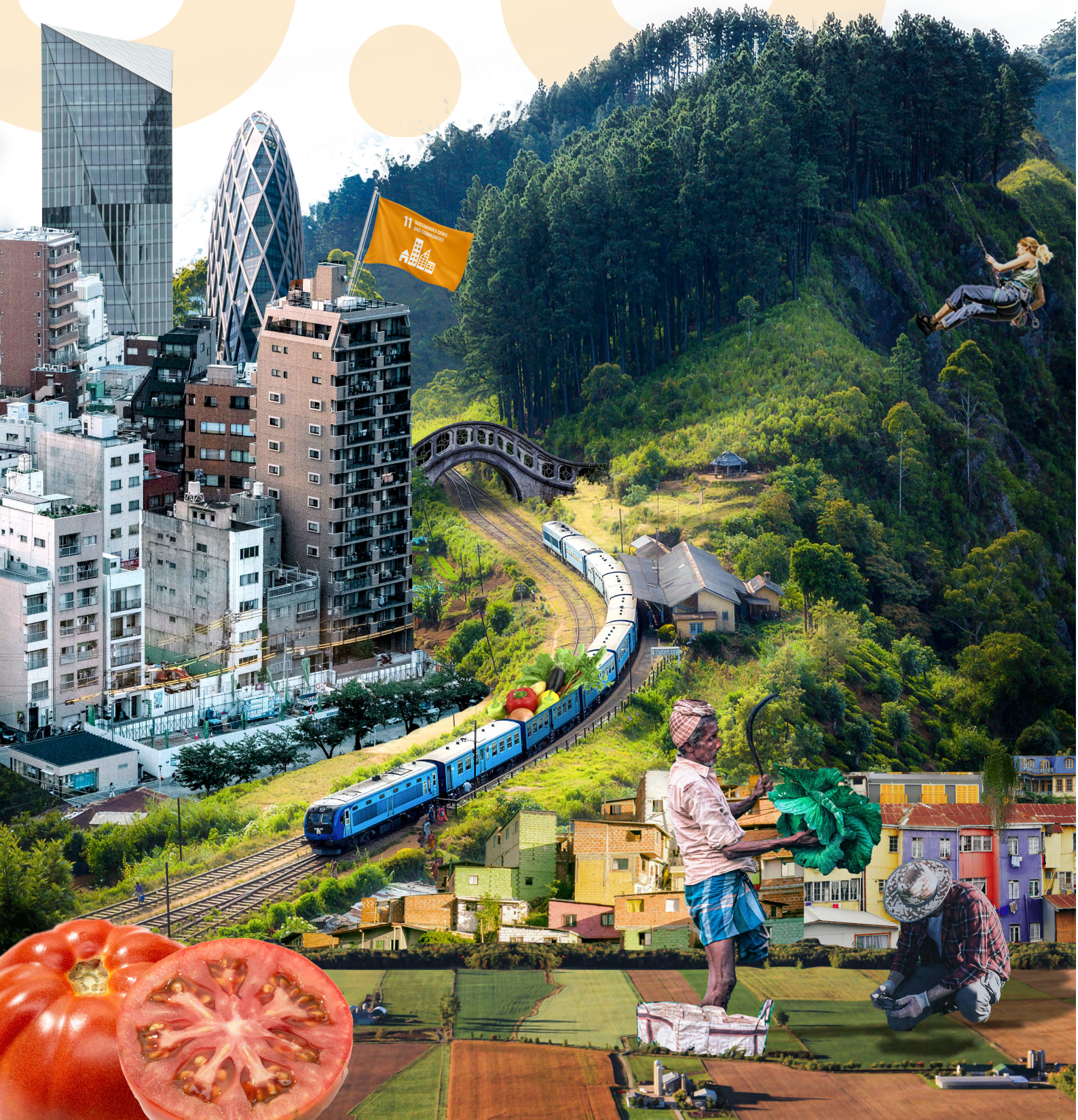
This research will be continued in the second half of 2023 and the first half of 2024, with the hypothesis that the best way to fully integrate culture into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is through **the creation of a stand-alone Culture Goal (SDG 18)**. This goal would provide coherence to the policies and programmes, empower all stakeholders, generate new partnerships and endeavours and, therefore, contribute to the achievement of all the other SDGs.

3.4.4 Conclusions

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This paper has addressed the indispensable role of culture and heritage in the attainment of SDG 11 and, more specifically, target 11.4. It has also provided evidence on the interlinkages between cultural policies, actions and heritage and SDGs 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 16 and 17. Taking a step further, an exhaustive analysis of the relationship between culture and all the SDGs, using the “analysis of the interaction” technique, has been presented. This analysis constitutes an interesting approach for the design and implementation of rights-based cultural policies, but also a way to show, in synthesis and eloquently, in just a figure, how strongly cultural actions, programmes and policies influence the achievement of the SDGs. The results, depicted in a single figure, summarize the “cultural boost for SDG implementation between now and 2030” called for by the UN Secretary-General in May 2023. It is important that this cultural boost is discussed at the upcoming UN events in 2023 and 2024 and that clear, operational guidelines are agreed.

PAPER 5. MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE TO SUPPORT BALANCED URBAN SYSTEMS: HOW LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS ENABLE EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



3.5.1 Introduction

Within Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, target 11.a reflects a global commitment to “Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning.” In this vein, this paper focuses on promoting a positive reinforcing relationship between **balanced urban systems and national, regional and local policy and planning**. It does so by recognizing the need for national urban policies (NUPs) that support such balanced systems through **multilevel governance** that fosters policy coherence across different levels and policy integration to localize global development agendas.

Based on this, the paper identifies three interrelated dimensions of balanced urban systems:

- Decentralized multilevel governance that clearly defines institutional and financial roles and responsibilities with the principle of subsidiarity at the centre (SDG targets 11.a, 1.a, 4.7, 5.1, 10.3 and 16.3)
- National, regional and urban policy and planning that promotes balanced and equal urban and territorial systems (SDG targets 11.a, 1.b, 10.3 and 10.4)
- The right to democratic, inclusive, and active engagement in multilevel governance processes (SDG targets 11.3, 5.5, 10.6 and 16.8)

Local and regional governments (LRGs) are on the front line of global efforts to leave no one and no place behind. Making this commitment a reality requires more equitable, sustainable and integrated urban and territorial development. **Specifically, SDG target 11.a calls for a focus on multilevel governance in which NUPs and regional development plans (RDPs) are central instruments working alongside and positively reinforcing local urban and territorial policy and planning.** In 2020, to monitor SDG target 11.a, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators adopted indicator 11.a.1: “Number of countries that have national urban policies or regional development plans that (a) respond to population dynamics; (b) ensure balanced territorial development; and (c) increase local fiscal space.”¹

This focus on urban development and multilevel governance is reflected in other SDG 11 targets and the New Urban Agenda (NUA), which was adopted by the international community at the United Nations (UN) Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in October 2016. At Habitat III, national governments committed to implementing NUPs as a key instrument to achieve sustainable and balanced urban and territorial development.² LRGs have also reaffirmed their role through different commitments such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Pact for the Future of Humanity, adopted at the 2022 World Congress in Daejeon. In this pact, LRG leaders pledge “to pursue an open, constructive and sustained structural dialogue with national governments to ensure joined-up delivery for all citizens, and communities.” Furthermore, they recognize the im-

portance of “the development of an interurban system of small, intermediary and large cities and metropolises, strengthening the urban-rural continuum.”³ At the core, the Pact is a call to redefine “governing in partnership.” It aims “to place all citizens and communities at the core of the decision-making” in a multilevel governance system which seeks to advance urban equality.⁴

Through urban and regional planning countries are expected “to support positive economic, social and environmental links.” Such planning should foster sustainable and inclusive urbanization and reduce the gaps between urban and rural areas to achieve the SDGs (see Papers 2 and 3). Urban and regional planning are critical levers for national governments to reinforce multilevel governance by fostering cooperation and mutual support across different levels of governments and by incentivizing and facilitating collaboration among regions, metropolitan areas, intermediary cities, small towns and their respective hinterlands.⁵ This entails a **decentralized sharing of power and responsibilities across different spheres of government, robust and formalized institutional arrangements and adequate “local fiscal space” to decrease inequalities across territories, within urban centres and between urban and rural areas.**⁶

In this paper, Section 2 gives a brief overview of three global and regional trends related to inequalities in urban and territorial systems and current multilevel governance structures. Addressing these trends, Section 3 proposes three overlapping and reinforcing pathways that aim to strengthen decentralized and responsive multilevel governance. Section 4 highlights the challenges that LRGs face in realizing these pathways as well as the capacities they are building. In conclusion, Section 5 highlights key messages to advance LRGs’ role in accelerating progress towards SDG target 11.a. and related SDGs to positively reinforce the *relationship between balanced urban and territorial systems and national, regional and local policy and planning*.



3.5.2 Trends

In assessing progress towards SDG target 11.a, this section gives an overview of three current trends related to inequalities in urban and territorial systems and national, regional and local planning within multilevel governance structures.

Growing economic, social and environmental inequalities across urban, peri-urban and rural areas

Despite some progress on reducing extreme poverty in many countries, megatrends indicate that inequalities are increasing. **The current economic and climate crisis, combined with persistent and longstanding income and spatial inequalities, is eroding social and territorial cohesion.** Cities and territories within countries are increasingly heterogeneous, with deepening social and spatial fragmentation. The growth of small and intermediate cities, along with metropolitan areas, reflects that neither the benefits nor the costs of urbanization have been spread equitably within cities and regions. The unprecedented and unmanaged growth of large cities and megacities not only results in intra-urban inequalities but also exacerbates inequalities between urban and rural hinterland. This “asymmetrical development compounds the urban spatial divide, especially with regard to secondary cities.”⁷

In the last two decades, an increasing number of countries and urban areas have begun to experience growing internal territorial divergence, widening traditional gaps.⁸ In developed countries, poor regions and neighbourhoods are characterized by economic marginalization and social problems. Peripheral regions suffer from rural desertification and shrinkage of cities. Within the countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), labour productivity in the most productive regions nearly doubles that of the least productive regions within the same country.⁹ In the USA, large cities with at least one million inhabitants were those that recovered the fastest from the 2008 crisis. The most unequal cities in the USA have become even more unequal, with urban poverty tied to strong class and racial inequalities.¹⁰ Between 2000 and 2016, in Europe, growth was better distributed. Nevertheless, several countries experienced spatially concentrated growth in a small number of cities and regions,¹¹ with mounting evidence of growing inequalities. In 2021, 95.4 million European Union (EU) inhabitants – 21.7% of the total population – were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.¹² For those in low and lower middle income groups, their ability to meet basic needs has been negatively affected by exorbitant increases in utility bills (e.g. electricity, water) and inflation.

Developing countries experience the highest levels of inequality. The urbanization of poverty has deepened existing inequalities in cities, especially those in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa.¹³ Globally, there is a

growing divide across regions in access to basic services. About 70% of the urban population in developing countries is currently underserved by municipal services. In 2020, for example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, as much as 70% of the population lacked safely managed drinking water, compared to 38% in Central and South Asia and 25% in Latin America and the Caribbean. About 79% of the Sub-Saharan African population lacks access to safe sanitation services, compared to 66% in Latin America and the Caribbean and 53% in Central and South Asia (see Paper 1).¹⁴ Slums and informal settlements are prevalent in South-East, Central and South Asia and particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 56% of the urban population live in slums. The incidence of malnutrition is much higher in Africa (affecting 282 million people, or 21% of the population) despite the larger absolute numbers in Asia (418 million, or 9% of the population). 61.2% of global employment is in the informal sector, with the highest rates of informality corresponding to Africa (85.8%) and Asia-Pacific and the Arab states (68%). In the Global North, about 86% of people use the internet, compared to 47% in the Global South, with women “disproportionately excluded from access to digital tools and platforms.”¹⁵

Inequalities are correlated with the rapid rate of urbanization, which is particularly challenging for Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia due to structural deficits.¹⁶ These two regions concentrate the majority of people living in multidimensional poverty.¹⁷ The urban population in these regions will expand by nearly a billion or more between 2020 and 2050. The pace and scale of this growth is creating new demands for infrastructure and services, as well as associated political and environmental pressures (see Paper 3).

Growing income inequalities, demographic trends, ongoing urbanization and climate change, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and regional armed conflicts, contribute to maintaining stark and persistent regional socio-economic disparities over the last decade.¹⁸ Such disparities have an intersectional character, highlighting not only growing class-based inequalities but also those related to gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability and sexuality,¹⁹ depending on the context. Not only do these inequalities contravene the right to the city of large numbers of urban residents, but they are also impacting established national and institutional governance relations (e.g. Brexit in the United Kingdom – UK –, fuelling populism and conflicts in several regions).²⁰

Continued top-down national policies with a limited focus on inequalities in national urban and regional planning

To what extent has national urban and territorial planning, promoted by SDG target 11.a, succeeded in acting as a lever to address the inequalities outlined in the previous section and their expressions across the SDGs? To monitor SDG target 11.a, UN-Habitat, the OECD, and Cities Alliance published the 2021 edition of the *Global State of National Urban Policy* (GSNUP) report. This report highlights **the progress made in 162 countries that are developing and using NUPs.**²¹ **Regular monitoring of SDG implementation through Voluntary National Reviews**

(VNRs) as well as Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) complements these monitoring efforts.²²

An NUP is defined as “a coherent set of decisions through a deliberate government-led process of coordinating and rallying various actors towards a common vision and goal that will promote more transformative, productive, inclusive and resilient urban development for the long term.”²³ The GSNUP report concludes that a majority of countries have NUPs, “although in different forms, at different development stages and with varying thematic foci.”²⁴ Progress varies across countries and regions: 38% of countries have an NUP in the development stages and 62% have advanced an NUP to the implementation stage.²⁵ Among the 162 countries analyzed, only 91 countries explicitly used NUPs as a coherent strategy (an increase from 76 countries in 2018), while in the 71 other countries, urban policies are embedded in national development strategies or sectoral plans (e.g. housing, transport, land use).²⁶

In fact, **among the 91 countries with explicit NUPs, only 23 countries have NUPs and 17 have RDPs that fulfil all three “qualifiers” of SDG indicator 11.a.1.** From a group of more than 58 countries with NUPs and 43 countries with RDPs that responded more in detail to the survey, 54 NUPs and 41 RDPs fulfilled the first qualifier on population dynamics, 55 NUPs and 37 RDPs tackled balanced territorial development, and 26 NUPs and 19 of RDPs aimed attention at increasing local fiscal space.²⁷

These findings highlight a number of key problems that need to be addressed to accelerate progress towards SDG target 11.a. First, **the planning traditions of many countries have different understandings of what an NUP is and lack a comprehensive vision of regional planning founded on the concept of balanced territorial development and territorial cohesion.** Indeed, top-down strategies and policies with weak place-based approaches persist. Such strategies assume that the benefits of promoting socio-economic dynamism in key urban areas and regions will eventually spill over, or trickle down, into surrounding rural territories and less dynamic areas. Yet, this does not necessarily hold true in all cases. Instead, such policies have often led, *de facto*, to treating these “lagging” localities and regions as obstacles to national development.²⁸

Second, **in addition to space and place, many of these policies also ignore social identity, which often results in wider inequality gaps between diverse urban and territorial populations.** Intersecting inequalities based on social identity are a defining feature of urbanization and urban development, and they need to be recognized and addressed in policy and planning. For example, in Bangladesh, where 50% of urban growth is due to rural-urban migration, this migration is “gendered, with women making up a large proportion of rural-urban migration, drawn into the garment industry.”²⁹

Third, **while NUPs are an important first step, the 2022 quadrennial report of the UN Secretary-General on the implementation of the NUA observed that an uptake in adoption of NUPs has not yet translated into impact in local urban planning.** For example, “in much of Africa, urban plans are being used to attract the private sector,

both locally and internationally, to invest in sustainability projects that unfortunately do not substantially improve public infrastructure. This mismatch indicates that policy coherence through a[n] NUP is a necessary but not sufficient condition for effective multilevel governance.”³⁰

Fourth, local fiscal space, as outlined in SDG indicator 11.a.1, is a critical condition for LRGs to have room for manoeuvre to build more equal and collaborative territories. However, because of the demands of the pandemic, government expenditure has been negatively impacted, with increases in expenditure to the detriment of capital expenditure and direct investment.³¹

A global analysis of 122 countries, published by the OECD and UCLG, demonstrates the importance of local fiscal space – and the difficulties LRGs are facing in many countries. Table 3.5.1 indicates the role that LRGs, by region, already play in contributing to public expenditure, revenue and public investment. Globally, in 2020, LRGs accounted for 21.5% of total public spending and 8.3% of the gross domestic product or GDP (general government revenues and expenditures account for an average of 31% of GDP). In 48% of countries, primarily from Africa, the Middle East and West Asia but also several Latin American countries, LRGs have more limited spending responsibilities. The proportion is even lower in least developed countries (LDCs), where total LRG expenditures and revenues accounted for less than 2% to 3% of GDP in 22 countries.³²

Table 3.5.1 LRGs’ average percentage of public expenditure, revenue and public investment in 2020, by region

Region	LRGs’ average % public expenditure	LRGs’ average % revenue	LRGs’ average % public investment
Africa	11.6%	14.9%	23.9%
Asia-Pacific	33.7%	39.1%	47.2%
Europe and North America	26.6%	29.9%	42.3%
Eurasia	26.5%	29.8%	38.7%
Latin America	17.8%	23.0%	45.1%
Middle East and West Asia	8.8%	10.9%	29.6%
World	21.5%	25.9%	39.5%

Source: Based on data from the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Spending (SNG-WOFI)

With regard to public investments, essential for local infrastructure, LRGs play a key role globally: they manage 39.5% of total public investment (1.5% of GDP). The share of LRG investment as a percentage of GDP is the highest in Asia-Pacific, where it is nearly twice as high as in Africa.³³ In the context of LDCs, SNG-WOFI (2022) states that these figures are embedded in continued unclear divisions of responsibilities, unfunded or under-funded mandates and a lack of LRG participation in programme budget processes.³⁴

Each of these four issues points to problematic trends in multilevel governance structures and, in particular, to a lack of progress towards effective decentralization that constrains the effective implementation of NUPs to build more equal and balanced territories.

Limited participation of LRGs and citizens in processes of multilevel governance

This trend concerns to what extent LRGs and citizens participate in “the deliberations, imagination and decisions about current and future urban and territorial trajectories.”³⁵ The development of NUPs – and other instruments to advance the SDGs – is an opportunity to develop more place-based policies that redefine and strengthen national and subnational roles and responsibilities, not only for increased coherence and efficiency but also for partnership and legitimacy.³⁶ **Coordination between national and subnational governments, as well as with local civil society and private sector stakeholders, is critical in any NUP and SDG process.** While some progress can be observed – for example, in Chile’s multistakeholder National Council for Urban Development, the Spanish Urban Agenda and South Africa’s Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF)³⁷ – the participation of LRGs and non-LRG stakeholders continues to be limited. Out of 86 countries, “51 (59%) use legislation and regulatory mechanisms and 44 (51%) have a platform of dialogue between national and sub-national governments in different NUP stages.”³⁸ The number of countries that engage with non-governmental stakeholders – civil society and the private sector – is even lower.³⁹

There are different perceptions about the involvement of national governments and LRGs through the different NUP stages. According to the GSNUP report in 48 out of 59 countries that responded to the survey, the highest engagement with subnational governments occurred in the feasibility stage (23 countries said it was extensive, 27 reported moderate and 18 reported low). Engagement dropped off in subsequent stages with the lowest being the monitoring and evaluation stage (18 countries said it was extensive, 17 reported moderate and 11 reported low).⁴⁰ This information can be contrasted with a survey carried out in parallel by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments and UCLG that collected information on LRGs’ involvement in NUPs in 53 countries. In 33 countries with explicit or implicit NUPs, LRG were involved in 22 countries, a lower or more moderate level of involvement than in the GSNUP report.⁴¹

Citizen participation in multilevel governance structures varies widely across different contexts. There are worrying trends that 75% of the global population lives in 73 countries where political rights and civil liberties are declining.⁴² Political representation also exhibits strong patterns based on gender, age, ethnicity, race and disability, depending on the context. For example, although women’s representation is generally higher in local governments than at the national level, in 2020, **“Only 20 countries [...] have reached over 40 per cent women in local decision-making bodies and an additional 28 countries have women’s representation between 30 and 40 per cent [...]”**. Seventy countries fall between 10 and 30 per cent women’s representation, and 15 countries have less than 10 per cent women’s representation.”⁴³ Trends indicate that equal identity-based representation in multilevel governance structures declines from local to national levels.



3.5.3 Pathways to multilevel governance: Towards people-, rights- and care-centred approaches to leave no place and no one behind

At the heart of achieving SDG target 11.a, there is an urgent need to strengthen multilevel governance as an enabling framework for national, regional and urban planning that reinforces pathways to equality throughout national urban systems. **An effective multilevel governance system “allows the allocation of competences and responsibilities of government both vertically and horizontally in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity,” recognizing that the form this takes, including the interdependence between levels, is context-specific.** Multilevel governance requires that all levels share information and collaborate fully, “so every level can manage horizontal relations with its respective stakeholders in public and accountable ways.”⁴⁴

Maintaining the focus on developing inclusive, coherent and accountable NUPs, this section outlines and shares experiences related to three intersecting pathways or trajectories for change in a multilevel governance framework that will accelerate more balanced and equitable urban and territorial systems. The first pathway is creating the governance framework for NUPs, which, in effect, dovetails with the project of decentralization and the principle of subsidiarity. The second is developing NUPs, exploring ways to make them more inclusive, coherent and accountable. Finally, the third pathway deepens the notion of accountability, linking the development of NUPs not only to the participation of LRGs but also to that of other actors, in particular civil society, based on the quest to put people at the centre of development.

Creating a coherently decentralized multilevel governance framework with the principle of subsidiarity at the centre

The first pathway is to create the institutional conditions for effective national and urban planning through a decentralized system based on the principle of subsidiarity.⁴⁵ Almost all regions of the world “have expanded local self-government authorities, particularly from the 1990s, through processes that have involved different degrees of deconcentration, delegation and devolution [...] processes [that] combine *administrative, fiscal, and political* elements.”⁴⁶ In 2022, there were over 637,900 LRGs in the world, based on the definition of an LRG as a “de-

centralised entity elected through universal suffrage and having general responsibilities and some autonomy with respect to budget, staff and assets.”⁴⁷ Globally, LRGs encompass 624,166 municipal entities, 11,965 intermediate governments and 1,769 state and regional governments. Looking at different regions, Asia-Pacific has the largest number of LRGs with 426,611, followed by Europe, Eurasia, North America, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East and West Asia.⁴⁸

When LRGs are adequately resourced and empowered, they can play a critical role in the development of policies, programmes and projects aimed at addressing a range of socio-economic, environmental and spatial challenges in their territories. For example, mobilizing LRGs to provide local infrastructure investment and to improve public services is crucial for more equal urban and territorial development. Table 3.5.1 showed the role that LRGs already play in contributing to public expenditure, revenue and public investment. To ensure decentralization and the capacity to act, a balance needs to be established between the allocation of responsibilities and resources to LRGs in multilevel governance structures.

Empowered LRGs are also important in the context of disaster risk reduction. Learning from the pandemic “has revealed that having a diversified funding system based on a basket of revenues made of grants (for delegated functions or priority objectives), tax revenues, tariffs and fees and property income also diversifies risks and contributes to coping better with external shocks. It also makes the continuity of public service delivery more likely during a period of crisis.”⁴⁹

Putting subsidiarity into practice implies a particular kind of “governing in partnership,” as highlighted in the UCLG Pact for the Future of Humanity.⁵⁰ In fact, such governing in partnership is **undermined by a global mismatch, in almost all regions, between the increasing responsibilities transferred to LRGs and the revenue they receive.** In most regions, **incomplete fiscal decentralization and limited access to borrowing undermine the coherence of national and local policies and the upgrading of territorial and urban initiatives.** Box 3.5.1 shows an alternative vision for multilevel governance partnerships in the context of EU regional development.

BOX 3.5.1

EU Cohesion Policy: Supranational policy frameworks with urban competences were particularly evident Europe⁵¹

The EU Cohesion Policy, the EU's integrated and multi-national regional and urban policy, is one of the largest local and regional economic development programmes in the world operating under one broad legal and institutional architecture. The overwhelming focus of the policy is on fostering economic development in weaker regions (the least prosperous ones and those facing industrial decline), improving connectivity, enhancing environmental quality and promoting more socially equitable local societies.

Several principles are at the core of the EU Cohesion Policy: (a) **partnership**, meaning that countries and LRGs are required to co-finance every project (with different co-financing ratios – the poorest regions are eligible for the largest shares of funding, with progressively more prosperous regions eligible for progressively less funding); (b) **shared management** in implementation;

and (c) **subsidiarity**, which states that the management of the policy should be devolved downwards to the lowest level that is meaningful. As such, in many countries, LRGs should be managing and delivering the policy in a manner which is close enough to the local context.

Two main instruments, Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), are used to implement EU Cohesion Policy funding in an integrated and place-based manner. These tools help guarantee that local governments and local stakeholders will be closely involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of the EU funds they receive. Feedback from local government associations in 2021 was quite positive. ITI and CLLD empower local authorities and, in doing so, build their capacities to manage EU funds.⁵²

These shared management practices across the EU Cohesion Policy landscape are a key part of building multilevel governance arrangements among the different governance levels (local, national, regional) across Europe to deliver territorial development and integration. These processes also reinforce trust among the different governance levels.

These are critical dimensions for implementing NUPs. Reforms require fiscal systems that foster an incremental approach to promote buoyant local tax systems, ensure a fairer share of national fiscal revenues through regular and transparent intergovernmental transfers and facilitate access to responsible borrowing. Likewise, improving redistribution of resources across territories for equalization purposes requires large-scale schemes to balance the tensions between territories.⁵³

By strengthening the fiscal architecture to ensure secure revenue streams for improved planning and investment at different scales, NUPs can enhance cities' access to finance and improve their capacity to raise and manage own-source revenue. As underlined by the GSNUP report, resources can be mobilized through different sources to enhance local fiscal space. The report indicates that the most important source of financing for NUP implementation is national government investment (67% of countries, particularly in Africa), followed by co-financing between national and subnational governments (42%, more usual in Europe and North America) and subnational government investment (35%, more prominent in Asia).⁵⁴

National regulatory frameworks determine how LRGs can access particular funding sources and deploy specific financing mechanisms. At the same time, **flexible and efficient horizontal or vertical equalization mechanisms are needed to mitigate the structural differences between territories or the unequal impact of crises.** Co-financing between national and subnational governments is a common practice, for example, through "City Deals" (Australia) or city or territorial contracts (France and Colombia). National fiscal incentives can encourage joint municipal plans in major city regions. For example, Finland has used "MAL contracts" to integrate land use, infrastructure for new housing areas and sustainable transport in urban regions of **Helsinki, Tampere, Turku**

and **Oulu** for 2020 to 2031. Ireland is providing a 2 billion EUR Urban Regeneration and Development Fund for a wide range of projects, such as low carbon and climate resilient projects in an urban context.⁵⁵

At the same time, working with international institutions and national development banks can enhance financial instruments for channelling funding to improve the financing capacity of LRGs. LRGs and several partners are supporting alternative ways to facilitate access to the financing of a sustainable urban transition.⁵⁶ **LRGs can also provide critical support to enable scaling up local action through community funds. This can set in motion a blended finance model that promotes greater political, social and financial inclusion** (e.g. as implemented in Thailand and Zimbabwe).⁵⁷

Developing a reinforcing set of national, regional and local policies and plans to create a balanced and equal interurban system of small, intermediary and large cities and metropolises

Recent reforms in local governance aim to respond to urbanization trends as well as unequal territorial development processes. Differences among regions, metropolitan areas, peripheral cities, intermediary cities,⁵⁸ and rural territories require particular attention. For example, **NUPs could enable the development of intermediary cities to play a key role to promote spatially balanced development, with these cities acting as regional economic hubs and providing essential services to both urban and rural populations.** Improving their functions and efficiencies, intermediary cities could lift the performance of national economies, alleviate pressures on metropolitan regions and help reduce rising interregional inequalities. **Attention should also be paid to the of-**

ten-extractive relations between urban and rural territories to promote a more balanced form of territorial development. In Africa, for example, small towns and intermediary cities are growing, absorbing a large share of the exponentially rising urban population. However, they are not always able to retain their inhabitants, who move towards metropolitan cities.⁵⁹ Governments need to put their intermediary cities at the core of their regional and national development strategies to support more balanced urban systems.

In parallel, the increasing role of large cities (metropolises, megacities) and urban corridors and regions, are a clear example of territorial polarization. National policies often promote metropolitan champions to be more competitive. To face the rising complexity of metropolitan governance (fragmented power-sharing among municipalities and other actors), the number of metropolitan governance reforms has increased.⁶⁰ However, **to address inefficiencies and inequalities in metropolitan governance and linked peripheral cities, there is a need for a new approach to shape polycentric metropolitan areas that facilitate more inclusive access to infrastructure and services, promoting intermunicipal cooperation, supported by financial incentives and equalization mechanisms that reduce the fragmentation between core and peripheral areas and neighbourhoods.**

As stressed by UN-Habitat and the NUA, more localized policies can help:

“to realize sustainable urban futures, an integrated and territorial approach to urban development [...]. Various levels of government can develop and implement national urban policies and strategies that ensure integrated spatial growth and development to harness the potential of inclusive and balanced urban systems and territorial cohesion.”⁶¹

Yet, this approach is still very limited. Even if most countries recognize the potential of NUPs to advance equality and the SDGs, important efforts are needed to increase countries' commitment and reporting to align national urban and territorial policies.

NUPs are particularly important for Sub-Saharan Africa, where urbanization is rapid and local governments are typically weak. Around 18 African countries have policies that resemble an NUP (explicit or implicit), often with international support.⁶² However, many explicit NUPs lack resources to deploy comprehensive NUPs and very few countries have the financial and technical capacity to implement their NUPs. Challenges range from structural socio-economic constraints, aggravated by the impact of globalization, to incomplete fiscal decentralization and lack of coherence between local policy guidelines and the different global agendas. The case of South Africa highlights the complexity of using an NUP to address historical inequalities inherited from apartheid, within a carefully constructed decentralized institutional architecture (see Box 3.5.2).⁶³

BOX 3.5.2

Urban policies in South Africa to fight against apartheid⁶⁴

Over a long period, territorial policy has been used in South Africa to drive racial inequality. As a result, there are strongly marked racial inequalities in the distribution of infrastructure, service levels, environmental protection and quality of life across the country – and also within brutally segmented urban settlements.

The national government is currently working to improve the coordination and coherence of its global, regional, national, provincial and local development plans, particularly with respect to the 2030 Agenda, the African Agenda 2063 and the Southern African Development Community's Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan. In 2016, the national government adopted the Integrated Urban Development Framework, South Africa's NUP, an initiative coordinated by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in collaboration with other national departments, local government associations and international partners. Together with the National Development Plan 2030, the IUDF represents South Africa's vehicle for localizing the NUA. The IUDF has been promoted not as a policy or plan but as an “all of society” approach to implementing the NUA and its four strategic goals of spatial integration, inclusion and access, inclusive growth and effective governance.

Provincial and municipal governments are responsible for IUDF roll-out through their provincial and municipal spatial development frameworks and strategies. However, clear guidelines and support for the implementation of the IUDF at the local level and for how the IUDF can contribute to other development agendas, such as the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, are weak. This is because the responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of these agendas lies with other government departments such as the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. More attention needs to be given to all of the supporting policies – ensuring policy coherence – on which inequality rests and has become spatially embedded or locked in.

In the context of multilevel governance frameworks, NUPs need to ensure alignment and coordination across sectoral ministries and across different levels of government. Centralization, policy silos, lack of place-based content, “persistent data and information gaps, and weak capacity continue to challenge both national and subnational governments in making the most of NUPs' potential.”⁶⁵ In the 86 countries that facilitated information for the GSNU report, 64 countries (74%) have already deployed formal multiministerial platforms between the leading NUP ministry (a ministry or agency specialized in urban issues, designated in 54 countries) and relevant sectoral ministries to facilitate coordination. Still, fifteen

countries indicated that the NUP leading institution is not clearly defined.⁶⁶ While progress is observed, insufficient coordination is one of the key challenges). Cross-sectoral and intergovernmental coordination ultimately involves developing planning that seeks to equalize access to income, decent work, health, housing, basic and social services, connectivity, safety and security. This not only requires a re-thinking of “integrated” planning but also raises the questions of how NUPs address performance criteria to promote equal access and how such criteria acknowledge contextual factors when localized.⁶⁷

In the same vein, coordination between the SDGs and national, regional and local policy and planning is also evident. Most countries are making efforts to align their national development plans or strategies with the SDGs,⁶⁸ but references in these plans to local development plans or localization strategies are still limited. Highly centralized, top-down and space-unaware policies limit local development opportunities.⁶⁹ Box 3.5.3 highlights efforts made in Rwanda to coordinate SDGs with national and local urban planning.

At the subnational level, intermunicipal cooperation is an approach adopted by LRGs that can contribute to more horizontal coordination. Such cooperation may have a single, specific purpose or several different ones. Examples include improved service quality through economies of scale, attraction of investment funds and enhanced economic performance through coordinated planning while, at the same time, providing better environmental protection (e.g. for waste management, health or school services). Intermunicipal cooperation is well-developed in countries such as France, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the USA as well as in many countries in Asia and Latin America.⁷⁰ Box 3.5.4 demonstrates examples of rural-urban local government consortiums that were formed in Ecuador and the Republic of Korea to address food security.

BOX 3.5.3

Localizing the SDGs in Rwanda: Using national and regional territorial policies and plans⁷¹

The Rwandan government has made strong commitments to translating global commitments into national visions and programmes, as well as into local plans, illustrating an emblematic case of SDG localization. For example, it allocated the role for overseeing SDG localization to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and built a special task force for intersectoral and interagency coordination. Starting at the top and cutting across all levels of government institutions, responsible entities were identified to cover strategic aspects as well as day-to-day implementation.

Urbanization is one of the key challenges for the country. Early master plans such as the 2013 **Kigali City Master Plan** have been critiqued for providing an inadequate and rigid economic blueprint, “largely a production of an international cadre of planners and architects, with a staff composition of 75% foreign and only 25% local.”⁷² However, this master plan’s revision as well as the 2015 National Urbanization Policy, the Urbanization and Rural Settlement Sector Strategic Plan 2018–2024, and the national roadmap for green secondary cities have been widely commended for their inclusive visions. Specifically, they aim to integrate rural and urban areas while reducing resource depletion particularly associated with urban sprawl.

BOX 3.5.4

Regional economic development in Ecuador and the Republic of Korea⁷³

In Ecuador, the population of **Pichincha** Province is unevenly distributed, with almost 90% of inhabitants living in the capital city of Quito. A consortium of local governments was formed in 2014 to address high rates of poverty through linking local and national policy implementation. This manifested, for example, in the comprehensive Quito Food Strategy, formally adopted in 2018, which built on participatory urban agriculture experiences to produce, promote and distribute food products from the territory, combatting economic inequalities and improving health.

In the Republic of Korea, the rapidly growing city of **Seoul** with 9.7 million inhabitants is facing a dual challenge: addressing increasing economic inequalities between the city and its rural surroundings and securing food for its population. Seoul’s Metropolitan Government therefore created the Urban-Rural Coexistence Public Meal Service in 2017. This programme addresses food safety and security and provides a renewed framework of urban-rural coexistence. It also builds inter-jurisdictional governance capacities by pairing urban districts with rural authorities in order to supply meals to public institutions. It has resulted in reduced distribution costs and number of intermediaries and has promoted direct trade between farmers and the population.



Metropolitan areas could also play a key role in fostering new forms of governance that link core urban areas to a wider range of smaller urban areas and rural areas. The case of city-region combined authorities in the UK illustrates this, as does the initiative in **Metro Vancouver** (Canada). In the latter, 21 municipalities, one electoral area and one First Nation have worked together since 2007 to provide a collaborative framework for promoting regional growth, supporting liveability and agreeing on a vision and actions related to regional priorities.⁷⁴ Positive urban-rural partnerships are central to search for complementary assets and capabilities for infrastructure provision, service delivery and preservation of key resources (e.g. water, land, agriculture and forests). Co-operation and coordination built on relationships of trust are critical for rural-urban governance partnerships. A key means for building this trust is providing groups of local authorities with the flexibility to identify which modes of cooperation are most appropriate for addressing the challenges territories are facing, keeping in mind differences in power and priorities.

Nested in decentralized structures based on principles of subsidiarity, partnership and inclusion, this pathway fosters policy cohesion and the urban-rural continuum, integrated action across sectoral silos, and area- or place-based approaches that acknowledge and value the diverse needs and aspirations of the population, including marginal and peripheral areas and groups. The latter links policy and planning to participatory processes that engage with LRGs as well as citizens, which is the focus of the third pathway to urban equality.

Promoting inclusive, participatory and accountable multilevel democratic governance processes

Urban and territorial policies and planning are unlikely to address inequalities unless they are supported by multi-level governance arrangements that involve all spheres of government, including LRGs, as well as local civil society and private sector actors in all their diversity. **Not only are participatory and accountable governance practices a right, but they are also more likely to promote locally tailored strategies, make more effective use of resources and, in the longer term, create local ownership and a more robust democratic system.**

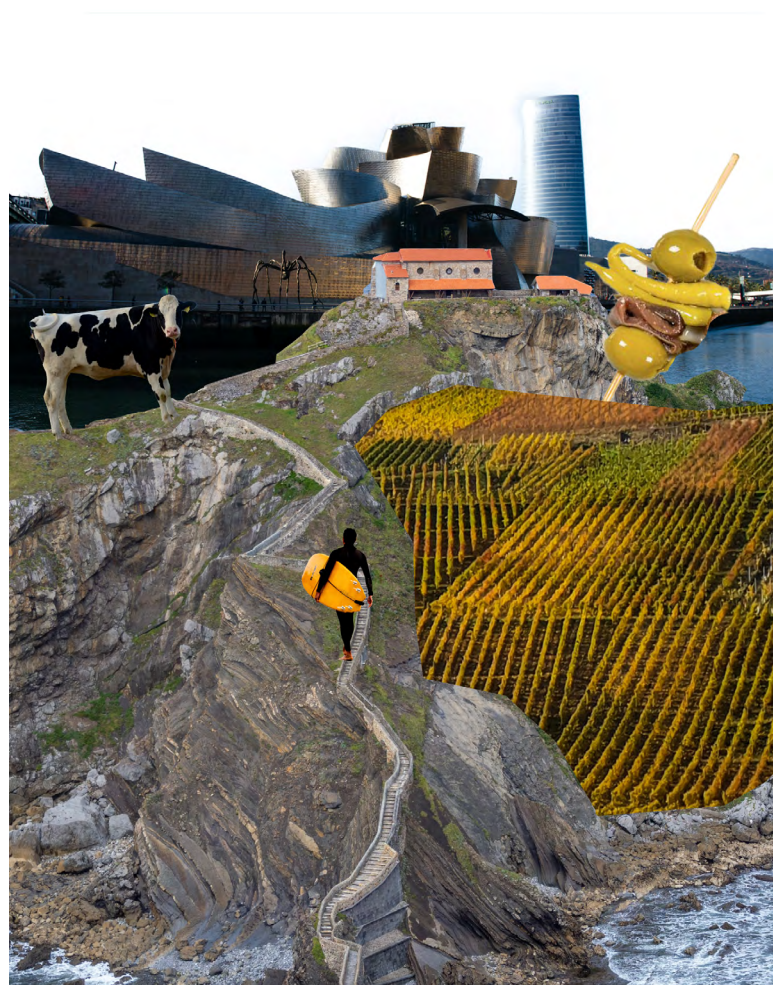
To operate on the principle of subsidiarity and respect local autonomy and adequate financing, it is necessary for national, regional and local planning to determine the appropriate spatial scale on which to operate (reflecting citizens' and territorial priorities). Such planning requires targeting, through area- or place-based approaches, highly disadvantaged territories and neighbourhoods. In addition, it requires building on and reinforcing conditions that ensure substantial, sustained, coordinated and concrete responses to governance challenges are mobilized across appropriate scales.⁷⁵ As polarization of urban systems and interregional inequalities become more evident, a gradual shift is observed in different regions in the way regional and urban policies are being re-designed. Significant examples are the territorial cohesion policies and the new EU urban policy – the Pact of Am-

sterdam (2016) and the New Leipzig Charter (2020) – that can be found in the EU, which also include the principles to promote a more integrated and inclusive involvement of LRGs.

There are several noteworthy examples of national and supranational participatory management of natural resources such as forests, water bodies and renewable resources (see Paper 3). This type of operation has been implemented in many parts of the world, including in Brazil, France, Malaysia and the Niger River Basin, with local governments' and stakeholders' involvement.

With regard to collaborative access to data, in **Nairobi** (Kenya), grassroots movements and civil society organizations have successfully built upon years of data collection and advocacy to develop a holistic, participatory upgrading process at scale. This process has received strong support from local governments' official agencies, academics and other partners (see Paper 1).

When adequately empowered and resourced, LRGs may enjoy a privileged position to coordinate and foster equality-driven actions, including to support multilevel governance, more inclusive metropolitan areas, intermunicipal cooperation and the management of rural-urban interlinkages. Cooperation can take different forms, from localized collaboration between municipalities to regional and supraregional collaboration. Box 3.5.5 highlights the example of the Basque Country (Spain).



BOX 3.5.5

Subnational government cooperation: Regional Government of the Basque Country (Spain)⁷⁶

Since 2017, the regional government of the **Basque Country** (Spain) has developed a multilevel and multi-stakeholder strategy to better align regional, provincial and municipal planning and actions for SDG localization. The Basque Country is home to a population of 2.1 million, 80% of whom live in cities. This framework structures actions to localize the SDGs, promoting “vertical” and “horizontal” development.

Vertical development integrates multilevel governance, with specific responsibilities by level of government:

- At the **regional** level, framed within the SDG “Decade of Action” strategy, the regional government aligned four-year legislative planning with the SDG targets and indicators under an umbrella strategy: the Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda. Four additional initiatives were put into place: sustainable bonds, the Education for Sustainability Strategy, best practices from government bodies and agencies, and the Basque Foundation for Food Safety.
- At the **provincial** level, various provinces led specific efforts: budget alignment (Gipuzkoa), cross-sector alliances (Araba), and an SDG-oriented tax system (Biscay).
- At the **municipal** level, municipalities promoted

a collective transition from Agenda 21 to the 2030 Agenda and produced the Local 2030 Agenda, a practical guide for aligning municipal strategies with the SDGs. NGOs are also active development partners.

Four components cut across this multilevel structure:

- **Accountability** through yearly reports to the Basque Parliament and the Open Government Platform
- **Data management** by the Basque Statistical Office, including alignment and adaptation of SDG indicators
- **Training on the “SDG Vision”** in yearly modules for public administration (technical and political) and the private sector (small and medium-sized enterprises and clusters)
- **Support from academia** through the University 2030 Agenda

In 2019, the Basque Country also adopted the Basque Urban Agenda (Bultzatu 2050) and neighbourhood-based urban regeneration initiatives. This agenda defines the Basque Region as a “polycentric urban region” and, together with the initiatives, they constitute as a strategy “bridging” regional government, provincial government and municipal action.⁷⁷ The Basque regional government has a long tradition of inclusive and integrated endogenous development, the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises, smart specialization focused on research and technology, and the creation of regional clusters by taking advantage of their mutual proximity.

The active participation of citizens and their representative organizations is central to constructing an accountable multilevel governance system. **Data on political representation indicates that national, regional and local governments have to do more to ensure more equal and meaningful engagement in decision-making at different levels.** Specifically, they need to address inequalities based on class, gender, age, ethnicity, race, disability and sexuality, depending on the context. With political commitment, transparent procedures and clear communication, collaborative governance among the full diversity of local stakeholders and local officers can create greater levels of trust as well as co-produced knowledge and skills. With such an approach, planning can promote more balanced territorial development, a necessary condition for greater urban and territorial equality. The practice of participatory budgeting brings together the elements of decentralization with people at the centre: citizen decision-making and fiscal responsibility supported by legal and administrative frameworks with subsidiarity at the core. Box 3.5.6 demonstrates the experiences and conditions for successful participatory budgeting across a range of different contexts.

BOX 3.5.6

Participatory budgeting: The examples of Yaoundé (Cameroon) and Penang (Malaysia)⁷⁸

Since the late 1980s, participatory budgeting has democratized decision-making and provided a transparent and accountable space for collaboration between local governments and civil society. More than 10,000 experiences have been identified in 71 countries.⁷⁹ The participatory budgeting process includes several steps: proposing projects, determining their prioritization and putting proposed projects to a citizen vote.

Documentation of the experiences indicates that participatory budgeting initiatives are mostly organized by territorial unit (mostly neighbourhood- or district-level) or by theme. An example of the former are participatory budgeting processes in **Yaoundé** (Cameroon), where the ASSOAL association facilitates decision-making on investments for basic needs such as water, sanitation and energy in highly disadvantaged communities. The thematic approach is practiced in **Penang State** (Malaysia), where two local councils evaluate public expenditure according to its contribution to gender equality and social justice.

Participatory practices also ensure that LRGs and local communities are regularly involved in **monitoring and evaluation** of local, regional and national policies and plans for the implementation of the SDGs and the NUA, including through digital governance. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) and contemporary technological changes have opened up new opportunities for LRGs to communicate with and involve citizens (e.g. e-democracy and ICT-based participation).⁸⁰

Promoting inclusive, participatory and accountable multilevel democratic governance processes as an intrinsic part of national, regional and local planning builds people-, rights- and care-centred democracies. These processes empower citizens and inhabitants and enable constructive and mutually beneficial cooperation and solidarity among all spheres of government.

3.5.4 Towards local recommendations within multilevel governance: LRG challenges and needs

Enabling institutional environment

Creating an enabling institutional environment in the context of decentralization, with subsidiarity at its heart, is a political, administrative and fiscal challenge for both LRGs and national governments. **NUPs have a strategic role to play in recognizing the importance of LRGs in addressing inequalities in urban and territorial systems and in reinforcing the necessary enabling institutional conditions to do so.**

Institutional arrangements vary widely, depending on whether a state is unitary or federal, on the culture of governance and on changing political and policy priorities. With this complexity in mind, there are three interdependent conditions for decentralized multilevel governance:⁸¹

- **Political** decentralization: it establishes the legal basis for the devolution of power
- **Administrative** decentralization: it reorganizes the assignment of tasks across levels of government, and usually assigns LRGs the competences to adopt decisions around planning, financial and management
- **Fiscal** decentralization: it delegates taxing and spending responsibilities to LRGs; the degree of decentralization depends on the amount of resources that are delegated and the autonomy of the LRGs to manage them

With these three conditions in place, the paper demonstrates how LRGs, independently or jointly, are in the best position to address inequalities and contribute substantially to balanced urban systems.

Resources

While LRGs can orchestrate a range of resources, they are reliant on national governments for key material resources and often the procedures that regulate them. As noted above, **finance is key in the effective practice of decentralized governance, and local fiscal space is an important indicator for SDG 11.a. However, insufficient financial and human resources continue to be a major challenge for LRGs in implementing NUPs.** This was reported by 54% of the 48 national governments surveyed for the GSNUP report.⁸² Despite this, many LRGs are carrying out innovative financial projects, strengthening revenue raising options and entering into partnerships with the private sector and civil society.

Even in this constrained financial context, human resources are a central issue to enable LRGs to deliver their mandates. LRGs are already important public sector employers, with expenditure on staff accounting for 35.3% of subnational government spending globally in 2020.⁸³ However, LRGs have critical human resources weaknesses, particularly in developing countries. Recruitment, retention and capacity building are key levers for strengthening the quality and diversity of LRG capacities for improved service delivery and urban/territorial development.

Data is also a critical resource for LRG policy-making and planning and a key challenge in the formulation of NUPs. As noted by UN-Habitat, **“Deficits in the quality and quantity of high-value data exist throughout cities globally and are accentuated within cities in low- and middle-income countries, which can obscure certain populations even as decision-makers push forward with crisis response and investment decisions.** However, as the *World Data Report 2021* states, simply gathering more data is not the answer, if data is not effectively linked to improve development outcomes.”⁸⁴ This presents an ongoing challenge for LRGs as well as for national statistical offices, which have been under increasing financial pressure through the pandemic.⁸⁵ LRG partnerships with civil society organizations are an important source of knowledge co-production in this context (see Paper 1).⁸⁶

Capacities

To be effectively used, resources need to be complemented by a range of capacities. Capacities for practicing subsidiarity in multilevel governance structures go beyond traditional policy and planning competences. **Central are capacities that enable more effective and diverse forms of communication and cooperation throughout all stages of policy-making and planning to achieve balanced and equitable urban systems. This includes new technological capacities to use ICT in an ethical manner,**⁸⁷ mindful of the ongoing digital divide in most countries. UN-Habitat indicates that “Undoubtedly, the impact of digital technology will be uneven across cities in low-income countries, but the availability of geospatial technologies and the resultant data will influence governance even in the most remote urban areas.”⁸⁸

For the successful operation of a decentralized system, efforts should go beyond strengthening only LRGs’ capacities, given the different demands of new ways of de-

centralized working. “Unlearning” centralizing governance practices at all levels is an ongoing challenge for regional and national governments as well. There is also an urgent need to continue capacity building for mainstreaming an intersectional approach to policy and planning, despite the ongoing work in this regard at different levels. Continued work may build on the existing efforts, for example, by different LRGs and their networks on gender and urban planning, as well as by international agencies such as UN-Habitat (see Paper 2).⁸⁹

It is also important to recognize both formal and informal systems of learning within and across levels of governance. C40 Cities, UCLG, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, Metropolis – World Association of the Major Metropolises, Global Resilient Cities Network, the Mayors Migration Council and other **formal networks have become important spaces not only to champion cities and their LRGs in different strategic spaces but also to promote learning among multiple actors at different governance levels.** Myriad informal networks have also grown and play an important role in responding to new challenges and adapting capacities accordingly.

Citizen engagement

Creating the conditions that enable democratic and meaningful citizen engagement in SDG localization is more urgent than ever. While NUPs can address this at a meta level, LRGs have crucial roles to play in promoting local democratic practices in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policy and planning. As argued in this paper, a central component of addressing this challenge is including the full diversity of voices. In particular, **it is key to engage groups who have experienced structural discrimination based on their class, gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, disability and/or sexuality.**⁹⁰ For example, UN Women, UN-Habitat, the Huairou Commission and UCLG have taken joint action for gender parity through their global partnership on strengthening a feminist leadership.

In this political space, LRGs also have a role in the rise of “city diplomacy” undertaken by local government networks, often in collaboration with civil society and international organizations.⁹¹ For example, the formal networks mentioned in the previous section advocate at different levels on behalf of cities.

3.5.5 Conclusion: Realizing the power of localization

Achieving balanced and equitable urban systems with positive reinforcing relationships between urban, peri-urban and rural areas, which is the aim of SDG target 11.a, is essential scaffolding to support the realization of human rights and harmony with nature in these areas. This systemic approach to human settlements is more likely to effectively address the structural causes of inequality, which manifest in living conditions in urban and territorial areas. In this sense, achieving SDG target 11.a can catalyze progress on many other SDGs. This makes the implementation of NUPs, the indicator in place to mon-

itor SDG target 11.a, a pivotal lever to guide collective political, socio-economic and environmental action to make this systemic urban initiative a reality. It also puts multilevel governance, the framework in which NUPs are created and implemented, centre stage.

Yet, as analyzed in this paper, trends indicate that inequalities persist, as do the obstacles that impede an urban and territorial equality agenda. **While acknowledging the progress made, the paper demonstrates that NUPs, the underlying conditions supporting as well as created by them, and indeed, in many cases, the monitoring process itself, are limited by governance approaches that have not been able to generate substantial, sustained, coordinated and concrete responses to growing urban and territorial inequalities.** To contribute to the debate, the paper proposes a set of pathways for robust decentralization to localize the SDGs. These actions need to be tailored according to each country’s context and complexities, which will shape the limits and possibilities of change.

The first pathway argues for **promoting the principle of subsidiarity in decentralization**, co-creating an effective distribution of powers, responsibilities and resources within government and among government, civil society and the private sector. The foundation for this pathway is the imperative to **root governance in a more inclusive approach, strengthening the multilevel collaboration framework and bringing people to the centre.** As noted in the UCLG Pact for the Future of Humanity, “In co-creating and implementing bold and transformative actions, it is essential that the immediate and ongoing needs of local communities are balanced with achieving the Global Goals.”⁹² LRGs are in a unique position with respect to the localization of the SDGs. They are at the forefront of the territorial manifestation of inequalities and, as a part of government, are closest to urban residents and their daily experiences of these inequalities. LRGs are also most likely to be more effective in responding to this ambitious agenda by working in a range of different “governing partnerships” within systems of multilevel governance.

Within this decentralized institutional framework, the second pathway is to **strengthen national, regional and local policy and planning** to accelerate progress towards more balanced and equitable urban and territorial systems. As noted, NUPs are pivotal levers to achieve this if they are integrated in national and sectoral development strategies to ensure policy cohesion, if they are place-based, if they recognize the intersecting social identities of the populations they encompass and if they address the ecological challenges of these territories.

The third pathway focuses on the need to deepen and fortify the procedures and practices that **enhance democratic participation, transparency and accountability** for the multiple actors within multilevel governance structures. LRGs and their communities need to be regularly involved in the decision-making that feeds into the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and planning. Only through genuine participation, multistakeholder dialogue and peer learning within and among all levels of governance can national, regional and urban policy and planning address the urgent challenge of creating balanced and equitable urban systems – and the global quest to leave no one and no place behind.

3.6 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.



4. CONCLUSIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

Over the past few years, LRGs have demonstrated their commitment and growing capacities in advancing sustainable development despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, the increasing number of violent conflicts and other interconnected complex emergencies. Their evolving policy and reporting initiatives reflect their efforts to mobilize resources for accelerating the full localization of the SDGs. Despite persistent inequalities and constraints, LRGs, LGAs and their networks have piloted transformative actions to achieve the global sustainable development agendas. As the introduction to this report emphasizes, the world stands at an inflection point in achieving the 2030 Agenda: urgent action is needed to accelerate SDG localization. This section outlines the most relevant conclusions drawn from the report and offers several ways forward.

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

Revitalizing multilateralism is necessary to accelerate the localization of the SDGs and bolster transformation from the bottom up: the road towards the SDG Summit and the Summit of the Future.

At this point, the world is off track to achieve most SDGs. Soon after the 2023 HLPF, the second SDG Summit will be convened under the auspices of the UN General Assembly. Held in September 2023, it will mark the half-way point in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The SDG Summit and the subsequent Summit of the Future in 2024 represent crucial opportunities to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and reaffirm the vital role of LRGs, LGAs and their networks in achieving the SDGs. Localization remains a pillar of SDG achievement, and LRGs demonstrate their commitment through on-the-ground strategies and actions. To support them, a re-invigorated multilateral system should ensure that LRGs are involved and their perspectives recognized. These summits provide an opportunity to acknowledge LRGs' voices at the global level and actively involve them in decision-making. Revitalizing multilateralism, multilevel governance and cooperation is indispensable for building a more equitable system that fully engages LRGs as the level of government that most directly represents local communities.

LRGs and LGAs are committed to achieving the 2030 Agenda and to empowering local communities by aligning local policy-making with the SDGs.

LRGs increasingly recognize the importance of the SDGs, which has contributed to encouraging progress. Growing SDG awareness among stakeholders and local communities can be attributed, in part, to LGAs and networks established by LRGs as well as the pathways to SDG localization leveraged by LRGs to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The report highlights the increasing number of LRGs and LGAs that have already started implementing policies directly or indirectly aligned with the SDGs, demonstrating their commitment to sustainable development. These LRGs and LGAs further promote multistakeholder approaches to ensure inclusivity and equity – essential for achieving the SDGs – empowering all local communities and leaving no one behind. Better multilevel, multistakeholder and cross-sectoral coordination is necessary to fully integrate the 2030 Agenda into LRGs' strategies and planning frameworks, thereby institutionalizing SDG localization and effectively mainstreaming all 17 SDGs and overarching principles across local policies and actions.

To facilitate localization from a whole-of-government perspective, LRGs need to be better integrated into national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation.

LRGs' and LGAs' representation and participation in national coordination mechanisms, essential for policy coherence and efficient action, is still insufficient and requires strengthening. Despite calls for LRGs' increased and more regular direct participation, a significant proportion of countries (42%) that reported to the HLPF this year lack meaningful involvement of LRGs, having either no involvement or limited and ad hoc engagement. This year, 35% of reporting countries included LRGs in their national coordination mechanisms through regular consultations or as equal partners. This represents progress, as only 29% of reporting countries did so in 2016, but progress is not linear, regional disparities are vast and there is still a long way to go. SDG implementation requires multilevel governance and shared leadership, based on the recognition of the role of LRGs, LGAs and their networks in leading the global movement to localize universal agendas.

LRGs and LGAs increasingly monitor and report on SDG localization through VLRs and VSRs, showcasing their actions and commitment to the SDGs and calling for recognition of their role.

This increasing trend showcases LRGs' and LGAs' unwavering dedication to the SDGs. It also leads to positive im-

pacts in local governance by increasing transparency, accountability and ownership of the SDGs. As country-wide analyses of SDG localization and national enabling environments for local action, VSRs have not only fostered constructive dialogue between LGAs and national governments but also strengthened collaboration among member LRGs. For their part, VLRs have become a vehicle for institutional innovation and multilevel governance, incentivizing new ways and opportunities to connect national and local agendas. By actively monitoring and reporting on their actions, LRGs call for recognition and validation of their contributions to achieving the SDGs, thus reinforcing the importance of their involvement in the global sustainable development agendas. However, only 42% of the countries that reported to the HLPF this year, and 38% since 2016, involved LRGs in the reporting process. Enhanced coordination between national, sub-national and local monitoring and reporting processes would support harnessing synergies and connecting SDG implementation initiatives at all levels.

LRGs are adopting a rights-based approach and prioritizing equality as a core aspect of their actions to localize the SDGs. They are acting to:

- **Ensure universal access to housing and basic services**

Ensuring populations' right to adequate housing entails acknowledging that access to adequate housing and basic services for all, as well as the improvement of informal settlements, is a precondition for the fulfilment of other human rights. Thus, such acknowledgement is a crucial means to promote the achievement of not only the dedicated SDG 11.1 target but also all other SDGs. To do so, it is vital to comprehensively consider all aspects of adequate housing. Equitable access to adequate housing and basic services facilitates socio-economic benefits, environmental sustainability and democratic governance. The experiences shared in this report demonstrate that LRGs can play a pivotal role in advancing this right through diverse pathways based on the protection, promotion and fulfilment of populations' right to adequate housing.

- **Implement feminist, accessible and participatory urban planning practices**

Empowering citizens and inhabitants through participatory mechanisms is crucial for ensuring equitable access to and utilization of land, public spaces and public services, as well as for achieving SDG targets 11.2, 11.3 and 11.7. By adopting a long-term democratic approach, LRGs consider and incorporate the needs and aspirations of local communities, improving their daily environments and ensuring that no one and no place are left behind.

Feminism, accessibility and proximity are cross-cutting principles for the implementation of integrated and participatory urban planning practices. They are intricately interwoven, with each principle serving as a building block for the next, forming a cohesive framework for integrated and participatory approaches to urban planning and management. Feminism and accessibility have proved essential in fostering the inclusion and participa-



tion of a broader and more diverse range of individuals, as well as addressing the diverse needs and aspirations of inhabitants with different social identities and lived experiences through urban and territorial planning. By fostering proximity-based approaches, LRGs have enhanced people's daily environments through easy access to essential services and facilities near their homes.

- **Advance social and environmental justice and sustainability**

Going beyond the business-as-usual approach, an increasing number of LRGs has prioritized the wellbeing of both human and non-human species while protecting their social and ecological functions. The pathways of decoupling, restoring, localizing and commoning play vital roles in successfully reversing ecological overshoot and attaining SDG targets such as 11.b, 11.5, 11.6 and 11.7. These pathways are rooted in the adoption of a rights-based approach, aiming for a just re-naturing and ensuring equitable access to health and environmental benefits, regardless of class, gender, race, ethnicity, territory of origin, age, sexual orientation, religion and disabilities. Through their actions, LRGs are significantly promoting the rights of present and future generations to social and environmental justice.

- **Promote rights-based cultural policies to better connect culture and heritage with sustainable development**

A strong cultural boost is necessary to achieve SDG target 11.4 and all the SDGs by 2030. Cultural awareness and the free exercise of cultural rights are crucial elements for advancing SDG localization. LRGs have increasingly developed strategies that recognize diversity

and promote a more gender-equal and inclusive cultural landscape. Through these, they aim to ensure the preservation and revitalization of heritage spaces for sustainable tourism and economic development. They are also encouraging building reuse and protecting traditional knowledge in addressing climate change. By considering all experiences, needs and aspirations, and ensuring all individuals' engagement in and access to cultural life, LRGs are influencing the achievement of the SDGs through their cultural actions, programmes and policies. Nevertheless, the lack of a stand-alone Culture Goal leads to missing key opportunities. Such a goal could support ensuring the coherence of cultural initiatives to advance SDG 11 in a more general and systematic way, empowering stakeholders and contributing to the achievement of all SDGs.

- **Advocate for balanced urban systems through strengthened multilevel governance and better re-distribution of resources**

The decentralization of power, responsibilities and resources, based on the principle of subsidiarity, support balanced urban systems. Efforts to mitigate urban and territorial inequalities are, however, limited by governance approaches that have not generated coordinated and concrete responses. Consequently, strengthening multilevel governance and coordination between national, regional and local policies and plans, as well as implementing participatory and accountable governance processes, is crucial for SDG achievement. This approach not only results in more equitable urban systems but also ensures greater policy coherence, legitimacy and efficiency. A more distributive economic system and fairer financial practices are pivotal to improve local service provision, address inequalities and develop green and social infrastructure throughout territories. Structural differences between territories and the unequal impact of urbanization while localizing the SDGs cannot be addressed without a renewed fiscal architecture. Such architecture should incorporate flexible and efficient horizontal or vertical equalization mechanisms to strengthen LRG resources and enhance local fiscal space. For this reason, LRGs advocate for a more decentralized sharing of responsibilities and resources. Fostering collaboration with metropolitan areas, intermediary cities and their peripheries is essential for formulating place-based policies. As a pending matter, most national urban policies still have not arranged a collaborative framework to promote dialogue and collective action with local governments.

Moving forward, continued support for LRGs at the national and global levels is crucial. As we reach the mid-point of 2030 Agenda implementation, it becomes imperative to foster a more inclusive multilateral system, multilevel governance and better sharing of resources. LRGs possess a deep understanding of their communities' needs and aspirations. By involving them in decision-making, we can ensure more people-centred and place-based policies and interventions. Furthermore, accelerating SDG localization initiatives and strengthening LRGs' reporting initiatives are key to facilitating improved recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and effectively implementing the 2030 Agenda.

4.2 WAYS FORWARD

- **Enhancing awareness and incentivizing action among local stakeholders and populations regarding the climate emergency and worsening inequalities**

Raising awareness among local stakeholders and populations is a critical prerequisite for accelerating SDG localization through a whole-of-society approach. While national and local governments are prioritizing sustainable development and aligning their recovery strategies with global commitments, civil society organizations, businesses and local communities are important partners in responding to climate emergencies and reducing inequalities. All spheres of government should ensure meaningful, transparent and sustained citizen participation and inclusive engagement across local communities, while addressing deeply ingrained power asymmetries. By engaging a wider array of local stakeholders, LRGs are facilitating the restructuring of growth-oriented models and bolstering the commitment to sustainable development, to circular economy models and to our local and global commons.

- **Strengthening decentralization and multilevel governance for greater LRG involvement in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation**

According to LGAs and LRGs, limited access to funding, insufficient human resources and limited coordination across levels of government remain major challenges to SDG implementation. Defining, implementing and monitoring public policies in line with the SDGs hinges upon the active involvement of LRGs and local stakeholders. Alongside civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, LRGs need to participate in all stages and levels of decision-making. This is critical to reflect the needs and aspirations of local populations in national and global strategies and to effectively localize the SDGs.

There is an urgent need to empower and support LRGs and local communities to accelerate recovery processes and improve localization efforts. This can be done by developing institutional arrangements and regulatory frameworks that seek to decentralize powers, responsibilities and resources, based on the principle of subsidiarity, as well as by guaranteeing adequate representation and participation in decision-making. Strengthened national, regional and local policy-making and planning can help achieve balanced and equitable urban and territorial systems that meet the needs and aspirations of local communities.

- **Systematizing LRGs' involvement in national reporting processes and supporting LRGs' reporting efforts, particularly through VLRs and VSRs**

LRGs' reporting efforts and bold actions are not adequately reflected in their participation in VNR processes. While the increasing number of VLRs and VSRs over the years demonstrates the efforts made by LRGs and LGAs to report on the progress of SDG localization, LRGs and

LGAs require greater support from national governments and the international community to enhance their capacities and maintain momentum.

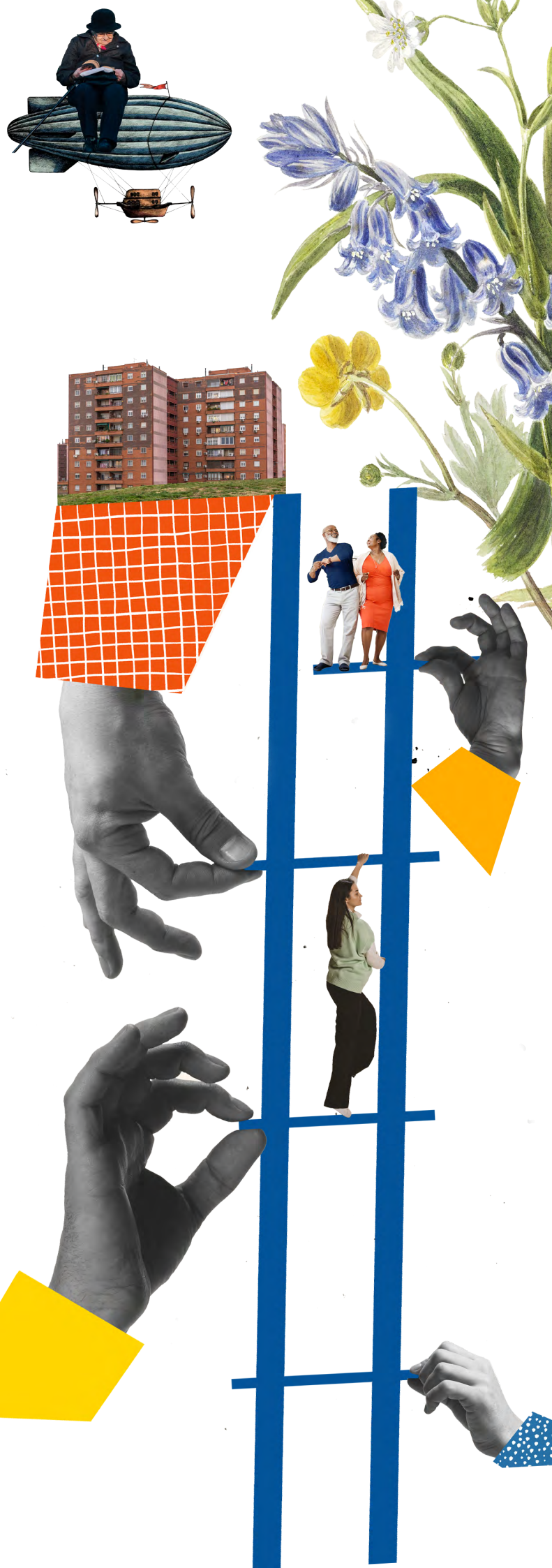
By producing VLRs and VSRs, LRGs and LGAs showcase their commitment to SDG localization, demonstrate their capacity and provide examples of how cities and regions align their strategies with the SDGs. Their role and efforts should be further recognized and promoted at the national and global levels. It is important for LRGs to contribute to reports and participate directly in designated reporting units and drafting processes, alongside national governments and other stakeholders. Beyond this, VNRs should also dedicate special attention to SDG localization and LRGs' initiatives, acknowledging LRGs' role in achieving the 2030 Agenda while creating potential for scaling up best practices.

- **Mainstreaming localization in all efforts towards the global agendas with a renewed multilateral system that is more inclusive and accountable**

The multilateral system should effectively incorporate LRGs' voices. The increasing prominence of cities as international actors, particularly amidst the current interconnected crises, points to the pressing need for LRGs' meaningful involvement within a renewed multilateral global governance system. LRGs play a crucial role as government actors, actively shaping policies and solutions to advance global agendas, notably the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda. Accountable and network-based multilateralism, drawing upon collaborative relations across different levels of governments and communities, is key to ensure that international governance bodies and mechanisms remain fit for purpose to safeguard the future of our societies and our planet. A more inclusive and open international policy-making system, multiway local-regional-national dialogue and an effective global funding architecture to mobilize adequate resources to support LRGs in SDG localization can pave the way for the renewal of multilateralism.

- **Promoting feminism as an overarching vision for urban planning and sustainable development that places human rights and care at the centre**

To effectively guarantee and scale up the right to the city, all spheres of government and stakeholders should centre their agendas on protecting and fulfilling human rights, as well as reinforcing democracy. Furthermore, to foster sustainable and just cities and achieve the SDGs, an equality-driven approach should be adopted and mainstreamed in processes and policies at all levels. In particular, prioritizing feminism, accessibility and proximity in policy-making and urban planning enables addressing historical and contemporary structural inequalities. It also ensures inclusiveness and equity across local communities and territories. Feminist decision-making processes and policies place people at the centre, emphasize governance of proximity, promote peaceful collaboration and deliver services for both those who provide and receive them. As a result, they are much needed today to respect, care for and empower all individuals and communities, as well as to protect local and global commons, including our planet.



ANNEX

PAPER 4. FULL LIST OF STATEMENTS



SDG 1

a. Cultural resources and facilities as basic services that all members of the community have the right to access and participate in.

b. Promotion of cultural participation as a key element for human dignity, and for overcoming poverty and exclusion.

c. Cultural narratives that limit and constrain human capabilities implied in the multi-faceted nature of poverty, and curb poverty reducing policies.

d. Integration of cultural aspects, preservation of cultural resources, and promotion of cultural capabilities, in local economic and resilience strategies, while engaging with local communities.

e. Promotion of job creation within the cultural sector for people experiencing poverty and vulnerability.

f. Community-based cultural mapping, advocacy and management policies.

g. Libraries as basic services foster inclusive and equitable education through literacy programming, spaces for learning, etc.



SDG 2

a. Protection of cultural landscapes to enhance economic and infrastructural development of rural areas.

b. Cultural aspects related to poverty that perpetuate hunger and curb food safety strategies.

c. Traditional and heritage food and agriculture system, sustainable use of biocultural heritage, and gastronomy and traditional food practices to promote healthy eating, sustainable farming (such as organic farming) and food safety.

d. Strengthening of museums and heritage interpretation centers as assets for the conservation and dissemination of content related to food, agriculture and ecosystems.

e. Promotion of knowledge and practices on the relationship between the diversity of genetic resources (namely seeds, cultivated plants and animals), food and endogenous development which contribute to the sustainable use of natural resources.



SDG 3

a. Consideration of cultural rights and cultural contexts, as well as cultural and traditional knowledge related to health (especially from indigenous peoples) in the provision of appropriate health services.

b. Expanding local policies related to health and wellbeing with explicit references to cultural factors, which further promote behavioral changes towards healthy living and eating habits.

c. Culture and artistic practices to boost health and wellbeing, and promote mental health for all.

d. Access and participation in culture within health settings (hospitals, health centers, etc.).

e. Beliefs and values that negatively impact access to health services and wellbeing of vulnerable groups, especially women and girls; and/or prevent them from accessing certain types of health services.

f. Medical research is narrowed by cultural, social and economic factors (excluding women, traditional knowledges, needs of vulnerable groups...).

g. Regular monitoring of the relationship between personal welfare, health and active cultural practices at local level to further enhance its synergies.



SDG 4

a. Creativity and artistic education as integral parts of primary and secondary schools.

b. Schools, universities and any educational setting as community hubs, including cultural mediation with artists and cultural professionals.

c. Cultural programs as enablers of lifelong learning and enhanced community life.

d. Cultural actions in schools supporting critical thinking including ecological awareness, human rights and cultural rights, as well as gender, fundamental freedoms and the deconstruction of patriarchy.

e. Educational and cultural foundations acting for developing cultural identity, valuing cultural diversity, and promoting solidarity and inclusion.

f. Socio-cultural biases impeding inclusion in education systems and policies.

g. Cultural tools to build early childhood programmes

that help to promote peace and justice, non-violence, solidarity and human coexistence.

h. The synergy between culture and education facilitates the development of cultural industries and inclusive cultural opportunities.

i. Cultural facilities, sites and cultural programmes as formal and informal environments for educational activities.

j. Protection and promotion of linguistic diversity in educational programmes.

k. Cultural programmes in schools, universities and educational settings to enhance democratic transmission of, and access to, information and knowledge (media and social media).



SDG 5

a. Promotion of women's access, participation and contribution to cultural life: all cultural programmes and organizations guarantee gender equality.

b. Synergies between gender, interculturality and human rights to

jointly address discrimination due to cultural, linguistic, gender and sexual diversity.

c. Arts and culture to enable dialogue, challenge and overturn gender inequality attitudes, promoting women's voices, perspectives, analyses and creativity, also through equal spaces and profiles in the media.

d. Promotion of public spaces and events safer for all people, regardless of sex, gender and sexual orientation.

e. Gender responsive use and design of public spaces that ensure women and girl's right to the city, including new imagery and lexicon in public spaces.

f. Cultural narratives and practices that go against human rights and democratic processes, and legitimize the violation of the rights of women, girls and other people for their sexual orientation and gender identity (e.g. LG-BTQ+).

g. Gender responsive cultural policies, that also include specific measures; and the integration of cultural rights in policies that foster gender equality and address gender discrimination.

h. Elimination of the pay gap between genders within the cultural sector, and increase in the amount of women in cultural decision-making to reach labor equality.

i. Involvement of artists, culture and heritage actors towards new models that question and challenge patriarchy and traditional masculinities.



SDG 6

a. Promotion of cultural values that recognize, celebrate and protect water.

b. Interlinkages between cultural landscapes or bio-cultural envi-

ronments and water protection and management plans.

c. Integration of the connection between culture and environmental sustainability in cultural policies, cultural facilities, events and activities, including the sustainable use of resources.

d. Promotion of an appropriate and sustainable use and management of water-related ecosystems drawn from the learnings taught by indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge and heritage.

e. Misuse and water contamination due to certain cultural practices (e.g. massive cultural events), curbing sustainable management of water.



SDG 7

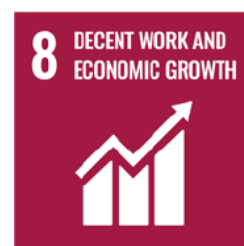
a. Potential of creative processes to foster new approaches to energy production and consumption.

b. Creative actors to design educational and awareness-raising activities on energy production and

consumption.

c. Existence of cultural narratives by some social groups that argue against the use of clean energy and jeopardize green energy actions and strategies.

d. Evaluation of the environmental impact of cultural organizations, and their further contribution towards energy efficiency.



SDG 8

a. Promotion of local cultural diversity for vibrant cities and communities.

b. Unregulated creative economy as a source of unsustainable development, often linked to urban regeneration activities.

c. Accurate analysis of impact of cultural events with potential positive effects on the economy.

d. Cultural actors and industries as key drivers of economic development strategies.

e. Tourism programmes that are socially responsible, connected to local communities and interactive with the cultural ecosystems.

f. Traditional cultural knowledge and practices appropriation and exploitation for private economic profits and/or that can undermine the cultural identity of communities.

g. Massive cultural events (festivals, concerts, etc.) offered for economic development, with impacts in local heritage, local cultural sector, and the overuse of local infrastructures.

h. Promotion of crafts, heritage and traditional livelihoods to support contemporary re-skilling and economic diversification for job creation and enhanced resilience.

i. International mobility of artists and culture professionals with specific programmes.

j. Inclusion of informal care, as a type of work often unpaid and carried out by women, in new working frameworks within the cultural sector.

k. Cultural programmes to promote jobs for indigenous peoples.

l. Promotion of job creation within the cultural sector for the youth, as well as for people experiencing poverty and vulnerability.

m. Promotion of new frames of working conditions, rights protection and fair remuneration for cultural professionals.

n. Strengthening of cultural, social, and economic implications of existing and emerging forms of cultural creation, access and reproduction, such as copyright, copyleft, and open source.



SDG 9

a. Existence and generation of quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient cultural infrastructures (spaces and venues dedicated to training, creation, and production of culture, e.g. art schools, music schools, museums, heritage

centers, cultural centers, festivals, dance houses, auditoriums, libraries, etc.) that are available and accessible to everyone as key component in the city/territory.

b. Strong connection between culture and innovation. Cultural action facilitating anticipation, and being a driving force of reform and imagining possibility.

c. Promotion of heritage value of industrial areas and their use as cultural spaces for the communities.

d. Creative professionals and academia partnering to research, develop and innovate for the industry and economy, thus facilitating knowledge transfer.

e. Promotion of the right to access culture and information, with a growing online presence, as a key motivation for providing access to technology and Internet to all people.

f. Cultural investment programmes, such as microcredits, venture capital and sponsorship programmes, to ensure affordable and equitable access for all and a sustainable industrialization.



SDG 10

a. Local programmes focused on the right of all to participate in cultural life lead to greater democratization and reduction of inequalities (sharing, confronting and understanding the differences, doing things between people

and communities, promoting dialogue and tolerance).

b. Cultural democracy programmes as key for participation empowering and promoting the inclusion of all people, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

c. Involvement of artists and creative professionals in the evolving process of designing local narratives.

d. Cultural facilities mainstreaming the protection and wellbeing of vulnerable groups and accessible to all.

e. Recognition of cultural diversity as a goal in cultural policies, and integration of intercultural dialogue and active participation to address migration, refuge and internal displacement.

f. Grassroots cultural projects promoting intergenerational cooperation.

g. Cultural policies with a systemic approach on indigenous peoples.

h. Cultural events and infrastructure are not fully accessible to people in situations of functional diversity, marginalized communities, and disengaged audiences due to a wide range of barriers.

i. Elitism of some cultural programmes, which have vectors for reproducing inequalities and deepening exclusion.

j. Discrimination and repressive actions against LGBTQ+ collectives and other groups due to prejudices sometimes expressed as cultural differences.

k. Cultural indicators to monitor and make visible inequalities between groups in terms of space and time use, and adoption of measures to address this.

l. Promotion of religious and interfaith dialogue.

m. Exclusion of certain groups in policies that address inequalities legitimated by beliefs, traditions or rituals.



SDG 11

a. Cultural and heritage policies as facilitators and key conditions of sustainable development (through appropriate capacity building, policy design, implementation, evaluation, etc.).

b. Culture and heritage are integrated in urban planning strategies, as the main contributors of living environments and quality of life, as well as to the uniqueness of each city, championing local identity and urban pride.

c. Protection and management plans of cultural landscapes to strengthen the relationship between citizenship and environment, nature and sustainable development.

d. Adoption of policies regarding the protection of cultural heritage in all its dimensions, both tangible and intangible.

e. Cultural plans for revitalizing neighborhoods, in parallel to the revitalization of other parts of the city, through the decentralization of cultural facilities and local cultural resources of communities.

f. Integration of culture and artistic practices in urban planning and design, as well as cross-cutting collaborations and community participation.

g. Sustainable reuse of buildings and regeneration of his-

toric quarters, adopting measures to include culture and cultural actors in this renovation works and in urban development plans.

h. Preservation and utilization of historical and cultural resources as assets for economic development.

i. Regeneration strategies in historic and artistic quarters, without the involvement of neighbors and communities, as a source of gentrification and loss of identity with irreversible impact.

j. Environmental and social impact of the mobility embedded in the access to culture, facilities and events offered by public and private actors.

k. Connection of public art with the issues faced by cities and territories, enabling the accumulation of knowledge provided by communities and actors of the civil society, while creating stronger links with inhabitants.

l. Cultural impact assessment in sustainable urban planning, transport and mobility, waste recycling and reduction, uses of the environment, and other related areas.

m. Increasing cultural opportunities to overcome inequalities between the city centers and the periphery, as well as the rural areas.

n. Cultural lens in disaster risk management (to address impacts on cultural heritage and the cultural sector).

o. Data collection on cultural practices and programmes, especially in terms of the use of public spaces, commuting, etc., for building more sustainable and resilient cities.

p. Adaptation of culture and heritage programmes to remote, digital technologies and enhanced connectivity.

SDG 12



a. Cultural and natural heritage management is not yet present enough in local and national frames and standards to achieve sustainability.

b. Contribution of culture and creative industries towards enhancing sustainable tourism and

production of local and traditional products suited for sustainable consumption.

c. Artists and designers' voices to embrace environmental values, drive the circular economy and circular culture, and trial new, values led business models.

d. Promotion of the transcendence of modern take-make-waste approaches through traditional knowledge and the worldviews and endogenous interpretations of development of indigenous peoples and local communities.

e. Recognition of gastronomy, based on local production, as a constituent element of local culture.

f. Citizen initiatives for the sustainable use of public spaces, especially those linked to new gardening practices, and other examples of ecological innovation.

g. Cultural programmes that raise awareness on waste

management throughout the life of the products (production, use, recycling, reuse, etc.).



SDG 13

a. Expansion of climate plans by including heritage and cultural factors, and policies and traditional knowledge as a major strategy, while making climate action strategies culturally responsible.

b. Culture and heritage institutions as platforms for listening to communities and for providing open opportunities to inspire participation in advocacy and collective climate action.

c. Incorporation of climate action, resilience and sustainable use of resources into cultural policies, programmes, activities, infrastructures and institutions (i.e. libraries, museums, festivals, concerts and heritage sites).

d. Tensions between climate mitigation and adaptation measures, and certain cultural practices and heritage values.

e. Cultural programmes for solidarity towards forced displacements, hunger and poverty caused by climate change.

f. Cultural events and creative professionals involved in awareness-raising and educational activities on climate change, while also reinterpreting today's carbonscapes, and facilitating behavioral changes.

g. Adaptation of traditional buildings in terms of energy efficiency and increased sustainability to mitigate climate change.

h. Cultural heritage-based resource efficiency strategies (i.e. continued use and adaptive reuse of existing buildings, conserving embodied carbon and avoiding GHG emissions).

i. Historic contributions memorialized in order to use and move beyond them as part of transition to a post-carbon economy (revisiting history and practices through museums, archives, literature, etc.).



SDG 14

a. Cultural action to raise awareness on the blue economy and protection of aquatic life.

b. Explicit consideration of the notion of landscape in policies, integrating both natural and cultural aspects of development in the protection and recognition of life below water.

c. Protection and recognition of the importance of underwater heritage.

d. Recognition and preservation of cultural practices, traditions, stories, as well as customs of indigenous peoples, related to sustainable uses of oceans, seas and marine resources, including through the establishment of specialized institutions (e.g. ecomuseums, maritime museums, etc.) and other initiatives.

e. Potential negative impact of cultural tourism in the protection of natural heritage linked to water.

f. Cultural values to enhance the sustainability and practice of the fishing sector.



SDG 15

a. Integrated management, protection and use of cultural and natural heritage resources.

b. Explicit consideration of the notion of landscape in policies, integrating both natural and cultural

aspects of development in the protection and recognition of life on land.

c. Promotion of initiatives to foster preservation and transfer of traditional knowledge and intangible heritage practices related to sustainable management, and for the preservation and use of terrestrial ecosystems.

d. Mobilization of cultural influence in the harmony of humans with nature and nature-based traditions.

e. Existence of cultural narratives by some social groups that argue against actions of protection, restoration and the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.

f. Cultural events to raise awareness among citizens towards the protection of green spaces.



SDG 16

a. Cultural rights placed at the center of policies to promote peace.

b. Grounding dialogue in local cultural knowledge and tradition to help all stakeholders to listen,

learn, cooperate and co-create with communities, rather than only aiming to 'transform' them.

c. Relevance of cultural policies as safe processes for dialogue and understanding, including the acknowledgment of differences and dissent.

d. Potential of cultural action to address complex urban segregation, prevent conflicts and crime, as well as to activate neighborhood hot spots through collective mobilization, reassigning meaning and promoting cultural diversity.

e. Plural governance of culture, including civil society organizations and networks, that also promote pioneer initiatives such as participatory budgeting.

f. Cultural institutions being transparent, accountable, creative and diverse, and that evaluate the public services that they provide.

g. Intercultural differences (including language) jeopardizing mutual understanding, dialogue, partnerships, and

actions and strategies.

h. Cultural factors as a source of conflicts and war, misunderstandings, discrimination, exclusion and racism, and as an obstacle to peace and tolerance actions and strategies.

i. Threats to fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and creation.

j. Freedom of expression and creation, and the promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions for societies more vibrant, powerful and democratic.

k. Ensured access to free, plural and reliable information through local and national media that also integrates the communities in the process of elaboration of information.

l. Relevance of a "cultural policy chapter" and a "cultural impact assessment" process in national programmes to implement SDGs.

m. Cultural consequences of colonization, including the restitution of cultural goods, jeopardizing the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

n. Libraries and knowledge centers as key public facilities to foster access to information and knowledge, and safe spaces for all citizens.

o. Fake news against vulnerable groups intentionally generated by biased media.

p. Social-cultural trends leading to social media abuse and harmful practices to the construction of peaceful and inclusive societies.



SDG 17

a. Cities and local and regional governments are not often involved in multilateral partnerships on cultural development.

b. Cultural rights-based programmes as a booster of solidarity among people and places (e.g. in crisis, emergency situations, etc.).

c. Intrinsic role of cultural diplomacy as an enabler of cooperation between communities and territories.

d. National and international cooperation programmes with a particular emphasis on the protection and promotion of cultural diversity.

e. Participation of local government associations and cultural stakeholders in national strategies to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, as well as to address sustainable development more broadly.

f. Strengthened capacities of cultural stakeholders, enabling them to address other sustainable development challenges.

NOTES

1. Introduction and methodology

1 See the latest version available at the time of writing here: United Nations General Assembly, 'Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet' (New York, 2023), <https://bit.ly/3MNSpTP>.

2 United Nations General Assembly.

3 World Food Programme, 'A Global Food Crisis', 2023, <https://bit.ly/42guqRy>.

4 UN-Habitat, 'Priorities 2022–2023: Adequate Housing, Cities and Climate Change, and Localising the Sustainable Development Goals' (Nairobi, 2022), <https://bit.ly/42galef>.

5 UN-Women, 'Measuring the Shadow Pandemic: Violence against Women during COVID-19', 2021, <https://bit.ly/307HHFA>.

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7 VNRs are reports produced voluntarily by UN Member States on the state of SDG implementation in their countries. In total, 39 VNRs are to be presented at this year's HLPF. The European Union is also producing its first [Voluntary Review](#) in 2023, included in the UN's official repository of VNRs. As of 2023, 330 VNRs have been presented by a total of 188 countries, 64 countries have presented one VNR, 108 countries have already presented two VNRs, 14 countries have presented three VNRs, and 2 countries have presented four VNRs. Out of the 193 Member States that signed onto the 2030 Agenda, only five have not presented any VNR: Haiti, Myanmar, South Sudan, the United States of America and Yemen.

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15 The 2006 Constitution created Decentralized Territorial Entities, which include cities, communes, sectors and chiefdoms. However, as of 2021, no information is available on the exact number of entities to be created, and no elections to these entities have been held.

16 The 1972 Local Government Act establishes 14 provin-

cial councils and 13 municipal councils. However, councils have been suspended and elections to them postponed since 2009.

17 According to its constitution, Portugal has a three-tier system of local government, consisting of regions, municipalities and parishes. In practice, however, a regional level has not been implemented in mainland Portugal, and there are only two overseas autonomous regions.

18 There are three districts in the city of Kigali that are not included in the total number of districts, as they do not have legal status like the other 27 districts.

19 In the 285 municipal councils within Saudi governorates, half of the members are appointed and half are elected.

20 There is no local government on Saint Kitts, but the Nevis Island assembly serves as a local government for that island. There are 14 parishes across the two islands, which are administrative structures of the national government.

21 The onset of the civil war and the ensuing collapse of an effective political system led to a multiplicity of administrative systems in areas not controlled by governmental forces. Military or civilian leaders in different zones are retaining control over territorial organizations.

22 The chairs of all subnational governments are appointed and can be dismissed by the president.

23 Oecusse-Ambeno is a municipality and has Special Administrative Region status. The country is further divided into 442 villages (with elected suco councils).

24 Tanzania is a unitary republic with two governments: the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania and the Government of Zanzibar. This implies a dual decentralization policy, which entails challenges for the local government institutional framework. There are 150 administrative districts but some districts have more than one council. In total there are 195 local councils: 53 are urban (47 on the Mainland, 6 and in Zanzibar) and 142 are rural (137 on the Mainland, and 5 in Zanzibar).

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2. Policy and enabling environment for SDG localization

2.1 Strengthening ownership: LRGs' participation in VNR preparation

1 This section's analysis excludes the VNRs of Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore and Turkmenistan, where there are no elected LRGs. The following countries, which had not published their VNR at the time of finalizing this report (29 June 2023) are also excluded: Cambodia, Canada, Croatia, Guyana, Liechtenstein, Saint Kitts and Nevis, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam.

2 However, it was not possible to verify if the VNR took these VLRs into account as it had not yet been published at the time of this report's analysis.

3 The VNRs of Cambodia and the United Republic of Tanzania were not yet published at the time of this analysis. Therefore, we cannot identify if they mention the VSRs developed this year.

3. Localizing SDG 11 to empower communities for sustainable transformation

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Paper 2. Integrated and participatory urban planning: How local and regional governments enable equality through feminism, accessibility and proximity

1 This paper has been drafted by Daniel Oviedo at University College London (UCL) with the support of Julia Wesley, María José Arbeláez and Caren Levy at UCL. Support was also provided by Cécile Roth, Julia Munroe, Federico Batista Poitier and Adrià Duarte from the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) World Secretariat, as well as Hannes Lagrelius and Benjamin Dard from the World Blind Union.

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Paper 3. Forefronting transformative action: How local and regional governments are crafting social and environmental justice and sustainability

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Paper 4. A cultural boost in the achievement of the SDGs: How local and regional governments are promoting cultural heritage and sustainable cities and territories

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38 Culture 2030 Goal Campaign, 'A Culture Goal Is Essential for Our Common Future' (Mexico, 2022), <https://bit.ly/3WAldkU>.

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41 This methodology presents some limitations, including (a) the potential that some statements may have a positive or negative counterpart and (b) global consistency. In the light of these perceived limitations, additional efforts have been made to ensure greater comprehensiveness in the wording of the statements. The authors of the analysis welcome comments and observations.

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45 This exercise required adapting the methodological framework applied by the International Council for Science, which cross-references elements of the same order (e.g. a goal to a goal, a target to a target). By contrast, the current exercise compares statements on cultural actions, programmes or policies with their actual (or potential) contribution to, or undermining of, SDG achievement. For this reason, the neutral score "0" has not been applicable throughout the evaluation process of this exercise. For a more detailed explanation with regard to each score, please refer to page 23 of the report cited above: International Council for Science, 'A Guide to SDG Interactions: From Science to Implementation'.

46 The statements shown in this figure have been summarized for layout purposes. The full statements can be found in the Annex.

Paper 5. Multilevel governance to support balanced urban systems: How local and regional governments enable equitable and sustainable development

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2 United Nations General Assembly, 'Resolution 71/256. New Urban Agenda' (2016), <https://bit.ly/3mkLHXu> paragraphs 86 and 89 (page 25).

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4 UCLG, 17.

5 United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 71/256. New Urban Agenda, 93–95.

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8 Jose Manuel Roche, 'State of Inequalities', in *GOLD VI: Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality* (Barcelona: UCLG, 2022), 62–64, <https://bit.ly/30jDuC9>.

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11 OECD, *ECD Regional Outlook 2019: Leveraging Megatrends for Cities and Rural Areas* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019), 29. Countries where economic growth has been concentrated in large cities include Estonia, Italy, Finland, France, Greece, Lithuania and the USA.

12 Eurostat, 'Over 1 in 5 at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion', News, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3lqArnP>.

13 Roche, 'State of Inequalities', 52–54.

14 WHO, UNICEF, and JMP, 'Estimates for Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Services by Countries (2000–2020)', Wash Data, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3MjGbkh>.

15 UN-Habitat, 'World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities', 81, 83 and 83. See also: Roche, 'State of Inequalities', 70–88; Martha Chen and Victoria A. Beard,

'Including the Excluded: Supporting Informal Workers for More Equal and Productive Cities in the Global South', World Resources Institute Working Paper (Washington, DC, 2018).

16 UN-Habitat, 'World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities', 9, 43 and 44. From 587 million people in 2020 to 1.49 billion in 2050 in Africa and from 2.36 billion people in 2015 to 3.48 billion in 2050 in Asia.

17 556 million in Sub-Saharan Africa and 532 million in South Asia. Of these people living in multidimensional poverty, 92.3 million in Sub-Saharan Africa and 89 million in Asia-Pacific live in urban areas. Source: UNDP and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2020, quoted by UN-Habitat, 77–78.

18 OECD, *OECD Regions and Cities at a Glance 2022* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022), 17–18, <https://bit.ly/2CigOgw>.

19 For example, in 2019, persons with disabilities and older persons made up 25% of the global population. Over half of them lived in cities. Global Campaign on Inclusive and Accessible Cities, 'Inclusive and Accessible Cities. #CitiesAreListening Town Hall Track' (Durban, 2019), <https://bit.ly/3WeAsRv>.

20 For example, the voting patterns during Brexit in the UK appear to reflect a "geography of discontent," with voters expressing their perception of being "left behind" while London and the Southeast of England have flourished. See discussion in: Philip McCann and Raquel Ortega-Argilés, 'The UK "Geography of Discontent": Narratives, Brexit and Inter-Regional "Levelling Up"', *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 14, no. 3 (2021): 545–64.

21 OECD et al., *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3BHVcHN>. The concept of NUPs include, for example, national development strategies with some dedicated focus on urban areas or national-level sectoral policies and plans (e.g. housing, energy, transport, land use) with elements addressing the urban level (e.g. a national-level transport plan incentivizing the use of electric vehicles) (p. 26). See the report for details on the methodology used to analyze the 162 countries.

22 As of May 2023, 183 VNRs, more than 200 VLRs, and 26 VSRs have been presented. For VLRs and VSRs see: UCLG, 'Localizing the SDGs: A Boost to Monitoring & Reporting', *GOLD*, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3hip3fy>.

23 OECD et al., *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3BHVcHN>.

24 UN-Habitat and OECD (2018), quoted in OECD et al., *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action*.

25 OECD et al., 13–14. Calculated based on 157 countries with available information on NUPs.

26 OECD et al., 13–14 and 51–56. The Latin America and Caribbean region had the highest share of explicit NUPs (68%) followed by Africa (58%), Asia and the Pacific (57%), Arab States (53%) and Europe and North America (50%).

Given the global population distribution, absolute numbers differed. For example, Asia and the Pacific had the highest number of “explicit NUPs” (26 out of 46 countries), followed by Africa (23 out of 40 countries).

27 OECD et al., 116–17. 31 NUPs and 20 RDPs reported meeting two qualifiers, and 4 NUPs and 6 RDPs met one qualifier required by SDG indicator 11.a.1. Overall, 30 countries have reported that either their NUPs or RDPs meet all three qualifiers, thus fulfilling SDG 11.a.1.

28 UCLG, ‘GOLD VI: Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality. Addressing Inequalities through Local Transformation Strategies’ (Barcelona, 2022), <https://bit.ly/436ETAq>, Chap 8, section 5.1; Philip McCann, ‘Investing at Scale: EU Regional and Urban Policy’ (Barcelona, 2022).

29 ADB (2011), quoted in UN-Habitat, ‘National Urban Policy: Asia and Pacific Report’ (Nairobi, 2015), 94.

30 UN-Habitat, ‘World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities’, 263.

31 OECD and UCLG, ‘2022 Synthesis Report World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment’, 2022, 7, <https://bit.ly/3Wpxz0s>.

32 OECD and UCLG, 18, 50–51 and 77.

33 OECD and UCLG, 65–66. Information available for 93 countries.

34 OECD and UCLG.

35 Christopher Yap, Camila Cociña, and Caren Levy, ‘The Urban Dimensions of Inequality and Equality’, GOLD VI Working Paper Series (Barcelona, 2021).

36 United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 71/256. New Urban Agenda, paragraphs 92 and 163;; OECD et al., *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action*, 21.

37 OECD et al., 83 and 125.

38 OECD et al., 80–81.

39 OECD et al., 85. Out of 86 responding countries, 43 responding countries engaged with civil society, 42 with academia and 37 with the private sector during the diagnosis stage. The engagement decreased in the formulation stage. Forty-three countries introduced special measures to ensure that their NUP is sensitive to vulnerable urban populations.

40 OECD et al., 82.

41 OECD et al., *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action*. LRGs (and particularly their associations) were more engaged at the preparatory stage (diagnosis and feasibility) of NUPs, while the level of engagement of LRGs decreases at the implementation stage.

42 Freedom House’s 2021 assessment of political rights and civil liberties documented the biggest democratic deterioration since 2006. Cited in: UN-Habitat, ‘World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities’.

43 Ionica Berevoescu and Julie Ballington, ‘Women’s Representation in Local Government: A Global Analysis’

(New York, 2021), 7, <https://bit.ly/3BHTFKX>.

44 UCLG, ‘GOLD V: The Localization of the Global Agendas. How Local Action Is Transforming Territories and Communities’ (Barcelona, 2019), <https://bit.ly/3xrko3j>; UN-Habitat, ‘Urban Governance, Capacity and Institutional Development’ (Nairobi, 2017), <https://bit.ly/38iM-7dj>, as cited in the UCLG, ‘GOLD VI: Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality. Addressing Inequalities through Local Transformation Strategies’.

45 For an approach to the concept of decentralization, see OECD and UCLG, ‘2022 Synthesis Report World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment’. According to the principle of subsidiarity, “public responsibilities should be exercised by those elected authorities closest to citizens. The central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those responsibilities or tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level. Subsidiarity requires that local governments have adequate financial, managerial, and technical and professional resources to enable them to assume their responsibilities to meet local needs, carrying out a significant share of public expenditure. Local governments should be granted the authority and power to raise local resources in line with the principle that authority be commensurate with responsibility as well as the availability of resources.” UCLG, ‘GOLD VI: Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality. Addressing Inequalities through Local Transformation Strategies’.

46 UCLG.

47 OECD and UCLG, ‘2022 Synthesis Report World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment’.

48 OECD and UCLG, 28.

49 OECD and UCLG, 8.

50 UCLG, ‘Pact for the Future of Humanity. The Daejeon Political Declaration’, 17.

51 This paper is extracted from a contribution of Philip McCann, *The Regional and Urban Policy of the European Union: Cohesion, Results-Oriented and Smart Specialisation* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015); and from a study of the CEMR-CCRE, ‘Cohesion Policy: The Implementation of the Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) by Members States’ (Brussels, 2015), <https://bit.ly/3oc2Bw8>. See also European Commission, ‘New Cohesion Policy’, Regional Policy, 2023, <https://bit.ly/42bE5sZ>.

52 CEMR-CCRE, ‘Cities and Municipalities in the Driving Seat for EU Cohesion Policy Funds?’, Cohesion policy, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3Wm5nLI>.

53 UCLG, ‘GOLD VI: Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality. Addressing Inequalities through Local Transformation Strategies’, chap. 3.

54 OECD et al., *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action*, 94. Based on a survey carried out in 48 countries.

55 OECD et al., 81.

56 For example, the C40 Cities Finance Facility; the ICLEI-Transformative Actions Programme; the Cities

and Climate Change in Sub-Saharan Africa of the French development agency, AFD; and the GCoM City Climate Finance Gap Fund, the Global Coalition for Municipal Finance, created in 2018 by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the Global Fund for Cities Development (FMDV) and UCLG. See UCLG and GTF, 'Towards the Localization of the SDGs. 6th Report to the HLPF' (Barcelona, 2022), sec. 5, <https://bit.ly/3pTIMtH>.

57 UCLG, 'GOLD VI: Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality. Addressing Inequalities through Local Transformation Strategies', 410–11.

58 See UCLG, 'Intermediary Cities. The Vital Nexus between the Local and the Global', *Our Territorial Agenda*, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3q1Ye7m>.

59 UN-Habitat, 'World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities', 53–54. Population growth is observed in small and intermediary cities.

60 Two-thirds of OECD countries have metropolitan-level governance bodies. Over the past decade, metropolitan reforms have also increased in Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and Africa.

61 UN-Habitat, 47.

62 Anton Cartwright et al., 'Developing Prosperous and Inclusive Cities in Africa - National Urban Policies to the Rescue?', Coalition for Urban Transitions, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3lugAgX>.

63 Sylvia Croese, Lise Rose Cirolla, and Susan Parnell, 'African Region', in *GOLD V: The Localization of the Global Agendas* (Barcelona, 2019), 57; see also Cartwright et al., 'Developing Prosperous and Inclusive Cities in Africa - National Urban Policies to the Rescue?'

64 Susan Parnell and Aromar Rev, 'Expanding Transformative Change at Scale', 2020.

65 OECD et al., *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action*, 13.

66 OECD et al., 59.

67 Reference is made to performance criteria rather than standards, given that '[C]ontext-specific conditions make it difficult to recommend prescriptive standards and design measure.' In UN-Habitat, 'World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities', 199.

68 OECD et al., *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action*. Out of 86 countries, 58 (67%) reported that they mainstreamed the SDGs into their NUPs, while 52 countries (60%) had mainstreamed the NUA as well as regional agendas such as the European Urban Agenda and Africa Agenda 2063.

69 UCLG and GTF, 'Towards the Localization of the SDGs. 6th Report to the HLPF'.

70 UCLG, 'GOLD VI: Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality. Addressing Inequalities through Local Transformation Strategies', 363.

71 UN-Habitat, 'World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities'.

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73 UCLG Regions, 'Regional Economic Development to Promote Endogenous Dynamics and Territorial Solidarity', *GOLD VI Pathways to Equality Cases Repository: Prospering* (Barcelona, 2022).

74 Brian Roberts and John Abbott, 'Collaborative Governance: Improving Sustainability of Development in Metropolises', in *Steering the Metropolis: Metropolitan Governance for Sustainable Urban Development*, ed. David Gómez-Álvarez et al. (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2017), 123–39 (quoted in *GOLD VI report*, page 412).

75 UCLG, 'GOLD VI: Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality. Addressing Inequalities through Local Transformation Strategies', chap. 3.

76 Andoni Hidalgo Simón, 'SDG Localisation and Multi-Level Governance: Lessons from the Basque Country', ed. Alice Siragusa and Paola Proietti (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), <https://bit.ly/45mAZFi>. See also Basque Government Voluntary Local Reviews 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2021.

77 Hidalgo Simón. See also Basque Government Voluntary Local Reviews 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2021.

78 Adrià Duarte, Amanda Fléty, and Jaume Puigpinós, 'Local Institutions for Civic Participation, Participatory Budgeting and Planning', *GOLD VI Pathways to Equality Cases Repository: Democratizing* (Barcelona, 2022).

79 See Participatory Budgeting World Atlas, 'Data Index', 2022, <https://bit.ly/3lxnXJM>.

80 OECD, 'Regional Governance in OECD Countries. Trends, Typology and Tools' (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022), <https://bit.ly/3oiAco5>.

81 UCLG, 'GOLD V: The Localization of the Global Agendas. How Local Action Is Transforming Territories and Communities'; UN-Habitat, 'Urban Governance, Capacity and Institutional Development' (Nairobi, 2017), <https://bit.ly/38iM7dj>.

82 OECD et al., *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action*, 91–92. Lack of technical expertise (19 countries, 40%) tends to be more important at the sub-national level.

83 OECD and UCLG, '2022 Synthesis Report World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment', 10.

84 UN-Habitat, 'World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities', 246–47.

85 United Nations, 'The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022' (New York, 2022), <https://bit.ly/3MqW20r>.

86 See, for example, Vanesa Castán Broto et al., 'Co-Production Outcomes for Urban Equality: Learning from Different Trajectories of Citizens' Involvement in Urban Change', *Current Research in Environmental Sustainability* 4, no. July (2022).

87 See the Digital Rights Governance Project, developed by Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, together with

UN-Habitat, UCLG and Eurocities, in partnership with Open Society Foundation: Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, 'Digital Rights Governance Project', 2023, <https://bit.ly/3OCFs0i>.

88 UN-Habitat, 'World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities', 248.

89 See, for example, UN-Habitat, 'Gender and Urban Planning' (Nairobi, 2012), <https://bit.ly/3lxEVch>.

90 Attention to different social identities is the focus of a range of UN agency policy commitments, some of which are reflected in SDG targets and indicators (e.g. SDG target 5.5 on women's representation).

91 UN-Habitat, 'World Cities Report 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities', 254.

92 See page 8 of UCLG, 'Pact for the Future of Humanity. The Daejeon Political Declaration'.



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