

# Localising the Sustainable Development Goals in Europe: Perspectives for the north

## Report background

The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), with financial support from The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has commissioned Nordregio to do a review of ongoing localisation efforts implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across European institutions and organisations. The scope of the report is primarily based on the relevance for the member networks of KS. This includes a broad Nordic coverage as such, and programmes under the European Union, i.e. with a focus on the European Commission and related organisations, as well as key networks supporting Agenda 2030 action at the regional and local levels.

## Acknowledgements

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## About

Nordregio is a Nordic and European research centre for regional development and planning, established by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1997. Nordregio conduct solution-oriented and applied research, addressing current issues from both a research perspective and the viewpoint of policymakers and practitioners. Operating at the international, national, regional and local levels, Nordregio's work covers a wide geographic scope, with an emphasis on the Nordic and Baltic Sea Regions, Europe and the Arctic.

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**“ Europe, including the Nordics, is a patchwork of ca. 100,000 municipalities, provinces and regions. As such, the local level play a key role in achieving the SDGs.**

# Sammendrag (Norwegian summary)

På oppdrag fra KS, med støtte fra Utenriksdepartementet, har Nordregio gjennomført en kartlegging av arbeidet med FNs bærekraftsmål og Agenda 2030 på lokalt nivå i Norden og Europa. De siste årene har det utviklet seg en tydelig forankring globalt at bærekraftsmålene ikke kan skje uten lokal innsats. Lokaliseringen av Agenda 2030 handler om å involvere innbyggerne og skape gode prosjekter som bidrar til å nå ett eller flere bærekraftsmål. Oppfølging er viktig, og bruk av rammeverk for fremdriftsstatus og evaluering på tvers av alle styringsnivåer må legges til grunn for måloppnåelse.

Norge skal rapportere til FN for andre gang under High Level Political Forum i juli 2021. Samtidig utarbeides det en nasjonal handlingsplan for bærekraftsmålene. KS er en del av delegasjonen som skal legge fram landets tiltak de siste fire årene. Parallelt med dette koordinerer KS også Norges første Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR), som skal gjenspeile arbeidet med bærekraftsmålene på regionalt og kommunalt nivå. I sammenheng med den frivillige rapporteringen, sender KS en spørreundersøkelse til alle kommuner og fylkeskommuner om arbeidet med bærekraftsmålene på en rekke områder. Tidligere rapporter fra Nordregio og Nordlandsforskning har fanget opp lokale Agenda 2030 initiativ i Norge, samt andre tiltak rundt bærekraftig utvikling av byer og lokalsamfunn i Norden. Studiene reflekterer et allerede mangfoldig bærekraft-

sarbeid lokalt og regionalt. Til tross for lovende innsats, er det fortsatt mye å hente når det gjelder forsterkningen av framtidsrettet samfunnsutvikling og politiske Agenda 2030 prioriteringer.

"Perspectives for the north" håper dermed på å bidra med nyttig informasjon og utvide verktøykassen. I første del sammenfatter rapporten det Nordiske samarbeidet med Agenda 2030 og andre bærekraftstiltak. Gjennom Nordisk samarbeid deler landene ambisjoner om måloppfyllelse primært på regjeringsnivå. Når det gjelder gjennomføring er det derimot variasjoner verdt å merke seg rundt det som skjer både nasjonalt og lokalt. Her finnes mange muligheter for erfaringsutveksling mellom Nordiske land som kan gagne kommuner og regioners iverksetting og operasjonalisering av Agenda 2030. Andre del retter blikket mot kommuneorganisasjoners rolle, og er en sammenfatning av pågående hovedaktiviteter, koordinering, og kapasitetsbygningsarbeid med bærekraftsmålene. Tredje del er en oversikt over institusjoner, nettverk og relaterte prosjekter på EU-nivå og Europa generelt som er relevante for norske kommuner og lokale aktører. Gjennom EØS-avtalen har EUs politikk stor betydning for Norges bærekraftsarbeid for å sammen oppnå målene. Summen av innhentet informasjon setter norske tiltak i Europeisk sammenheng. Gjensidige koblinger og referanser til nye bærekraftsinitiativ både nasjonalt og globalt er viktig for Norge og for handlingstiåret landet står ovenfor.

# 1. Introduction

Norway will deliver its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (UN HLPF) in July 2021. This is the sixth time the international community convenes since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This time, regional and local sustainability efforts will form an important part of the reporting.<sup>1</sup> In the years since the first VNR was submitted, the government's annual 'One Year Closer' reports have reflected that Norway is advancing on some relevant indicators and is not far from reaching several others. However, the work to implement the SDGs at the local level, both in national and international contexts, deserves broader mentioning and targeted action and policies.<sup>2</sup>

Why do SDGs matter to local and regional governments (LRGs)? While 2030 Agenda implementation occurs primarily at the national level, SDG achievement depends strongly on the efforts and progress made at the local level. As echoed by the OECD and other organisations such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), at least 105 of the 169 targets underlying the 17 SDGs will not be reached without LRGs.<sup>3</sup> LRGs played an important role in influencing the definition of the

SDGs, and successfully campaigned for a stand-alone goal on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements (SDG 11).<sup>4</sup> Member states, as part of the Agenda 2030 framework, committed to working closely with LRGs on SDGs implementation. This is embodied in SDG 17 and related targets, which calls for partnership for sustainable development and countries to enhance policy coherence.

Since 2015, cities, LRGs and their associations alike have actively been advocating for localising the 2030 Agenda, bringing the SDGs closer to the people and communities they serve, and using the framework as a tool for local planning and development. While limited attention has been paid to subnational implementation until recently, local action on sustainability is not a new concept. Nordic countries have had sustainability on the agenda since the Brundtland Commission report 'Our common Future' in 1987. During the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, mayors asserted their support for environmental initiatives, adopting Local Agenda 21 and addressing local sustainability on the global high-level policy making agenda.

The SDGs have become universal, applicable to every country in the world. But what is meant by localisation?

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<sup>1</sup> Source from KS (the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities) internal proceedings February 2021.

<sup>2</sup> The Norwegian government has published One Year Closer reports since 2016. See Norwegian Ministry of Finance, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One year closer 2019 - Norway's progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Oslo. 2019. [https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/2030agenda\\_rapport2019.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/2030agenda_rapport2019.pdf). For an overview of Norwegian municipalities and regions' localisation work, see, Aasen Lundberg et. al. "Strekk i laget: En kartlegging av hvordan FN's bærekraftsmål implementeres i regional og kommunal planlegging." 2020. Nordlandsforskning: <https://hdl.handle.net/11250/2723330>.

<sup>3</sup> OECD. "OECD Programme on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs." 2021. Available: <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/territorial-approach-sdgs.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. Roadmap for localizing the SDGs: Implementation and monitoring at subnational level. 2017. Available: [https://www.global-taskforce.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/bfe783\\_434174b8f26840149c1ed37d8febba6e.pdf](https://www.global-taskforce.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/bfe783_434174b8f26840149c1ed37d8febba6e.pdf). See the third edition of UCLG's report, Towards the Localization of the SDGs. 2019. Available: [https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/towards\\_the\\_localization\\_of\\_the\\_sdgs\\_0.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/towards_the_localization_of_the_sdgs_0.pdf). See also UN Sustainable Development Solution Network. Getting Started with the SDGs in Cities. A Guide for Stakeholders. 2016. Available: <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/be6d1d56/files/uploaded/9.1.8.-Cities-SDG-Guide.pdf>

**SDG localisation is described as: “The process of defining, implementing and monitoring strategies at the local level for achieving global, national and subnational sustainable development goals and targets.”<sup>5</sup>**

This involves developing concrete tools and mechanisms, as well as platforms and processes to effectively and innovatively translate global objectives to the local context.<sup>6</sup> The local dimension of the SDGs means that municipalities and cities are not merely implementing agencies, their challenges and opportunities in achieving the SDGs deserve recognition. The localisation concept should also be adapted holistically, to include all local actors across civil society, religious organisations, academia, the private sector and others.<sup>7</sup>

Taking all of this into a Northern European, and more specifically, a Norwegian context, the overarching aim of this report is to inform and add perspectives to the ongoing Agenda 2030 efforts across municipalities and regions. The report presents the most relevant information by grouping initiatives in the Nordics and Europe. With reviews, the report is mindful of enabling ‘easy access’ to information that can at times be a challenge in approaching the SDGs. As a municipality representative expressed, “Browsing reports with 180 pages is not an easy task in identifying the relevance for our [SDG] work. We need to find what is needed for our municipality, and it has to be concrete and understandable.”<sup>8</sup> The vocabulary around Agenda 2030 localisation is still gaining traction at the

start of the ‘decade of action’. While the report targets local authorities that have already come further in their Agenda 2030 work, it also aims to provide inspiration where engagement with the SDGs is in an early phase.

**The following key questions are explored:**

- How do Nordic/European organisations, institutions, including municipal associations, support SDG implementation at the local level, and what are current key initiatives?
- Which of these initiatives are particularly relevant for the Norwegian context and how can this serve ongoing SDG implementation at the regional and local levels?

The report considers localisation efforts in the following four chapters. The first is dedicated to Nordic cooperation and approaches by countries. This is followed by an overview of the coordination work municipal associations do to support their respective member networks with Agenda 2030. The Nordics remain Norway’s closest partners, and background knowledge here about the current state of play and related challenges is thus emphasised. The third chapter then looks at European organisations, programmes, networks and activities, which have led by example in terms of SDG localisation and offer resources for EU members as well as non-member states. The report concludes with some outlooks on how this can support Norwegian regional and local authorities in strengthening the work on localising Agenda 2030, where there is a lot of potential for further capacity building and knowledge exchange in the pan-Nordic and European context.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Towards the Localization of the SDGs. 2019. See e.g. also the 2014 statement from the Eighth session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Excerpt from presentation on the “Strekk i laget” report by Aasen Lundberg et. al. Nordlandsforskning. 2020.

## 2. SDGs localisation in the Nordics

The Nordic countries began reformulating and upgrading processes for implementing the United Nation's goals by 2030 through a shared regional vision in 2015, spearheaded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.<sup>9</sup> A key message that has emerged through joint cooperation is that the Nordic countries, while being global sustainability leaders across many areas, continue to experience several of the same challenges and obstacles in meeting specific sustainable consumption and climate targets among some others.

### **Increasing attention has been dedicated to how local and regional levels are now working with the 2030 Agenda across the Nordic countries.**

Pivoting from national level assessments of sustainability policies and initiatives, increasing attention has been dedicated to how local and regional levels are now working with the 2030 Agenda across the Nordic countries. Given that the cooperation within the Nordic Council of Ministers takes place at the national level, not all programmes directly target the municipal level as such, although considerable focus is paid to sparsely populated and rural areas of the Nordics.

In 2018, Nordregio, commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers, analysed the approaches taken by 27 so-called first movers municipalities in the Nordics, including the Faroe Islands, Green-

land and Åland in a report called "Global goals for local priorities: The 2030 Agenda at local level". These municipalities got an early start with mainstreaming the SDGs into local development strategies. The study highlighted that communication of national priorities and activities within the 2030 Agenda, guidance on how to work with the SDGs, and assistance in monitoring progress were needed for further advancing local efforts.<sup>10</sup> Addressing these issues would help local efforts building capacity to achieving the SDGs in the coming years.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the study also provides 27 recommendations on localising Agenda 2030 based on each of the first mover municipalities. This survey has recently been followed by a webinar series in 2020-2021, 'Taking Agenda 2030 to the local level' which provided a forum for sharing recent best-practices. Each webinar was dedicated to SDGs 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 17, respectively, whereby Nordic municipalities, regions and local and regional associations discussed ongoing work, activities, and challenges.<sup>12</sup>

The time between the report and webinar series reflected that much is happening every year at the local and regional level – localising efforts are indeed advancing. Initiatives to share knowledge are also picking up across the Nordic countries. There is however a great deal of potential to amplify shared Nordic ambitions, for example by sustaining the networks and knowledge sharing established over the course of a webinar series. Other Nordic best-practice exchange and mutual

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<sup>9</sup> The United Nations adopted the 17 new Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015 and the related 169 targets. See e.g. "Make the SDGs a reality," Sustainable Development, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, <https://sdgs.un.org/>

<sup>10</sup> Slätmo, E., et al. "Global goals for local priorities: The 2030 Agenda at local level." Nordregio, 2018. Available: <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1251563/FULLTEXT03.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Another 2018 survey by Deloitte also surveyed how municipalities were working with the SDGs. Here, municipalities expressed similar barriers to localisation, including a misalignment of expectations regarding the 2030 Agenda implementation at national and local levels. Overall, the report reflected that Nordic municipalities have a great deal of potential that was yet to be tapped. See the study, "Localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Nordic Municipalities," [https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/dk/Documents/strategy/Downloads/sdg\\_report\\_may2018\\_en.pdf](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/dk/Documents/strategy/Downloads/sdg_report_may2018_en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> The webinar series' programme can be accessed via <https://nordregio.org/events/agenda-2030-at-the-local-level/>.pdf. Downloads/sdg\_report\_may2018\_en.pdf

learnings should focus on how to monitor progress in working with the SDGs, as many municipalities state that this is a challenging area for them in their implementation activities. As such, Norwegian regions and municipalities can continue to benefit from an enhanced understanding of how the Nordics and autonomous regions work to actualise localisation of the SDGs.

## 2.1. Nordic Cooperation and the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development

The framework for joint Nordic efforts around the 2030 Agenda has been the Generation 2030 programme, launched in 2017. Through Generation 2030, the Nordic countries place special emphasis on the involvement of children and young people as agents of change, and on sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG12), 'the Achilles SDG' in the Nordic regions.<sup>13</sup>

The programme has three main objectives, which is to 1) ensure that the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers contributes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by way of political focus and relevant projects; 2) contribute to involvement in and knowledge sharing related to the 2030 Agenda in the Nordic Region; and 3) improve the visibility of the Nordic Council of Ministers' work in the Nordic region and internationally. The programme aims to contribute to national level SDG realisation by way of relevant analyses,

knowledge-sharing discussions and debate, the development of methodologies, and the involvement of all Nordic stakeholders.

Generation 2030 aligns with the current Nordic Strategy for Sustainable Development, 'A Good Life in a Sustainable Nordic Region', which runs from 2013 to 2025.<sup>14</sup> The overlap with the strategy and the SDGs is illustrated in Figure 1. As seen, the SDGs address almost all the goals and objectives of the Nordic strategy and vice versa, but the Nordic outlooks generally express a vision and do not specify targets.

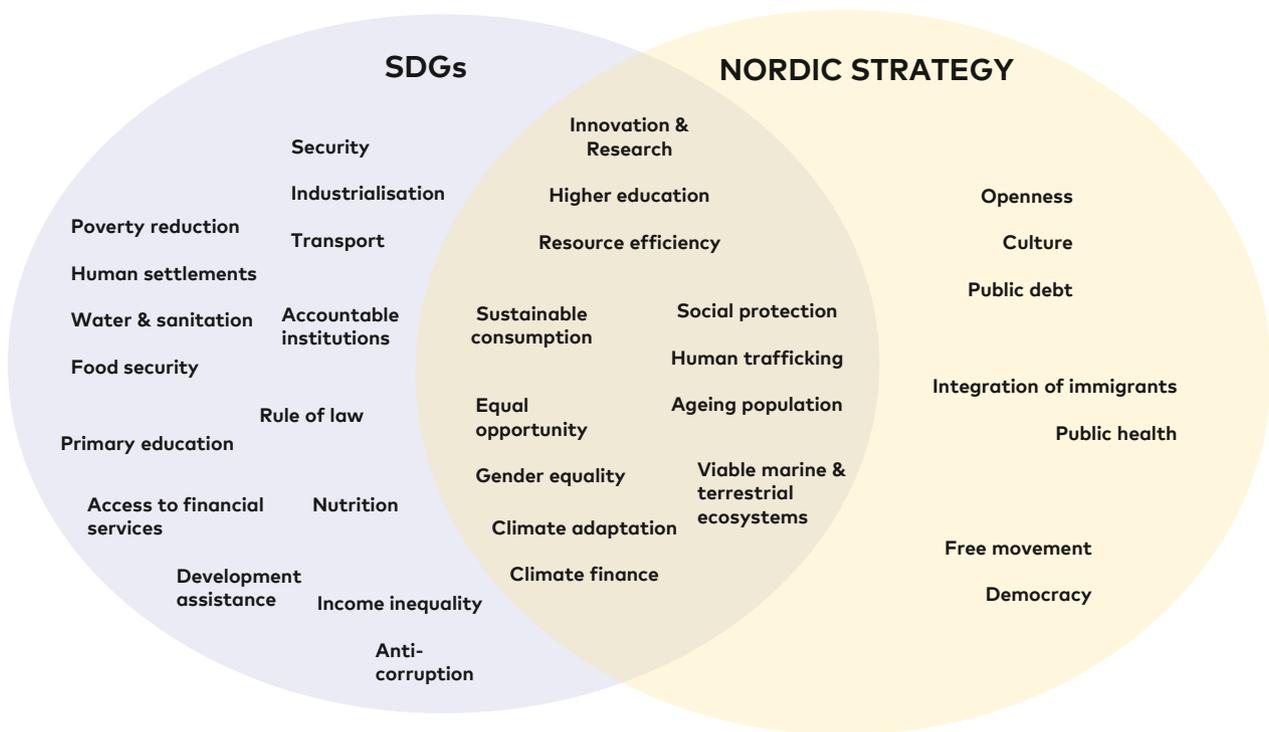
A broad shared challenge that continues to face the Nordic countries as such is to develop and understand the SDGs in a Nordic context. In the 'Sustainable Development Action – The Nordic Way' report from 2019, a survey conducted among members of the committees of senior officials in the Nordic cooperation reflected that most of the 17 SDG goals are prioritised, and approached from an economic, social and environmental dimension that accords with the Nordic vision towards 2030.<sup>15</sup> The study also emphasises that although synergies between the Nordic Council of Ministers' current activities, the Nordic sustainability strategy, and Agenda 2030 are in play, there is potential for strengthened initiatives involving the regional and local levels. As a follow-up to the milestone report, an abbreviated and updated version is expected to be launched in 2021.

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<sup>13</sup> Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). "Generation 2030: Nordic programme for Agenda 2030." 2017, <https://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1153406/FULLTEXT01.pdf>. See also the two dedicated reports, "Sustainable Consumption and Production: An Analysis of Nordic Progress towards SDG12 and the way ahead." NCM. 2018. Available: <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1231011/FULLTEXT01.pdf>; and "Nordic Youth As Sustainable Changemakers in the Transition to Sustainable Consumption and Production." NCM. 2019. Available at: <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1331807/FULLTEXT01>.

<sup>14</sup> NCM. "A Good Life in a Sustainable Nordic Region: Nordic Strategy for Sustainable Development 2013-2025." 2020. Available: <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1292569/FULLTEXT03.pdf>. Prior to this, the Nordic countries have through Nordic cooperation committed themselves to sustainable development, and launched a first joint strategy in 2001. This was the first macro-regional strategy of its kind, although sustainable development had been a core aspect of Nordic cooperation for many years. Nordic acknowledgement of sustainable development at the national level has indeed been reflected for decades, including the 1972 establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme in Stockholm as well as important Nordic input to the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Halonen, M. et. al. "Sustainable Development Action – The Nordic Way." NCM, 2019. Available: <https://dx.doi.org/10.6027/TN2017-523>



**Figure 1: Comparison between SDGs and the Nordic Strategy areas.**

Source: NCM. Sustainable Development Action – the Nordic Way (2019), based on Stockholm Environment Institute, p. 70.

## 2.2. Nordic Council of Ministers 'Our Vision 2030'

In August 2019 the Nordic Prime Ministers adopted a new Nordic vision for 2030, complementing ongoing Agenda 2030 work within the Nordic Council of Ministers and promoting Nordic cooperation on sustainable development more broadly. The vision aims at making the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. The vision consists of three strategic priorities: a green Nordic region, a competitive Nordic region, and a socially sustainable Nordic Region.<sup>16</sup> The programme for Vision 2030 was approved in 2020 and followed by an action plan. The priorities outlined there will guide the

work of the Nordic Council of Ministers up to 2024. There is additionally an appointed Nordic Expert Group for Sustainable Development that oversees ongoing activities. The role of this expert group is to support the implementation of the Vision 30 and cross-sectoral efforts relating to sustainable development.<sup>17</sup>

The Nordic Council of Ministers also publishes individual reports, primarily under the 10 thematic councils, encompassing 13 sectors. This work captures the multitude of activities related directly or indirectly to all the SDGs. The reports are often according to different programme periods and strategic plans under different leadership of a Nordic country. To this end, the initiative on 'Nordic Solutions to Global

<sup>16</sup> See more about the NCM "Our Vision 2020" and the Action Plan available at <https://pub.norden.org/politikkord2020-728/>

<sup>17</sup> See more about the Nordic Expert Group for Sustainable Development on <https://www.norden.org/en/information/nordic-expert-group-sustainable-development>. This mandate runs from 1 January 2021 until 31 December 2024. The mandate was approved by the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation on 10 September 2020.



Picture: [Unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com)

Challenges' has been an example contributing to the overall Nordic response to the attainment of the SDGs.<sup>18</sup> There are additionally many projects connected to sustainable food systems (e.g. Nordic Nutrition Recommendations 2022) and Nordic guidelines on Green Public Procurements.<sup>19</sup>

To evaluate the region's progress towards sustainable development objectives, the Nordic countries agreed on a set of Nordic sustainability indicators introduced in 2013. These were meant to be showing long-term trends outlined in the 2013-2025 'A Good Life' sustainable development strategy. Since adopting the Generation 2030 programme, it was also found relevant to review the Nordic sustainability indicators in light of the 2030 Agenda. A new set of the indicators linking

the SDGs to Vision 2030 were therefore published in 2020.<sup>20</sup>

To understand and assess the added value of Nordic cooperation on Agenda 2030, mapping and reporting ongoing Nordic sustainable development processes and initiatives will continue to be important in the years to come. The current and planned actions within the Nordic cooperation is meant to jointly contribute towards Agenda 2030 and Vision 2030 goals. While this complements ongoing Nordic initiatives in a holistic manner, it is not always clear how Nordic indicators and those of Agenda 2030 at both national and local levels will be communicated. The following section therefore looks at some of the variations between the countries.

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<sup>18</sup> Read more about the Nordic Solutions to Global Challenges initiatives here, <https://www.norden.org/en/information/nordic-solutions-global-challenges> and all of the Nordic publications on its Diva portal at <http://norden.diva-portal.org/>.

<sup>19</sup> To access these reports and more, refer to the Diva portal above.

<sup>20</sup> The Nordic Indicators for Vision 2030 published by the NCM in 2020 (in Swedish). Available: <https://pub.norden.org/politknord2020-731/>



Picture: Unsplash.com

### 2.3. Status of approaches to Agenda 2030 in Nordic countries

Through Nordic cooperation, the Nordic countries steer ambitions towards both the regional vision and in achieving the 2030 Agenda targets. It might therefore be taken for granted that all the countries' policies and priorities are well aligned with regards to SDG implementation. However, there are several differences in governance approaches that impact how key actions on SDG localisation is developing from the national down to the local level. The question is, then, to what extent is Nordic cooperation translated into national policy contexts, e.g. action plans with regards to the sustainability goals?

**At a closer look at the Nordic VNRs, the reports paint a mixed picture, who does what at the national level across the Nordic countries vary, and consequently, so is the work and vocabulary with regards to subnational SDGs implementation.**

As individual countries, adoption of the SDGs has varied in scope and mandate. This is reflected in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to the UN High-Level Political Forum (see Box 1). Much of this context is also captured in the 'Sustainable Development Action – The Nordic Way' report, which outlines significant consideration of the Nordic countries plans and work for Agenda 2030 at the national level, including the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The evolving nature of this work nevertheless renders some information outdated. The autonomous regions are not discussed in detail here, but the report also refers to their policies and priorities.<sup>21</sup> As small Nordic communities, the work that is being done in these regions serve in many ways as one of the key models for Nordic SDG localisation. Åland has for instance in recent years received a lot of recognition for their Agenda 2030 efforts. This is accessible at [barkraft.ax](http://barkraft.ax), which contains all relevant information on Åland's sustainability implementation.

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<sup>21</sup> The Faroe Islands and Greenland, represented by Denmark at the UN, recognise sustainable development to be a responsibility shared with its Nordic neighbours, see e.g. the Faroese <http://www.government.fo/the-government/coalition-agreement/>. Greenland is actively involved in various international fora at the UN and EU levels as well playing an important role in Arctic co-operation.

### **Box 1: Agenda 2030 reporting to the United Nation's High Level Political Forum (UN HLPF): Voluntary National, Sub-national and Local Reviews**

**Voluntary National reviews (VNRs)** form an important part of the 2030 Agenda framework. As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms on sustainable development, signatory countries are encouraged to present annual VNRs to the UN HLPF. Since 2015, the HLPF is the world's main platform for sustainable development, where all countries present progress, achievements and challenges faced in the implementation of the SDGs.

A set of common reporting guidelines are meant to support countries documenting how progress is assessed and tracked at the national level against the country's own strategies. Such guidelines also point to institutional arrangements to implement and support all stakeholders involved with actualising the 17 SDGs. In the process of submitting VNRs, several European countries have been taking the lead in developing strategies for integrating sustainable development mechanisms into national and local structures. The latter has resulted in significant involvement of local and regional governments (LRGs) in the VNR process.

The 2030 Agenda encourages countries to conduct reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels. This was reinforced recently with the Seville Commitment recognising localisation of the SDGs globally. In parallel to VNR reporting, **Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)** and **Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs)** are additional processes in which LRGs initiate assessments of their progress of SDGs implementation. VLRs and VSRs can help strengthen vertical and horizontal Agenda 2030 coherence to e.g. avoid duplication of efforts. The reports are meant to complement the VNRs by filling the gap between local action and national policies, and by informing policy makers across governance levels about SDGs implementation.

While holding no official status, undertaking these local and sub-national reviews is providing multiple benefits to Agenda 2030 localisation at large. VLRs and VSRs provide the opportunity for LRGs to share experiences, challenges, and lessons learnt across the world in implementing their local vision for the SDGs. In addition, it can also enable local governments to further engage citizens in the review process, strengthening accountability and inclusive governance.

*Source: UN General Assembly. 2015. Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York. The Seville Commitment took place at a high-level forum February 2019 in Spain, see the declaration outcome available at: [https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/seville\\_commitment.\\_27\\_02\\_2019.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/seville_commitment._27_02_2019.pdf)*

For the purposes of this report, some highlights of the Nordic countries' main differences in terms of priorities and allocated mandate to localising Agenda 2030 are summarised in Table 1.<sup>22</sup> At a closer look at the Nordic VNRs, the reports paint a mixed picture, who does what at the national level across the Nordic countries vary, and consequently so is the work and vocabulary with regards to subnational SDGs implementation.

Out of the five Nordic countries, three will soon have submitted two VNRs. Norway and Sweden are in the process of reporting in 2021. Finland, which submitted its second VNR in 2020, is also the country where most local reporting has taken place. Broad multi-stakeholder engagement appears to be particularly strong in both Finland and Denmark, whereas in Iceland, the involvement from civil society and actors from all stakeholder groups was formalised at the beginning of 2021. In Norway, annual reporting on SDG progress to the parliament is part of the budget bill, and a territorial guidance on to Agenda 2030 is incorporated in the 'National expectations for regional and municipal planning 2019-2023'.<sup>23</sup> However, recent review by the country's Office of the Auditor General identified significant gaps.<sup>24</sup> The assessment is signalling that national implementation of the sustainability goals in the

years since 2016 lack policy cohesion in meeting 2030 agenda's expectations of a holistic and cross-sectoral approach. Sweden, with its strong commitment to the SDGs on all levels, has planned a national monitoring system since 2017, but this is still in development. There is however the Kolada database available for municipalities (see p. 28).

An overview of the 17 Goals at the national level is presented in Figure 2. It shows the Nordic countries' performance as ranked by the Sustainable Development Report 2020 (SDG Index & Dashboards).<sup>25</sup>

Interesting to note, 'Bumps on the Road to 2030', a briefing document from 2017, highlighted that across the Nordic region, countries were underperforming in six SDGs, namely SDG 2, 7, 12, 13, 14, and 15.<sup>26</sup> SDG 8, 'Securing economic growth for all', was additionally identified as an area where the countries' performance varied greatly. As of 2020, the SDGs still indicate a need for improvement compared with 2017 data, with the exception of SDG 7.

**As of 2020, the SDGs [where the Nordics are underperforming] still indicate a need for improvement compared with 2017 data.**

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<sup>22</sup> See also Chapter 1, "National implementation of the Agenda 2030 goals: An overview," in Sustainable Development Action – The Nordic Way, NCM, 2019, 11-66.

<sup>23</sup> See how the Agenda 2030 is part of the strategy framework by the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation in National expectations regarding regional and municipal planning 2019–2023. 2019. Available: <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/cc2c53c65af24b8ea560c0156d885703/nasjonale-forventninger-2019-engelsk.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Riksrevisjonen (Office of the Auditor General). Undersøkelse av styring av og rapportering på den nasjonale oppfølgingen av FN's bærekraftsmål. 2020. Available (in Norwegian): <https://www.riksrevisjonen.no/rapporter-mappe/no-2020-2021/undersokelse-av-styring-av-og-rapportering-pa-den-nasjonale-oppfolgingen-av-fns-barekraftsmal/>

<sup>25</sup> The report is authored by Sachs et al. The Sustainable Development Goals and Covid-19. Sustainable Development Report 2020. SDSN & IEEP. Available: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2020/2020\\_sustainable\\_development\\_report.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2020/2020_sustainable_development_report.pdf). See the Nordic Country Profiles in the Sustainable Development Report, available at <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles>.

<sup>26</sup> NCM. Bumps on the Road to 2030. 2018. Available: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1138263/FULLTEXT01.pdf>. The 2017 data was based on research from the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Country	Lead coordination of SDGs implementation Year of VNR submission	Localising strengths	Localising challenges
<b>Denmark</b>	The Ministry of Finance (national implementation), with support of Interministerial Group on Sustainable Development  Ministry of Foreign Affairs (international SDG fora)  VNR submitted in 2017	Large civil society networks and advocacy channels providing inputs of SDGs implementation at national and local levels	Coordination role of the decentralised regions not clear in how to translate global goals to the local level
<b>Finland</b>	Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of the Environment with National Commission on Sustainable Development  VNRs submitted in 2016 and 2020	Clear development and sustainability policies at the national level has allowed for broad absorption of Agenda 2030	A key challenge remains when it comes to balancing policy coherence, budgeting and means of implementation
<b>Iceland</b>	Prime Minister's Office in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs  Interministerial Steering Group  VNR submitted in 2018	Close coordination across governance levels through Interministerial Steering Group	A formal structure for the engagement of civil society and the public recently formalised formal structure for the engagement of civil society and the public
<b>Norway</b>	Ministry of Local authorities and Modernisation  VNR submitted in 2016, upcoming in 2021	Broad stakeholder involvement in the process of national action plan for the implementation Agenda 2030	Coordination between national level and subnational regarding SDGs localisation
<b>Sweden</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs  VNR submitted in 2017, upcoming in 2021	Considerable capacity among municipalities and regions to localise SDGs	Alignment between the domestic and international Agenda 2030 contexts

**Table 1. Nordic countries strengths and challenges to SDGs localisation.**

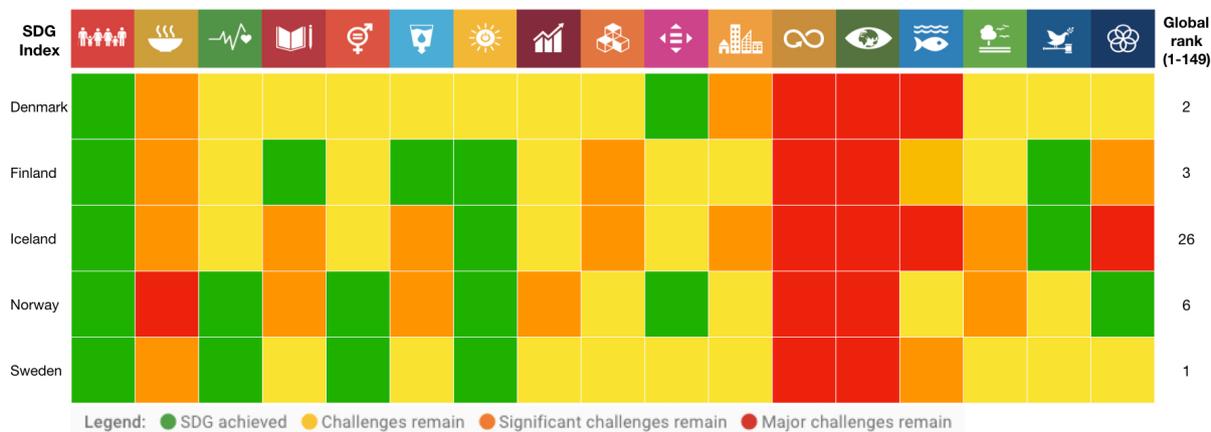
Source: The Voluntary National Review reports by the Governments of Denmark (2017), Finland (2016, 2020), Iceland (2018), Norway (2016) and Sweden (2017).

As of 2020 challenges remain across SDGs 8, 9, and 15, whereas significant or major challenges remain for SDGs 2, 12, 13, and 14. Figure 3 nevertheless reflects the trends showing where the countries are progressing, stagnating, or reversing positive developments withing each of the 17 goals. This suggests that increasing national and local level cooperation and understanding of how regions and local levels are performing will provide an even better map of the work ahead for each country to navigate. This should be reflected in national and subnational reporting in the coming years, as well as made visible through joint Nordic collaboration.

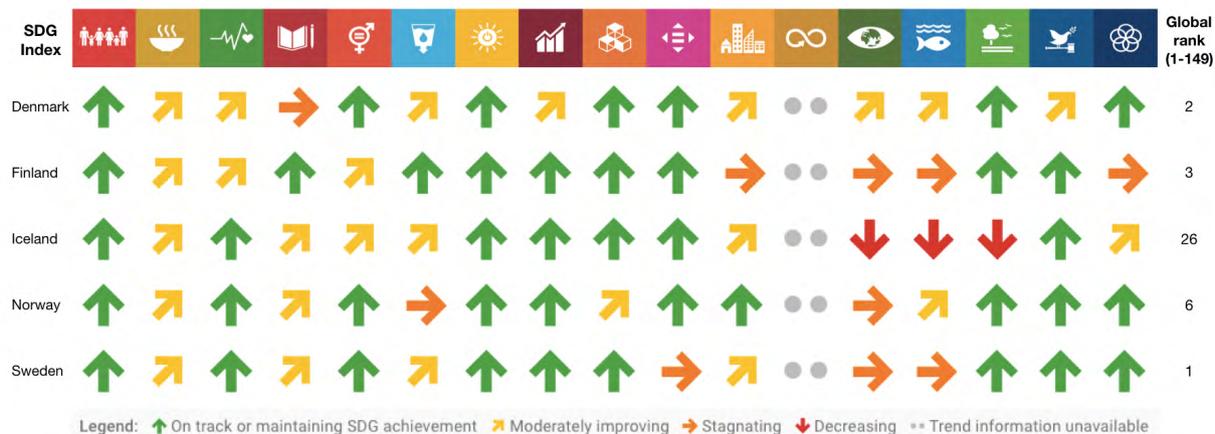
**Localising Agenda 2030 is in some ways still a “new” concept in sustainability efforts, but several Nordic regions and municipalities are well on their way.**

The Nordic countries’ consistent position as regional and global sustainability frontrunners presents an opportunity to lead by example. The Nordics continue to send strong signals on social welfare levels and remain committed to a global 2030 Agenda to support and sustain progress on human rights issues and development aid across a range of sustainability topics. “At home” however, regional cooperation and national level support for local implementation could benefit from increased attention to governance/policy cohesion.

Localising Agenda 2030 is in some ways still a new concept in sustainability efforts, but several Nordic regions and municipalities are well on their way. When it comes to continuing the conversation and action on how regional cooperation best can benefit and contribute to the local level advancing along this pathway, while (the countries are) mutually learning from each other, have room for improvement. The sharing of practices and tools between Nordic governments and non-government actors (NGOs, the private sector, local level actors) as addressed in the next section may represent a concrete area for further joint Nordic collaboration.



**Figure 2: Comparison of Nordic countries performance across the 17 SDGs.**  
 Source: Figure based on data from the Sustainable Development Report by Sachs et al. (2020).



**Figure 3: Comparison of Nordic countries SDG trends across the 17 SDGs**  
 Source: Figure based on data from the Sustainable Development Report by Sachs et al. (2020).

## 2.4. SDGs networks and civil society activities in the Nordic countries

There are many civil society organisations (CSOs) and networks that actively work with Agenda 2030 within their respective Nordic country and across the region. There is broad acknowledgement that the SDGs require input from all sectors of society. To varying degrees, Nordic governments have already made efforts to engage multistakeholder ownership of SDG implementation. The aggregated efforts of civil society organisations are important, as the activities of these networks reflect a broader commitment to SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals.

In Norway, ForUM is a key network that have represented over 50 CSOs working on a range of sustainability issues for more than twenty years. Since 2020, the network adopted the 2030 Agenda as an integral part of its advocacy and communications activities, and mission-oriented strategic framework. ForUM is also coordinating Norwegian CSOs' assessments of the country's work with the 2030 Agenda to the HLPL.<sup>27</sup> In this process, ForUM has drawn from Finland's multi-stakeholder approach as inspiration. Sweden and Denmark al-

ready have in place more formal structures, where CSOs have been responsible for individual assessments of Agenda 2030 implementation at the national level. The working groups on the SDGs in Sweden is coordinated by Concord Sweden, which mostly focuses on international SDG aspects, and the Swedish UN Association and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), which focuses on implementation within municipalities and regional authorities (see more on p. 28). In Denmark, there are also two national CSOs networks, the 92 group and Global Focus.<sup>28</sup> In Finland, CSOs and other non-governmental organisations have seats in the National Commission for Sustainable Development in the sustainable development monitoring expert group. Involvement also includes attending the parliament hearings on SDGs, and invitations to workshops with the ministries for developing finance mechanisms for sustainable development. Finnish CSOs have been part of the HLPF delegation presenting Finland's VNR. There is also an informal working group in Finland for sharing information and advocacy planning. Iceland's stakeholder involvement with regards to Agenda 2030 is in the process of being formalised, and will be given a role in

<sup>27</sup> More information about ForUM's coordination of CSOs, available: <https://www.forumfor.no/nyheter/2021/inviterer-sivilsamfunnet-til-%C3%A5-delta-i-norges-gjennomgang-av-b%C3%A6rekraftsm%C3%A5lene>

<sup>28</sup> See e.g. shadow reports on Agenda 2030 submitted by the Nordic CSOs. Available at <https://action4sd.org/resources-toolkits/>

implementation plans and review processes at the national level as well.

It is also worth noting that research communities play an important role. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) has established a Northern Europe office located in Gothenburg. The regional network aims to connect academia, business, government and civil society to develop solutions for the SDGs. Thus far, it has some 35 members consisting mainly of universities and research institutes in the Nordic region and Baltic States. In Norway, Trondheim hosts the UNECE Centre of Excellence working to promote SDGs localisation in the country. Key activities

include hosting a national network and using the SDG City Transition Framework as a knowledge-based approach to sustainable development at the local level.<sup>29</sup>

Aggregated, the efforts of so-called informal SDG networks cannot be underestimated in actualising the 2030 Agenda. The Nordic model of consultation and civil society engagement in general can therefore help strengthening Agenda 2030 partnerships. To this end, development of local indicator frameworks could to a greater degree focus on the role CSOs, measuring impact and/or performance if this has not been covered already.

## Box 2. Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) to the UN HLPF from Norway and Sweden in 2021

At a glance, European and Nordic national level reporting to the UN HLPF has been consistent, although the structures of the deliveries vary. In 2021, Sweden and Norway will present their second VNRs. In addition, VSRs as addressed in Box 1, will also be submitted. The processes are coordinated by the local and regional associations (LRAs) in Norway and Sweden. Along with Germany and Spain, these will be the first European countries to submit VSRs.

In **Sweden**, the VSR will primarily focus on existing data and ongoing initiatives conducted by SALAR, i.e. the Kolada portal, in addition to the activities of Swedish municipalities and regions. The report aims to complement and interlink local and national processes, highlighting the local perspective throughout the report. To compare, **Norway**, is currently conducting a nationwide survey on Agenda 2030 amongst its members that will be incorporated into its VSR. The ambition for Norway's VSR is to provide a comprehensive and representative overview of local SDGs implementation, including an assessment of the direction, pace and status of work in regions and municipalities. The report will also make visible the interaction between local, region, and national level through case collection and analysis of data and indicators. In addition, KS' existing work and publications such as 'Status Kommune' will also be incorporated in the report, which will be structured according to the UN DESA Global Guiding Elements.

The processes for how the LRAs are approaching the VSRs share similarities, but Germany has for instance chosen to call its submission a Voluntary Local Government review to underscore the reporting level. Given that few countries so far have submitted VSRs, future reporting can benefit from cross-country/regional knowledge-sharing. The work is globally coordinated with help from United Cities and Local Governments.

*Source: The local and regional municipal associations of Norway (KS) and Sweden (SALAR). To see VSRs/VLRs submitted by other cities and regions, see the UN portal at <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews>.*

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<sup>29</sup> See more about UNECE Centre of Excellence in Trondheim via <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/unece-trondheim-establish-centre-of-excellence-to-promote-sdgs-at-local-level/>

# 3. The role of Nordic Local and Regional Associations localising Agenda 2030

Considering the fact that two thirds of the SDG targets can only be reached with the involvement of local and regional actors, their efforts need to be brought forth on the sustainability agenda. The coordinating role of local and regional associations (LRAs) is therefore increasingly important to strengthen and sustain capacity for Agenda 2030 localisation.<sup>30</sup>

Almost five years into the work with Agenda 2030, many European countries are demonstrating best-practice cases and know-how. At the same time, European LRAs and networks are to date among the most advanced in helping support localising the SDGs, as the goals have increasingly been anchored in policy frameworks.<sup>31</sup> Through member networks, the LRAs coordinating role can enhance the capacity to accelerate local implementation of the SDGs.<sup>32</sup> A result of the support from the LRAs can be reflected in the progress several local and regional governments have made in developing their own sustainable development strategies, and reporting mechanisms to monitor their progress. However, it should be added that many municipalities have also been doing work on their own to mainstream the SDGs into local frameworks. For example, larger municipalities that initiate Voluntary Local Reviews often have enough resources and capacity to deliver these independently.

This chapter looks at the Nordic LRAs, and how they appropriate the instruments of Agenda 2030 to support its members in regions, cities and smaller municipalities. In considering the role which Nordic LRAs each play in anchoring national level ambitions for Agenda 2030 goals, areas of strengths include increasingly supporting municipalities and regions with data needed to monitor implementation of SDGs. On one hand, the countries, regions and municipalities have significant experience with facilitating and working in partnerships, networks and platforms that help implementing the SDGs. On the other hand, there is still considerable potential to strengthen municipal and regional capacity to raise public and institutional awareness, both for citizens, local/regional politicians, and municipal/regional employees. Here, the associations can further harmonise access to information, as well as sharing insights about tools and mechanism that have worked well, and what the challenges are in coordinating the horizontal and vertical integration at the local and national levels. A balance between bottom-up and top-down support remain essential, as well as funding allocated for municipal and regional SDG activities. Across all countries, it is important that the roles and responsibilities of municipalities, the national government, respectively, are clear.

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<sup>30</sup> See e.g. the Seville Commitment, the high-level agenda on localising the SDGs, addressed in Box 4 in this report.

<sup>31</sup> UCLG. (2020). "Towards the Localization of the SDGs - How to accelerate transformative actions in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak." Available at: [https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/report\\_localization\\_hlpf\\_2020.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/report_localization_hlpf_2020.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Platforma. (2019). "How local & regional government associations bring the SDGs to life". Available at: <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CEMR-PLATFORMA-study-SDGs-2019-EN-ok3.pdf>; and Platforma. (2019). "The 2030 Agenda - Through the eyes of local and regional governments' associations". Available: <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CEMR-PLATFORMA-study-SDGs-2019-EN-ok3.pdf>.



Picture: [Unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com)

### 3.1. Denmark

In Denmark, the country's five regional authorities are represented by Danish Regions, and Local Government Denmark (KL), represent the 98 member municipalities. The overall mandate of Danish Regions is to safeguard the interests of the regions in a national as well as an international context. KL is primarily an interest group that supports building local level capacity and ensures the interests of municipalities at a national and EU level. As such, Danish Regions and KL are cooperating with the government in to achieve the SDGs.

In the Voluntary National Review (VNR) Denmark submitted in 2017, Danish Regions and KL are, as representatives for local and regional governments, key stakeholders in terms of linking national and local/regional level SDG initiatives. KL support municipalities and regions with resources and knowledge sharing and influencing legislative and financial frameworks to facilitate authorities in delivering on the SDGs. The vision of the associations are, "to keep Denmark as a free, prosperous and safe society by continuously incorporating the SDGs into political initiatives," as stated in the VNR.

**Even though new [local and regional] activities are not necessarily initiated with the SDGs in mind, they are certainly aligned with the UN intentions and goals.<sup>33</sup>**

The Danish Regions' strategies focus on cross-cutting issues related to sustainable development, which include citizen involvement, municipal SDG implementation, education and raising awareness about the SDGs, health, climate efforts, circular economy and sustainable procurement, and international capacity building.<sup>34</sup> One example is its vision for sustainable healthcare, focusing on health for all and health for life, and as such, the regional authorities are all implementing plans encompassing several of the SDGs. The region of Southern Denmark has spearheaded subnational work amongst the regions in the country, aligning its new Regional Development Strategy (2020-2023) with the SDGs. The experiences from this process is presented in an OECD report through the region's participation in the 'A Territorial Approach to the SDGs' programme (see p. 42).<sup>35</sup>

KL has in recent years had a key role in strengthening SDG uptake among municipalities by raising awareness, promoting knowledge-sharing activi-

ties, coordinating implementation with relevant national and local institutions, and ensuring involvement of and dialogue with a range of stakeholders. Other key aims also include supporting municipalities with identifying which SDGs are most relevant and promote the challenge-based approach to identifying opportunities, as well as sourcing possible funding opportunities through e.g. private-public collaboration. Some municipalities, such as Ringsted, have adopted the SDGs in its municipal strategy and plans.<sup>36</sup> Maintaining a holistic approach, the associations stated in Denmark's VNR that, "Even though new activities are not necessarily initiated with the SDGs in mind, they are certainly aligned with the UN intentions and goals. The consequences of climate change reveal the need for action and to view challenges as possibilities. The scope of activities depends on funding."<sup>37</sup>

From March to May 2021, KL will be hosting a series of webinars about Agenda 2030. The four webinars will broadly focus on how Danish municipalities can localise the SDGs for concrete change. The webinars will address how the Agenda 2030 framework can act as a lever for local collaborations and co-creation beyond municipal administrations, as well as how the government's new action plan can support local implementation as part of Denmark's fulfilment of the SDGs.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The Government of Denmark. Report for the Voluntary National Review - Denmark's implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 2017. Available: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16013Denmark.pdf>, p. 55-60

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. Danske Regioner. (2021). "How local & regional government associations bring the SDGs to life. Available at: <https://www.regioner.dk/regional-udvikling/regionaleudviklingsstrategier>. In addition, the ICLEI report published on KL explores how the association is instrumental in accruing power in municipalities and working on behalf of cities at the national level. Local Governments for sustainability (ICLEI). (2020). "Devolution to cities: A case study of KL - Local Government Denmark". Available at: <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CEMR-PLATFORMA-study-SDGs-2019-EN-ok3.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> The OECD. (2020). "A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals in Southern Denmark, Denmark." Available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/deliver/8d672234-en.pdf?itemId=%2Fcontent%2Fpaper%2F8d672234-en&mimeType=pdf>

<sup>36</sup> See Ringsted municipality's local strategy based on Agenda 2030 framework: Ringsted kommune. Sammenhæng i Muligheder - Planstrategi 2019-2031". 2019. Available: [https://ringsted.dk/sites/default/files/kommunen\\_-\\_politikker\\_planer/planstrategi\\_2019-2031\\_sammenhaeng\\_i\\_muligheder\\_23.12.2019.pdf](https://ringsted.dk/sites/default/files/kommunen_-_politikker_planer/planstrategi_2019-2031_sammenhaeng_i_muligheder_23.12.2019.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> The Government of Denmark. Report for the Voluntary National Review. 2017, 55-60

<sup>38</sup> See e.g. Kuntaliitto's action plan for sustainable development (in Swedish): Finlands Kommunförbund. (1997). "Finlands Kommunförbunds handlingsprogram för hållbar utveckling". Available: [https://www.kommunforbundet.fi/sites/default/files/media/file/KEKE\\_SV.pdf](https://www.kommunforbundet.fi/sites/default/files/media/file/KEKE_SV.pdf)



Picture: Unsplash.com

### 3.2. Finland

In Finland, the Association of Finnish Municipalities, or Kuntaliitto, coordinates several networks' activities on sustainability issues where all of Finland's 310 municipalities and cities are members. Other parties involved in its activities include regional councils, hospital districts and other joint municipal authorities, as well as limited companies that are under local governments' authority. At the overarching level, the association's goal is to improve the operating conditions of local authorities by looking after their interests and providing development and other services. When it comes to supporting members with implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Kuntaliitto approach has a strong focus on each sector's issues.<sup>39</sup>

Finland's VNR in 2016 revealed that municipalities had limited knowledge about the 2030 Agenda. The municipalities nevertheless play a key role in the implementation of the SDGs and have a wide range of responsibilities and lots of possibilities to influence sustainable development. Indeed, Finnish municipalities work extensively with sustainable development, because of their large field of operation and tasks, but not all link their work explicitly with the 2030 Agenda. Yet, advancement in local sustainability work can be seen in the Finnish regions, municipalities and networks. In recent years, a cross-sectoral approach aligning municipalities' existing activities and ambitions is becoming a more common way of implement-

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<sup>39</sup> See e.g. Kuntaliitto's action plan for sustainable development (in Swedish): Finlands Kommunförbund. (1997). "Finlands Kommunförbunds handlingsprogram för hållbar utveckling". Available: [https://www.kommunforbundet.fi/sites/default/files/media/file/KEKE\\_SV.pdf](https://www.kommunforbundet.fi/sites/default/files/media/file/KEKE_SV.pdf)

ing SDGs, and as such sustainability is integrated into everyday actions and leadership. Kuntaliitto support their members accordingly, which is for instance reflected in the association's current strategy, where sustainable development is a key area. In addition, there are plans in the pipeline to further support municipalities in approaching social sustainability, as well as the development of sustainable city indicators.

In many projects, Kuntaliitto and municipalities jointly develop management processes and tools for climate mitigation and SDG localisation, primarily focusing on social, environmental and economic sustainability. These include, 'New generation with 25 municipalities', which supports SDG framework into local leadership, as well as one on climate management with a network of 15 municipalities. The focus of this is on integrating ecological and sustainable methods into a broad range of decision-making processes. There is additionally an SDG network among Finland's 6 largest cities.

### **A cross-sectoral approach is becoming a more common way of implementing SDGs, and as such sustainability is integrated into everyday actions and leadership.**

In Finland's second VNR submitted in 2020, it acknowledged that there is room for improvement in the coordination between the national level and the local level on the specific role of the municipalities in implementing the SDGs.<sup>40</sup> However, there are initiatives that are enhancing and facilitating interaction between these governance levels.<sup>41</sup> Kuntaliitto, representing all municipalities, is a member of the National Commission on Sustainable Development, currently chaired by Prime Minister Sanna Marin (2020–2023).<sup>42</sup> The Ministry of the Environment is running the Sustainable City Programme (2019–2023) that promotes the sustainable development of cities and municipalities through practical urban development and strategic management. Many activities in this programme are in partnership with Kuntaliitto.

The association is a member of several international organisations, such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), working with a range of regional and local development interests, including Agenda 2030 implementation.

As per February 2021, the frontrunner cities of Espoo, Helsinki and Turku have submitted Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR).<sup>43</sup> When Helsinki submitted its VLR to the 2019 HLPF, it was one of the first European cities to do so. The cities have however been leading these processes without much involvement from the association.

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<sup>40</sup> Prime Minister's Office of Finland. Voluntary National Review 2020 - Finland: Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 2020. Available: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26261VNR\\_Report\\_Finland\\_2020.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26261VNR_Report_Finland_2020.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Kestävähelyitys (the National Commission on Sustainable Development). "Läget för hållbar utveckling," 2021. <https://kestavakehitys.fi/sv/uppfoljning>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. "Kommissionen för hållbar utveckling". 2021. Available at: <https://kestavakehitys.fi/sv/kommissionen>

<sup>43</sup> See the VLRs here: City of Espoo. Espoo, Euroopan kestävin kaupunki. 2021. Available at: <https://www.espooli.fi/download/noname/%7B51AF2F3B-6828-4CB3-BF78-D597D839E95B%7D/129376>. City of Turku. A Voluntary Local Review 2020 - The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the City of Turku. 2020. Available: <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CEMR-PLATFORMA-study-SDGs-2019-EN-ok3.pdf>. City of Helsinki. From Agenda to Action: The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019. 2019. Available: <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/SDG-VLR-Helsinki-2019-en.pdf>.



Picture: Unsplash.com

### 3.3. Iceland

The Icelandic Association of Local Authorities (Samband íslenskra sveitarfélaga) is recognised as the interest guarding body of the 69 local authorities in the country's Local Governments Act. The Association, Samband, has the key role of coordinating the interests of Icelandic municipalities.

In its strategy for the current election period 2018-2022, Samband emphasises advocacy and awareness raising of the SDGs among municipalities, as well as active dissemination of information and advice on implementation. Samband has since 2017 participated in an Inter-ministerial Steering Group on the SDGs led by the Prime Minister's Office, and thus been directly involved in the national SDG working group from the beginning. Activities related to knowledge dissemination and providing members with advice on implementation can be said to be at the core of Samband's Agenda 2030 efforts.

#### **A special SDG cooperation committee was established in January 2021 [and] has started working on the development of common SDG indicators for Icelandic municipalities.**

In 2019 samband took the initiative to establish a network between municipalities dedicated to work on the implementation of the SDGs and on climate issues. The majority of the Icelandic municipalities have joined the network. Within the network, there are two working groups with representatives from Samband and the municipalities focusing on Agenda 2030 and climate issues, respectively. These working groups prepare

regular information and knowledge sessions for its members. In its VNR submitted the same year, the government highlighted in the report that, "With the involvement of [Samband] the introduction of SDGs is approached as a joint project of the state and municipalities, as they have an important role for successful implementation of the SDGs."<sup>44</sup>

Icelandic local and regional authorities are increasingly linking their policies and plans to the SDGs. The second biggest municipality in Iceland, Kópavogur is considered one of the frontrunner municipalities, and participated in the OECD programme on 'A territorial approach to the SDGs' (see p. 42).<sup>45</sup> The municipality is currently composing a special SDG index of indicators. The municipality has also acquired a ISO 37120 certification for Sustainable Cities through the World Council on City Data. Additionally, it will base its local SDG index on that standard, complemented with other datasets such as Child Well-Being data, and the Social Progress Index (SPI). The capital city Reykjavik is also preparing to adopt the ISO Standard to monitor its local SDG implementation.

Upon the recommendations of the OECD, a special SDG cooperation committee was established in January 2021 between the government and Samband to strengthen support for its members, as well as promoting increased coordination and support from the national to local level. The committee is led by the chair of the Inter-ministerial Steering Group on the SDG. Samband is also joined by the Ministry of Local Government and the Statistical Bureau of Iceland in the committee. The working group has started working on the development of common SDG indicators for Icelandic municipalities, and is also overseeing the development of a tool box on municipal Agenda 2030 implementation.

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<sup>44</sup> Government of Iceland: Prime Minister's Office. Iceland's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development June 2019 - Voluntary National Review. 2019. Available: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23408VNR\\_Iceland\\_2019\\_web\\_final.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23408VNR_Iceland_2019_web_final.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> OECD. A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals in Kópavogur, Iceland. 2020. Available: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/deliver/e0f3c1d6-en.pdf?itemId=%2Fcontent%2Fpaper%2Fe0f3c1d6-en&mimeType=pdf>



Picture: Unsplash.com

### 3.4. Norway

In Norway, KS, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, represent all municipalities and regions. KS motivates, supports and encourages its members to develop innovative programme and services for inclusive communities through applying the SDGs.

In recent years, KS support for Agenda 2030 uptake and localisation actions for its members has been comprehensive. Some main initiatives and programmes include the Norwegian Network of Excellence on SDG City Transition - "Bærekraftsnettverket" - coordinated by KS and the UN Centre of Excellence in Trondheim. The network was initiated by several municipalities, regional authorities, organisations and companies, together with KS, as part of the Stavanger Declaration with the UN on smart sustainable development of cities and local communities. This is an ongoing prototyping of a multi-level and

multi-stakeholder approach to sustainable development, and collaboration happens in close partnership with United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC). U4SSC is a UN initiative coordinated by 16 UN organisations that aim to develop and implement the first global set of indicators to measure and track municipalities' development towards smart and sustainable societies. To strengthen the efforts of the SDG City Transition-network, KS is also working together with the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) and the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) to develop a national partnership called "Bærekraftsløftet" - a sustainability pledge to strengthen the progress on fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.<sup>46</sup>

From a research context, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim Municipality and Limerick City and County Council has also developed a framework for sustainable societal transition. This has been developed through the EU-funded project Positive City Ex-

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<sup>46</sup> Kommunesektoren (KS). "Kommunesektorens løft for bærekraft". 2021. <https://www.ks.no/fagomrader/samfunnsutvikling/barekraft/barekraftsnettverket/>. For the Stavanger Declaration, see <https://www.stavanger.kommune.no/nyheter/stavanger-erklaringen/>, and more about U4SSC at <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-T/ssc/united/Pages/default.aspx>

Change with funding from the EU-commission under the Horizon 2020 Smart Cities Lighthouse project. The SDG City Transition Framework (Bold City Vision) is a tool for cities to link data, policy and action. KS and the SDG City Transition-network use this framework to structure a knowledge-based approach to sustainable development at the local level, and is also applied in other European countries. In 2020, it was recognised by the European Commission's innovation radar as an important contribution to sustainable change. Another key initiative is the development of a taxonomy to classify SDG-related indicators. The taxonomy is a classification system that can assess either a given indicator or a set of indicators, and proposes three dimensions: Goal, Perspective and Quality. The taxonomy was developed in partnership with Statistics Norway, and a report was launched in March 2021.<sup>47</sup> KS also participates in various international localising initiatives and has promoted the exchange of good practices among its members. This included recent participation in the aforementioned OECD programme along with the Region of Viken (see p. 42).<sup>48</sup>

## 2020 marked a year when mobilisation around local SDG implementation in Norway was brought forth by KS.

In conjunction with Norway's second VNR submission to the UN HLPF in July 2021, as well as the preparations for a national action plan on the SDGs, there has been a great deal of momentum across the country, and broad stakeholder engagement has been part of the processes so far. In

this context, KS has had a key role in enhancing the importance of regional and local capacities to deliver on Agenda 2030 in Norway.<sup>49</sup> Over the years, in the absence of such action plan, the ongoing national assessment and evaluation of Agenda 2030 efforts has stressed the urgency of enhancing the coordination across governance levels to support regional and local authorities.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, for KS, 2020 marked a year when mobilisation around local SDG implementation in Norway was brought forth by the association. KS provided its recommendations to the national action plan, but will also, through a formal collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, strengthen local and regional actions and visibility in the 2021 VNR.<sup>51</sup> In parallel, KS is overseeing the first Voluntary Sub-national Review (VSR) in Norway, and will be part of the Norwegian delegation to the HLPF. Both the VSR coordination and participation is underscoring the priority at national level to highlight local and regional SDG efforts in Norway (see Box 2).

At least 30 percent of its membership (representing 356 local and 11 regional governments) is actively working on SDG implementation as of 2021. Trondheim and Asker will be the first Norwegian municipalities to submit VLRs. This is happening in coordination with KS. In addition, Trondheim, along with Ålesund and Bodø municipalities, is also a member of United Smart Cities (USC), which is the world's largest network of smart cities.<sup>52</sup> The municipality of New Asker, a recent merger of the former municipalities of Hurum, Røyken and Asker, has used a participatory approach to identify the most relevant SDGs for its municipal master plan.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Statistics Norway. A taxonomy for indicators related to the Sustainable Development Goals. 2021. <https://www.ssb.no/en/natur-og-miljo/artikler-og-publikasjoner/a-taxonomy-for-indicators-related-to-the-sustainable-development-goals>

<sup>48</sup> OECD. "A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals in Viken, Norway". Paris, 2020. Available: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/dc1b182d-en.pdf?expires=1615565718&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=AA374F1049CD7B0FADBC30B621459E9B>

<sup>49</sup> Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet. "Bærekraftsmålene for Norge," 2021. Available: <https://berekraft.regjeringen.no/>

<sup>50</sup> Riksrevisjonen. Undersøkelse av styring av og rapportering på den nasjonale oppfølgingen av FN's bærekraftsmål. 2020.

<sup>51</sup> KS. "KS innspill til nasjonal handlingsplan for bærekraftsarbeidet i Norge". 2021. Available (in Norwegian): <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/793e429727db46539d67fa664fdcb029/ks.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Additionally, USC is part of (U4SSC), see e.g. <https://unece.org/housing/norwegian-project>

<sup>53</sup> New Asker. "Asker's work on the SDGs." 2020. Available: <https://www.asker.kommune.no/asker-mot-2030/fns-barekraftsmal/askers-work-on-the-sdgs/>



Picture: Artūras Zelenkauskas

### 3.5. Sweden

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) represents and advocates for local governments in Sweden. All of Sweden's municipalities and regions are members. SALAR strives to stay ahead of the curve by acting decisively, enlightening public opinion and highlighting important changes that affects its members. This includes promoting and supporting municipalities and regions to conduct coherent sustainability work that harnesses social, ecological and economic dimensions.

In 2016, SALAR began the work to raise awareness about the 2030 Agenda for its members. One of SALAR's key responsibilities in Sweden's Agenda 2030 efforts is analysing how the organisation aligns its objectives within each operational area with the SDGs, as well as monitoring the im-

plementation of the 17 goals amongst members. National level initiation of stakeholder platforms and partnerships with a bearing on Agenda 2030, primarily with the private sector, civil society, the research community, and municipalities has provided a robust foundation. Local2030 Sweden Hub is an example of such platform.<sup>54</sup> As such, the regional and local levels in Sweden have been well-placed to define and make decisions on sustainability agendas. A key project co-organised by SALAR has been pivotal in building capacity with regards to this. 'Glokala Sverige' (Glocal Sweden) is a project that has worked to enhance local and regional authorities' capacity, knowledge, as well as local commitment and engagement to the SDGs.<sup>55</sup> Glokala Sverige has offered workshops for local administrations and politicians to learn about SDGs localisation, as well as hosting annual "Mötesplats Agenda 2030" conferences where

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<sup>54</sup> Global utmaning. (2021). "Sweden Local2030 Hub". Available: <https://www.globalutmaning.se/local2030/>

<sup>55</sup> See more Glokala Sverige via the Swedish UN Association at <https://fn.se/glokalasverige/ansokan-glokala-sverige/>

municipalities and regions can exchange knowledge and experiences.<sup>56</sup> The project is a collaboration with the Swedish UN Association and the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy, with financial support from Sida, the Swedish development fund. As of 2021, 163 municipalities and 18 regions are engaged in the network, of which many are local elected representatives and civil servants.<sup>57</sup> 70 percent of the municipalities and regions in SALAR's network today use Agenda 2030 as a tool in the work with sustainable development.

### **The purpose of 'Öppna jämförelser' is for municipalities and regions to promote cross-comparisons of the current status in the transition to a sustainable future, [to] inspire municipalities and regions to work even more vigorously with achieving Agenda 2030 goals.**

SALAR started early to map its members' initiatives regarding the 2030 Agenda. This resulted in 'Öppna jämförelser' (open comparisons).<sup>58</sup> The purpose of 'Öppna jämförelser' is for municipalities and regions to promote cross-comparisons of the current status in the transition to a sustainable future. This involves further strengthening knowledge-sharing and inspiring municipalities and regions to work even more vigorously with achieving Agenda 2030 goals. One outcome has been the Kolada database where municipalities across the country can retrieve key indicators and data for analyses on sustainability progress.<sup>59</sup> The key figures in Kolada are based on national statis-

tics from Statistiska centralbyrån (SCB), but data is also drawn from other sources. Kolada is owned by the non-profit association Council for the Promotion of Municipal Analyses (RKA) in collaboration between the government and SALAR. The Kolada database has generated a lot of interest amongst municipalities. Local authorities in particular appreciate the opportunities it offers for municipalities to compare themselves with each other and to analyse progress in their work with the SDGs.

There are several examples of the local and regional best-practices among Swedish municipalities and regions. For instance, the regions of Kronoberg, Kalmar County and Västra Götaland have developed regional development plans aligned with the SDGs. Several other municipalities, including Malmö, Åtvidaberg, Strängnäs, and Kalmar region have also been working actively with integrating Agenda 2030 and the 17 global goals in local plans and development work, and Upplands Väsby, for instance, has included the SDGs in their multi-annual plans and budgets.

Sweden is also submitting a VSR (see Box 2), and discussions with the national level, regarding LRA-input to the VNR, are ongoing. SKR will facilitate the exchange by coordinating a consultation between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and local and regional representatives. The consultation will be arranged in March 2021. Four municipalities (Malmö, Helsingborg, Stockholm and Uppsala) will present VLRs which have been individually initiated. SALAR engages in regular exchange on the localisation of SDGs within UCLG, CEMR and PLATFORMA. In the last quarter of 2020, SKR released a couple of podcasts focusing on Agenda 2030 localisation, which may be useful not only for the Swedish, but also the Norwegian context.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See the Swedish UN Association. (2020). "Möten och seminarier om Glokala Sverige". Available: <https://fn.se/glokalsverige/moten-och-seminarier/>

<sup>57</sup> SALAR. (2020). "Agenda 2030 – för hållbar utveckling". Available: <https://skr.se/tjanster/omskr/agenda2030.19225.html>

<sup>58</sup> SALAR. (2020). "Öppna jämförelser – Agenda 2030". Available: <https://rapporter.skr.se/oppna-jamforelser---agenda-2030.html>

<sup>59</sup> A database with similar functions will soon be available in Norway (currently being tested). In this area, there are opportunities for discussion and knowledge-exchange.

<sup>60</sup> See e.g. the SALAR podcasts from October 2020, "Agenda 2030 – Från det lokala till det globala" and "Agenda 2030 i praktiken."



Picture: Unsplash.com

## 4. SDGs localisation in Europe

For non-member states like Norway and Iceland, the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement grants significant access to the European Union's (EU) work with Agenda 2030 and related programmes. This includes Horizon 2020, which will be followed by Horizon Europe 2021-27, seeking to deliver on cross-cutting sustainability targets across social, environmental and economic areas.<sup>61</sup> Norwegian municipalities and regional authorities are involved in European affairs, and recognising how the EU relates to the sustainability goals is central to how Norwegian actors equip themselves for European Agenda 2030 collaboration. Under the EEA Agreement, Norway can put forward proposals and provide input when the European Commission and the EU's agencies are developing initiatives in areas covered by the Agreement.

This chapter provides an overview of key institutions and central initiatives in Europe with regards to local and regional implementation of the SDGs. The intention is to point out relevant networks, with mentioning of implications for Norwegian municipalities and regions. Some Norwegian

municipalities are either well familiar and/or have already participated in European programmes and activities.<sup>62</sup> For other municipalities that are less involved in European programmes and partnerships, the institutions and networks might provide ideas and inspiration to get involved with new activities or capacity building in localising the SDGs. EU-level activities suggest that enhancing deliberations on how to spread participation and networking know-hows continues to be relevant. To this end, there are also many resources to draw on from Nordic neighbours' European level involvement through direct EU membership.

Strengthening the knowledge of a broad range of Norwegian actors, such as regional authorities and municipalities, interest organisations, and research groups through participation in European networks and the various EU cooperation programmes has been recognised by the Norwegian government.<sup>63</sup> This engagement can act as an important lever to decision-makings involving the global community and vice versa.

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<sup>61</sup> The Horizon programme targets research, but within this framework Norwegian municipalities can join consortia.

<sup>62</sup> KS. (2021). "Mot et bærekraftig Europa." Available: <https://www.ks.no/fagomrader/samfunnsutvikling/barekraft/mot-et-barekraftig-europa-2030/>

<sup>63</sup> See e.g. the Norwegian Government's strategy for cooperation with the EU 2018–2021, [https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/eu\\_strategy/id2600561/](https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/eu_strategy/id2600561/)

## 4.1. EU-level organisations and initiatives localising SDGs

### 4.1.1. European Commission

The EU was instrumental in shaping the 2030 Agenda globally and has since 2015 been taking concrete action to implement them. The European Commission is responsible for drawing up proposals for new European legislation, as well as implementing the decisions of the European Parliament and the EU Council. Under the leadership of Presi-

dent Ursula von der Leyen, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs form an important part of the Commission's new political programme and are at the core of policymaking and internal and external action across all sectors.<sup>64</sup> The new programme period also suggests that the role of local and regional government will be key in realising a multi-governance approach to the 2030 Agenda in the EU. This is addressed in the current Commission's "whole of government" approach to SDGs implementation (see Figure 4) and outlined in the first of three scenarios presented in the "Reflection



**Figure 4. The current Commission's comprehensive or "whole of government" approach to SDGs implementation.** Source: European Commission (2020)

<sup>64</sup> See the EU's framework on sustainable development, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-holistic-approach-sustainable-development\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-holistic-approach-sustainable-development_en)

Paper: Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030".<sup>65</sup> Together, the Reflection Paper, the European Green Deal (see e.g. the European Climate Pact), and the European Commission's political priorities and its work programme, reflect commitment to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and mainstream activities through its internal and external policies, emphasising the Commission's holistic approach to sustainable development.<sup>66</sup>

Part of the background anchoring European level SDG localisation includes the formation of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform in 2017.<sup>67</sup> The platform advocated i.a. for a territorial approach to the implementation of the SDGs within EU policy frameworks. A set of recommendations for the implementation of SDGs was published at local and regional level focusing on the key priority areas of territorial dimension, governance, monitoring and evaluation, and how to facilitate knowledge-exchange of experience and praxis.<sup>68</sup>

EU level ambitions to implement the promises of the 2030 Agenda necessitates a strong national-level framework for action and relevant structures. Nevertheless, the SDG localisation agenda is quickly evolving. Identifying the work of organisations that are addressing the need for stronger local involvement, and making these resources accessible, could benefit municipalities and regional authorities, as well as the local and regional associations of which they are part.

#### 4.1.2. Joint Research Centre

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) is the Commission's science and knowledge service. JRC's Knowledge Centre for Territorial Policies specifically supports EU policymaking through better knowledge management on territorial - i.e. urban and regional - issues.<sup>69</sup> This work is co-steered by the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) and is gathering, managing, and synthesising the vast amount of knowledge available on European cities and regions. This has been important in advancing the work on local monitoring and evaluation for the SDGs at the city level in Europe, and more generally, support capacity building around the implementation of the 2030 agenda.

Of particular relevance to Norwegian municipalities and regions is the 'European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews' (VLRs).<sup>70</sup> The Handbook is a comprehensive tool that can give local policymakers, researchers, and practitioners an inspirational framework to set up VLRs. As stated earlier on in this report, local reporting in the format of a VLR is becoming a powerful instrument that regions and municipalities are now using to monitor progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. The Handbook provides key examples of official and experimental indicators useful to set up an effective SDG local monitoring system. Presenting each of the 17 goals separately, the Handbook is specifically designed for European cities and includes examples from all countries.

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<sup>65</sup> European Commission. 2019. "Reflection Paper: Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030." Available: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/rp\\_sustainable\\_europe\\_30-01\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/rp_sustainable_europe_30-01_en_web.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> See the Commission's factsheet, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/delivering\\_on\\_uns\\_sustainable\\_development\\_goals\\_factsheet\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/delivering_on_uns_sustainable_development_goals_factsheet_en.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> This mandate ended in 2019. For more information and members of the platform, see e.g. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/engagement-civil-society-private-sector-and-other-stakeholders/multi-stakeholder-platform-sdgs\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/engagement-civil-society-private-sector-and-other-stakeholders/multi-stakeholder-platform-sdgs_en)

<sup>68</sup> Members contributing to these recommendations included: CEMR, COFACE; Committee of the Regions; Eurocities; EPHA; EEAC; SDG Watch and OECD as observer. Available: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/delivering-sdgs-local-regional-level.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> See the JRC's KCTP work here: "Knowledge Centre for Territorial Policies," available: [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/territorial\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/territorial_en)

<sup>70</sup> Siragusa, A., Vizcaino, M.P. et al. European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews. JRC. Luxembourg, 2020. Available: [doi:10.2760/670387](https://doi.org/10.2760/670387)

### Box 3. Regional development and Smart Specialisation (S3) in Europe with relevance for Norwegian Agenda 2030 localisation

In addition to the institutions, networks and activities covered in this report, Europe's Smart Specialisation (S3) Platform is relevant for Norwegian municipalities and regions. With a strong regional development focus which is important to strengthen SDG implementation, S3 strategies are of interest to EU member states as well as non-EU members willing to improve their innovation ecosystems.

Norway has published a national roadmap for smart specialisation, and some regional authorities have taken it into account in their strategies. While Norway is not committed to S3 implementation and does not receive funding as a non-member country of the EU, identifying interlinkages and synergies between smart specialisations and Agenda 2030 could benefit strategic planning at both the regional and local levels in the country. Through participating in the EU's Interreg programmes ([www.interregeurope.eu](http://www.interregeurope.eu)) for instance, some regional and local governments in Norway are through cross-border projects developing better policy deliverance in this area.

*Source: The Ministry for Local Government and Modernisation. Roadmap for Norwegian Smart Specialization. 2018. Available at: <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/9cff31a9a15c457c9366c63c5aa65f42/veiledersmart-spesialisering-endelig.pdf>*

#### 4.1.3. URBACT

The URBACT network is a European exchange and learning programme financed by the European Commission under its territorial cooperation goal, and as part of its initiatives and programmes on interregional cooperation. The network covers all EU member states, Norway, and Switzerland. The aim of the network is to stimulate innovation in urban regeneration by encouraging towns and cities to identify, transfer and disseminate good practice. URBACT was a key member of the European dialogue process to update the Leipzig Charter (see Box 4).

Projects financed under the most recent programme, URBACT III, have focused on addressing the main objectives to help build capacity for

cities to deliver sustainable urban policies, improving urban policy implementation and design, and ensure that knowledge sharing is spread.<sup>71</sup> Through the programmes and 'City Labs' initiatives, URBACT share the experiences of hundreds of cities facing practical and policy challenges, as well as identifying and addressing challenges that remain. This happens through the discussions on specific thematic topics that URBACT facilitates with city representatives and different levels of governance. In Norway, Kristiansand, Oslo, Notodden, and the former regional authorities of Vestfold and Østfold have participated or are currently actively involved in URBACT projects. These cover sustainable development topics such as food systems, youth, and demographic change in small- and medium-sized cities.

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<sup>71</sup> See the URBACT network's tools, best-practices and reports via <https://urbact.eu/>. For projects and involved partners: <https://urbact.eu/interactive-map?country=150>. More about Norway's local government reforms in 2020: <https://www.ks.no/om-ks/ks-in-english/local-government-reforms-in-norway/>. See also Nordregio report on Nordic reforms more broadly: A new wave of reforms sweeping over the Nordic countries? 2015, accessible <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:860942/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

#### 4.1.4. The European Committee of the Regions

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is an EU advisory body composed of locally and regionally elected representatives coming from all 27 Member States.<sup>72</sup> Through the CoR, members provide their input on EU legislation that directly impacts regions and cities. It serves as a key platform through which regional and local governments can work to influence EU policy. Norway and Iceland

is not represented in the CoR, but has established links via the EEA EFTA Forum of Elected Representatives of Local and Regional Authorities.

In recent years, the CoR has coordinated key networks and activities focused on SDGs localisation.<sup>73</sup> In 2020, as a response to the Commission's Reflection Paper, the CoR issued an opinion.<sup>74</sup> Here, the member states reinforced the formal involvement of regions and cities in localising the SDGs at multiple levels of governance.

#### Box 4. The 'territorial' and 'urban' dimensions of Agenda 2030

Agenda 2030 localisation addresses the processes through which regional and local governments and local stakeholders operationalise and monitor the SDGs within place-based contexts. The SDGs are therefore a particularly powerful policy tool for cities and regions to improve people's lives and lead the transition towards sustainable development. The urban dimension of Agenda 2030 and related territorial approaches are closely interlinked with localisation efforts as such. It is a way of understanding how cities and regions can adopt and transpose the global goals to their urban contexts. This is reflected e.g. in the New Urban Agenda, SDG 11 and the urban elements targeted in the other SDGs.

At the EU level, there is advocacy ongoing for a territorial approach for the delivery of the SDGs. The response to the Commission's approach to Agenda 2030 has called for multi-level governance approach and multi-stakeholder involvement, encompassing regional and local authorities, cities, as well as civil society and professional organisations in articulating European and national strategies. Complementing this work, the Urban Agenda for the EU with its 14 Partnerships was set up to support these types of approaches. The agenda was launched in May 2016 with the Pact of Amsterdam, promoting vertical and horizontal collaboration to stimulate growth, liveability and innovation in European cities and regions.

The Urban Agenda for the EU was reaffirmed as an instrument to implement the principles in the New Leipzig Charter in 2020. Norway was invited to participate in the charter's revision process. Signed in 2007, the Leipzig Charter promotes the use of 'integrated urban development' policy and sets out in a single EU document, the key principles behind good urban policy, to promote a balance between just, green and productive cities. While the charter does not make explicit reference to the SDGs, priority areas of the charter are aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Goals. Four Norwegian cities are part of EU's Urban Agenda partnerships: Oslo, Stavanger, Larvik and Trondheim each are part of initiatives focusing on circular economy, nature based solutions, innovative public procurement and climate adaptation, respectively.

*Source: European Commission. "The Urban Agenda for the EU." 2021. More information at <https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/en/urban-agenda>. The New Leipzig Charter. 2020. Read the Charter here: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/new\\_leipzig\\_charter/new\\_leipzig\\_charter\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/new_leipzig_charter/new_leipzig_charter_en.pdf)*

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<sup>72</sup> European Committee of the Regions (CoR). "European Committee of the Regions (CoR)." 2020. Available: [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/european-committee-regions\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/european-committee-regions_en)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> CoR opinion paper, "A Sustainable Europe by 2030: Follow-up to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, ecological transition and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change," 2020, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019IR0965>

In addition, the CoR published a study on 'A territorial approach for the implementation of the SDGs in the EU – the role of the European CoR'.<sup>75</sup> This study reviews the status for SDG policies in the European Union and the role of local and regional authorities in implementation work. The study further identifies potential for how the CoR can support member states with SDG localisation – an area considered relatively new for the Committee.

The CoR also has a monitoring platform on the involvement of local and regional authorities in the European Semester of economic policy coordination and in the EU's long-term strategy for sustainable growth.<sup>76</sup> Other networks and activities include The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), Cities and Regions for Integration initiative, and the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. Norway is represented through the commitment of Oslo in the Covenant of Mayors, joining cities worldwide targeting reduction of CO2 emissions, increasing local resilience to climate change, and ensuring access to sustainable and affordable energy to all.

Together with the OECD, the CoR also hosted a conference titled 'Regions and Cities Making the SDGs Happen' in 2019. Until 2019, the CoR chaired the mandate of the Commission's Multi-Stakeholder Platform on SDGs. During the annual European Week of Regions which in October 2020, several workshops were organised by the CoR, many of which focused on local and regional SDGs implementation in EU regions.<sup>77</sup>

#### 4.1.5. The European Sustainable Cities Platform

The European Sustainable Cities Platform was launched in 2016, following the eighth European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns (ESCT) in Bilbao. The platform is a source of information and for knowledge sharing, supporting its members with SDG localisation, facilitating and connecting several networks and local sustainability frameworks.<sup>78</sup>

The platform builds on the ESCT conferences, which have been held every three to four years since 1994. Back then, the Aalborg Charter was formulated, and the Norwegian cities of Bergen, Fredrikstad, Kristiansand, Lillehammer, Oslo, Stavanger, Tromsø and Trondheim were signatory cities. The ESCT conferences have been marking milestones for progress and achievements in local sustainability across Europe.

A key outcome of the recent conference in 2016 was the Basque Declaration. The declaration reaffirms the commitment to sustainable European cities and towns to support and accelerate socio-cultural, socio-economic and technological transformation and can be endorsed by all.<sup>79</sup> In Norway, the municipality of Drammen has endorsed the declaration so far. Whereas the charters of the Sustainable Cities Platform are generally declaratory, the commitments signify a more structured and ambitious approach to be taken by the signatories. The Sustainable Cities Platform also has a transformative actions database, which functions as a case study and best-practice portfolio of the platform's members.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> CoR. "A territorial approach for the implementation of the SDGs in the EU – the role of the European CoR." 2019. Available: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/SDGS.pdf>

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. CoR on "Involving local authorities in the European Semester," available at <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/europe2020/Pages/european-semester.aspx>

<sup>77</sup> See e.g. the programme from the European Week of Regions 2020, including, "How sub-national authorities act to transform and galvanise their societies and practices localising and raising awareness about SDGs." Available: [https://europa.eu/regions-and-cities/programme/sessions/1618\\_en](https://europa.eu/regions-and-cities/programme/sessions/1618_en)

<sup>78</sup> More about the platform's work accessible via <https://sustainablecities.eu/sustainable-cities-platform/>

<sup>79</sup> See the Basque Declaration by the Sustainable Cities Platform here: [https://sustainablecities.eu/fileadmin/repository/Basque\\_Declaration/Basque-Declaration-ENGLISH-WWW.pdf](https://sustainablecities.eu/fileadmin/repository/Basque_Declaration/Basque-Declaration-ENGLISH-WWW.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> See the Transformative Action Database accessible via: <https://sustainablecities.eu/transformative-actions-database/>

## 4.2. Other European networks and activities

### 4.2.1. The European Economic Area and European Free Trade Association (EEA EFTA) Forum of Elected Representatives of Local and Regional Authorities

The EEA EFTA Forum links the EU member states with Iceland and Norway, which are each represented by six full members.<sup>81</sup> The Forum is an informal body to involve the elected representatives from local and regional authorities in EEA matters, including the European Committee of the Regions.

Echoing the scope of the opinion submitted by the CoR on the Commission's Reflection Paper, the Forum also submitted its own opinion in 2019.<sup>82</sup> With regards to Agenda 2030, EFTA members recognise its role to facilitate and promote inclusive local and regional action for the SDGs. Significantly, the opinion emphasises EFTA members to consult with local and regional governments on SDGs when assessing EEA relevance and policy, as well as integrating EU directives with bearing on the 2030 Agenda.

### 4.2.2. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) / PLATFORMA - The pan-European coalition of Local and Regional Governments

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR-CCRE) is the oldest and broadest European association of local and regional governments.<sup>83</sup> CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), through

which it represents European local and regional governments at the global level. It is the only organisation bringing together the national associations of local and regional governments from 41 European countries and represents, through them, all levels of territorial governance.<sup>84</sup> KS is the Norwegian member of CEMR.

Platforma is a pan-European coalition hosted by the CEMR and has since 2008 gathered about 30 national, European, and international associations of territorial communities, as well as cities and regions in the domain of cooperation and development. CEMR/PLATFORMA promote the 2030 Agenda as an overarching and global strategy. This is reflected in its work programme, where CEMR has based its overall strategy around the SDGs and the proposed priorities and activities are associated with the 17 SDGs.<sup>85</sup> There is also a CEMR taskforce on SDGs to support knowledge exchange.

CEMR has produced several publications to raise awareness about the Agenda 2030, for instance to promote tools for local and regional governments that are localising the SDGs. In 2020, a study titled "The 2030 Agenda through the eyes of local and regional governments' associations" looked at the progress made by Europe's municipalities, regions and their national associations in working with and towards achieving the SDGs. Preceding studies similarly looked at how local and regional associations as well as European municipalities and regions have taken ownership of 2030 Agenda implementation.<sup>86</sup> These studies stressed the importance of local action and showcase how municipalities, regions and their national associations early began to bring international ambitions

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<sup>81</sup> More information about the EEA EFTA Forum accessible via: <https://www.efta.int/Advisory-Bodies/EEA-EFTA-Forum-Elected-Representatives-Local-and-Regional-Authorities-1287>

<sup>82</sup> The EEA EFTA Forum's opinion to the Commission's Reflection Paper is available at: <https://www.efta.int/sites/default/files/documents/advisory-bodies/eea-efta-forum/2019-06-28-efta-forum-opinion-on-European-Commission-Paper-on-Sustainable-Europe-2030.pdf>. A translation of the proceedings of the opinion can be found here: [https://fundur.reykjavik.is/sites/default/files/agenda-items/26b\\_dagskra\\_efta.pdf](https://fundur.reykjavik.is/sites/default/files/agenda-items/26b_dagskra_efta.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> See e.g. the CEMR study on its members: National associations of local and regional governments in Europe. 2020. available at: [https://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR\\_study\\_association\\_local\\_government\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_study_association_local_government_EN.pdf)

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> CEMR. CEMR and SDGs: Developing a multi-annual CEMR Work Programme as of 2020. 2019. Available: [https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR\\_work\\_programme\\_2019\\_EN.pdf](https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_work_programme_2019_EN.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> CEMR/Platforma. How local & regional government associations bring the SDGs to life. 2019. Available: <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CEMR-PLATFORMA-study-SDGs-2019-EN-ok3.pdf>. All of the publications can be found via <https://platforma-dev.eu/our-publications>.



Picture: Mats Samuelsson

to territorial realities. A tool CEMR together with ICLEI and Platform31 has developed is the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC).<sup>87</sup> There are also several publications documenting challenges local and regional governments have been facing in their day-to-day work with the SDGs.

### 4.2.3. Eurocities

Eurocities is a network with over 190 of Europe's major cities from 39 countries, representing 130 million people. Eurocities promotes knowledge-sharing and coordinates Europe-wide activities, and is also considered an interest group as such. It focuses on re-establishing the power of the city vis-a-vis the nation-state, and to a certain degree on connecting citizens of the EU across cities and borders.<sup>88</sup> The goal of the network is to foster a better quality of life for all, and as such the network has been active in organising workshops,

often together with CoR and CEMR, on SDG implementation, particularly with a focus on urban development and more recently the EU Green Deal. In Norway, Oslo, Bergen and Stavanger are part of the network, along with several other Nordic cities.

A recent Eurocities report on "Paving the way for sustainable cities," examines the main drivers for effectively localising SDGs in the European context.<sup>89</sup> Here, several practical examples of key SDG acceleration actions are mentioned. These include planning finance mechanisms for sustainable urban development, integrating SDGs in city strategies, and breaking the silos identified city regions. Oslo and Copenhagen are mentioned, for instance, as examples of sustainable procurement. Published in 2020, the report also takes into consideration the impacts of the Covid-19 and recognises the interlinkages between the SDGs and local action to secure progress on local Agenda 2030 efforts in order to 'build back better' after the pandemic.

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<sup>87</sup> See the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities online toolkit at [www.rfsc.eu](http://www.rfsc.eu).

<sup>88</sup> Eurocities' strategic framework and information about member cities are accessible at <https://eurocities.eu/cities/>

<sup>89</sup> [https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EUROCITES\\_SDG\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EUROCITES_SDG_report_2020.pdf). See also Eurocities, Paving the way for sustainable cities. 2020. Available: [https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EUROCITES\\_SDG\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EUROCITES_SDG_report_2020.pdf). Eurocities' recent statement: EU recovery powered by cities: Leading and supporting cities with covid recovery, 2020. Available via: [https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Eurocities-Briefing-Note\\_Cities\\_EU\\_Recovery.pdf](https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Eurocities-Briefing-Note_Cities_EU_Recovery.pdf)

## Box 5. Tracking progress on Agenda 2030 localisation in Europe

Monitoring and evaluation is a cornerstone of Agenda 2030 implementation at all levels of governance. Chapter one and two capture how the Nordic countries are developing systems for assessing SDG progress. At the local level, this has in some places happened with support from local and regional associations, or individual municipal initiatives - many of which have drawn from European models and resources.

In the EU context, a key tool is **Eurostat's EU SDG indicator set**, based on national-level data. Eurostat is the EU's statistical office reporting progress on SDG implementation through a set of indicators adapted to the European context. This involves Eurostat translating the policy priorities of the EU and identifying data quality requirements for indicators used to monitor SDG performance. Updates and adjustments of the indicators are shared in annual reviews, trying to capture the transversal and interdependent nature of the SDGs in Europe. The SDG indicator set framework was a result of a consultative process coordinated by Eurostat, adopted in 2017 by the European Commission. In addition, **ESPON** is a European organisation supporting monitoring work of the SDGs in European cities and regions. Through the European Grouping on Territorial Cooperation, ESPON has also developed a web application with SDG localising tools. This focuses on regional data and indicators related to the SDGs made accessible for local, regional and national governments.

The **Europe Sustainable Development Report (ESDR) 2020** is the second edition of an independent quantitative report on the progress of the EU towards Agenda 2030. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) prepared the 2020 edition. The report tracks and ranks government policies along SDG indicators, complementing official SDG indicators and voluntary country-led review (VNR) processes, but is not an official monitoring tool. Since 2019, there are also reports for European cities, comparing capital cities and selected large metropolitan areas in the EU and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) area.

*Source: Eurostat. "SDG Indicators – Goal by Goal." 2020. See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi/indicators>. ESPON. "SDGs localising tool." 2020. See <https://www.espon.eu/localise-SDG>. SDSN and IEEP. ESDR 2020. See the full report and dashboard at <https://eu-dashboards.sdgindex.org>. Other regional SDG indices and dashboards are also available via <https://www.unsdsn.org/sdg-index-and-monitoring>.*

#### 4.2.4. ICLEI Europe

ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability - is a global network of more than 1,750 local and regional governments (as of 2020) committed to sustainable urban development. ICLEI act through five strategic development pathways, which are reducing emissions, nature-based and circular solutions, resilience, and equitable and people-centred development. KS was a founding member of the organisation and was active in the board from 1990 to 2004. During this period, KS was part of launching several environmental initiatives, such as the programme for water management, the Local Agenda 21 initiative, and the programme on climate change.<sup>90</sup> Norwegian municipalities that are members of ICLEI today include: Lillehammer, Bergen, Arendal, Kristiansand and Stavanger, in addition to KS.<sup>91</sup>

At the global level, Local2030.org is the ICLEI platform for local governments to join the SDG movement and working towards implementing the goals. This is led by the ICLEI Council and the Global Executive Committee. The ICLEI Council is formed by the nine Regional Executive Committees, and these are elected by Members in each ICLEI region. ICLEI Europe is the network advocating on behalf of members in the region, linking actions across civil society, business leaders and all levels of government to accelerate change. The SDGs present a major milestone in the local-to-global conversation, and in Europe, ICLEI has

a range of projects in partnership with many organisations and networks, the European Commission, and the Committee of the Regions. The 2030 Agenda framework has helped providing local voices, which the network has supported for almost three decades, a place on the global table.

ICLEI Europe's work preceded the Agenda 2030 framework, but its activities actively contribute to the fulfilment of the SDGs. Recent initiatives include the Pilot Project for the European Green Capital Network, which aims to supporting and enhancing the network of European Green Capital winners and finalists together with Eurocities.<sup>92</sup> ICLEI Europe is also in partnership with the OECD in launching and implementing a project to support selected cities/regions in using public procurement as a strategic tool to achieve their policy objectives and priorities.

Together with the City of Aalborg (Denmark) and the Basque Country, ICLEI Europe also recently launched the "15 Pathways to Localise the Sustainable Development Goals" report.<sup>93</sup> This guidance document illustrate how the Basque Declaration can be used by towns and cities to localise the SDGs. This is directly linked with the Transformative Action database of the Sustainable Cities Platform (see p. 36).

Other publications and tools that ICLEI Europe shares within its networks and/or on its webpage cover a range of sustainable urban development topics such as urbanisation issues and climate adaptation and mitigation.<sup>94</sup> The document on 'Road

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<sup>90</sup> In 2004 KS hosted an event on north-south partnerships on sustainable development at local level in cooperation with the UNDP, the World Bank, and the Norwegian Ministry of Environment during the UN Commission on Sustainable Development's 12th session in New York. KS presented its program on Municipal International Cooperation (MIC) with case study on the cooperation between the municipalities of Antsirabé, Madagascar and Stavanger, with focus on water, sanitation, and human settlements. ICLEI and KS also represented the local authorities internationally during the session at UN. In 2012, KS was also politically represented in the UNCSD summit in Rio de Janeiro (Rio+20) to develop the framework for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN17).

<sup>91</sup> Overview of all ICLEI members can be accessed via [https://iclei.org/en/members-search.html?region=Europe&order\\_by=2](https://iclei.org/en/members-search.html?region=Europe&order_by=2)

<sup>92</sup> See the ICLEI Pilot Project on European Green Capital Network at <https://iclei-europe.org/projects/?c=search&uid=9ACWL9HW>

<sup>93</sup> ICLEI European Secretariat. 15 Pathways to Localise the Sustainable Development Goals: Inspiration from Cities Implementing Local Actions Contributing to Global Goals. 2019. Available: "[http://www.sustainablecities.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Basque\\_Declaration\\_SDG\\_document/Localise\\_the\\_SDGs\\_final\\_online.pdf](http://www.sustainablecities.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Basque_Declaration_SDG_document/Localise_the_SDGs_final_online.pdf)<https://platforma-dev.eu/our-publications>.

<sup>94</sup> In Germany, where ICLEI is headquartered in Bonn, and ICLEI Europe has offices in Freiburg and Berlin, an online self-assessment tool for sustainable management in German municipalities has been developed. See more about ICLEI Europe's projects on performance measurements via <https://iclei-europe.org/topics/indicators-performance-measurement>.

See more about ICLEI Europe's projects on performance measurements via <https://iclei-europe.org/topics/indicators-performance-measurement>.

to replication' for instance, encourages decision-makers in local and regional governments to accelerate the adoption, replication and upscaling of smart city measures in their territories (see e.g. Box 3).<sup>95</sup>

As of 2021, ICLEI has more than 20 offices around the world. The Council convenes every three years at an ICLEI World Congress and establishes ICLEI's priorities and direction through the adoption of a six-year strategic plan. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the upcoming ICLEI World Congress will be held in two parts: the first one will be convened virtually in April 2021, while the second one will take place in Malmö, Sweden in 2022.

#### 4.2.5. C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group

The C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group is a group of 97 cities around the world in 2005 and led by cities, C40 is focused on tackling climate change and driving urban action that reduces greenhouse gas emissions and climate risks, while increasing the health, wellbeing and economic opportunities of urban citizens.

Norwegian municipalities, along many other European cities, are part of C40's networks, such as the Food Systems Network. A C40 office was recently established in Oslo. The office will lead the work of spreading best practice in the areas of energy and innovation to other cities. Specifically, Oslo will contribute to disseminating knowledge on how major cities in the world can adopt technology and solutions toward making the building and construction industry more environmentally friendly. One of the aims of this work is

to strengthen collaboration between climate ambitious governments and cities across Scandinavia and Europe.<sup>96</sup>

### 4.3. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD

The OECD has been active in terms of developing approaches and synthesising lessons for Agenda 2030 implementation since 2016. Through the "Better Policies for 2030" Action Plan, the OECD is committed to enhance existing knowledge, tools and experience, including mainstreaming Agenda 2030 across the organisation and its global development cooperation work to meet the targets of a sustainable development future.<sup>97</sup>

In 2016, the OECD started providing data and indicators for gap analyses through a pilot indicator framework called, "Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets".<sup>98</sup> This was developed in order to assist member countries with their national Agenda 2030 implementation. In 2019, the OECD published a third edition of the report, providing high-level overview of strengths and weaknesses in performance across the SDGs, including expanded target coverage and analyses of trends and transboundary aspects of implementation in countries.<sup>99</sup>

Through the programme 'A Territorial Approach to the SDGs', the OECD supports regional and local governments in localising the 17 goals. The programme's primary objectives are to measure where cities and regions stand compared to the national average and peer cities/regions on the SDGs. Core results of the project have been

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<sup>95</sup> See ICLEI Europe's 2019 report, Road to Replication – Guiding Cities on Smart Urban Development Process and Lessons Learned in Growsmarter. Accessible at: [https://grow-smarter.eu/fileadmin/editor-upload/Reports/Concluding\\_report\\_on\\_Replication\\_online.pdf](https://grow-smarter.eu/fileadmin/editor-upload/Reports/Concluding_report_on_Replication_online.pdf)

<sup>96</sup> More information about C40 the establishment of the Oslo office at [https://www.c40.org/press\\_releases/c40-cities-opens-oslo-office-to-accelerate-clean-construction-and-climate-governance](https://www.c40.org/press_releases/c40-cities-opens-oslo-office-to-accelerate-clean-construction-and-climate-governance)

<sup>97</sup> OECD. Better Policies for 2030: An OECD Action Plan on the Sustainable Development Goals. 2016. Available: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/Better%20Policies%20for%202030.pdf>

<sup>98</sup> The OECD's Mapping the 169 Targets: A pilot study on how to align international development co-operation to Agenda 2030, was first published in 2017. See e.g. "Agenda 2030 and results" via [oecd.org/dac/results-development/agenda-2030-and-results/](https://www.oecd.org/dac/results-development/agenda-2030-and-results/)

<sup>99</sup> See the third edition of the OECD programme, "Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets 2019: An Assessment of Where OECD Countries Stand." 2020. Accessible: <http://www.oecd.org/sdd/measuring-distance-to-the-sdgs-targets.htm>

summarised in a synthesis report.<sup>100</sup> The synthesis considers how cities and regions adapt and use the SDGs to rethink sustainable development from the ground up, as well as use the goals to facilitate new dialogues between lower and upper levels of government.

For example, as one of the case studies in the programme, the region of Viken in Norway used the 2030 Agenda as a framework to specifically implement a territorial reform merging the three former regions of Akershus, Østfold and Buskerud. See also the examples of the region of Southern Denmark and Kópavogur mentioned in this report's second chapter. The Danish and Icelandic initiatives i.a. aimed to develop multi-stakeholder dialogues and consultation processes to better coordinate local SDG implementation with the private sector and civil society. During the last couple of years, networking, knowledge-sharing events and webinars have part of the programme, including three Roundtables on Cities and Regions for the SDGs.<sup>101</sup> The most recent one was co-hosted in November 2020 with Viken and KS.

In 2019, the OECD also published its report on Norway's global efforts for sustainable development.<sup>102</sup> Taking the observations from the report into consideration in Agenda 2030 implementation can be valuable. In the context of ongoing reforms, the report added that Norway will need to

ensure that its strong approach to global awareness-raising is maintained, both with regards to Agenda 2030 and a range of other sustainability issues.

The broad scope of the Agenda 2030 and the framework for the 17 goals are complementary to OECD policy tools, instruments, and dialogue platforms across a range of thematic areas. Some of these focus on the results of development co-operation and how this can be supported by the 2030 Agenda. Most reports are available on an open digital discovery tool called SDGs Pathfinder, which offers resources with SDG-related policy content from six international organisations, including the Nordic Council of Minister's cooperation programme.<sup>103</sup> The OECD also has specific programmes which can be said to address individual SDGs. Two examples are the programmes for children and youth and gender equality targeting women and girls.<sup>104</sup>

In the OECD Action Plan, it is pointed out that the responsibility for implementing the 2030 Agenda lies primarily with countries and their governments. Attention to promoting synergies and avoid duplication of efforts from the local to the national level will therefore be important given the demands of reaching the SDG targets in the coming years.

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<sup>100</sup> OECD. A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis report. 2020. Available <https://doi.org/10.1787/e86fa715-en>. See more about the OECD's work on SDGs in cities and regions at <https://oe.cd/sdgs-local> and the territorial programme via: <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/territorial-approach-sdgs.htm>

<sup>101</sup> Programmes for the Roundtables are available via <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/regionaldevelopment/sdgs-cities-regions-roundtable.htm>

<sup>102</sup> The report i.a. observes that Norway could deepen its efforts to address national and global sustainability challenges, see OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Norway 2019. 2019. Available: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/29a50dc6-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/29a50dc6-en>.

<sup>103</sup> The SDG Pathfinder can be accessed via: <https://sdg-pathfinder.org/>

<sup>104</sup> See e.g. Child Well-Being and the Sustainable Development Goals, 2018, via <https://www.oecd.org/sdd/Child-Well-Being-and-SDGs.pdf>, and Applying a Gender Lens on the SDGs: How are Women & Girls Doing? 2020. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/sdd/applying-a-gender-lens-on-SDGs-OECD.pdf>.

# 5. New perspectives for Norwegian regions and municipalities?

The number of initiatives, tools and programmes that currently address the localisation of the SDGs is increasing at an encouraging pace and scope. As a result, maintaining an overview and staying updated with what is relevant for a municipality or a region to adopt can present a challenge. The report hopes to serve as a guidance, with the references providing information and background on selected Nordic and European SDG localisation efforts, reflecting important objectives, priorities and key activities of the different institutions, organisations and programmes. In so doing, the aim has been to help navigate among the available resources, and to identify which initiatives, networks or tools might be most suitable for a given context and available capacities.

What follows is a summary highlighting what can be drawn from Nordic and European level SDG localisation, especially for local and regional authorities that want to:

- Establish longer-term networks with other municipalities in the Nordic Region and Europe for knowledge-exchange and dialogue.
- Strengthen knowledge exchange about initiatives and activities going on in the local and regional associations in all the Nordic countries, but also other European associations.
- Consult frameworks for indicators to see how their municipality or region is doing compared to others in fulfilling the SDGs and related targets, and where more work needs to be done.
- Draw inspiration, more generally, from different European networks and organisations, which offer a variety of programmes, tools and publications intended to support municipalities in working with the SDGs, and measuring progress in their work.
- Receive support on the more technical know-hows for preparing a Voluntary Local Review and/or how to include the SDGs in a local budgets and strategies. There is potential here for a common Nordic platform, including resources on the reviews at all levels of governance that strengthen

networks and structures for intermunicipal and regional/international cooperation.

- Enhance communication around their own local SDG activities in the Nordics and Europe. E.g. Norwegian municipalities and KS could share experiences and knowledge on programmes that work well in Norway, and could be adapted elsewhere.
- Join forces with other municipalities and regions to advocate for local level perspectives in Nordic, European or international fora.
- Increase the involvement of a broader range of stakeholders, including civil society organisations, research, religious organisations and others. This could involve building on the synergies of existing networks and multistakeholder platforms.
- Know how to work with the SDGs in specific sectors, such as gender equality, circular economy, climate adaptation or smart specialisation, as well as post-pandemic considerations of applying the SDGs to 'build back better'.

Europe, including the Nordics, is a patchwork of approximately 100,000 municipalities, provinces and regions, most of which - if not all - are part of a national association of local and/or regional governments. This context underscores the crucial role of local and regional governments and associations in achieving the SDGs. The local level is where the approach of equality in implementing the SDGs at the national level can be sustained. All the SDGs include targets relating to local and municipal powers and responsibilities, especially the provision of basic services and the promotion of endogenous, inclusive and sustainable territorial development. Reaching the goals by 2030 will require an enhanced understanding of the internal and national/domestic landscape while being able to navigate the regional/global terrain of sustainable development shifts.

In Norway, it is important that Agenda 2030 is not just new sustainability packaging for local and regional authorities. Given that 2021 is pivotal year with the development of a national action

plan for the 2030 Agenda and high-level reporting, all levels of governance should take this as an opportunity for new considerations and synergies of localisation efforts. With both the Nordic and European contexts, there is potential for more direct exchange of practices around the most important challenges and tasks for municipalities.

EU policies and frameworks remain important for Norwegian stakeholders. SDG localisation does not happen in national or regional isolation. Access to resources and capacity for uptake are by no means easy for local and regional authorities in

Norway or elsewhere. Assessment and surveys in the near future could map to what extent Norwegian regions and municipalities work with Agenda 2030 both in local, national and international networks, and what they are interested in learning more about when it comes to solving local challenges. By overcoming constraints, exchanging innovative practices and working together in Europe and around the globe, municipalities and regions are striving to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

## Further resources

### Nordic/Europe

- NALAS – Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
- SDG Watch Europe
- Sweden Local 2030 Hub
- The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)
- The European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN)

### Global networks

- Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)
- UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC)
- Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (led by UCLG)
- Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)
- Global Parliament of Mayors
- Regions 4 Sustainable Development
- United Smart Cities
- SDG Knowledge Hub (International Institute for Sustainable Development)
- UN SDG Cities (SDGC) Leadership Platform
- United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC)
- Commonwealth sustainable cities network (CSCM)
- Partners for Review (P4R) led by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
- Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (Global RCE Network)
- Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (nrg4SD)

### The OECD (hyperlinks)

- The Sustainable Development Goals: An overview of relevant OECD analysis, tools and approaches
- OECD Expertise Relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals
- OECD project on Decentralised Development Co-operation (DDC)
- Implementing the Paris Agreement
- The Circular Economy in Cities and Regions
- Policy Highlights

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