

# Paving the way for sustainable cities

## EUROCITIES report on the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals at local level

This report is based on the pre COVID-19 situation. The pandemic has though highlighted an urgent need to ‘build back better’ and not just tackle the new challenges with the answers of the past.

This unprecedented size, scope and pace of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic requires a mobilization of political and financial resources beyond short-term responses to address the more long-term challenges faced by our societies. In this respect, the COVID-19 global health crisis has reinforced the need for accelerating progress in the transformation pathways as required by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>1</sup>

The pandemic and its socio-economic consequences have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable sectors of society and have emphasized the interlinkages and interdependencies between the different dimensions covered by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as health, environment, social inclusion and economic development. To achieve the systemic change going with the 2030 Agenda, a strong programme to boost sustainable long-term investment is needed also at the local level. Cities have been particularly vulnerable to the outbreak of the pandemic due to their high network density and socioeconomic activity. But cities are also at the forefront of identifying, testing and piloting the right policy mix needed to drive the systemic transformation<sup>2</sup> towards an inclusive and sustainable recovery in line with the SDGs.

<sup>1</sup> UNDESA. Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to socio-economic consequences of COVID-19. March 2020, United Nations, New-York.

<sup>2</sup> EUROCITIES statement on ‘EU recovery powered by cities’: [http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Eurocities\\_EU\\_recovery\\_powered\\_by\\_cities.pdf](http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Eurocities_EU_recovery_powered_by_cities.pdf)

## Executive summary

Sustainable cities are at the heart of the transformation needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. As the level of government closest to people and communities, local authorities have a crucial role in making societies more liveable, inclusive, and resilient. This report examines the main drivers for effectively localising SDGs in the European context and gives examples of key SDG acceleration actions implemented in cities. Highlighting the need to advance the understanding of context-specific SDG interactions, we focus on good practices to promote cross-sectoral governance, integrated planning, local leadership, sustainable finance, and citizen involvement. We recommend promoting knowledge partnerships and peer-learning activities to co-design solutions to complex urban challenges, while engaging in a dialogue with other cities and regions to unlock the potential of the 2030 Agenda at local level. Transforming cities in line with the SDGs will require the mobilisation of additional investment; the EU Green Deal , the forthcoming (post-2020) EU cohesion funds and other instruments offer a critical opportunity to promote local investment and support sustainable development in cities and adjacent areas. Finally, cities should take the opportunity to formalise their efforts in achieving the SDGs by preparing a Voluntary Local Review that goes beyond existing policies and strategies, and identifies critical implementation gaps and pathways for real change.

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# Introduction

Urbanisation is an important transformative trend of our time and sustainable cities are at the heart of the successful implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG11 - making cities inclusive, safe and sustainable is central to sustainable urban development, and systemic interactions make it directly relevant for at least 11 other SDGs. While many countries have started to incorporate the SDGs into their national strategies and plans, the importance of local action has gained significant traction over recent years. In many ways, European cities have been driving this effort by playing a key role in the implementation of the SDGs.

With local level engagement necessary to achieve at least 65% of the SDGs<sup>3</sup>, the territorial dimension (or ‘localising SDGs’) is a key precursor in transforming cities towards a sustainable model. The political declaration<sup>4</sup> adopted by heads of state and government at the UN General Assembly to launch the ‘Decade of Action’ for the SDGs recognises the crucial role of cities in bolstering local action to accelerate SDG implementation and commits to supporting cities, local authorities and communities in this endeavour. Since 2018, several cities have started to report their progress on SDGs to the United Nations, by submitting Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), a subnational equivalent to Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to report on actions and policy solutions to achieve the Goals.

The Voluntary Local Review (VLR) is a process through which local governments can achieve better policy integration and accountability to citizens. VLRs are not only a review process, but also a tool to identify critical gaps and areas to be improved. VLRs are complementary to the national report that governments present on a voluntary basis to the annual UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

## Background, structure and objective of the report

As an integrated agenda, the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets are interlinked; to avoid that progress in one area does not harm progress in others, the implementation of SDGs requires coherent policy making with the aim of maximising synergies and minimising trade-offs. Many of these interlinkages can be context-specific at local level; for instance, the exact type of local energy mix and its pricing (SDG 7) can have different effects on energy poverty (SDG 1).

Recognising the critical interdependencies underlying the whole 2030 Agenda, our report focusses on the main drivers for localising SDGs in cities. The approach is inspired by the

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<sup>3</sup> UN Sustainable Development Solution Network (2016) Getting Started with the SDGs in Cities. A Guide for Stakeholders <http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/9.1.8.-Cities-SDG-Guide.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/4>

transformation pathways (see Figure 1) outlined in the UN Global Sustainable Report (GSDR 2019)<sup>5</sup> to guide global implementation of the SDGs for the current decade.

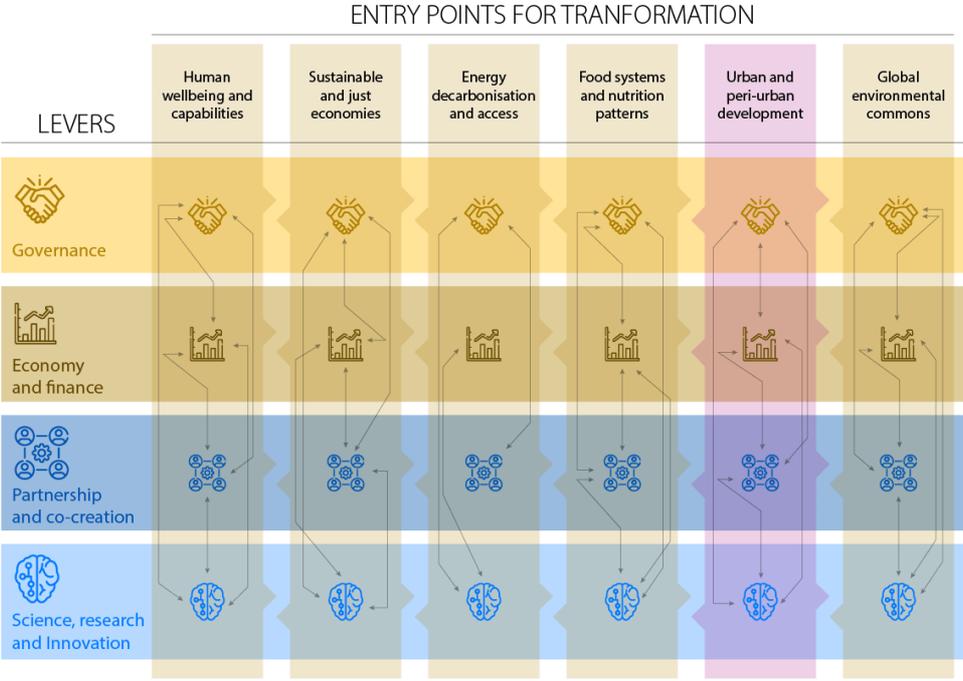


Figure 1: Pathways to transformation with a context-specific combination of critical levers for localising SDGs<sup>1</sup>

Our report showcases different actions undertaken by cities that explicitly use the SDG framework in their local strategic orientation and planning. It is based on a mapping exercise and a survey of EUROCITIES members, with city actions validated together with members of the EUROCITIES taskforce on SDGs (see Figure 2). While the examples are non-exhaustive, our goal is to present a snapshot of good practices that can inspire others, while strengthening cooperation and mutual learning for sustainable development.

<sup>5</sup> Based on UN (2019), *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now - Science for Achieving Sustainable Development*, UN, New York, <https://doi.org/10.18356/5d04ad97-en>

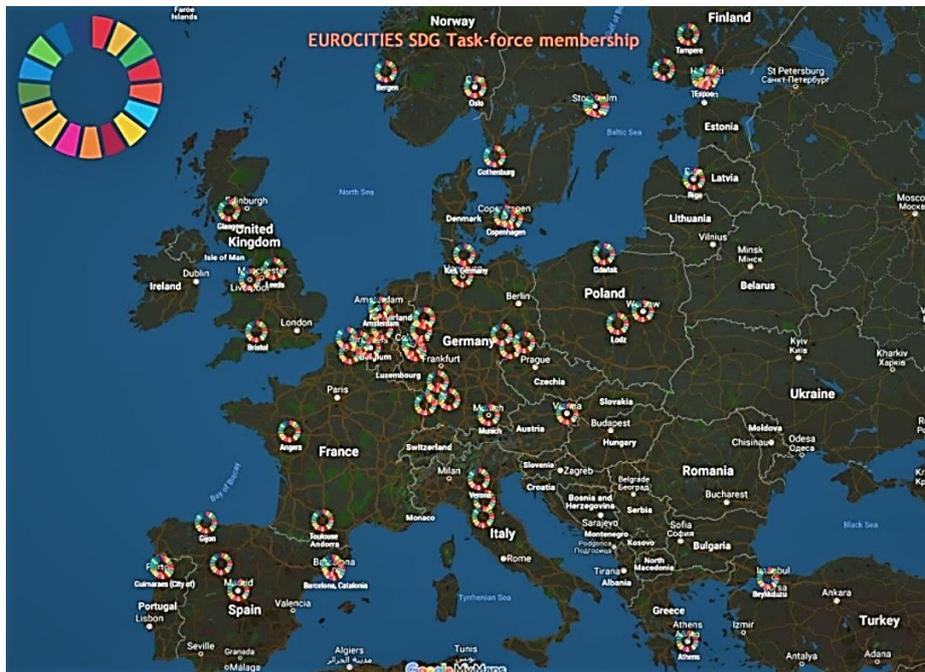


Figure 2: The EUROCITIES SDG Taskforce has over 50 active cities engaged in mutual learning on the localisation of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda

Furthermore, the actions presented in the report should be considered complementary to integrated territorial development supported by EU’s cohesion policy. The forthcoming programming period 2021-2027<sup>6</sup> puts increased focus on integrated territorial and local development strategies, lending EU support to cross-sectoral action, multi-stakeholder partnerships, complementarity of policy actions and the integration of multiple sources of funding. Combined with ambitious earmarking of cohesion funds for sustainable urban development (SUD), local authorities will be able to prioritise integrated planning to address social, economic, environmental and governance challenges in cities, including functional urban areas<sup>7</sup>, in line with the SDGs. In addition, relevant EU frameworks such as the Urban Agenda for the EU and the new Leipzig Charter provide further political momentum to stimulate the transformative action needed to implement the SDGs while connecting local and global agendas.

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/2021\\_2027/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/2021_2027/)

<sup>7</sup> According to the OECD-EU definition, a Functional Urban Area (FUA) comprises a city with its commuting zone. It is characterised by a high degree of socio-economic interactions with the urban core area.

# Towards sustainability-oriented local governance

The achievement of the SDGs requires an important coordination effort across all levels of government. Strengthening SDG leadership, multi-level governance and capacity building across national, regional, and local levels together with key stakeholders (see Figure 3) is essential. Cross-sectoral models of governance within city administrations are also central for policy coherence and the mainstreaming of the SDGs while reducing fragmentation of policies and projects.

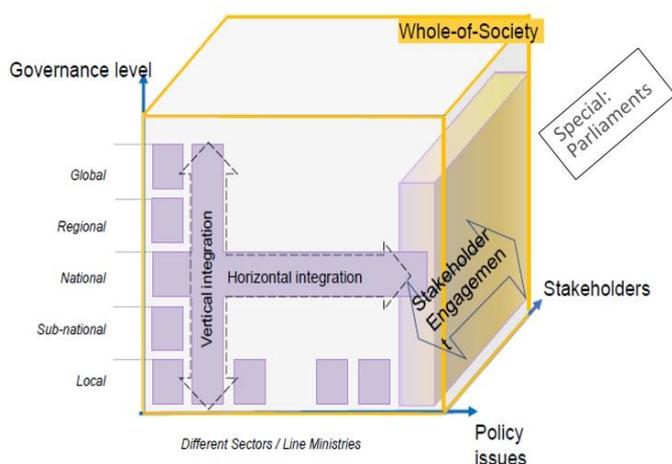


Figure 3: Multi-level governance with vertical and horizontal dimensions <sup>8</sup>

Integrated approaches between different levels of government and across issues are necessary to achieving the necessary scale for coherent policy implementation. For example, sustainable urban development and healthy food systems require integration between urban and rural areas, and across various parts of the agriculture and food value chain.

## Planning differently by integrating SDGs in city strategies, breaking silos between different departments and developing a framework for integrated actions

The integration of SDGs in the overall city strategy is a powerful tool to boost city-wide action for sustainable development. Starting from a strong vision on sustainable development, several cities have aligned their strategic plans with the SDGs and put in place dedicated coordination mechanisms (for example SDG coordinators and SDG teams).

- **Ghent, Gothenburg and Vantaa** are operationalising their city goals by developing SDG strategic guidelines to be applied to their own local policies and projects.
- **Bonn** has set up an inter-departmental steering committee to develop its municipal SDG strategy<sup>9</sup> together with local stakeholders. With the adoption of the sustainability

<sup>8</sup> Based on Niestroy, Hege et al (2019). Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: Good practices and the way forward. Policy Department for External Relations, European Parliament, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2861/28364>

<sup>9</sup> The strategy can be downloaded (in German) here: <https://www.bonn.de/themen-entdecken/uno-internationales/bonner-nachhaltigkeitsstrategie.php>

strategy by the city council, the steering committee with members from all departments was installed as a permanent coordination group monitoring to advance the implementation of the strategy.

- **Mannheim's** SDGs localisation roadmap includes both short-term and long-term actions, including the possibility to readjust to changing external conditions. This approach helps local authorities to build internal support before scaling-up different actions.
- **Bristol and Vantaa** are introducing inter-departmental activities to improve horizontal coordination, work on reinforcing synergies between different policy and action areas while minimising trade-offs. They set up coordination teams and committees under the mayor's office. By giving responsibility for specific SDGs to each member of the city council, they ensure political commitment. This new structure favours both personal and shared accountability. It also ensures that key departments (e.g. economic and finance department) engage in dialogue and coordinate with others.
- **Munster** has developed a sustainability strategy with strategic guidelines and objectives for 2030, based on the SDGs, as well as a short-term action plan for 2022. The collaborative process involved stakeholders from the sustainability advisory board and cross-sectoral cooperation in the public administration. Munster won the price for the most sustainable city in Germany in 2019 for its efforts.
- **Copenhagen** has put in place coordination mechanisms within the city administration to prepare tools to localise SDGs, such as guidelines, financial instruments, regulatory frameworks, data disaggregation, as well as voluntary national reviews.
- **Vienna** has integrated the SDGs into its renewed Smart City Wien Framework Strategy<sup>10</sup> for all 169 sub-targets. The focus of the strategy is on high quality of life, social inclusion, conservation of resources and innovation. In addition, 'digitalisation' and 'participation' were introduced as new target areas. The Smart City Wien Framework Strategy is the city strategic policy document for delivering the UN 2030 Agenda.

### Investing in innovative mind-sets of public administration and building local capacity and leadership

Mainstreaming sustainable development in municipal governance needs to be supported by appropriate coordination mechanisms and organisational learning. For example:

- **Strasbourg** considers local leadership on SDGs to be a top priority and is fostering a new vision for local governance by building a wide political commitment on SDGs. The aim is to convince leaders that the Agenda 2030 needs a long-term strategy and investment beyond short-term political cycles.
- **Ghent** has set up 'living labs' inside the administration to develop new management practices, with results-oriented and risk-taking tasks that can speed up SDG implementation.

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<sup>10</sup> The full Smart City Wien Framework Strategy 2019-2050 in alignment with the SDGs is available in English here <https://www.wien.gv.at/stadtentwicklung/studien/pdf/b008552.pdf>

- **Gothenburg and Malmo** are investing in human resources and lifelong learning by organising trainings and workshop on sustainability, system thinking and horizontal management available to staff and politicians.
- **Bonn** is running a capacity building programme for all staff by conducting regular mini-workshops on different aspects of SDGs and the link to municipal tasks. This training programme also strengthens interdepartmental exchange.

## Leveraging finance for sustainable urban development

Local authorities can leverage a range of policy instruments to re-orientate investment flows towards sustainable development needs. Examples include raising awareness and incentivising businesses to contribute to mainstreaming SDGs, providing space for coordination platforms on sustainable development and helping to de-risk investment in sustainable innovations.

- **Dortmund and Ghent** are supporting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) networks to adapt and commit to the Agenda 2030 with the aim to change local production systems and favouring the development of social-minded businesses (e.g. fair local platform cooperatives). Ghent is developing SDG labels that businesses can use to show their commitment, thereby creating a strong link to sustainable finance and local investments.
- **Bonn, Munster and Stuttgart** set up policies for sustainable investments by defining clear criteria for investments and divestment. They exclude investment of assets in equities and bonds involving fossil energy supplies, child labour, weapons, and genetic technologies.
- **Brussels and Gothenburg** are focusing on how SDGs partnerships can be enabled financially. Brussels supported the creation of a social impact bond to achieve goals related to unemployment, and **Copenhagen** issued a green bond of €70 million to achieve climate related objectives.

### Sustainable procurement

One of the main instruments cities have at their disposal is sustainable public procurement that embeds social and environmental considerations into procurement policy. While public procurement is a stand-alone target under Agenda 2030,<sup>11</sup> it has multiple interlinkages with other goals and is a driver for an inclusive and circular economy. Many cities are already using their buying power to shape more sustainable and inclusive markets:

- **Copenhagen and Oslo** have passed new resolutions on sustainable and fair procurement, with the ambition to determine bidders dialogue and to reform procurement governance to achieve strategic goals with cross-sectoral actions. Oslo is

<sup>11</sup> SDG Target 12.7: Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities

developing comprehensive and multidimensional assessment to evaluate the lifecycle of services and products with the aim of strengthening sustainable procurement.

- **Copenhagen** is using its purchasing power as a driver for sustainable development in agriculture and food production. The municipality supports local food systems and healthy diets by carefully planning tenders and choosing suppliers, promotes short food chains based on seasonal production and creates relationships between end users and producers (e.g. children and farmers).
- **Hamburg** and **Stuttgart** are engaged in eco-fair trade and social public procurement, by including green sustainability criteria in sectors such as waste management, energy, mobility and social criteria with social clauses in their purchasing decisions.
- **Bonn** has collaborated with the government agency Engagement Global to develop a procurement tool that supports the inclusion of sustainability criteria in procurement processes. A successful practical example is the tender process of ethically produced work wear for workers of the department for parks and gardens.<sup>12</sup> Bonn has also joined the network of BioCities to promote the consumption of regionally and organically produced food in its institutions.
- **Ghent**, starting from a pilot procurement project for sustainable purchasing of work wear, has developed a toolbox for sustainable public procurement with focus on transparent, environmentally friendly and socially responsible supply chains.<sup>13</sup> The toolbox aims to inspire other public buyers to implement sustainable procurement policies. Building on a long tradition for sustainable public procurement, the city of **Dortmund** has developed a similar guide<sup>14</sup> and engages in regular exchange and peer-learning activities in the context of European collaboration on fair trade.<sup>15</sup>

## Integrating SDGs into city budgets

Integrating SDGs into city budgeting can be an important tool for cities to address resource allocation, mobilise investments, and encourage participatory budgeting processes to better address interconnected challenges. An ambitious approach to sustainability budgeting would entail taking the SDGs as a starting point to identify gaps and improve budget performance and policy coherence, rather than just mapping existing budgets against SDGs.<sup>16</sup>

- **Gothenburg, Malmo and Strasbourg** explicitly reference sustainable development and are making the SDGs central to their budget allocation by matching resources to meet SDG targets within specific timeframes.

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<sup>12</sup> The experiences from this process and resulting guidelines can be found in the publication <https://femnet.de/images/downloads/beschaffung/Schritt-fuer-Schritt-Zur-fairen-oeffentlichen-Beschaffung.pdf> published by Femnet in cooperation with the City of Bonn.

<sup>13</sup> The toolbox is available for download here [https://www.hrprocurementlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ToolboxSocResWorkwear\\_1406-1.pdf](https://www.hrprocurementlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ToolboxSocResWorkwear_1406-1.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> The guidebook is available for download (in German) here [https://www.faire-metropole-ruhr.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Pdf/2016\\_praxis\\_leitfaden\\_sozial\\_gerechter\\_einkauf\\_1\\_aktiv.pdf](https://www.faire-metropole-ruhr.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Pdf/2016_praxis_leitfaden_sozial_gerechter_einkauf_1_aktiv.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.trade-city-award.eu/>

<sup>16</sup> See IDDRI study on integrating SDGs into national budgetary processes [https://www.iddri.org/sites/default/files/PDF/Publications/Catalogue%20iddri/Etude/201807-ST0518-SDGs-budget-EN\\_1.pdf](https://www.iddri.org/sites/default/files/PDF/Publications/Catalogue%20iddri/Etude/201807-ST0518-SDGs-budget-EN_1.pdf)

- **Mannheim** is gradually introducing SDGs in its evaluation of the budget cycles. Their aim is to create accounting mechanisms on how resources are allocated between the SDGs.
- In **Bonn**, budget planning is closely linked to SDG impact indicators. Three departments of the municipality are transforming their budget planning on the basis of the expected SDG impact.
- **Cologne** is moving from short-term to long-term budgeting by developing innovative financial forecasting models and by using SDG11 as an entry point to develop a ‘sustainability budget’ for the city.
- **Stuttgart** is moving towards sustainability budgeting by making a ‘climate check’ obligatory for city council submissions. Any political decision will be evaluated according to its CO<sub>2</sub> footprint. The council established a €200 million fund designated to climate protection and approved a cross-sectoral programme of action on climate protection.
- **Espoo**’s goal is to ensure that its carbon handprint is greater than its carbon footprint. A roadmap on how to achieve carbon-neutral Espoo by 2030 will be prepared in the city’s budget and financial plan for 2021-2023. The plan will be based on Espoo’s Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP) adopted in 2019, commitments on SDGs, as well as on goals set in Sustainable Espoo Programme.

## Partnership and co-creation

Working in partnerships across multiple levels is vital to implementing all SDGs. A dedicated SDG - Goal 17 - focusing on partnerships represents a key enabling framework that cuts across the 2030 Agenda.

At the same time, traditional multi-stakeholder partnerships may not be enough; building new, experimental, and unconventional alliances is necessary to harness the full potential of the 2030 Agenda. As the level of government closest to people, city authorities can already tap into a wealth of experience around co-creating policy solutions, citizens’ assemblies, civic dialogues and participatory budgeting.<sup>17</sup> Using this intelligence to promote collective action is a key driving force to implementing SDGs at local level and ensuring that policies meet the needs of citizens while increasing the sustainability of their impact. For example:

- **Vienna**’s vision of a sustainable, liveable city is built on the premise of broad civic involvement. Encouraging people to think creatively about new urban lifestyles and partnering with civil society, businesses, academia, culture and art is central to this endeavour. New initiatives, such as the ‘wien.welt.offen’<sup>18</sup> forum has been set up to

<sup>17</sup> See ‘Cities4Europe, Europe for citizens’ campaign website for examples <http://cities4europe.eurocities.eu>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.wienweltoffen.at/>

develop strategies, projects and measures to encourage new forms of public participation.

- **Bristol and Mannheim** developed a multi-stakeholder alliance representing the full spectrum of business, NGOs, public sector and academia which meets regularly to support the implementation of the SDGs. It provides a ‘reality-check’ on the direction and works as a catalyst for new activities, making sure the administration focuses on relevant goals and targets.
- In **Bonn**, the municipality has been working together with stakeholders from civil society, science, businesses, and politics in the development of its sustainability strategy. Bonn is also supporting SDG-oriented civil society organisations by organising a platform for all interested stakeholders to network local actors and plan joint activities. The city also supports SDG-related activities organised by civil society organisations with a small annual grant scheme.
- In **Liverpool** civil society is an actor engaged with the city hall through the Local 2030 Hub for the development of policy initiatives and projects on sustainability.
- **Hamburg** established local councils and advisory boards on sustainable development as well as an instrument called ‘comply or explain’ enhancing the transparency in political decision-making towards civil society. In **Mannheim**, civil society served as a consultative body for the development of goals and targets, and the over 1,500 answers provided formed the basis for the mission statement on SDGs.
- **Espoo** aims to work with its partners to develop pioneering solutions, products and services that could help tackle the challenges of sustainable development on a global scale. The city is preparing its Voluntary Local Review (VLR) for 2020 in an inclusive and participatory process with hundreds of people from local organisations.
- **Utrecht** understands the importance of creating civil society awareness on SDGs. Through a targeted campaign (see table 2) it raised the awareness of around 35% of the overall population, with the goal to reach 75%.
- **Stuttgart** had its own multi-stakeholder campaign to engage people on SDGs and to link them with local initiatives and practices. Civil society has also been involved in a partnership to design and implement SDG activities.<sup>19</sup>

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19 [www.meinstuttgart-meinewelt.de](http://www.meinstuttgart-meinewelt.de)

To increase awareness at city level, the City of Utrecht

- developed a local campaign, coordinated by the foundation Utrecht4globalgoals (U4GG) and sponsored by the municipality, to raise awareness of SDGs locally and inspire residents, civil society organisations and the private sector to be actively involved;
- supported the awareness campaign through a dedicated website: [www.utrecht4globalgoals.nl](http://www.utrecht4globalgoals.nl), which provides information about events and activities around the city;
- built a Global Goals Dashboard - to present local SDG-related data in a user-friendly way. The tool enables the user to make connections between various data points and policy areas, and to see where progress is being made by establishing a baseline;
- finances SDGs initiatives through small grants and serves as a bridge to develop partnership agreements between different sectors of the economy as opportunities to partner with local businesses connecting their products and services with the SDGs and promoting the SDGs



Table 1: Utrecht's SDGs awareness tools, picture of Mayor Jan van Zanen with students

### Using (digital) communication to inspire action

Most cities have developed communication activities on SDGs in the forms of events, workshops and official documents, both for internal and external stakeholders:

- **Bologna and Florence** use national communication portals<sup>20</sup> to coordinate their activities on SDGs. Serving as both an online and offline platform, these portals facilitate the decentralised creation of content and material, and the involvement of local stakeholders in the creation of high-level event and conferences.

<sup>20</sup> See the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) for further information: <https://asvis.it/asvis-italian-alliance-for-sustainable-development>

- **Stuttgart** co-created the event series ‘Agenda 2030 in action’ of a network of stakeholders from civil society, business and academia, using creative tools to approach citizens.
- **Bonn** developed the ‘SDG Days’ campaign. Launched in 2018 on the theme ‘17 days for the 17 goals’, it integrates many initiatives and organisations, and presents examples of SDG implementation in Bonn. With numerous events such as bicycle tours to sustainable projects, SDG poetry slams and pub quizzes, it aims to increase support for the implementation process.



SDG days in Bonn

- **Ghent** has been awarded the 2018 SDG Award for professionalising their communication activities on SDGs. Ghent developed impactful storytelling in a comprehensive campaign by bringing SDGs into everyday life, framing challenges as solutions, creating a sense of belonging and shared responsibility.
- **Bristol, Espoo and Utrecht** are experimenting with visualisation tools and gamification to engage younger citizens on the topic of sustainability, create a direct and personal relationship with the topic, and spark debates on best practices.



Youth engagement in the process of preparing a Voluntary Local Review, Espoo

## Introducing SDGs in local educational activities

Most European cities have a shared education competence with regional or national levels of government from preschool, primary and secondary education to vocational education and training, and adult education. Many cities are also going beyond their legal competences to meet the need for inclusive education and promote equal opportunities for all.<sup>21</sup> With education being an essential tool for sustainable development, champion cities are adopting a long-term perspective and building support for sustainable development initiatives by introducing the SDGs in both curricular and extra-curricular activities of schools and training centres.

- **Kiel** established the ‘Education for Sustainable Development’ initiative to bring ‘SDG-Project days’ to local schools. **Bristol** secured funding to create an interactive Global Goals education centre to help adults learn about and engage with the SDGs, and to make sustainability part of the curriculum of pupils between 9-13 years.
- **Munster** is a regional centre for education for sustainable development (ESD) in the federal network of North Rhine-Westphalia and offers training programmes for multipliers and pupils regarding the sustainability strategy of Munster. Amongst others, pupils can visit one non-formal learning facility per SDG in Munster, and can access additional educational sources online.
- **Chemnitz** developed resources for pupils and teachers by building a library and educational training on SDGs. **Bonn** continuously offers lectures and workshops on the SDGs through its Adult Education Centre, addressing a different SDG every six months. **Dortmund** runs a dedicated campaign ‘school for the future’, connecting schools with partners organisations to promote education for sustainable development.
- **Stuttgart** developed a chart on available training materials and services on the SDGs by different departments of the administration as well as civil society organisations. This tool is in line with the school curriculum and allows teachers to incorporate the SDGs as integral part of their subjects in class.<sup>22</sup>
- **Espoo and Vantaa**, with the support of civil society and digital entrepreneurs, developed an app which serves as a learning tool through small quizzes and e-learning modules on SDGs, with a version for adults and children.

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<sup>21</sup> On municipal responsibilities to enable inclusive education for all, see also the EUROCITIES report on Equal opportunities and access to the labour market in cities in Europe [http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES\\_report\\_Cities\\_delivering\\_Social\\_Rights.pdf](http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES_report_Cities_delivering_Social_Rights.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <https://solid.lhs.stuttgart.de/images/mdb/item/611196/141399.pdf>

## Promoting policy coherence and dialogue with other cities and regions of the world

Cities engage in a sustainability dialogue and peer-to-peer learning with partners globally while establishing key partnerships to develop common projects. The mayors of Amsterdam, Bonn, Dortmund, Helsinki, Strasbourg and Utrecht have attended and reported to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Ensuring policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD)<sup>23</sup> also means capturing externalities and spill-overs (unwanted consequences) arising from polluting activities or unsustainable use of resources to other parts of the world. While data to evaluate such impacts from European cities is still scarce, important initiatives such as the assessment of the ecological footprint of cities are being progressively developed.

- **Guimaraes**, along with five other Portuguese municipalities, is using a Footprint approach to assess its local ecological footprint versus available biocapacity. This approach identifies key unsustainable consumption patterns together with their drivers, informing ongoing policy debates on city sustainability assessments and progress towards meeting SDG12<sup>24</sup> (sustainable consumption and production).
- **Bilbao** is working with the Basque Region to develop a plan for policy coherence looking how it can reduce outsourcing emissions and reduce the costs of its production and consumption that affect directly other communities in the world.
- **Bonn** and **Chemnitz** are taking action to change local practices that affect sustainable development and have joined forces in the development of fair-trade purchasing practices. For example, Bonn's long-term partnerships with cities like Bukhara (Uzbekistan), Cape Coast (Ghana), Chengdu (China), La Paz (Bolivia), Minsk (Belarus) and Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) all focus on projects and expert exchange including enhancing resilience, advancing renewable energies, introducing recycling systems or reforesting sensitive biodiversity spots.

**Cologne, Dortmund, Stuttgart and Utrecht** are putting their expertise at the disposal of other cities to support decentralised cooperation with twinning, mentoring programmes and partnerships on innovation in areas such as climate mitigation and adaptation, waste management, youth, education, mobility and housing. Building on a long-standing cooperation agreement, Cologne aligned its work with SDGs to also reinforce equitable partnerships in climate, health and education with partner municipalities of Corinto and El Realejo (Nicaragua). Dortmund engages in a cooperation with Kumasi (Ghana), Dabola (Guinea) and Dura (Palestine) on climate adaptation, waste management and environmental education. Utrecht built a coalition to make an international contribution to SDG11 in Uganda. Utrecht is working with Leon, its sister city, to facilitate the take-up of innovation in areas such as waste management, education and housing. Stuttgart supports with its

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<sup>23</sup> OECD, Recommendation of the Council on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, OECD/LEGAL/0381, available at <https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/oecd-recommendation-on-policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development.htm>

<sup>24</sup> Galli, Iha, et al. Assessing the Ecological Footprint and biocapacity of Portuguese cities: Critical results for environmental awareness and local management. *Cities*. Volume 96. 2020 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.102442>.

approach of ‘Local empowerment - strengthening and connecting young actors’, the youth of its twin city Menzel Bourguiba (Tunisia) with capacity building projects.

## Science, research and innovation ecosystems

Scientific research, innovation and technology are central to understanding the conditions under which a transformation to sustainable development can take place and can help identify context-specific interactions between the SDGs to inform policy, technological and governance solutions to be implemented at local level. Cities produce 72% of all global greenhouse gas emissions and are places where decarbonisation strategies need to address energy, transport and buildings, foster green jobs while working to ensure that the most vulnerable citizens are not disproportionately affected by the transition. For this reason, researchers and urban policy makers have been calling for ‘urban science’, that reaches out across disciplines, is geared towards impact, and is recognised for its role in shaping cities.<sup>25</sup>

Creating knowledge hubs for SDGs and peer learning activities is proven to enhance local capacity building for sustainable urban development and strengthen cooperation amongst cities. Ambitious cities increasingly foster a quadruple helix approach to innovation, to support cooperation among public-private organisations, research institutes, civil society and citizens, where research and innovation is done with and for society.

- **Bristol** and **Munster** are working in close partnership with universities<sup>26</sup> to support closer integration of the SDGs in the city strategy and established a circle of scientific experts to explore issues around sustainable urban development.
- **Bonn, Malmo, Strasbourg, Stuttgart and Utrecht** are building SDG-oriented partnerships to overcome the gap between the ‘sustainability’ and ‘innovation’ community, while bringing together applied research, businesses and activists. Malmo is connecting the private sector network M21 with Forward Malmo, a network representing civil society. Utrecht is supporting the Social Impact Factory to develop new partnerships with applied research and businesses. In Bonn, an international sustainability hub has evolved and now connects more than 150 organisations in multiple thematic circles. Strasbourg is working on the links between social/circular economy and the SDGs. Stuttgart works together with businesses in the field of circular economy and supports its own municipal enterprises as well as private sector companies to develop reports according to *economy for the common good* criteria in line with the SDGs.

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<sup>25</sup> Acuto, Michele, et al. Science and the Future of Cities. Nature Sustainability. 2018 <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-017-0013-9>

<sup>26</sup> The role of the University of Bristol to support the SDG localisation process is reflected in Bristol's voluntary local review (2019) available at <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/cabot-institute-2018/documents/BRISTOL%20AND%20THE%20SDGS.pdf>

## Mission-driven approach to SDGs

On European level, the SDGs have helped to transform the science, research and innovation agenda, especially by inspiring a mission-oriented approach<sup>27</sup> to deliver solutions to complex societal challenges as the ones described above. As a result, the research and innovation mission on Climate-neutral and smart cities (see Figure 5) is specifically geared to support and promote European cities in their transformation towards climate-neutrality by 2030. A holistic, transformative mission for climate neutral cities, based on the concepts of citizen participation and inclusive society can contribute and help EU progress towards multiple SDGs.

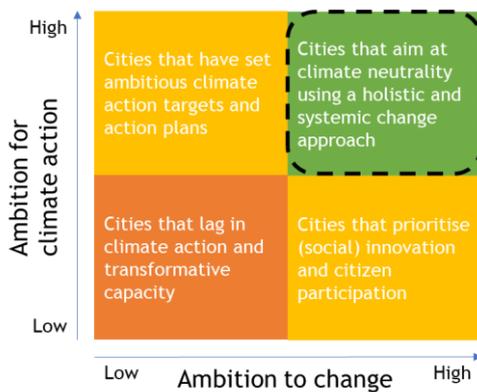


Figure 4: Mission Board on climate neutral and smart cities<sup>28</sup>

This strategic approach of bringing together various stakeholders to co-design and co-create solutions to grand challenges can also be observed at city level:

- **Manchester** is the first European city that is openly adopting a mission-oriented approach to tackle climate change, issuing ‘A Mission-Oriented Approach to Greater Manchester’s Clean Growth Challenge’ to make sure the city goes beyond small-scale and community-based solutions to achieve scale and reach SDGs targets.
- **Munich** is applying a similar approach in its cooperation with the Municipal Waste Agency to adapt the agency strategy and mission for the implementation of SDGs, both on sectorial goals (12) but also considering specific goals (4,7,8,9,13). This requires coordination and partnerships with businesses, research institutes and public sector agencies to build an action plan.
- **Gothenburg and Malmo** have been part of a research project within the national innovation agency ‘VINNOVA’ and ‘Mistra Urban Futures’ to create a common understanding of the challenges and develop solutions in a mission-oriented approach, with a clear attention to users and co-creation.

<sup>27</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe-next-research-and-innovation-framework-programme/missions-horizon-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe-next-research-and-innovation-framework-programme/missions-horizon-europe_en)

<sup>28</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/communities/sites/jrccties/files/100\\_climate\\_neutral\\_cities\\_report\\_.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/communities/sites/jrccties/files/100_climate_neutral_cities_report_.pdf)

- **Brussels** is forging partnerships with municipal agencies and builders to develop integrated approaches, for example using urban farming in social housing complexes
- **Stuttgart** is implementing an ambitious energy transition concept, working together with the academic and civil society community. The city participates as a model community in several federal research projects linked to SDG anchoring, monitoring and implementation.

## Accountability, evidence and monitoring

There is no unifying framework used by cities to report on SDG implementation, and local authorities face several challenges in availability, harmonisation and local disaggregation of data. However, while methods to integrate the local dimension in international reporting are currently under discussion at international level, cities have already started to report on SDGs. The European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews includes a useful overview of the reviews produced at local level and presents a collection of useful indicators especially relevant to European cities.<sup>29</sup>

Many cities are developing indicators and monitoring systems to see what works and successfully evaluate the steps taken towards the implementation of the SDGs with measurable targets. In some cases, cities are developing indicators in cooperation or with the support of national and regional authorities, or else in partnership with institutions and specialised agencies. This allows them to develop comprehensive sets of indicators with experimental and granular data, to build the capacity to monitor them, thereby achieving scale with limited resources. For instance, the Association of German cities is partnered with the Bertelsmann Foundation and Ghent is working in cooperation with the Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) to develop a set of indicators that can be used in the local policy framework.

Other examples:

- **Bristol** has tested and developed 75 targets that have been mapped into the 6 themes of Bristol's One City Plan and the objectives within the plan will help deliver the SDGs. This provides sustainability checklists that help communicating priorities in a concrete manner.
- **Helsinki** developed and used indicators to monitor and track progress on SDGs which resulted in the first Voluntary Local Review<sup>30</sup> submitted by a European city to the United Nations. In their analysis the authors stressed that it is important to have a smart number of indicators that are manageable, disaggregated and policy-relevant.
- **Utrecht** developed an SDGs dashboard which includes descriptive indicators to raise citizens awareness and engage them on the city's performance. Various cities

<sup>29</sup> European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/european-handbook-sdg-voluntary-local-reviews>

<sup>30</sup> <https://hel.fi/static/helsinki/julkaisut/SDG-VLR-Helsinki-2019-en.pdf>

followed and in **Bristol**, an SDGs dashboard portal attracted thousands of users through a series of composite indicators.

- **Malmo** has updated its yearly Sustainability Report to monitor their progress towards the 17 SDGs with nearly one hundred local indicators in total. The aim of the report is to, through pointing out strengths and challenges, lay the foundations for political prioritisation, strategic partnerships and local action.

While progress on SDG indicators is ongoing, the availability of disaggregated data at local level remains a key challenge to track progress. The latter is particularly challenging when it is necessary to account for the dynamic situation in cities and track the multiple deprivation factors related to poverty and inequalities where national data (often based on household surveys) is proving insufficient. Increasing availability and quality of geospatial data and supporting geographical information systems (GIS) can assist in filling critical data gaps and contribute to the process of effectively localising SDGs. In addition, open mapping initiatives which use crowdsourced geospatial data such as OpenStreetMap<sup>31</sup> can assist with micro level data on a real-time basis and identify critical community assets and vulnerabilities at local level, while fostering participatory mapping approaches.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.openstreetmap.org/about>

<sup>32</sup> Clark, Mikel, et al. *Open Mapping for the SDGs: A Practical Guide to Launching and Growing Open Mapping Initiatives at the National and Local Levels*. World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/967511563521548873/Open-Mapping-for-the-SDGs-A-Practical-Guide-to-Launching-and-Growing-Open-Mapping-Initiatives-at-the-National-and-Local-Levels>

# Recommendations

The implementation of the SDGs is an opportunity for Europe to accelerate the transition and to pioneer cutting-edge innovation that can inspire the world. Cities can be key drivers of this change. To unlock their potential to localise SDGs, we recommend to:

- Start from an **overall vision and priority setting** in line with the local context and adopt a proactive approach to identifying **critical interdependencies** between programmes and action areas to pursue a coherent approach to SDG implementation at local level;
- Use the SDG framework as the explicit and formal **reference for budget procedures** and evaluation at city level, encouraging each department to identify how their strategies and actions would benefit sustainability in other policy areas within the competence of the local government;
- Based on identified urban challenges, focus on the **means of implementation** by mobilising local governance, finance, collaborative partnerships, science, and innovation to scale up policies and harness systemic change;
- Develop **local leadership** for SDGs by investing in education, training and life-long learning to increase problem-solving skills and ownership of the agenda;
- Use the recently adopted EU taxonomy for sustainable activities<sup>33</sup> to promote **sustainable local investments** by defining clear criteria for investments and divestments;
- Use **local purchasing power** to promote circular economy solutions and sustainable business practices as a direct contribution to inclusive, transparent and sustainable value chains;
- Strengthen **knowledge partnerships** and collaboration with the scientific community, civil society and private sector to strengthen the urban science-policy interface, increase local capacity building and scale up sustainable solutions;
- Make use of the common vision and universal language of the SDGs to form partnerships with cities in and outside of Europe to **increase peer-learning** and replicate sustainable practices while increasing the understanding of international spill-over effects to other parts of the world;
- Step up efforts for **assessment and SDG monitoring** by strengthening data collection at local level, including improving availability and access to geospatial data and by enhancing data literacy among decision makers;
- Build **sustainable urban development strategies** (SUD) to promote integrated local investment, channelling European cohesion policy funding to sustainable development needs

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<sup>33</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/sustainable-finance-teg-taxonomy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/sustainable-finance-teg-taxonomy_en)

- **Explore synergies** with the European Green Deal and EU instruments beyond cohesion policy funds, such as Horizon Europe, LIFE+, InvestEU, Creative Europe, Digital Europe, as well as the financial support of the European Investment Bank to mainstream sustainable development and scale up policies and projects;
- Ensure that a **Voluntary Local Review** goes **beyond a business-as-usual approach** of adding an SDG perspective to existing local policies; use it instead to launch a city-wide reflection process on mainstreaming sustainable development, harnessing stakeholder partnerships, identifying critical interdependencies, gaps and barriers to SDG implementation and improving local data collection capacity.