

**3rd OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

16 -17 November  
12:00 - 15:00 (CET)



# The SDGs as a Framework for Long-term COVID-19 Recovery Strategies in Cities and Regions

16-17 November 2020

## HIGHLIGHTS



As part of the [OECD Programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#) that was launched during the UN High-Level Political Forum in July 2018, the [3rd OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs](#) (The SDGs as a framework for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions) virtually took place on 16 and 17 November 2020, co-organised by the County of Viken in Norway, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities and the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation of Norway. The Roundtable gathered 600+ representatives from a wide range of cities, regions, national governments, and from the European Commission (DG DEVCO, JRC), alongside international organisations (FAO, UNDP, UNECE, UN-Habitat, UN SDG Action Campaign), networks of cities and regions (Committee of the Regions, Eurocities, ICLEI, UCLG) and other stakeholders such as, EIT Climate-KIC, GIZ, national ministries and universities among others ([Agenda](#), [List of participants](#), and [Presentations](#)).

The objectives of the OECD Roundtable were to:

- **Reaffirm the relevance** of a territorial approach to the SDGs for the COVID-19 recovery through the commitment of local and regional political leaders and stakeholders
- **Understand** how the SDGs can help cities and regions shape and implement COVID-19 recovery strategies by sharing lessons and showcasing successful experiences
- **Take stock** of key actions that can accelerate progress in the Decade of Action through lessons learned from Bonn (Germany), Kitakyushu (Japan), Córdoba (Argentina), Flanders (Belgium), Southern Denmark (Denmark), Viken (Norway), Kópavogur (Iceland), Paraná (Brazil) and Moscow (Russian Federation)
- **Launch** three new OECD pilot reports on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs, and chart the way forward to implement the recommendations on the ground
- **Coordinate** *Voluntary Local Reviews* with *Voluntary National Reviews* to strengthen the multi-level governance of the SDGs
- **Harmonise SDGs** measurement frameworks, building on the OECD localised indicator framework that measures the distance to the SDG targets of 600+ regions and 600 cities

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# Summary of Outcomes

The 3<sup>rd</sup> OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs – The SDGs as a framework for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions – took place virtually on 16-17 November 2020. It gathered 600+ representatives from a wide range of cities, regions, national governments, and from the European Commission (DG DEVCO, JRC), alongside international organisations (FAO, UNDP, UNECE, UN-Habitat, UN SDG Action Campaign), networks of cities and regions (Committee of the Regions, Eurocities, ICLEI, UCLG) and other stakeholders such as, EIT Climate-KIC, GIZ, national ministries and universities among others (see the [Agenda](#), [List of participants](#), [Presentations](#)).

The Roundtable was organised as part of the OECD programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs, which aims to support cities and regions in fostering a territorial approach to the SDGs through:

- measuring where they stand vis-à-vis the national average and their peers;
- engaging a multi-level dialogue with their lower and upper levels of government to build consensus on who can do what, at what scale and how; and
- sharing best practice and lessons from international experience

The first day of the Roundtable focused on the topic of *Ten years left: Leveraging the full potential of cities and regions to meet the SDGs* and consisted of two sessions: i) A Decade of Action – the Key role of Cities and Regions to meet the SDGs and ii) Coordinating Voluntary Local and National Reviews. The second day shed light on *Long-term Recovery from COVID-19 and the SDGs in cities and regions* and also consisted of two sessions: i) Cities' and regions' responses to COVID-19, ii) The SDGs for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions. The meeting showcased how several cities and regions take advantage of the 2030 Agenda to rethink their local and regional policies and design their COVID-19 response strategy, use the SDGs to better assess their performance and engage with a broad range of stakeholders. Among them are [Flanders](#) (Belgium), [Southern Denmark](#) (Denmark) and [Viken](#) (Norway), whose pilot reports on *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals* were launched during the Roundtable.

**The opening remarks of Day I** clearly stated the relevance of the SDGs in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has set back parts of the progress made on the 2030 Agenda, but also illustrated how powerful political decision can be taken in exceptional circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The **SDGs offer a clear and stable framework to guide governments in shaping a transformative recovery from COVID-19**. The transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda provides a key opportunity for national, regional and local governments to promote a new sustainable development paradigm and to move towards a resilient recovery from COVID-19. Three new OECD reports on A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals in [Flanders](#) (Belgium), [Southern Denmark](#) (Denmark) and [Viken](#) (Norway) were launched to that effect.

**The first session of Day I** focused on the **key role of cities and regions to meet the SDGs in the decade of action**. The SDGs offer an opportunity to implement a new regional development paradigm

promoting a **shift towards a multi-sectoral, place-based, context-specific and bottom-up approach**, where local or regional governments are key protagonists in regional development policy. In that way, the **SDGs can contribute to promoting better policy coherence, complementarities and alignment across levels of government** beyond administrative boundaries. Many cities and regions have already followed this approach and started to use the SDGs as an integral part of their policy planning, measurement and stakeholder engagement. For example:

- **The Region of Southern Denmark, Denmark**, has integrated the SDGs into its regional development strategy “Southern Denmark of the Future 2020-2023” which puts a strong focus on partnerships and was co-created in a year-long process involving key stakeholders such as municipalities, educational institutions, NGOs and citizens.
- **The Region of Flanders, Belgium**, has identified seven priority transitions needed for a more sustainable society that were published in its Vision 2050 and set up the Focus 2030 strategy to adapt and implement the SDGs in Flanders pursuing more concrete mid-term objectives to be achieved by 2030. Moreover, Flanders translated the SDGs into 51 goals particularly relevant for the region, paired them with an indicator set and identified seven priority transitions that are needed for a more sustainable society in Flanders until 2050.
- Many of the members of **the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities** base their strategic planning efforts on the SDGs to ensure sustainable service provision and future-oriented local and regional development.
- **The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany**, has launched a project on the localisation of the SDGs that supports German municipalities in drawing up their own local development strategies, which provides opportunities for mutual learning and leverages the municipalities’ potential for decentralised development co-operation.
- **The Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities (VVSG)**, considers stakeholder engagement as a valuable tool for the COVID-19 recovery, where the SDGs can play an important role. VVSG is actively raising awareness on the SDGs through events and online courses. Many of the Flemish municipalities are integrating the SDGs into their decentralised development cooperation activities.

**The second session of Day I looked at the coordination of Voluntary Local and National Reviews.**

As part of its follow-up and review mechanism, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls on member states to **get involved in progress reviews** at the national and sub-national levels and **to report on their implementation of the SDGs** through Voluntary Local and National Reviews. There is a large **potential to reconcile Voluntary Local and National Review processes** to improve the linkages between the two and ultimately the sustainability of these efforts at all levels of government. In addition, the 2030 Agenda calls for **granular data to monitor progress on the SDGs to produce evidence-based VNRs** going beyond national averages. **Local reviews can showcase unique, but scalable solutions to existing problems, help assessing and addressing geographical mismatches** within a country, **support meaningful stakeholder engagement** for national reviews and **expand the communication** with the civil society and the private sector. To that end, **UN DESA has developed a set of global [guiding elements for VLR processes](#)** including a checklist of issues that could be reflected in a VLR. These guidelines also aim at fostering a dialogue, alignment and integration between the VLR and VNR.

**Several national and subnational governments have already been engaged in such VLR and VNR processes** over the past years, such as:

- **The State of Pará, Brazil**, has released its first Voluntary Local Review in September 2020, introducing its Amazon Now plan to promote sustainable development by fostering the local economy and preserving forests in the Amazon region. Pará considers VLRs to be important tools to improve the visibility of sub-national governments in the 2030 Agenda implementation.

- **The City of Helsinki, Finland**, was one of the first cities worldwide that was engaged in a VLR and is now in the preparation process for its second VLR, which has the objective strengthen the people's interaction and engagement with the 2030 Agenda to build a stronger connection between the SDGs and the city's residents. For the city, it was very useful that there are other cities in Finland that have been engaged in a VLR. This has allowed for a collaborative effort between the cities developing VLR and the national government working on the second VNR of Finland.
- For **the City of Bonn, Germany**, its VLR, released in 2020, acts as a monitoring tool for its strategic objectives and creates interlinkages between political strategies and indicator-based reporting. It further serves as a communication tool to showcase the role of subnational governments for the 2030 Agenda. To that end, Bonn supports a stronger coordination of VLRs and VNRs to align policies and facilitate multi-level decision making processes.
- **The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway**, is co-creating its second VNR jointly with the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, supported by a civil servants forum, a state secretary forum and a policy coherence forum to ensure broad participation of different stakeholder groups.
- **The European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC)** has released the European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews. The handbook provides guidelines and key examples of official and experimental indicators useful to set up an effect SDG local monitoring system targeted to European cities. The JRC also stressed the importance of integrating local contributions into VNRs and following a harmonized approach between VNR and VLR approach.

The **concluding remarks of Day I** highlighted the **importance of the 2030 Agenda** and the opportunities that the SDGs provide as a **tool to design strategies, policies and plans**, but also to foster and improve the **coordination between different levels of government**. **Data and information** are crucial to measure progress on the SDGs and reveal synergies and trade-offs between them. Going further, the SDGs can also play an important role in **financing and budgeting** processes and present a great opportunity to interact with a wide range of **stakeholders** and **engage them** in the work on sustainability.

The **opening remarks of Day II** underlined the opportunities that **the SDGs provide as a framework and guideline for the recovery from COVID-19**. The SDGs can be powerful tool to design response and recovery strategies as they allow to **identify local and place-based priorities**, they can help **foster the coordination across levels of government** and compel engagement with the whole of society, including the private sector and civil society. The pandemic has been **boosting a progress in digital work and collaboration**, including on the 2030 Agenda and the **local level has been a key partner** of national governments for the restoration of the economy and social life in a wide range of cities and regions across the globe.

**The first session of Day II dealt with cities' and regions' responses to COVID-19 and the lessons that the pandemic has taught.** Cities and regions have been at the forefront of the response to the coronavirus outbreak. Many are now moving from short-term responses to the development of medium- and long-term recovery strategies. In that context, some of the front-runner cities and regions have used the **2030 Agenda as a framework to elaborate their more long-term strategies and recovery packages**. Building on an analysis of activities in around 100 cities, the OECD has developed a list of **key lessons learned from COVID-19 for cities and urban policy**, which illustrates among others the **timeliness of global agendas**, the shift from **mobility to accessibility**, the increased **visibility of inequality** and opportunities to **rethink the future of work, public services and social interactions**. Some examples of cities' and regions' policy responses to COVID-19 presented during the session are:

- The **City of Braga, Portugal**, has worked out a strategic development plan for sustainability focussed on assessing the city's progress on the SDGs, including indicators, which was very helpful in the context of COVID-19. Concrete responses to the pandemic developed in Braga include measures such as support mechanisms to families aiming to improve housing affordability, incentives to use public transport or facilitated access to digital platforms for small businesses.

- As a response to COVID-19, the **City of Rotterdam, the Netherlands**, has developed a recovery and urban renewal agenda containing measures to foster economic opportunities, restore the job creation process, accelerate economic transitions and reinforce the resilience of the economy. The agenda is aligned with the SDGs and was drawn up on the basis of the need to link long-term economic ambitions for a sustainable, circular, digital and inclusive economy with the immediate need for economic recovery.
- The **City of Kitakyushu, Japan**, has used its SDGs headquarters, set up in 2018, as a coordination mechanism to allow for a quick response to the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, Kitakyushu has allocated an additional budget putting in place measures like financial support schemes, a demand stimulus package and awareness-raising programmes about the coronavirus. The city has moreover set up a green recovery programme that focuses on achieving economic recovery through environmental technologies.
- **United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)** showcased how local governments have been at the forefront of the response to the COVID-19 crisis ensuring the continuity of basic services, and the health system, supported by local and regional government networks active in multiplying the exchange of expertise. While place-based responses were crucial in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak, insufficient public budgets and the lack of municipal budget emerged as key challenges.
- **The City of Moscow, Russian Federation**, has taken advantage of digital technologies, such as the digitalisation of public services offers or QR-code based check-in systems as a tool access offices and restaurants. These tools made contact tracing of infected residents and their social contacts possible and were able to reduce the burden on Moscow's healthcare system. The city also scaled up its Moscow Electronic school programme to allow for distant learning.

**The second session of Day II** focused on the **SDGs for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions**. While the pandemic has had a global impact, it has largely been under control in most of the Asia-Pacific region, but raging out of control in Europe and the United States. The keynote speech by Professor Jeffrey Sachs reiterated that victory was declared too early and that **Western countries could learn from the Asian-Pacific experience** and strategies tackling the coronavirus outbreak. Mutual learning is also important when it comes to the SDGs, whose achievement requires serious planning, budgeting, regulation, cooperation between government, businesses as well as the deployment of technologies. According to SDSN, **six SDGs transformations will be necessary to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda** – good education, universal access to public health services, an energy transition towards renewable sources, sustainable agriculture and land use, sustainable cities, and a digital transformation.

The **SDGs are a set of normative principles for a decent, inclusive and sustainable society** and provide a valuable **roadmap for the future**. However, they need to be **translated into manageable operational plans for actions**. Some examples illustrate how the SDGs can be used for the development of long-term recovery strategies from COVID-19 are:

- **The State of Paraná, Brazil**, has put in place a short-term strategy for the 2020-2022 period aiming to restore economic growth and development. Policies include measures such as cutting red tape, reforming human resources management and digitalising public services. Most of the actions are related to SDG 16 in the sense that they have the objective to strengthen the government of Paraná as an institution.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the focus of the **Province of Córdoba, Argentina**, on the social dimension of the SDGs. In particular, it has forced Córdoba to take actions in those areas that have been most affected, for instance through increased social spending and digital education. In order to guide its long-term planning on the SDGs, also in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Córdoba uses a matrix of interactions between different SDGs targets and provincial

political priorities that serves as a conceptual framework to identify priority actions and the drivers of social inclusion in Córdoba.

- **The European Committee of the Regions (CoR)**, called for a mapping of structural risks for cities and regions, an analysis of the capabilities of local and regional authorities and a stronger collaboration between national and subnational actors. For the CoR, the SDGs are the right framework to guide the long-term recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, but they require a more prominent place on the UN Agenda and as a criteria to access EU recovery funds.
- For the **City of New York, United States**, the collaboration and sharing of best-practices and key strategies are important assets towards building a stronger future post-COVID-19. The VLR movement can have a crucial role in that process as a means to share ideas and mutually engage local and regional governments to accelerate change and the COVID-19 recovery through the implementation of the SDGs.
- The **Brookings Institution** considers the SDGs to be a useful framework for a transformational recovery from COVID-19 as they encourage to look at the social, economic and environmental dimensions of recovery at once, addressing synergies and trade-offs. They moreover provide an operational value proposition as a tool to bring together different sectors and break down policy silos, both at the local level, but also as a common language between different government levels.

**The conclusions** underlined the **numerous valuable contributions the participants provided** during the two days and highlighted the importance of the collaboration and exchange of different stakeholders active on the 2030 Agenda. The Roundtable confirmed the key role of cities and regions in the decade of action. While many of them are not yet on track to reach the goals of the 2030 Agenda, using the SDGs as a policy-making tool can help accelerate progress on that pathway. The Roundtable also highlighted the great opportunity to integrate VLR and VNR to strengthen the multi-level governance of sustainability and the increasing recognition at subnational and national level on the need to integrate the two processes. The SDGs are a key framework for the COVID-19 recovery. They are the roadmap for the future, but need to be operationalised to help shifting “business as usual” and create a change in behaviour by engaging all stakeholders and connecting the local with the global level.

The main next steps and key milestones of the OECD programme on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs in 2021 are the **release of four more pilots reports** on the City of Kitakyushu (Japan), the City of Moscow (Russian Federation), the Province of Córdoba (Argentina) and the State of Paraná (Brazil) in the first half of 2021 and the **start of the second phase of the programme including new pilots**. The **4<sup>th</sup> OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs** will be held in a virtual format towards the beginning of June 2021, co-organised by the European Committee of the Region.

### Box 1. Social Media Highlights

The OECD Roundtable provided a great opportunity to promote the messages of institutions working on the localisation of the SDGs and raise awareness on the key role of cities and regions for the 2030 Agenda. More than 800 participants overall and more than 600 unique participants from more than 70 countries followed the Roundtable via Zoom. The outreached strategy yielded the following results:

**Key figures from Social Media:** Excellent coverage of the Roundtable on social media, with a very active audience. Posts earned more than 20k impressions via Twitter and LinkedIn. This was made up of 806 clicks to the work, 50 retweets and 162 likes. Downloads for the three reports launched at the Roundtable total 491.

#### Top tweets:

- <https://twitter.com/Akhmouch/status/1328651721992769536?s=20>

- [https://twitter.com/OECD\\_local/status/1328312601101611011?s=20](https://twitter.com/OECD_local/status/1328312601101611011?s=20)
- <https://twitter.com/Akhmouch/status/1329706393205682176?s=20>

# 1 Ten Years left: Leveraging the full potential of cities and regions to meet the SDGs

Ms. Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, Director of the OECD's [Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities \(CFE\)](#), welcomed all participants to the 3rd OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the Sustainable Development. She thanked the County of Viken in Norway, the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation of Norway and the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Governments for the collaboration over the past years and for co-hosting the event. Ms. Kamal-Chaoui pointed out that **in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SDGs are more relevant than ever**. She presented the three main objectives of the Roundtable: i) to accelerate progress in the Decade of Action towards 2030 learning from front runners that succeeded in localising the SDGs, ii) to discuss how to best coordinate ongoing efforts to prepare Voluntary Local Reviews alongside National Reviews on the SDGs and iii) to focus on long-term recovery strategies from COVID-19 considering the role that a territorial approach to the SDGs can play in helping cities, regions and countries to build back better.

## Opening remarks by Tonje Brenna, Chair of the County Government of Viken, Norway

Ms. Tonje Brenna, Chair of the County Government of Viken, Norway, welcomed the participants to the 3<sup>rd</sup> OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs. In Viken, a [county](#) established in January 2020 merging three former counties into one as the result of a national territorial reform, the SDGs are used as an underlying foundation for all government actions. In its work with the 2030 Agenda, the county has made three main observations.

- First of all, in order to achieve the SDGs, it is **necessary to take a holistic approach** seeing the different SDGs in relation to each other and **explore possible synergies and trade-offs**, which makes multi-level dialogue and cooperation essential.
- Furthermore, **no one can claim to have already reached the SDGs** and “**nobody wins unless everyone wins**”. Circumstances, strengths, weaknesses and approaches differ across cities, regions and organisations, but it is imperative that all of them find ways of working with the SDGs.
- Thirdly, the county of Viken considers the time where all dimensions of sustainability have equal weight to be over. Ms. Brenna explained that we are living in a global climate change and biodiversity loss crisis and that destroying our own living conditions would make all other goals irrelevant. She stated that **social and economic goals therefore need to be pursued within the planetary boundaries**.

Finally, Ms. Brenna encouraged the participants not to stop building knowledge, to continue the dialogue and to implement the necessary changes and tools to achieve the objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

## Opening remarks by Nikolai Astrup, Minister of Local Government and Modernisation, Norway

Mr. Nikolai Astrup, Minister of [Local Government and Modernisation of Norway](#), thanked the OECD for the invitation to deliver the opening remarks of the 3<sup>rd</sup> OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs. He explained that despite the progress made in many areas since the adoption of the SDGs by the UN in 2015, **the world is not yet on track to meet the objectives within the next ten years**. What is more, the global pandemic has set back parts of the progress made, not only in the area of health. The pandemic has also illustrated how much people depend on each other and how powerful political decisions can be taken if necessary. Mr. Astrup underlined that these decisions now have to be used not only to get out of the crisis, but also to promote a new sustainable development paradigm.

In view of the beginning of the UN Decade of Action, **Norway is working on a national plan for the achievement of the SDGs** with the objective to make the country more sustainable by translating global issues into relevant actions for Norway. Against that background, Mr. Astrup declared SDG 17 to be of particular importance as **the SDGs are so inevitably tied together that they cannot be solved one by one**. According to him, **achieving the SDG targets requires innovative partnerships bringing together the public and private sector, civil society and academia**. He explained that more than 100 of the 169 targets cannot be achieved without the efforts of regional and local authorities as they are the responsible actors for community planning, land use planning, and the provision of basic services for their inhabitants. In that context, Mr. Astrup pointed out that Viken is one of the frontrunners in Norway having developed a strategic plan for the county based on the SDGs and involving its community, particularly the youth, in the process. Finally, he once more emphasized that **regional and local authorities can provide the innovative ideas and skills that are necessary to turn the vision of the 2030 Agenda into a reality**.

## Keynote speech by Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen, Deputy Secretary General, OECD

OECD Deputy Secretary General Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen expressed his delight to open the 3<sup>rd</sup> OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs and to launch three new OECD reports on [A Territorial Approach in Flanders \(Belgium\)](#), [Southern Denmark \(Denmark\)](#) and [Viken \(Norway\)](#). According to Mr. Knudsen, the **SDGs are more relevant than ever in recent times of crisis as they are offering a clear framework to help cities, regions and national governments on all stages of development to build back better**. He also reiterated the necessity of choosing a new path of policy-making using the SDGs as a guide. In that regard, cities and regions have a key role to play as public policies and investments are a shared responsibility across levels of government with the subnational level accounting for 60% of total public investment. No country worldwide is yet on track to achieve all SDGs by 2030 and at least 80% of regions have not yet achieved the targets for 2030 in any of the 17 goals. He explained that these insights have led to the development of the OECD policy dialogues with nine partner cities and regions to help them understand how they perform with regards to the SDGs, where they need to prioritise and how they can guide the decision-making going forward.

Mr. Vestergaard Knudsen subsequently presented three important take-away messages that have emerged from these policy dialogues. Firstly, **cities and regions are using the SDGs as a framework to assess their performance in a range of policy domains** to understand their strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities. Secondly, **cities and regions are using the SDGs as a policy-making tool rather than as a compliance agenda**. In all the three case studies, the SDGs were seen as an opportunity to rethink drastically from the ground up how to plan, invest, budget and engage local and regional stakeholders. Thirdly, **local and regional government are leveraging the SDGs to strengthen multi-level governance for sustainability**. The three reports also provide **customized policy recommendations for the three regions** to go the extra mile and use the SDGs as a means to design

better local and regional policies for better lives. For example, one of the OECD recommendations for Viken is to **use the SDGs to promote a functional approach to address the county's key development challenges** related to public transport, housing and industry cluster policies, and to ensure a balanced regional development. In Flanders, the **use of the SDGs could further enhance the strategic alignment between federal, regional provincial and municipal sustainable development strategies, and between domestic and external actions**. In Southern Denmark, the SDGs could be used as a **tool to improve environmental sustainability and climate objectives** through the promotion of active means of transport like cycling, walking, or shared transport solutions while also contributing to health and wellbeing, as well as economic benefits.

Mr. Vestergaard Knudsen concluded his remarks by thanking the three regions for their remarkable efforts in localising the SDGs and for providing a source of information and inspiration for other local and regional governments eager to follow the same path. Lastly, he encouraged the participants of the Roundtable to take a brave step forward towards a more sustainable future emphasising the role the SDGs can play as a guide in that process.

## 2 A Decade of Action – the Key Role of Cities and Regions to meet the SDGs

Moderator Ms. Aziza Akhmouch opened the first session by thanking Ms. Brenna, Mr. Astrup and OECD Deputy Secretary General Vestergaard Knudsen for their opening remarks. She then introduced the first panel discussion aiming to share the main take-away messages from ongoing policy dialogues and the intended steps to guide public action in the post covid-19 era.

### Panel discussion with key highlights from frontrunner pilot cities, regions and countries

#### ***Using the SDGs to reshape the regional development strategy in Southern Denmark, Denmark***

Mr. Bo H. Eriksen, Chief Analyst for Regional Development in the [Region of Southern Denmark](#), provided the participants with insights into how the region integrated the SDGs into its regional development strategy “Southern Denmark of the Future 2020-2023”. The **regional development strategy**, which was approved by the Southern Denmark’s regional council in May 2020, is the **result of the co-creation of a roadmap for the future of the region**. The roadmap and the identification of key challenges and ambitious goals for the region were elaborated in a year-long process through various consultations and meetings with key stakeholders such as municipalities, educational institutions, NGOs and citizens.

Mr. Eriksen explained that **the SDGs are of key importance to the new regional development strategy**, which consists of six strategic tracks. For each of the tracks, **the region related the specific goals for regional development to the relevant SDGs**. Overall, Southern Denmark is focusing on 11 of the SDGs, which are those where the region can have the largest impact. Climate change is one example of how the region is trying to integrate the SDGs into its daily work processes. Policy proposals for instance now have to undergo a climate assessment before the regional council can put them in place. In the future, **the region is planning to increase its efforts to raise awareness on the SDGs**. This will be done among others through the dissemination of data about the SDGs and their specific context in Southern Denmark to citizens, municipalities, educational institutions and other stakeholders.

#### ***COVID-19 recovery strategies and the role of the SDGs for the implementation of regional transition processes in the Region of Flanders, Belgium***

Ms. Julie Bynens, Secretary General of the [Region of Flanders](#), Belgium, presented the importance of the SDGs for the COVID-19 recovery phase and explained how the region is using the 2030 Agenda to advance regional transition processes. In her intervention, Ms. Bynens underlined the **importance of**

**continuing to build a road towards the achievements of the SDGs** in order to leave no one behind. In the region of Flanders, the SDGs have been translated into 51 goals specifically relevant for the region that have been paired with 111 indicators, which will be further refined through long-term policy plans such as the housing and living plan approved in 2019. Furthermore, the region **of Flanders has identified seven priority transitions needed for a more sustainable society** that were published in its [Vision 2050](#). As a next step, the regional government of Flanders is planning to increase the degree of decentralisation to give more competencies to local governments.

According to Ms. Bynens, two elements that are linked to the SDGs will be important for the recovery from COVID-19. Firstly, **all stakeholders need to engage in the recovery phase in order to build back better** and secondly, **sustainability has to be an important aspect of the recovery plans**. To that end, Flanders is planning to invest in the energetic renovation of public and private buildings, urban renewal projects and sustainable transportation infrastructure among others. The SDGs will be used as an instrument to strengthen synergies between the region's identified transition processes, guide the recovery planning, develop indicators and streamline the SDGs into the policy priorities of the government.

### ***Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities: The role of partnerships and collaboration for the 2030 Agenda***

Ms. Anne Romsaas from the [Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities](#) (KS), shared with the participants the experiences of how Norwegian municipalities and counties are working on strategies to achieve the SDGs. Ms. Romsaas explained that the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation has become the national coordinating body for the SDGs in January 2020 and is now drafting an implementation strategy for the 2030 Agenda. The national government has taken furthermore some steps to strengthen the horizontal and vertical coordination to implement the SDGs, but Ms. Romsaas noted that it could expand awareness raising initiatives on the SDGs and foster a whole of society approach. She pointed out that **many municipalities and counties in Norway base their strategic planning efforts on the SDGs to ensure sustainable service provision and future-oriented local and regional development**. Nevertheless, the dialogue with KS' members has revealed further potential, for instance concerning the development of progress measurement systems and the establishment of partnerships.

Ms. Romsaas underlined that **the SDGs offer a great opportunity for the creation of partnerships of various actors in the field of sustainability, the business community and universities**. She also highlighted the **important role that public procurement can play** for the achievement of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Norway. She furthermore informed the participants about a new network of excellence created by several Norwegian municipalities together with U4SSC, KS, Innovation Norway and DOGA. This network has the objective to collaborate in localising the SDGs, demonstrate local adaption and accelerate impact by linking local action to regional, national and international partners for knowledge sharing and funding. Lastly, Ms. Romsaas reminded the participants that **Norway will present a Voluntary National Review in summer 2021** and explained that **several Norwegian municipalities are planning to develop their own Voluntary Local Reviews** in order to strengthen local and regional voices in the VNR process. In 2021, KS will continue the collaboration with its international network and national stakeholders with the ambition to better align those processes.

### ***Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany: Supporting the localisation of the SDGs from the national level***

Ms. Daphne Groß-Jansen from the Department of Regions and Municipalities in [Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development \(BMZ\)](#), provided the participants with some insights into BMZ's rationale to engage in the localisation of the SDGs. She stated that **BMZ is convinced that SDG 17 on global partnerships is one of the most important SDGs** and that it needs to be a "multi-

actor goal". For BMZ, it was therefore obvious to engage also the subnational levels as the SDGs cannot be achieved without regions' and cities' action.

To that end, BMZ has launched "[Municipalities for Global Sustainability](#)", in 2016, a project that supports cities and municipalities in Germany and aligning their local plans to the SDGs. The project allows BMZ to assess what is relevant in each of the municipalities, but it also contributes to the national and international dialogue on the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Ms. Groß-Jansen clarified that **BMZ has the objective to leverage the municipalities' potential for decentralised development co-operation**, but also conveyed her belief that the project provides a lot of mutual learning that one can capitalise on and that cities have a lot to offer going beyond the strict development cooperation settings. She expressed her hope that more cities in Germany will follow the example of the OECD pilot city of Bonn that has recently published its [first VLR](#). This would allow to feed all the experiences into an international dialogue and thus help to use local experiences, interests and needs in international negotiations.

### ***Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities: Key take-aways and lessons from the OECD recommendations on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs***

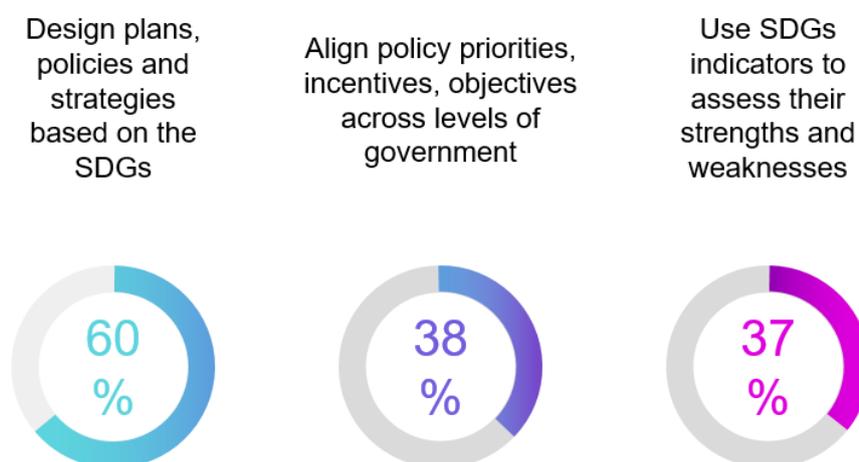
In his intervention, Mr. Wim Dries, Mayor of Genk and President of the [Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities \(VVSG\)](#), illustrated his views on four main elements and recommendations of the OECD report on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs in the region of Flanders. First, he declared that **VVSG will keep raising awareness on the SDGs** mentioning the week of sustainable municipalities and the launch of the Flemish SDG Academy, an online course on the SDGs targeting Flemish municipalities and government staff. Secondly, Mr. Dries reiterated his **support for the OECD recommendation to integrate the SDGs into decentralised development cooperation projects**. He pointed out that multiple Flemish municipalities already use them to reflect on common priorities with their development cooperation partners to design more sustainable programmes and activities.

Thirdly, he agreed that **SDG indicator frameworks at different government levels should be more aligned**. According to him, there is already a lot of data available at the local level that provides opportunities for the Flemish and federal government to build on when selecting and developing their own SDGs indicators. He also advocated for a further disaggregation of local data, for instance by neighbourhood, but also by gender, age and similar socio-demographic characteristics to optimally use data to improve local policies. Mr. Dries moreover highlighted the importance of policy reporting, including through Voluntary Local Reviews. Lastly, he emphasised **the need to engage all stakeholders in the recovery from COVID-19, for which the SDGs provide a valuable tool**. In order to contribute to that objective, he proposed to involve local governments and their umbrella associations right from the beginning when it comes to future work and activities around the SDGs.

### **Interactive Poll I**

After the first panel discussion with representatives from pilot cities and regions, Moderator Ms. Aziza Akhmouch invited all participants to take part in an interactive zoom poll answering the question "How can cities and regions best use the SDGs to improve sustainable development for their residents?". The participants were invited to pick their top two responses among five options: i) Design plans, policies and strategies that are based on the SDGs, ii) use the SDGs indicators to assess their strengths and weaknesses; iii) allocate budget based on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at local and regional level; iv) align policy priorities, incentives, objectives across levels of government; v) engage all territorial stakeholders in policymaking.

**Figure 1. First zoom poll - How can cities and regions best use the SDGs to improve sustainable development for their residents?**



More than 60% of participants picked the option that cities and regions should design plans, policies and strategies based on the SDGs to best use the 2030 Agenda to improve sustainable development for their residents. Around 38% voted for aligning policy priorities, incentives, and objectives across levels of government. Allocating budget based on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was the third-most frequently selected answer.

## Group discussion

Key highlights from the following debate on the key role of cities and regions to meet the SDGs in the decade of actions were:

- **Involving cities and regions in the 2030 Agenda is crucial to ensure inclusivity and leave no one behind, but is also a challenging process.** Establishing the SDGs as a basis for the daily work in the local administration and to familiarise staff with the concept and framework of the 2030 Agenda can be a time-consuming process.
- **Involving stakeholders and different levels of government in the elaboration of development strategies allow for the integration of a broader range of views on the territorial context.** The region of Flanders for instance has developed a cross-cutting way of designing policies and plans by going beyond horizontal political coordination and involving different government levels and different sectors with their various stakeholders and associations. Another example is the region of Southern Denmark that has invited its citizen to contribute and participate in the development of the regional development strategy through conferences and workshops. The region has moreover jointly undertaken local projects on the 2030 Agenda with private companies and universities, for instance in the education sector. Maintaining a constant dialogue seeking opportunities for cooperation among different stakeholders has emerged as a best-practice in that context.
- **Granular data collection and trainings are two valuable tools that can help to foster the local implementation of the SDGs.** The county of Viken in Norway for instance has created a regional knowledge base, through which the county compiled statistics on SDGs indicators relevant for the new county and its municipalities in order to measure progress and reveal intra-county differences and challenges. The county has furthermore integrated the SDGs into its planning and governance



# 3 Coordinating Voluntary Local and National Reviews

Mr. Robin Ogilvy, Special Representative and Permanent Observer of the OECD to the United Nations opened the second session of the day focusing on coordinating Voluntary Local and National Reviews. The aim of the session was to discuss how to better align and reconcile Voluntary Local and National Reviews for a more effective multi-level governance of the SDGs: first, because cities and regions play a key role for the achievement of the SDGs; second, as there is a huge potential to reconcile Voluntary Local and National Review processes to improve the linkages between the two and ultimately the sustainability of these efforts at all levels of government; third, as we need granular data to monitor progress on the SDGs to produce evidence-based VNRs going beyond national averages. Following his introductory remarks, Mr. Ogilvy invited the first speaker of the session, Mr. Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-Charge at the Division for the Sustainable Development Goals at the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs to deliver his keynote speech.

## Keynote speech by Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-Charge, Division for the Sustainable Development Goals, UN DESA

In his keynote speech Mr. Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-Charge in the Division for the Sustainable Development Goals at [UN DESA](#), reiterated that **cities and regions have a crucial role to play to accelerate progress in the Decade of Action** and to **leverage the full potential of the SDGs as a policy tool** to improve people's lives. Mr. Trepelkov noted that there has been an increasing number of Voluntary Local Reviews conducted in the past years which shows the encouraging trend of increasing ownership of the SDGs by all stakeholders at the regional and local levels. **The VLR process can bring multiple benefits, including more integrated policymaking and coordination within the government, enhanced data collection and increased engagement with the civil society, academia, the private sector and all other stakeholders.** In addition, it can also serve as a communication tool between different levels of government. Mr. Trepelkov stated that such reviews at the local level can also be helpful against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic as a means to devise an appropriate and targeted response and to make necessary adjustments to long-term sustainability strategies.

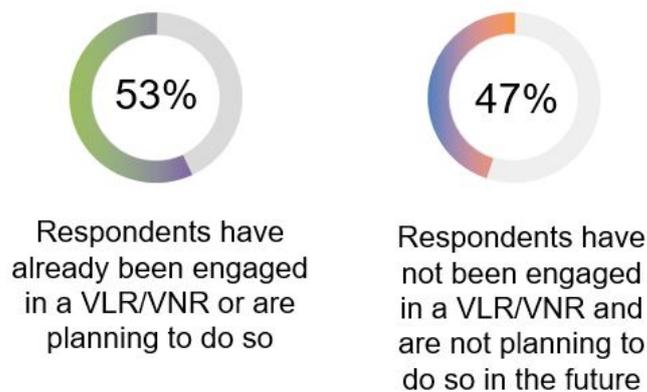
UN DESA supports Voluntary Local Reviews through peer learning activities. The first global capacity-building workshop, held online in June 2020, brought together cities and regions that had already conducted a local review to share their experiences with those only starting the journey. At the same workshop, experts from national governments shared their experiences from the VNR processes. Mr. Trepelkov noted that the organisation continues to offer such peer learning opportunities on topics such as stakeholder engagement, the incorporation of the SDGs into subnational plans, strategies, and budgets, data monitoring, and institutional arrangements. **UN DESA has also developed a set of Global [Guiding Elements for VLR processes](#)** drawing on the UN Secretary General's common voluntary guidelines for the VNR. The elements include a checklist of issues that could be reflected in a VLR. These elements also aim at fostering a dialogue, alignment and integration between the VLRs and VNRs.

Mr. Trepelkov subsequently highlighted that as the Secretariat of the High-level Political Forum, UN DESA has seen an increasing number of VNRs refer to meaningful collaboration with sub-national governments and in 2020 for the first time also to the VLRs. He described **several benefits that local reviews can provide to the VNR processes**. They can, for instance, **showcase unique, but scalable solutions to existing problems, help assess and address geographical inequalities** within a country, **support meaningful stakeholder engagement** for national reviews and **expand the communication** with the civil society and the private sector. Furthermore, they **can be used to reach out to the most vulnerable and marginalised groups** and help amplify their voices. Mr. Trepelkov also emphasised the important role of local government associations, city networks, think tanks, regional actors and international organisations in supporting local authorities in their efforts to localise the SDGs. He closed by offering UN DESA's support for entities interested in using the VLRs as a flexible and useful tool for promoting SDG implementation at the sub-national level.

### Interactive Poll III

As a transition to the second panel, Moderator Mr. Ogilvy asked the audience to participate in a second Zoom poll answering the question “Have you been engaged in a Voluntary Local Review or a Voluntary National Review or are you planning to participate in one in the near future?”. It turned out that 53% of cities and regions participating in the Roundtable had already been engaged in a VLR or were planning to do so in the near future, which underlined the growing recognition of VLRs among subnational governments.

**Figure 3. Results of the second Zoom poll - Engagement in VLRs and VNRs**



### Panel discussion with frontrunner cities, regions, countries, and institutions

#### ***The role of the subnational government in the 2030 Agenda implementation process in the State of Pará, Brazil***

Mr. Helder Barbalho, Governor of the [State of Pará](#), Brazil, provided the participants with some insights into how the state is adopting the 2030 Agenda. For Pará, the **2030 Agenda is an important planning and management tool**. Mr. Barbalho explained that the state is already **incorporating the SDGs into its policies** and encouraged the municipalities in Pará to do the same in order to promote sustainable development in the Amazon region. According to him, the start of term of the newly elected mayors in

January 2021 represents a great opportunity to do so. Mr. Barbalho informed the participants that **the state of Pará has recently released a [Voluntary Local Review](#)**, which introduced the Amazon Now plan, an integrated public policy to promote sustainable development by foresting the local economy and preserving the forests in the Amazon region.

Mr. Barbalho underlined the **importance of VLRs in giving visibility to the engagement of subnational governments in the 2030 Agenda implementation** in Brazil. He also emphasised the **key role that multi-level governance and multi-sectoral partnerships play in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**. According to him, the dialogue and cooperation between decisions-makers and their various partners are essential for the success of the 2030 Agenda. Lastly, he reiterated that initiatives such as the [OECD programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#) provide knowledge and tools for the coordination of key actors and are therefore crucial for the process of building back better and creating a society where no one is left behind.

### ***Strengthening people's engagement with the 2030 Agenda through Voluntary Local Reviews in Helsinki, Finland***

Ms. Sani-Mari Jäntti, Director of Strategic Initiatives in the Mayor's Office of [City of Helsinki](#), Finland, informed the participants about Helsinki's engagement in Local Voluntary Review processes. **Helsinki was one of the first cities worldwide engaging in a VLR** and is now in the preparation process for the second edition. She explained that the city's [first Voluntary Local Review](#), released in 2019, was **mainly a strategic tool to increase the visibility of Helsinki's journey towards achieving the 2030 Agenda**. In addition to that, it was also considered **an important communication tool, both for the interaction with other cities and the national government**. A third reason to get involved in the VLR was to engage the whole city administration and connect the entirety of the city's work to the 2030 Agenda.

She also elaborated on the multi-level dialogue in Helsinki, which is mostly based on sharing information, collaboration through workshops and finding a common framework. She explained that it was **very useful for Helsinki that there are other cities in Finland that have been engaged in a VLR**. She pointed out that this **allowed for a collaborative effort between the cities developing VLRs and the national government working on the second VNR of Finland**. Ms. Jäntti furthermore highlighted how the **VLRs have become a global language in the past few years with now more than 200 cities worldwide working on a VLR publication**. For its second VLR, Helsinki has the objective to strengthen the people's interaction and engagement with the 2030 Agenda to build a stronger connection between the SDGs and the city's residents. In that sense, Helsinki wants the VLR to be agile, pragmatic and human-centred focusing on action and implementation.

### ***City of Bonn, Germany: Leveraging the full potential of cities and regions to meet the SDGs by integrating local contributions into Voluntary National Reviews***

Ms. Verena Schwarte from the Department of International Affairs and Global Sustainability in the [city of Bonn](#), Germany, [provided the participants with some insights](#) into the development of [Bonn's first VLR](#) and **called for a stronger integration of local contributions into VNRs**. She explained that the main reasons for the city of Bonn to develop its VLR were closely linked to the [city's sustainability strategy](#). **For Bonn, the VLR acts as a monitoring tool for its strategic objectives and creates interlinkages between political strategies and indicator-based reporting**, which did not exist before. It furthermore serves as a **communication tool and allows to demonstrate the crucial role that local governments play in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**. In order to prepare its VLR, the city of Bonn was able to build on several resources including its municipal SDGs indicator set, its participation in the OECD programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs, the network of VLR cities led by New York and the ongoing integration of sustainability criteria in the city's budgetary planning. Bonn's VLR is structured around the six priority

areas of Bonn's sustainability strategy and highlights trends and the impact of the SDGs along 46 indicators.

Beyond that, **Bonn uses its VLR to call for a stronger coordination of VLRs and VNRs**. Ms. Schwarte expressed her belief that **VLRs are a very useful instrument to create a visibility for the local contributions to the SDGs** and to mainstream them with subnational and national efforts. She explained that as such, they can also lay the foundation for a genuine participation and involvement of cities in multi-level decision making processes. According to Ms. Schwarte, vertical coordination, the implementation, measurement and monitoring of the SDGs could still be strengthened by directly engaging German cities and municipalities in national processes. On that occasion, she referred to the publication of Germany's VNR in 2021 as a good opportunity to do so in a more systematic way.

### ***Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway: The Voluntary National Review of Norway 2021***

Mr. Inge Herman Rydland, Special Envoy for the 2030 Agenda in the Government of Norway, [provided the participants with a national perspective on Norway's VNR and on the relevance of involving local actors](#). **Norway presented its first Voluntary National Review in 2016** focusing on the SDGs more broadly rather than on target achievements and indicators. The country is **now working on the publication of a second edition scheduled for July 2021**. Mr. Rydland explained that the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation (national coordination) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (international coordination) jointly coordinate Norway's work on the 2030 Agenda and the VNR. They are supported by an administrative forum composed of civil servants and a state secretary forum whose main purpose is to anchor the agenda politically and to guide the work. Norway has additionally set up a policy coherence forum where the issue of policy coherence is discussed with a broad range of representatives from the civil society.

Mr. Rydland stated that **the VNR represents more than a simple report for Norway** as the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the engagement of a range of actors such as the civil society, the private sector and academia as well as all levels of government including counties and municipalities. Mr. Rydland explained that **Norway has seen major developments regarding its work on the SDG, which are linked to an improved public understanding of the 2030 Agenda in the country**. He also pointed out that the Statistical Bureau of Norway has created a publicly available database of SDGs indicators, which he deemed very important for the VNR process. As a next step, Norway will elaborate ways to measure its progress on the SDGs and illustrate the developments in the VNR. All the current work is floating into a white paper process and plan of action that will be submitted to the parliament prior to the completion of Norway's VNR in mid-2021.

### ***European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC): The European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews***

Ms. Alice Siragusa, Project Leader at the [Joint Research Centre \(JRC\)](#) of the European Commission, presented the [European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews](#) and provided her perspective on the importance of coordinating VLRs with national processes. Over the last few years, the **JRC has been working on the publication of this handbook aiming to lift the burden on small cities with little statistical capacity** to allow them to start working with reliable information and knowledge in their VLR assessment process. The **handbook provides key examples of official and experimental indicators useful to set up an effective SDGs local monitoring system** specifically targeted towards European cities. Per each goal, the handbook highlights examples of harmonised and locally collected indicators so that local actors can both benchmark themselves with other cities and monitor their own specific needs and challenges.

Following up on the publication, the JRC is currently working with several cities to test the use of the handbook, assessing which indicators are most frequently used and which ones require further improvement. In addition, the **JRC is providing scientific support to develop new indicators and refine methodologies**. In that context, Ms. Siragusa expressed her appreciation for the recently released UN DESA guidelines to integrate local contributions into VNRs. She also emphasized the **importance of engaging the stakeholders in the preparation of voluntary reviews** as well as the beneficial role of international organisations as providers for sharing information and knowledge.

## Group discussion

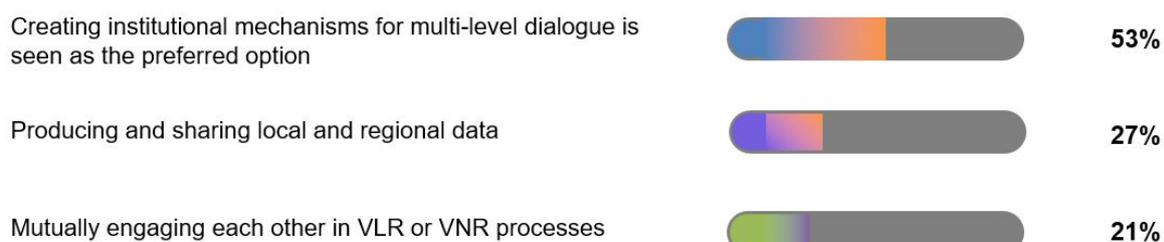
Key highlights from the following debate on the coordination of VLR and VNR were:

- **VLRs should remain voluntary processes and not be made mandatory, as it is also the case for VNRs.** Participants pointed out that there should not be strict rules and restrictions for VLRs. Rather than making them mandatory, they should arise from the local democracy. Participants highlighted that the work on the 2030 Agenda itself should be seen as an obligation. Guidelines on VLRs should be considered as guiding elements for the actual purpose of VLRs, which is to enhance the contribution of local authorities, cities and regions to achieve the 2030 Agenda targets.
- **The concept of the VLRs is of great value as VLRs allow to communicate how the SDGs are used at the local level and thus represent an excellent tool to feed into VNRs.** In case a national government is either not supportive of the 2030 Agenda, not able to deliver a review or not able to partner with the subnational levels, it is even more meaningful for cities and regions to take the lead as an actor for the 2030 Agenda achievement.
- **The 2030 Agenda has been agreed at global level so that every goal can be of interest for any country.** Despite different starting conditions between countries at different levels of development, the Agenda should be addressed with a coherent, global and holistic approach. The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has released [guidelines on VLRs in Asia-Pacific](#) to provide more knowledge about engaging the local level in non-EU settings.

## Interactive Poll IV

Transitioning from the group discussions to the concluding remarks, Moderator Mr. Robin Ogilvy invited the participants to contribute to a third and final zoom poll for the day answering the question “How can all levels of government better coordinate their VLRs and VNRs?”. The audience was invited to select up to two options among the three options:

**Figure 4. Results of the third zoom poll - How can all levels of government better coordinate their VLRs and VNRs?**



More than half of the participants (53%) voted for “Creating institutional mechanisms for multi-level dialogue, which was seen as the preferred option, followed by producing and sharing local and regional data (27%) and mutually engaging each other in VLR or VNR processes (21%).

## Conclusion of Day 1 by Stefano Marta, Coordinator, A Territorial Approach to the SDGs, OECD

Mr. Stefano Marta, Coordinator of the [OECD programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#), thanked the audience for their participation in the first day of the Roundtable. In order to summarize some of the key messages, Mr. Marta presented the OECD Checklist for Public Action on the SDGs, which was developed based on the policy dialogues with the nine pilot cities and regions and co-designed with the participants of the second edition of the Roundtable in Bonn in December 2019.

The checklist is based on **five key pillars**. The first pillar assesses **how to use the SDGs to design strategies, policies and plans**. Cities and regions should take the opportunity to use the SDGs to address concrete local challenges that require a holistic approach, such as clean forms of urban mobility, affordable housing, gender equality and thereby use the SDGs to promote synergies and manage trade-offs among sectoral policies. The second pillar deals with **multi-level governance** and is thus strongly linked to the discussions on VLR and VNR. One of the key recommendations of the work in that context was to include cities and regions to a larger extent in the VNR process and also to use it as a tool to improve multi-level governance for the SDGs and vice versa. Mr. Marta moreover emphasised pillar three, the **importance of data and information**, including their better integration into VNR and VLR processes referring to the localised indicator framework the OECD has produced as part of its work on measuring progress on the SDGs. The fourth pillar is about **financing and budgeting**, and recommends to mainstream the SDGs in budgeting processes to ensure adequate resources are allocated for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Governments should allocate financial resources based on the identified place-based policy priorities and key local challenges. The fifth pillar about **stakeholder engagement** and calls for the usage of the SDGs as a vehicle to enhance accountability and transparency through engaging all territorial stakeholders, including civil society, citizens, youth, academia and private companies, in the policy-making process.

Finally, Mr. Marta informed the participants about upcoming OECD projects such as the second phase of the programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs on implementing the Checklist and a new project with the European Commission on city-to-city partnerships for localising the SDGs. Lastly, he provided an outlook on the second day of the Roundtable focusing on the SDGs as a framework to recover from COVID-19.

# 4 Long-term Recovery from COVID-19 and the SDGs in cities and regions

Mr. Stefano Marta, Coordinator of the [OECD programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#), opened the second day of the Roundtable and introduced the subsequent sessions on i) policy responses to COVID-19 and ii) using the SDGs as a framework to help cities and regions to recover from the pandemic.

## Opening remarks by Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, Director of OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities

In her opening remarks, **Ms. Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, Director of the OECD's [Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities \(CFE\)](#)**, provided an overview on short-term and long-term responses to COVID-19 and highlighted the role of the SDGs in long-term recovery strategies. Ms. Kamal-Chaoui explained that in the short-term the immediate priority of governments is to protect the vulnerable and support businesses and jobs. She pointed out that the OECD has been supporting them in shaping policy responses through the [Digital Hub on the Coronavirus](#), which entails more than 160 policy briefs providing the latest data, analysis and recommendations, including on [cities' policies responses](#) and the [territorial dimension of COVID-19](#). Ms. Kamal-Chaoui referred to governments' initial policy responses worldwide as ambitious with more than 12 trillion dollars spent globally and highlighted the explicit territorial dimension of many of the latest national recovery packages across OECD countries.

She stated that **the crisis has revealed the unsustainable nature of environmental and social trends, especially in cities**. Against that background, she **called for long-term solutions to make our economies more resilient** and able to withstand future shocks, our **societies more inclusive** and our **practices more sustainable**. In that context, she highlighted that **the SDGs should be our guide for the recovery process** for three key reasons. First, the **SDGs provide a framework to identify local, place-based priorities directed towards sustainable development**. Second, the SDGs are a **powerful tool to help foster coordination** across national, regional and local levels of government, which is essential to align priorities, incentives, objectives and resources. Third, the **SDGs compel governments to engage with the whole of society** – including the private sector, as well as civil society and citizens. Ms. Kamal-Chaoui concluded her opening remarks by encouraging the participants to think big, be bold and work together to secure a brighter future. According to her, the SDGs offer cities, regions and national governments a way towards this big, bold and bright future, and challenges us all to seize that future for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.

## Opening remarks by Tonje Brenna, Chair of the County Government of Viken, Norway

In her opening remarks, Ms. Tonje Brenna, Chair of the [County Government of Viken](#), Norway, illustrated the opportunities that the COVID-19 pandemic is creating. According to her, **the pandemic has been**

**boosting a progress in digital work and collaboration** while at the same time saving time and money. Despite underlining the fragility of our societies, **COVID-19 has highlighted the human ability to change and adapt in the case of an emergency** and showed how important it is to work together responding to the consequences of the crisis. Ms. Brenna explained that while it can be easy to lose track of the bigger picture and long-term goals including the SDGs, **sustainability has become more important than ever during this pandemic**. She referred to examples such as access to clean water and sanitation and equal access to quality education. At the same time, she reiterated positive effects caused by the pandemic such as improvements in air and water quality, the rediscovery of outdoor activities and new ways in which people are productive and creative and cooperate with each other. She stated that in this regard, **a more sustainable society is not only necessary, but also possible** and something to look forward to.

In 2021, the county of Viken will introduce a **climate account**. The year after, the county will additionally set up a **climate budget**. The **county's objective is to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> in the county by 80%** by 2030. Ms. Brenna emphasized that this target is very demanding but will generate great advantages for the global climate and local communities. To reduce potential negative impacts for businesses and on the labour market, Viken benefits from both national and regional funding that will be invested in training and education for its employees. Ms. Brenna underlined that the **SDGs are more relevant than ever in setting long-term recovery measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic** and offer a valuable framework to build a more sustainable and resilient society. She also thanked the other participants in the Roundtable for taking part in the discussions, being willing to listen and share knowledge and experiences. According to her, this is showing that they do not lose sight of the common sustainability goals, which she called both impressive and inspiring.

## Opening remarks by Gunn Marit Helgesen, First Vice President of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities

Ms. Gunn Marit Helgesen, First Vice President of the [Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities](#) (KS), **highlighted the important role of local governments in light of the COVID-19 pandemic**. The first national lockdown in Norway in March 2020 created an unprecedented situation for the country that tested its national system for inter-governmental dialogue, collaboration and service delivery. Across levels of government, the local democracy was included in the country's quest for finding the best temporary solutions.

Ms. Helgesen explained that the **SDGs are used in Norway as a guide for an accelerated transformation towards a more sustainable world**, also with regards to the response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Adding to that, she stressed three lessons learned from the ongoing work on the localisation of the SDGs in Norway. First, there is a **need for trust and democratic, municipal and regional councils** that are close to the citizens, local businesses and the civil society. Trust according to her is one of the most important assets across all levels of government that must be gained and nourished. Relating to that, the second lesson learned in Norway is about the importance of multi-level governance. Ms. Helgesen stated that **achieving the SDGs is a shared responsibility across all levels of government**, including local and regional, which requires proper competencies and financial authorities while keeping the citizens at the heart of government action. She emphasized that municipalities, cities and regions are key partners of the national government for the restoration of the economy and social life at the local and regional level following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The third lesson learned is about the **advantage of consultation processes in Norway**. Ms. Helgesen explained that **Norway has benefitted from its pre-existing consultation system between levels of government** that has been acting as a main coordination mechanism between the local, regional and national governments. Such **no glitch-based consultations will be particularly relevant for the COVID-19 recovery**. In that context, Ms. Helgesen also mentioned KS' ongoing collaboration with its international

network and national stakeholders with the ambition to present a Voluntary Sub-National Review alongside Norway's Voluntary National Review due to be released in mid-2021. To emphasize the importance of localisation and collaboration, Ms. Helgesen pointed out that **KS' highest political body committed to localising the SDGs** and that **KS' medium-term strategy** from 2020 to 2023 is **built around local action for sustainability to leave no one behind**.

# Cities' and regions' responses to COVID-19

## Keynote speech by Aziza Akhmouch, Head of the Cities, Urban Policies and Sustainable Development Division, OECD: 10 lessons from COVID-19 for cities and urban policy

In her keynote speech, Ms. Aziza Akhmouch, Head of the Cities, Urban Policies and Sustainable Development Division at the OECD, presented [10 lessons from COVID-19 for cities and urban policies](#). The lessons build on a mapping and stock-taking exercise conducted by the OECD secretariat analysing what activities around 100 cities from different OECD countries have been undertaking throughout the year 2020 in response to the pandemic. It also used some of the insights provided by the members of the [OECD Champion Mayors initiative for Inclusive Growth](#) and the [OECD Working Party on Urban Policy](#):

1. **While the pandemic has had an asymmetric impact across different places, national policies were originally very place-blind** not paying much attention to these differences across places. In later phases of the pandemic, countries took more granular and place-based approaches including more bottom-up type of initiatives related to fostering the continuity of local public services, business recovery and targeting vulnerable groups.
2. The **health crisis has largely turned into a systemic economic and social shock, mostly suffered by cities** as they are the engines of growth and the places where most people live and work. Against that background, the OECD has observed a varying capacity of cities to recover depending on their productivity metrics, their exposure to global value chains and labour markets that all feed into the narrative of inclusive growth that local governments can drive.
3. With lockdowns **we have rediscovered the need to shift from mobility to accessibility**, where wellbeing and proximity are at the core of citizens' concerns.
4. The **COVID-19 pandemic was an eye-opener to all forms of inequality across people and places** regarding digitalisation, access to health and access to public services, especially in large cities. The crisis has also shown how mayors were active at the forefront of tackling such forms of inequality.
5. According to the OECD, **the urban premium** that results from the agglomeration benefits that the special concentration of firms and workers in cities generate **is not going to turn into an urban penalty post-COVID**. Nevertheless, mid-size cities will likely gain traction in the near and medium-term future.
6. The aspect of digitalisation is an important element that differs from previous health crises. The **digital progress and its effects on the substitution of the physical by a digital proximity allow to rethink the future of work, public services, public space and social interactions** in our cities.'
7. Another aspect is the **combination of a "Zoom effect" and a "Greta effect"**, which **make the ecological transition socially and politically more acceptable** today than they were a decade ago. This can be seen through the proliferation of cycling paths and intensified discussions around the circular economy and minimising the pressure on our resources.
8. A lesson learned from the crisis are the **implications** it has had **on trust and governance**, particularly **confirming a higher level of trust in local governments and local leadership**.
9. The **crisis has shown that resilience is not a new concept at all**. It also underlined the importance of local leadership and a territorial approach.

10. Global agendas **have never been as important, timely and relevant for cities and regions as a long-term stable frameworks** to rethink their planning, investments, budget allocations and strategies.

Ms. Akhmouch subsequently acted as the moderator of the second day. In her role as moderator, she introduced the speakers of the first panel of the second day on cities' and regions' policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the role that the SDGs play in that context.

## Panel Discussion on cities' and regions' policy responses

### *Policies for sustainability and the COVID-19 response in the City of Braga, Portugal*

Mr. Ricardo Rio, Mayor of the [City of Braga](#), Portugal, presented Braga's view on the role of local governments for the SDGs and the city's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He explained that most of the lessons learned presented by Ms. Akhmouch align with the experiences the city of Braga has made over the past months. Mr. Rio stressed that Braga has been very engaged in sustainability issues. The city has developed a **strategic development plan for sustainability focused on assessing the city's progress made on the SDGs**, including through collaborations with universities on indicator development. He explained that Braga is moreover incorporating the SDGs in all of its local policy domains. **SDG 17 on global partnerships is of particular relevance for the city as Braga considers the SDGs to be a shared responsibility** and common vision between local, national and international level. Related to that, Mr. Rio stressed that i) the **strategic alignment between the municipality and all institutions and stakeholders in the city** as well as ii) the **engagement of citizens** are two more elements that are crucial to achieve the SDGs.

Mr. Rio also **highlighted the engagement in global networks** and the innovative approaches shared in those networks **to be useful means for an effective response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic**. In addition to that, he touched upon the increased responsibilities of cities and regions in the pandemic. According to him, **cities and regions should value the subsidiarity approach between local and national authorities** and other institutions as it allows them to develop innovative approaches and solutions in response to COVID-19 and for a brighter future. Responses developed by the city of Braga included measures such as support mechanisms for families to improve housing affordability, incentives to use public transport or improved access for small businesses to digital platforms. Finally, Mr. Rio emphasized the **importance of linking such initiatives to the SDGs and incorporating the goals into all municipal actions as means to an end** rather than seeing the SDGs as an end in themselves.

### *Recovery and renewal agenda in the City of Rotterdam, Netherlands*

Ms. Valéry Hunnik, Head of the Economics Department, [City of Rotterdam](#), Netherlands, [presented Rotterdam's recovery and renewal agenda](#). In recent years, the city has started a process to transition from its industrial heritage linked to the port of Rotterdam towards a resilient, digital, sustainable and inclusive economy. This transition process provided the base for the development of Rotterdam's recovery and renewal agenda, the city's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. **The main objective of this agenda is to restore the economic opportunities and job creation processes, accelerate economic transitions and reinforce the resilience of the economy**. It was developed in collaboration with various departments of the city administration, other fellow governments and the private sector using recommendations from think-tanks, banks and universities. As the economic consequences of the ongoing pandemic are uncertain, the city of **Rotterdam decided to work out different possible scenarios to get an overview of the measures needed for a recovery and transition to a sustainable, digital and circular economy**.

Based on the scenarios, its short-term effects and long-term ambitions, the recovery and urban renewal agenda consists of six pathways: 1) Human capital and education, 2) a broad sectoral structure (for the port and the city), 3) economic transitions (energy, circularity, digital and inclusivity), 4) attractiveness of the city, 5) enterprises and innovation ecosystem and 6) service provision. These pathways are interrelated and despite being a mix of already existing policies, the measures are even more focused on the economic impact and renewal. An **important aspect in Rotterdam's integrated approach is the monitoring and measurement aspect**, which has the objective to make the agenda more adaptive. Ms. Hunnik pointed out that the **agenda was drawn up on the basis of the need to link long-term economic ambitions for a sustainable, circular, digital and inclusive economy with the immediate need for economic recovery**. She also stressed that the agenda is aligned with the SDGs and contains around 50 measures that contribute to one or several SDGs.

### ***Reponses to COVID-19 and green recovery strategies in the City of Kitakyushu, Japan***

Mr. Masanori Nakagawa, Director, Environmental Bureau, [City of Kitakyushu](#), shared with the participants the [experiences of Kitakyushu responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and what role the SDGs have played in that process](#). After briefly presenting Kitakyushu, a city in the Southwest of Japan with around 1 million inhabitants, Mr. Nakagawa pointed out the comparatively low number of total COVID-19 infections in the city (672 as of 18 October 2020). He explained that the **local governments in Japan have a strong responsibility in the area of public health** and mentioned two possible main factors why the city is successfully handling the pandemic.

The first one are its **institutional mechanisms**. Mr. Nakagawa explained that there has been a SDGs Headquarter in the City Office since 2018, headed by the Mayor and including all executive members. **In order to tackle the pandemic, the city of Kitakyushu used its SDGs Headquarter as a coordination mechanism to allow for a quick response**. Secondly, the city of Kitakyushu has allocated an **additional USD 80 million budget putting in place measures based on the concept of the SDGs**. This included financial support schemes, especially for SMEs, a demand stimulus package, awareness-raising programmes with regards to COVID-19 and shortened opening hours for restaurants. Mr. Nakagawa emphasised that the **consideration of economic, social and environmental sustainability played a guiding role in the elaboration of the response measures**. Finally, Mr. Nakagawa presented the city's green recovery programme that focuses on achieving economic recovery through fostering environmental technologies such as wind power, solar energy and fuel cell vehicles.

### ***United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG): The Emergency Governance Initiative for Cities and Regions***

Mr. Edgardo Bilsky, Director of programs and research at [United Cities and Local Governments](#) (UCLG), [highlighted the lessons learned from the pandemic regarding the role of local and regional governments](#). He pointed out how **cities and regions have been at the forefront of the response to the COVID-19 crisis** ensuring the continuity of basic services, supporting the health system and responding to people's demands. He also stressed the role that local and regional government networks have played in that process by multiplying the exchange of expertise. Moreover, Mr. Bilsky touched upon the **need for place-based responses** that has emerged in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak. In a survey conducted by UCLG, Metropolis and the London School of Economics, local governments in 35 countries identified the **lack of municipal autonomy and the politicisation as main political governance challenges** and **insufficient public budgets and uncertainty of funding as main administrative governance challenges**.

Furthermore, Mr. Bilsky **stressed the increase in poverty and inequality caused by the COVID-19 pandemic**. In that context, he mentioned the re-municipalisation of public services as an emerging trend and alternative to the decay and privatisation of public services over the past decades. Going a step further,

Mr. Bilsky **called for a redefinition of “the normal”**, the rediscovery of proximity offers and the possibility to review planning. In that context, he mentioned frontrunner cities revising their traditional planning approaches and transitioning to short-term mobility, enhancing pedestrian and public space and creating polycentric and greener cities. However, in order to avoid a return to a business as usual and foster those trends, adequate support and upscaling of small-scale projects will be necessary. According to Mr. Bilsky, **the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that the central problems in governments are the insufficient or deficient relation between the different territorial levels and the collaboration between local governments themselves**. As part of its strategy to strengthen localisation efforts, UCLG has defined a [Decalogue for the post-COVID-19 era](#) linking the recovery process to the global agendas (SDGs, Paris Climate Agreement, New Urban Agenda among others) putting human rights, the fight against poverty and inequality as well as multi-level governance approaches and multilateralism at its centre.

### ***Using digital tools to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in the City of Moscow, Russian Federation***

Mr. Eduard Lysenko, Government Minister, Head of Information Technology, [City of Moscow](#), Russian Federation, provided the participants with insights into how the city has used digital technologies to face the COVID-19 pandemic. **A key component of Moscow’s reaction to COVID-19 was a range of digital solutions** implemented using the city’s digital ecosystem for citizens and businesses that had been formed over the past 10 years. The city of Moscow has set up an official internet portal through which the city administration offers its services digitally. This platform has become the main points for interaction between the city, its residents and its businesses, used by an average of 20 million users per month. In response to the pandemic, **a digital pass system for private and public transportation was deployed and used to process and analyse the number of social contacts to slow the spread of the coronavirus** and reduce the burden on Moscow’s healthcare system.

In order to find a balance between increased citizen safety and the preservation of business operations in the city, Moscow’s government introduced an app with a QR-code based check-in system for its citizens to get access to entertainment facilities, restaurants, but also workplaces. Through this system, the city was able to trace physical contacts of people tested positive for COVID-19 and inform other people who have shared the same spaces with them. In addition to that, Mr. Lysenko shared with the participants how the pandemic has created challenges for Moscow’s education system highlighting the **importance of remote learning**. He explained that Moscow was able to build on the online Moscow electronic school project launched in 2016. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, **around half of the pupils in Moscow were able to use distant learning services**, including digital textbooks, electronic schedules and video conferences through the Moscow electronic school platform.

### **Debate with participants**

The debate with the participants provided some more insights into the topic of cities’ and regions’ responses to COVID-19:

- **The relevance of the exchange on the SDGs between different levels governments and among local governments enables the sharing of best-practices, which is also relevant for COVID-19 response strategies.** The transfer of technologies, particularly soft technologies that can help local government to share information with the citizens has emerged as a helpful tool and best-practices in the work of UCLG in that regard.
- **The engagement of local governments in countries’ recovery packages is of great importance** over the coming years. Taxation is a particularly relevant topic in that regard considering budgetary constraints at the local level in many countries.

- **Trust in the relation between local governments and its citizens is crucial in the recovery phase from COVID-19.** Citizens need to sense that their opinions and contributions are valued and taken into account in the decisions of local authorities.

# The SDGs for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions

Mr. Stefano Marta, Coordinator of the [OECD programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#), announced his pleasure to introduce the keynote speaker of the following session on “The SDGs for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions:” Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, President of the [UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network](#) and Director of the [Center for Sustainable Development](#) at Columbia University in the City of New York, United States.

## Keynote speech by Prof. Jeffrey Sachs: using the SDGs to support cities and regions in their COVID-19 recovery strategies

In his keynote speech, Prof. Jeffrey Sachs elaborated on the recovery from COVID-19 and the role that the SDGs can play in that process. At the beginning of his speech, Prof. Sachs pointed out that the pandemic is not a global shock overwhelming all regions, but a global shock largely under control in most of the Asia-Pacific region, whilst raging out of control in Europe and the United States. He stated that the **failures are thus taking place in highly sophisticated societies that were at the top of all pandemic preparedness lists**, but have **turned out to be unable to respond**. In view of low numbers of COVID-19 cases, **many countries declared victory over the virus too early**. Prof. Sachs explained that many people did not understand the geometric development of epidemics when few control measures like lockdowns or public health measures are in place. He stressed that many Western countries did not and do not sufficiently look at the experience of Asia-Pacific countries to learn how they successfully used testing, contact tracing, isolating, and quarantine measures.

Referring to the importance of that mutual learning, Prof. Sachs then turned to the topic of the SDGs. The **SDGs are important because they outline socio-economic and environmental rights** in 17 goals for a decent society. In that regard, they emerged from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and represent a guidepost to a better life and a better society. Prof. Sachs argued that **we are not achieving the goals in the same way that many countries are failing to stop the COVID-19 pandemic. Achieving goals like the SDGs requires serious planning**. It requires taking the objectives rationally and seriously looking at what is needed in terms of budgeting, regulation, cooperation between government and business, and deployment of technologies, especially digital technologies and renewable energy.

Next, Prof. Sachs presented six challenges we must face to achieve the SDGs – [the six transformations developed by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network](#). The **first challenge is to ensure that everybody receives a good education**, which includes various organisational challenges and has become increasingly difficult during the pandemic. The **second challenge is the universal access to public health services and healthcare**, which is a systems management issue that requires financing, organisation and deployment of technologies. The third is **to move to sustainable energy practices**. For cities, this means a high degree of cooperation and collaboration at state and national levels to plan out the transformation of energy systems from fossil fuels to renewables. The energy transition also means that cities will need to get ready for electric vehicles, including by adding the necessary infrastructure.

The **fourth area of transformation is sustainable agriculture and sustainable land use**. Prof. Sachs explained that our food systems are currently not sustainable, nor are they resilient. He called the agriculture system the greatest source of anthropogenic damage to the environment; at the same time, it is the most vulnerable of all our economic systems to climate change. **The fifth area of transformation is to make our cities more liveable**. Huge technological changes in cities and fundamental changes in

mobility will reshape our cities and have the potential to create more pleasant places to live. The **sixth transformation is the digital transformation** – the most important cluster of technologies required for the changes ahead. Prof. Sachs argued that if people are not online now and cannot reap the benefits of the digital transformation, they will not be able to partake of their empowerment as citizens.

Prof. Sachs concluded his speech by emphasizing the role of **the SDGs as a set of normative principles for a decent, inclusive, and sustainable society**, and reiterated their role as our roadmap for the future. However, **the SDGs need to be broken down into manageable, operational plans for actions**. This means moving resources directed at achieving the goals through the public sector- public investments and public services- as well as through the private sector. Considering the failure to stop the COVID-19 pandemic, government structures need to be re-examined to understand why we cannot stop problems right now in order to move on and achieve the SDGs in the short-term future.

### Questions and answers on the keynote speech

In response to Prof. Sachs' keynote speech, Moderator Ms. Aziza Akhmouch thanked him for his enlightening and inspiring words and directed a number of questions from the audience to him.

*The role of the differences in political systems (democracy versus autocracy) in the COVID-19 response:*

Prof. Sachs clarified that **one can observe a difference of unity versus disunity rather than democracy versus autocracy**. There are several democracies that have done extremely well in the Asia Pacific (Taiwan, Korea, Australia, and New Zealand) that acted together, showed trust in the government and found unified ways to move forward. On the other hand, there were also one party states (China, Vietnam, and Cambodia) that were very successful in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In that context, Prof. Sachs illustrated that **societies in the Asia Pacific are less divided and have thus been able to mobilise public responses adhered to by the citizens**. He pointed out that surveys have highlighted a high level of trust in this region between government and the population, both in autocracies and democracies.

*Risk management, preparedness and resilience – is the SDGs framework still fit for purpose?*

Prof. Sachs explained that people in the Asia Pacific often emphasize that they were better prepared for the pandemic than others as they have been facing many risks and shocks like earthquakes, droughts and floods that have kept societies in the region on a kind of alert mode, but also other pandemics such as SARS, MERS and H1N1. That **sense of risk meant that countries were already taking precautions, screening people at the airport and getting testing systems up and running in the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic**. Contrastingly, no such measures were taken in Europe and the United States and precautions were lifted over the summer as if the pandemic had ended. Prof. Sachs emphasized that **due to the set-back of the pandemic, we are not on a path to achieve the SDGs**. He **called for a strategy of working backwards from where we are supposed to be in 2030 to where we are today**. On that pathway, the **SDGs are more relevant than ever because it is more urgent than ever to use them as a guideline for how we want to build the future**. According to Prof. Sachs, this will require a **different kind of governance, looking ahead, planning and thinking ahead, developing pathways to success** and explaining how to financially do this, including through wealth taxation, raising taxes on the big tech companies and stopping tax havens.

*The fragmentation of global frameworks and the importance of cooperation:*

Regarding the multitude of global frameworks, Prof. Sachs put emphasis on the **need to cooperate on global agendas putting aside areas of bickering and conflict** so that all major regions are working together, particularly China, Europe and the United States. **Cooperative stakes need to be risen and within every region of the world** and neighbours need to cooperate with each other. Prof. Sachs



**related to SDG 16** in the sense that they aim to strengthen the government as an institution. Mr. Silva highlighted seven actions the state will be implementing. First, Paraná will improve the efficiency of public services. Second, the state will drastically reduce the number of vehicles used by its administration through the establishment of a car rental programme. Third, Paraná will be promoting the improvement of its human resources management. Fourth, regarding the digital innovation, the plan of the state is to increase the population's access to online services. Fifth, the state will regulate its public services in order to reduce costs. Sixth, in light of the experience with the pandemic Paraná will reform remote working regulations. Lastly, the state has the objective to cut red tape.

Regarding long-term actions, Mr. Silva stated to be counting on the OECD recommendations presented to the state on the second mission in early December. He invited all the participants of the Roundtable to put the OECD slogan of better policies for better lives into practice and thanked the OECD for its work on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs.

### ***Putting the focus on the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda in Province of Córdoba, Argentina***

Ms. Silvina Rivero, Minister of Coordination, Government of the [Province of Córdoba](#), Argentina, provided insights into how the province is tackling the SDGs and how its work has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Córdoba has been working on the 2030 Agenda since 2016. Accompanied by the OECD, **Córdoba has linked all its government policies and strategies to the SDGs with a focus on the social dimension (SDGs 1-5 and 10). This emphasis on social justice and social inclusion originates in a social and financial crisis the province has been undergoing** in recent years, which was reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. It also affected a wide range of SDGs, notably SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10. Consequently, the province of Córdoba has reinforced different policies to target these SDGs. It has for instance strengthened social assistance for people with problems related to employment, increased social spending and accelerated policies to narrow the digital and the gender gap among the population.

Ms. Rivero explained that **the pandemic has forced Córdoba to take actions in those sectors that have been most affected**. It has also forced the province to accentuate long-term policies in order to not lose sight of the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. In its work with the OECD, **the province has developed an interaction matrix that allows to analyse how the SDGs can help to achieve Córdoba's priorities and priority targets**. Ms. Rivero stressed that **this matrix provides the province with a conceptual framework to analyse the government's policies and programmes in order to work towards the achievement of the SDGs**. Lastly, Ms. Rivero called for a higher degree of interaction between different levels of government and different sectors involved in the 2030 Agenda.

### ***European Committee of the Regions: The recovery from COVID-19 in the European Union***

Analysing the relation between COVID-19 and the 2030 Agenda from a European perspective, Ms. Tauglègne, Deputy Director, [European Committee of the Regions](#), pointed out that **the pandemic has exposed a number of vulnerabilities**. According to her, **Europe needs a better implementation of the SDGs**. To that end, she proposed three crucial steps to support that process. She **called for a mapping of structural risks** for the EU and its cities and regions over the medium and long-term, the **necessity to analyse the gaps and capabilities of local and regional authorities** and a **transition from local to global and global to local**. In order to achieve the SDGs, Ms. Taulègne pointed out the importance of their localisation, also for the long-term recovery from COVID-19, and called for a new mind-set in the policy-making process.

She also shared five key take-aways on the role of the SDGs in the recovery process that were brought up in the last stock-taking event of the European Local and Regional Authorities. First, **the SDGs are the**

**right framework for recovery.** Second, **Europe has to rely on instruments that have been tried and tested.** Europe also **needs more coordination with the academic world and between public administrations** to assure the delivery of powerful strategies. In addition, Ms. Taulègne mentioned the need to use the opportunities that the cooperation of associations of cities offer including their link to the global, European, national and local level. Lastly, **the SDGs have to be put higher on the agenda of the UN** to ensure continuity to mainstream the SDGs in policies and to allow for an efficient implementation at all levels, also under the leadership of the European Commission. In that context, Ms. Taulègne argued in favour of increasing the visibility of the SDGs in the criteria to access EU recovery funds in the medium- and long-term.

### ***City of New York, United States: Engaging the global community to find responses to the COVID-19 pandemic***

Ms. Aissata M.B. Camara, Deputy Commissioner for Operations and Strategic Partnerships, Mayor's Office for International Affairs, [City of New York](#), United States, described some of the measures that the city of New York, one of the epicentres of the epidemic in the United States, has implemented to ensure the safety of its citizens during the pandemic. Examples include the provision of free laptops and tables to students to take part in remote learning (SDG 4), a test and trace programme in the communities most affected by the virus (SDG 3), and the establishment of more than 400 food hubs to ensure families' access to meals (SDG 2). Regarding policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Camara stressed the **importance for cities to continue sharing best practices and key strategies towards building a stronger future.** She also elaborated on the development of the [One New York City 2050](#) strategy, which has charted the path forwards for achieving sustainability in the city since 2015 and later led to the development of the [Global Vision | Urban Action platform](#). This platform has the objective to foster an exchange about New York's actions on the SDGs and a mutual learning experience.

Moreover, **New York was the first city worldwide to release a Voluntary Local Review** reporting directly to the United Nations, demonstrating its commitment to accountability in achieving the SDGs. Ms. Camara described the city's **belief in the collective power of cities and other local governments advocating for change as one of the driving forces behind its engagement on VLRs.** She highlighted how over the past years, the VLR movement has expanded to over 210 cities and states that have committed to sharing ideas and using the SDGs to accelerate change in their communities. Finally, Ms. Camara **called on other local governments to contribute to the voluntary local review movement, to take part in global solutions and to mutually find solutions to end the COVID-19 pandemic** in order to leave no one behind.

### ***Brookings Institution: The SDGs as a framework for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions***

Mr. Tony Pipa, Senior Fellow at [Brookings Institution](#), [highlighted the relevance of COVID-19 as a framework for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions.](#) Mr. Pipa told the participants that **in the response to the epidemic, one has to ensure that city leaders are involved in global policy decisions about the transformative recovery strategies.** He also pointed out the dual-tracking strategies that sub-national leaders, mayors and local officials are implementing that combine immediate responses to ensure public health and safety and the development of a more forward looking recovery strategy. Building on that, Mr. Pipa presented **five main agendas that are being developed by city to city cooperation and city networks.** These agendas are a set common principles expressed by cities about what transformational recovery looks like – **social and economic equity, climate action and resilience at the local level, protection of public services and investment and the call for research and science driven responses.**



## Concluding remarks and next steps

Ms. Bente Bjerknes, Assistant Director General, Office of the Governing Mayor, [County of Viken](#), Norway, thanked the participants for two inspiring days at the roundtable. She also **underlined the importance of the discussions** and Viken's participation in the OECD pilot project more broadly for building the new county and for the collaboration with local, regional, national and international partners. Going forward, Ms. Bjerknes **encouraged the audience to stay curious about different methods, actions and ways of transforming the society and reaching the SDGs**. Lastly, she also **expressed the need for further cooperation on the 2030 Agenda** and emphasised the need to focus on building and keeping a high level of trust in the society overall.

Ms. Aziza Akhmouch, Head of the Cities, Urban Policies and Sustainable Development Division, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (CFE), OECD, thanked Ms. Bjerknes for her concluding remarks and expressed her gratitude for the work of the local team involved in the case study and the organisation of the Roundtable. She also thanked the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Governments and the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation in Norway.

Finally, Ms. Akhmouch wrapped-up the Roundtable by illustrating the evolution of the OECD programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs from its initiation in July 2018, the [first Roundtable](#) in March 2019, the release of the [Synthesis report](#) and [SDGs data tool](#) in February 2020 to its third edition in November 2020. Going forward, the OECD will release four more pilot reports on the city of Kitakyushu (Japan), the city of Moscow (Russian Federation), the province of Córdoba (Argentina) and the state of Paraná (Brazil) over the course of 2021 and launch a second phase of the programme including new pilots. Ms. Akhmouch invited interested cities and regions to get in touch with the OECD to receive additional information. Beyond that, the OECD is discussing the idea to introduce a steering committee as a light governance system for the Roundtable with some of its founding members. Future work will also include a geographical expansion of the OECD's localised SDG dataset and an increase in granularity. She lastly thanked the OECD team for its excellent work and declared the Roundtable being closed.