

4th OECD Roundtable on

Cities and Regions for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

29-30 June, 2021



HIGHLIGHTS

As part of the [OECD Programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#), the [4th OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs](#) took place virtually on 29 and 30 June 2021, and was co-organised with the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). The Roundtable gathered around 400 representatives from a wide range of cities, regions, national governments, and from the European Commission, alongside international organisations (UNCDF, UNECE, UN-Habitat, UNESCO, World Bank), networks of cities and regions (Assembly of European Regions, Committee of the Regions, Eurocities, Metropolis, UCLG) and other stakeholders such as GIZ, URBACT and universities ([Agenda](#), [List of participants](#), and [Presentations](#)).

The objectives of the OECD Roundtable were to:

- **Present** the preliminary findings of the OECD-CoR Survey and good practices of frontrunner cities and regions to understand how the SDGs can help them implement long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies;
- **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;
- **Shape** High-level Principles on city-to-city partnerships to localise the SDGs developed in the framework of the Italian G20 Presidency; and
- **Discuss** the role of higher education institutions to support cities and regions in achieving the SDGs

Table of Contents

Summary of Outcomes	4
1 The SDGs as a framework for COVID-19 recovery in cities and regions	9
Opening remarks by Thomas Wobben, Director for Legislative Works, European Committee of the Regions	9
Opening remarks by Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen, Deputy Secretary-General, OECD	10
Video testimonies from pilot cities & regions	10
Kenji Kitahashi, Mayor of Kitakyushu, Japan	10
Silvina Rivero, Minister of Coordination, Province of Córdoba, Argentina	11
Keli Guimarães, Vice-president of the State Council for Economic and Social Development, Paraná, Brazil	11
Interactive Poll I	12
The SDGs for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions	12
EU implementation of the SDGs: preliminary findings of the OECD-CoR Survey	13
Panel discussion	14
Antoine Neumann, Counsellor, Delegate for Agriculture and Food Policy, City of Strasbourg, France	14
Åsa Bjering, Project Manager, International Relations, City of Helsingborg, Sweden	15
Kirsten Korte, Managing Director, Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region, Germany	15
Anna Lisa Boni, Secretary General, Eurocities	16
2 City-to-city partnerships to achieve the SDGs	17
G20 High-level Principles on city-to-city partnerships	17
Panel discussion	19
Christine Moro, Ambassador and Head of Delegation for External Action of Local Authorities, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France	19
Nicole A. Hofmann, Senior Policy Officer, Federal States and Local Authorities Division, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany	19
Imme Scholz, Co-Chair, Independent Group of Scientists for the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report	20
Marlene Holzner, Head of Unit, Civil Society and Local Authorities, DG INTPA, European Commission	20
Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat	21
Group discussion	21
Interactive Poll II	23
3 The role of universities to support cities and regions to achieve the SDGs	24
Keynote speech by María Cortes-Puch, Vice-President, Network Program, Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)	24
Panel and group discussion	25

Johan Blaus, Senior Advisor, KTH Stockholm, Sweden	25
Denis Gauvreau, Director of Innovation and Business Management, Polytechnique de Montréal, Canada	26
Erin Bromaghim, Director of Olympic and Paralympic Development and Hilton Fellow on the SDGs, City of Los Angeles, US	26
Sean Fox, Senior Lecturer, University of Bristol, United Kingdom and Allan Macleod, Sustainable Development Goals Coordinator, City of Bristol, United Kingdom	27
Concluding remarks and next steps	28

Summary of Outcomes

The 4th OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs took place virtually on 28-29 June 2021. It gathered around 400 representatives from a wide range of cities, regions, national governments, and the European Commission, alongside international organisations (UNCDF, UNECE, UN-Habitat, UNESCO, World Bank), networks of cities and regions (Assembly of European Regions, Committee of the Regions, Eurocities, Metropolis, UCLG) and other stakeholders such as GIZ, URBACT 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 in a multi-level dialogue with lower and upper levels of government to build consensus on who can do what, at what scale and how; and
- sharing best practices and lessons from international experience

The first day of the Roundtable focused on the topic of *The SDGs as a framework for COVID-19 recovery in cities and regions* and consisted of two sessions. The first session provided the opportunity to launch three OECD pilot reports on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs in [Córdoba](#), [Kitakyushu](#) and [Paraná](#). The second session focused on the role that the SDGs play for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions, including the presentation and discussion of the results from the [joint survey](#) of the OECD and the European Committee of the Regions on that topic. The second day also consisted of two sessions and shed light on i) *City-to-city partnerships to achieve the SDGs* and ii) *The role of universities to support cities and regions to achieve the SDGs*.

The opening remarks of Day I clearly stated the **relevance of the SDGs as a framework for cities and regions to assess their performance** in a range of policy domains, **as policymaking tools** to rethink how to strategize, plan, invest and allocate budget and to **strengthen multi-level governance and stakeholder engagement**. The SDGs also represent **a clear and stable framework to guide governments in shaping a transformative recovery from COVID-19**. Nevertheless, the SDG narrative has lost momentum in the discussion on the COVID-19 pandemic at the EU level and often the SDGs are not fully integrated into the recovery plans. The opening remarks also noted the absence of policy coherence in those recovery plans, one of the most useful features of the SDG, leading to evitable overlaps with other initiatives and a lacking consideration of regions' and cities' efforts for a sustainable recovery.

The first session of Day I focused on the launch of three OECD pilot reports on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs in [Córdoba](#), [Kitakyushu](#) and [Paraná](#). The three cities and regions have started to **use the SDGs as an integral part of their policy, planning, measurement and stakeholder engagement** and can provide a source of inspiration for other local and regional governments to follow that path:

- **The City of Kitakyushu, Japan**, has developed an SDG-based vision, which outlines the city's main sustainable development targets and actions and sets up a governance framework with a

strong focus on citizen participation and private sector engagement. As reflected in Kitakyushu's Voluntary Local Review and participation in the SDGs Future City initiative, 17 actions shape the local vision to foster sustainable development through, in particular, the transition to low-carbon energy production and a circular economy, female empowerment, inclusion of vulnerable groups and international cooperation.

- **The Province of Córdoba, Argentina**, uses the SDGs as a framework to promote social inclusion and well-being. The province has undertaken a multi-stakeholder engagement process, which has led to five strategic lines of action for the achievement of the SDGs in Córdoba to: i) build a vision of multidimensional economic development for the province, ii) bridge the housing supply gap and foster sustainable construction, iii) generate decent work for the most excluded, iv) implement a sustainable water management system and v) deepen the process of coordination and transparency in policymaking.
- **The State of Paraná, Brazil**, has used the SDGs as a tool and framework to reduce longstanding challenges related to health, education and safety as well as to address global megatrends affecting the state such as climate change, demographic pressures and digitalisation. Paraná is aligning its Multi-Year Plan (PPA) for 2020-23 and other planning and budgeting tools with the SDGs to face the socio-economic territorial disparities within the state. Through a multi-stakeholder governance framework, guidelines and financial contributions, the state provides incentives to align local and regional planning systems with the 2030 Agenda and to address sustainable development challenges in an integrated way.

The second session of Day I looked at the role that the SDGs play for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies in cities and regions. Despite the absence of an EU overarching strategy on the SDGs, the commitment of local and regional authorities to the Global Goals has kept increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The joint survey launched by the CoR and the OECD showed that the use of indicators and measurement system to track progress and awareness raising campaigns are the actions most widely adopted by local and regional governments, while political leadership at the local/regional level is considered as the most important success factor. 60% of local and regional governments consider the SDGs as a suitable framework for designing a holistic approach to the COVID-19 recovery and 44% have not used them before but are planning to do so to recover from COVID-19.

Several subnational governments and organisations have already been using the SDGs to shape their policies and strategies or leverage the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to do so in the near future:

- The SDGs enable **the City of Strasbourg, France**, to take into account three major priorities of the city government, namely climate, social justice and democracy. Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the city has developed a pact for local and sustainable economy to amplify the local ecological, social and digital transition and responsible corporate action. It brings together local stakeholders to drive the transition towards a sustainable development model. Furthermore, Strasbourg initiated a food policy pact, founded on the SDGs as a lever for transformation, considering all the impacts of food policy for citizens, the private sector and the environment.
- **The City of Helsingborg, Sweden**, has aligned its quality of life programme, Helsingborg's steering document for the city's work relating to sustainable development, with the SDGs. To that end, the city has developed around sixty indicators to measure its progress on the 2030 Agenda. The city is also using the SDGs to a large extent as a framework for the COVID-19 recovery and to guide its actions towards climate neutrality and the EU Green Deal. In 2021, the city of Helsingborg also published its first VLR.
- **The Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region, Germany**, has a strong tradition in stakeholder engagement through collaborations with the private sector, science, administration and civil society. Together with local partners, the Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region has elaborated a regional development concept, which takes the form of an innovation strategy. The innovation

strategy focuses on green and biotech, the social economy and the digital economy and should as a next step be aligned with the SDGs and use them to address the region's challenges and opportunities as well as its COVID-19 recovery strategy.

- **Eurocities** has set up a task force and conducted surveys to support cities in using the SDGs framework for the COVID-19 recovery. The organisation found that those cities that localise the SDGs and promote synergies and citizen engagement are better positioned for a sustainable and inclusive recovery and can have a direct impact on the quality of life of people. Eurocities considers the nexus between sustainable development, the post COVID-19 recovery and quality of life as a long-term goal in the future.

The **first session of the Day II** underlined the opportunities that **city-to-city partnerships provide for the localisation of the SDGs**. Sustainable development is one of the key priorities of the Italian G20 presidency, notably with regards to **rethinking the role of cities for sustainable development**. Against that background, the development Ministers of the **G20 have committed to support local authorities to lead those efforts** with a particular focus on addressing climate change, but also the importance of intermediary cities for urban-rural linkages and systemic transformation. The G20 development working group (DWG) will also **launch a platform for policy dialogue on intermediary cities and their role for sustainable development and the localisation of the SDGs** by the end of the year. The G20 DWG will also launch the **Ten Rome G20 High-level Principles on city-to-city partnerships for the localisation of the SDGs**, that were discussed at the Roundtable.

Some examples of countries' and international organisations' work on city-to-city partnerships for the SDG localisation include:

- In **France**, it was less difficult for local authorities to integrate the SDGs in their international cooperation activities than in their local domestic policies because even before the adoption of the SDGs, the topics addressed by French local authorities in their development cooperation were much in line with the SDGs. To foster SDG localisation internally and abroad, France is adopting a new law, which calls for local and regional governments to report on the implementation of the SDGs in their domestic policies and their international cooperation.
- In **Germany**, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is committed to the localisation of the SDGs through north-south cooperation, the application of the subsidiarity principle and peer-learning. BMZ has established a special agency to provide guidance to German municipalities and their partners in setting up and managing their city-to-city partnerships.
- The **Independent Group of Scientists for the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report**, is currently in the elaboration phase of the outline and key messages for the next GSDR identifying the topics and scales, which it will focus on, notably the impact of COVID-19 and climate neutrality. According to the group, the levers for the implementation of the SDGs and for ensuring policy coherence span from STI policies, economic and financial policies to individual and collective action and multi-level governance and require a strong view on how multi-level governance arrangement work.
- For the **European Commission**, decentralised development cooperation can support local and regional governments' SDGs localisation efforts in EU and partner countries. Based on calls for proposals, the European Commission analyses partnerships with regards to their contribution to good governance, the European Green Deal, economic growth, job creation, digitalisation and migration and selects the partnerships it is supporting financially.
- For **UN-Habitat**, SDGs localisation has to be embedded in a multi-level governance framework, where national governments have to play the role of enablers and coordinators, and should consist of four parts: i) the fact that the SDGs are understood as guiding framework for development, ii) policy, planning and budgetary alignment with the SDGs, iii) alignment of investments towards the

SDGs and iv) monitoring and reporting. Against that background, UN-Habitat advocates for the framework of city-to-city partnerships to be underpinned by national and international facilitation and support.

The second session of Day II focused on the role of universities to support cities and regions to localise the 2030 Agenda. Achieving the **SDGs will require deep economic, social and technological transformations**, including amongst others the rapid scale-up of high quality social services, such as health and education, a shift to net zero carbon emissions and deep changes to the global food systems. Such **transformations will need unprecedented problem solving, cross-disciplinary thinking and the rapid dissemination of sustainable development technologies**, which also **depend on the engagement of universities** as centres of knowledge generation and knowledge repositories. **Universities as multidisciplinary knowledge centres can help cities and regions to address constraints of local and regional governments** such as limited political and fiscal power, lack of coordination with other levels of government and thus an inability to participate in multi-stakeholder partnerships and support them in the design of SDG-focused policies, data, monitoring and evaluation frameworks. They also provide students with knowledge, skills and the motivation to understand and address the SDGs, thereby empowering them to become actors of change.

Some examples of partnerships between cities and universities on the localisation of the SDGs are:

- **KTH Stockholm, Sweden**, has a long tradition of cooperation with the city of Stockholm. In the past years, the city of Stockholm intensified its collaboration with KTH realising the need for alliances to tackle the city's challenges transitioning to a green and sustainable future, which has also put the SDGs into the centre of KTH's attention. Among other things, they collaborated in the design of Sweden's largest strategic innovation programme *Viable Cities* that is led by KTH Stockholm and coordinates a range of climate contracts with Swedish cities, engaging cities and universities in Sweden in environmental sustainability and providing a mechanism for peer learning.
- The city of Montreal is the largest contract partner of the **Polytechnique de Montréal, Canada**. Both have been collaborating on a range of topics related to the SDGs, including water, mobility, public health and climate action. In order to improve the collaboration on the SDGs and finding solutions to local development challenges, Polytechnique de Montréal advocates for the concept of research and technology organisations, which can provide a platform and the necessary for research and innovation and the creation of a network of partners from different sectors.
- **The City of Los Angeles, United States**, is preparing its second VLR, which connects to the work of and partnerships with universities in the city. Through summer cohorts, semester-long SDG taskforces and internship and fellowship offers, the city of Los Angeles has been working with over 160 students across five academic partner institutions. The collaboration between the city and the students has had a strong multiplier effect in terms of the value added for the city both in terms of the relationships built and the ecosystem created around the work of the SDG localisation
- **The University of Bristol and the City of Bristol, United Kingdom**, started collaborating on the SDGs in 2017 on a report commissioned by a local CSO on the relevance of the SDGs for the city. Since then, the University of Bristol has co-produced the city's first VLR, the SDGs have been integrated into Bristol's One City Plan and a dedicated position to foster local dialogue and exchange with other cities through stakeholder dialogues and city networks has been created.

The conclusions of the Roundtable underlined the **numerous valuable contributions the participants provided** during the two days and highlighted the importance of the collaboration and exchange among different stakeholders active on the 2030 Agenda. In particular, the Roundtable provided **new insights on the role the SDGs can play as a framework for the recovery from COVID-19 in cities and regions**. Furthermore, the Roundtable provided useful **feedback from the panellists and the audience on the G20 High-level Principles on city-to-city partnerships**, notably concerning monitoring and evaluation,

multi-level governance, the principle of reciprocity and digitalisation. The Roundtable also highlighted the **key role that universities and university networks play in the localisation of the SDGs**. It emphasised in particular the importance of universities as actors that go beyond political cycles and the role of students contributing to VLRs and the SDGs more broadly.

The main next steps and key milestones of the OECD programme on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs are the **release of the pilot report about the city of Moscow**, Russian Federation, in autumn 2021, the **start of the second phase of the programme, including new pilots**, the presentation of a **policy paper on the results of the joint OECD-CoR survey** during the European Week of Cities and Regions in October 2021 and at the OECD Regional Development Policy Committee in November and a new project on **Reshaping Decentralised Development Cooperation (DDC) in cities and regions: lessons from Germany for a Global Policy Toolkit**.

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. Around 400 participants from 65 countries followed the Roundtable via Zoom. The outreach 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 38.3k impressions via Twitter and LinkedIn. This was made up of 1120 clicks to the work, 62 retweets and 394 likes. Downloads for the three reports launched at the Roundtable total 911.

Top tweets:

- State of Paraná, Brazil: https://twitter.com/OECD_local/status/1413204343755526166?s=20
- OECD Roundtable: https://twitter.com/OECD_local/status/1405909702412800000?s=20
- Province of Córdoba, Argentina: https://twitter.com/OECD_local/status/1409959283274489861?s=20

1 The SDGs as a framework for COVID-19 recovery in cities and regions

Ms. Aziza Akhmouch, Head of the Cities, Urban Policy and Sustainable Development Division at the OECD [Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities \(CFE\)](#), welcomed all participants to the 4th OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the Sustainable Development, co-hosted by the [European Committee of the Regions](#). She stressed that the previous edition of the Roundtable made a strong point that the SDGs offer a clear and stable framework to guide local and regional governments in shaping a transformative recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and that this Roundtable will provide a deep dive as to “how” this is done. Ms. Akhmouch then presented the four main items of the event’s agenda: i) the launch of three new OECD pilot reports on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs in [Córdoba](#), [Kitakyushu](#) and [Paraná](#); ii) the discussion of the OECD-CoR [joint survey](#) on the SDGs as a framework for the COVID-19 recovery; iii) the role of city-to-city partnerships to localise the SDGs; and lastly iv) the role of higher education institutions to support local and regional governments in the localisation of the SDGs.

Opening remarks by Thomas Wobben, Director for Legislative Works, European Committee of the Regions

On behalf of his organisation, Mr. Thomas Wobben, Director for Legislative Works, [European Committee of the Regions](#) (CoR), welcomed the participants to the 4th OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs. He described the participation of the CoR in the Roundtable as another stepping-stone of its collaboration with the OECD and highlighted the **importance of the SDGs as part of their joint action plan and memorandum of understanding for the promotion of multilevel governance and local agendas**. Since 2015, the CoR has been working with local and regional governments in Europe on the localisation of the 2030 Agenda, promoting it as a common language and key development framework. Mr. Wobben stated that the SDG narrative has however lost some visibility in the discussion about the COVID-19 pandemic in the EU, even though it should be the natural framework to accompany the EU’s recovery strategy and the recipe for a sustainable future.

Mr. Wobben subsequently pointed towards a recent study commissioned by the CoR to analyse the level of integration of the SDGs in the recovery plans of eight member states. He expressed his concern that the findings suggest that the **SDGs are not effectively integrated in these plans**, with only some cases of implicit references to the 2030 Agenda and a prioritisation of the economic dimensions of the SDGs over the social and environmental ones. Beyond that, the study noted the **absence of policy coherence**, one of the most useful features of the SDGs, which according to Mr. Wobben leads to **evitable overlaps with other initiatives and a lacking consideration of regions’ and cities’ efforts for a sustainable recovery**. Lastly, Mr. Wobben mentioned the joint survey carried out by the OECD and the CoR on the implementation of the SDGs at the local and regional level and strategies for the recovery from the pandemic, whose evidence reinforces the CoR’s political message at EU level to **endorse the SDGs as**

strategy for recovery. He concluded by thanking the OECD for the partnership and the participants of the roundtable for their commitment to the SDGs around the globe.

Opening remarks by Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen, Deputy Secretary-General, OECD

Mr. Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen, Deputy Secretary-General, OECD, expressed his gratitude to the CoR for co-hosting the roundtable and highlighted the survey on the SDGs for long-term COVID-19 recovery strategies carried out by the OECD and the CoR as an excellent example of the benefits of their collaboration. Mr. Vestergaard Knudsen subsequently shared his delight to launch three new OECD reports on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs in [Córdoba](#), Argentina; [Kitakyushu](#), Japan; and [Paraná](#), Brazil. According to him, **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. He emphasised that no country worldwide is yet on track to achieve all SDGs by 2030. At least 80% of regions have not yet achieved the targets for 2030 in any of the 17 goals.

Mr. Vestergaard Knudsen then presented three important take-away messages that have emerged from the policy dialogues with Córdoba, Kitakyushu and Paraná.

- Firstly, **cities and regions are increasingly using the SDGs as a framework to assess their performance in a range of policy domains** to understand their strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities. In Paraná for instance, 94% of the electricity production comes from renewable sources, thereby outperforming the average of OECD regions (41%).
- Secondly, cities and regions increasingly **use the SDGs as policymaking tools to rethink how to strategize, plan, invest and allocate budget** at local and regional levels. Kitakyushu for example was one of the first cities worldwide to publish a Voluntary Local Review in 2018, to shape a vision to foster sustainable development through the transition to low-carbon energy production and a circular economy, female empowerment, inclusion of vulnerable groups and international cooperation.
- Thirdly, cities and regions are **leveraging the SDGs to strengthen multi-level governance and stakeholder engagement**. The province of Córdoba has initiated a multi-stakeholder engagement process and shaped a dedicated ‘matrix’ to identify synergies and trade-offs between its prioritised SDG targets. For instance, sustainable construction utilising recycled and reusable material are a means to tackle both the amount of waste produced in the province (SDG 12) and housing affordability and quality (SDG 11). The three new reports also provide tailored policy recommendations based on the OECD checklist for public action to localise the SDGs in order to further support the three cities and regions.

Finally, Mr. Vestergaard Knudsen congratulated Córdoba, Kitakyushu and Paraná for their remarkable efforts to localise the SDGs and for providing a source of inspiration for other local and regional governments to follow that path, and encouraged the participants to take a look into the reports and recommendations.

Video testimonies from pilot cities & regions

Kenji Kitahashi, Mayor of Kitakyushu, Japan

Mr. Kenji Kitahashi, Mayor of the [city of Kitakyushu](#), Japan, thanked the OECD for the launch of the new report and expressed his gratitude to participate in the programme on [A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#). He explained that the city of Kitakyushu has a history of overcoming serious pollution through the joint

efforts of citizens, the private sector and the public administration. This experience has raised citizens' awareness about the environment, generated valuable assets and paved the way for enhanced international cooperation.

Mr. Kitahashi then mentioned several good practices illustrated in the report that create synergetic effects across the SDGs, for instance Kitakyushu's offshore wind power project or its community restaurants. He thanked the OECD for its recommendations such as using the **SDGs as a framework to enhance the collaboration with national, regional and municipal actors** and **creating a SDGs platform to develop concrete policies jointly with local stakeholders**. Mr. Kitahashi subsequently explained that the city has announced a zero carbon goal in October 2020 and just released the **second version of its future city plan aiming to transform Kitakyushu into a green growth city through the usage of the SDGs**. He emphasised that Kitakyushu is determined to pursue its mission as a model city in Asia and to disseminate SDGs strategies within and beyond the country.

Silvina Rivero, Minister of Coordination, Province of Córdoba, Argentina

Ms. Silvina Rivero, Minister of Coordination, [Province of Córdoba](#), Argentina, explained that the province of Córdoba understands the **SDGs as an opportunity to strengthen its public administration** as they provide the framework for a more sustainable and inclusive society. To that end, the province has been collaborating with the OECD since 2015 with the objective to align its policies to the SDGs. Ms. Rivero described how Córdoba started a process to **adapt national goals to the provincial reality** and prioritised several targets **in collaboration with its stakeholders**. Indicators were developed to measure the scope of policies responding to local and global challenges. Ms. Rivero highlighted that **the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that SDGs are more relevant than ever before**, which is why the province of Córdoba has focused its efforts on the commitment to the 2030 Agenda responding to matters of health, education, safety and connectivity, among other priorities.

The provincial government uses the 2030 Agenda and the participation of multiple stakeholders in particular as a framework to improve local governance and policy outcomes. All **political actions are underpinned by its three management axes social justice, sustainable economic growth and the strengthening of institutions** that aim to reduce inequalities. Ms. Rivero explained that collaborative discussions and efforts guarantee that decisions are inclusive and contribute to leaving no one behind. She also stressed the **administration's commitment to continue and strengthen its participative approach in order to achieve the SDGs**, diversify its economy, reduce the housing deficit, create decent jobs for the most excluded and deepen the coordination and transparency process in the formulation of public policies. Lastly, Ms. Rivero declared to be willing to continue working with the OECD in the design and implementation of measures that allow consolidating and aligning its management model with the province's future vision.

Keli Guimarães, Vice-president of the State Council for Economic and Social Development, Paraná, Brazil

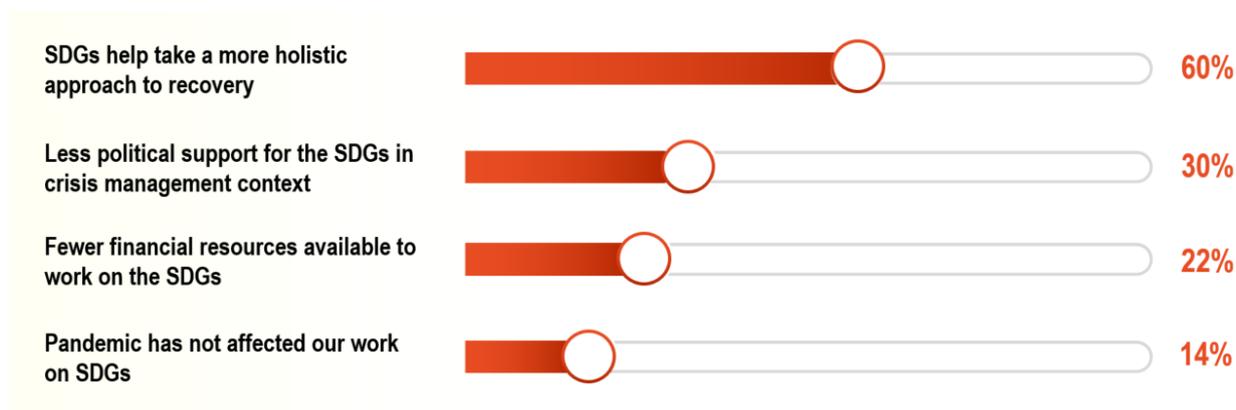
Keli Guimarães, Vice-president of the [State Council for Economic and Social Development, Paraná](#), Brazil, pointed out that the **COVID-19 pandemic has shown the urgent need for resilient societies** and that **global challenges can only be solved through local solutions**. She explained that for Paraná, the 2030 Agenda represents an opportunity to generate concrete policy impact on people's lives. Paraná has been working on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the state through its "[Paraná Keeping an Eye on the SDGs](#)" strategy. In particular, the state has launched a **predictive programme that highlights the government's best initiatives contributing to the social and economic recovery**. Paraná also aligned these actions with the SDGs to provide transparency and identify potential actions and policies.

Ms. Guimarães illustrated how the **project with the OECD has revealed the state's challenges, potential, and conditions to promote sustainable development**, including through its network of state universities, the engagement of the private sector, civil society and the courts of justice and accounts. **The state will continue to gather national actors that are committed to sustainable development to work on the implementation of the OECD recommendations.** In addition, Paraná is elaborating an action plan jointly with stakeholders to develop a recovery strategy for the state. Lastly, Ms. Guimarães expressed her pride to announce that **Paraná was the first city to join the second phase of the OECD programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs.**

Interactive Poll I

After these video testimonies, Moderator Ms. Aziza Akhmouch invited all participants to take part in an interactive zoom poll answering the question “*How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your work on the SDGs?*”. The participants were invited to pick their responses (multiple choice) among four options: i) *The SDGs help us take a more holistic approach to recovery*, ii) *there are now fewer resources available to work on the SDGs*; iii) *there is less political support for the SDGs agenda in a context of crisis management*; and iv) *the COVID-19 pandemic has not affected our work on the SDGs*.

Figure 1. First zoom poll - How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your work on the SDGs



60% of participants picked the option that the SDGs help take a more holistic approach to recovery. 30% declared that there is less political support for the SDGs in a crisis management context. 22% of the respondents now have fewer financial resources available to work on the SDGs. For 14%, the pandemic has not had an effect on their work on the SDGs.

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

Paola Deda, Director of Forest, Land and Housing Division at the [United Nations Economic Commission for Europe](#) (UNECE), started her keynote speech by pointing out the **importance of the SDGs for the localisation of development efforts**. Jointly with ITU and UN-Habitat, **UNECE has developed the [United 4 Smart Sustainable Cities's \(U4SSC\) key performance indicators \(KPIs\) to assess the implementation of the SDGs in various cities](#)**. Among other things and building on the 91 indicators, UNECE has prepared city profiles for Grodno (Belarus), Nur-Sultan (Kazakhstan) and for four cities in Norway. The KPIs also helped UNECE to set up guidelines for the preparation of Voluntary Local Reviews. Against that background, Ms. Deda emphasised that the **availability and access to data are the main challenge** at local level. Another important area that Ms. Deda mentioned is the focus on innovative

financing. She explained that the **KPIs co-developed by UNECE allow to identify policy areas at the local level that require special financing**, in particular in order to achieve SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities.

In the next part of her speech, Ms. Deda emphasised how the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that **cities were at the forefront of responding**, identifying solutions and addressing emergencies. However, UNECE observed that **those living in informal settlements were left behind in the recovery**. To tackle that issue, **UNECE has developed a post-COVID-19 recovery action plan for informal settlements** in the UNECE region with **concrete recommendations to enhance the integration of informal settlements into the urban fabric of cities** and to help cities to recover from the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Outcomes of the project were also integrated into the "[Building Urban Economic Resilience during and after COVID-19](#)" project to strengthen the capacity of city governments in 16 cities to design, implement, and monitor sustainable, resilient, and inclusive COVID-19 economic and financial responses, recovery, and rebuilding plans. Ms. Deda explained that **building back better also means reflecting on the way cities are built and planned**. Related to that, she presented a **circular cities guide** developed together with 16 other UN agencies that contains practical examples dealing with the assessment of circularity in cities and provides recommendations on how to prioritise and introduce circular economy concepts at the local level. Lastly, she invited the participants to participate in the Second UN Forum of Mayors in Geneva taking place in April 2022, which will among other topics tackle the question how cities and regions are implementing the SDGs at the local level.

Responding to a question by the moderator on how the 91 key performance indicators were affected by the pandemic, Ms. Deda stressed that the **indicators related to health were those most affected by the pandemic**. UNECE also noticed an **increased interest in nature-based solutions to the pandemic** that were requested by city governments with the objective to foster the greening of cities. Concerning possible changes to indicator sets due to the effects of the pandemic, Ms. Deda pointed out that **constantly changing indicators would result in a lower comparability of developments over time and across cities**. She recommended to **update indicators but to limit the adjustments to ensure sustained comparability**.

EU implementation of the SDGs: preliminary findings of the OECD-CoR Survey

Ricardo Rio, Mayor of the [City of Braga](#) in Portugal and Rapporteur on the SDGs for the CoR, presented the preliminary findings of the OECD-CoR Survey on the SDGs as a framework for the COVID-19 recovery. Mr. Rio explained that the **SDGs have almost disappeared from the EU narrative while the commitment of local and regional governments on SDGs has actually increased during the COVID-19 pandemic**. He pointed out that there is **no overarching strategy on SDGs at EU level and no mainstreaming of the SDGs in the European Commission's internal governance**. He stressed that the latest EU policy document on SDGs is a Staff Working Document listing different EU initiatives one after the other and labelling them SDGs ex post, which is far from ensuring policy coherence and SDGs mainstreaming in policies. Likewise, the systematic involvement of stakeholders in SDGs policy making had an abrupt stop when the mandate of the EU multi-stakeholder platform on the SDGs was not renewed.

Mr. Rio stressed that the [OECD programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#) and the survey findings will be a tremendous help in the endeavour to better link the recovery and the SDGs. The survey showed that an overwhelming majority of respondents is working on the SDGs:

- **Using indicators and measurement system to track progress and awareness raising campaigns are the actions most widely adopted by local and regional authorities** – more than 40% of respondents have either used one of the two or both.
- **Political leadership at the local/regional level is considered as the most important success factor** for SDGs implementation in cities and regions.

- 60% of local and regional authorities consider the **SDGs as a suitable framework for designing a holistic approach to the COVID-19 recovery** – a key finding to advocate for the SDGs to be more prominent in the EU recovery effort.
- 40% of respondents have been using the SDGs before the pandemic and now started to use them to address the recovery, while 44% have not used them before but are planning to do so to recover from COVID-19. The social dimension is seen as the biggest challenge post-COVID.
- Questions on specific SDGs revealed that **digital health solutions are considered the top priority** regarding SDG 3. Moreover, for around half of local and regional authorities, the decrease of pollution or the promotion of healthy lifestyles are the top priority.
- **A half of the respondents consider the improvement of multi-modal transport, such as active and clean urban mobility with public transport, proximity and walkability as main contributor to sustainable mobility** and accessibility (SDG 11).
- To help strengthening citizens' trust in their governments and achieve SDG 16, respondents consider **engaging citizens and territorial stakeholders in local and regional policy-making** as the most effective tool.

Mr. Rio stressed that **one of the biggest challenges in the SDGs discussions is to show that they are not an abstract agenda but have a tangible impact on the daily life of citizens**. This can be the quality of health, well-being, the reduction of air pollution or new solutions to transportation. In order to have an impact on these topics, Mr. Rio advocated for a **mobilisation of all actors and local stakeholders** including the citizens themselves. To that end, he deemed it important to **identify areas in which cities and regions can develop specific initiatives that will lead to the achievement of the goals**. He emphasised that it is also very **important to monitor progress** and to make a concrete commitment to accountability and use the SDGs to restore trust in the government.

Panel discussion

Antoine Neumann, Counsellor, Delegate for Agriculture and Food Policy, City of Strasbourg, France

Antoine Neumann, Counsellor and Delegate for Agriculture and Food Policy at the [City of Strasbourg](#), France, elaborated on the city's efforts to achieve the SDGs. The city of Strasbourg and the Eurométropole Strasbourg, which comprises the city and its 32 surrounding municipalities, have been active in the localisation of the SDGs since 2018. Mr. Neumann pointed out that the **SDGs enable the city to jointly take into account three major priorities of the city government, namely climate, social justice and democracy**. Mr. Neumann stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the limits of human activity with regards to the respect for the biosphere and nature. It also **highlighted the global interdependencies** and showed that no part of the global community is immune to the consequences of ongoing and accelerating disruptions.

The city has developed a [pact for local and sustainable economy](#) that illustrates **Strasbourg's commitment to amplify the local ecological, social and digital transition and responsible corporate action**. It **brings together local stakeholders to drive the transition towards a sustainable development model** that should benefit the local economy, preserves the environment and health of all. Mr. Neumann mentioned the example of Strasbourg's public procurement policy, which has recently been reviewed in light of the city's commitments and is now aligned with the SDGs framework.

Responding to a question on the role of the food policy in the broader strategy on SDGs localisation in Strasbourg, Mr. Neumann stressed that there was no holistic vision when his administration took office. The city of Strasbourg therefore decided to propose a **food policy pact, founded on the SDGs as a lever**

for transformation considering all the impacts of food policy for citizens, the private sector and the environment. Through a new agreement with the regional water protection agency, the city has obtained funding that will be used to support local farmers in their transition to non-polluting agricultural practices and protecting water resources. The city has also set up an **urban agriculture project in unprivileged neighbourhoods, which aims to involve the local population in urban farming, provides work opportunities and raises awareness of healthy nutrition**. Mr. Neumann concluded by emphasising the importance of carrying the message of transformation to the European level and **making the SDGs a decision-making tool within the framework of the European semester**, considering the local level as a key actor.

Åsa Bjerling, Project Manager, International Relations, City of Helsingborg, Sweden

Åsa Bjerling, Project Manager for International Relations at the [City of Helsingborg](#), Sweden, provided insights into the SDGs localisation in Helsingborg. Ms. Bjerling informed the participants that the City of **Helsingborg has conducted two follow-ups on its [quality of life programme](#)**, Helsingborg's steering document for the city's work relating to sustainable development, **to align the strategy with the SDGs**. Around sixty indicators have been analysed and compiled to measure Helsingborg's progress. Ms. Bjerling explained that **Helsingborg is notably strong in the environmental dimension while inequality is a challenge for the city**. However, she suggested to consider that the extent of inequalities cannot yet be fully captured by Helsingborg's data and indicators, which is a challenge that the city is currently working on.

In 2021, the city of Helsingborg published its first [voluntary local review](#), inspired by [Sweden's voluntary national review](#). For Helsingborg, conducting a voluntary local review was a useful tool to **prioritise and focus on specific local policy areas and challenges**. Ms. Bjerling pointed out that Helsingborg is also using the SDGs to a large extent as a framework for the COVID-19 recovery as well as to guide its actions towards climate neutrality and the EU Green Deal. In addition, Ms. Bjerling emphasised the **need for partnerships to achieve the SDGs**. Finally, she reiterated the **need for multi-level governance** and called on higher levels of government and the European Union to support the local level in working on the SDGs.

Responding to a question on the connection between Helsingborg's smart city agenda, the SDGs and its recovery plan, Ms. Bjerling stressed that **Helsingborg is a smart, sustainable and inclusive city using technology to improve the quality of life for people living in the city within the planetary boundaries**. A special budget has been put aside to fund innovations in the city two years ago, which has led to more than 260 innovation projects that are currently ongoing. She lastly emphasised the importance of stressing the social inequalities that need to be addressed as part of the green and digital transformation.

Kirsten Korte, Managing Director, Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region, Germany

In her intervention, Kirsten Korte, Managing Director at the [Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region](#) in Germany, introduced the unique organisational structure of the Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region and presented its innovation strategy. To begin with, Ms. Korte stressed the special characteristics of the Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region, which spans across 15 urban and rural districts in three federal states. The organisation, which is responsible for regional planning and development of the region, is using a multi-level governance approach and public-private partnership model, consisting of a public cooperation, a regional association, and a private limited company. As such, it has a strong tradition in stakeholder engagement through collaborations with the private sector, science, administration and civil society.

Together with its partners, the Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region has elaborated **a regional development concept, which takes the form of an innovation strategy**. Ms. Korte explained that actors from various sectors have worked on this strategy implementing a mixture of lighthouse projects and broad strategic

orientations. The **innovation strategy focuses on green and biotech, the social economy and the digital economy**. Ms. Korte emphasised that as a next step, the **Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region should now align this strategy with the SDGs** and use them to address the region's challenges and opportunities. She furthermore **suggested using the SDGs in the region's recovery strategy**. She also pointed out the **need to improve the region's monitoring system and to make sustainability and innovation more visible** for the citizens in the region.

In response to the question on how to align the policies of three states in an effort to boost sustainability, Ms. Korte reiterated that the **collaboration across three federal states is a challenge and an opportunity in terms of dealing with urban and rural areas at the same time**. She emphasised the need to tie different projects together and to find solutions to bundle funding from three federal states to be able to spend them across the states, which is currently not possible. A first step in that direction is a **mobility pact that the Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region has signed together with the three federal states to holistically rethink mobility in the region**, in particular due to the impacts of COVID-19.

Anna Lisa Boni, Secretary General, Eurocities

In her intervention, Ms. Anna Lisa Boni, Secretary General, [Eurocities](#), described the **SDGs as a common language, transversal, systemic and integrated approach and single framework of actions** that can ensure that all policies contribute in a coherent and integrated way to fight poverty, improve wellbeing, and respect the environment. She clarified that taking this approach can help cities to demonstrate policy results to their citizens. She furthermore described SDG reviews and monitoring as useful tools for cities that want to influence global governance and worldwide phenomena such as climate change and migration.

Ms. Boni also pointed out **that many cities had already adopted the SDGs as an explicit framework to drive their sustainable urban development before the pandemic**. However, **the COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more essential to take sustainable approaches and use the SDGs**. She explained that those cities that are localising the SDGs and promote synergies, an integrated approach and citizen engagement are better positioned for a sustainable and inclusive recovery and can have a more direct impact on the quality of life of people. For Ms. Boni, the **nexus between sustainable development, the post COVID-19 recovery and quality of life is the real long-term goal**. She also emphasised the strong connection between the green deal and the SDGs. For that reason, Eurocities is about to launch the [Mayor's Alliance for the European Green Deal](#) to leverage a win-win city vision where different dimensions of sustainable development come together.

2 City-to-city partnerships to achieve the SDGs

Moderator Ms. Aziza Akhmouch welcomed the participants to the second day of the 4th OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs. She introduced the topics of the two sessions of the day, which focused on i) city-to-city partnerships and how they can help to localise and achieve the sustainable development goals and ii) the role of universities to support cities and regions in that effort. She then provided the participants with some background information on the OECD's support to the [G20 development working group](#) shaping a set of **high level principles on city-to-city partnerships** before introducing the key note speaker Mr. Francesco Rampa from the Prime Minister's Office of the [Italian G20 presidency](#).

G20 High-level Principles on city-to-city partnerships

Francesco Rampa, Prime Minister's Office, Italian Presidency, shared some insights into the development of the G20 High-level Principles on city-to-city partnerships. He stressed that **sustainable development is a key priority of the Italian G20 presidency**, in particular, the **importance of rethinking the role of cities for sustainable development**. Cities have therefore been put on the agenda of the development working group and the sustainability working group, while the digital economy task force is analysing how public procurement can foster sustainable development through information technologies. Mr. Rampa emphasised the **interlinkages between urban planning and the SDGs** and explained that **cities need to be closer to the human needs** to lead to a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future that leaves no one and no place behind.

He explained that the **development ministers of the G20 have committed to work at all levels of government to support local authorities to lead the efforts towards sustainable development** with a particular focus on addressing climate change and the importance of intermediary cities for urban-rural linkages and system transformation. He also informed the participants that the G20 development working group is preparing to launch a **platform for policy dialogue on intermediary cities and their role for sustainable development** by the end of the year. The Italian presidency will also launch the Ten Rome G20 High-level Principles on city-to-city partnerships by the end of the year.

Subsequently, Mr. Rampa invited participants to provide their feedback on the principles and underlined that these **principles should be owned by all stakeholders** and be used to keep the G20 and the international community accountable for their actions. Lastly, he **advocated for result-oriented city-to-city partnerships**. He also suggested to use monitoring frameworks to analyse the success and possible bottlenecks of city-to-city partnerships and SDGs localisation.

Box 2. Ten G20 Rome High-level Principles on city-to-city partnerships for localising the SDGs

1. Territorial Approach. Promote city-to-city partnerships as a means to enhance the implementation of a territorial approach in responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing vulnerability to climate change.

2. Multi-level Governance. Strengthen multi-level integrated governance and coordination for greater effectiveness of city-to-city partnerships and for more demand-based initiatives, while considering local and regional contexts and responding to the specific needs of different geographical areas and governance systems, as appropriate.

3. Rural-urban Connectivity. Enhance rural-urban connectivity, and co-operation, including between primary and intermediary cities, including through past G20 work on infrastructure.¹

4. Data and Indicators. Encourage local and regional governments to exchange approaches and practices in mainstreaming SDGs indicators into planning and policy documents at all levels of government and produce disaggregated data towards strengthened context-specific analysis and assessment of territorial disparities in collaboration with national governments, which could also support countries in developing their Voluntary National Reviews.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation. Taking into account different national and local contexts, develop monitor and evaluation (M&E) indicators towards a result framework for evidence-based city-to-city partnerships, documenting their impact and providing recommendations to optimise those partnerships.

6. Peer-to-peer Learning. Focus on mutual benefit, peer-to-peer learning, support and review in city-to-city partnerships, including the exchange of knowledge on sustainable urban planning and capital investment planning.

7. Capacity Development. Support capacity development and build local managerial capital and skills for effective, efficient and inclusive city-to-city partnerships implementation.

8. Stakeholder Engagement. Engage all relevant stakeholders to implement territorial network modalities of city-to-city partnerships towards the achievement of the SDGs, including by establishing partnerships with the private sector.

9. Financing. Call on local and regional governments to develop effective financing and efficient resource mobilisation strategies and instruments in collaboration with national governments as appropriate, through existing mechanisms to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through city-to-city partnerships, including by integrating the SDGs in budgeting processes.

10. Digitalisation. Develop strategies to build human, technological, and infrastructural capacities of the local and regional governments to make use and incorporate digitalisation best practices in city-to-city partnerships.

Responding to a question on the role of G20 member countries in connecting the dots between different SDG localisation initiatives, Mr. Rampa stressed the central role of the G20 and the national governments. He explained that **SDGs localisation is a shared task but not necessarily easy to implement due to regulatory, legislative or cultural resistance to the application of the subsidiarity principle in a multi-level governance system.** He therefore suggested that governments should increasingly commit to subsidiarity and apply the principle in the future. In addition, he **encouraged governments to support**

¹ Including: the Principles on Quality Infrastructure Investment, the G20 Guidelines on Quality Infrastructure for Regional Connectivity and the G20 High Level Principles on Sustainable Habitat through Regional Planning.

the global south in their efforts to localise the SDGs and foster the subsidiarity principle. Furthermore, he underlined the importance of the G20 as a platform for discussion between national governments.

In response to a question why the Italian G20 presidency put a **specific focus on intermediary cities**, Mr. Rampa stated that the selection was mainly political and **based on a sustainability model refocusing on people's way of living together within the planetary boundaries**. Secondly, it was related to the need of **supporting urban-rural linkages**. He explained that there are strong inequality in services and economic opportunities between rural and urban areas, which is behind many of the trends that need to be rebalanced. In this context, **intermediary cities** are typically located in the spatial continuum between remote rural areas and the capital that has the **potential to create economic opportunities** and a more local food supply based on connectivity.

Regarding the role of the private sector in city-to-city partnerships, Mr. Rampa declared that the **private sector is considered in the principles as part of an inclusive and multi-stakeholder process**. He stressed the role of the private sector to foster partnerships and emphasised the economic opportunities that the concept of intermediary cities provide. He highlighted that there is a lot to learn from SMEs to create economic opportunities and stated the **private sector should therefore be included in the G20 High-level Principles on city-to-city partnerships**.

Panel discussion

Christine Moro, Ambassador and Head of Delegation for External Action of Local Authorities, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France

Ms. Christine Moro, Ambassador and Head of Delegation for External Action of Local Authorities, [Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs](#), France, provided the participants with some insights into French development cooperation. She explained that it was **less difficult for local authorities in France to integrate the SDGs in their international cooperation than in their local domestic policies**. This is because even before the adoption of the SDGs, the topics addressed by French local authorities in their development cooperation were much in line with the SDGs. Access to water and sanitation is the most popular decentralised cooperation topic among French local governments. Other priorities are the fight against poverty, food production, health, education and tackling climate change. Ms. Moro pointed out that the integration of the vocabulary of the SDGs was difficult at first, but later also had positive effects on the domestic policies. Ms. Moro also informed the participants about a new law in France, which highlights the importance of local governments in international cooperation. In particular, the **new law will oblige local authorities to report on how they implement the SDGs in their domestic policies and their international cooperation**.

In response to a question on how France is dealing with refugees and their access to the labour market in the context of its city to city partnerships, Ms. Moro explained that local governments are registering the financial support given to refugees, including scholarships for students from developing countries. Moreover, there are international cooperation projects in place led by French local authorities in partner countries where many refugees and displaced people live.

Nicole A. Hofmann, Senior Policy Officer, Federal States and Local Authorities Division, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany

Nicole A. Hofmann, Senior Policy Officer, Federal States and Local Authorities Division, [German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development](#) (BMZ), Germany, shared some information about Germany's decentralised development cooperation policy. To begin with, she expressed that the

achievement of the SDGs requires a wide range of actors and a clear strategy of roles and responsibilities. According to her, BMZ is very committed to the localisation of the SDG through north-south cooperation. In its decentralised development cooperation activities, **BMZ also applies the concepts of subsidiarity and peer learning.** Ms. Hofmann described the **Federal states in Germany as intermediaries for the coordination of the programmes.**

In 2012, BMZ started to support city-to-city partnerships and established a special agency to provide guidance to German municipalities in setting up and managing their partnerships. The budget of the agency has increased from EUR 7 million in 2012 to more than EUR 80 million and offers different capacity building programmes and project funding for German municipalities and their partners. **One of the challenges that BMZ has encountered is to ensure the quality of the deliverables of city-to-city partnerships,** which varies significantly across the different actors involved in the programme. Ms. Hofmann furthermore informed the participants that **Germany is taking a multi actor perspective in its inter-governmental development negotiations.** Country level preparations for instance include stakeholder meetings where municipalities, federal states as well as civil society actors are participating. She mentioned that German municipalities and their partners in the global south are also represented by [Germany's service agency SKEW](#), the country's competence centre for municipal development policy, to foster bottom-up planning possibilities.

Imme Scholz, Co-Chair, Independent Group of Scientists for the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report

Imme Scholz, Co-Chair, Independent Group of Scientists for the [2023 Global Sustainable Development Report](#), informed the participants that **the new Independent Group of Scientists for the 2023 Global Sustainable Development report is currently in the elaboration phase for their outline and key messages for the next GSD Report** as well as the briefing at the upcoming High-level Political Forum. In particular, the group is identifying the topics and scales, on which it will focus. She stated that the group would **need to look at the impact of COVID-19 as well as new trends such as climate neutrality,** which will attract a lot of political and economic energy. According to her, **the levers for the implementation of the SDGs and for ensuring policy coherence, span from STI policies, economic and financial policies to individual and collective action and multi-level governance.** She pointed out that more attention needs to be paid to multilevel governance arrangements. In particular, **it should be assessed where they favour local implementation and where their role is more about vertical coordination,** which is **needed to ensure policy coherence** and to avoid that localisation is leading to stronger territorial inequality.

Reacting to a question on the narrative of the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report, Ms. Scholz explained that the new **Independent Group of Scientists is currently exploring the state of research on the application of the levers of the 2019 report,** which are STI policies, economic and fiscal policies, individual and collective action and governance. Lastly, she stressed that the plan of the Independent Group of Scientists is to report on what is known about the use of the levers and what is known about their non-use.

Marlene Holzner, Head of Unit, Civil Society and Local Authorities, DG INTPA, European Commission

In her intervention, Marlene Holzner, Head of Unit, Civil Society and Local Authorities, [DG INTPA](#), European Commission, presented the European Commission's approach to decentralised development cooperation. She expressed her belief that **decentralised development cooperation is a helpful tool for the European Commission to support its local and regional governments and the authorities in their partner countries** in their work on the SDGs localisation. She explained that the **European**

Commission provides the financing but considers the local authorities as partners that can select their own peers to collaborate with and determine their preferred type of partnership.

Based on calls for proposals, the **European Commission assesses possible partnerships with regards to their contribution to good governance, the European Green Deal, economic growth, job creation, digitalisation and migration** and selects the partnerships to support. Between 2018 and 2020, the Commission financed **partnerships of a total volume of EUR 165 million**. Ms. Holzner also presented a new web portal, which allows EU member states, private companies and local authorities to find project partners and funding for decentralised development projects so that these do not need to rely on the Commission's financing.

Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat

Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch, [UN-Habitat](#), clarified that **localising the SDGs does not mean that local authorities can fulfil this task on their own**. Instead, the **localisation has to be part of a multi-level governance framework**, where national governments have to play the role of enablers and coordinators. She stressed that this **governance context is needed for local governments to play a major role to accelerate the progress towards the SDGs**.

Ms. Narang Suri also explained the term of SDG localisation and its understanding. Based on reflections within UN-Habitat, she explained that the **first part of SDG localisation is the fact that everyone embraces the SDGs, understands the SDGs and agrees that the SDGs are the guiding framework for development** going forward. It thus plays an important role in terms of advocacy, communication and education, which is where city-to-city partnerships can contribute. The **second part of SDG localisation according to her is the policy, planning and budgetary alignment**, which requires normative support and guidance, among other things through the work of international organisations like UN-Habitat and the OECD. **The third part is the alignment of investments towards the SDGs and the assessment of the SDG-impact** of projects and funding, which is where the private sector comes in. In that sense, city-to-city partnerships are not only about local government partnerships but also about a whole of city approach to the partnership. **The fourth part of SDG localisation is monitoring and reporting**. Ms. Narang Suri explained that SDG localisation is about granular, disaggregated data, indicators, and developing indicator frameworks. Lastly, she stressed the importance of the framework of city-to-city partnerships being underpinned by national and international facilitation and support.

Ms. Narang Suri also highlighted that the UN Secretary General has made a strong commitment to inclusive multilateralism being the way of doing business for the UN in the future. This means integrating more stakeholders, including local and regional governments, into international negotiations. In order to foster such an integrative approach, the UN is revamping the [Local 2030 Platform](#) towards the Decade of Action to take the international development agenda to the local level. She also pointed towards the regional UN forums on sustainable development, which according to her put a lot of emphasis on the dialogue between governments and local actors.

Group discussion

In the following group discussion, the different panellists shared their views and thoughts on the Draft G20 High-level Principles on city-to-city Partnerships presented by Mr. Rampa:

- **Christine Moro, Ambassador and Head of Delegation for External Action of Local Authorities, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France**
 - Ms. Moro declared that France supports the emphasis on intermediary cities, as it is important not only to focus on big cities and keeping in mind the inequalities across territories. According to her, it is a question of justice to create opportunities for smaller sized cities and to relieve

the burden put on large cities. She also pointed out that the principles of rural-urban connectivity and reciprocity are very much in line with the French approach.

- **Nicole A. Hofmann, Senior Policy Officer, Federal States and Local Authorities Division, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany**
 - Ms. Hofmann stressed that the principles are very relevant for the work of the German government. Building on that she raised the question how one can best integrate a multi-sectoral approach at subnational level, in particular in terms of coordination and harmonisation of actions. She also pointed towards the importance of funding and financing, notably the need to leverage funds and expertise rather than solely distributing funds from the national to the sub-national level. She urged the OECD to help national and sub-national governments to understand how to make development cooperation more effective to achieve the SDGs.
- **Imme Scholz, Co-Chair, Independent Group of Scientists for the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report**
 - Ms. Scholz expressed her delight to see the G20 taking the initiative to boost learning and implementation of the SDGs at city level and using partnerships as a support tool. In that context, she stressed the importance of measuring the impact of cities on the SDGs. According to a survey among German cities engaged in city-to-city partnerships, most of the German cities are engaged in shaping their public procurement systems to make it more fair and sustainable. She suggested to consider that the application of fairness and sustainability principles in public procurement could have a huge impact on countries from the global south as German cities are responsible for 50% of public procurement. Concerning the principles, Ms. Scholz questioned whether cities are actually staffed to implement those principles considering that development cooperation agencies and specialist firms exist for a reason.
- **Marlene Holzner, Head of Unit, Civil Society and Local Authorities, DG INTPA, European Commission**
 - Ms. Holzner stated to be in line with the previous speakers and notably with the proposed G20 High-level principles on city-to-city partnerships, particularly regarding the need for monitoring. She shared her concern that the individual monitoring of a partnership is very context-specific, which is why the OECD and the European Commission are working on the development of a homogenous monitoring and evaluation framework for city-to-city partnerships. She explained that the Commission is also trying to set up a coordination mechanism among all those who participated in the EC's call for project and entered in an EC-financed city-to-city partnership, in order to compile a list of best practices and examples.
- **Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat**
 - In her statement, Ms. Narang Suri stressed the importance of building partnerships around the issue of indicator mainstreaming and sharing how indicators are being developed and applied. She also addressed the topic of resource mobilisation and integrating the SDGs into planning and budgeting. She advocated for an increase in resource mobilisation for development cooperation in general and even more so for a redistribution to shift money and resources to the local level where they can be effectively used and deployed. Lastly, she pointed out that the discussion around digitalisation and innovation, which she deems to be a central topic to be featured in discussions about any kind of partnership, is not fully captured in the G20 principles.

Mr. Rampa thanked the participants and panellists for their feedback. He clarified **that the principles do not intend to mean that a city-to-city partnership can solve the whole aspiration of the SDGs.** Instead, they will inspire a **Compendium that should be a living document that gets frequently updated** based on the experience of individual city-to-city partnerships and the analysis of success factors. He stated his belief that **the issue of sustainable procurement and digital innovation will become part**

3 The role of universities to support cities and regions to achieve the SDGs

Mr. Raffaele Trapasso, Programme Coordinator of the [HEInnovate programme at the OECD](#), opened the second session of the day focusing on the role of universities to support cities and regions to achieve the SDGs. He explained that higher education institutions are both local and international actors and thus very good partners for cities and regions in their SDG localisation efforts. He referred to the previous discussions about city-to-city partnerships stating his hope that the terms partnership, capacity to manage complexity, evaluation and monitoring would also lead the discussion of the second session of the day. He then introduced the keynote speech by Ms. María Cortes-Puch, Vice-President of the Network Program at the [Sustainable Development Solutions Network](#) (SDSN).

Keynote speech by María Cortes-Puch, Vice-President, Network Program, Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)

Ms. Cortes-Puch, Vice-President, Network Program, [Sustainable Development Solutions Network](#) (SDSN), declared that **achieving the SDGs requires deep economic, social and technological transformations, including amongst others the rapid scale-up of high quality social services**, such as health and education, **a shift to net zero carbon emissions** and **deep changes to the global food systems**. According to her, this will need unprecedented problem solving, cross-disciplinary thinking and the rapid dissemination of sustainable development technologies. She pointed out that all of these depend on the engagement of universities as centres of knowledge generation and knowledge repositories. She explained that **universities are key conveners for local communities and can strengthen public engagement on the SDGs**. Furthermore, they can support policymaking through research, incubate new solution and new businesses.

Ms. Cortes-Puch noted that **local and regional often face constraints** such as limited political and fiscal power, lack of coordination with other levels of government and thus an inability of participating in multi-stakeholder partnerships. According to her, **universities as multidisciplinary knowledge centres can help cities to address these challenges and support them in the design of SDG-focused policies**. They can clarify the interaction between multiple goals, identify trade-offs and assess the opportunities of synergetic policies. In some cases, **universities are already collaborating with cities to localise the SDGs**, notably taking the role of advisers, through the exchange of staff, secondments or joint research projects. University researchers are also working very closely with city officials on data, the identification of meaningful SDG metrics and indicators to track progress at the local level.

Another crucial area of collaboration is education. Universities provide students with knowledge, skills and the motivation to understand and address the SDGs, thereby empowering them to become actors of change. The fact that SDSN's guide on accelerating education for the SDGs in universities is the

organisation's most consulted resource underlines the important role of education. Ms. Cortes Puch stressed that **universities are increasingly incorporating local real examples and case studies into their curricula to illustrate SDG learning**, work with cities and invite local government officials as speakers or visiting professors. **Universities are also developing awareness raising programmes on the SDGs**. Lastly, Ms. Cortes-Puch pointed out that through their expertise, independence, social trust, and long-term perspective, **universities are the ideal place to help convene stakeholders**, which will be needed to achieve the deep transformations that the SDGs call for.

In the following discussion with the moderator, Ms. Cortes-Puch addressed the question, which transformations universities need to undergo to be able to cooperate with cities. She pointed out that it is a question that SDSN has been working on and which is also featured in their guide on accelerating education for the SDGs in universities, where the organisation presents cases of universities undergoing transformation processes. Ms. Cortes-Puch stressed that **transformation processes are a challenging task for universities due to their long traditions, the need to ensure the quality of services and their independence**. SDSN therefore suggests to **create working groups involving different actors linked to the university**. These should include the university leadership, individual faculties, students and the administration to work together to propose changes that increasingly get integrated in the institution while the university continues to be able to deliver its mandate.

Panel and group discussion

Johan Blaus, Senior Advisor, KTH Stockholm, Sweden

For Mr. Johan Blaus, Senior Advisor, [KTH Stockholm](#), Sweden, much of the keynote speech resonates well in the case of KTH Stockholm. Since its inauguration almost 200 years ago, KTH had a very close relationship with the city of Stockholm, providing the society with engineers to transform the city for the industrial revolution. Later on, when successful global companies developed in Stockholm, KTH still served as the backbone for the city as a place to educate its engineers. **The university also played a key role in the transformation towards a green city** supporting the transition through technology development.

Over the past years, the **city of Stockholm intensified its cooperation with KTH realising the need for alliances to tackle the city's challenges transitioning to a green and sustainable future**, which has also put the SDGs into the centre of KTH's attention. Among other things, they collaborated in the design of Sweden's largest strategic innovation programme *Viable Cities* that is led by KTH Stockholm and coordinates a range of climate contracts with Swedish cities, engaging cities and universities in Sweden in environmental sustainability and providing a mechanism for peer learning.

Responding to the moderator's question about what kind of improvements would be needed to allow for a better cooperation between universities and city councils to promote the SDGs at the local level, Mr. Blaus highlighted the **facilitation of staff mobility between organisations as one of the key items**. According to him, systematic shifting between research, city administration and private companies throughout the work life would also facilitate the collaboration between the different sectors. At KTH Stockholm, such partnerships already exist with some global companies. In addition, Mr. Blaus also emphasised the **importance of procurement** and the **key role that cities and regions play with regards to the procurement of technology and solutions to local development challenges**. In that context, he advocated to **use cities as living laboratories to experiment with new technology** and solutions. Lastly, he also mentioned the **importance of an active and ongoing dialogue between cities and universities** as the provision of education and the development of competence are long-term projects.

Denis Gauvreau, Director of Innovation and Business Management, Polytechnique de Montréal, Canada

Denis Gauvreau, Director of Innovation and Business Management, [Polytechnique de Montréal](#), Canada, provided the participants with some examples of **collaboration projects between the university and the city of Montréal, which is the university's largest contract partner**. They have been collaborating for instance on a number of **projects on water**, in particular water treatment. Another **key area of cooperation is the topic of mobility and transportation engineering**, notably modelling the interaction between urban travel behaviour and spatial dynamics as well as interactions between travel behaviours and public health. Other examples include a number of projects on cybersecurity and the **establishment of the Institute of Sustainable Engineering and Net Zero Economy**, a platform dedicated to CO₂ capture and conversion. As part of the Institute, the university has created the so-called *training education access* to train students in sustainable engineering and providing them with the expertise to find solutions for sustainable development challenges.

Responding to the moderator's question about what kind of improvements would be needed to allow for a better cooperation between universities and local governments to promote the SDGs at the local level, Mr. Gauvreau explained that **cities need to become the strongest broker with the provincial or national government to support the SDGs**. Furthermore, universities should get more involved in the localisation of the SDGs. According to him, the **SDGs localisation requires multiple actors** including the city that has a specific problem or challenge, universities that can provide solutions and train people, the industry as long-term product supplier and investors to secure the necessary funding. He also elaborated on the concept of research and technology organisations (RTO) such as the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research, which provide platforms, infrastructure and the critical mass of people and equipment for research and innovation. He explained that such **RTOs could be the space to create a network of partners from different sectors to improve the collaboration on the SDGs** and finding solutions to local challenges.

Erin Bromaghim, Director of Olympic and Paralympic Development and Hilton Fellow on the SDGs, City of Los Angeles, US

Erin Bromaghim, Director of Olympic and Paralympic Development and Hilton Fellow on the SDGs, [City of Los Angeles](#), US, provided insights into the collaboration between the higher education sector and the city of Los Angeles on the SDGs. She informed the participants that **Los Angeles is currently in the preparation phase of its second VLR, which connects to the work of and partnerships with universities in the city**. According to her, the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown the importance of local residents' living situations, which is one of the topics Los Angeles' 2021 VLR focuses on, be it with regards to housing, food security or healthcare or transportation. Ms. Bromaghim explained that the **city has been working with over 160 students across five partner institutions, which has become a key foundation of the city's work with respect to the SDGs**.

The collaboration with students has taken several different shapes over the past four years. First, the **city of Los Angeles has hosted summer cohorts in 2018 and 2020, where students from its university partners came together in project teams with a city client over 10 weeks to solve local issues**. They built for instance data layers and a decision-making support tool looking at equity and the distribution of street assets, like bus benches and bike racks to actually building out new data sources and indicators under SDG 15 that linked back to the city's biodiversity index. Second, the **city also works directly with university faculties setting up semester-long SDG taskforces**, where an entire class is dedicated to a local development challenge in Los Angeles. Thirdly, the **city offers internships and fellowships to students to integrate them into the day-to-day work on SDG localisation** in the city. Ms. Bromaghim pointed out that the **collaboration between the city and the students has had a strong multiplier effect**

for **Los Angeles** in terms of the value added for the city both regarding the relationships built and the ecosystem created around the work of the SDG localisation.

Responding to a question on how to make the collaboration between cities and universities more relevant and impactful, Ms. Bromaghim emphasised the **importance of having dedicated personnel working on partnerships**. She pointed out that it is **necessary to have someone to broker parties together, create projects on an ongoing basis, oversee them, help them grow and understand both sides** in order to avoid ad-hoc collaboration. She also highlighted the need for a person who can understand and translate between the students' SDG projects she mentioned earlier and policy experts to ensure that the outcome of the collaboration between a city and a university can actually be incorporated into the city's work.

Sean Fox, Senior Lecturer, University of Bristol, United Kingdom and Allan Macleod, Sustainable Development Goals Coordinator, City of Bristol, United Kingdom

Mr. Sean Fox, Senior Lecturer, [University of Bristol](#), United Kingdom, provided the participants with insights into the work the University of Bristol has undertaken on the SDG localisation. He explained that the **university tries to serve as a responsive collaborative providing research support and facilitating stakeholder dialogue**. Moreover, it **has produced the UK's first VLR for the city of Bristol**. The origin of the university's SDG engagement dates back to 2017, when Bristol's Green Capital Partnership, a local CSO, commissioned a report from the university's environmental policy students on the relevance of the SDGs for the city, which eventually led to the creation of a research and facilitation vacancy to support the CSO's offshoot network, the SDG Alliance. Over the course of the past years, this role has become one of translational research fostering local dialogue and the exchange with other cities through stakeholder dialogues and city networks.

Through these dialogues, the **city of Bristol started to reflect on the integration of the SDGs into its city's planning and monitoring and evaluation processes, which led to the alignment of Bristol's One City Plan with the 2030 Agenda**. Mr. Fox highlighted that the preparation of the VLR by the university, in partnership with the City Office at Bristol City Council and members of the Bristol SDG Alliance, led to kind of a snowball effect. It attracted the attention of the British Council and a local law firm that decided to contribute to the preparation process, which underlines the **potential of local partnerships**. Lastly, he pointed out that **the university's engagement on the SDGs was also a great way to satisfy its mandate as a global and civic university**.

Mr. Fox also reinforced Ms. Bromaghim's remarks on the **importance of having a dedicated resource devoted to translate the SDGs into actions and working on partnerships for the SDGs**. Another topic he commented on is the issue of local politics. He stressed that regardless which party is in power, universities and mayors always need to get along with each other considering the large importance of universities for local employment. He explained that this relation creates sort of a political firewall, which prevents the universities from being overly politicised. In that context, Mr. Fox highlighted the **versatility of the SDGs allowing them to be instrumentalised for almost any political agenda**, which insulates them from political wins.

In addition, Mr. Fox highlighted the role universities can play vis-à-vis non-business stakeholders such as civil society networks and other local organisations, in particular with regards to immediate concerns of the local communities. He pointed out that these **local issues are of much higher relevance for local communities than abstract global agendas** and that **tackling them is thus necessary to get the buy-in from the local population**. According to him, **universities do have a very important role in empowering other organisations as well and supporting their efforts relating to the SDGs**. To foster such efforts, the University of Bristol has also adjusted its promotions framework and made civic engagement one pillar of the evaluation criteria.

Mr. Allan Macleod, Sustainable Development Goals Coordinator, [City of Bristol](#), United Kingdom, pointed out the importance of finding ways how the whole city can collaborate. According to him, universities can be crucial in such collaboration efforts for example on issues of the alignment of employment and enrolment. As key employers and key educators, **the way that universities operate and the strategies that they follow have a considerable impact on the achievement of the SDGs**. He explained that universities provide opportunities for young people, for instance through work placements and work experience offered jointly with local governments, as mentioned previously in the discussions. A second point he raised was about how universities can collaborate with each other and with the local governments on lobbying and holding other actors accountable, how they can contribute to the implementation of the SDGs and adding the local voice and how they can leverage businesses and SMEs. He mentioned the example of Bristol, where a local climate advisory committee supports the city's work on carbon neutrality. Mr. Macleod also touched on the topic of academics and researchers engaging with **complex local development challenges**, which according to him **need the weight of research behind them to be successfully tackled**.

Lastly, Mr. Macleod conveyed his belief that it is **essential for a university to get behind the ambitions of a city in order to commit to a partnership**. In Bristol for example, the city council and the Bristol city office are essential to navigate both the large corporate structure of the local government and large corporate structures elsewhere. He stated that those **gateways into different organisations are key conveners for the engagement on sustainable development across citizens, businesses, academia and local governments**.

Concluding remarks and next steps

Mr. Stefano Marta, Coordinator of the OECD programme on [A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#) provided his concluding remarks and informed the participants about the next steps of the programme.

According to him, the first session of the second day of the Roundtable was very useful in order to receive feedback from the panellists and the audience on the G20 High-level Principles on city-to-city partnerships. In particular, Mr. Marta highlighted four key messages. First, he stated that it is crucial to stress the **importance of monitoring and evaluation of city-to-city partnerships**. Secondly, he pointed out the **importance of multi-level governance for city-to-city partnerships**, including the consideration of the coordination between cities, regions, the national government and the private sector. Thirdly, he underlined the **importance of the principle of reciprocity** and idea of going beyond North-South-cooperation. Lastly, Mr. Marta mentioned the **importance of digitalisation** that emerged in particular against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic. He explained that the OECD will continue to work closely with the Italian G20 presidency on the finalisation of the principles. Furthermore, the OECD is going to leverage on a project that is currently under development with the European Commission focussing on the elaboration of an evaluation framework to assess the impact of city-to-city partnerships to the localisation of the SDGs.

Concerning the second session of day II of the Roundtable, Mr. Marta highlighted the **key role that universities and university networks play in the localisation of the SDGs** and how the SDGs are increasingly getting integrated into university curricula. Moreover, he stressed the **importance of universities as actors that go beyond political cycles** and the role of students contributing to VLRs. Mr. Marta stated that the connection between the higher education sector and the SDGs is an area that the OECD is planning to strengthen further in the future.

Referring back to day I of the Roundtable, Mr. Marta highlighted some key aspects from the discussion on the SDGs as a tool for recovery in cities in regions, including some preliminary results of the joint survey with the Committee of the Regions (60% of local and regional governments considering the SDGs as a suitable framework for designing a holistic approach to the COVID-19 recovery.; 44% of local and regional government not having used the SDGs before the pandemic, but planning to do so now).

Mr. Marta stated that the OECD will continue to work on the SDGs as a tool for the COVID-19 recovery. Among other things, the OECD is going to prepare a policy paper on the survey results, which is supposed to be presented during the European Week of Cities and Regions in October 2021 and the OECD Regional Development Policy Committee in November 2021. Mr. Marta informed the audience about the participation of new pilots in the OECD Programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs and the upcoming launch of the pilot report on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs in Moscow, Russian Federation.

He concluded thanking all speakers for their contribution to the Roundtable, the audience for their active participation in the chat and questions and answers, the OECD team for its excellent work preparing the Roundtable as well as the Committee of the Regions for co-organising the event.