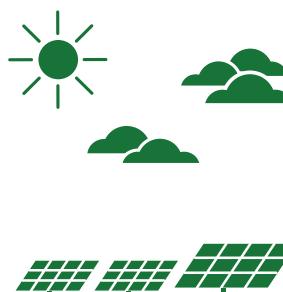
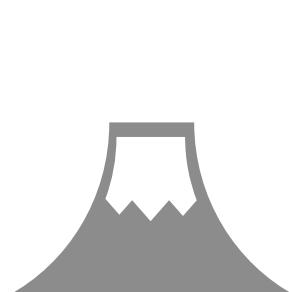
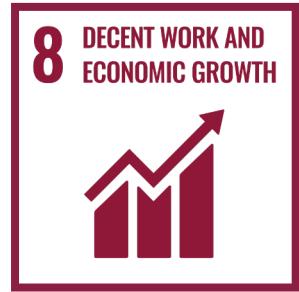
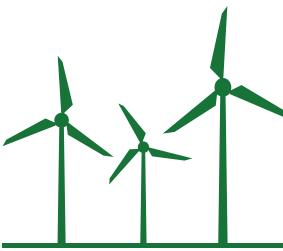


State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2023:

FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW OF THE 2030 AGENDA AT THE LOCAL LEVEL



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IGES



State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2023: Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda at the Local Level

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State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2023:
**Follow-up and Review of the 2030
Agenda at the Local Level**

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List of Acronyms

FUR: Follow-up and Review
GHG: Greenhouse Gases
HLPF: High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IGES: Institute for Global Environmental Strategies
LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean
LRG: Local and Regional Governments
MLG: Multi-level Governance
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
UCLG: United Cities and Local Governments
UN: United Nations
UNDESA: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNECA: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNECE: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCAP: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNSD: United Nations Statistical Division
UNSG: United Nations Secretary General
VLR: Voluntary Local Review
VNR: Voluntary National Review
VSR: Voluntary Subnational Review

Acronyms for Section 3:

AICCRE: Association of Italian Municipalities and Regions
ASviS: Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development
EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment
MAECI: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
MiTE: Ministry of Ecological Transition
NSDS: National Sustainable Development Strategy
PCSD: Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development
PTE: Plan for Ecological Transition
RSDGs: Regional Sustainable Development Goals
RSDS: Regional Sustainable Development Strategy
SEA: Strategic Environmental Assessment

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Summary

Halfway to the 2030 deadline, humanity is clearly off-track on the Global Goals. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains a significant challenge for society. Numerous and compounding crises—including coping with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing armed conflicts, climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the cost-of-living crisis, among many others—have hindered, and even reversed in some cases, progress towards achieving the SDGs. These crises are exposing and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, *de facto* leaving many behind.

In the wake of this bleak picture, urgent and bold actions are needed to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs. Innovative solutions and cooperation between different levels of governments and all segments of society will be essential to overcome the complex and interconnected challenges facing humanity today.

Local and regional governments, in particular, are at the forefront of implementing solutions to advance sustainable development. In their sustainability efforts, a growing number of local and regional governments are using Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) as a valuable policy tool to structure the localisation, planning, execution, and follow-up and review stages of SDG implementation. Between 2018 and 2020, almost 200 local and regional governments have conducted a VLR process.

This report marks the fourth edition in an annual series launched by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) in 2020 to analyse and document the VLR movement to date. This fourth edition explores the VLR reports published in 2022, paying special attention to the 40 reports identified by the authors presented by cities (available in either English or Spanish). The analysis focuses on two key themes: first, the integration between national and local reviews of progress; and second, how VLRs contribute to local follow-up and review processes. The report also provides an overview of the trajectory of the VLR movement from 2018 to 2022 to discern ongoing trends and new frontiers in the quest to deliver the ambitious promises made by the 2030 Agenda.

This report concludes that local and regional governments can play a crucial role by conducting VLRs that go beyond monitoring and reporting progress. Well-developed VLRs can help localise the SDGs, promote multilevel governance, enhance accountability and transparency, facilitate innovation and experimentation, and contribute to policy learning and diffusion. In the face of ongoing crises, it is crucial that all levels of government coordinate their strategies to avoid duplicities, redundancies and gaps. Moreover, robust follow-up and review frameworks can inform decision-making in the face of ongoing challenges to better adapt policies to changing contexts. Based on this analysis, this report recommends integrating the VLR process into the policymaking cycle and planning mechanisms of local and regional governments. By integrating VLR processes into policymaking, VLRs can become an important tool in advancing sustainable development beyond 2030.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Meeting the 2030 Deadline

When addressing to the General Assembly on the United Nation's priorities for 2023, António Guterres, UN Secretary General (UNSG) remarked that "The Doomsday Clock is now 90 seconds to midnight, which mean 90 seconds to total global collapse."¹ The UNSG noted the confluence of unprecedented challenges—including wars, the climate crisis, worsening economic inequalities, and geopolitical divisions—among some of the forces currently leading humanity closer to an irreversible catastrophe. Against this background, there is a growing need for advancing systemic transformations that are future-oriented and consider how to build a better, sustainable, and inclusive world for future generations that leaves no one behind.

Implementing, and needless to say, achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is now more important than ever. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present a blueprint to confront the problems that are steering humanity to irreversible catastrophe. Ending poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), achieving gender equality (SDG 5), creating sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), and fighting climate change (SDGs 7 and 13 among many others) must be part of a long-term vision for governments of every level across the world—a vision for which strong action is urgently required.

However, the 'Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022,' authored by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), made it clear that humanity is off track to achieve the SDGs by 2030.² The report assessed progress to 2022 on the SDGs, but painted a bleak picture. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs has reversed years of progress on many SDGs. For instance, the year 2020 saw an increase of more than 90 million people living in extreme poverty. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed around 24 million people out of education systems, with many of them being at risk of never returning to school. Overall, the report indicates that most countries are still battling the aftermath of the pandemic while having to confront additional problems—such as the global repercussions of the war in Ukraine that is increasing the cost of energy and food together with a severe humanitarian crisis. When



looking at the disaggregated data by regions, it is easy to observe the uneven geographic development effectively leaving many people behind.

For that reason, António Guterres declared that "the SDG Summit will be the centrepiece moment of 2023."³ The first SDG Summit took place in 2019 under the auspices of the General Assembly, resulting in the political declaration that inaugurated the so-called 'Decade of Action' which promised to accelerate actions to deliver the 2030 Agenda.⁴ The 2023 SDG Summit will be the second time that the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is convened under the General Assembly at the level of Heads of State and Government.⁵ It will serve to reflect on the progress made during the first half of the implementation period of the 2030 Agenda and subsequently, to provide guidance on best transformative pathways toward the 2030 deadline.

1.2.

The Importance of Local Action

While examining progress on SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities, the 'Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022'⁶ highlights several aspects that require attention. First, it points to the one billion people currently living in slums, with limited access to basic public services and utilities—such as sanitation, green open spaces, or public transport. Second, the report notes that 99% of urban populations worldwide are breathing polluted air. Third, it indicates several critical problems including limited access to public transport and public open spaces, as well as insufficient solid waste management. On a more positive note, the report highlights that a growing number of local governments have passed disaster risk management plans.

Nonetheless, it is easy to see how urban problems are cross-sectoral in nature, as they relate to other SDGs. As pointed out elsewhere,⁷ Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) are the keystone to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Not only are LRGs responsible for implementing an estimated 62% of the 169 targets put forward by the SDGs,⁸ but they are also at the forefront of efforts to address some of humanity's most pressing issues. In particular, cities have been vital in implementing ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets—in many cases, going beyond the

objectives of their respective countries.⁹ Cities have also been crucial in tackling the pernicious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, first in setting up measures to curb the spread of the virus and then in addressing some of the resulting consequences.¹⁰ Against this backdrop, a growing number of regional governments, cities and towns are using the SDGs to guide strategies to confront complex problems. Ultimately, LRGs are advancing the 2030 Agenda beyond SDG 11, supporting critical aspects to achieve all 17 of the Global Goals.

The active engagement of LRGs in implementing global agendas precedes the SDGs; already in the 1990s, LRGs took steps to localise Agenda 21¹¹ by presenting programmes commonly known as 'Local Agenda 21.' Over the course of the 21st century, LRGs have increasingly been recognised as key agents of sustainable development. For instance, the Race to Zero Campaigns, initiated by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), spotlighted LRGs as key to drive a zero-carbon recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.¹² More recently, the G7 Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué launched in May 2023 emphasised "the transformative power of cities worldwide as drivers for every aspect of sustainable development."¹³ Overall, throughout their work, LRGs are demonstrating leadership and active engagement in confronting global problems, and thus gaining access to international debates on sustainable development.¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, the Decade of Action—which is articulated around the key levels of global, local and individual people action—stressed the importance of LRGs to achieve the SDGs by the 2030 deadline.¹⁵

It is important to remember that implementing the 2030 Agenda at the local level presents a number of challenges for LRGs, due to the fact that the SDGs were tailored to the national level.¹⁶ Although the 2030 Agenda includes one SDG specifically targeting local governments (SDG 11), most of the 169 targets and 231 indicators making up the main substance of the SDGs respond to the needs of national levels of government. For instance, it is a common issue that some targets fall outside the competencies vested in LRGs. Besides this, many of the indicators used to track progress are not available at the local level. Finally, LRGs have no official recognition within the follow-up and review architecture of the SDGs, which was designed by the UN around the HLPF as an annual forum for nation states to present their progress towards the 2030 Agenda in the form of a Voluntary National Review (VNR).

To overcome these challenges, LRGs are resorting to the VLR process as a means to articulate their SDG work.¹⁷ In principle, VLRs mirror at the local level the follow-up and review process that national governments conduct in their VNRs. Initially, LRGs used VLRs to voluntarily assess their progress toward the 2030 Agenda, but the VLR process has proven in many cases to be more transformative. Ever since the first VLRs were presented at the 2018 HLPF in New York, VLRs have supported different aspects of the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. The VLR process is a tool to localise the SDGs, to leverage partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders, to advance policy integration across different municipal departments, to report progress by LRGs on the SDGs and various implementation challenges, to foster vertical integration with higher levels of government, and to benchmark and monitor progress toward the SDGs.¹⁸

1.3.

Voluntary Local Reviews

At first, VLRs emerged as a bottom-up response from LRGs to showcase their contribution towards attaining the 2030 Agenda. Pioneer VLRs took the process and report format of VNRs and adapted it to the local level, as recommended by UNDESA in its ‘Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews’.¹⁹ However, as the number of local governments conducting a VLR grew over the years, different UN agencies, think tanks and research centres have developed specific guidelines to support the VLR process.

Among UN Agencies, the first available guidelines were authored by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in 2020. These guidelines presented a clear blueprint for successful VLRs drawing from existing examples of cities in the region.²⁰ That same year, UNDESA



launched the ‘Global Guiding Elements for Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) of SDG Implementation’ that provided a template for what to include in VLR reports.²¹ Also in 2020, United Nations and Local Governments (UCLG) together with UN-Habitat presented the first volume of their guidelines, focusing on a comparative analysis of available VLRs and concluding with recommendations to maximise the outcomes of a local review of progress.²² This was followed in 2021 with a second volume that focused on how to better articulate the integration between VNRs and VLRs.²³ Subsequently, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) introduced additional guidelines to respond to their particular regional contexts—in 2021 and 2022 respectively.²⁴

Stakeholders outside UN Agencies have also produced VLR handbooks. Building upon the experience of the VLR of Shimokawa Town, Japan, the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) conceptualised a 10-steps method to guide the VLR process that was released in 2020.²⁵ Also in 2020, the European Commission Joint Research Centre (EJURC) launched a handbook to guide the VLR process tailored to the European context; this handbook was later updated in 2022.²⁶ Meanwhile, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) authored a handbook specific for Canadian communities. Finally, Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Monash University, has prepared a handbook to help Pacific Island Local Authorities assess the benefits and local opportunities of undertaking a VLR, identify and mobilise resources, and to be used as a tool for advocacy and engagement to gather political and civic support.²⁷ Overall, this wealth of guidelines provides support to LRGs facing the daunting task of initiating a voluntary assessment of their contributions to the 2030 Agenda and their progress towards implementing sustainable development policies.

IGES has promoted VLRs as a transformative tool to further SDG implementation since 2018. IGES co-authored the three VLRs presented by Japanese local governments at the 2018 HLPF—the VLRs of Kitakyushu, Fukuoka Prefecture; Shimokawa, Hokkaido; and Toyama, Toyama Prefecture. In 2019, IGES also co-authored the VLR of Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture. Furthermore, since 2020, IGES launched a series of annual reports entitled “The State of the Voluntary Local Reviews” as part of its commitment to support the VLR movement. Each year, the series reviews the publicly available VLR reports to gauge the trends defining VLRs as well as providing recommendations to LRGs so that they can maximise

their contribution to the VLR process. Previous editions focused on the following topics:

- The ‘State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2020: Local Action for Global Impact in Achieving the SDGs’ analysed 14 examples of frontrunner LRGs in the VLR movement.
- The ‘State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2021: From Reporting to Action’ focused on VLR reports published in 2020 to reflect upon the emerging role of the VLR process as a tool to structure and steer local action. It also paid special attention to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the progress towards achieving the SDGs.
- The ‘State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2022: Overcoming Barriers to Implementation’ explored VLR reports launched in 2021 to better understand how cities are localising the 2030 Agenda through VLRs. It also provided insights into the different approaches to the VLR process that have emerged between 2018 and 2021.

The present report, titled ‘Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda at the Local Level,’ is the fourth instalment in the series. By analysing the identified VLR reports published in 2022, this report explores how the VLR process contributes to create a monitoring system to assess progress and redirect efforts to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

This report is structured as follows. First, it details the methodology of the study and explains the different themes of inquiry. Second, it outlines the main characteristics of the identified VLRs which were published in 2022. Third, the report goes on to study the integration between the VNR and VLR processes, taking Italy as a case study. Fourth, it investigates how VLRs are supporting the follow-up and review process of LRGs. Fifth, the report summarises the main trends observed in the VLR movement since 2018. Finally, the report concludes with recommendation on how to leverage on the VLR movement to accelerate progress to achieve the SDGs by the 2030 deadline. Additionally, the report includes short reviews of 40 VLR reports published in 2022 authored by cities and written in either Spanish or English. Overall, this report hopes to continue encouraging local action to achieve the Global Goals.

2.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

2.1.

Case Selection

The present report maintains a similar methodology to that of the three previous editions of the 'State of the Voluntary Local Reviews' series. The main focus of the study is to identify emerging trends in the VLR movement to better understand how LRGs are contributing to advancing the 2030 Agenda. The report relies on analysing reports that are publicly available resulting from the VLR process presented by local and regional governments during the 2022 calendar year.²⁸

Consistently throughout the years, there have been two main challenges in identifying the data to conduct the analysis. The first challenge is on defining what constitutes a VLR. The second challenge is to compile VLR reports for the analysis.

The first challenge is to define what a VLR is. Given the lack of an official definition of what constitutes a VLR, this report sets three basic criteria²⁹ for classifying a local sustainable report as a VLR. First, the report is centred on any or all of the different stages of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda—localisation and planning, execution of projects, or follow up and review.³⁰ This would exclude reports measuring sustainable development performance without addressing sustainability issues in the universal language of the SDGs. Second, the report reviews two or more SDGs. This is because a report that address one single SDG is considered to be a sectoral report rather than a VLR. Third, the report is authored at the subnational level of government. Some subnational governments may be considered similar to countries, so their VLRs have been excluded from the analysis.

The second challenge was to find VLR reports for analysis. Even though the number of online repositories of VLR reports³¹ has grown since the first VLRs were presented at the 2018 HLPF, they do not always include all the available reports. For instance, the 'State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2022' found

49 VLR reports that were published in 2021; however, subsequent additions to online repositories resulted in a total of 66 VLR reports—a number that may grow even after this present report is published.³² One possible reason to explain the divergence between the reports hosted at different online repositories and the actual number of VLRs may be the bottom-up character of local reviews. As mentioned above, VLRs are not an official part of the follow-up and review architecture of the 2030 Agenda, and they lack an international forum similar to the HLPF to officialise the launching of reports.

Accordingly, a total of 57 VLR reports have been found as presented in 2022. Classifying them in terms of the language used in the report reveals that 28 reports were written in English; 21 in Spanish; three in Portuguese and English;³³ two in Spanish and English; one in Turkish and English; one in Italian and English; and one report, that of Barcelona, in English, Spanish and Catalan. When classifying them by the level of government authoring the VLR, 41 reports were authored by local governments, nine by regions, four were jointly presented by a local and a regional government, two by districts within a city, and one by a group of municipalities.

In order to analyse the VLR reports in greater detail, two basic criteria were established. First, similarly to the 2022 edition of the 'State of the Voluntary Local Reviews,' the focus of the study was solely on VLRs produced by local governments. Second, the study focuses on VLR reports with a version in either English or Spanish because of language limitations. The authors identified 40 VLR reports that meet both criteria (Figure 1).³⁴

This classification uses a broad understanding of local government. A local government refers to the governing body responsible for administering and managing the affairs of a specific geographic area, typically at a sub-national level below the national or regional government; local governments may have different names in different countries, such as cities, municipalities, towns, villages, etc.

The present report includes the four Italian VLRs authored by Metropolitan Cities—namely, the Metropolitan City of Genoa, the Metropolitan City of Messina, the Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria, and the Metropolitan City of Rome—as local governments. In Italy, a Metropolitan City (Città Metropolitana in Italian) is a type of local government entity that was established in 2014 to replace the previous province-level governments. A Metropolitan City is a territorial unit that includes a large urban area and its

surrounding municipalities, at a lower level than regions. The purpose of a Metropolitan City is to address the specific needs and challenges of a densely populated urban region, such as transportation, infrastructure and environmental issues. A Metropolitan City is similar to a municipality in that it provides local government services to residents within its jurisdiction, such as waste management, urban planning and public transportation. However, it has a broader authority and jurisdiction than a single municipality, as it oversees a larger geographic area and a more diverse population.³⁵ Nevertheless, this report is consistent with previous editions of the 'State of the Voluntary Local Reviews' that considered the VLRs of places like Tokyo as authored by local governments

To better understand the development of the VLR movement in 2022, section 2 of this report deviates from the previous approach and includes all 57 identified VLRs, regardless of the language used in the report and the level of government (Figure 2). This is intended to offer a comprehensive review of the breadth and scope of VLR movement in 2022, as well as to recognise the contributions of all LRGs in implementing the 2030 Agenda. For reports not written in English or Spanish, the analysis was restricted to identifying the authoring LRG's region and population size, as well as the reviewed SDGs. Consequently, section 2 provides an overview the 57

identified VLR reports of 2022, highlighting their main characteristics and basic approaches to the local review process. The remaining sections provide a detailed examination of the 40 VLR reports that met the two basic criterion for selection.

2.2.

Themes of Analysis

This year's report focuses on two key themes that are recognised as being critical to accelerate global efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda.³⁶ The first is the connection between national and local voluntary reviews of progress. The second is the ways in which the VLR process can help to structure follow-up and review processes (FUR) at the local level. Each theme is explored by analysing exemplary cases of VLRs.

The first theme of analysis focuses on multi-level governance and the integration between the VNR and VLR processes. Multi-level governance is important for implementing the SDGs because delivering the 2030 Agenda requires collaboration and coordination between different levels of government. The 2030 Agenda and its SDGs are comprehensive and interdependent, covering a range of economic, social and environmental issues, which cannot be addressed

Voluntary Local Reviews 2022



Figure 1: Map with all the studied VLRs and identified by the authors published in 2022.

without concerted efforts by national, regional and local governments. Multi-level governance enables different levels of government to share responsibilities, resources and expertise to promote sustainable development. It also allows for the localisation of the SDGs, where LRGs can tailor their policies and actions to address their unique development challenges and priorities, while aligning with national SDGs roadmaps (when available). The report highlights the case of Italy, a country that in 2022 made a concerted effort to connect the voluntary national and local reviews.³⁷

The second theme of analysis explores how VLRs can support local follow-up and review processes. The follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda is crucial for ensuring that progress towards achieving the SDGs is regularly monitored and assessed. In turn, this may help to identify challenges and opportunities arising from ongoing SDG implementation strategies, resulting in taking additional corrective actions to accelerate progress. Furthermore, the follow-up and review process helps to ensure accountability by tracking the commitments made by LRGs. It also helps to foster transparency and mutual accountability with a wide range of stakeholders, by providing a platform for sharing information and data on progress towards the SDGs.

In addition to these two themes, this report also takes a retrospective look at the development of the VLR movement since 2018. It provides an overview of the general trends that have defined local reviews of progress in the past five years based on those VLR reports that met the criteria set in Section 2.1.

As in previous editions, this report includes summaries of the 40 identified VLR reports in Appendix 1. The aim of these summaries is to act as a reference for academics, policymakers and the international SDG community when searching for examples of existing VLRs that align with their objectives and approaches to localising the 2030 Agenda. The overall objective of these summaries is to inspire action and inform policymaking, extending the influence of the VLR movement and motivating other cities to undertake a VLR.

Voluntary Local Reviews 2022



Figure 2: Map with the non-studied VLRs and identified by the authors published in 2022. (R) Regional Government; (D) District; (R+MC) Regional Government together with a Metropolitan City; (GM) Group of Municipalities.

3.

THE VLRS OF 2022

This section offers an overview of the main characteristics of the 2022 group of VLRs, addressing issues such as geographical classification, level of government, population size, and approach to the VLR process. The authors have identified 57 VLR reports published in calendar year 2022. Out of these, 26 VLRs were authored by LRGs in Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by 21 in Europe, eight in Asia, one in North America, and one in Oceania.³⁸ The authors have not identified any VLR from Africa in 2022. VLRs seem to have a slower uptake in the African region despite recent efforts to promote them—including the “Africa Voluntary Local Review Guidelines” published in 2022 and the commitment of nation states to the VLR process, as shown in the key messages of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.³⁹

In 2022, 41 local governments presented a VLR. The majority of them did so for the first time (33 out of 41). Eight cities launched their second or more VLR. Buenos Aires completed its fourth consecutive VLR. Barcelona and Ghent presented their third one in a row, while La Paz continued its efforts reported in 2018 and 2019. The remaining four put forward their second edition (Bonn, Bristol, Gladsaxe and Taoyuan). This indicates a growing trend among local governments to incorporate the VLR process into their follow-up and review mechanisms—a finding consistent with last year’s report. By conducting regular reviews of progress towards achieving the SDGs, cities are following the guidance set forth in the 2030 Agenda, which encourages regular progress reviews as a means to accelerate the localisation of the SDGs.

The local government with the smallest population size was Atenas at 8,015 residents in 2022. Meanwhile, the largest was Amman with more than 4,600,000 inhabitants in 2021. Most of the VLRs by local governments were from small-sized cities with less than 250,000 inhabitants (18 out of 41). There were also nine VLRs authored by mid-sized cities with populations between 250,000 and 500,000 inhabitants. Large-sized cities, which have a population between 1,000,000 and 5,000,000, accounted for seven VLRs. There were no VLRs conducted in 2022 by cities with a population exceeding 5 million. This is a significant departure from the 2021 group of VLRs. While in 2021, almost half of all the VLRs conducted by local governments were authored by places with more than

1 million inhabitants (21 out of 44), this number is relatively smaller among the 2022 group of VLRs (seven out of 41).

There were fewer VLRs presented by regional governments compared to cities in 2022, with eight regional governments independently conducting a VLR in 2022. The State of Pará introduced its third consecutive VLR, while the State of São Paulo launched its second (the first edition came out in 2019). Six regional VLRS were by first timers—namely: Córdoba Province, Lazio Region, Liguria Region, Neuquén, Sardinia Region and Tierra de Fuego. This aligns with the ongoing trend since 2018 suggesting that VLRS are becoming more popular among municipal governments—in line with the more prominent role in global discussions on sustainable development that cities have adopted in recent years.

There are three notable innovations regarding new approaches to the VLR process in terms of the levels of governments involved, governance, and stakeholder engagement. First, three different regional governments jointly authored a VLR: Abruzzo Region, Marche Region and Umbria Region. Second, four VLRS were jointly issued by regional and local governments: the Emilia-Romagna Region and the Metropolitan City of Bologna; the Lombardy Region and the Metropolitan City of Milan; the Piemonte Region and the Metropolitan City of Torino; and the Puglia Region and the Metropolitan City of Bari. These two trial methods are part of Italy’s approach to Multi-level Governance (MLG) that was put into practice in line with the country’s 2022 VNR—a topic that is further discussed in Section 4 of this report. Third, for the first time, there was a VLR presented by a group of municipalities, in this case, the Marmara Municipalities Union.⁴⁰ This approach is fairly similar to that of Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs), although more limited in its geographical scope. While VSRs are country-wide subnational reports,⁴¹ the VLR presented by the Marmara Municipalities Union reflects the reality of the 188 local governments that make up the region.

There were also two VLRS conducted by districts within a city: Avcilar, a district of Istanbul, and Seodaemun-gu, a district of Seoul. Avcilar is the second district of Istanbul that presented a VLR report, following last year’s Sultanbeyli. Both districts are part of the Marmara Municipality Union; moreover, Sultanbeyli is spotlighted in the section of best practices of SDG localisation in Marmara’s VLR.⁴²

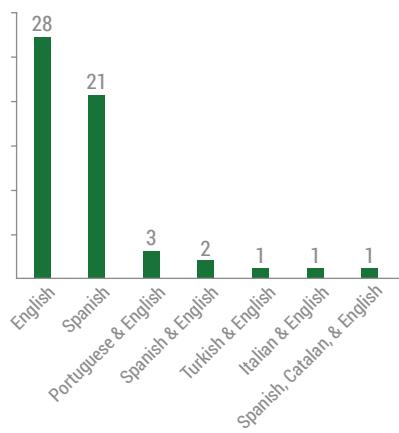
These new approaches demonstrate the jurisdictional complexity of implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda. The reality of a city often extends beyond the

THE VLRS OF 2022

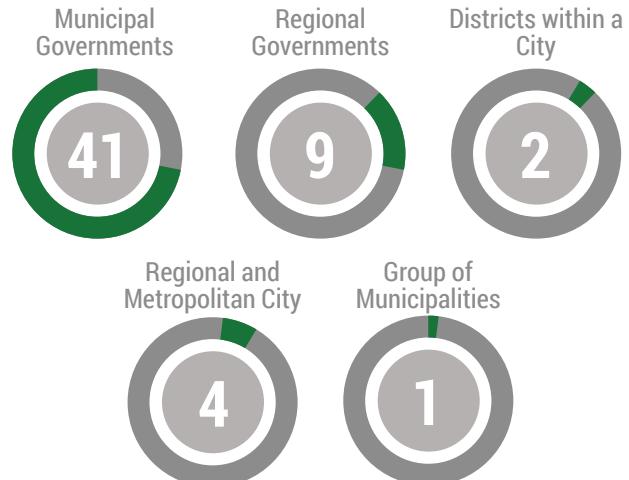
2022 VLRs by Region



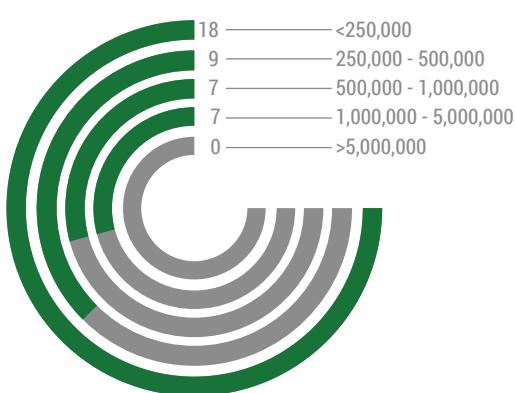
VLRs by Language of the Report



VLRs by Level of Government



VLRs by City's Population



Largest and Smallest City to Issue a VLR

Atenas
8 thousand inhabitants



Amman
4.6 million inhabitants



boundaries of any single local government. Concepts such as metropolitan area, built-up-area, or Functional Urban Area (FUA) are used to more accurately reflect this interconnected reality. In general, these concepts represent a geographical area consisting of a city and its commuting zone—i.e. the surrounding area that is economically linked to the city. Such concepts related to cities can cross administrative boundaries and include multiple municipalities or even regions, demonstrating the intricate interdependencies of economic and social activities within urban areas.

Bristol acknowledges jurisdictional complexity as one of the key challenges facing the city in delivering the SDGs in its 2019 and 2022 VLRs. The City of Bristol comprises around 70% of the population of the metropolitan area.⁴³ More often than not, development is spatially uneven, with neighbourhoods or commuting towns enjoying very different access to education or health services, public transport, or green areas; in turn, the choice of the geographical area of analysis can influence the results of assessing the state of implementation of the SDGs. Furthermore, it also makes it more difficult to coordinate across different municipalities when implementing SDG plans. Against this backdrop, in the three cases of innovative approaches to the VLR process mentioned above, the VLR worked as a tool to cross jurisdictional boundaries to diagnose the state of SDG implementation that better reflects the functional reality of urban areas or regions.

Beyond these approaches expanding the territorial understanding of local reviews of progress, the 2022 group of VLRs continues similar trends to those

identified in last year's report in terms of approaches to the VLR process and reviewing progress on the Global Goals. The review of the VLR reports produced in 2022 shows that LRGs are tailoring the VLR process to their respective local contexts to meet their own sustainable development objectives. The VLR process allows LRGs to bring the SDGs into municipal policymaking at different stages. For example, for LRGs initiating their SDG journey, they may utilise the VLR process to localise the 2030 Agenda, align their policies with the SDGs, or create action plans. In cases where there is a longer tradition of working with the SDGs—such as in Bristol, Buenos Aires, Bonn, Ghent, or La Paz—VLRs become a useful tool to follow up and review progress towards achieving the SDGs.

Table 1 and 2 compile the SDGs reviewed by each VLR report in 2022; table 1 compiles the SDGs reviewed by municipal governments while table 2 compiles those reviewed by other forms of government. Eighteen VLR reports do not review progress toward any SDGs. In these instances, the VLR process chiefly served to localise and operationalise the 2030 Agenda. There were 16 VLR reports that reviewed all 17 SDGs. The remaining 23 reports reviewed a set of prioritised SDGs. No VLR reviewed exclusively the SDGs prioritised by the 2022 HLPF (SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17). One possible explanation may be that SDG 14 on Life Below Water and SDG 15 on Life on Earth concern issues usually addressed by higher level of governments and thus, fall outside the sphere of influence of LRGs.

In terms of individual SDGs, the most reviewed was SDG 4 on Quality Education—one of the five prioritised



Table 1. VLRs presented by municipal governments and their reviewed individual SDGs. Source: compiled by the authors based on VLR reports.

Place	SDGs																	Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
HLPF 2022 ⁴⁴				●	●									●	●			5
Amman			●				●				●	●	●					6
Amsterdam	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Atenas	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		11
Barcelona	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Barueri	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Belen	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14
Bonn	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	16
Bristol	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Buenos Aires				●	●										●	●		5
Cochabamba	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Dhulikhel	●		●	●	●		●											4
Düsseldorf	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	16
El Alto	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Escazu																		0
Genova																		0
Ghent							●	●	●	●	●	●	●					5
Gladsae			●	●				●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	7
Goicoechea	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	13
Kiel				●	●									●	●	●	●	5
La Paz	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Manizales	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	15
Melbourne	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Messina																		0
Mico																		0
Partido de la Costa	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	15
Pereira				●	●									●	●	●	●	4
Puriscal				●	●													6
Reggio Calabria																		0
Rio Grande	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	11
Rome																		0
San Justo				●				●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	5
Santa Cruz de la Sierra	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14
Santa Fe Capital				●									●					2
Sarchí																		0
Singra					●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
Tampere	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Taoyuan	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Thunder Bay	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Toyota			●		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	8
Villa Maria			●															0
Yerba Buena																		0
TOTAL	21	18	23	28	26	22	22	25	24	20	27	20	24	13	20	19	23	-

SDGs under review by the 2022 HLPF—with 35 VLR reports monitoring its implementation. It was followed by SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities (34 VLR reports) and SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth (32 VLR reports). Perhaps, this indicates the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing efforts by LRGs to address its impact on education, economic growth, and the overall sustainability of cities and local communities. On the lower end, the least reviewed SDG was SDG 14 on Life Below Water, with 19 VLR reviews including an assessment of their work on marine sustainability. A possible explanation for this may be that many of the LRGs that conducted a VLR may not have coastal areas or jurisdiction to address marine resources.

Contrary to previous years, when VLRs were predominantly bottom-up exercises, there seems to be a greater number of VLRs resulting from top-down initiatives to localise the SDGs. For instance, Italy presented 12 VLR reports to supplement its 2022 VNR. The six VLRs produced by Costa Rican local governments—namely Atenas, Belen, Escazu, Goicoechea, Puriscal and Sarchi—stemmed from the project entitled “Network of Cantons Promoters of the SDGs” (Red de Cantones Promotores de los ODS in

Spanish) sponsored by the Institute for Development and Municipal Consulting (Instituto de Fomento y Asesoría Municipal (IFAM) in Spanish) and the Ministry of Economic Policy and Planning (Ministerio de Planificación y Política Económica (MIDEPLAN) in Spanish) with technical support from UN-Habitat and Un-Costa Rica. Moreover, the four VLRs authored by local governments in Bolivia—i.e. Cochabamba, El Alto, La Paz, and Santa Cruz de la Sierra—also received technical support from UN-Habitat.

In general, the local reviews have become more complex since 2018. Local governments are using the VLR process as an opportunity to speed up efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda through various means, such as aligning policies with the SDGs, promoting collaboration across different levels of government, following up and reviewing progress towards the SDGs, building new partnerships with different stakeholders, and motivating new policies. This demonstrates that LRGs are increasingly ambitious in achieving the SDGs for their constituents and are committed to contributing to the 2030 Agenda. The growing number of VLRs presented year after year ultimately shows that LRGs are working hard to make a global impact through local actions.

Table 2. VLRs presented by governments other than municipal and their reviewed individual SDGs. (R) Regional Government; (D) District; (R+MC) Regional Government together with a Metropolitan City; (GM) Group of Municipalities. Source: compiled by the authors based on VLR reports.

Place	SDGs																	Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Abruzzo, Marche and Umbria (R)																		0
Avcilar (D)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Córdoba (R)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Emilia-Romagna (R) and Bologna (MC)																		0
Lazio (R)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	16
Liguria (R)																		0
Lombardy (R) and Milan (MC)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14
Marmara Municipalities Union (GM)																		0
Neuquén (R)																		0
Pará (R)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Piemonte (R) and Torino (MC)																		0
Puglia (R) and Bari (MC)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
São Paulo (R)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14
Sardinia (R)																		0
Seodaemun-gu (D)																		0
Tierra de Fuego (R)																		0
TOTAL	6	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	5	7	6	5	-

4.

INTEGRATION BETWEEN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL AND LOCAL REVIEW PROCESSES

It is commonly agreed that achieving the SDGs involves all levels of government as well as a wide range of stakeholders. The term multi-level governance refers to the set of arrangements among different territorial levels of government—subnational, national and supranational. While these levels of government are formally independent, they are in fact functionally dependent on each other. Depending on the context, each level of government has different degrees of jurisdiction over specific policy domains.⁴⁵

Addressing the 2030 Agenda requires multi-level governance. Local governments have a unique role in tackling the SDGs by designing solutions tailored to the needs of their local communities and aligning them with local policy priorities. Local governments possess specific mandates and jurisdictions that differ from national governments, particularly in areas crucial to many SDGs such as land use planning, zoning, public transport, and water and waste management. This gives them the opportunity to reform existing policies and practices, and integrate the SDGs into strategies in a timely manner. Moreover, urban and regional governance of the 2030 Agenda allows for experimentation and learning from innovative solutions on a smaller scale. In turn, these advantages of local-level action support the development of stronger national policy frameworks that harness the benefits of implementing the SDGs at the local scale.

Multi-level governance is crucial to avoid gaps between local action plans and national policy frameworks (vertical integration) for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Vertical integration offers mutual benefits: local initiatives influencing national actions from the bottom up, and national frameworks empowering local players from the top down. Effective frameworks combine both approaches, creating hybrid models of policy dialogue where lessons learned are used to improve enabling frameworks, leading to more efficient local implementation of the SDGs. However, how to operationalise multi-level governance remains an open question. For the most part, attempts to

connect national and local SDG plans, and to follow up and review frameworks have lacked integration, especially in regards to interlinking the VNR and VLR processes. The following section focuses on the case of Italy, where in 2022 a concerted effort was made to connect both national and local reviews of progress.

4.1.

The Italian Experience

Italy has been successful in fostering collaboration with regional and metropolitan authorities to enhance the governance of SDGs at the local level. These cooperative efforts are designed to facilitate participatory processes, formulate local agendas, establish regional strategies, and develop metropolitan plans for the 2030 objectives. Ultimately, this has influenced the national follow-up and review process and its VNR. Italy presented its second VNR in 2022.⁴⁶ The country's 2022 VNR emphasises the importance of integrated territorial approaches and effective multilevel governance to achieve sustainability objectives. Symbolically, the cover design of Italy's 2022 VNR included the following logo: "VN/LR 22: Italy for SD."⁴⁷ This stresses the multi-level approach adopted by the Italian authorities that recognises the significant contributions of LRGs in implementing the SDGs by integrating VNR and VLR processes.

Italy's VNR integrated 12 VLR reports in its second annex (Figure 3). The VLR reports provide insights into Italy's process to implement the SDGs at the local level, thus complementing the overview provided by the national review. Italy's 2022 VNR includes three thematic deep dives: (1) on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD); (2) on localising the SDGs through the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS); and (3) on stakeholder engagement.⁴⁸ Therefore, Italy's 2022 VNR and VLRs focus specifically on the process followed to localise and implement the SDGs rather than on performance (understood as the monitoring of progress towards achieving concrete targets).

This section assesses how the 12 VLR reports presented in 2022 address three issues that emerged in connecting the VNR and VLR processes. First, the vertical integration between national and local action plans and follow-up and review frameworks—i.e. multi-level governance. Second, the territorial strategies that helped with the localisation of the 2030 Agenda. Third, the engagement with stakeholders.

The first theme of analysis focuses on the Multi-level Governance (MLG) model. MLG recognises the interdependence and interconnectedness of different government levels and stakeholders in achieving sustainable development at both horizontal and vertical levels. This theme is assessed based on its effective implementation, including governance arrangements that advance MLG, as well as coordination and policy implementation between different levels of government.

The second theme of analysis explores the territorial strategies that serve as reference frameworks for promoting policy coherence at local levels, paying special attention to those strategies designed to address the specific context of a particular city, region or locality. These territorial strategies help to enhance coordination, integration and participation among different stakeholders, while also ensuring policies and programmes that are measurable, productive and responsive. This section emphasises the importance of bottom-up strategic support towards localising the SDGs.

Finally, the third theme of analysis investigates stakeholder engagement processes at the local level. This refers to the process of involving and collaborating with diverse individuals and groups, especially with those who are often marginalised or excluded from decision-making processes. The stakeholder engagement process is explored for its ability to involve and collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders, analysing its functioning in line with the goal of leaving no one behind and nurturing a culture of sustainability.

Overall, the Italian experience of integrating VNR and VLR processes has shown how collaboration with regional and metropolitan authorities helps to enhance SDG governance at the local level in a way that merges top-down and bottom-up approaches. The following sections detail how Italy has implemented the VLR in the three above mentioned key areas: multi-level governance, territorial strategies and stakeholder engagement. The findings are summarised in Table 3.

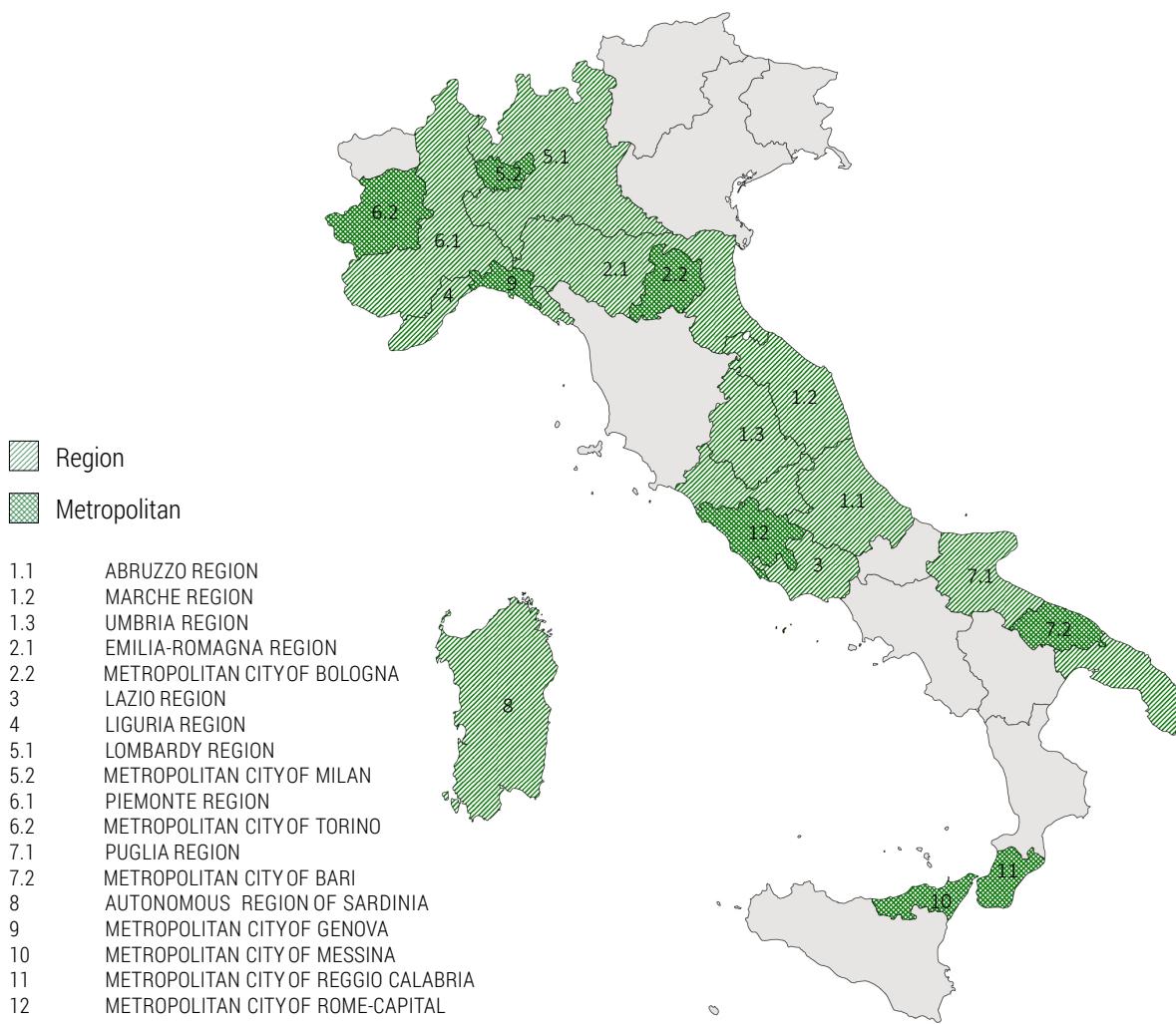


Figure 3: Map with the VLRs presented by Italy as part of its 2022 VNR.

4.1.1.

Governance Model: Vertical Integration

At the national level, the Government of Italy has established a vertical integration system to implement NSDS and promote synergies between national, regional and local policies. This section explores Italy's multilevel governance systems for achieving the SDGs.

In the Italian MLG system, the Presidency of the Council of Ministries (the Italian equivalent of the Prime Minister's office) oversees the implementation of the NSDS with support from the Ministry of Ecological Transition (MiTE) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI).⁴⁹ The State-Regions Conference—a collegiate body established in 1983 to foster cooperation and dialogue between the central government and the regions and autonomous provinces)—promotes synergies between national, regional and local policies. In addition, MiTE is working with regions and metropolitan cities to implement and review the NSDS through collaboration agreements, dialogue roundtables and capacity-building initiatives. For example, Liguria Region participated in a coaching project by MiTE, called CRelAMO PA, to improve the efficacy of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes for programmes, plans and projects. An experiment was launched to analyse the main plans and programmes subject to SEA or not, at the regional, provincial and municipal level, to assess their relevance for achieving sustainability objectives.⁵⁰

Another aspect of Italy's MLG relates to the definition of nationally-relevant indicator frameworks. In this regard, Italy has invested considerable efforts in

building statistical frameworks to evaluate sustainability and well-being, and has published annual reports on the NSDS. Furthermore, the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) and the Association of Italian Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE) have created databases and reports on progress towards achieving the SDGs at national and sub-national levels.

Italian cities and regions have existing dialogues across territorial levels related to the strategic objectives of the NSDS, but the degree of multi-level dialogues between cities and regions varies considerably across the country. Some regions and cities, like the Metropolitan city of Genova, have implemented extensive multi-level dialogues involving universities, other municipalities, SDG associations and business networks.⁵¹ Other regions, like Rome and Reggio Calabria, are expanding their tools to foster multi-level and multi-stakeholder dialogues.⁵² The Metropolitan City of Torino is developing a dialogue between different institutional levels within the framework of the NSDS and the Regione Piemonte to identify skills for preparing future employees for the green transition.⁵³ However, some places, such as the Metropolitan City of Catania, currently have no multi-level dialogue related to strategic objectives in place.⁵⁴

Overall, the Government of Italy has established a vertical integration system to implement NSDS and promote synergy between national, regional and local policies. When it comes to the local level, municipalities and regions maintain ongoing dialogues, thereby contributing to the effective exchange of ideas and collaboration. Although the extent of multi-level dialogues may differ, Italy's dedication to enhancing communication and cooperation between various tiers of governance



underscores their determination to continually improve and optimise the integration process.

4.1.2.

Territorial Strategies

Italy has been at the forefront of developing territorial strategies that can serve as reference frameworks for policy coherence at the regional level. These strategies adopt a bottom-up approach, engaging different departments to achieve greater policy coherence to ensure a more consistent regional implementation of the NSDS. There are mechanisms to foster policy integration both internally within a regional organisation and externally across different regions or between regions and metropolitan cities. As shown in the 12 VLR reports presented in 2022, several sub-national administrations have established sustainable development steering committees for drafting and implementing their strategies, thereby fostering policy coherence internally. Moreover, capacity-building activities have promoted the integrated implementation of the SDGs at the local level. At the same time, regional governments have created frameworks to promote collaboration between external entities—other regions and metropolitan cities—to share knowledge and best practices. By leveraging these internal and external pathways for policy coherence, Italy can continue to drive sustainable development initiatives and advance towards a more sustainable future.

In terms of internal coordination within the government, the Sustainable Development Strategy in Lazio involved a bottom-up process with regional hearings that included the participation of 18 Regional Directorates. These hearings provided information and suggestions to create an information base for the draft Regional Sustainable Development Strategy (RSDS) and regional planning.⁵⁵

Another example is the Sardinia region. The region's Institutional Steering Committee was established to facilitate direct engagement in the Strategy design and implementation process. Its primary operational tool is the Interdepartmental Working Group, which consists of over 100 civil servants from various regional departments and agencies. This group created a lifelong learning laboratory, where traditional paradigms are constantly questioned, and potential solutions are identified using the integrated approach of the 2030 Agenda. To ensure ongoing collaboration, a Permanent Coordination Lab was set up, consisting of various authorities and groups related to the strategy. This new system operates through shared

goals and continuous dialogue, making it a crucial part of the regional governance.⁵⁶

In terms of coordination with external entities, different Italian LRGs have established cross-regional and cross-metropolitan collaboration mechanisms. At the regional level, Abruzzo, Marche and Umbria have set up a shared working method towards resilience;⁵⁷ the three regional governments have established a concertation system to cooperate on resilience without signing a formal agreement. They have identified a coordinator (Umbria Region) and established a shared agenda of working meetings. Each region is responsible for a specific direction of development, with Umbria leading the general activities, Marche leading on climate change, and Abruzzo leading on green infrastructure. The progress of the collaboration is reported to the Ministry of Ecological Transition. Meanwhile at the metropolitan level, the Metropolitan City of Messina is cooperating with the Metropolitan City of Milan to use a tool owned by Milan called 'DataLab,'⁵⁸ which is a dashboard for monitoring indicators related to the SDGs.

Apart from the territorial strategies stated above, innovative approaches have been adopted by various regions in Italy to achieve their SDGs. Examples of innovative approaches taken by different regions in Italy discussed here include two at the regional level (in Lazio and Puglia) and one at the Metropolitan City Level (the Metropolitan City of Messina).

In the Lazio region, the Regional Sustainable Development Goals (RSDGs) and Lazio's Smart Specialization Strategy (S3) share common themes and areas of focus. The S3 was updated through an innovative approach that involved economic operators and knowledge actors in an entrepreneurial process of discovery. The RSDG Thematic Areas are complementary and partly overlap with the S3 Specialization Areas. The Plan for Ecological Transition (PTE) of the Lazio region is being developed, and its sectors are relatable to those of both RSDGs and S3. The PTE aims to achieve the goal of climate neutrality by 2040 through an integrated and scientifically grounded approach, framed within a holistic vision that embraces various sectors.

The Puglia region has developed its own RSDGs that align with the 2030 Agenda and different national strategies for sustainability. The region has prioritised gender equality and aims to bridge the gender gap in all dimensions, with a Gender Agenda that outlines specific objectives for improving women's quality of life, education, training, work, competitiveness, sustainability and innovation, as well as tackling

marginalisation and gender violence. The RSDGs and the Gender Agenda are integrated into the region's overall strategy for sustainable development and will be used to guide planning and evaluation of interventions.

The Metropolitan City of Messina focuses on education and training, and has signed an agreement with the University of Messina to provide analysis and support for sustainability policies. The University will assist with the coherence of plans and training for public administration in sustainable development.

In summary, Italy has been successful in developing territorial strategies through a bottom-up approach that engages local communities and stakeholders in the planning and implementation process. To ensure effective regional implementation of the NSDS, coordination with various planning and governance tools is required both internally and externally. At the same time, innovative approaches have been adopted by various regions to advance their SDGs by establishing partnerships with a myriad of actors to support ongoing strategies.

4.1.3.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a key component of Italy's VLRs. Italian LRGs have implemented a range of measures to ensure that the VLR process is inclusive, participatory and responsive to the needs and priorities of all stakeholders, as it assesses the impact of the SDGs in areas related to social indicators while upholding the "leave no one behind" principle. This goes hand in hand with Italy's commitment to nurturing a culture of sustainability through multilevel collaboration. By adopting these approaches, Italy is taking proactive steps to promote sustainable development, engaging its citizens in this effort.

Stakeholder engagement processes are key to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development. In general, the 2022 group of Italian VLRs have taken a range of measures to engage diverse groups and communities, including women, youth, professionals, academic institutions, trade unions, employers' organisations, migrant associations and cultural associations.⁵⁹

To better engage these groups in preparing the different VLRs presented in 2022, the national government encouraged local and regional governments to conduct public consultations and feedback mechanisms that target marginalised or

excluded groups. This would, in turn, ensure that the VLR process includes the needs and priorities of all stakeholders. Italy has also incorporated a "leave no one behind" approach into its policy and planning processes, making sure that the needs and priorities of all individuals and communities are considered.

For example, the "RC Metro Citizens in Transition" pilot project at the metropolitan of Reggio Calabria aims to transfer knowledge and experiences on "green jobs" through training and education programmes, in line with the SDGs and the NSDS. The project aims to enhance transversal and digital skills in curricula, acting with a view to overcoming the gaps in the minimum skills of young people, especially for young people from socio-economically disadvantaged families in Southern Italy.⁶⁰

In addition to engaging underrepresented and marginalised groups, the implementation process of the 2022 group of Italian VLRs is designed to foster a culture of sustainability that goes beyond simply consulting with stakeholders to engage all members of society. This has involved working with a broad range of stakeholders, especially youth, to promote awareness and understanding of the SDGs and their importance for the future of the country and of humanity, as well as to promote sustainable practices and initiatives at the local level.

The Metropolitan City of Bologna has emphasised the importance of education, training, information and communication in fostering a culture of sustainability among its citizens. For instance, the city has developed a project to promote sustainable work styles in a socially, environmentally and economically sustainable manner.⁶¹ The Metropolitan City of Bologna has also implemented a number of programmes focused on education and training. This includes the announcement of a competition on sustainable development issues⁶² for secondary schools in the metropolitan territory and the focus on sustainable development issues in the Festival of Technical Culture,⁶³ which promotes environmental education in schools and encourages students to take action on sustainability issues.

Civil society organisations, the private sector and local stakeholders have also played an instrumental role in promoting sustainable practices and initiatives, such as sustainable mobility, green infrastructure and circular economy practices. Italy's 2022 VLR process has involved partnering with these stakeholders to promote sustainable practices and initiatives, as well as working with local governments to integrate sustainability into planning and decision-making

processes. By doing so, Italy is ensuring that sustainable development is at the forefront of local planning and decision-making processes.

The Lazio region organised seven focus groups with qualified experts and practitioners to collect proposals, opinions and suggestions in line with the objectives of the NSDS. The focus groups explored priority issues, such as reducing poverty, improving the education system, and sustainable management of water resources. Over 514 stakeholders participated in the focus groups, resulting in the elaboration of reports with key findings. Lazio region also organised webinars during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, with over

70,000 views on social media. About 31,870 students participated in the webinars, indicating a high level of interest in sustainability issues among the younger generation.

Overall, Italy's VLR application process is designed to be inclusive, participatory and responsive to the needs and priorities of all stakeholders, including the younger generation. By focusing on training and education, as well as promoting sustainable practices and initiatives at the local level, Italy is nurturing a culture of sustainability that will contribute to long-term progress towards achieving the SDGs.

Table 3. Summary of the main approaches to the three themes of analysis of the 12 Italian VLRS presented in 2022.

	Governance Model: Vertical Integration	Territorial Strategies	Stakeholder Engagement
Definition and analysis framework	Multi-level Governance (MLG)	Bottom-up strategies at internal and external level; area of innovation.	Leaving no one behind; nurturing a culture of sustainability.
Abruzzo Region, Marche Region, Umbria Region		Cross-region cooperation through formal and informal methods, municipalities work cross region.	
Emilia-Romagna Region		Regional Economic and Financial Document (REFD) to guide administrative action and implement the regional strategy.	
Metropolitan City of Bologna			Sustainable Working Styles: a handbook for metropolitan local authorities.
Lazio Region		Regional hearings (internal); participates in the CRelAMO PA Project Groups (external); involved economic operators and knowledge actors in an entrepreneurial process of discovery.	Foster a culture of sustainability by involving civil society.
Liguria Region	Participated in a coaching project by MiTe.		
Metropolitan City of Torino	Developing a dialogue between different institutional levels.		
Puglia Region		Prioritised gender equality.	
Autonomous Region of Sardinia		Institutional Steering Committee, Interdepartmental Working Group, and Permanent Coordination Lab.	
Metropolitan City of Genova	Implemented extensive multi-level dialogues.		
Metropolitan City of Messina		Collaboration with the Metropolitan City of Milan; collaboration with University of Messina.	
Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria	Expanding tools to foster multi-level and multi-stakeholder dialogues		Transfer knowledge and experiences on "green jobs" through training and education programmes, especially for socio-economically disadvantaged families.
Metropolitan City of Rome-Capital	Expanding tools to foster multi-level and multi-stakeholder dialogues		

5.

VLRS AND THE FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW PROCESS OF THE SDGS

As of 2023, eight years have passed since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. The complexity of implementing the SDGs requires different stages: (1) localisation of the Global Goals and planning for action; (2) implementation of programmes; and (3) follow-up and review to understand achievements and identify shortcomings—feeding back into stages 1 and 2.⁶⁴ Halfway through the implementation deadline, it seems that the SDGs have been widely embraced by national, regional and local governments alike to guide their sustainable development policies; this has resulted into a large number of plans, localisation strategies and SDG roadmaps, mainstreaming sustainable development principles across the operations of governments (stage 1). These plans have often resulted in actions to implement the SDGs (stage 2). Predominantly, Follow-up and Review (FUR) exercises have ushered voluntary reviews of progress that are presented to the global community every year at the HLPF (stage 3).

As it has been highlighted in the introductory section to this report, unforeseen crises have slowed down—and even reversed—progress towards many of the Global Goals. This requires the recalibration of ongoing strategies to acknowledge the new context and additional challenges as well as any setbacks. It is in this recalibration where follow-up and review systems play a fundamental role. On the one hand, FUR processes allow for the assessment of current efforts, and can identify aspects that are escaping the reach of current policies. On the other hand, this assessment allows plans and actions to be redirected in a way that acknowledges ongoing failures and successes to truly accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. In turn, this implies that voluntary reviews of progress should go beyond mere reporting; rather, they ought to be tools integrated into policy cycles to guide decision-making with robust evidence-based assessments of progress.

It is useful to revisit how the 2030 Agenda articulated FUR processes before delving deeper into exploring the role of VLRs in implementing follow-up and review processes at the local level. At its core, the 2030 Agenda emphasises the significance of reviewing and

monitoring mechanisms to assess whether national governments are making headways towards achieving the SDGs or not. In order to follow up and review progress, the 2030 Agenda established 231 global indicators⁶⁵ in addition to the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets. In general, the 2030 Agenda places the responsibility for following-up and reviewing the implementation of the SDGs on national governments.

The 2030 Agenda states that “A robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated Follow-up and Review (FUR) framework will make a vital contribution to implementation and will help countries to maximise and track progress in implementing this Agenda in order to ensure that no one is left behind.”⁶⁶ This translates into nine guiding principles,⁶⁷ which are summarised as follows:

1. Follow-up and review processes are voluntary and led by nation states, taking into account national contexts and development levels.
2. Follow-up and review processes monitor the implementation of the SDGs (in a way that recognises their interconnected nature) as well as means of implementation.
3. Follow-up and review processes have a long-term perspective and provide support to evidence-based policymaking while also mobilising resources and creating partnerships.
4. Follow-up and review processes are accessible, inclusive and collaborative.
5. Follow-up and review processes prioritise the needs and well-being of individuals, promote gender equality, uphold human rights, and pay special attention to disadvantaged and marginalised groups, including those living in extreme poverty.
6. Follow-up and review processes leverage existing platforms and frameworks (to avoid duplication), and minimise the reporting burden on national administrations while taking into account emerging issues and new methodologies.
7. Follow-up and review processes are thorough and rely on factual high-quality data that is easily accessible, up-to-date, dependable, and that is categorised by income, gender, migration status, race, ethnicity, age, disability and geographic location.
8. Follow-up and review processes necessitate an increase in the provision of assistance for capacity building in developing nations, significantly regarding evaluation programmes and data systems.
9. Follow-up and review processes have the support of the UN system and other multilateral institutions.

Overall, these nine guiding principles put forward a comprehensive system to monitor sustainable development that recognises the complexity of the task at hand. It is significant that these guiding principles acknowledge the importance of tracking both outcomes and means of implementation, as well as of engaging as many people as possible in the FUR process—thus increasing ownership of the Global Goals and accountability to citizens. There are explicit references to the need to consider short-, mid-, and long-term perspectives and the interdependencies between the 17 SDGs—encouraging an integrative approach that looks at the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development across different time scales. Finally, these guiding principles stress that FUR should serve a greater purpose than simply monitoring progress towards achieving the SDGs. A well-conducted FUR should be based on robust data and should inform policymaking, as well as revealing gaps in means of implementation and shortcomings in outcomes.

National governments operationalised these principles into Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). According to the UN, and in line with the nine guiding principles outlined in the 2030 Agenda, VNRs serve as vehicles for “sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.”⁶⁸

The Committee for Development Policy (CDP)⁶⁹ has conducted critical assessments of VNRs annually since 2018. A common critique across the five reports presented between 2018 and 2022 is that VNRs are insufficient in providing significant information for peer-learning, meaning that they are not appropriately designed to extract valuable lessons for mutual learning. In general, VNRs are mainly descriptive in nature, and lack enough analysis and policy orientation to promote transformative changes towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. VNRs also fail to demonstrate sufficient efforts to meet the SDGs. Overall, the CDP points out a wide gap between the ambitious objectives of the SDGs and current implementation efforts.⁷⁰ This leads to question whether VNRs are an appropriate tool for FUR, and whether FUR processes, as recommended by the 2030 Agenda, are still lacking. Moreover, this points to the difficulty of assessing progress towards the Global Goals.

Although the 2030 Agenda signals national governments as being responsible for FUR processes, local and regional governments mirrored VNRs and initiated their own reviews of progress. Voluntary Local Reviews came to being as a bottom-up exercise by local governments to demonstrate their commitment to the 2030 Agenda. Originally, frontrunner VLRs were heavily inspired by VNRs, due to the lack of guidelines tailored to cities. A large number of the VLR reports presented in 2018 and 2019 had similar structures to that recommended by UNDESA for VNRs.⁷¹ In these early examples of VLRs, the emphasis was still on reporting, although there were already instances of VLR processes resulting in greater benefits for the local administration.⁷²

In subsequent years, the breath and scope of VLR processes expanded. Cities found that the VLR format could serve as a process to operationalise the three stages of SDG implementation at the local level—i.e., localisation, implementation, and follow-up and review. However, the three stages are covered unevenly across VLRs. Particularly for those cities lacking a detailed SDG roadmap, VLRs serve to localise the 2030 Agenda, enabling cities to choose priorities, and to identify indicators that monitor progress (stage 1). They exemplify their SDG work with actions to achieve the SDGs (stage 2). In other cases, VLRs are increasingly integrated into policy cycles, helping to structure local FUR processes (stage 3).

This leads to the question: How are VLRs helping cities to operationalise the different dimensions of FUR processes? In what follows, this report explores the trends that are emerging within the VLR movement in terms of their ability to assist cities in implementing FUR processes across two dimensions: the characteristics of FUR processes and the indicator system chosen to monitor progress towards the SDGs. Through this analysis, the report aims to identify good practices that can inform the design and implementation of more effective FUR processes, with a greater focus on supporting the needs and priorities of cities choosing to use their VLR to monitor their progress towards the SDGs and to inform their policymaking. This section extends the analysis beyond the VLRs published in 2022, focusing on cities that have conducted two or more VLRs. This is because of the recurring nature of the follow-up and review process, as recommended by the 2030 Agenda, which is intended to periodically assess progress to allow for adapting strategies to better accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

5.1.

Articulating Follow-up and Review Processes at the Local Level through VLRs

Follow-up and review processes are crucial to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. First, FUR processes are used to assess whether a government is on track to achieve the SDGs. Second, FUR processes help to identify areas where more action is needed, and to inform policy decisions. Finally, FUR processes are critical to monitor progress and ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development. Cities are not officially recognised as part of the SDG follow-up and review architecture designed by the 2030 Agenda. However, local FUR processes have gained traction as a way to address the challenges of planning, implementing and monitoring the SDGs at the local level. VLRs have become one of the main tools used by cities to articulate their FUR processes.

Even though not all VLR processes comprise an exhaustive follow-up and review of the SDGs, there are a number of cases in which cities are using their local review of progress to operationalise the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. Our review of available VLR reports from 2018 to 2022 suggests that the integration between VLRs and FUR processes is stronger in those cities that have reported two or more times on their VLR process.⁷³ In these cases, the VLR process is integrated into local efforts to implement the SDGs, encompassing the different stages of implementation while responding to political cycles. The resulting VLRs are therefore distinct accounts of the on-going process conducted by each local government in planning, implementing and monitoring the SDGs.

There are a number of good practices of ways to articulate a follow-up and review of the SDGs among the cities that have produced two or more VLR reports. In this section, the report considers three cases that are exemplary in joining together their VLR and FUR processes: Barcelona, Gladsaxe and Helsinki. Barcelona divided its FUR process into four steps that correspond to the different stages of SDG



implementation, from planning to monitoring.

Gladsaxe approached the follow-up and review of the SDGs from two complementary perspectives—quantitative and qualitative—to better understand the city's performance. In Helsinki, the VLR preparation process is increasingly aligned with the city's political cycle, helping to review the Helsinki City Strategy, which is updated in every council term.

Barcelona conducted three consecutive VLRs in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Its VLR process has strengthened the city's localisation efforts—which had already started in 2018. The process also gave structure to the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In each of its three VLRs to date, Barcelona has monitored progress on all 17 SDGs. To do so, the city localised the targets and indicators proposed by the 2030 Agenda, resulting in the so-called Barcelona targets. Most of the Barcelona targets include an operational definition, including its meaning and how it is measurable and assessable.⁷⁴ This initial exercise facilitates the FUR process of the implementation of the SDGs.

Barcelona divided its FUR processes into four steps:⁷⁵

1. The city identified indicators that would allow a comparison with other territorial units—including the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain and the European Union. In so doing, Barcelona embraces the emphasis on comparability promulgated by the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), seeking greater comparability of its progress with other European and Spanish cities; however, selecting indicators that are available in other national and foreign municipalities results in a smaller pool of indicators.
2. Barcelona created a prioritisation framework that includes intermediary targets. This relates to the initial process to identify the Barcelona Targets. At first, the city identified targets for which the municipal government is responsible. At the same time, Barcelona considered the importance of analysing the economic effort required for each target by linking them to the city's budget. Finally, it connected the targets to municipal operations—meaning that they are present in other municipal plans and strategies.
3. Barcelona then assessed the Barcelona Targets and completed an indicator system for monitoring progress.
4. Finally, Barcelona “move(d) the Municipal Agenda across to the Barcelona Agenda.”⁷⁶ In this final step, the follow-up and review process was linked to the city's political agenda to influence local initiatives.

These four steps put forward a method that integrates the different stages of SDG implementation. In

selecting the Barcelona Targets, the city planned the best way to undertake the 2030 Agenda. It also created a FUR process that fosters the continuous translation of SDG actions into the municipal political agenda, holding the potential to feed back into the planning and the implementation stages. These four steps align the monitoring process with local priorities and link it to the political agenda, therefore enhancing the effectiveness of the FUR process in driving progress towards the SDGs.

Gladsaxe has published two consecutive VLR reports in 2021 and 2022. The 2021 VLR focuses on the localisation of the SDGs and their integration into municipal policies. The 2022 VLR builds upon the city's wide range of actions to implement the 2030 Agenda, paying special attention to the monitoring and review of progress towards the SDGs. The first step was to localise the 2030 Agenda. In the Gladsaxe's Strategy for the 2018–2022 period, the city identified seven global goals—SDGs 3, 4, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 17—as being the most relevant to the local challenges. These seven SDGs were integrated into the Strategy's six Goals.⁷⁷ Each of Gladsaxe's strategic goals aligns with different SDGs; nevertheless, SDG 17 works cross all six of the city's goals, reflecting the need for stronger institutions, partnerships and policy coherence to achieve all local priorities. Gladsaxe's strategy has been politically adopted and implemented throughout the entire municipal organisational structure. This includes reporting on the triple bottom-line in the budget and annual accounts, as well as developing annual business plans and strategic agreements that all departments and units rely on to guide their activities and operations each year.

Gladsaxe conducts an annual review to assess the impact of its strategy towards achieving its Goals. All municipal departments report on their progress and comment on any deviations from the overall direction, which motivates municipal staff to move in the right direction. This annual review covers quantitative and qualitative aspects. For the quantitative assessment, the city has identified a set of indicators for each of its six Goals. The quantitative review is supplemented by a qualitative report based on cases from practice to capture emerging drivers, solutions and ideas not described in the strategy or set up goals for. Overall, the review makes it possible to monitor whether Gladsaxe is moving in the right direction across its six Goals of the strategy.

Helsinki has presented two VLRs to date—in 2019 and in 2021. The city is striving to integrate its VLR into the follow-up and review process used to evaluate the city's core strategy. The review cycle of the SDGs is

linked to the review cycle of the Helsinki City Strategy, which is updated every four years coinciding with every council term. The 2019 VLR took place part way through the implementation of the Helsinki City Strategy 2017-2021. This VLR reviewed both the progress on the SDGs as well as the development of key objectives of the City Strategy. The subsequent VLR in 2021 took place at the end of the Helsinki City Strategy 2017-2021 and also coincided with the drafting process for the following 2021-2025 Strategy. In this way, the VLR helped to assess progress made for the 2017-2021 strategy whilst also informing the drafting process of 2021-2025 Strategy. Helsinki hopes to continue using the VLR process as a tool to evaluate progress midway and at the end of each City Strategy period, thereby ensuring that a subsequent, evidence-based strategy can be developed.

Overall, these three examples show that the cities share a strong commitment to integrate the SDGs into local policies and to develop robust follow-up and review mechanisms to provide data and guidance to evidence-based planning systems. The three cases began by localising the 2030 Agenda, identifying relevant local targets and indicators. Subsequently, they developed a FUR framework that feeds back into policies and political cycles. This ensures an integrated approach to the local work on the SDGs. Significantly, in all three cases, the VLR and FUR processes have worked in unison as a means to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the local level.

5.2. Indicator System

Indicators play a crucial role in the follow-up and review architecture of the 2030 Agenda. They provide a way to track progress towards the achievement of the SDGs, measuring performance and means of implementation.⁷⁸ The global indicators system was approved in 2017, two years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. In principle, the chosen 231 indicators were intended to reflect the interlinked nature of the 17 SDGs, and therefore, they were designed to capture the different dimensions of sustainable development. However, they have been criticised for not being appropriate to capture the complexity of the 2030 Agenda, and especially for multidimensional targets that bring together the three dimensions of sustainable development; in the case of multidimensional targets, the environmental

dimension is often dropped by the indicator for the sake of simplification.⁷⁹

Initially, the indicator framework was supposed to “guarantee international comparability”,⁸⁰ but it was soon recognised that there was a need to develop indicators relevant to different national contexts. In turn, this makes it more complicated to ensure international comparability and global monitoring of the achievement of the SDGs, because adapting indicators to suit local contexts can lead to challenges in interpreting data across different regions.

For local governments, choosing an indicator system to monitor the implementation of the SDGs poses several challenges. First, there is the issue of data availability. Many local governments do not have access to pertinent data, nor do they have the capacity for data collection. Furthermore, even when data is available, it may not be disaggregated at the appropriate level, and it may not be regular enough to allow for long-term trend analysis, or be of sufficient quality to inform policy and decision-making. Second, local governments may lack the financial and technical resources needed to effectively localise indicators. Finally, localising the indicators requires coordination between different levels of government, in particular with national statistical offices (if any). By extension, the integration between national and local FUR processes needs to be considered when localising indicators. Ideally, localised indicators should be relevant to local governments and usable in evidence-based policymaking while easily aggregated into national or regional reviews of progress.

Cities usually confront the challenge of selecting an appropriate indicator system through their VLR process. In this section, the report considers three cases to illustrate how cities chose an indicator system for their VLR: Shah Alam, Melbourne and Bonn. Shah Alam had an existing set of indicators developed at the national level to meet the needs of Malaysian cities. The case of Melbourne highlights the importance of resorting to available indicators while striving to guarantee comparability—as was initially suggested by the United Nations Statistical Division. Bonn shows how an indicators system can evolve through time as FUR processes are repeated.

Shah Alam presented its VLR report in 2021. To monitor the progress towards the SDGs, Shah Alam used the indicators developed by the ‘Malaysian Urban Rural National Indicators Network for Sustainable Development’ (MURNInets).⁸¹ Moreover, Urbanice Malaysia (as part of the ‘Malaysia SDG Cities’ initiative) presented a set of ‘Local Indicators for Cities’ to

further facilitate the monitoring of the SDGs of local governments in Malaysia. There were six basic criteria for selecting indicators: (1) alignment with the UN's recommended indicators; (2) adapted to the local context of Malaysian cities; (3) relevant at the local level; (4) represent areas over which local Malaysian local governments have jurisdiction; (5) availability in different Malaysian cities; and (6) coverage to measure progress over time. This indicator framework benefited from nationally available indicators, including 39 of the indicators presented by MURNInet, 12 from the 'Low Carbon City Framework Indicators,' and 22 linked to the 'Malaysia Smart City Framework Indicators'.⁸² Overall, this indicator framework hopes to support the VLR and FUR processes of Malaysian cities.

In its first VLR, published in 2022, Melbourne selected a set of indicators that facilitates comparison across cities. The first step consisted on identifying outcome-focused indicators that were already being used to measure sustainable development in the City of Melbourne. Second, to complement this existing set of indicators, Melbourne further reviewed outside sources, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the OECD, AURIN, the Carbon Disclosure Project, and World Council on City Data. Following this analysis,

Melbourne assessed the data applicability, reliability and availability of indicators. Although priority was given to select indicators that align with the official UN-made list of indicators, the VLR acknowledges that not all indicators are relevant for local governments. Finally, the VLR sets 2015, the year of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, to benchmark progress towards the SDGs.⁸³

The city of Bonn has conducted two VLRs—in 2020 and 2022. The VLRs not only overview the city's localisation strategy but also serve as a framework to follow up and review the implementation of the SDGs. Bonn's VLR process builds upon the city's Sustainability Report, whose first edition was published in 2005, with follow-up editions every three years thereafter. Bonn's periodic sustainability reporting exercises provided the city with a sound foundation in terms of establishing an indicator system to measure progress towards the SDGs. Bonn's first VLR was built upon the results of its Fifth Sustainability Report. The Fifth Sustainability Report used 55 quantitative indicators grouped under four different categories: (1) 'well-being'; (2) 'social justice'; (3) 'environmental quality and resource efficiency'; and (4) 'economic efficiency'.⁸⁴ Bonn's 2020 VLR



restructured these indicators to cover the six fields of municipal action identified in the city's localisation strategy.⁸⁵

These indicators come from different sources. To begin with, the Association of German Cities and the Bertelsmann Foundation have identified a set of indicators to monitor the implementation of the SDGs tailored to the German context.⁸⁶ The 55 indicators used in the Fifth Sustainability Report combined some of the nationally determined indicators with some of Bonn's own indicators used in previous editions of its report. For its 2022 VLR, Bonn expanded the scope of its indicator system to include both quantitative and qualitative indicators to better portray how the city is advancing the SDGs. The qualitative analysis comprises all municipal core activities that contribute to advancing the SDGs.

Ultimately, follow-up and review processes and a robust indicator system go hand in hand. An indicator framework is the backbone of any FUR process, linking data with SDG targets and providing the foundation for evidence-based decision-making in implementing the 2030 Agenda. However, it is also one of the most challenging aspects of local governments' work on the SDGs. To set a locally relevant indicators framework requires tremendous capacity in terms of human resources, knowledge and funding. Moreover, the complexity of the SDGs—with their 169 targets and 231 indicators—may seem hard to articulate at the local level. As such, before committing to FUR processes, cities need to localise the SDGs, identify relevant targets, and then, decide on pertinent indicators that reflect available data while being relevant to the local context. All in all, cities benefit from nationally localised indicators and greater vertical integration through support provided by national statistical offices, as this would reduce the burden of FUR processes to local authorities. Against this backdrop, the VLR process holds the potential to guide SDG implementation efforts by local governments.

6. VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS 2018-2022: AN OVERVIEW

VLRs originated as a bottom-up exercise from local and regional governments to show their commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Pioneer cities mirrored the Voluntary National Review process to present their own reviews of progress. As more cities joined the VLR movement the VLR format adapted to meet the needs of different local governments. Various guidelines have been developed since 2020 and as well as recommending best practices, they have left room for LRGs to experiment with their own approach to the VLR process. As such, over the years, the VLR format has developed into a versatile tool that helps LRGs to institutionalise their work on the 2030 Agenda.

This section presents the overarching trends in the VLR movement between 2018 and 2022. In an effort to include as many VLR reports as possible, the authors have identified 196 VLR reports presented between 2018 and 2022 that meet the criteria set up in Section 2 of the present report.⁸⁷ The general characteristics are shown in the following infographics.

THE VLRS 2018-2022

Largest Municipality

■ 2018 ■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022



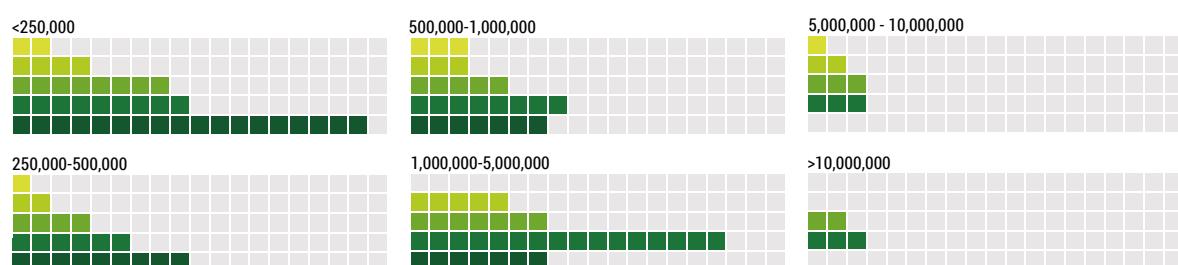
Smallest Municipality

■ 2018 ■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022



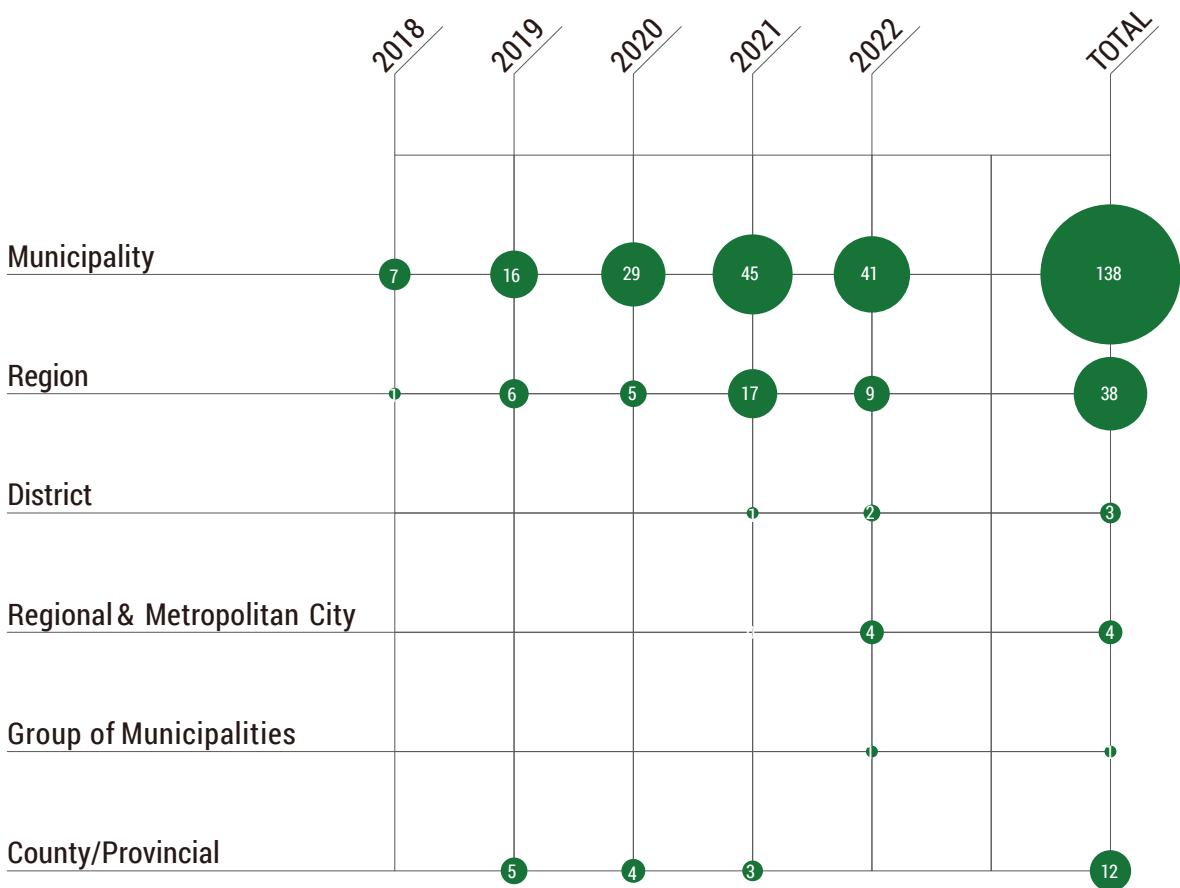
VLRs by municipality size

■ 2018 ■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022

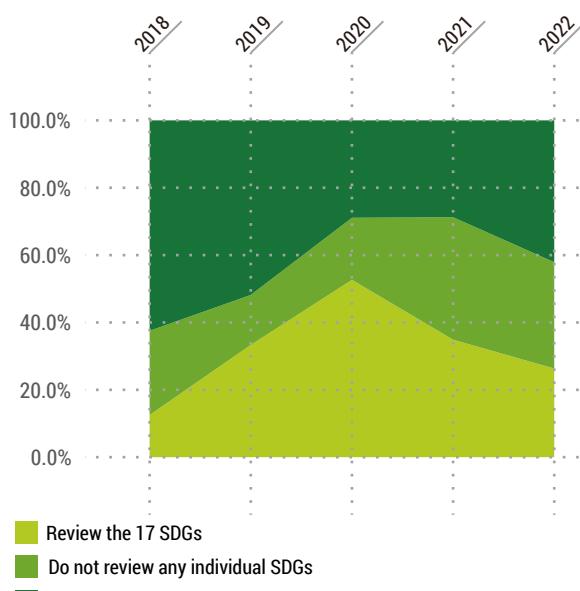


THE VLRS 2018-2022

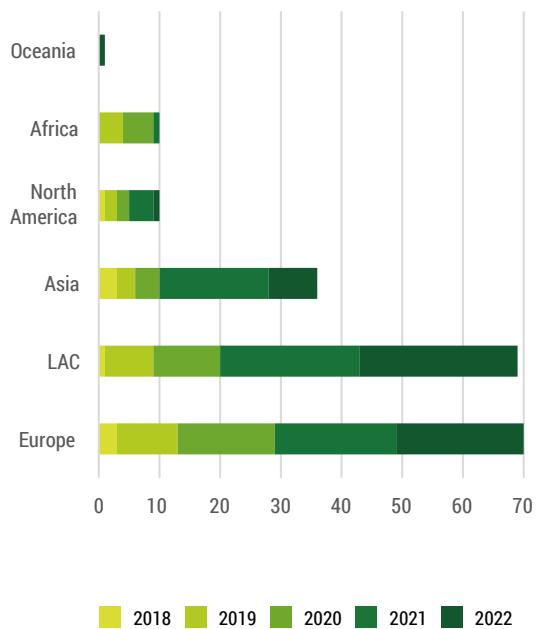
VLRs by type of government



Approach to the follow-up and review of the SDGs as share of all VLR reports

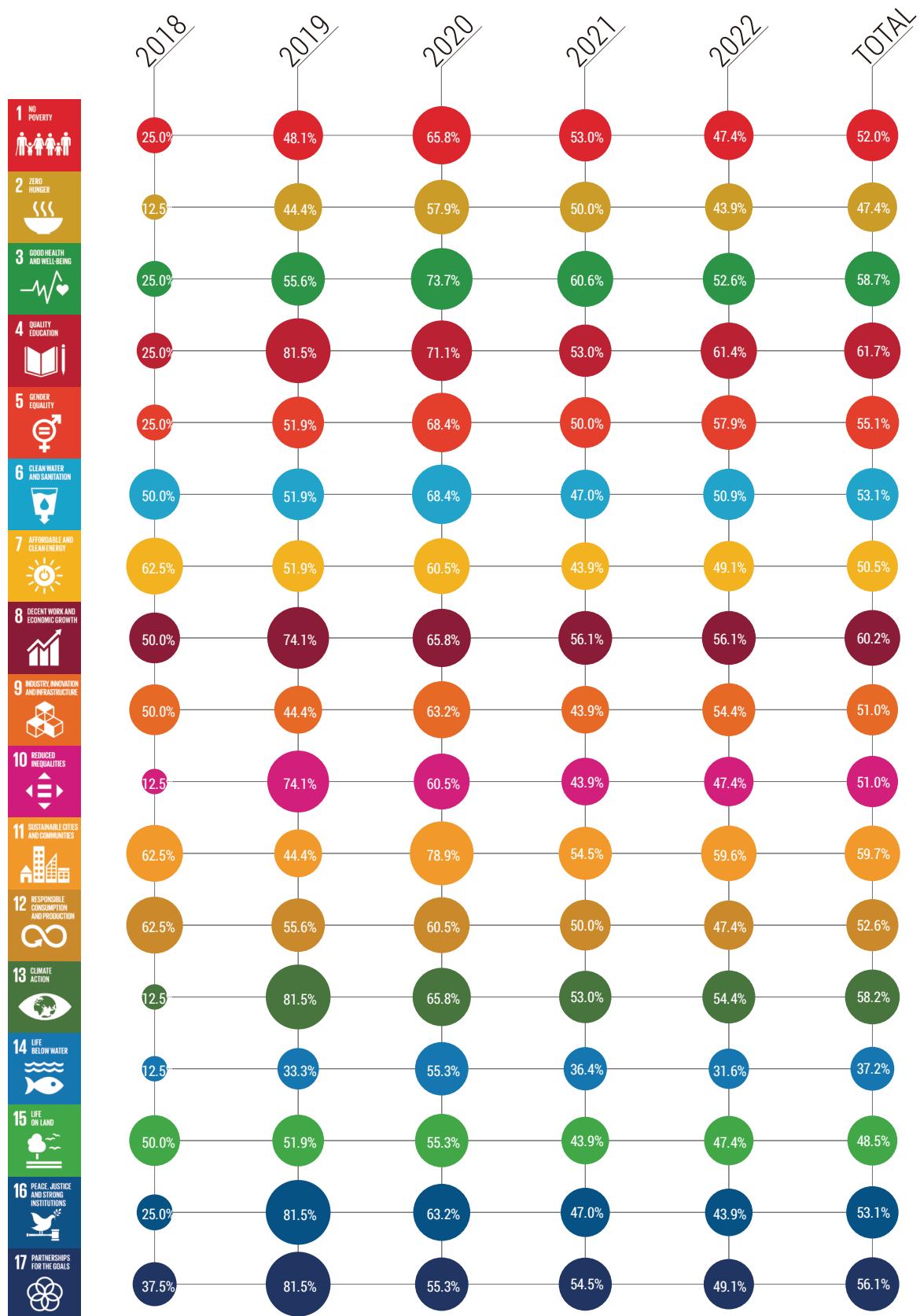


VLRs by geographical region



THE VLRS 2018-2022

Share of VLR reports reviewing each SDG



7.

CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

This report looks at the 2022 group of VLR reports. First, it overviews the 57 VLR reports identified by the authors, analysing the major trends and developments shaping the VLR movement in 2022. Second, the report explores two themes through exemplary cases of VLRs: (1) multi-level governance and the integration between VNRs and VLRs; and (2) how VLRs support the follow-up and review process of the SDGs. Moreover, this report discerns key trends in the VLR movement since its origin in 2018. This analysis reinforces the idea that cities are using their VLRs as a policy tool to articulate the planning, implementation, and follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda—findings that agree with those of previous editions of IGES's 'State of the Voluntary Local Reviews' series.

This report has explored how the VLR process structures two key and interrelated aspects to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. First, multi-level governance (MLG) is important because delivering the 2030 Agenda requires a collective effort and a whole-of-society approach that involves coordination among different levels of government; achieving some SDGs needs close coordination with national agencies.⁸⁸ Second, follow-up and review processes ensure that implementation strategies go according to plan—tracking progress towards the SDGs and identifying areas where more action is needed—and promoting accountability and transparency.

MLG is crucial for achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda because it recognises that sustainable development requires the involvement and cooperation of actors at all levels of government—as well as civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders. As such, how to optimise MLG is a crucial step across the planning, action, and follow-up and review stages of SDG implementation. To begin with, MLG for the 2030 Agenda highlights the need for coherence and alignment between national, sub-national, and local policies and strategies; this requires coordination and cooperation among different levels of government to ensure that policies and programmes are mutually reinforcing and working towards the same goals. In addition, multilevel governance requires effective communication, information-sharing and

participation among different levels of government. This helps to build trust, promote accountability, and ensure that diverse perspectives and needs are taken into account in decision-making processes.

The integration between the VNR and VLR processes can facilitate the coordination between different levels of governments and reinforce MLG. As this report has illustrated with the case of Italy, there is great potential in capitalising on VNRs and VLRs to empower LRGs to work on the SDGs.⁸⁹

The 2030 Agenda prescribed FUR as a process that helps to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. FUR is the main mechanism that guarantees the timely execution of strategies to deliver the SDGs while safekeeping the "leave no one behind" ethos of the 2030 Agenda. The 2030 Agenda singles out national governments as the key agents to conduct FUR—resulting in Voluntary National Reviews. However, regional and local governments have shown their commitment to localising the SDGs by mirroring VNRs at the local and regional levels—resulting in Voluntary Local Reviews.

As a tool to articulate FUR processes at the local level, VLRs lead to several benefits for local governments:

- Enhancing transparency and accountability: VLRs provide a platform for local governments to report on their progress towards the SDGs and share their achievements, challenges and gaps with both citizens and the global community alike.
- Strengthening local governance: VLRs promote citizen engagement, participatory decision-making, and collaboration among local government officials, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders, thereby enhancing the quality of local governance.
- Identifying priority areas for action: VLRs help local governments identify their strengths and weaknesses in SDG implementation, thereby helping to recalibrate action plans to address outstanding gaps and challenges.
- Improving resource allocation: VLRs help local governments identify resource gaps and mobilise resources to address priority areas, thereby improving resource allocation efficiency to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.
- Sharing knowledge and experiences: VLRs create opportunities for local governments to share their best practices, innovative solutions and lessons learned with other local governments, facilitating knowledge transfer and peer learning.

MLG and follow-up and review processes work at their best when they reinforce each other. MLG requires FUR to better guide cooperation across different levels of government. It can identify responsibilities and ensure

that they are effectively fulfilled, while avoiding duplicities in programmes to optimise the mobilisation of resources. FUR processes need to consider the territorial disparities that exist within a country. While a country may be performing well in delivering the SDGs at an aggregated level, more often than not, achievements are unevenly distributed across different territorial units. Multi-level FUR identifies these territorial disparities and can help to create synergies across different levels of government to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of the SDGs. In both cases, conducting a VLR can serve to structure MLG and FUR processes in a way that accelerates the achievement of the SDGs.

7.1.

Voluntary Local Reviews Beyond 2030

The SDGs' 15 year time period is half over. It seems unlikely that the ambitious objectives laid out in the 2030 Agenda will be achieved on time. The United Nation's '2023 Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report' sounds the alarm. The report examined the 140 targets for which there is sufficient data to gauge their progress. Out of those 140 targets, only about

12% are on track to be met by 2030. While around 50% of the targets show progress, some 30% have not improved or have even regressed.⁹⁰ In light of this data, the UNSG António Guterres remarked that "we are leaving more than half the world behind"⁹¹ when launching the report.

This bleak picture suggests a series of shortcomings in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to date. One possible explanation is that the lack of integration and coherence between policies and the SDGs is leading to fragmented and ineffective approaches to sustainable development. It may also be because policies so far have been inadequate (or missing) or because there is insufficient financing to achieve the Global Goals. Moreover, in many countries and at different geographical levels, a lack of data and monitoring is making it difficult to track progress and identify areas that require further attention. Furthermore, meaningful engagement with citizens—which is essential for achieving the SDGs in a way that leaves no one behind—is limited, ad-hoc, or not sufficiently inclusive.

Mid-point through the implementation period to achieve the 2030 Agenda, there are a number of challenges that hinder progress towards the delivery of the SDGs. There is insufficient financing and investing in sustainable development to achieve the SDGs. Climate change and environmental degradation



threatens to undermine progress on many SDGs. Moreover, new and unforeseen crises have slowed down or reversed progress in recent years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing armed conflicts.

Local and regional governments can help address the challenges and shortcomings hindering the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Conducting a VLR holds the potential to support these efforts. However, the VLR process needs to go beyond being a monitoring framework and a reporting exercise on progress on the SDGs. If well developed and institutionalised into local governance structures, the VLR process provides an opportunity to take ownership of the SDGs and adapt them to specific contexts; this, in turn, can help ensure that the SDGs are implemented in a way that is relevant and responsive to local needs and priorities. From this starting point, VLRs can help promote multilevel governance while enhancing accountability and transparency—as this report has shown. More importantly, VLRs can also serve as a laboratory for innovation and experimentation, allowing LRGs to test and scale up innovative approaches to SDG implementation. Ultimately, this can generate new ideas and solutions for achieving the SDGs, providing a basis for policy learning and diffusion across different contexts.

To maximise the contribution of the VLR process to sustainable development, it is recommended to incorporate VLRs into municipal planning mechanisms and policy-making processes. VLR processes can help create stronger links with national policies, build local awareness and capacity, align local planning processes with the SDGs, facilitate stakeholder engagement processes, and structure the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

Finally, integrating the VLR process into policymaking will allow VLRs to become an important policy tool that is useful in advancing sustainable development beyond 2030. VLRs can articulate an approach to policymaking that helps to localise global sustainable development agendas—including the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, or the New Urban Agenda to name a few. Bringing all these global agendas under the umbrella of the VLR process would help to avoid overburdening and overwhelming LRGs with too much complex reporting, while maximising their contribution to achieve global sustainability goals. The interconnected nature of sustainable development requires a multidimensional way of thinking that understands the synergies and

trade-offs between different actions to identify optimal pathways to advance transformative change.

This use of VLR processes can help to overcome silo-thinking and support local government's actions to achieve a more sustainable world. Silo-thinking refers to the practice of working in isolation or within a narrow scope without considering the interconnections between different sectors or issues. In the context of sustainable development this can lead to suboptimal outcomes, as it fails to take into account the complex and interconnected nature of environmental, social and economic problems.

To achieve sustainable development, it is essential to adopt an integrated approach that considers the interlinkages between different global agendas and areas of action—such as energy, water, food, health, education and social equity. This requires breaking down the silos between sectors and engaging in cross-cutting collaborations and partnerships. VLRs can articulate an integrated approach to identify synergies, trade-offs and co-benefits between different sectors and global agendas, leading to more effective and efficient policies and actions that contribute to sustainable development. As the world embarks on discussions for the post-2030 agenda, VLRs can promote an integrated and coherent attitude towards sustainable development in cities. With the help of VLRs, policymakers can better coordinate towards sustainable development, setting the stage for a more equitable future beyond 2030.

-appendix-

ANALYSIS OF THE 2022 GROUP OF VLRs

Amman

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review the City of Amman, Jordan

Population: 4,642,000 (2021)



Overview of the VLR Report

The Greater Amman Municipality has taken a number of steps to localise and achieve the SDGs since the introduction of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, including acquiring various certifications and joining networks such as the 100 Resilient Cities Network and the C40 Cities network. However, Amman faces a variety of challenges, including limited institutional capacity, funding, and access to urban data. According to Amman's review, to achieve sustainable development in the future, it is crucial to build the capacity of entities working towards the SDGs, take coordinated action, and implement evidence-based planning. The VLR was developed using quantitative and qualitative data collected from various sources, including the Amman Urban Observatory (AUO), the national Department of Statistics (DoS), UN-Habitat, and others, and focuses on Amman's performance on SDGs 3, 7, 9, 11, 13, and 17. The review highlights the need for modernisation and equal spatial distribution of healthcare services, further investment in the city's green and efficient energy sector, equal access to the labour market, tailored housing solutions, and climate action, among others.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on economic development in Jordan, affecting production, tourism, trade, and employment, particularly for women. The country's GDP decreased, while unemployment and poverty rates rose, and the public deficit grew. The pandemic also hindered access to healthcare infrastructure and services, including family planning and treatment of chronic diseases. Despite national efforts to revive tourism by adopting the National Tourism Strategy 2021-2025, the sector was heavily impacted by lockdown measures. Moreover, the pandemic created challenges in accessing basic goods, services, and infrastructure at the community level. These challenges underscore the importance of building resilient cities and communities that can continue to achieve the SDGs, even as they respond to crises.



Amsterdam

Name of VLR Report: City of Amsterdam Voluntary Local Review 2022

Population: 921,402 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

Amsterdam has adopted the City Doughnut, which is based on Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics, as a compass to localise the SDGs. The City Doughnut is a model that summarises the ecological and social boundaries of our planet, linking the monitoring of approximately 40 different instruments to one cohesive and collective story of a sustainable future for Amsterdam. The Doughnut Economics also provides seven design principles for navigating the city towards a sustainable future. Amsterdam has identified SDGs 1, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13 as the main focus for this report, as they are closely linked to the goals of the city council.

The city of Amsterdam aims to achieve sustainable development through a holistic approach that connects the '5Ps' of the UN SDGs: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership. Amsterdam prioritises equal opportunities for all local residents, addresses wealth inequality and housing accessibility issues, and responds to recent developments in Ukraine that may exacerbate inequality. Although the city aims to become a fully circular city by taking an integrated approach to environmental issues, it must go to greater lengths to meet targets, such as reducing CO₂ emissions and addressing energy poverty. In terms of prosperity, Amsterdam focuses on sustainable development and employment growth while acknowledging that not all groups benefit equally. The city advocates for alliances locally and globally to achieve peace and partnerships for the goals. Amsterdam recommends improving monitoring, adopting a holistic approach to urban challenges, and integrating Doughnut Economics principles. By embracing these measures, Amsterdam strives to balance local needs with global sustainability and foster sustainable policies and partnerships, ultimately aligning with the SDGs and working towards their successful implementation.

Atenas

Name of VLR Report: Informe Local Voluntario para los ODS Atenas 2022

Population: 8,015 (2022)



Overview of the VLR Report

The municipality of Atenas viewed its Voluntary Local Review (VLR) process as a way to showcase the significant contributions of local governments in implementing the SDGs. The involvement of various actors at the local level is essential for achieving the SDGs, given the local nature of many of their targets. The VLR report emphasises the need for political and civic commitment to incorporate the 2030 Agenda into local policies and development plans. The VLR report, prepared by the Planning Department and Environmental Management Unit of the Municipality of Atenas, provides an overview of the information collection process, contextualises how the SDGs became a cross-cutting axis of implemented actions, identifies contributions according to the SDGs, and includes general assessments of the process.

The first step in producing the Voluntary Local Review involved aligning the SDGs with municipal strategies. This localisation process provided a clearer understanding of areas where efforts are focused and where gaps exist. Information collection involved reviewing actions derived from the Local Human Development Plan and the Municipal Strategic Plan. Atenas shared this initiative with local stakeholders to gather ideas about actions and their connections to the SDGs. The report focuses on 11 of the 17 SDGs, presenting linkages between the SDGs and policies contained in the Local Human Development Plan and the Municipal Strategic Plan across eight areas: (1) economic development; (2) human security; (3) education; (4) social security; (5) public services; (6) territorial planning; (7) environmental management; and (8) public infrastructure. The VLR report highlights the importance of community involvement and capacity building, as well as the leadership and commitment of municipal authorities and institutional hierarchies in advancing the implementation of the SDGs.



Barcelona

Name of VLR Report: Annual monitoring and evaluation report on the Barcelona 2030 Agenda (Voluntary Local Review 2022)

Population: 1,636,193 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

This is the third edition of the VLR in Barcelona, following reports published in 2020 and 2021. With a focus on the 17 SDGs, the 2022 report provides detailed information on the progress of key indicators established in 2020 to measure the achievement of the goals. The report relies on data from the Municipal Data Office, which collects information from various sources such as statistical records, surveys, and opinion polls conducted by public and private institutions. The Barcelona City Council's Sociological Studies Plan also contributes valuable data through surveys on important issues in municipal policies and management. Additionally, joint research with the Spanish Network for Sustainable Development is incorporated to establish a priority model for SDGs targets.

The report highlights the complexities of social reality and the influence of ideologies on perceptions between different indicators. These indicators show that Barcelona experienced a parallel recovery from the pandemic, i.e., economic and social activity returned to pre-pandemic levels on the one hand, while negative factors persisted, such as pollution, housing rental prices, congestion, and certain types of crime. The city saw declines in educational performance and falling levels of social participation, while inflation and ongoing conflicts affected economic recovery. In response to these developments, the Barcelona 2030 Agenda quantifies targets through participatory processes, balancing ambition and realism. Barcelona's upcoming municipal elections provide an opportunity to renew the city's commitment to sustainability. Sectoral and integrated territorial strategies will require that SDGs targets be reviewed, shaping a stronger Barcelona 2030 Agenda. Barcelona forges alliances that reach beyond city limits, and aims to share its missions, objectives, and efforts at various territorial levels.

Belén

Name of VLR Report: Informe Local Voluntario Para los ODS Belén 2022

Population: 26,662 (2021)



Overview of the VLR Report

The Local Government of Belén conducted its first Voluntary Local Review in 2022. The localisation of the SDGs in Belén began with awareness sessions conducted by MIDEPLAN and the United Nations, involving municipal authorities, the mayor's office, municipal council, and municipal areas and units. This led to the alignment of cantonal plans and policies with the SDGs, forming the basis for the municipality's VLR. The report's development involved linking the strategic axes, programmes, and projects of the municipal's Strategic Plan through the Institutional Planning Unit, which validated the process with area directorates and unit coordinators. The VLR process was carried out in conjunction with a participatory update of the Local Human Development Plan, incorporating the SDGs into the canton's vision, mission, principles, values, policies, specific objectives, and action lines. The VLR included an extensive stakeholder engagement process. The Local Government of Belén aims to address the challenges posed by the 2030 Agenda through its existing management and planning instruments. The projects and programmes contribute to sustainable development, particularly in relation to 14 out of the 17 SDGs.

The VLR process allowed for an analysis of the opportunities for identifying indicators in a follow-up and review of the achievements of the SDGs at the local level. While the canton faces challenges in terms of data availability and coordination with state actors, this initial effort in identifying local indicators is considered crucial for future updates in Belén's strategy to implement the SDGs. This first report identifies 22 initial local indicators related to 17 targets in 10 SDGs, and includes budget execution indicators for institutional programmes from 2020 to 2021, categorised by specific SDGs. Overall, the VLR provided an opportunity for reflection and identifying areas for improvement to enhance efficiency and address civic issues more effectively in the future.



Bonn

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review 2022: The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the City of Bonn

Population: 336,000 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

Bonn has redesigned itself as the 'German City of the United Nations', establishing itself as a centre for international cooperation and sustainable development. Bonn houses a unique sustainability cluster of federal agencies, scientific institutions, businesses, development organisations, think tanks, and non-governmental organisations, all guided by the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The city has formed networks and alliances focused on biodiversity research, disaster prevention, and risk management, further connecting with the UN's areas of work. Bonn plays a significant role in promoting global sustainable development through various dialogue formats and initiatives.

This is Bonn's second edition of the VLR. In the previous project terms (2016-2020), focus was placed on developing integrated sustainability strategies for municipalities. In the current term (2021-2022), emphasis has shifted to the development of local sustainability reports. This framework aims to establish a more consistent and transparent approach to sustainability reporting in German municipalities. The report builds upon the German Sustainability Code, which has functioned as a reporting standard for corporate sustainability since 2011. The VLR in Bonn was developed through a collaborative process involving all relevant municipal departments. Stocktaking was conducted to gather qualitative and quantitative information. Qualitatively, core activities contributing to sustainability were collected, and quantitatively, indicators were evaluated using a predefined indicator set complemented by municipality-specific indicators. The information was gathered through questionnaires and meetings, with the results presented in the VLR.

Bristol

Name of VLR Report: Bristol and the SDGs: 2022 Review of Progress, Challenges and Opportunities

Population: 465,866 (2020)



Overview of the VLR Report

Following the city's first VLR in 2019, this updated report highlights Bristol's achievements in addressing education and the climate emergency, such as improvements in higher education, reduced carbon emissions, increased use of renewable energy, and other targets from previous years. However, challenges remain, including growing inequalities and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The VLR emphasises the importance of strong partnerships between the public and private sector, civil society organisations, unions, and academia in driving progress towards the SDGs. The report also calls for stable financial environments for local authorities, deeper devolution, and increased support for community action and collaboration at national and international levels to amplify local efforts in addressing global challenges.

Bristol's localised approach to sustainable development has fostered collaborative, cross-sectoral approaches through initiatives like the One City Plan. The VLR acknowledges the financial challenges faced by local authorities, with shrinking budgets and competitive funding mechanisms hindering long-term planning and service delivery. By adopting these measures, Bristol aims to continue its progress towards the SDGs and inspire other cities to adopt similar approaches in their local contexts.



Buenos Aires

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review 2022: Localisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Buenos Aires City

Population: 3,120,612 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

This is the fourth edition of the VLR, which Buenos Aires has published annually since 2019. The localisation process in the city revolves around three pillars: adaptation, strategic partnerships, and awareness-raising. Adaptation involves aligning and prioritising the global goals with actual local conditions, prioritising 16 of the 17 SDGs, 61 targets, and 235 indicators for monitoring. The 2022-2023 Government Plan of Buenos Aires aligns with the 2030 Agenda and focuses on education and labour, public safety, urban transformation, digital city, and comprehensive well-being. The city also actively engages in strategic partnerships by exchanging experiences and best practices with other cities and international organisations, and further enhances collaboration on the implementation of the goals through the SDG Leadership Cities Network and other initiatives. Buenos Aires aims to involve the entire community in achieving the SDGs through awareness-raising activities. 'BA Volunteering for the SDGs' is one of the city's most exceptional activities involving the participation of the public, with efforts accelerating actions and fostering engagement in this Decade of Action. As part of the global community working to achieve the SDGs, Buenos Aires also acknowledges the collective effort required to achieve sustainable development.

Buenos Aires has made significant progress towards sustainability in various areas, including digitisation, citizen services, education, health, public security, mobility, and public spaces. Initiatives such as the launch of a chatbot for queries from residents, modernising interactions with the private sector, and enhancing educational and health systems have helped improve the quality of life for residents. Efforts in public security have resulted in the lowest crime rates in the past 27 years, while mobility transformation has led to the construction of extensive bike lanes and a substantial increase in bicycle trips. The city recognises the importance of partnerships and collaboration in achieving the SDGs and coordinating with international organisations, city networks, civil society organisations, and other cities to adopt comprehensive and multilateral approaches. Gender equality, quality education, preservation of green spaces, and the social and urban integration of neighbourhoods are among the city's priorities to foster inclusivity and equal opportunities. In the post-pandemic reconstruction phase, Buenos Aires emphasises the urgency of local transformations to address global challenges and improve the well-being and quality of life for its residents and visitors.

Cochabamba

Name of VLR Report: Reporte Voluntario Local Cochabamba

Population: 856,198 (2022)



Overview of the VLR Report

Cochabamba's first VLR reflects the city's responsibilities in implementing the SDGs. The new Comprehensive Territorial Development Plan (CTDP 2021-2025) of the Autonomous Municipal Government of Cochabamba (AMGC) aims to fulfil the targets of the SDGs, identifying the needs and aspirations of the population and offering direction to municipal public services in improving quality of life with emphasis on transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, quality, and expedience. The municipality links its sustainable territorial model and the SDGs, particularly Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities, as well as its New Urban Agenda. In the 2021-2025 period, the AMGC aims to deepen this connection as it strives to become a modern, supportive, resilient, participatory, and open entity. The CTDP 2021-2025 seeks to generate concrete and measurable impacts in areas such as health services (Goal 2), education (Goal 4), water and sanitation (Goal 6), electricity (Goal 7), innovation (Goal 9), and urban planning (Goal 11). The CTDP is structured into four fundamental pillars: (1) governance and institutional development; (2) human development; (3) urban development and the environment; and (4) sustainable and productive development.

Cochabamba recognises the importance of generating information as input for strategic territorial planning. Its VLR informs about the municipality's progress in relation to the SDGs, articulating specific policies and actions at the local level. The VLR report also includes voluntary commitments made by the city, most of which are incorporated into the CTDP 2021-2025. These commitments consist of quantifiable goals to be achieved by 2025 through specific actions and programmes defined in the CTDP. All secretariats within the Cochabamba municipal government worked together to set priorities and formulate the objectives and targets presented in the VLR. The government collaborated closely with UN-Habitat in prioritising and monitoring the SDGs indicators, selecting those relevant to the local context and aligning them with Cochabamba's strategic criteria and policy priorities. The indicators and objectives presented in the VLR correspond to important targets for Cochabamba's actual territorial context. The process of prioritising policies includes reviews of available information at the local level, which ensures that indicators are periodically monitored.



Dhulikhel

Name of VLR Report: Dhulikhel, Nepal Voluntary Local Review

Population: 36,183 (2011)

Overview of the VLR Report

Inclusive and people-centric, Dhulikhel's VLR process aims to incorporate the perspectives of various stakeholders. The methodology followed for the VLR process adheres to the guidelines outlined by the UNESCAP. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, virtual meetings were conducted with the core team to measure progress, analyse gaps, and share updates on the reporting process. The municipality's strong commitment and involvement of competent organisations was instrumental to the success of the VLR process, which began with an inception meeting in January 2021, officially launching the assessment. The meeting, which involved city officials, NGOs, educational institutes, and other stakeholders, discussed the importance of the VLR process. An orientation workshop was conducted to enhance understanding and knowledge of the SDGs, targets, indicators, and the reporting process. A core team representing different sectors within the municipality was formed to lead the VLR process. Stakeholder consultations were carried out virtually due to the pandemic, involving a wide range of stakeholders from public and private institutions. The city mapped out ongoing programmes in line with the 17 SDGs, prioritising four specific goals for in-depth evaluation: Goal 1 No poverty, Goal 3 Good health and well-being, Goal 4 Quality education, and Goal 6 Clean water and sanitation.

Dhulikhel emphasises the principle of 'leaving no one behind' and has developed by-laws, policies, and programmes to promote equality, equity, non-discrimination, and participation. The municipality has established five separate councils for women, people with disabilities, Dalits, tribal peoples, and youth, utilising the Mayor's Poverty Alleviation Funds. These councils engage marginalised segments of the population in local decision-making processes and implement income generation and skill development activities for these communities. The city prioritises reaching the furthest behind first through various initiatives, including gender-responsive development, and has implemented programmes to promote technical skills development, raise awareness about girls' education, and address issues such as child marriage.

Düsseldorf

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review 2022: The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the City of Düsseldorf

Population: 619,477 (2021)



Overview of the VLR Report

Düsseldorf's VLR was developed within the project 'Global Sustainable Municipality in North Rhine-Westphalia', together with the four other German cities of Bonn, Münster, Dortmund, and Arnsberg. The VLR is structured according to the German Local Sustainability Reporting Framework (BNK), consisting of overarching steering criteria and thematic fields. The steering criteria cover aspects such as sustainability strategies, public participation, sustainable administration, finances, and innovation. Thematic fields translate the 17 SDGs into nine areas of municipal sustainability relevant to the German context.

Düsseldorf has adopted the overarching concept of 'shaping sustainability at the municipal level' as the framework for sustainable development in the city. The strategic approach within the administration involves conducting a stocktaking of target and actual performance, prioritising fields of action, defining goals and success criteria, implementing and documenting actions, and setting standards. The prioritised fields of action for municipal sustainability in 2022 include climate protection, mobility, waste management, biodiversity preservation, sustainable land management, sustainable construction, sustainable urban development, north-south cooperation, lifelong learning, culture for sustainable development, and sustainable procurement. Each field of action is coordinated by a lead department and contains specific objectives, sub-objectives, measures, and success criteria. Priorities were determined based on a stocktaking survey that assessed the city's sustainability activities and compared them to the goals of Agenda 2030.

Düsseldorf also embraces digitisation to promote innovation and synergy between sustainability and digitisation in its administration. The city also utilises a 'contract management database' for easy access to contracts, tax compliance, transparency, and efficiency control. Digitisation allows for extensive remote work options, reducing environmental impact and fixed costs. The Digital Innovation Hub Düsseldorf/Rheinland focuses on strengthening innovation and driving digitisation in the region. The hub implements smart city concepts and technologies, such as the Long Range Wide Area Network, which enables data to be transmitted securely for various applications like traffic management and waste disposal. The City Council of Düsseldorf has established the 'Smart City Düsseldorf' commission to develop a comprehensive strategy that links projects, considers the implications of digitisation, and invites interdisciplinary collaboration with external partners.



El Alto

Name of VLR Report: Reporte Voluntario Local El Alto

Population: 1,109,048 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

In its first VLR, the municipality of El Alto details the main actions implemented to achieve the SDGs within the framework of its local planning instruments. The VLR also establishes a follow-up and review framework that systematises the monitoring process of its development in alignment with the SDGs. The municipality of El Alto envisions an open and transparent governance model that supports vertical integration with other levels of government (municipal, departmental, and national). El Alto's long-term development plans prioritise health, education, and non-violence with four strategic government pillars: (1) green and welcoming city; (2) guaranteeing rights through health and education, free from violence; (3) municipal development with employment and dignity; and (4) open and transparent governance. These pillars encompass specific policies that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

El Alto's VLR aligns the current administration's vision with the SDGs. It recognises the importance of achieving the SDGs to realise systemic, integrated, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient urban development in El Alto. In doing so, the VLR process enables the articulation of local policies to address El Alto's most pressing challenges. The report includes the municipality's commitments, mostly incorporated into the comprehensive Territorial Plan for Integrated Development for Living Well (PTDI) 2021-2025. These commitments consist of voluntary targets for 2025 that are expected to be achieved through specific actions and programmes, allowing for regular monitoring of progress. El Alto worked with UN-Habitat to prioritise the SDG indicators. The VLR relies on official information published by the National Statistics Institute (INE) and the municipality's own administrative records, ensuring methodological robustness and continuity for monitoring the 2030 Agenda. The VLR report also highlights significant challenges for the city, primarily arising from its rapid urbanisation process. Migration from rural to urban areas in recent decades has led to considerably sized informal settlements, creating pockets of poverty within the municipality. The VLR report emphasises the power of the SDGs to serve as a blueprint to address this and other pressing issues. Finally, the VLR report monitors progress made towards achieving the goals of all 17 SDGs.

Escazú

Name of VLR Report: Informe Local Voluntario Municipalidad de Escazú 2022

Population: 70,054 (2021)



Overview of the VLR Report

The VLR process of Escazú focuses on the localisation and implementation of the SDGs. The VLR report highlights technical aspects and strategic-tactical considerations, such as aligning municipal plans with the SDGs and showcasing the municipality's good practices in governance and community services. The municipality places people at the centre of its interventions. In June 2021, the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN), United Nations offices in Costa Rica, and the Instituto de Fomento y Asesoría Municipal (IFAM) launched a project on tools for implementing the SDGs to raise the level of competitiveness of local governments, highlighting the importance of aligning local plans and budgets with the 17 SDGs in order to reach the goals by 2030.

Work on localising the SDGs in the municipal context continued in 2022, following the established work plan for October 2021 to August 2022. The VLR process consisted of three main phases. In the first phase, Escazú aligned its municipal plans with the SDGs, a process that involved the city's Commission for Sustainable Development Goals, which linked Escazú's Strategic Plan (2019-2024) to the SDGs. The second phase focused on localising the SDGs indicators at the municipal level by aligning them with the city's Strategic Plan (2019-2024). The third phase categorised the level of direct, indirect, and management contributions by Escazú to each SDG. The VLR process includes the development of monitoring tools for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the local level.



Genoa

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review 2022, Città Metropolitana di Genova

Population: 815,739 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

The Metropolitan City of Genoa (CMGe) has established a matrix structure to coordinate activities aimed at updating its strategic plan according to the new European and national socio-economic and policy framework. CMGe has signed a master agreement with metropolitan municipalities, enacting a network governance system that involves municipalities in co-designing activities for multiple issues faced from a sustainability perspective. CMGe has also signed collaborative agreements with the metropolitan cities of Venice, Milan and Turin in order to establish an inter-institutional working group for widespread metropolitan cities, aimed at integrating sustainable governance between territories.

CMGe's Sustainable Metropolitan Agenda proposes a 'sustainable urban space model' to integrate multiple sustainable interventions to improve the socio-economic fabric, social cohesion, and quality of life of residents while ensuring environmental and economic sustainability. This model aims to be scalable and applicable to different metropolitan spatial contexts. The city has identified guiding criteria related to infrastructure (accessibility), people (usability), space design (quality and naturalness), welfare, and digital innovation to create sustainable living conditions in the cities and communities located in its territory.

CMGe is taking action to promote a culture of sustainability through education, training, information, and communication. The municipality has collaborated with various research institutions, including the University of Genoa, National Institute of Urban Planning (INU), and National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development (ENEA), to support the development of a sustainable urban space model. CMGe has also organised various activities and events to promote sustainability in its territory, including a mobility boot camp, sustainable participatory cycling event, participation in Genoa Smart Week, and co-design of a sustainable development strategy with Environmental Education Centres (CEA). CMGe also organised a training course called the 'Rissêu' Living Lab focused on enhancing the area's natural, historical, cultural, and architectural heritage. These activities aimed to raise awareness and promote sustainable development in various areas, such as biodiversity, renewable energy, economy, and sustainable mobility.

Ghent

Name of VLR Report: Ghent Sustainability Report 2022: Focus on Prosperity, Voluntary Local Review

Population: 265,086 (2022)



Overview of the VLR Report

The Ghent Sustainability Report 2022 is Ghent's third edition of the VLR, focusing on initiatives that are instrumental to the 5Ps of the UN SDGs, specifically those under the 'prosperity' pillar. The 'people' and 'planet' pillars are covered in previous or subsequent reports. This report highlights SDGs 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, which include affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, and sustainable cities and communities. The report aims to support policies, inspire audiences, and showcase the steps taken towards a more sustainable city and world. The report also focuses on other international agendas, such as 'leave no one behind', 'human rights-based approach', 'gender equality and women's empowerment', 'Decade of Action', and the 'New Urban Agenda'. These agendas are linked to ten selected initiatives in the report, showcasing their alignment with broader global sustainability goals. These ten initiatives include LabLand's Sliding House (innovative construction technology), Energent (local renewable energy cooperative), North Sea Port's Connect 2025 strategic plan, TriVelo (social bike taxi service), Toreke ASBL (community restaurants), Tondelier (sustainable living and housing concept), Labeur VZW (urban mining), Samen Leven VZW (job crafting for the over 55 population), URBCON (circular benches made of sustainable concrete), and Cargo Velo and CityDepot (sustainable urban logistics).

Ghent's long-term strategic plan for 2020-2025 is based on an administrative agreement among the majority parties, with several objectives that can help achieve the SDGs. The plan is organised around four topics: developing the city with a view to the future, creating opportunities, fostering a sense of community, and empowering the people of Ghent. This strategic plan is aligned with the city's sustainable development goals and contributes to its overall sustainability efforts. The plan aims to lead in various policy areas, make bold choices, and prepare Ghent for the future. The mission of the city is to create a proud, inclusive, and sustainable city where people can live, work, and thrive, with a focus on development, opportunities, community, and engagement.



Gladsaxe

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review from Gladsaxe 2022

Population: 69,259 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

In Gladsaxe's second VLR, focus is on the progress made in 2021 and how the vision and SDGs can be implemented through a clear strategy, systematic governance structures, and by empowering employees to take action on sustainability within the organisation and with local actors who share the same vision. Gladsaxe's vision encompasses environmental, economic, and social sustainability. The city believes in a broad agenda and prioritises all three aspects in their strategy and practices. Gladsaxe's VLR demonstrates that putting sustainability on the agenda leads to more than just defined goals and targets—it stimulates the creation of new ideas and solutions when professionals translate sustainable development into practice across different areas of the organisation and in collaboration with local community actors. Gladsaxe's strategy includes six cross-sectoral goals that encompass all administrative sectors and activities. These goals focus on children shaping the future, creating a business-friendly city through job growth, ensuring equal opportunities to succeed, building a green and vibrant city, promoting lifelong health and well-being, and becoming a climate-conscious city. Gladsaxe has identified six SDGs (3, 4, 8, 11, 12, and 13) that align with their goals, and Goal 17 serves as a means to achieve them.

Gladsaxe has successfully implemented a comprehensive strategy to drive progress and make a positive impact. Its approach involves a political commitment to achieving results, a systematic implementation process within the organisation, and fostering participation and partnerships for local initiatives. This strategy has proved to be highly effective, as sustainable development goals have been reflected in annual reports and integrated into the municipality's priorities, influencing economic decisions. All plans and decisions are aligned with the strategy's vision and goals, and the municipality has collaborated with stakeholders to adapt these goals to the local context. Gladsaxe actively engages with enterprises, organisations, and local residents, inspiring them to embrace sustainability and contribute to the 2030 Agenda. By emphasising the importance of tailored local approaches, Gladsaxe demonstrates that clear strategies with ambitious goals can successfully translate global objectives into local action, resulting in a sustainable and resilient community.

Goicoechea

Name of VLR Report: Informe Local Voluntario para los ODS Goicoechea 2022

Population: 140,764 (2022)



Overview of the VLR Report

The VLR of Goicoechea articulates the canton's achievement in ensuring that 'no one is left behind' through actions to strengthen integral human development at the local level. The VLR report emphasises the municipality's approach to the VLR process, including the localisation of the SDGs in municipal planning and the establishment of follow-up and review processes. The VLR report highlights public policies from a rights-based approach, such as policies to promote gender equality and the protection of children and adolescents, as fundamental in efforts to ensure that no one is left behind. The VLR was prepared by the Directorate of Human Development of the municipality of Goicoechea through a data coordination process involving other municipal units, public institutions present in the canton, and local political and social actors who provided information on their actions related to the SDGs. Additionally, the VLR included input from a diagnostic process called 'Dialogue Tables: Co-responsibilities for Sustainable Development', that helped in engaging with stakeholders. The diagnostic process focused on four strategic areas: road and community infrastructure, economic development, environmental management, and social and cultural development.

The VLR report primarily focuses on 13 SDGs (all except Goals 11, 12, 14, and 15) due to their breadth. The localisation of the SDGs within the local government involved aligning short-term, local planning tools, such as the annual operating plan (local government) and municipal budget for 2022. Planning over the medium term was achieved through the municipal strategic plan (every five years) and the cantonal plan for the development of local human resources (every 10 years). The VLR report also describes Goicoechea's contributions to different SDGs. For example, in terms of Goal 7, Goicoechea is set to promote renewable energy actions, aiming at generating the canton's energy from renewable sources, as well as conducting electricity and water saving campaigns. Goicoechea participates in the Blue Flag Ecology Program and has an institutional environmental management programme. All in all, Goicoechea's commitment to renewable energy and community-based energy efficiency initiatives aligns with the targets set under Goal 7 and contributes to the overall sustainability of the canton.



Kiel

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review, Kiel 2022

Population: 248,000 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

Kiel is committed to sustainability and aligns its activities with the SDGs. Prioritising Goals 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17, the city's sustainability approach rests on three pillars: combining global and local responsibility, leaving no one behind, and focusing on climate protection and sustainable transport.

Under the pillar of global and local responsibility, Kiel uses the SDGs as a policy framework and implements projects to achieve the goals at the local level. The city is actively engaged in international cooperation with 13 sister cities and promotes intercultural dialogue and sustainability. Kiel also takes responsibility locally by providing assistance to refugees and addressing the latest political challenges. Additionally, marine conservation plays an important role in Kiel due to its seaside location, with the city actively taking steps to protect marine life and position itself as a marine protection city. Kiel also promotes sustainable consumption through its status as a fairtrade city and implementing zero-waste activities, as it aims to become a sustainable circular economy.

The pillar of 'leaving no one behind' focuses on providing all residents with equal opportunities to shape the city and participate in the community, regardless of their financial means. Kiel addresses social challenges, such as child poverty and affordable housing, through measures that address social injustice. Civic engagement is encouraged, and funding programmes are provided to support sustainable, resident-led improvements. Kiel has a long tradition of sustainability in terms of climate protection and sustainable transport, and has implemented measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prioritise sustainable travel options. The city aims to create a people-centred transport network and promotes cycling through the expansion of bike lanes and routes. Kiel has also made progress in reducing energy consumption with the opening of a new gas power station.

La Paz

Name of VLR Report: Reporte Voluntario Local La Paz

Population: 945,889 (2021)



Overview of the VLR Report

The city of La Paz has integrated the SDGs into its comprehensive planning system, using them to articulate the different projects and instruments contained in the Integral State Planning System (SPIE); in so doing, La Paz has integrated the three dimensions of sustainable development into planning. This integration was already part of the city's long-term, comprehensive plan, 'La Paz 2040: La Paz que Queremos (The La Paz We Want)'. The city has incorporated the challenges and responses to the SDGs into its five-year strategic planning process, creating a six-pronged approach: (1) a healthy and safe La Paz; (2) a peaceful La Paz; (3) a productive and goal-oriented La Paz; (4) a fast and interconnected La Paz; (5) an open and effective governance La Paz; and (6) a modern and green La Paz.

The current VLR report extends the work on localising and monitoring the 2030 Agenda conducted in 2018 and 2019, respectively. These results were compiled into two reports: the 'Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible y su localización en el municipio de La Paz' published in 2018, and the 'Agenda ODS para el municipio de La Paz' released in 2019. In its VLR, La Paz utilises the United Nations' Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF) to track progress and impact on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs at the city level. This framework provides greater coherence in measuring progress and reporting on the urban dimensions of the SDGs. La Paz's VLR reports progress on the 17 SDGs, tracking progress spatially through different maps illustrating the geography of achievement of the 2030 Agenda at the local level. This highlights the oftentimes uneven spatial development of cities.



Manizales

Name of VLR Report: Primer Reporte Local Voluntario Manizales, Colombia 2022

Population: 458,442 (2023)

Overview of the VLR Report

The city of Manizales has incorporated the SDGs into its local development plan called 'Manizales + Grande' for the period 2020-2023. The plan consists of five strategic lines, each of them linked to several SDGs: (1) a human-centric, equitable city (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17); (2) a competitive city through employment and innovation (SDGs 8 and 9); (3) a sustainable and resilient city (SDGs 7, 11, 15); (4) a connected city (SDG 11); and (5) a transparent governance city (SDGs 16, 17). These strategic lines aim to improve the quality of life of the population by focusing on sustainability, efficiency, and transparency in the use of public resources. Under this framework, 26 programmes have been developed to align with each strategic line of the development plan and promote correlations with the SDGs. These programmes were created through a collective stakeholder engagement process called 'La Conversación Más Grande', initiated by the municipal government.

This comprehensive localisation strategy includes mechanisms for monitoring progress, the creation of a forward-looking vision for the city, recognition of the importance of resident-led and private sector initiatives as accelerators, and the establishment of a research scholarship fund for students studying for their masters with a focus on SDG-related topics. Key initiatives include the development of a forward-looking vision for Manizales 2030 in line with the SDGs, creating a set of indicators to monitor the SDGs agenda, producing a VLR report every two years, implementing the SDGs at the community and business levels, and establishing the 'Manizales Most Innovative' scholarship fund, among others. The VLR report then goes on to review 15 SDGs, excluding Goals 14 and 17. For instance, in SDG 11.2, Manizales recognises that one of its greatest challenges in urban mobility is the rise in the number of private vehicles and motorcycles. Manizales implemented a project to address this issue, focusing on promoting sustainable transportation, specifically the expansion of public transport. The project enhances the efficiency, accessibility, and attractiveness of public transport options to encourage residents to choose sustainable modes of mobility.

Melbourne

Name of VLR Report: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, City of Melbourne, Voluntary Local Review 2022

Population: 183,756 (2020)



Overview of the VLR Report

The city of Melbourne released its first VLR to assess progress towards the SDGs. The report aims to involve all residents in evaluating the city's initiatives and their effectiveness in creating a better future for everyone. The council is committed to using the SDGs as a framework to achieve holistic sustainable development and address shared challenges in collaboration with partners. The data and insights from this review inform the council's annual planning and budget process, with progress monitored through an annual performance scorecard.

Melbourne's VLR highlights both progress and areas for improvement within each goal, target, and indicator. The municipality has demonstrated world-leading performance in certain areas, such as reducing operational emissions by 76% and powering electricity from 100% renewable sources. The city has also taken actions to address homelessness, improve cycling infrastructure, and increase native vegetation during COVID-19 lockdowns. Other positive indicators include declining relative poverty rates, high vaccination rates among children, reduced residential water consumption, increased use of public transport, and strong community support for cultural diversity and park utilisation. At the same time, the city of Melbourne is committed to responding to areas that are not performing well. Key areas requiring accelerated action and collaboration with others include poverty reduction, addressing food insecurity, increasing kindergarten participation, promoting gender equality, facilitating economic growth, raising awareness of Aboriginal heritage and culture, reducing waste generation, combating climate change, improving stormwater quality, and enhancing safety in the city, particularly for women.

The impact of COVID-19 on Melbourne's businesses and communities remains a significant challenge. The council will continuously monitor and respond to the pandemic's effects on each SDG, adapting strategies as more data becomes available. The city of Melbourne aims to embed the SDGs into its strategic planning cycle, using them as a framework to guide policies, actions, and investments. Collaboration, benchmarking, and learning from other cities are crucial to achieving sustainable and inclusive development in the post-pandemic recovery period. The review acknowledges the need to include Aboriginal voices and resolve data gaps to measure and evaluate performance more accurately over time. To ensure long-term sustainable development, the active involvement of civil society, the private sector, and other levels of government is essential.



Messina

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review 2022, Metropolitan City of Messina

Population: 647,477 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

The Metropolitan City of Messina has collaborated with the Ministry of Ecological Transition to create an 'Agenda for Sustainable Development', which is based on harmonising economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection and is intended to provide a framework for the sustainable development of Messina. The agenda was created in a participatory manner, according to the principles of bottom-up governance and with reference to the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. Messina has established a control room responsible for integrating the agenda's contents with the strategic plan and other programming and planning tools. The control room also monitors activities implemented and ensures the achievement of sustainability objectives in the metropolitan area.

Messina recognises that sustainability is not only an environmental issue but requires a collaborative approach from all components of society. Messina's implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a tool for alignment with national and regional objectives and involves the strong engagement of private companies, civil society, and the public sector. To promote a culture of sustainability and encourage participation, Messina has established a Metropolitan Forum for Sustainable Development and six focus areas, including building an active network of people for sustainability projects, reforestation projects, air quality, reducing plastic waste in schools, the National Restart and Resilience Plan, and protecting natural resources. These initiatives aim to involve residents, private companies, and other stakeholders in sustainability projects and to address key issues related to sustainability. Messina hopes that these actions will promote awareness and contribute to a more sustainable future.

Mixco

Name of VLR Report: Primer
Reporte Local Voluntario Mixco
2022

Population: 465,773 (2018)



Overview of the VLR Report

Mixco's 2022 VLR report highlights the efforts made by the local government and other stakeholders to achieve national development priorities and the SDGs. The report is structured into seven sections: (1) description of the VLR methodology; (2) contextualisation of Mixco's work on the 2030 Agenda; (3) description of the national process to localise the SDGs and Mixco's response; (4) alignment of Mixco's planning instruments with the 2030 Agenda; (5) progress of the national development priorities (PND) and the SDGs; (6) description of the follow-up and review process; and (7) summary of the lessons learned and challenges identified throughout the VLR process.

The SDGs in Mixco are implemented through the municipality's territorial plan (Planes de Desarrollo con enfoque de Ordenamiento Territorial, PDM-OT). The plan was updated and modified, especially after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The process used to update the plan consisted of three stages. In the first stage (Strategic Planning Alignment), the existing goals and objectives of the PDM-OT were reviewed to identify any gaps between the PDM-OT, PNDs, and the SDGs. Additionally, the programmes, projects, and activities of each department were reviewed based on work reports from 2016 to 2021 to ensure coherence between the objectives of the PDM-OT, PND, and the SDGs. The second stage, 'Linking Global and National Agendas', connected the Global Goals with national priorities; the 17 SDGs, along with their targets and indicators, were analysed and compared to the 99 strategic development goals (MED) of the PNDs. This analysis provided the basis for establishing thematic priorities that helped to improve the understanding of how daily activities contribute to the achievement of the PNDs and the SDGs. The third stage, 'Redefining Strategic Lines and Action', reformulated strategic lines to reflect their connection with the programmes and activities identified in the earlier stages. This involved incorporating more specific lines of action that could be measured through indicators to subsequently follow-up and review the progress of each department's activities towards the SDGs, both quantitatively and qualitatively.



Partido de la Costa

Name of VLR Report: Informe Voluntario Local Partido de la Costa 2022

Population: 101,400 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

In 2021, the municipality of Partido de La Costa declared their commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda through a collaborative agreement with the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies (Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales Argentina). This commitment involves adapting the SDGs to the reality of local conditions. As part of this commitment, Partido de la Costa presented its first VLR report in 2022. The complexity of implementing the SDGs at the local level and conducting a VLR process requires cross-sectoral cooperation within the government and the active involvement of the community to create a sustainable municipality in which no one is left behind. The Secretary of Sustainable Development and Environment has been entrusted with the comprehensive implementation of the three pillars of sustainable development—namely, social, economic, and environmental. As the focal point, the Secretary is responsible for applying and monitoring the SDGs to ensure that Partido de la Costa complies with the 2030 Agenda. The VLR report serves as an informative document, reflecting the current status of Partido de La Costa in terms of the application and monitoring of the SDGs, outlining progress made to date, and providing examples of implemented policies, as well as future challenges and goals.

The VLR report focuses on good practices implemented by the local government on 15 SDGs, excluding Goals 15 and 16. Examples of Goal 3 include the successful COVID-19 vaccination campaign, which established vaccination centres and itinerant clinics across different areas, reaching the entire population. Additionally, efforts were made to reinforce the healthcare system by enhancing laboratory facilities, expanding intensive care units, and ensuring emergency care capabilities. The VLR report concludes by highlighting the need for ongoing education, awareness, and community engagement to achieve the SDGs, emphasising that sustainability should be a shared objective for the entire community in the near future. The challenges ahead include the accurate categorisation of data and the adaptation of goals to the local context, enabling the formulation of concrete and achievable actions within the municipality.

Pereira

Name of VLR Report: Reporte Local Voluntario 2022: Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible

Population: 467,269 (2019)



Overview of the VLR Report

The VLR process in Pereira focuses on localising and implementing the SDGs. Pereira's Municipal Development Plan (PDM) incorporates the SDGs as a conceptual and theoretical framework. The PDM is structured around three strategic pillars: Modern Pereira, Smart Pereira, and Pereira for the People, which include 17 strategic projects aiming to achieve the SDGs and address local challenges. The VLR is a tool to monitor and evaluate progress towards the SDGs, as well as showcase non-governmental initiatives and partnerships contributing to the success of the SDGs. The VLR demonstrates Pereira's potential to translate the broad 2030 Agenda into concrete actions tailored to specific contexts, and helps residents understand how local action contributes to achieving the SDGs and the goal of leaving no one behind.

The inclusion of the SDGs in Pereira's PDM is a significant move forward towards localisation. The plan emphasises three structural pacts: legality, entrepreneurship, and equity, and aligns with the National Development Plan (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (PND) 2018-2022) and the Departmental Development Plan, encouraging regional and national articulation to increase territorial competitiveness. Pereira's PDM is organised into three strategic lines. First, the 'Modern Pereira' strategy encompasses themes of equity and social inclusion, sustainability, science, technology and innovation, security, productivity, competitiveness, participation, institutions, and governance, and is in alignment with SDGs 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, and 17. The 'Smart Pereira' strategy focuses on technological, human, social, and community approaches, and is in alignment with SDGs 4, 7, 8, and 9. The third strategy, 'Pereira for the People', aims to reduce inequalities as an expression of injustice, and aligns with SDGs 3, 6, 15, and 16. The VLR report then focuses on strategies advancing four priority SDGs (namely, Goals 4, 5, 15, and 17). For instance, as part of its work on Goal 4, Pereira launched the 'Pereira cuenta con voz de mujer' competition to stimulate cultural creativity and strengthen writing skills among girls and young women in official educational institutions of the municipality. Overall, Pereira's VLR process highlights the city's commitment to the SDGs, the progress made in localising the goals, and the need for further alignment and monitoring to ensure their effective implementation and achievement.



Puriscal

Name of VLR Report: Informe Local Voluntario para los ODS Puriscal 2022

Population: 38,593 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

This is the first VLR released by Puriscal, and is the result of work conducted under the framework of the Red de Cantones Promotores de los ODS (Network of Canton Promoters of the SDGs) promoted by IFAM and UNDP. The VLR highlights the commitment of the municipal council to promote the SDGs, and emphasises the alignment of strategic plans with the 2030 Agenda, the identification of institutional policies for sustainable development, and the incorporation of SDG references in operational plans and budgetary documents.

Puriscal's VLR process was structured around eight steps: (1) forming teams; (2) mapping strategic actors; (3) prioritising local goals; (4) defining indicators; (5) mapping linkages and contributions to the SDGs; (6) requesting documented information from stakeholders; (7) systematising information; and (8) establishing results in three dimensions. For instance, step 3 prioritised six SDGs as essential to Puriscal's development—namely Goals 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, and 13. Furthermore, indicators to track progress towards each prioritised goal were selected based on global indicators and adapted to the local context to ensure relevance. Finally, in step eight, the VLR classified the results into three dimensions—namely, management, political, and quantitative results. Quantitative results are presented for each prioritised goal, including indicators and baselines for 2021. Results can be seen in actual achievements, such as scholarships for indigenous students (Goal 4), waste collection services (Goal 11), sustainable purchasing practices (Goal 12), and environmentally friendly cleaning products (Goal 12). The VLR report also showcases specific strategies, programmes, and initiatives implemented in Puriscal that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs targets, underlying the importance of generating public value and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Reggio Calabria

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review 2022, Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria
Department 5 – Professional Training

Population: 516,277 (2022)



Overview of the VLR Report

The strategy for sustainable development employed by the Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria emphasises capability-building, community engagement, and the pursuit of shared goals. By prioritising education and decent work, Reggio Calabria aims to address the region's challenges and improve the well-being of its residents. Through tactics such as codesign and assessment, the strategy promotes effective governance and monitors the impact of interventions. The action narrative presented in the VLR reflects the region's commitment to the Agenda 2030 process and provides an open and transparent account of the progress of implementation. With its futuristic vision and focus on participatory governance, the strategy aims to create a sustainable future for the region, guided by the principles of justice, well-being, and open knowledge.

The 'RC Metro Citizens in Transition' pilot project implemented by Reggio Calabria focuses on providing quality training for green jobs. The project aims to transfer knowledge and skills related to the SDGs and areas to young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds in Southern Italy. By enhancing transversal and digital skills through inclusive teaching methods, the project aims to address the skills gap and improve the competitiveness of metropolitan territories and communities. The implementation of the project has benefited from interinstitutional co-design activities, facilitated by the National Sustainable Development (SvS) Table of the Ministry of Ecological Transition. These activities have fostered collaboration and an exchange of ideas between the metropolitan city council, regions, provinces, and metropolitan cities, enabling the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development. The involvement of various stakeholders has increased awareness and understanding of the common challenges and strategies related to sustainable development.



Río Grande

Name of VLR Report: ODS
Informe Voluntario

Population: 95,917 (2016)

Overview of the VLR Report

Río Grande published its first VLR in 2022. The city has embraced the 2030 Agenda as a guiding framework for governance, incorporating dialogue and participation from social and institutional actors within the community. Río Grande embarked on its sustainability journey between September 2020 and June 2021, resulting in the development of the Centenary Action Plan: Sustainable Río Grande (Plan de Acción del Centenario: Río Grande Sostenible), in collaboration with the YPF Foundation. This plan outlines key management and planning instruments, including ongoing plans, programmes, and projects necessary for the city's sustainable development. In 2021, the municipality of Río Grande signed a cooperative agreement with the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies (CNCPS, Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales) to mobilise efforts and resources for achieving the SDGs within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

The cooperative process aims to connect local planning instruments with the SDGs, focusing on defining targets, indicators, policies, and specific programmes to fulfil the 2030 Agenda at the local level. Río Grande formally adhered to the 2030 Agenda through an agreement signed between the municipality and the CNCPS on 11 March 2021. The Directorate of Cooperation, part of the Secretary of Economic Development and Environment (Dirección de Cooperación, dependiente de la Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico y Ambiente), oversees the local implementation and monitoring of the agenda. Río Grande has prioritised specific SDGs and targets to address the city's three strategic axes: (1) environmental and climate change sustainability as it relates to Goals 6, 7, 11 and 13; (2) social and urban sustainability as it aligns with Goals 3, 4, and 11; and (3) economic sustainability which prioritises Goals 1, 8, and 9. These priority goals were then localised, resulting in the development of the Río Grande SDGs Targets; for instance, target 11.7 became the Río Grande SDGs Target aiming at improving access to green spaces and public spaces by 2030. To conclude, Río Grande's VLR emphasises the performance of three SDGs in the current administration: Goals 2, 5, and 11.

Rome

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review 2022 Metropolitan City of Rome-Capital (Italy)

Population: 4,214,436 (2021)



Overview of the VLR Report

The VLR of metropolitan city of Rome-Capital (CmRC) aims to evaluate and present progress towards the SDGs at the local level and become a tool for achieving local transformation towards sustainable development. The CmRC is undergoing a process of redesigning institutional and territorial governance in line with Law 56/2014, with the Metropolitan Agenda for Sustainable Development (AmSvS) and the Metropolitan Strategic Plan (PSM) serving as the two pillars of the new governance model. The CmRC is also participating in the Italian 'Strategic Metropolis' project, emphasising the integration of policies, interinstitutional collaboration, and consistency with international instruments and policies.

The VLR is a crucial component of the drafting process, strengthening synergy and coherence between the Metropolitan Strategic Plan and the Metropolitan Agenda 2030. The drafting methodology involves qualitative and quantitative information from various sources, including the conclusion report coordinated by the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASvIS), databases for collecting information at the sub-metropolitan level, and outcomes of the participatory process conducted by the University of Florence and Tor Vergata University of Rome. Rome-Capital's 2030 Metropolitan Agenda for Sustainable Development is an instrument of coordination, strategic orientation, and political direction for the commitment of all actors towards sustainable development, which includes interventions for rebalancing the socio-economic system, achieving territorial climate neutrality, investing in the circular economy, promoting energy communities and efficiency, encouraging innovative and ecological forms of enterprise, and local development. The promotion of place-based strategies represents an opportunity to address the course of institutional strategic action towards sustainable development.



San Justo

Name of VLR Report: Reporte Local Voluntario Ciudad de San Justo

Population: 24,908

Overview of the VLR Report

San Justo aims to play an instrumental role in implementing the 2030 Agenda by localising the SDGs into its public policies, aligning its development efforts with the 2030 Agenda to achieve a more liveable and environmentally sustainable city. This has translated into the city's first VLR, which presents the achievements and contributions of San Justo to its prioritised goals—namely SDGs 4, 8, 10, 11, and 13. The VLR report is the result of coordinated efforts from all management areas of the city and their teams to adapt, implement, and monitor the SDGs. A monitoring and linkage dashboard was developed based on aligning the government's strategic priorities with the SDGs. This collaborative and cross-cutting tool centralises and systematises information on each programme, initiative, and project in the city, allowing for an analysis of their components in relation to prioritised goals. This systematisation established concrete parameters linked to the SDGs and their targets, allowing for progress to be properly monitored. The VLR process adapted the SDGs and their indicators to reflect actual conditions on the ground and the measurable impact of government actions. The SDGs were prioritised in a participatory manner.

The VLR report highlights actions, experiences, and initiatives that demonstrate not only results but also the commitment, initiative, and innovation of the government of San Justo in achieving the SDGs. The challenge of preparing the VLR highlighted local capacities and enabled municipality-led efforts to be systematised, laying the foundations for monitoring and evaluating public policies through frameworks oriented towards the SDGs, their targets, and indicators. The VLR report further details programmes to implement prioritised goals and their contribution to local objectives. For instance, in relation to Goal 10, the VLR spotlights an 'Accompanying Programme,' which focuses on the social right to education and aims to contribute to the integral development of individuals, with a focus on equity, by preventing and reducing their exposure to exclusionary and socially vulnerable situations.

Santa Cruz

Name of VLR Report: Reporte Voluntario Local Santa Cruz de la Sierra

Population: 1,903,398 (2022)



Overview of the VLR Report

The autonomous municipal government of Santa Cruz de la Sierra (GAMSC) aims to be a modern, supportive, resilient, participatory, and open entity that serves as national and international reference for the provision of public services promoting the integral development of its inhabitants. The GAMSC declared its commitment to the VLR process after recognising the importance of localising and implementing the SDGs. The GAMSC has aligned the six management objectives of its municipal government plan with the SDGs: (1) designing and executing infrastructure projects to address urban mobility issues (aligned with Goals 9 and 11); (2) ensuring legal security for businesses and promoting public-private partnerships to improve income and quality of life (aligned with Goals 8 and 17); (3) enhancing healthcare accessibility and infrastructure (aligned with Goal 3); (4) decentralising resources to address urgent needs at the district and neighbourhood level (aligned with Goal 16); (5) generating employment opportunities within the districts (aligned with Goals 8 and 16); and (6) constructing and maintaining educational infrastructure (aligned with Goal 4).

Furthermore, Santa Cruz de la Sierra's VLR outlines the progress of the municipality in achieving the SDGs. The report includes voluntary commitments and specific quantifiable goals to be achieved by 2025. The GAMSC has collaborated closely with UN-Habitat to prioritise and monitor the SDGs indicators. In its review of progress, the report analyses 14 SDGs (excluding Goals 12, 13, and 14). For instance, one of the examples provided on the localisation of Goal 11 highlights the GAMSC's vision of building a supportive, modern, and participatory city to ensure inclusivity and transforming marginalised areas to improve the quality of life for the population. Finally, the VLR emphasises the need for dialogue, collaboration, and empowerment of all stakeholders, as well as regional coordination within the metropolitan area. Ongoing efforts in capacity building, monitoring, and aligning strategic planning instruments with the SDGs are vital for the success of the municipality's progress towards its objectives.



Santa Fe

Name of VLR Report: Agenda de Desarrollo Sostenible: Reporte Local Voluntario Santa Fe Capital 2022

Population: 429,026 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

Santa Fe released its first VLR in 2022. The city adheres to the 2030 Agenda through its 'Santa Fe Capital Government Agenda', a planning instrument that sets out the government's priorities to improve the lives of the people. The first edition of the Santa Fe Capital Government Agenda, entitled 'From the City We Have to the City We Want', was developed in 2020 based on priority strategic projects. These projects are framed within a common vision: to contribute to the social and urban integration of the city. The second edition of the Government Agenda, entitled 'Projects in Progress, Changing Territories' (Proyectos que marchan, territorios que cambian), is a compilation of the key achievements in each of the 60 prioritised projects in 2021. With an open and flexible planning strategy aimed at transformative action, adjustments were made to ensure the continuity and enhancement of certain projects, considering the state of COVID-19 in the city.

Santa Fe decided to conduct a VLR to further solidify its commitment to the 2030 Agenda. During 2020 and 2021, officials from the General Secretariat, the Government Secretariat, and the Agency for Cooperation, Investments, and Foreign Trade of the city participated in training workshops on VLRs organised by UNDESA. The first step in preparing the VLR was the definition of the focal point; the General Secretariat of the Municipal Executive was designated to lead the report's preparation process. A working team was formed, consisting of the Directorate of Social Dialogue and Coordination under the General Secretariat and the Agency for Cooperation, Investments, and Foreign Trade (Dirección de Diálogo Social y Coordinación dependiente de la Secretaría General y por la Agencia de Cooperación), a municipal autonomous entity. The strong urban and community integration focus of the Santa Fe Capital Government Agenda prioritised Goals 4 and 11. Both objectives encompass a significant number of local initiatives with a strong territorial impact, allowing for the clear demonstration of results and achievement of several identified key targets. This highlights the orientation of the city's main implemented policies and significant efforts focused on urban transformation.

Sarchí

Name of VLR Report: Informe Local Voluntario Para los ODS Sarchí 2022

Population: 22,596 (2011)



Overview of the VLR Report

Sarchí took on the challenge of preparing its first Voluntary Local Review, recognising the crucial role of local governments and stakeholders in implementing the SDGs. The VLR is part of the initiative led by MIDEPLAN and the Red de Cantones Promotores de los ODS (Network of Canton Promoters of the SDGs) promoted by IFAM and UNDP. In 2021, this initiative facilitated the localisation process of the SDGs, providing tools and trainings to adapt objectives and targets to local contexts. This process led to the integration of the SDGs into the main planning instruments of the local government and raised awareness internally among municipal staff and local actors to encourage collaboration and support for the VLR.

Sarchí's 2021-2031 Local Human Development Strategy, part of the Cantonal Plan for Local Human Development, is guided by a vision and mission centred on sustainable development in which no one is left behind. The plan's defined eight thematic axes are aligned with the SDGs. The VLR report then details each of Sarchí's thematic axes, including their different strategic objectives, and provides information on different action lines and projects to achieve strategic objectives (with implementation periods, participating institutions, linked SDGs, and quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure progress). For instance, within the objectives included in the strategic axis of 'sociocultural development' is the idea of 'strengthening identity and sense of belonging' among the local population by organising collective actions to preserve the cultural values and traditions of the canton. This objective includes two action lines: (1) strengthening interinstitutional coordination for collective work on activities related to Sarchí's identity and idiosyncrasies; and (2) designing and implementing programmes and projects targeting different population groups to promote the development of culture and sports. One of the associated projects aims to provide physical spaces with the necessary conditions to promote the development of sports and recreation in Sarchí, to be implemented in 2023. This project relates to SDGs targets 16.6 and 17.17, among others. There are two indicators to measure progress, namely the firm agreement between the parties and remodelling of 60% of the facilities at the recreation centre.



Singra

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review, Singra, Bangladesh

Population: 49,707 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

Bangladesh submitted its second VNR report on the progress towards achieving the SDGs in 2020. Singra Municipality became the first local government in Bangladesh to formulate a VLR report, aligning its development vision with Agenda 2030 and localising the SDGs. The municipality formed a core team to put together the VLR report, focusing on Goals 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 13. Localised indicators were established to measure progress, and data was collected and analysed to identify challenges and bottlenecks hindering the achievement of the SDGs. Singra allocated 86.78% of its budget to Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and the least to Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth). Efforts for Goal 5 (Gender equality) focus on women's empowerment and participation in governance. Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation) faces challenges in terms of access to safe water and sanitation, with a goal to achieve 100% access by 2030. Singra aims at 100% electricity coverage (Goal 7) through renewable energy projects. More attention must be paid to Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth, particularly in addressing child labour. Goal 11 focuses on sustainable cities, with plans for housing, public transport, waste management, and inclusive planning, and Goal 13 (Climate Action) include efforts to develop a City Resilience Strategy and reduce disaster risk.

The VLR process revealed a disconnect between the city's development programmes and the draft master plan and national policies. Integrated and strategic development plans were needed, along with improved data management, governance processes, financial allocation, and collaboration with partners. Training municipal staff in sustainable urban development and exploring partnerships with private entities were also suggested as a means to overcome challenges.

Tampere

Name of VLR Report: City of Sustainable Action: The Voluntary Local Review of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Tampere 2022

Population: 244,000 (2022)



Overview of the VLR Report

Tampere's VLR was initiated as part of the city's strategy development process. In 2021, Tampere assessed the compatibility of the 2030 Agenda goals with its operations and strategic guidelines, affirming its commitment to implementing the SDGs in November of that year. The city decided to promote the SDGs as a whole through its strategic management system and ensure transparency in its actions towards sustainability. Consequently, Tampere prepared its first VLR to review recent activities and progress in relation to the SDGs, focusing on the operations of the Tampere group.

The VLR was created by compiling and structuring assessments, reports, and plans that described the city's efforts in line with the SDGs. Tampere utilised diverse monitoring data extensively in the review, examining it in relation to both the SDGs and their sub-targets. However, this initial review is limited to assessing the Tampere Group's own operations. The VLR serves as a starting point to enhance Tampere's understanding of sustainable development from a global and intergenerational perspective, and follows a structure that presents each of the 17 SDGs from a global, national, and local perspective. The review highlights Tampere's perspectives and examples related to each goal, drawing on preparatory materials, discussions, and the city's key programmes and plans. The review also includes monitoring indicators suitable for evaluating goals that are based on Tampere's existing set of indicators. The aim is to identify indicators that best describe each goal from a local perspective and provide examples to illustrate progress.



Taoyuan

Name of VLR Report:
Sustainable Development Goals,
Taoyuan City Voluntary Local
Review

Population: 2,270,000 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

Taoyuan has incorporated the SDGs into its municipal framework. In 2020, Taoyuan conducted the Taoyuan City VLR 1.0 to comprehensively review policies. In 2021, the Taoyuan City Government Sustainable Development Committee was established to review and revise policies and evaluation indicators. The Taoyuan City VLR 2.0 was published in 2022 as a comprehensive metric for promoting sustainable development and setting future development goals. Taoyuan City VLR 2.0 is divided into three parts. The first part includes qualitative interviews and disclosures to stakeholders to review the governance achievements of sustainable development policies. The second part is an inventory of plans by the Taoyuan City Government Sustainable Development Committee, examining the compliance of 292 policy plans with sustainable development principles. The final part presents quantitative indicators with 59 evaluation indicators to track governance progress. The VLR 2.0 also aims to bridge the gap with the public by providing plain text explanations and presenting evaluation index data in infographics, making the concept of the SDGs more accessible to Taoyuan residents.

The report serves as a benchmark for Taoyuan City to continuously review the effectiveness of policies and adjust strategies to keep pace with the times, and ensures the rational allocation of resources and the implementation of SDGs throughout the city. By adopting the SDGs and conducting voluntary local reviews, Taoyuan demonstrates its commitment to sustainable development and aligning its policies with global goals. The VLR 2.0 not only evaluates past achievements but also sets expectations for future development, encouraging citizen engagement and understanding of the SDGs. Taoyuan's efforts aim to create a more sustainable and inclusive future for its residents and contribute to the global agenda of achieving the SDGs.

Thunder Bay

Name of VLR Report: Thunder Bay and the SDGs: A Voluntary Local Review

Population: 108,843 (2021)



Overview of the VLR Report

Thunder Bay conducted a VLR to evaluate the region's progress towards sustainability. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the flexible nature of the VLR allowed for an adaptive process that fostered collaboration among partners in a virtual space. Thunder Bay's VLR aims to address as many targets as possible across all 17 Goals, providing a comprehensive report on the region's progress. The report includes key indicators, contextual data, and qualitative information, creating a detailed picture of Thunder Bay's contributions to each SDG. The principles of reconciliation and equity were integrated throughout the report to ensure that no one is left behind, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda.

This VLR serves as a baseline and identifies data gaps. It highlights successes, efforts, challenges, and potential ways forward, but acknowledges that it cannot capture all SDG-related work in the region in a single report. The report utilises a threshold of 5% percent change to track the progress of key indicators over a span of five years or the closest available timeframe. For instance, a positive move greater than 5% is identified as positive change. This threshold aims to standardise the process while detecting meaningful changes. The report acknowledges that the interpretation of whether a change is desired for certain indicators may be debatable. Symbols are used to denote positive or negative changes. Future VLRs may explore controversies and provide additional explanations. As part of their commitment to representation, the report also aims to amplify the work being done by Indigenous Peoples and highlights numerous Indigenous organisations working on the SDGs. For example, Elevate NWO is a non-profit organisation provides support for individuals affected by HIV, AIDS, and Hepatitis C.



Toyota

Name of VLR Report: Toyota City Voluntary Local Review 2022

Population: 422,542 (2015)

Overview of the VLR Report

The city of Toyota has been designated as an 'Eco-Model City' and 'SDGs Future City' by the Japanese government, and has initiated numerous environmental and energy-driven efforts to foster a fun, interconnected living environment that promotes diverse values. This city's success stems from an extraordinary partnership between stakeholders, including residents, private companies, and organisations, all striving to meet the targets of the SDGs. Three significant platforms bolster these efforts: Toyota SDGs Partners, a hub for registered entities to address local issues; the Toyota City Connected Society Verification Promotion Council, focused on leveraging new technologies and social systems to overcome regional challenges; and the Oiden-Sanson Centre, which encourages partnerships between urban and rural communities. Toyota also collaborates with the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), hosting trainees and co-organising international events to raise awareness of the SDGs globally.

Launched in 2017, the Toyota City Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2021 to align more closely with specific SDGs targets. The next phase of the Comprehensive Plan, starting in fiscal 2025, prioritises alignment with the 2030 Agenda's goals. Toyota underscores the importance of continuous monitoring and the integration of SDGs evaluation indicators and Key Performance Indicators in their comprehensive plans. While this integration poses challenges due to each municipality's unique initiatives, there is potential for unification. Toyota's powerful growth strategy leverages a holistic approach and localised monitoring indicators to encourage the creation of a sustainable future. One of Toyota's most distinguishing features is the 'Handbook for SDG Monitoring by Local Governments', used as a foundation for their VLR. The VLR methodology consists of two components: an assessment of SDGs achievements using localised outcome indicators, and a focus on governance indicators to evaluate systems promoting the SDGs, which involve the private sector and local residents. Toyota City's commitment to sharing knowledge and promoting initiatives on a global scale has given rise to innovative collaborative opportunities, such as a partnership with a private consultant to establish a certification system for companies contributing to the SDGs.

Villa María

Name of VLR Report: Examen Local Voluntario sobre la Implementación de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible, Villa María 2022

Population: 88,000



Overview of the VLR Report

The VLR of Villa María summarises the process followed by the local authorities to localise and implement the SDGs. To this effect, Villa María followed the methodology provided by the National Council for Coordination of Social Policies (CNCPS) in the 'Manual for the Territorialization of the SDGs' (Manual para territorialización de los ODS). The VLR report gathers, organises, and updates information that reflects the progress in incorporating the principles of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into local public management. The VLR report presents the steps, here referred to as 'moments', proposed by the CNCPS as a guide for local and regional governments in Argentina. The report covers activities carried out since March 2021, focusing on the first moment of 'installation' and the initial work of the second moment of 'territorialization'. The report also includes a summary of the fourth moment on 'communication and dissemination' strategies and activities related to promoting the SDGs in society. The third moment, that of 'monitoring', is not included in the current VLR report.

The moment of installation involved determining the area and the team responsible for implementing the 2030 Agenda at the local level and analysing the municipality's context for appropriate adaptation of the methodology. It included the process of institutionalising the designation, training and awareness of the municipal cabinet and council members, analysis of contexts, and compilation and systematisation of relevant local information. The moment of territorialization uses the SDGs as a guiding framework for local planning, allowing the municipality to align its objectives, targets, and programmes with global thematic axes reflecting the SDGs. In the process of territorialization, communication is emphasised for inclusiveness, participation, transparency, and public debate—this is the fourth moment. Effective communication and dissemination also support community engagement and commitment.



Yerba Buena

Name of VLR Report: Reporte Local Voluntario 2022: Localización de la Agenda 2030 en la Municipalidad de Yerba Buena

Population: 58,001 (2010)

Overview of the VLR Report

The VLR of the municipality of Yerba Buena localises the 2030 Agenda, detailing the methodology used to bring the SDGs to the local level. This process involves aligning public policies and initiatives with the SDGs, aiming to incorporate the 2030 Agenda into the daily lives of local residents. Yerba Buena has established a technical unit called the Directorate of Management Coordination (Dirección de Coordinación de Gestión), which functions as a delivery unit. This unit focuses on supporting the government's highest priorities, providing direct assistance to the executive leadership and sectoral ministries to strengthen their vision, priorities, planning, and data generation; specifically, it is dedicated to aligning local projects with the SDGs. Since the second half of 2021, all secretariats within the municipality have collaborated closely with the Directorate of Coordination (Dirección de Coordinación) to redefine local SDGs indicators and strategic management axes. This redefinition aims to ensure effective implementation and measure the impact of projects.

The localisation strategy was guided by two main questions: 'Where are we?' and 'Where do we want to go?' At the same time, Yerba Buena designed a monitoring tool called the 'A+Matrix' to assess the development of the city's main public initiatives. The A+ Matrix has been in use since 2021 and includes information on ten projects classified as most important by the Chief of the Cabinet Office (Jefatura de Gabinete). The localisation process also helps in identifying institutional weaknesses, such as insufficient data recorded during the implementation of projects in some sectors. Furthermore, incomplete or inconsistent information hindered a comprehensive view of the current situation and the difficulties faced in achieving the SDGs. To measure the progress on SDGs targets, the A+ Matrix consolidates goals and indicators into three stages: (1) prioritisation (selecting important projects for inclusion); (2) adaptation (aligning local objectives with the SDGs); and (3) consolidation of SDG targets and indicators (current stage).

Endnotes

1. The complete discourse of the UNSG can be accessed online at: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2023-02-06/secretary-generals-briefing-the-general-assembly-priorities-for-2023>
2. UNDESA (2022).
3. The complete discourse of the UNSG can be accessed online at: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2023-02-06/secretary-generals-briefing-the-general-assembly-priorities-for-2023>
4. UN General Assembly (2019).
5. Information on the SDG Summit can be found online at: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/SDGSummit2023>
6. UNDESA (2022).
7. See, for example: Jones and Comfort (2020), Immel and Sakkens (2021), Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020).
8. OECD (2020).
9. Elmqvist et al. (2019).
10. UNESCAP (2021).
11. Agenda 21 is an action plan to advance sustainable development that stemmed from the 'Earth Summit' (the UN Conference on Environment and Development) that took place in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Local Agenda 21 had been already discussed in past editions of the 'State of the Voluntary Local Reviews' series. For more information, see: Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020, 2021).
12. Information on the campaign and member LRGs can be found at: <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/race-to-zero-campaign>
13. The Communiqué can be accessed online at the G7's official website: <https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/en/>
14. Bizikova and Pinter (2017).
15. This is seen in the 'Remarks to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development' delivered by the UNSG in 2019, available at: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-09-24/remarks-high-level-political-sustainable-development-forum>
16. Macleod and Fox (2019).
17. For a more detailed history of the VLR movement, please see: Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020, 2021) and UCLG and UN-Habitat (2020).
18. See, for example: Ortiz-Moya et al (2020, 2021), Ortiz-Moya and Kataoka (2022), and Ortiz-Moya and Reggiani (2023).
19. UNDESA (2020a).
20. UNESCAP (2020).
21. UNDESA (2020b).
22. UCLG and UN-Habitat (2020).
23. UCLG and UN-Habitat (2021).
24. UNECE (2021) and UNECA (2022a).
25. Koike et al. (2020).
26. Siragusa et al. (2020, 2022).
27. International Institute for Sustainable Development (2022), and Dechrai et al. (2023)
28. For further details, please refer to the previous editions of the State of the Voluntary Local Reviews series: Ortiz-Moya et al (2020, 2021), Ortiz-Moya and Kataoka (2022). Furthermore, this approach aligns with the methodology used in recent studies on Voluntary National Reviews as, for instance Elder and Ellis (2022), Elder (2020), and Elder and Bartalini (2019).
29. These three basic criteria are built upon the review of existing literature and guidelines on VLRs, including: Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020, 2021), UCLG and UN-Habitat (2020), UNDESA (2020c), or UNESCAP (2020), among others.
30. This framework is inspired by Yonehara et al. (2017); it will be explained in more detail in Section 5 of the present report.
31. The authors have cross tabulated the reports available at four online repositories, namely UCLG (available at: <https://www.gold.uclg.org/report/localizing-sdgs-boost-monitoring-reporting>), UNDESA (available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews>), UN-Habitat (available at: <https://unhabitat.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews>) and IGES (available at: <https://www.iges.or.jp/en/projects/vlr>).
32. As identified by the authors by 31 March 2023.
33. The report of Barueri was written in Portuguese but included a summary in English.
34. Out of the 41 reports authored by local governments, only Barueri's VLR had not been written in or translated into English or Spanish.
35. Crivello and Staricco (2017).
36. These two topics are recognised as frontier issues needing additional empirical research. See, for example: Bexell and Jönsson (2019), Hidalgo Simón (2021), Narang Suri et al. (2021), Persson et al. (2016), and UCLG and UN-Habitat (2021).

- 37. Ministero della Transizione Ecologica and Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (2022).
- 38. This geographical classification is the same used in previous editions of the State of the Voluntary Local Reviews series. It follows the Statistics Regions used by the Statistic Division of the United Nations, but dividing the Americas into North America and Latin America and the Caribbean. For a complete list of countries included in each region, see: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49#geo-regions>
- 39. See, for example, the key messages of the 2022 (UNECA, 2022b) and 2023 (UNECA, 2023) Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.
- 40. The Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU) is a regional union of municipalities located in the Marmara region of Turkey. It was founded in 1984 and represents the local governments of 182 municipalities in the region. The MMU aims to strengthen the cooperation among its member municipalities, promote sustainable development, provide technical support and training to local governments, and advocate for their interests at the national and international levels. For more information, see: <https://www.marmara.gov.tr/en>
- 41. UCLG (2021).
- 42. Kanaat et al. (2022).
- 43. See: Cabot Institute and Bristol City Council (2019, 2022).
- 44. Complete information about the 2022 HLPF can be found at: <https://hlpf.un.org/2022>
- 45. Conzelmann (2008), Piattoni (2009), and Sabel and Zeitling (2008).
- 46. Italy's first VNR was presented at the 2017 HLPF.
- 47. Ministero della Transizione Ecologica and Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (2022).
- 48. Ministero della Transizione Ecologica and Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (2022).
- 49. UH-Habitat (2022).
- 50. Regione Liguria (2022).
- 51. Città Metropolitana di Genova (2022).
- 52. Metropolitan City of Rome (2022), Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria (2022).
- 53. Regione Piemonte and Città Metropolitana di Torino (2022).
- 54. OECD (2021).
- 55. Regione Lazio (2022).
- 56. Autonomous Region of Sardinia (2022).
- 57. Abruzzo Region, Marche Region, and Umbria Region (2022).
- 58. <https://sdgcittametropolitana.mi.it/>
- 59. UN (2017).
- 60. Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria (2022).
- 61. This project is documented in the report entitled 'Sustainable Working Styles: a handbook for metropolitan local authorities.'
- 62. https://www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/agenda_sviluppo_sostenibile/Home_Page/Archivio_news/Leva_per_la_sostenibilita
- 63. <https://www.festivalculturatecnica.it/>
- 64. This model is adapted from Yonehara et al. (2017).
- 65. The global indicator framework was developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2017. For more information see: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>
- 66. UNGA (2015, paragraph 72).
- 67. UNGA (2015, paragraph 74).
- 68. According to the UN's website for the HLPF. Available at: <https://hlpf.un.org/vnrs>
- 69. This is a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. For more information, its website can be accessed at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/about-us/secretariat-of-the-committee-for-development-policy.html>
- 70. CDP (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).
- 71. See analysis conducted by Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020). UNDESA's recommendations can be found at: UNDESA (2020a).
- 72. For example, Ortiz-Moya and Reggiani (2023) have demonstrated the influence of VLR processes in achieving greater policy integration.
- 73. Between 2018 and 2022 the authors have identified fifteen cities that have presented two or more VLR reports. These cities are, in alphabetical order: Barcelona (2020, 2021, 2022); Bonn (2019, 2022); Bristol (2019, 2022); Buenos Aires (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022); Ghent (2020, 2021, 2022); Gladsaxe (2021, 2022); Helsinki (2019, 2021); La Paz (2018, 2019, 2022); Los Angeles (2019, 2021); New Taipei (2019, 2021); New York (2018, 2019); São Paulo (2020, 2021); Stuttgart (2020, 2021); Taipei (2019, 2020, 2021); and Taoyuan (2020, 2022).
- 74. Barcelona City Council (2020).
- 75. Barcelona City Council (2021).

76. Barcelona City Council (2021, p. 140).

77. The six strategic goals are aligned with the SDGs as follows: (1) "Children shaping the future" aligns with SDGs 4 and 17; (2) "Business-friendly city with job growth" with SDGs 8, 12, and 17; (3) "Equal opportunities to succeed" with SDGs 3, 4, 8, and 17; (4) "Green and vibrant city" with SDGs 11 and 17; (5) "Lifelong health and well-being" with SDGs 3 and 17; and (6) "Climate-conscious city" with SDGs 12, 13, and 17. Gladsaxe Municipality (2021, p. 8).

78. The 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda are divided into 'outcome' and 'mean of implementation' targets. The indicator systems mirror this structure.

79. Elder and Olsen (2019).

80. According to the United Nations Statistical Division, in its decision 47/101 on the "Global indicator Framework for the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" adopted in its 47th Session in 2016. The resolution can be found at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/decisions-ref/?code=47/101>

81. Urbanice Malaysia & Shah Alam City Council (2021). MURNInets own website can be accessed at: <https://murninetsv2.planmalaysia.gov.my>

82. Urbanice Malaysia (2021).

83. City of Melbourne et al. (2022).

84. City of Bonn (2022, p. 18).

85. City of Bonn (2020).

86. The set of indicators can be accessed at: <https://sdg-portal.de>

87. The sources of data are the same as described in Section 2 of the present report.

88. King et al. (2018).

89. Nevertheless, there are additional examples to encourage MLG to implement the 2030 Agenda. For instance, the Government of Japan supports the local implementation of the SDGs through the SDGs Future Cities Programme. The second edition of the State of the Voluntary Reviews series discussed this in greater detail. See: Ortiz-Moya et al. (2021).

90. United Nations General Assembly Economic and Social Council (2023).

91. The remarks can be found at: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2023-04-25-secretary-generals-remarks-launch-the-special-edition-of-the-sustainable-development-goals-progress-report>

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1 NO
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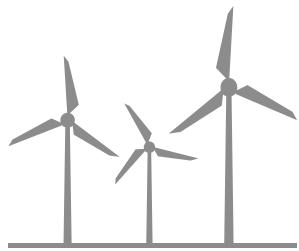
2 ZERO
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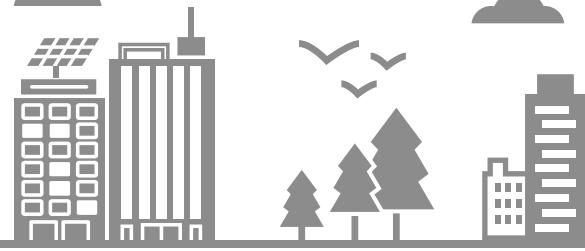
3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



5 GENDER
EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH



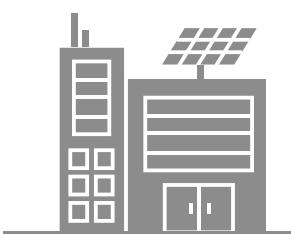
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED
INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



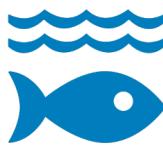
12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



15 LIFE
ON LAND



14 LIFE
BELOW WATER



IGES

16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS

