

LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS WANT TO SPEED UP THE 2030 AGENDA OUR MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

What do the Sustainable Development Goals mean for local and regional governments?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a vision for People, Planet, Peace and Prosperity to be achieved through Partnership and solidarity. It is now in its fourth year of implementation.

For local and regional governments (LRGs), it is a transformative agenda that strives to improve the delivery of public services for citizens and enhance people engagement in public policy-making by breaking silos across policy areas and connecting with different stakeholders. LRGs are confronted and have to deal with a vast majority of today's challenge, including climate change and air quality, social segregation and changing demography, waste management and energy efficiency, local economic development, etc.

The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) therefore depends on full ownership by regions, cities and communities of all sizes. All SDGs have a territorial dimension and also depend on the place and the territorial context where they are implemented.

For LRGs, localising the SDGs is about supporting the development of policies that have both a sustainable impact on their own territories and on partner countries' territories. Inspired by the international dimension of the 2030 Agenda, LRGs are increasingly generating transnational alliances, exchanging experiences and cooperating among themselves. LRGs are key to help connect the European and international spheres, including through local procurement strategies, and ensuring the coherence between domestic and external policies.

Collaboration with and between cities and regions across the globe is showcasing positive results in the development of urban and territorial policies. In addition, city-to-city and region-to-region initiatives, also known as decentralised cooperation, now take many [forms](#)¹. The objectives of decentralised cooperation are to directly support the processes of decentralisation, structural change and institutional reinforcement, and better design territorial public policies, which are fundamental development factors for the territories and key means to achieve the localisation and implementation of the SDGs.

Through mirroring public policies between partners, coupled with both technical as well as political dialogues on local policies between peers², the exchange and learning process goes both ways. There is a clear paradigm shift supported by the implementation of the SDGs towards achieving common goals together, based on common diagnosis.

What is this shift about for LRGs?

- It is about promoting the spirit and opportunities of the 2030 Agenda at local level including its transnational and its development cooperation dimensions, focusing on the causes and consequences of development problems and the global interdependence.
- It is about developing a common language around the SDGs by putting them at the heart of all policy and action plans, together with partners and in discussion with citizens;

¹ Some of which are listed in PLATFORMA-CEMR [2019 publication](#) on 'How local and regional government associations bring the SDGs to life'

² Such as between local administration staff, local politicians, mayors, etc.

- It is about promoting political cooperation projects and technical exchanges between LRGs to strengthen their capacities in designing and implementing public policies aligned with the 2030 Agenda and its global development dimension.
- It is also about cooperation, both vertical between different spheres of governance including the subnational, national and EU levels; as well as horizontal where all stakeholders have a key role to play, including LRGs, academia, NGOs, Member States, communities, private sector and citizens. Ecosystems for development cooperation are crucial.
- Finally, it is about measuring. The 2030 Agenda is a means for LRGs and their associations to make a diagnostic of where they stand on an array of policy issues. It is important to have a baseline, to be able to determine progress as from year one, and determine spill over effects for the purpose of policy coherence.

The commitment of European local regional governments and their associations

LRGs and their associations are already embracing the SDGs. They create new economic, social and sustainable opportunities every day and are becoming fully pledged actors for the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. They must notably deliver the institutional coherence, continuity and coordination needed to implement the 2030 Agenda, provided they have the necessary powers, resources and capacities.

Together with their peers and supported by their associations, LRGs have the political mandate to continuously develop their public policies, together with their citizens. They must strive for better coordination with their national governments in building coherent and impactful public policies. And this increased coordination should be reflected in national reporting of the 2030 Agenda to the United Nations (UN).

LRGs also commit to further working with peers in partner countries, through decentralised cooperation. By using the SDG framework as a guiding blueprint, peers across the globe can better identify common priorities and work together to overcome their common concerns. Together, they can support each other in the implementation of their jointly created strategies and review each other's progress.

In this sense, associations of LRGs commit to further engaging with their members to create a space to exchange experiences and practices and to support each other on the localisation of the SDGs. We encourage LRGs to experiment on new ways of cooperation in Europe and beyond with their peers in partner countries and to report annually to the High-Level Political Forum of the United Nations (UN). PLATFORMA commits to put forth these messages to EU institutions, and at international level together with the Global Taskforce of local and regional governments recognised by the UN.

What LRGs expect from the EU institutions and its members states in order to fully implement the SDGs and reach our commitment

We are convinced that the EU's response needs to become more ambitious, inclusive and multilateral, in order to make the 2030 Agenda a real transformative process for Europe and the World.

We wish to see a comprehensive post-2020 global strategy of the European Union on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, involving actively and equally all spheres of governance, in cooperation with all stakeholder groups. Europe should be a leader on sustainability which should be reflected in all its actions and policies.

In this context, LRGs need to be key partners of the European Commission and the Member States for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Beyond the "stakeholder tick-box" consultation exercise, they should be acknowledged as autonomous entities capable to define and implement sustainable development policies at local and regional level, involving all local stakeholders across Europe and at international level together with their peers. We firmly believe that the EU needs to have clear instructions on the working modalities with the different stakeholders, at all levels, and at all stages of the policy-making process.

PLATFORMA FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

After two [studies](#)³ presenting the overview of the implementation of SDGs in Europe and with peers in the world, and emphasizing the pivotal role of national associations of LRGs in steering efforts, PLATFORMA presents a series of five recommendations for the way forward to achieving the SDGs by 2030. These are targeted to the EU institutions, including the European Commission and national governments.

1. Create an overarching post-2020 EU strategy based on the SDGs

The 2019 [European Commission's Reflection paper towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030](#) put out three scenarios for the future of the EU towards 2030. At PLATFORMA, we align ourselves with the 1st scenario, calling for an overarching post-2020 EU Strategy based on the SDGs, assuring coherence between internal and external policies.

The [New European Consensus on Development](#) recognises the key role of LRGs, notably in terms of scrutiny, and active participation in decision-making processes. The Consensus rightly acknowledges that most "SDGs can only be achieved through an active involvement of LRGs (...) including through decentralised cooperation".

So far, the European Union (EU) has published reactions and reported globally in July 2019 the progresses made internally and externally ([Joint Synthesis Report](#)).

We strongly welcome European Commission's President, Ursula von der Leyen's [announcement](#)⁴ [end of 2019](#) that the College, as a whole, will be responsible for the overall implementation of the Goals, with each Commissioner ensuring the delivery of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals within their policy area.

- We call on the European Commission to effectively implement in practice the Presidents decision to integrate SDGs across all policy areas of the European Commission, for example by having **one representative within each EU Commissioner's cabinet and at least one transversal unit** within each directorate-general **working specifically on SDGs**. These units would answer back directly to the Directors-General. **The European Commission President should ensure and be responsible herself for the overall coordination of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.**
- We call for **clear guidelines on policy coherence**, within the European Union amongst the different levels of governance, as well as with partner countries. The EU should screen its legislations to ensure that its own policies do not negatively affect peers across the globe, as required by SDG 17 target 14⁵. Likewise, the EU should frame its cooperation programmes around the SDGs, so that the 2030 Agenda is at the heart of its international development policy. This would be entailed into the overarching strategy. It would therefore represent a step forward in the conception of policy coherence for development.
- We call the European Parliament to **create an SDG intergroup**. This group should welcome a balanced political representation of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), as well as different stakeholders including LRGs to discuss on priorities and next steps to achieve the 2030 Agenda. We recommend PLATFORMA and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) be included in this group. **Each Parliamentary Committee of the European Parliament should nominate a representative for this intergroup.** This person would become their focal point for SDGs. Together, Parliamentary focal

³ PLATFORMA/CEMR [2018 study](#) on "Sustainable Development Goals – How Europe's towns and regions are taking the lead" and PLATFORMA/CEMR 2019 study "How local & regional government associations bring the SDGs to life"

⁴ As mentioned in the EU President-elect's [mission letter](#) to Executive Vice-President-designate for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans, p 2, September 10, 2019

⁵ SDG 17 target 14 states the need to "**Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development**"

points for SDGs should ensure better scrutiny and mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda in EU legislative proposals⁶.

- We applaud the Member States that have already developed national SDG strategies and would wish to see all others follow this lead. For instance, we call for **Member States to appoint a person in charge of SDGs within each ministry of the central government**. This person should ensure that decision-making at national level remains in line with the 2030 agenda and regularly work hand in hand with relevant stakeholders, including LRGs.

2. Explicitly recognise the role of LRGs as policymakers and provide them with an equal seat at the table

LRGs are the closest level of governance to the citizens. They ensure, among other, access to public services to all, oversee public infrastructure and mobility, manage local finances, safeguard local and regional culture, and implement innovative and sustainable ideas for decarbonisation on the ground. They are central players of territorial development and can contribute to national sectoral policies, given their legal competences. Subsidiarity and proportionality are core elements of the [Commission's better regulation agenda](#) and the [New European Consensus on Development](#).

- We call on **for national governments and the EU to enhance and support effective decentralisation policies⁷, which are central to empowering LRGs to localise the SDGs in Europe and in partner countries**. LRGs are policy-makers. They design adapted territorial policies, implement them and monitor the results on the ground. They are the one held responsible by the inhabitants of a town or region. As central players of territorial development and given their legal competences, they can also contribute to national sectoral policies, such as decentralisation reforms.
- We call for the European Commission and Member States to **systematically include LRGs and their national associations in all processes of implementation and monitoring of the EU overarching strategy on SDGs, from the design to the final evaluation**.
- We call on the European Union and its Member States to **facilitate and promote the international action and visibility of LRGs** and to include their voice in international policy-making. Increased support should be given to strengthen LRGs' engagement at international, EU and Member State levels. This can be done for example, by systematically including local and regional elected officials in the EU and national delegations attending international gatherings, notably the yearly High-level Political Forum of the United Nations.

3. Allocate funds and increase support dedicated to the localisation of the SDGs and learning between peers at EU and international level

The next Multi-financial Framework questions the place of LRGs in development cooperation policies. They are seen as strategic partners in geographic programmes, but no budgetary line is dedicated to their international actions.

Capacity building for LRGs on local and regional sustainability plans in Europe and in partner countries should be strengthened. Decentralised cooperation is an effective support modality to exchange and learn between peers; and help achieve the SDGs.

⁶ This can be done through the development of a (simple) sustainability assessment, addressing questions like: are the SDGs considered in an appropriate way? Does the proposal contribute to, or hamper the achievement of the SDGs?

⁷ As defined in the International guidelines on Decentralisation, adopted by the UN HABITAT Governing Council in 2007

- We call on the **European Commission to provide increased funding for capacity building and technical support for LRGs in partner countries aiming at spurring SDG implementation** and experimentation between peers in Europe and across the globe. Examples of such innovative experiments include for instance, LRGs working together with peers across the globe on the same SDGs that are considered to be a priority within all the different territories – together they can monitor each other, support the implementation phase and create a common methodology to implement the SDGs.
- We call on **Member States to further provide financial support and capacity building to their cities and regions in Europe to acquire the necessary resources to mainstream 2030 Agenda in their own administration and policies**⁸. This support should also include the strengthening of Education for Development and Awareness-raising activities lead by local governments which are instrumental for promoting critical, conscious and responsible citizenship with global development.
- We call on the **European Union and its Member States to officially acknowledge decentralised cooperation as an essential means to mainstream the 2030 Agenda in international development cooperation**. Partnerships should use the SDGs as a blueprint to set up or readjust their guidelines and strategic objectives.
- We call on for **support to European towns and regions to experiment new approaches for sustainable territorial development, and to continue to exchange practices on public policies**, enhance capacities, develop a common language with citizens and non-European partners around the SDGs.

4. Promote multilevel and multistakeholder partnerships as a prerequisite for implementation of the SDGs

PLATFORMA encourages dialogues at all levels of government, in close cooperation with all stakeholders, always keeping in mind the international dimension, how our actions in Europe affect other regions of the world, how other regions of the world affect us in Europe, and how we can all work closer together, notably through decentralised cooperation, in order to reach the goals. PLATFORMA welcomed the initiative of the Juncker Commission to set up a [multi-stakeholder platform on SDGs](#).

- We recommend the **European Commission to pursue the multi-stakeholder platform for SDGs** in its new mandate and make the link with the [Policy Forum on Development](#).
- Following on the great example of the [Urban Agenda for the EU](#) and its effective multilevel partnerships, **we recommend Members States also to lead on the creation of multilevel partnerships on the topic of SDGs**, involving equally LRGs. For instance, we would strongly welcome the creation of a group led by each EU Presidency on the implementation of the SDG in Europe and in partner countries, involving also the European Commission and key players such as associations of LRGs⁹.
- We call on the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Member States to **support the role of LRGs in different cross-cutting thematic issues** such as gender equality, migration, business environment, youth, climate action etc. Multilevel governance, especially on cross-cutting issues, is a prerequisite to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

⁸ Example of the German government providing support to LRGs by financing the full-time position of an SDG officer within the administration of several cities. This person coordinates the work done on sustainable development across the different policy departments of the city, and also works on awareness raising initiatives on the SDGs for the citizens.

⁹ Urban Development Group or NTCCP model

- We call for **effective structured dialogue** between the European Commission, its delegations in partner countries, the Member States, LRGs and their associations, **to make sure that LRGs are part of the policy dialogue on development strategies at country level**. LRGs should be fully involved in the elaboration of development cooperation programmes when engaging in partner countries.

5. Provide inclusive, transparent and available data to monitor progress at all levels of governance

The lack of available and disaggregated data at local and regional level remains a top challenge to monitor progress on the implementation of the SDGs. The current UN and EU set of indicators to monitor the state of play of SDG implementation doesn't take sufficiently into account the local level and competencies of LRGs. This is due to an insufficient coordination with subnational governments.

- We call for the **European Union to offer options for measurement and self-assessment in the implementation process of the SDGs**. European indicators need to be further developed in coherence with what already exists at local, national and international level, through close consultation with LRGs to make sure that they become useful and complementary to already existing self-measurement tools.
- We call for Member States to **work closer with their national statistics offices and observatories**, as well as with LRGs and related research institutes, **to ensure the collection of accessible, up-to-date and disaggregated data for towns, cities and regions**. It is also essential to promote research and studies/reports on the impacts of local and regional policies on global development and on the development of countries in particular.
- We call for **Member States to involve LRGs in the national monitoring and reporting of SDG implementation**, not only through ad-hoc consultations. When available, Member States should make better use of local and regional monitoring reports, such as the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), to identify progress and the persisting gaps across their territories. **Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) should also include decentralised cooperation activities as well as education for development activities carried on by LRGs** in the field of the 2030 Agenda.

PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of LRGs – and their associations – active in town-to-town and region-to-region development cooperation. Since its creation in 2008, PLATFORMA has been representing more than 100,000 LRGs. All are key players in international cooperation for sustainable development.

The diversity of PLATFORMA’s partners is what makes the network unique. PLATFORMA reflects the diversity of LRGs’ realities in Europe and across the world.

The aim of PLATFORMA is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and mutual learning, but also to strengthen the specific role of LRGs in development policies.

In 2015, PLATFORMA signed a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with the European Commission. Its signatories commit to take actions based on common values and objectives to tackle global poverty and inequalities, while promoting local democracy and sustainable development.

The Secretariat of PLATFORMA is hosted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions ([CEMR](#)).

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