Localising the SDGs in a changing landscape

OECD Regional Development Papers

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This paper was authorised for publication by Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, Director, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities, OECD.

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Preface

The OECD and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) are delighted to introduce the results of a survey jointly conducted between 22 February and 9 June 2023 by the OECD, SDSN and the European Committee of the Regions on localising the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a changing landscape.

A series of significant shocks in recent years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, higher inflation and energy prices, disruptions to global supply chains, and heightened geopolitical tensions, have raised hurdles on the path toward achieving the SDGs. Only 15% of them are considered to be on track for achievement by the 2030 deadline. Progress towards 48% of the SDG targets is currently insufficient, and 37% are either stagnating or regressing, including on key targets such as those related to poverty, hunger and climate action.

More specifically, rises in price levels and energy costs, alongside disruptions in global food markets, have adversely affected SDG targets related to poverty and inequality (SDGs 1 and 10), affordable energy (SDG 7) and food security (SDG 2). Our survey of over 175 local and regional governments (LRGs) revealed a decline in living standards due to inflationary pressures and the repercussions of recent shocks among 80% of respondents. Over 70% indicated an increase in electricity costs, putting the achievement of SDG 7 at risk, while around half noted the growing importance of combating hunger (SDG 2).
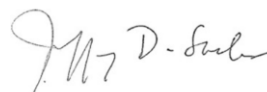
Cities and regions play a pivotal role in steering the SDGs back on track. The principle of subsidiarity emphasises the importance of taking decisions at the territorial level where they will have their maximum effect. Moreover, in 2021, LRGs accounted for 55% of public investment in OECD countries, and, because they are typically responsible for critical areas such as water, housing, transport, infrastructure, land use and climate change, at least 105 of the 169 targets that underlie the 17 SDGs are contingent upon the active engagement of LRGs.

This paper paints a comprehensive picture of how recent shocks the COVID-19 pandemic, a changing landscape and rising living costs have affected progress on the localisation of the SDGs at the local level. It also suggests potential ways forward for local and regional governments to harness the SDGs for crafting sustainable urban and regional development policies, combating rising price levels, incentivising decarbonisation in both production and in consumption, promoting sustainable food systems and reducing food waste. Both our organisations are also leading work on financing the SDGs in cities and regions, including via the SDSN Global Commission for Urban SDG Finance that which will publish its final recommendations in the summer of 2024.

Our two institutions take great pride in this collaborative endeavour and look forward to supporting local, regional and national governments further on their journey towards achieving the SDGs for a more sustainable and resilient future.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CoR	European Committee of the Regions
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
LRGs	Local and regional governments
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goal
SDSN	United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network
UN	United Nations
VNR	Voluntary national review

Executive summary

This policy paper presents the results of a survey jointly conducted by the OECD, the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) between February and June 2023 on the localisation of the SDGs in a changing landscape. Findings show that local and regional governments (LRGs) are actively engaged in the implementation of the SDGs, notably through awareness-raising campaigns, dedicated strategies for the SDGs and indicator systems to track progress. Many LRGs have also applied the SDGs as a guiding framework to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the survey has revealed governance challenges such as a lack of resources for the implementation of the SDGs, shifting political priorities and insufficient vertical co-ordination. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the survey puts the spotlight on the declining standards of living in many cities and regions (SDGs 1 and 10), increases in energy price levels and associated measures such as increasing demand for renewable and domestic energy sources (SDG 7) as well as the growing importance of food security (SDG 2).

Political leadership is the main success factor in targeting the SDGs at the local level, while the lack of financial resources represents a challenge

- Most cities and regions (62%) use awareness-raising campaigns as the most common action in their work to localise the SDGs, followed by a dedicated strategy or action plan for the SDGs (56%).
- LRGs consider political leadership to be the most important factor in achieving the localisation of the SDGs in cities and regions (76%).
- LRGs are facing several challenges when it comes to the implementation of the SDGs, notably a lack of financial resources (64%) and shifting political priorities, e.g. after local or regional elections (52%).

The SDGs served as a key framework to guide cities and regions in recovering from the COVID-19 crisis

- Around two thirds of LRGs are using the SDGs to guide policy making, which represents an increase of nearly 25 percentage points compared to before the pandemic (39%).
- Almost half (45%) of LRGs consider the People dimension (SDGs 1 to 5) to be the most important post-COVID-19 challenge, which encompasses the SDGs on poverty, food, health, education and gender.

The cost of living, energy and food security have taken a deep toll on the current landscape

- Most LRGs (83%) reported that living standards have worsened because of the increase in the cost of living. In response to rising prices, two-thirds of responding LRGs have implemented measures to support vulnerable groups such as the provision of warm meals and financial support programmes for families in need. To save on heating and electricity costs, 62% of LRGs have reduced the average temperature in public buildings, while 46% have cut back on street lighting.

- For 45% of LRGs, higher cost of living has reduced available funding for SDG implementation as subnational governments have prioritised expenditures on critical and essential services to address the short-term impacts of the crises.

- SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy has gained importance for LRGs since the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Twenty-three percent of responding LRGs reported it had become their top priority, while an additional 57% stated that it had increased in relevance.

- The growing pressures on the international energy market have led 36% of LRGs or their public energy provider to ramp up the share of renewable energy in their energy mix. Thirty-six percent also reported that they reduced their dependence on imported energy.

- Shifting from fossil fuels to zero-carbon sources of energy (44%) and improving energy efficiency in the built environment (37%) are the 2 main priorities of LRGs to achieve SDG 7.

- LRGs have implemented a variety of measures to address SDG 2 Zero hunger in light of increasingly frequent disruptions in the global food supply chain, notably setting up food banks and food distribution mechanisms for vulnerable populations (46%).

- The most common action of LRGs to achieve sustainable food systems is the promotion of local food production (60%) while promoting a circular economy approach (60%) is the most common programme to reduce food waste.

Ways forward to make the most of the SDGs in a changing landscape

The survey has shed light on how LRGs are localising the SDGs and using the 2030 Agenda to navigate today's multi-crisis world, including post-COVID-19 recovery. Yet, their journey to achieve the SDGs has been put at risk by the cost-of-living crisis, high energy prices and the ensuing funding gap for LRGs' SDG efforts. Possible strategies for local, regional and national governments to advance the SDGs in the current landscape could be to:

- **Leverage the SDGs to design sustainable urban and regional development policies**. LRGs could:
  - Align local or regional development strategies with the SDGs. The recovery phase should be leveraged as an opportunity to enhance resilience and preparedness for future shocks and crises, including by using the SDGs to periodically assess progress and make necessary adjustments as conditions evolve.
  - Boost political leadership for the SDGs by actively engaging in national and international city networks that enable peer-to-peer learning on the 2030 Agenda and help adopt the SDGs as a policy-making and monitoring framework.
  - Ensure adequate financial resources and capacity for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, for example by incorporating the SDGs into budgeting processes, using the SDGs to attract investment through innovative financial mechanisms such as municipal or regional sustainability bonds or local crowdfunding platforms for investment and considering the recommendations of the SDSN Global Commission for Urban SDG Finance.

- **Combat rising price levels to support SDG 1 No poverty and SDG 10 Reduced inequalities**. For example, LRGs could:
  - o Improve housing affordability by developing targeted solutions for the most vulnerable, such as temporary rent subsidies or eviction preventions.
  - o Expand social safety net programmes, including unemployment benefits and food assistance, to cushion those in need.
  - o Enhance public transportation options and affordability (e.g. temporary reduction in ticket prices for those most in need) to counter the financial burden of increasing fuel prices and incentivise the usage of low-carbon mobility options to help meet climate objectives.

- **Incentivise decarbonisation both in production and consumption**. To achieve SDG 7 and encourage the decarbonisation of energy production, energy efficiency improvements in buildings and the electrification of current fossil fuel use, LRGs could:
  - o Negotiate long-term power purchase agreements with energy providers to finance the installation of greener sources of energy and harness group purchasing, such as Community Choice Aggregation, to procure a less carbon-intensive mix of energy.
  - o Promote the generation of local energy for local consumption, e.g. by incentivising district heating or cooling systems to foster more sustainable and energy-efficient alternatives compared to individual building-based solutions.
  - o Set decarbonisation goals, standards and regulations and lead by example to decarbonise government-owned and -operated infrastructure to achieve SDG 7 at the local level. For example, develop and implement building standards and green procurement policies for construction and refurbishment, which include a focus on whole life carbon and circularity, while financing energy efficiency retrofits for buildings and infrastructure through green bonds.

- **Promote sustainable food systems and reduce food waste**. To advance sustainable food systems (SDG 2) and incentivise the reduction of food waste (SDG 12), LRGs could:
  - o Adopt a holistic approach to food systems by developing urban food strategies that intertwine food policy with urban development strategies.
  - o Develop a comprehensive circular economy strategy that incentivises circular food supply chains and encourages the purchase of goods and services from circular businesses.
  - o Collaborate with organisations that rescue surplus food and distribute it to those in need, e.g. food banks and promote the use of technology-based solutions like food recovery applications that connect surplus food providers with recipients, minimising waste.

1 Introduction

The role of cities and regions in achieving the SDGs amid geopolitical uncertainty

Cities and regions hold a pivotal role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Established by the United Nations in 2015, the 17 SDGs aim to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment and foster prosperity for all by 2030. Local and regional governments (LRGs) are crucial partners of national governments in ensuring the effective, location-specific implementation of the SDGs. According to OECD estimates, at least 105 out of the 169 targets that underlie the 17 SDGs depend on the active engagement of local and regional governments (OECD, 2020[1]). In 2021, subnational levels of government in OECD countries accounted for 55% of public investment and 37% of total public spending (OECD, 2023[2]). Their activities span numerous policy areas, including but not limited to housing, transportation, infrastructure, land use, waste management, access to clean drinking water and sanitation, energy efficiency and addressing climate change. However, currently, 48% of SDG targets are moderately or severely off track and a further 37% are stagnating or have even regressed (UN, 2023[3]). These include crucial targets related to poverty reduction, hunger eradication and addressing the pressing issue of climate change. The European Union and its member states are also facing notable gaps towards the achievement of the SDGs, including SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities (Eurostat, 2023[4]; Lafortune et al., 2024[5]). Further complicating efforts to reach these targets, cities and regions are confronted with specific challenges when it comes to financing sustainable development (Birch, Rodas and Drumm, 2023[6]). They are caught between front-line responsibility for the delivery of many services and infrastructure investment and back-of-the-line access to public financing: national governments, by and large, continue to collect most revenue to fund public investments and social services (Sachs et al., 2023[7]).

The current uncertain geopolitical context adds obstacles to achieving the SDGs. The ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the repercussions of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, along with the associated rise in price levels and energy costs and impacts on global food markets, have far-reaching implications for numerous policy domains and the overarching pursuit of the SDGs. This is, in particular, the case for those SDG targets related to poverty and inequality (SDGs 1 and 10), clean and affordable energy (SDG 7) and food security (SDG 2). Cities and regions face the highest levels of inflation across OECD countries in over 3 decades, with an average of 9.5% in 2022 and an estimated 6.9% in 2023 (OECD, 2023[8]; 2024[9]). Recent economic indicators indicate a slight slowdown in gross domestic product (GDP) growth, with attacks on ships in the Red Sea raising shipping costs and lengthening delivery times, disrupting production schedules and raising price pressures (OECD, 2024[10]). Industrial production reflects such uncertainty, with its global growth having slowed down from 6.2% in 2021 to 2.3% in 2022 as a result of inflation, energy price shocks, disruptions in supply chains for raw materials and intermediate goods, and a broader global economic deceleration (OECD, 2024[11]; UN, 2023[3]). The agricultural sector is under strain from rising energy and fertiliser prices, compounded by more frequent and severe climate-related disasters, posing threats to food security. Inflation in food prices is eroding income gains, raising additional barriers to accessing food around the globe. In 2022, 9.2% of the global population experienced chronic hunger, up from 7.9% in 2019, with projections indicating that more than 600 million people could be facing hunger by 2030, the endpoint of the SDGs (UN, 2023[3]). Being closest to their citizens, cities

and regions will be key to navigating these challenges and steering the 2030 Agenda back on course through targeted measures to tackle the cost-of-living crisis, facilitate access to clean and affordable energy, and improve food security.

The OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape

The OECD, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) launched a joint survey in 2023 to take stock of the progress made by cities and regions in implementing the SDGs in a changing international landscape marked by shocks and crises. The survey analyses local and regional governments' efforts to achieve the SDGs and assesses how cities and regions are using the SDGs in their post-COVID recovery. It also examines how the SDGs and three key policy areas (cost of living, energy, food) have been affected by crises such as COVID-19 and the fallout of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, including high inflation, disruptions in global food value chains and rising energy prices. The survey questionnaire was divided into three sections: i) implementation of the SDGs by cities and regions, ii) SDGs for COVID-19 recovery in cities and regions; and iii) the SDGs and key policy areas affected by current crises (Box 1.1).

Box 1.1. The OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape, 2023

Conducted from 22 February 2023 to 9 June 2023, the survey gathered answers from 243 respondents, 72% of which came from European Union (EU) countries, 6% from non-EU OECD member countries and 22% from non-OECD member countries. The most represented countries were Poland (13%), Italy (12%) and Germany (9%), followed by Spain (6%) and Portugal (5%).

The aim of this survey was to provide a snapshot of the views of different local and regional stakeholders. Almost half of responses were received from municipalities (48%): 23% had fewer than 50 000 inhabitants, 12% between 50 000 and 200 000 inhabitants, 8% between 200 000 and 500 000, and 5% from large cities (more than 500 000 inhabitants). Respondents also came from regions (18%) and intermediary entities such as counties or provinces (7%) in countries with 3 levels of subnational government or other local and regional bodies. The remaining 27% of respondents represent other categories of territorial stakeholders, such as academia and research institutions, non-governmental organisations or public bodies. The analysis treated governments and territorial stakeholders as two separate categories to distinguish between formal governing bodies and other entities.

Survey structure (see detailed survey in Annex A)

1. Cities' and regions' implementation of the SDGs.
    a. Policies and actions adopted for the implementation of the SDGs.
    b. Types of data used to track progress on the SDGs.
    c. Success factors for SDG implementation.
    d. Governance challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda.
2. The relevance of the SDGs in the COVID-19 recovery phase for cities and regions.
    a. The role of the SDGs as a framework for the COVID-19 recovery phase.
    b. Post-COVID-19 challenges in cities and regions.
3. SDGs and key policy areas affected by the current crisis.

> *Cost of living*
> a. Impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the standard of living in cities and regions.
> b. Policy areas most affected by the increased cost of living.
> c. Measures to respond to increasing price levels.
> d. Impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the work on the SDGs.
>
> *Energy*
> a. Impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on SDG 7 Clean and affordable energy.
> b. Impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on the cost of electricity.
> c. Responses to growing pressures on the international energy market.
> d. Consumption-based emission targets.
> e. Policies and strategies to best transition to cleaner energy production.
>
> *Food*
> a. Prioritisation of SDG 2 Zero hunger.
> b. Actions to address SDG 2 in cities and regions.
> c. Measures put in place to achieve sustainable food systems.
> d. Programmes implemented to reduce food waste.

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[7]

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[3]

2 Snapshot of SDG implementation in cities and regions

Awareness-raising campaigns are the primary vehicle that local and regional governments deploy to achieve the SDGs

Awareness-raising campaigns are the most common action adopted by cities and regions for the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Almost two-thirds (62%) of responding local and regional governments stated they used awareness-raising campaigns, followed by a dedicated strategy or action plan for the SDGs (56%). The awareness-raising campaign already ranked top in the 2021 OECD-European Committee of the Regions (CoR) survey of local and regional governments (Box 2.1). In the new survey, more than half (51%) of respondents also reported using existing indicators or setting up new measurement systems to track progress on the SDGs. Less common are governance arrangements, such as setting up an internal committee or taskforce working horizontally across departments (34%) or a sustainable development council attached to a high-level decision maker (16%). Responses from territorial stakeholders reflect this pattern, with 59% engaging in awareness-raising activities and 44% having a dedicated SDG strategy or action plan in place (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Which of these policies and actions has your city/region adopted for the implementation of the SDGs in your territory?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible
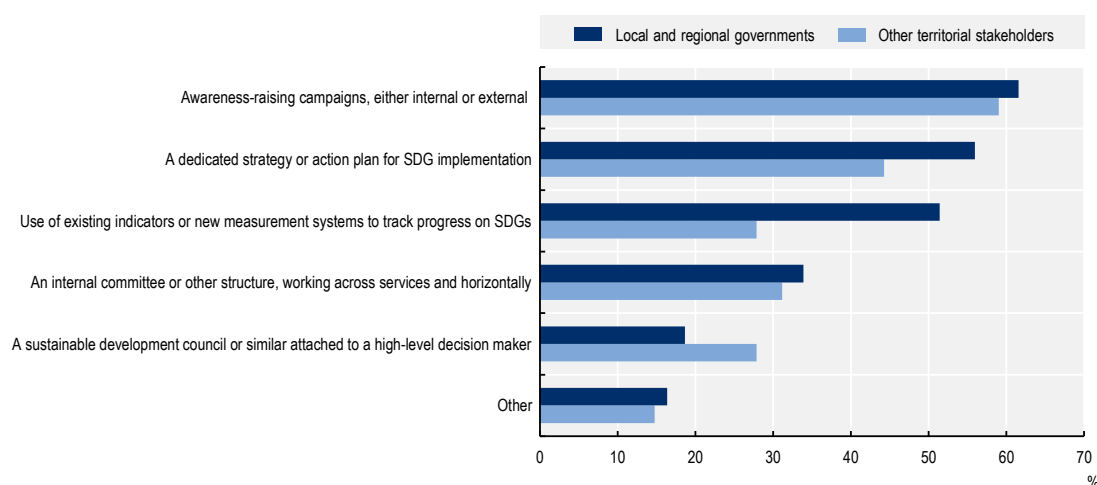
Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 177; number of responses from other territorial stakeholders: 61.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

Box 2.1. Key findings from the previous OECD-CoR survey (2021) on the SDGs as a framework for COVID-19 recovery in cities and regions

From 10 May 2021 to 18 June 2021, the OECD and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) conducted a survey on "The SDGs as a framework for COVID-19 recovery in cities and regions" across cities and regions. The survey targeted representatives of local and regional governments as well as other stakeholders at the local and regional levels (more than 140 respondents) to collect examples and evidence of their work on the 2030 Agenda in the COVID-19 recovery phase. The OECD and CoR conducted this second survey after a first on "The key contribution of cities and regions to sustainable development" between December 2018 and March 2019.[1]

Overall, most local and regional governments (60%) responding to the survey considered the SDGs to be an appropriate framework for designing a holistic approach to the COVID-19 recovery. Forty percent of local and regional governments (LRGs) had already used the SDGs as a policy-making tool before the pandemic and started using them to shape their recovery strategies. Forty-four percent had not used the SDGs prior to the pandemic but were planning to do so. Sixty-eight percent of LRGs using the SDGs for recovery decided to do so to shape new plans, policies and strategies based on the 2030 Agenda or to adapt existing ones. In terms of challenges, capacity (staff and skills) and funding gaps were the main bottlenecks preventing LRGs from using the SDGs to guide their recovery strategies for 47% and 44% of respondents respectively.

Among the measures put in place to advance the 2030 Agenda, indicators and measurement systems to track progress on the SDGs and awareness-raising campaigns were LRGs' most widely adopted actions to advance the SDGs (41%). At the same time, political leadership played a key role. Thirty-eight percent of respondents considered it the most important success factor for implementing the SDGs. However, only half of surveyed LRGs and territorial stakeholders contributed to their national government's Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), suggesting potential for improving co-operation between different levels of government.

In terms of key policy priorities for cities and regions in the COVID-19 recovery phase, almost 60% of them prioritised the efficient delivery of social and community services for disadvantaged groups and equitable access to education to reduce inequalities. A third of them considered switching from fossil fuels to zero-carbon sources and decarbonising the built environment as the two most promising strategies for transitioning to cleaner energy production. Almost half of cities and regions (49%) identified improving multi-modal transport, such as active and clean urban mobility, as a key priority for sustainable mobility and accessibility. Thirty-six percent of LRGs considered digitalisation as a top priority for the transition towards smarter cities and regions. Finally, 41% of cities and regions highlighted stakeholder engagement in local and regional policy making as the most effective contribution to the SDG to strengthen citizens' trust in their governments.

1. Detailed findings of the first OECD-CoR survey can be found in OECD (2020[1]).
Source: OECD (2022[2]), "The Sustainable Development Goals as a framework for COVID-19 recovery in cities and regions", https://doi.org/10.1787/6d25b59b-en.

Political leadership at the local and regional levels is the most important success factor in SDG implementation for subnational governments

Political leadership is considered the most relevant success factor for the localisation of the SDGs. Political leadership at the local and regional levels is the top success factor for both LRGs (76%) and territorial

stakeholders (49%) who responded to this survey question. Over 50% of LRGs and more than 40% of territorial stakeholders also responded that peer-to-peer learning with other cities and regions and dedicated funding are instrumental for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Territorial stakeholders responded that citizen engagement (45%) and political leadership at the national level (34%) were important success factors for the localisation of the SDGs, i.e. higher shares than those reported by LRGs (38% and 28% respectively) (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. What contributes to the success of SDG implementation in your city/region?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible
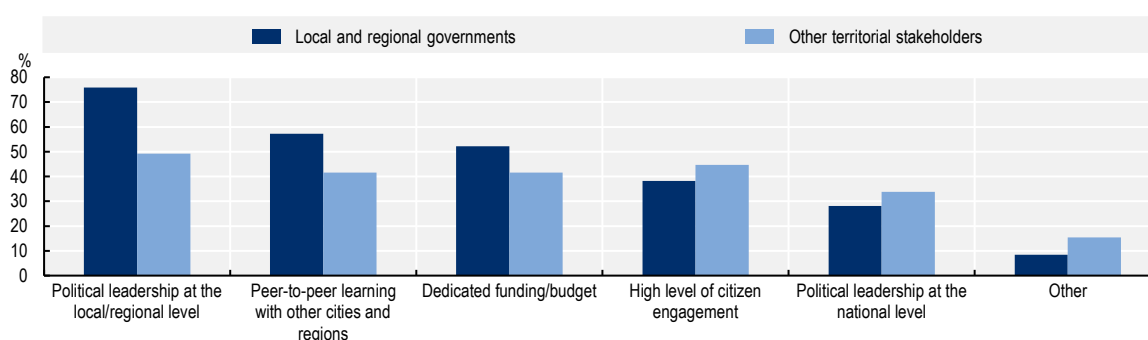
Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 178; number of responses from other territorial stakeholders: 65.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

For most local and regional governments, a lack of financial resources is a key governance challenge for implementing the SDGs

A majority of local and regional governments cited a lack of financial resources as a governance challenge for implementing the SDGs. The main challenge identified by local and regional governments (64% of respondents) was a lack of financial resources. In comparison, 52% of territorial stakeholders responded that a lack of financial resources was a governance challenge. LRGs also indicated that shifting political priorities (49%), a lack of vertical co-ordination (44%) and a lack of awareness (43%) were among the governance challenges they faced. Responses from territorial stakeholders differed slightly from LRG responses. Higher percentages of territorial stakeholders stated that shifting political priorities (60%), a lack of vertical co-ordination (55%), awareness (60%) and horizontal co-ordination (54%) were key governance challenges for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Both LRGs and territorial stakeholders considered data availability to be less of an obstacle. Twenty-four percent of local and regional governments and 37% of territorial stakeholders indicated that a lack of data represented a governance challenge (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. What are the governance challenges your city/region has faced or is currently facing in implementing the 2030 Agenda?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 176; number of responses from other territorial stakeholders: 65.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

Local and regional governments track SDG progress using local, regional and national data

A significant majority of LRGs use local, regional and national data to monitor their progress in achieving the SDGs. As mentioned above, more than half (51%) of LRGs reported tracking their SDG progress by using existing indicators or setting up new measurement systems. Seventy percent of respondents from LRGs use local and regional sources of data (official statistics) to track their SDG progress. Sixty-four percent use national data sources to do so. Additionally, 41% of LRG respondents use qualitative assessments (e.g. case studies, interviews, workshops) in tracking SDG progress. Fewer LRGs used private (21%), international (20%), open (18%) or unconventional (16%) sources of data. There are also considerable differences between the responses of LRGs and those of territorial stakeholders. Territorial stakeholders used qualitative (48%), international (36%), private (25%), open source (31%), and unconventional sources of data (22%) more frequently than local and regional governments did to track SDG progress. Conversely, territorial stakeholders used local and regional data sources much less frequently (53% compared to 70% among LRGs) (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4. What type of data do you use to track progress on the SDGs?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 176; number of responses from other territorial stakeholders: 65.
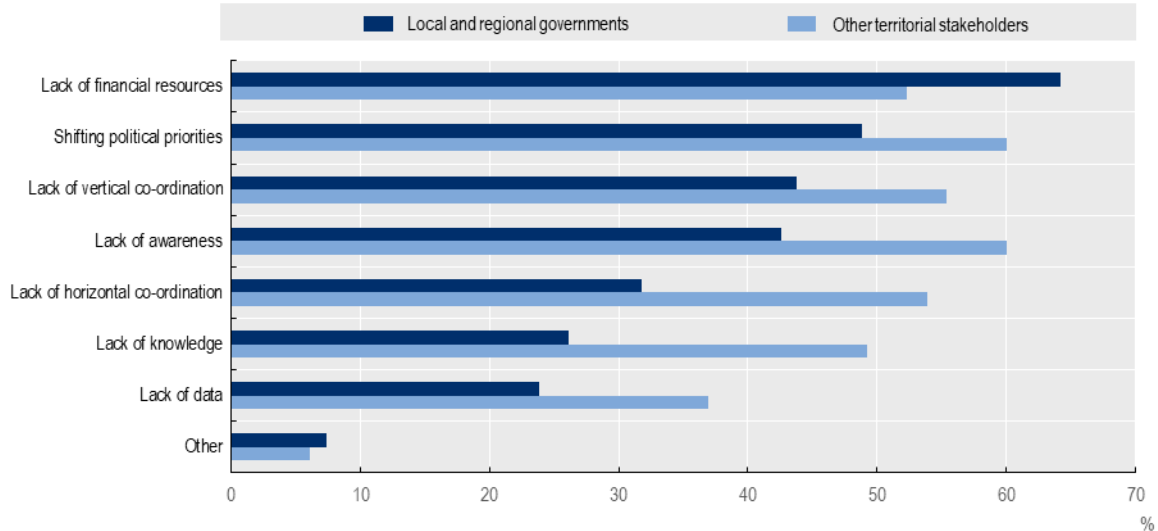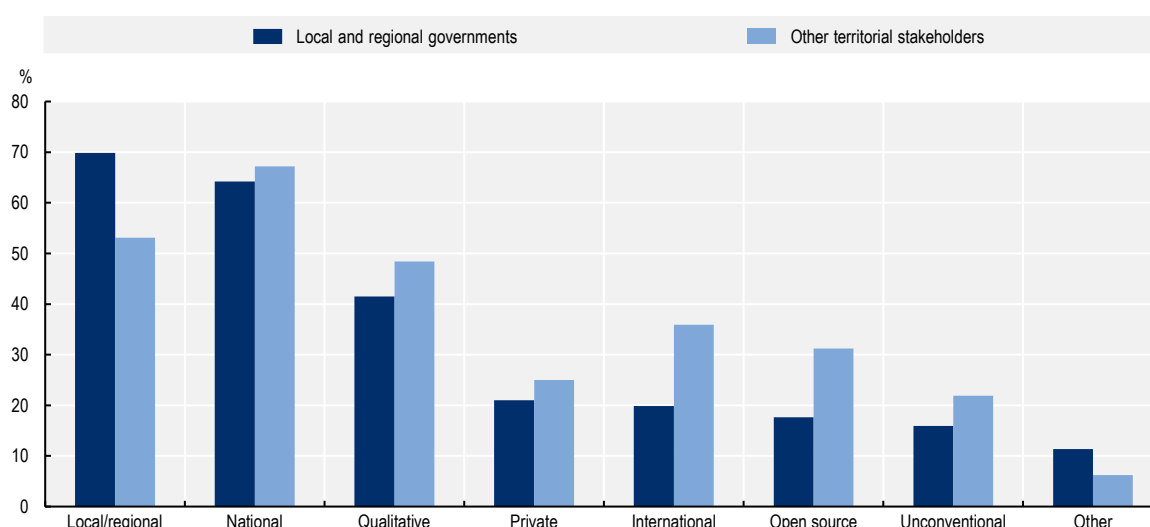Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

Ways forward

Some possible ways forward for LRGs to harness the SDGs to shape sustainable development policies, track progress and secure sufficient resources could be to:

- **Leverage the SDGs to design sustainable urban and regional development policies.** To advance sustainable development in their city or region, additional subnational governments could mainstream the SDGs in their policies and strategies for urban and sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda provides a long-term vision for strategies, plans and policies with a clear and common milestone in 2030. If sustainable development strategies already exist, integrating the framework of the SDGs into them allows LRGs to overcome the challenges of sector-based planning and shift from a sectoral to a multi-sectoral and holistic approach in the design and implementation of local and regional development strategies and policies. It also enables them to prioritise their main sustainability targets while considering and managing the links, impacts and trade-offs concerning other SDGs (e.g. between climate and air quality, sustainable mobility and inequalities).

- **Boost political leadership for the SDGs.** Given the importance of political leadership at the subnational level, with over 70% of LRGs reporting their contribution to the success of SDG implementation, local and regional governments could expand their outreach by actively engaging in national and international city networks, including through enabling peer-to-peer learning on the 2030 Agenda. Such engagement could help leverage local and regional political leadership to increase the uptake of the SDGs as a policy-making tool and monitoring framework, but also to raise awareness among internal and external stakeholders about the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, civil servants need to be vocal about the advantages of the SDGs as a policy-making framework and advocate for their implementation at the local level, thereby raising the awareness of their political leaders about the 2030 Agenda.

- **Set up localised SDG indicator frameworks or align existing indicator frameworks with the SDGs to track the progress of the 2030 Agenda.** When starting to use indicators to track

progress of the 2030 Agenda or further refining existing frameworks, LRGs should define their strategic goals for SDG monitoring, e.g. if they want to demonstrate progress against national or international averages, prioritise local policy decisions with reference to specific SDGs, assess the impact of existing policies against SDG targets and/or communicate with citizens and other stakeholders, which all involve both internal processes and capacity for collecting and analysing data and public-facing tools (e.g. an online portal or database) for public dissemination. In particular, LRGs should:

o Assess the availability and sources of data and their capacity to collect, process, maintain and disseminate these on a regular basis. This could inform the selection of indicators based on data availability and political priorities.

o Allocate dedicated funding and/or resources to ensure data are regularly processed, updated and shared. Many of these steps can be taken through targeted collaborations with universities, research institutes and the private sector, allowing LRGs to expand the range and types of data used for SDG monitoring and policy evaluation. The OECD, Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and other organisations also offer tools for LRGs to align this work with existing harmonised, comparable approaches such as the OECD localised indicator framework for measuring the distance to achieving the SDGs in cities and regions.

o Bridge the data gap, which will be essential for better monitoring given that 24% of LRGs responded that a lack of data remained a challenge for them and that sources beyond administrative data (e.g. qualitative, international, open and unconventional [social media, mobile tracking, etc.]) remain underexploited. This involves not only accessing these types of data, including through tools like artificial intelligence and relevant software but also making resources available and building capacity to incorporate them effectively into SDG monitoring and broader policy evaluation frameworks.

o Set up a multi-level governance framework that allows for horizontal co-ordination within local or regional government departments and among territorial stakeholders to determine clear roles and responsibilities for collecting, validating and sharing data. LRGs should also co-ordinate vertically with other levels of government, assessing how their local monitoring framework contributes to or overlaps with existing national frameworks and initiatives, including country-level VNR processes.

- **Secure the necessary resources and capacity for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.** LRGs should use the SDGs as a tool to allocate budgets to ensure the allocation of sufficient resources to implement the 2030 Agenda and foster continuity over time (OECD, 2022[3]). This exercise requires adequate local SDG monitoring as described in the previous recommendation in order to set targets, assess progress and prioritise policies based on specific SDGs. LRGs can also use the SDGs to attract investment, whether through innovative financial mechanisms like municipal or regional sustainability bonds, local investment crowdfunding platforms or contingency funds tied to achieving specific SDGs. They can also encourage private sector investment to fund urban development projects aligned with the SDGs through sustainable public procurement and public-private partnerships. Finally, LRGs can also participate in or learn from the growing number of peer-to-peer learning groups and international city networks that are seeking to address the lack of subnational financial resources for the SDGs. For example, the SDSN and the University of Pennsylvania, with the participation of the OECD, have convened the SDSN Global Commission for Urban SDG Finance, a commission to analyse barriers to urban SDG finance, evaluate existing proposals to improve access to urban finance and develop new strategies and mechanisms to better align the global financial architecture with urban needs (SDSN, 2023[4]).

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OECD (2020), *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis report*, OECD Urban Policy Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/e86fa715-en. [1]

SDSN (2023), "SDSN Partners with the Penn Institute for Urban Research to establish a Global Commission for Urban SDG Finance", United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, https://www.unsdsn.org/sdsn-partners-with-the-penn-institute-for-urban-research-to-establish-a-global-commission-for-urban-sdg-finance (accessed on 4 October 2023). [4]

3 The role of the SDGs for COVID-19 recovery in cities and regions

Around half of surveyed LRGs use the SDGs in the COVID-19 recovery phase

Around 39% of local and regional governments (LRGs) used the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) before the pandemic and are using them to address the COVID-19 recovery phase. The most reported response was using the SDGs before the pandemic and incorporating them in the recovery phase. Another quarter of respondents reported that they had not yet used the SDGs as a framework for COVID-19 recovery but were planning to do so. Approximately 23% of respondents reported not using the SDGs and not intending to incorporate them into the COVID-19 recovery phase. A small proportion of respondents (9%) seized the opportunity of the COVID-19 recovery phase to initiate work on the SDGs. Territorial stakeholders exhibited a similar pattern, as 39% had used the SDGs before the pandemic and continued to do so during the COVID-19 recovery phase. Among all territorial stakeholders, 29% intend to integrate the SDGs into the recovery phase, although they had not used them before (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Are you using the SDGs as a framework for the COVID-19 recovery phase?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options
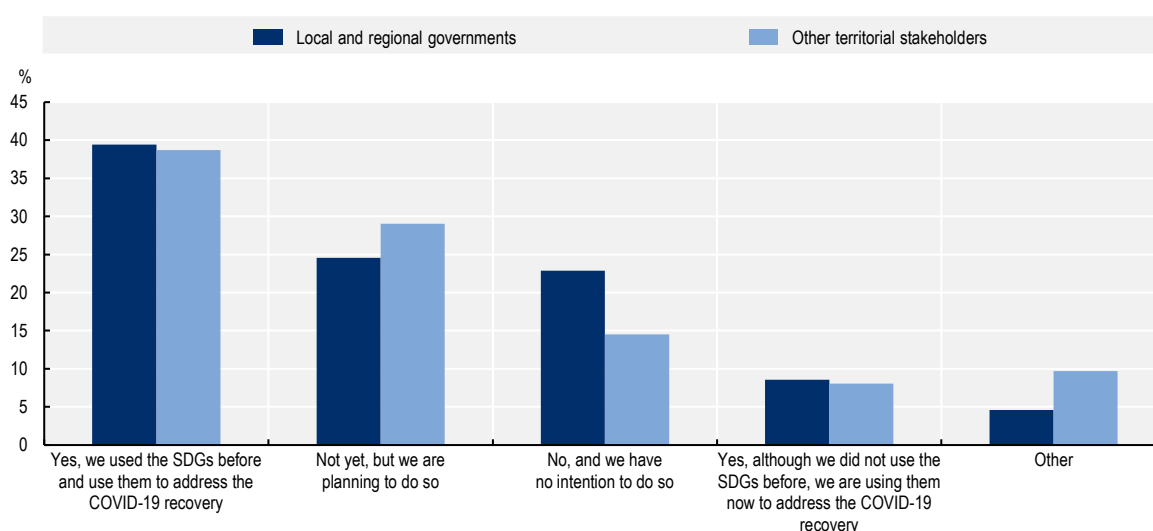
Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 175; number of responses from other territorial stakeholders: 62.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

The people dimension is the top post-COVID-19 challenge at the subnational level

Among the 5 dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, 45% of LRGs consider the people dimension (SDGs 1-5) to be the most important post-COVID-19 challenge. Responses underline the importance of the SDGs on poverty, food, health, education and gender. These SDGs had already emerged as the most important challenges in the previous 2021 OECD-CoR survey (Box 2.1). The second-most important post-COVID-19 challenge for LRGs is the prosperity dimension (SDGs 7-11), with 22% of responses. It includes the SDGs on energy, economic growth, innovation and infrastructure, inequality and sustainable cities. The planet dimension (SDGs 6 and 12-15), which comprises the SDGs on water, sustainable consumption and production, climate action and life on land and underwater, received a slightly lower priority (20%), followed by SDG 17 on partnerships (8%) and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions (5%) (Figure 3.2). The responses of territorial stakeholders are in line with those of local and regional governments. Among territorial stakeholders, 40% considered the people dimension to be the major post-COVID-19 challenge in their city or region, i.e. 5 percentage points less than among LRGs. The prosperity dimension ranked second for territorial stakeholders, albeit with a higher share than for LRGs (30% vs. 22%), followed by the planet and partnership dimensions (13% each) and the peace dimension (3%) (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2. Where do you see the biggest post-COVID-19 challenges for your city/region with regard to the SDGs?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options
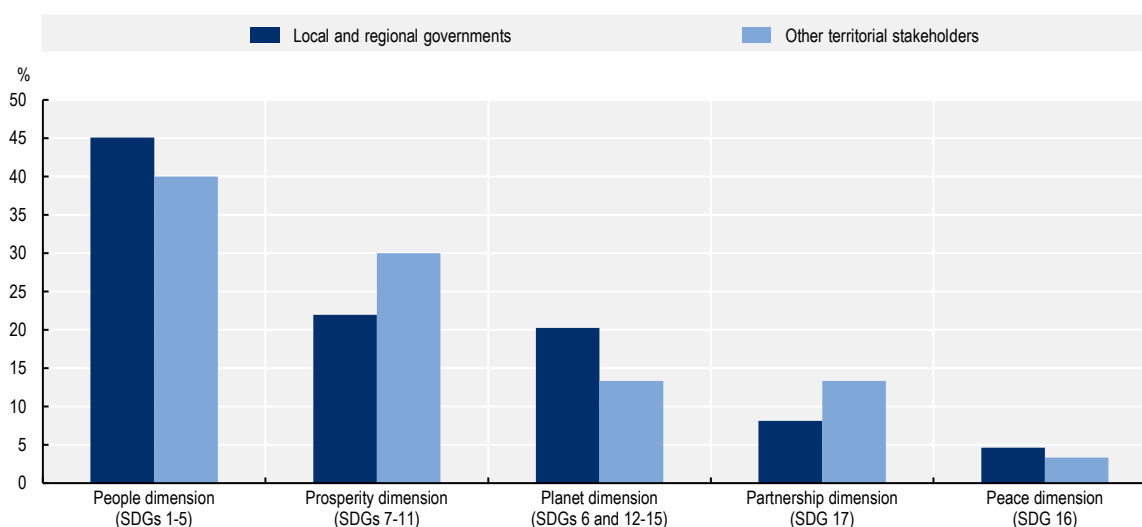
Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 173; number of responses from other territorial stakeholders: 60.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

Ways forward

Some possible ways forward for LRGs to use the SDGs to achieve their key policy priorities in the COVID-19 recovery phase are:

- **Align local or regional development strategies with the SDGs.** Ensure that recovery plans are aligned with both the SDGs on the one hand and the local or regional development strategy on the other, while accounting for the specific needs and challenges of each city and region, including the

varied impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recovery phase should be leveraged as an opportunity to enhance resilience and preparedness for future shocks and crises. LRGs should periodically assess progress on the implementation of the recovery plan and local policy priorities, making necessary adjustments to strategies as conditions evolve.

- **Use SDG indicators to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.** Take advantage of SDG data and localised indicator frameworks to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at the local level. Doing so could help guide local policy making during the COVID-19 recovery period, with a particular focus on the SDGs of the People dimension (SDGs 1-5) that have emerged as the most important post-COVID-19 challenges. The recovery period could provide an opportunity to set up new measurement systems for the SDGs if they do not yet exist or to align existing systems with harmonised and comparable local SDG indicator frameworks such as the OECD localised indicator framework for measuring distance to achieving the SDGs.

- **Promote policy coherence across levels of government.** The COVID-19 recovery phase and the mid-point of the 2030 Agenda provide an opportunity to reassess the multi-level governance of the SDG implementation between cities, regions and national governments, reducing the risk of disjointed recovery efforts. This calls for aligning national, regional and local policies and strategies for the SDGs and defining clear roles and responsibilities for each level of government regarding SDG implementation. This also means assessing whether standardised reporting mechanisms across levels of government as well as harmonised legal frameworks are in place to facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda across levels of government.

4 Impact of current crises on key policy areas and SDGs

Cost of living

The majority of local and regional governments (LRGs) have experienced a deterioration in living standards as a result of the cost-of-living crisis

The cost-of-living crisis has eroded living standards in cities and regions. Among LRGs, 55% reported that living standards had worsened as a result of general price increases and that they expected further deterioration. An additional 28% of LRGs acknowledged a decline in living standards but did not predict a further decline. Consequently, over 80% of responding LRGs reported lower living standards within their territories due to inflationary pressures and the repercussions of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Only 18% of LRGs reported no change in living standards. However, within this group, 13% anticipated a deterioration in living standards during the same year, while 5% did not expect any further impact on living standards within the next year (Figure 4.1). Territorial stakeholders' responses mirror these patterns, with 72% experiencing a decrease in living standards in their cities or regions. Among them, 47% anticipated a further deterioration, while 25% did not expect any additional reduction in living standards.

Figure 4.1. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, living standards in my city/region have… [answer]

Share of respondents selecting the respective options
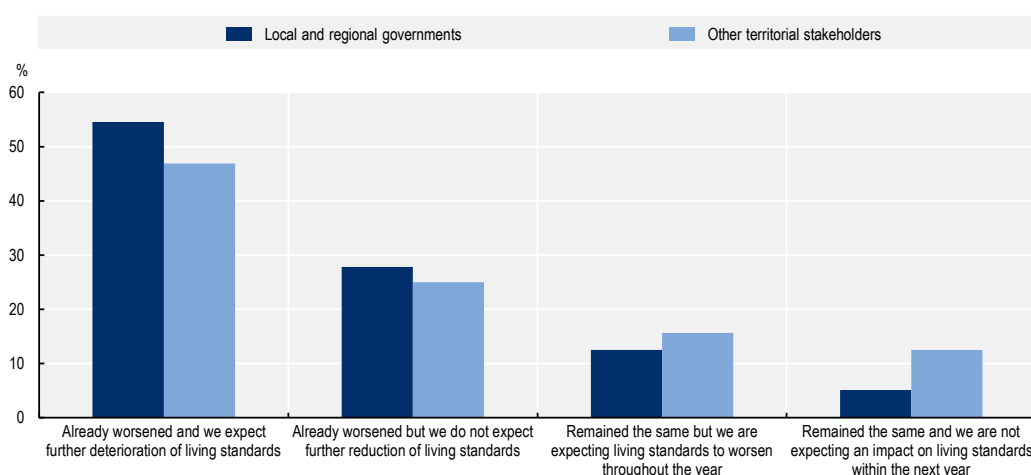
Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 176; number of responses from other territorial stakeholders: 64.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

The cost-of-living crisis has taken a toll on poverty and energy

LRGs identified poverty (United Nations Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] 1) and energy (SDG 7) as the two policy areas most significantly affected by the rise in the cost of living. Seventy percent of responding LRGs indicated that they had identified an impact of the cost-of-living crisis on poverty and energy supply (Figure 4.2)**.** Housing (SDG 11) is another policy area that has been particularly affected (58%). Inequalities (SDG 10) have been worsened by the rise in the cost of living in half of responding cities and regions, while 47% of respondents mentioned the impact on health and well-being (SDG 3). The remaining policy areas also felt the repercussions to some extent, with food security (SDG 2) and the labour market (SDG 8) both experiencing impacts reported by 38% of respondents. Climate (SDG 13) and mobility (SDG 9) were relatively less affected, with 28% and 22% of respondents respectively reporting an impact in these two policy areas. These findings underscore the need for targeted policy interventions to address the challenges arising from the cost-of-living crisis, particularly in the areas of poverty, energy, housing and inequalities. The responses from territorial stakeholders convey slightly different observations compared to those of the LRGs. While both LRGs and territorial stakeholders identified poverty as one of the 2 most affected areas, with 70% of LRGs and 71% of territorial stakeholders mentioning it, observations diverged when it came to the second most affected policy area. Seventy percent of territorial stakeholders registered an impact on health and well-being, compared to 47% among LRGs. Additionally, territorial stakeholders more often mentioned food security (60%) and inequalities (59%) compared to LRGs. Furthermore, climate (43%) emerged as a more prominent concern in the responses of territorial stakeholders. Conversely, energy (57%) and housing (54%) were less frequently identified as affected areas by territorial stakeholders (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Which areas are the most affected by the increase in cost of living in your city/region?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 177; number of responses from other territorial stakeholders: 63.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

Support measures for vulnerable groups are the most common response of LRGs to address increasing price levels

Two-thirds of responding LRGs have implemented measures to support vulnerable groups in response to rising prices. Supporting the vulnerable population (SDG 1) is the most common measure implemented by

LRGs. To save on electricity costs, 62% of LRGs have reduced the average temperature in public buildings, thereby cutting heating expenses (SDGs 7 and 13). Additionally, 46% of LRGs implemented measures to cut back on street lighting (SDG 7). One-third of LRGs directed their efforts towards assisting local businesses through support measures, such as subsidies or tax breaks (SDG 8). Other less common measures include subsidies for sustainable mobility (26%), such as offering discounts on public transport fares (SDGs 9 and 11), implementing temporary housing support schemes (19%) (SDG 11), enforcing price caps to bring down energy costs (17%) (SDG 7) and adopting measures to reduce food insecurity (14%), such as cutting taxes on food (SDG 2) (Figure 4.3). Territorial stakeholders echoed similar actions taken by LRGs, with 56% identifying support measures for vulnerable individuals as the most common response by their respective city or region to tackle rising prices. The second most common action identified by territorial stakeholders was the implementation of price caps to lower energy costs (32%). Reducing the average temperature in public buildings (30%) and support measures for local companies (29%) played a similarly important role. These findings highlight the proactive engagement of LRGs in taking diverse measures to address the challenges posed by rising prices.

Figure 4.3. Which of the following measures has your city/region put in place to respond to increasing price levels?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible
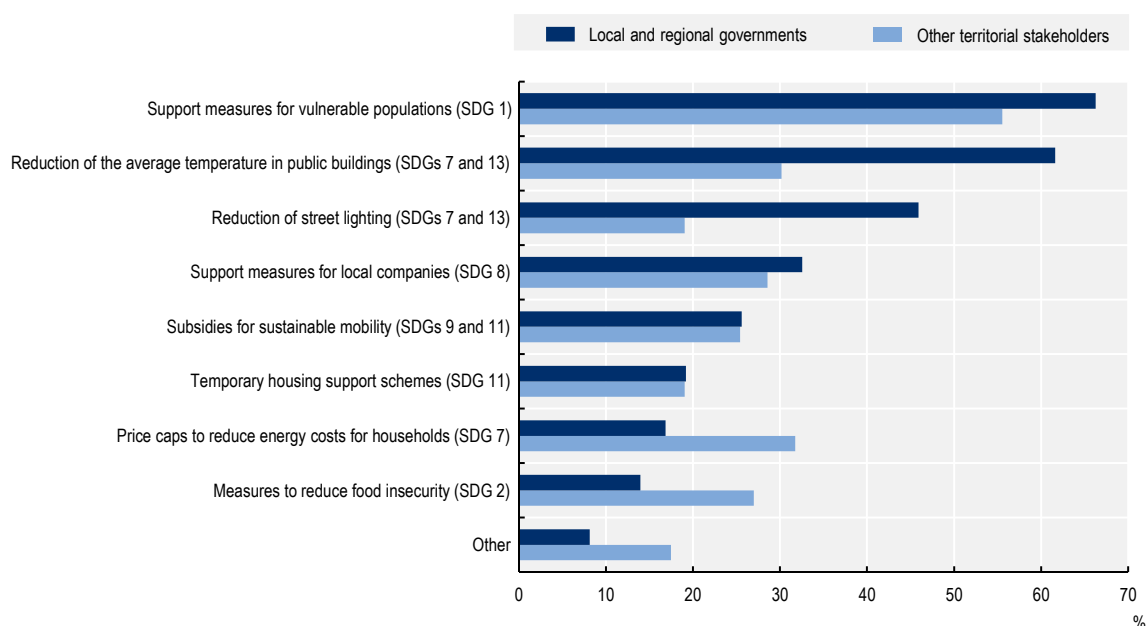
Note: Number of respondents: 172; number of responses from other territorial stakeholders: 63.
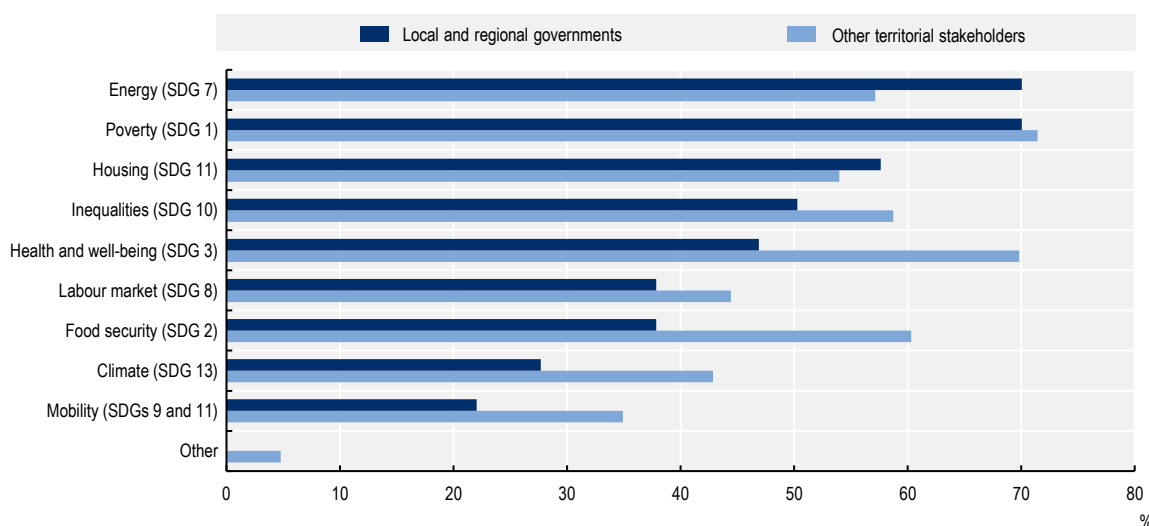Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

The cost-of-living crisis affected LRGs' human and financial resources for the SDGs

The cost-of-living crisis has often strained LRGs' human and financial resources to work on the SDGs. Among the survey respondents, 45% of LRGs indicated a decrease in the availability of funding for SDG projects, while 37% reported that the cost-of-living crisis had not affected their capacity and resources to work on the SDGs (Figure 4.4). Conversely, 20% of LRGs reported an increase in funding for SDG-related initiatives, possibly suggesting proactive efforts to address the crisis. In terms of human resources, 10% of LRGs experienced a drop in staff dedicated to SDGs, while 8% of LRGs observed an increase in the number of people working on SDG activities compared to the period before Russia's war of aggression

against Ukraine. In addition, 3% of LRGs had to suspend or halt their SDG initiatives. Among territorial stakeholders, 56% reported a decrease in the availability of funding for SDG work, while 18% stated that the cost-of-living crisis had not affected their SDG pursuits. Similarly, 18% of territorial stakeholders cited an increase in funding for SDG projects and 15% noted an increase in the number of people working on the SDGs since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Meanwhile, 13% experienced a decrease in staff working on the SDGs and 7% temporarily suspended their SDG efforts. These statistics illustrate the diverse and evolving strategies employed by different entities as they navigate the challenges associated with the current crisis while striving to achieve the SDGs.

Figure 4.4. What impact does the cost-of-living crisis have on the human and financial capacity of your city/region to work on the SDGs?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 172; number of responses from territorial stakeholders: 61.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

Energy

Achieving SDG 7 on Clean and affordable energy has gained greater prominence for most local and regional governments since the outbreak of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

SDG 7 has gained importance for local and regional governments since the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Twenty-three percent of responding local and regional governments reported it had become a top priority for them, with a further 57% saying it had increased in relevance (Figure 4.5). Only 18% of local and regional governments stated that SDG 7 had remained as relevant as before the war. Moreover, only 3% indicated that it had become less relevant since then. Responses from territorial stakeholders were different. Twenty-one percent found that SDG 7 had become a top priority in their city or region, while 30% reported that it had increased in relevance. For more than a third (37%), its achievement had stayed relevant and 11% stated that it had decreased in relevance since the outbreak of the war.

Figure 4.5. Since the outbreak of the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the achievement of SDG 7 (Clean and affordable energy) in my city/region has… [answer]

Share of respondents selecting the respective options

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 176; number of responses from territorial stakeholders: 63.
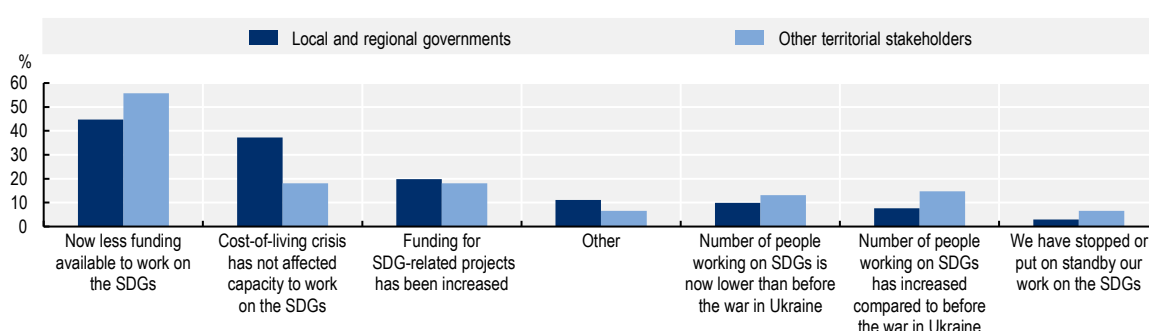Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has coincided with increases in the cost of electricity for over 70% of responding cities and regions

Electricity costs have increased for over 70% of local and regional governments since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Half of local and regional governments responded that the cost of electricity had increased by up to 50% since the beginning of the Russian war in Ukraine. An additional 21% of responding LRGs stated it had increased by between 50% and 100% and the reported cost increase for 16% of LRGs exceeded 100%. Thirty-eight percent considered it had stayed relevant and 11% found it had decreased in relevance (Figure 4.6). Responses from LRGs in the European Union (a sample of 145 respondents) suggested a greater impact on electricity prices. In the European Union, 94% of LRG respondents reported that electricity costs had increased since the outbreak of the war. Among these, 51% reported costs increasing by up to 50%, 24% noted increases of between 50% and 100%, and 18% stated that electricity costs had gone up by over 100%. Among territorial stakeholders, the rise in electricity costs showed a slightly milder impact, with fewer respondents reporting increases compared to LRGs. Nearly 30% reported no changes in electricity prices, while 5% noted a decrease.

Figure 4.6. Since the outbreak of the Russian war in Ukraine, the cost of electricity in my city/region has… [answer]

Share of respondents selecting the respective options

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 175; number of responses from territorial stakeholders: 62.
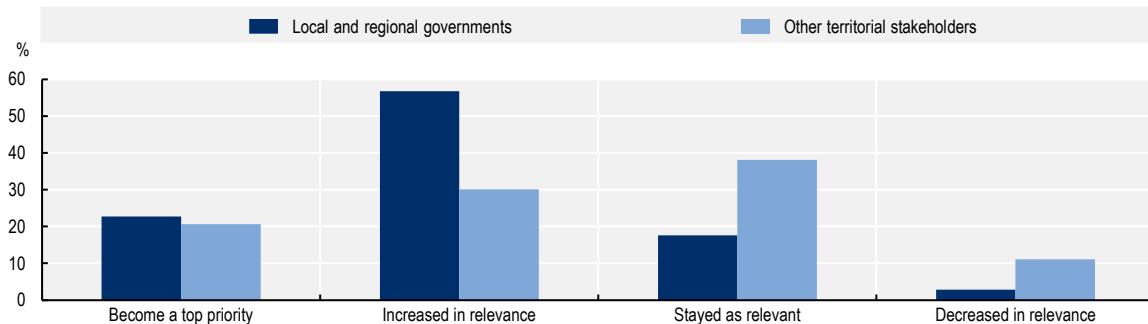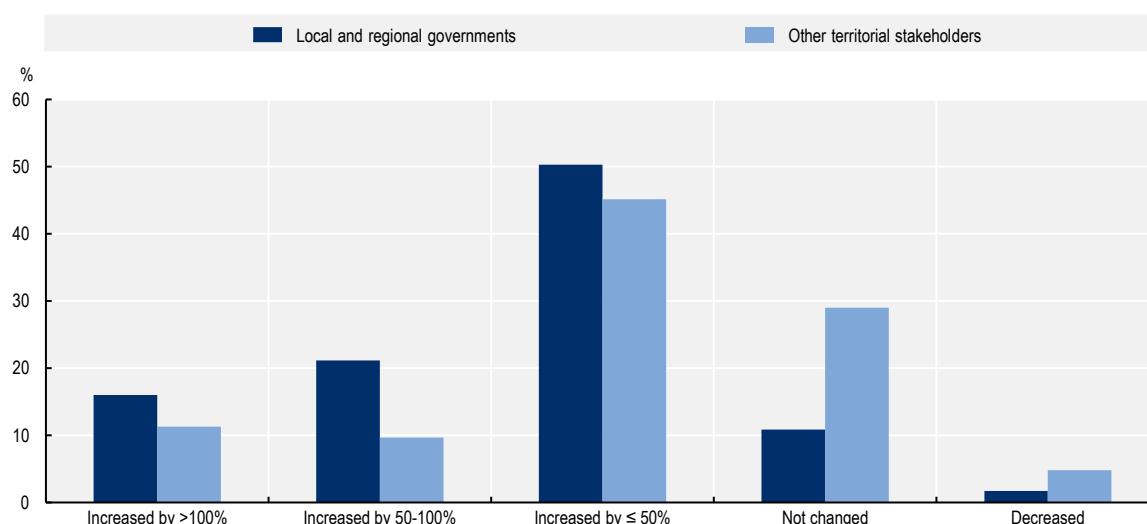Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

LRGs and public energy providers have increased the share of renewables or reduced their dependence on imported energy since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine

Growing pressures on the international energy market led 36% of cities and regions or their public energy provider to increase the share of renewable energy in their energy mix. Thirty-six percent reported that they reduced their dependence on imported energy. A further 34% of LRGs responded that the composition of their energy mix remained unchanged after the outbreak of the war. Sixteen percent of LRGs noted that they or their public energy provider had diversified the sourcing of energy. Only 9% of local and regional governments reported they had increased the share of non-renewable energy in their mix (Figure 4.7). The responses of territorial stakeholders show a similar pattern. Among them, 38% reported increasing their share of renewable energy and 33% responded that they had tried to reduce their dependence on imported energy. The most notable difference compared to LRGs relates to the diversification of energy sourcing. Among territorial stakeholders, 28% increased the diversification of their energy sources, which is 12 percentage points higher than the corresponding figure among LRGs. Additionally, 11% of territorial stakeholders raised the proportion of non-renewable sources in their energy mix. Meanwhile, 31% of territorial stakeholders reported no alterations in their energy mix composition following the outbreak of the Russian war in Ukraine.

Figure 4.7. In response to the growing pressures on the international energy market, our city/region and public energy provider have… [answer]

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 166; number of responses from territorial stakeholders: 64.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

About a third of local and regional governments say they have overall and sector-specific consumption-based emissions targets but 40% say they do not

More than half of LRGs have overall or sector-specific consumption-based emissions targets or both. Developing subnational consumption-based emissions estimates can be a valuable tool for cities and regions to help measure the emissions intricately tied to consumption patterns. In turn, it offers a metric to assess the effectiveness of demand-side mitigation policies (OECD, 2023[15]).[1] Over one-third (35%) of local and regional governments responded that they had both overall consumption-based emission targets and sector-specific targets (e.g. in transport, construction) (Figure 4.8). A further 18% indicated that they had overarching consumption-based emission targets in place but no sectoral targets. Twenty-one percent of LRGs responded that they did not have consumption-based emissions targets but that they planned to implement them. In addition, 19% reported that they did not have such targets and did not plan to introduce them. Responses from territorial stakeholders indicate that in 23% of the cases, their city or region had both overall and sectoral consumption-based energy targets. Sixteen percent reported having only overall targets. Additionally, 26% indicated they did not yet but that setting such targets was planned. Finally, 25% responded that they did not have consumption-based targets and did not plan to implement them.

Figure 4.8. Does your city/region have consumption-based emission targets?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 170; number of responses from territorial stakeholders: 61.
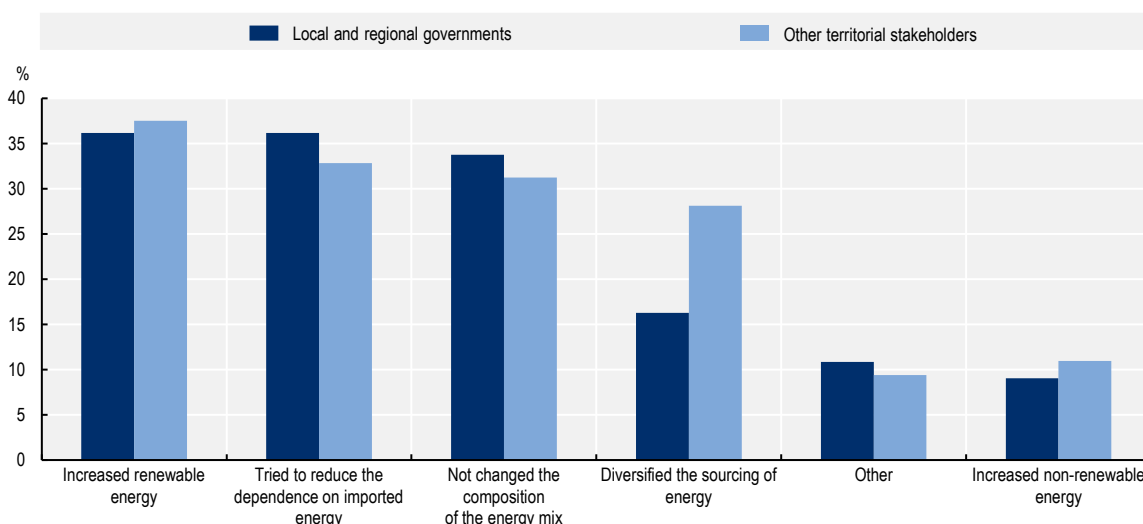Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

To achieve SDG 7, local and regional governments are prioritising decarbonising fuel sources and improving energy efficiency in the built environment

Decarbonising and improving energy efficiency in the built environment are the two top priorities of LRGs for SDG 7. When asked which strategies or policies could help their city or region best transition to cleaner energy production and achieve SDG 7, 44% of local and regional governments responded that decarbonisation – shifting from fossil fuels to zero-carbon sources of energy – would help the most. In addition, 37% responded improving energy efficiency in the built environment (Figure 4.9). Smaller percentages responded improvements in energy efficiency in transport (7%) and in industrial sectors (5%) or electrifying current uses of fossil fuels outside power generation (5%). Most territorial stakeholders (52%) also responded that decarbonising by shifting from fossil fuels to zero-carbon fuel sources would help their city or region in its energy transition to achieve SDG 7. In addition, 25% of territorial stakeholders indicated that improving building energy efficiency would help address these goals. Seven percent stated that energy efficiency in the industrial sector and electrifying the current uses of fossil fuels outside power generation would help transition to cleaner energy production and achieve SDG 7. Lastly, 15% selected policies and strategies aiming for greater energy efficiency in the transport sector as their top priority.

Figure 4.9. Which of the following strategies or policies could help your city or region best transition to cleaner energy production and achieve SDG 7?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 170; number of responses from territorial stakeholders: 61.
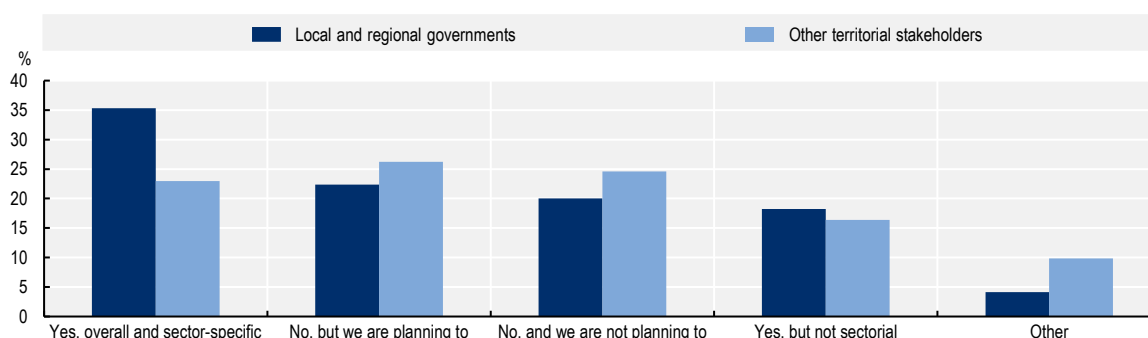Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

Food security

SDG 2 Zero hunger has gained importance for LRGs but is not among their top priorities

Although not a top priority for most LRGs, the relevance of SDG 2 has increased as a result of current inflation levels. Nineteen percent of LRGs mentioned it as one of their top priorities. Furthermore, 29% of LRGs reported an increase in the relevance of SDG 2 as a result of higher prices and named that SDG as a priority. In addition, 28% identified SDG 2 as one of their priorities but noted that there are more pressing issues for their local or regional government. At the same time, about a fourth of LRGs responding to the survey (24%) do not consider SDG 2 to be a priority for their government. The picture is slightly different for territorial actors, with 32% of them citing SDG 2 as one of their top priorities and another 43% citing it as a priority. For 21% of respondents, its relevance has even increased in light of current inflation levels, while 22% said that there are more pressing issues (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10. To which extent is SDG 2 Zero hunger a priority for your local and regional government?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 174; number of responses from territorial stakeholders: 63.
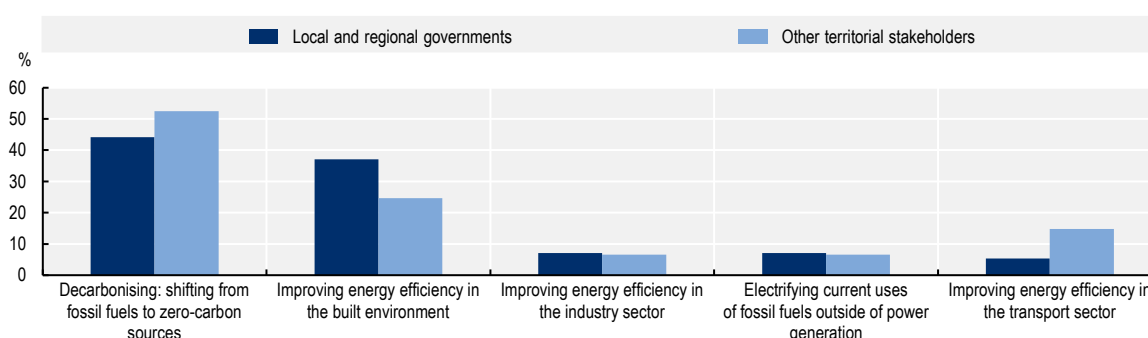Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

LRGs have implemented a variety of emergency measures to address SDG 2 in light of more frequent disruptions in the global food supply chain

Setting up food banks and food distributions for vulnerable populations are LRGs' most common actions to target SDG 2. Almost half (46%) of responding LRGs indicated they have already implemented such measures to address SDG 2 (Figure 4.11). A distant second action LRGs took to address SDG 2 (with 28% of responses) is to provide information to citizens about balanced diets and offer subsidies for specific nutritious foods. Safety standards and food subsidies also play a notable role. Twenty-two percent of LRGs have either enforced safety standards and informed consumers about regulations and/or implemented food subsidy programmes to close supply gaps and counterbalance a cost increase. Similarly, 21% of LRGs focus on reducing nutrient losses, pesticide and fertiliser use and antimicrobial resistance while promoting sustainable farming practices. In contrast, setting up public stockholding programmes to address supply chain disruptions was the least frequently used action (13%). This might imply that the

impact of ruptures in the global food supply chain has not yet warranted extreme emergency measures. Among territorial stakeholders, reducing nutrient losses, using pesticides and fertilisers, and addressing antimicrobial resistance while promoting sustainable farming practices garnered the highest share of responses (30%). Following closely, setting up food banks and food distributions for the vulnerable population accounted for 26% of responses, underscoring the significance of targeting vulnerable populations for territorial stakeholders. The remaining actions were distributed relatively evenly among territorial stakeholders, receiving between 16% and 21% of responses.

Figure 4.11. In light of increasingly frequent ruptures in the global food supply chain due to the implications of the war in Ukraine and the consequences of climate change, how does your city/region address SDG 2?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 158; number of responses from territorial stakeholders: 61.
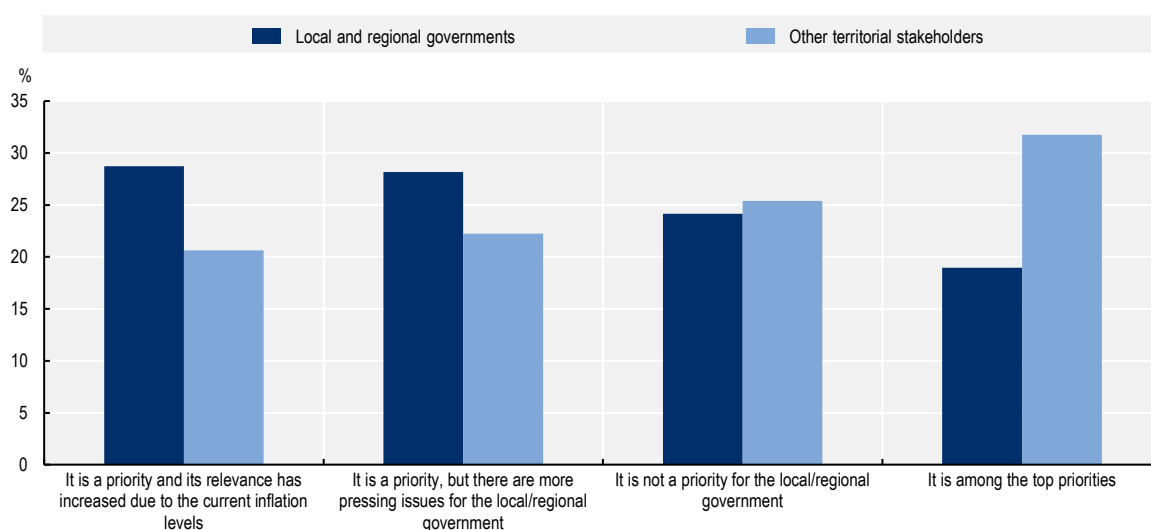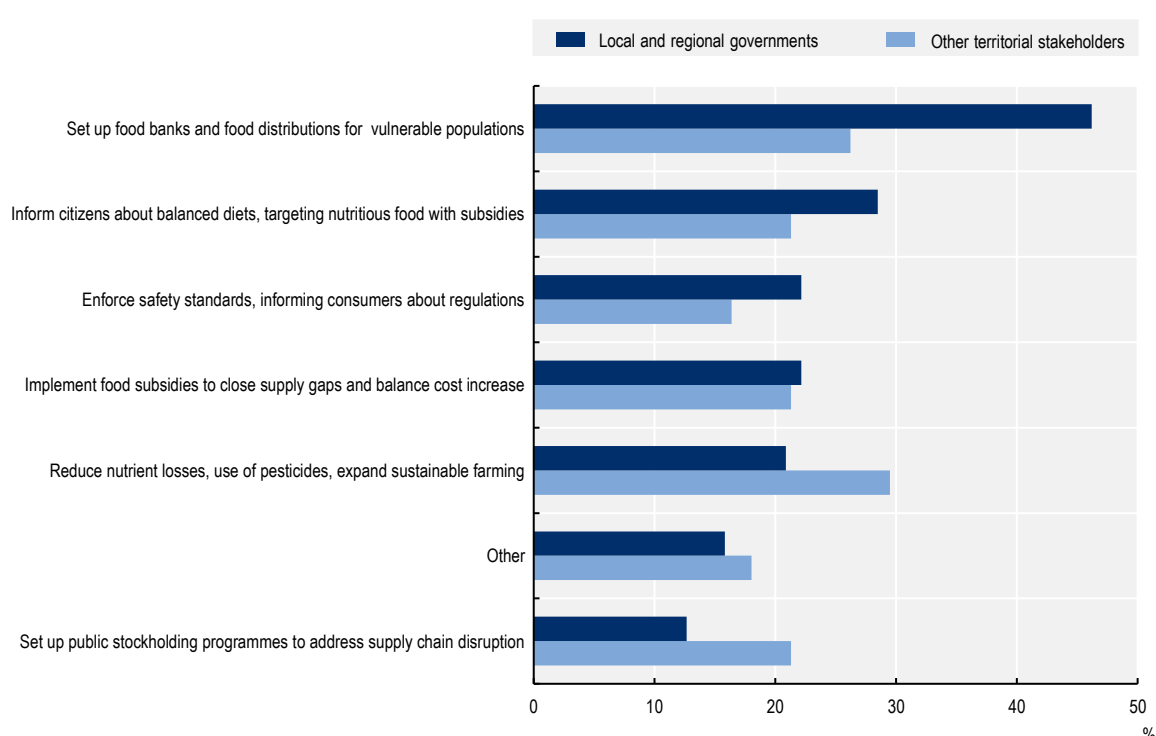Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

The most common action to achieve a sustainable food system is the promotion of local food production

Nearly 60% of cities and regions participating in the survey are actively promoting local and regional food production. Local food production, i.e. urban agriculture projects and urban-rural partnerships, emerged as the most frequently mentioned measures to attain a sustainable food system (Figure 4.12). The promotion of a circular economy approach is similarly important for LRGs, as mentioned by 54% of respondents. In addition, cities and regions often organise awareness-raising events or campaigns to educate the population about diets and healthy nutrition (51%). More than a third (35%) of LRGs reported having incorporated food policies into their urban or regional development strategy, thus demonstrating an integrated approach to food systems. Only 4% of LRGs reported importing food predominantly from

abroad. Territorial stakeholders also emphasised the importance of promoting local food production, with 52% of them mentioning it as one of the measures implemented in their city or region to achieve sustainable food systems. Other important measures reported by stakeholders include promoting a circular economy approach to the local and regional food system (33%) and organising awareness-raising events to educate the population about diets and healthy nutrition. Despite some variation in their share of replies compared to LRGs, the top three responses were consistent between LRGs and territorial stakeholders.

Figure 4.12. Which measures has your city/region put in place to achieve a sustainable food system?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible
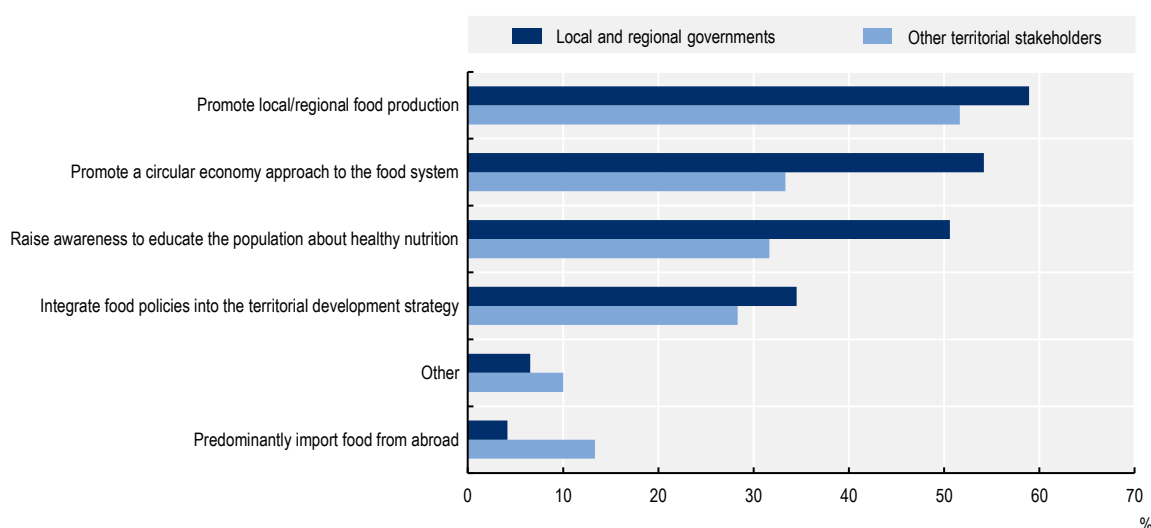
Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 168; number of responses from territorial stakeholders: 60.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.

Cities and regions mostly promote a circular economy approach to reduce food waste

Promoting a circular economy approach and reusing surplus food are the two most common programmes implemented by LRGs to reduce food waste. Sixty percent of LRGs promote a circular economy approach with the objective of reducing food waste (Figure 4.13). About 46% of LRGs engage in reusing and redistributing surplus food through food banks, supermarket initiatives and transforming it into animal feed. Additionally, 45% of LRGs have implemented measures to prevent food waste throughout the food supply chain. Composting and anaerobic digestion for nutrient substance recovery from food waste are cited by 36% of LRGs. Less frequently used measures include revalorising byproducts and transforming products to last longer (12%) as well as energy recovery from food waste (8%). Among territorial stakeholders, the most frequently cited response is the prevention of food waste throughout the food supply chain (44%), followed by the promotion of a circular economy approach (38%) and reusing and redistributing surplus food (32%). These findings align with the priority measures reported by LRGs. They underscore the multifaceted efforts undertaken by cities and regions to tackle food waste, effectively contributing to SDGs 2 and 12.

Figure 4.13. What programmes are being implemented in your city/region to reduce food waste (SDGs 2 and 12)?

Share of respondents selecting the respective options, multiple responses possible

Note: Number of responses from local and regional governments: 171; number of responses from territorial stakeholders: 63.
Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape.
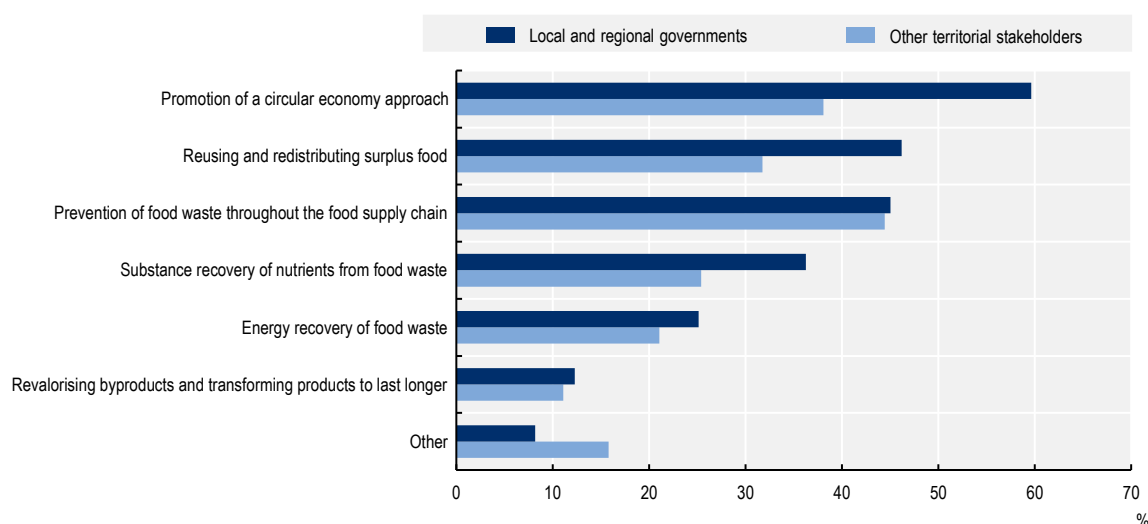
Ways forward

Some possible ways forward for LRGs to use the SDGs to respond to the cost-of-living crisis, transition to clean and affordable energy and achieve food security are:

Cost of living

- **Combat rising price levels.** Considering that 55% of LRGs reported that living standards had already deteriorated since the outbreak of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and that they expected further deteriorations with impacts notably on SDGs related to poverty (SDG 1) and inequality (SDG 10) as well as housing (SDG 11), there is a variety of measures that they can take to respond to increasing price levels:
    - Provide the local population with resources and education on budgeting, saving and financial management during times of economic stress, e.g. through financial literacy programmes (SDGs 1, 4 and 10).
    - Improve housing affordability by developing targeted solutions for the most vulnerable, such as temporary rent subsidies or eviction preventions to limit increases in housing costs and ensure housing remains affordable for residents (SDGs 10 and 11).
    - Expand social safety net programmes and food assistance to cushion those in need (SDGs 1, 3 and 10).
    - Enhance public transportation options and affordability (e.g. temporary reduction in ticket prices for those most in need) to counter the financial burden of increasing fuel prices and incentivise the usage of low-carbon mobility options to help meet climate objectives (SDG 11).

Energy

- **Incentivise decarbonisation both in production and consumption.** In order to contribute to SDG 7, LRGs need to encourage the decarbonisation of energy production, energy efficiency improvements in buildings, industry and transport sectors and the electrification of current fossil fuel use. Public-private partnerships and the issuance of municipal bonds and green, social and sustainable bonds could help finance respective measures to do so. In particular, LRGs should:
  - Negotiate with energy providers for a cleaner energy mix or establish a public utility. LRGs can negotiate long-term power purchase agreements with energy providers to finance the installation of greener sources of energy over the medium term. They can also harness group purchasing, such as Community Choice Aggregation or other models, to procure a greener mix of energy from a utility on behalf of citizens and the local government. Some LRGs have established publicly owned energy companies to invest directly in green energy generation and supply, which could help finance additional measures and incentives to decarbonise production and consumption.
  - Offer technical (e.g. public, accessible consultancy services) and financial support – grants, local tax rebates, soft loans in partnership with local banks and development banks – to small and medium-sized enterprises and/or lower-income households to incentivise building renovation measures.
  - Improve energy efficiency in the industrial and transport sectors and electrify current fossil fuel use outside power generation, e.g. through low-interest loans to industrial businesses for energy efficiency upgrades, setting up energy efficiency standards and the incentivisation of low-carbon transport through support programmes for electric vehicles.
  - Promote the generation of local energy for local consumption, e.g. by incentivising district heating or district cooling systems to foster more sustainable and energy-efficient alternatives compared to individual building-based heating and cooling solutions.
  - Foster behavioural change among relevant key territorial stakeholders through awareness-raising (e.g. energy efficiency competitions between schools, municipal offices or social housing blocks, direct marketing to citizens); partnerships with local non-profits and territorial stakeholders to analyse local energy savings opportunities; and faster processes and permitting from urban planning authorities for new construction projects that propose to meet or exceed ambitious local energy efficiency standards.

- **Lead by example to decarbonise government-owned buildings and assets.** Government-owned and operated office buildings, social housing, infrastructure and vehicle fleets can be leveraged to achieve SDG 7 at the local level. LRGs, where possible, should:
  - Set ambitious energy performance standards and regulations for new construction.
  - Collect data on the energy performance of their building stock.
  - Develop and implement green procurement policies for new construction and refurbishment, which include a focus on whole life carbon and circularity.
  - Finance energy retrofits for buildings and infrastructure through green bonds and other instruments that link repayment to energy savings.
  - Progressively electrify LRG-owned transport fleets (personal, utility and maintenance vehicles).
  - In cases where cities own or have delegated authority over lighting infrastructure, retrofits to LED and smart management of lighting can generate significant savings and reduce their carbon dioxide footprint. Building and infrastructure retrofits can be conducted by local governments alone or via multi-stakeholder and public-private partnerships. On-site and local energy generation from renewable sources on LRG-owned property and large-scale,

longer-term solutions such as district heating and cooling can also be financed in this way and significantly contribute to decarbonisation efforts.

Food

- **Promote sustainable food systems.** There are several tools that could help cities and regions advance sustainable food systems (SDG 2), for example:
  - o Support local and regional food production, e.g. promoting urban and peri-urban agriculture to increase local food production and facilitating the creation of community gardens and allotments.
  - o Adopt a holistic approach to food systems by developing urban food strategies that intertwine food policy with urban development strategies, thus connecting the social and economic dimensions of food systems.
  - o Promote the systematic knowledge sharing of cities' actions and best practices for sustainable food systems whereby frontrunner cities (e.g. Milan, New York and Strasbourg, among others) can inspire other cities.
  - o Enhance a circular transition in the food sector through public procurement requirements for canteens and food services, e.g. by applying life cycle and environmental criteria to contribute to sustainable, organic and responsible product supplies whilst minimising and, in the best case, avoiding negative environmental impacts and waste creation.
  - o Foster circular food systems, e.g. systems for food waste recovery and composting, to close the nutrient loop and reduce landfill waste and by encouraging the use of sustainable and recyclable packaging materials.
- **Reduce food waste.** Local and regional governments could implement several measures to incentivise the reduction of food waste within their territory (SDG 2):
  - o Encourage a circular economy approach, e.g. by developing a comprehensive circular economy strategy, incentivising circular food supply chains and encouraging the purchase of goods and services from circular businesses.
  - o Support and collaborate with organisations that rescue surplus food and distribute it to those in need, e.g. food banks and supermarket initiatives. Additionally, promote the use of technology-based solutions like food recovery applications that connect surplus food providers with recipients, minimising waste.
  - o Set specific targets for cutting down food waste and implement regulations to hold businesses accountable for meeting these targets, e.g. require food-related businesses, such as restaurants and supermarkets, to report their food waste data regularly, thereby encouraging better waste management through increased transparency.
  - o Initiate public awareness campaigns to educate citizens and the private sector about the environmental and economic impacts of food waste and work with local non-governmental organisations and businesses to reduce food waste collectively. Establishing a certification or recognition programme for businesses that actively work to reduce food waste can also incentivise customers to choose such products.

Reference

OECD (2023), *A Territorial Approach to Climate Action and Resilience*, OECD Regional Development Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/1ec42b0a-en. [1]

Note

[1] Consumption-based emissions account for emissions embedded in trade and ensure that cities and regions are not simply outsourcing their emissions outside their territorial boundaries to meet climate neutrality targets. However, the methodology of measuring and monitoring consumption-based emissions is not as developed as the one of measuring production-based emissions. More information can be found here in OECD (2023[1]).

Annex A. Examples of policies and actions implemented by cities and regions

Table A.1. Policies and actions put in place by cities and regions responding to the survey

Type of action	Example
Policies and actions adopted for the implementation of the SDGs	• The city of Tallinn, Estonia, has aligned its strategic and operational targets, integrating United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators to drive sustainable development. • The city of Zagreb, Croatia, tracks its performance through SDG indicators that are part of the city's urban development strategy's annual reporting and are directly linked to the national development strategy. • The autonomous province of Bolzano, Italy, has created an alliance for sustainability with research institutes and universities, fostering joint efforts in implementing the SDGs in the province. • The region of Catalunya, Spain, has created the Catalonia 2030 Alliance, a partnership of public and private entities willing to work together to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. • The city of Manresa, Spain, has established a subsidy scheme for dissemination and training on the 2030 Agenda in its municipality. • The city of Florence, Italy, has integrated the SDGs into its 2030 Agenda strategy. • The state of Brandenburg, Germany, has established discussions fora within and for municipalities and civil society to advance the implementation of the SDGs in its territory.
Types of data used to track progress on the SDGs	• The Central Denmark Region uses qualitative data through good practice examples that are showcased to stakeholders who want to raise awareness of the SDGs. • The municipality of Speyer, Germany, conducts regular sustainability surveys with a representative sample of citizens. • The city of Dresden, Germany, uses the data portal www.wegweiser-kommune.de provided by the Bertelsmann Stiftung. • The municipality of San Valentino in Abruzzo Citeriore, Italy, uses indicators provided by the association *Rete dei Comuni Sostenibili* (Network of Sustainable Municipalities). • The municipality of Fundão, Portugal, uses data from the Municipal Sustainability Index provided by Cesop Local (https://cesop-local.ucp.pt/). • The region of Catalunya, Spain, uses data provided by research centres, universities and relevant stakeholders.
Measures put in place to respond to increasing price levels	• The state of Brandenburg, Germany, has implemented support measures for municipalities to accommodate refugees, enhance social infrastructure (e.g. healthcare and schools) and provide assistance to specific groups (e.g. students). • The municipality of Pombal, Portugal, has established financial support programmes to assist families with newborns. • The city of Roeselare, Belgium, has implemented measures to provide support to local associations. • The state of Saarland, Germany, has established the programme *Das Saarland rückt zusammen* (The Saarland is moving closer together) covering measures across five areas: i) providing warm meals and safe places; ii) offering overnight accommodations; iii) strengthening voluntary work; iv) enhancing emergency support and counselling services; and v) addressing poverty among the elderly. • The city of Bratislava, Slovak Republic, has offered financial aid to schools, social services and cultural facilities.

Type of action	Example
Responses to growing pressures on the international energy market	• The region of Häme, Finland, has initiated new projects and plans related to the use of renewable energy sources. • The administrative district of Gmina Solec Kujawski, Poland, has implemented policies aimed at lowering electricity and heat consumption. • The region of Catalunya, Spain, has created a new public energy agency.
Measures to achieve a sustainable food system and reduce food waste	• The city of Helsinki, Finland, has expanded its co-operation with food banks and developed surplus food systems. • The city of Oulu, Finland, has organised awareness-raising campaigns to educate youth on reducing food waste. • The city of Bonn, Germany, has launched campaigns to raise awareness among the population about the benefits of consuming locally produced food. • The city of Thessaloniki, Greece, has established a local food council to develop sustainable food policies and systems, and it runs a Horizon Europe research and innovation programme called Food Trails, which focuses on urban agriculture initiatives. • The Marche region, Italy, is funding several projects aimed at assisting municipalities in tackling food waste. Additionally, the regional sustainable development strategy emphasises the adoption of agricultural practices that safeguard soils, waters and biological heritage in response to climate change. • The region of Catalunya, Spain, has established a regional food council that involves key stakeholders in the food system and engages experts to foster collaboration and sustainable practices in the food sector.

Annex B. The role of cities and regions in implementing SDGs in a changing landscape – A joint OECD-SDSN-CoR survey

Table B.1. Survey structure and questions

Section	Sub-section	Question	Options
Section 1: Cities' and regions' implementation of the SDGs		1. Which of these policies and actions has your city/region adopted for the implementation of the SDGs in your territory? (Multiple answers possible)	A dedicated strategy or action plan for SDG implementation
			An internal committee, taskforce, working group or other structure, working across services and horizontally
			A sustainable development council or similar attached to a high-level decision maker: mayor, governor, etc.
			Use of existing indicators or establishment of new measurement systems to track progress on the SDGs
			Awareness-raising campaigns, either internal (among employees and departments) or external (targeted at citizens, civil society, business and/or schools)
			Other
		2. What type of data do you use to track progress on the SDGs? (Multiple answers possible)	Datasets produced by local and regional/metropolitan governments
			Datasets produced at the national level (statistics from the national statistical office)
			Datasets produced by international organisations
			Open-source data (e.g. Open Street Map)
			Private data providers (e.g. from utilities, businesses, paid data provision services)
			New/unconventional sources of data (big data, geospatial data)
			Qualitative information on SDG policies
			Other
		3. What contributes to the success of SDG implementation in your city/region? (Multiple answers possible)	Political leadership at the local and regional levels
			Political leadership at the national level
			Dedicated funding/budget
			Peer-to-peer learning with other cities and regions
			High level of citizen engagement
			Other
		4. What are the governance challenges your city/region has faced or is currently facing in implementing the 2030 Agenda? (Multiple answers possible)	Lack of vertical co-ordination across levels of government
			Lack of horizontal co-ordination across departments and/or line ministries
			Lack of data on the SDGs
			Lack of knowledge on how to monitor progress (indicator frameworks, methodologies, etc.)
			Lack of financial resources
			Lack of awareness, capacities or trained staff
			Shifting political priorities due to other crises (energy, war, inflation etc.)
			Other

Section	Sub-section	Question	Options
Section 2: SDGs for COVID-19 recovery in cities and regions		5. Are you using the SDGs as a framework for the COVID-19 recovery phase? (Multiple answers possible)	Yes, we used the SDGs before and use them to address the COVID-19 recovery
			Yes, we did not use the SDGs before but we are using them now to address the COVID-19 recovery
			Not yet, but we are planning to do so
			No, and we have no intention to do so
			Other
		6. Where do you see the biggest post-COVID-19 challenges for your city/region with regards to the SDGs? (Single answer)	People dimension (SDGs 1-5)
			Planet dimension (SDGs 6 and 12-15)
			Prosperity dimension (SDGs 7-11)
			Peace dimension (SDG 16)
			Partnership dimension (SDG 17)
Section 3: SDGs and key policy areas affected by the current crises	Cost of living	7. Due to the cost-of-living crisis the standard of living in my city/region has… (Single answer)	Already worsened and we expect further deterioration of living standards
			Already worsened, but we do not expect further reduction of living standards
			Remained the same, but we are expecting living standards to worsen throughout the year
			Remained the same, and we are not expecting an impact on living standards within the next year
		8. Which areas are affected by the increase in cost of living in your city/region the most? (Multiple answers possible)	Poverty (SDG 1)
			Food security (SDG 2)
			Health and well-being (SDG 3)
			Energy (SDG 7)
			Labour market (SDG 8)
			Mobility (SDGs 9 and 11)
			Inequalities (SDG 10)
			Housing (SDG 11)
			Climate (SDG 13)
			Other
		9. Which of the following measures has your city/region put in place to respond to increasing price levels? (Multiple answers possible)	Support measures for vulnerable populations (SDG 1)
			Measures to reduce food insecurity (e.g. reduce taxes on food) (SDG 2)
			Reduction of the average temperature (i.e. heating) in public buildings (SDGs 7 and 13)
			Reduction of street lighting (SDGs 7 and 13)
			Price caps to reduce energy costs for households (SDG 7)
			Support measures for local companies (e.g. subsidies, tax breaks) (SDG 8)
			Subsidies for sustainable mobility (e.g. special reduced fares for public transport) (SDGs 9 and 11)
			Temporary housing support schemes (SDG 11)
			Other
		10. Which specific impacts does the cost-of-living crisis have on the work of your city/region on the SDGs? (Multiple answers possible)	There is now less funding available to work on the SDGs
			Funding for SDG-related projects has been increased to respond to the crisis
			The number of people working on the SDGs is now lower than before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine
			The number of people working on the SDGs has increased compared to before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine
			The cost-of-living crisis has not affected our capacity and resources to work on the SDGs
			We have stopped or put on standby our work on the SDGs
			Other

Section	Sub-section	Question	Options
	Energy	11. Since the outbreak of the Russian war in Ukraine, the achievement of SDG 7 Clean and Affordable Energy in my city/region… (Single answer)	Has become a top policy priority
			Has gained importance
			Has remained as relevant as before
			Has become less relevant
		12. Since the outbreak of the Russian war in Ukraine, the cost of electricity in my city/region has… (Single answer)	Decreased
			Remained at the same level as before
			Increased by up to 50%
			Increased by up to 100%
			Increased by more than 100%
		13. In response to the growing pressures on the international energy market, our city/region and public energy provider have… (Multiple answers possible)	Increased the share of renewable energy in the energy mix
			Increased the share of non-renewable energy (e.g. fossil fuels) in the energy mix
			Not changed the composition of the energy mix
			Diversified the sourcing of the energy mix (i.e. sourcing energy from other countries than before)
			Developed strategies to reduce the dependence on imported energy and produce energy more locally
			Other
		14. Does your city/region have consumption-based emission targets? (Single answer)	Yes, we have overall consumption-based emission targets and sector-specific targets (e.g. in transport, construction)
			Yes, we have consumption-based emission targets in place, but no sectorial targets
			No, but we are planning to set up consumption-based emission targets
			No, and we are not planning to set up consumption-based emission targets
			Other
		15. Which of the following strategies or policies could help your city or region best transition to cleaner energy production and achieve SDG 7? (Single answer)	Decarbonising: shifting from fossil fuels to zero-carbon sources
			Improving energy efficiency in the built environment
			Improving energy efficiency in the industry sector
			Electrifying current uses of fossil fuels outside of power generation
			Improving energy efficiency in the transport sector
	Food	16. To which extent is SDG 2 Zero hunger a priority for your local and regional government? (Single answer)	It is among the top priorities
			It is a priority and its relevance has increased due to the current inflation levels
			It is a priority, but there are more pressing issues for the local and regional governments
			It is not a priority for the local and regional governments
		17. In light of increasingly frequent ruptures in the global food supply chain due to the implications of the war in Ukraine and the consequences of climate change, how does your city/region address SDG 2? (Multiple answers possible)	Implement food subsidy programmes to close the supply gaps and balance cost increase
			Set up food banks and food distributions for vulnerable populations
			Reduce nutrient losses, the use of pesticides and fertilisers, antimicrobial resistance, increase sustainable farming practices
			Set up public stockholding programmes (food reserves, purchase interventions, food procurement and controlled release) to address supply chain disruption
			Enforce safety standards, informing consumers about regulations
			Inform citizens about balanced diets, targeting specific nutritious food with subsidies
			Other

Section	Sub-section	Question	Options
		18. Which measures has your city/region put in place to achieve a sustainable food system? (Multiple answers possible)	Integrate food policies into the urban development strategy
			Promote a circular economy approach to the local and regional food systems
			Promote local food production (e.g. urban agriculture projects)
			Predominantly import food from abroad
			Organise awareness-raising events to educate the population about diets and healthy nutrition
			Other
		19. What programmes are being implemented in your city/region to reduce food waste (SDGs 2 and 12)? (Multiple answers possible)	Prevention of food waste throughout the food supply chain
			Reusing and redistributing surplus food (i.e. food banks, supermarket initiatives, transformation into animal feed)
			Revalorising byproducts and transforming products to last longer
			Substance recovery of nutrients from food waste (composting, anaerobic digestion)
			Energy recovery of food waste
			Promotion of a circular economy approach
			Other

Source: OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of cities and regions for the SDGs in a changing landscape

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