HIGHLIGHTS

The 6th OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs took place on 20 April 2023 in a hybrid format. The Roundtable gathered more than 70 participants onsite and 320 participants online from cities, regions, national governments, the European Commission (Secretariat-General, DG INTPA), and the European Committee of the Regions alongside international organisations (FAO, UN-Habitat, UNDESA, UNOPS, UNWTO), networks of cities and regions (CEMR, Eurocities, ICLEI, UCLG), academia and other stakeholders (GIZ, BMZ, Engagement Global, SDSN, International Water Resources Institute, amongst others (Agenda, List of participants).

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 objectives of the OECD Roundtable were to:

- **Launch** three OECD reports on i) Reshaping Decentralised Development Co-operation in Germany; ii) Decentralised Development Co-operation: A Global Policy Toolkit and Guidance for Practitioners; and iii) City-to-city partnerships to localise the Sustainable Development Goals

- **Analyse** progress on SDG11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities as a contribution to the 2023 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

- **Present** the preliminary results of the OECD-Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)–European Committee of the Regions (CoR) survey on "The role of cities and regions for the SDGs in an uncertain geopolitical context"

- **Discuss** the role of cities in promoting sustainable food systems and addressing the food crisis generated by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

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Summary of Outcomes

Overview

The [6th OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs](#) took place on 20 April 2023 in a hybrid format. The Roundtable gathered more than 70 participants onsite and 320 participants online from cities, regions, national governments, the European Commission (Secretariat General, DG INTPA), and the European Committee of the Regions alongside international organisations (FAO, UN Habitat, UNDESA, UNOPS, UNWTO), networks of cities and regions (CEMR, Eurocities, ICLEI, UCLG), academia and other stakeholders (GIZ, BMZ, Engagement Global, SDSN, International Water Resources Institute, amongst others ([Agenda](#), [List of participants](#))).

The first session of the roundtable addressed the topic of decentralised development co-operation and city-to-city partnerships, and launched three new OECD policy reports on "[City-to-City Partnerships to Localise the Sustainable Development Goals](#)", "[Reshaping Decentralised Development Co-operation in Germany](#)" and "[Decentralised Development Co-operation - A Global Policy Toolkit and Guidance for Practitioners](#)". The second session delved into the renewed role for cities and regions to drive the SDGs through troubled waters, including the presentation of preliminary findings of an OECD-Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)-European Committee of the Regions (CoR) survey on the role of the SDGs for cities and regions in an uncertain geopolitical context. The third session focused on the review of SDG 11. In the fourth session, participants exchanged on the role of cities for sustainable food systems.

Session I - Decentralised development co-operation and city-to-city partnerships: what works?

The first session of the roundtable focused on the crucial role of city-to-city partnerships and decentralised development co-operation (DDC) in advancing the SDGs, addressing global megatrends, navigating the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and managing other shocks, with an emphasis on the importance of sharing guidance, examples, and developing monitoring and evaluation systems for effective DDC implementation.

In the **opening remarks of the first session, Markku Markkula**, **President of the Helsinki Region (Finland) and Vice-President of the European Committee of the Regions**, underscored the necessity of policy alignment across government levels, citing Espoo's commitment to SDG achievement by 2025 as a noteworthy example inspiring other cities. **Lamia Kamal-Chaoui**, **Director of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities,** highlighted a 38% increase in DDC volumes between 2015 and 2021 and emphasised the relevance of targeted partnerships, appropriate legal frameworks, and robust monitoring mechanisms to amplify the impact of SDG-related projects for DDC. **Pilar Garrido, Director of the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate,** pointed out the reciprocity inherent to DDC partnerships and urged central governments to intensify their support to enhance the effectiveness

of SDG collaborations at the local level. **Jochen Steinhilber, Director-General for Displacement, Crisis prevention and Civil society, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in Germany**, acknowledged the policy recommendations from the OECD report on German DDC, recognising the 2030 Agenda's utility in guiding policy priorities. **Erica Gerretsen, Director at DG INTPA, European Commission**, highlighted the EC's commitment to DDC, pointing to the Partnerships for Sustainable Cities programme and the collaborative development of a monitoring framework for city-to-city partnerships with the OECD. Looking forward, Gerretsen invited cities and regions to participate in the EU Global Gateway Strategy.

During the panel discussion that followed the opening remarks, key DDC actors exchanged insights. **Markus Delfs** explained 'IZ's active involvement in DDC and the challenges of its multi-level governance, also underscoring the importance of anchoring DDC within the civil society. **Melanie Habelitz-Wollgam** presented the **State of Bavaria (Germany)'s** DDC approach, which focuses on African countries, vocational training, agriculture, and environmental projects, and envisions a shift from development aid to a broader concept of co-operation. **Verena Schwarte** shared the **City of Bonn's** experience engaging in DDC, emphasising its hands-on activities in fields such as climate change and disaster prevention, and highlighting the importance of political support and long-term perspectives in city partnerships. **Maria Pilar Moreno Fernandez** discussed **Spain's** decentralised model, focusing on improving co-ordination in monitoring and evaluation with a pilot project aligning indicators with the SDGs. **Fabrizio Rossi, CEMR,** stressed the urgency of achieving the SDGs and involving local and regional governments, emphasising the need for monitoring frameworks and investing in capacity-building. **Neila Akrimi, representing VNG International and the UCLG Capacity and Institution Building Working Group,** advocated for the recognition of local governments as key actors in international co-operation, empowering them for effective and sustainable contributions to decentralised development.

Session II - A renewed role for cities and regions to drive the SDGs through troubled waters

The second session of the Roundtable presented the preliminary findings from an OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of SDGs in cities and regions in an uncertain geopolitical context ran between 22 February 2023 and 9 June 2023. The survey takes stock of the progress made by cities and regions in implementing the SDGs, assesses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs and analyses how current crises such as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine are affecting the work on the SDGs and in particular the cost of living, energy and food. In terms of key findings, political leadership emerged as crucial for SDG localisation. The SDGs have become vital for local and regional governments (LRGs) in navigating challenges posed by COVID-19, with a focus on supporting vulnerable populations amid price increases. Notably, 75% of LRGs find SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) very relevant due to rising electricity prices, leading to a heightened emphasis on decarbonisation and building energy efficiency. The survey emphasises local and regional food production as a prevalent action for sustainable food systems. For instance, for 31% of LRGs, SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) has gained importance due to inflation. The final results of the survey will be published as part of an OECD policy paper in the first quarter of 2024.

The session featured a **panel discussion** with contributions from **Markku Markkula, President of the Helsinki Region (Finland)**, emphasising local collaborations, ambitious environmental goals, and the significance of data in SDG implementation. **Rafał Trzaskowski, Mayor of Warsaw (Poland)**, highlighted the role of subnational governments, stressed the importance of indicators, and discussed the EU's comprehensive approach to the SDGs. **Asier Aranbarri Urzelai, Director of Social Innovation for the Basque Country (Spain)**, emphasised the interlinkages of global and local governance of the SDGs and presented transformative programmes addressing social impacts in the Basque Country. **Junko Ota, Policy Researcher from Kitakyushu (Japan)**, shared insights from the city's environmental model with

a focus on offshore wind power, and a three-stage framework for SDG implementation, emphasising the use of qualitative data.

Session III – Towards the Review of SDG 11

The third session highlighted the relevance of assessing the implementation of SDG 11 and underscored the crucial role of local and regional governments in achieving this goal. **Shipra Narang Suri from UN-Habitat** outlined key findings from the UN-Habitat report on SDG 11 for a resilient urban planet, prepared for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)emphasising the need for multisectoral governance. The report underscores the crucial role of local and regional governments in achieving SDG 11 and highlights transformative changes needed for achieving the SDGs by 2030, particularly in housing, basic services, and public transport. **Ricardo Rio, Mayor of Braga** (Portugal), and Rapporteur on the SDGs, European Committee of the Regions, shared Braga's initiatives, using the SDGs as an important tool for city management, particularly for monitoring and evaluation. Mr. Rio also emphasised the importance of policy alignment between government levels. **Laia Pinós Mataro from the European Commission** discussed ongoing EU Voluntary Review efforts, recognising local authorities' pivotal role in SDG implementation. **Riina Jussila, Sustainable Development Officer, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UNDESA**, highlighted the crucial juncture of 2023 for the SDGs, emphasising the UN Secretary-General's call for a rescue plan for people and the planet. The UN's increasing focus on the role of local and regional governments is reflected in the upcoming HLPF sessions and side events. Finally, **Marcos Diaz Ramirez from the OECD** presented how the OECD localised indicator framework for the SDGs and visualisation tool have been used to measure the distance to the SDGs in regions and cities and support the SDGs implementation (e.g. OECD territorial dialogues on SDGs with 11 pilot cities and regions, synthesis report on [A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#) and [Regions and Cities at a Glance](#)). He explained that the OECD will update its indicator framework with recent data.

Session IV – Cities for Sustainable Food Systems

The fourth session of the roundtable featured discussions on the role of cities for sustainable food systems, stressing multi- level food governance, institutionalisation of food strategies, the importance of reducing food waste and promoting urban and peri-urban agriculture. The session also highlighted the pivotal role of cities in integrated urban sustainability and food systems, advocating for a comprehensive approach to policy-making. Additionally, the discussions underscored the significance of data-driven decision-making, emphasising the need for rigorous measurement, evaluation, and collaboration among stakeholders to achieve sustainable food systems.

The discussions built on several examples for advancing the agenda on sustainable food systems. **Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, FAO**, emphasised the need for collaborative efforts to reform food systems, reduce food waste, and promote urban and peri-urban agriculture, while also highlighting the significance of focusing on urban food systems as a priority area. **Anna Scavuzzo, Vice-Mayor of the City of Milan (Italy)**, shared Milan's initiatives to ensure access to healthy food, sustainable production, food education, and waste reduction, showcasing the city's role as a laboratory for innovative solutions to global challenges and the collaborative sharing of ideas and practices among cities worldwide. **Peter Defranceschi, Head of Brussels Office & Global City Food Programme – ICLEI**, highlighted the pivotal role of cities in integrated urban sustainability and food systems, stressing the importance of comprehensive urban food policies, sustainable public procurement, and the power of sustainable food choices and education. Finally, **Koen Deconinck, Economist of the Trade and Agriculture Directorate at the OECD**, focused on the interconnected challenges within food systems, advocating for a comprehensive approach to policy-making. He highlighted the "triple challenge" of food systems: ensuring

food security and nutrition, promoting livelihoods, and addressing environmental sustainability, while also stressing the importance of resilient food systems and the need for alignment and collaboration between cities and national governments.

The conclusions of the Roundtable acknowledged the numerous valuable contributions the participants provided throughout the sessions and highlighted the roundtable's role in raising the profile of local and regional governments by sharing success stories and challenges encountered in working on the SDGs. The conclusions also highlighted the ongoing OECD SDG pilot case studies with various regions, due for publication in 2023 and 2024, and invited participants to attend the next edition of the Roundtable and related events to further raise the profile of cities and regions working on the SDGs.

1 Decentralised development co-operation and city-to-city partnerships: what works?

Opening and highlights from three new OECD reports

Markku Markkula, President of the Helsinki Region, Finland, and **Vice-President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR)**, highlighted the ongoing collaboration between the OECD and the CoR on the localisation of the SDGs. Noting that the world has seen a reversal of progress on the SDGs, Mr Markkula called for policy alignment between different levels of government for the SDGs. He explained that societal innovations and research and technology could help get us back on track to achieve the SDGs, and cited his city of Espoo, which has committed to achieving the SDGs by 2025, as a role model that can inspire other cities. He explained that an increasing number of local and regional governments are now working on the SDGs in co-operation with neighbouring cities and regions, but also with international networks. In this context, he highlighted the EU Voluntary Review and the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) published by different countries and cities from around the world. Finally, he acknowledged the work of the EU, the OECD and the UN on localising the SDGs for the benefit of local and regional governments.

Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, Director, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities, OECD, stressed that subnational governments play a key role in at least two thirds of the SDG targets and account for 55% of public investment in OECD countries. DDC can help subnational governments address challenges such as rapid urbanisation, population growth and budgetary pressures and help contribute to the SDGs. She explained that between 2015 and 2021, the total volume of DDC increased by 38% to reach more than USD 2.8 billion, providing hands-on support for projects related to government and civil society, health, and agriculture and nutrition, among others. Ms. Kamal-Chaoui highlighted three key messages from the three new OECD reports. First, to maximise the impact of the DDC actions, cities and regions should focus their partnerships on those areas where they have developed unique skills and knowledge. Second, the right legal frameworks and incentives set up at the national level can unlock and enhance subnational partnerships. Third, it is important that governments at all levels strengthen monitoring and evaluation of DDC to increase transparency and accountability.

Pilar Garrido, Director, Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD, explained that DDC shows that partnerships are more often a two-way street and do not just flow from north to south. In fact, peer-to-peer learning and mutual benefit are key to the success of DDC. She explained that growing contributions to DDC require renewed efforts from central governments to help improve the effectiveness and impact of SDG partnerships at the local level. Ms. Garrido outlined three ways in which national governments can scale up DDC to support development co-operation strategies that reach people and communities in need.

First, with the right policies in place, DDC can help bring aid closer to citizens. Second, with better multi-level coordination, DDC can facilitate the demand-driven exchange of technical services and expertise. Finally, with better data, impact of DDC on the SDGs can be better understood and communicated. She concluded by looking forward to new findings from the German multi-level DDC study, encouraging a policy dialogue to provide guidance and good practices from the DDC global policy toolkit and seeking to promote further engagement with the development policy community.

Jochen Steinhilber, Director-General for Displacement, Crisis prevention and Civil society, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany, thanked the OECD team for the report on the German DDC and the international peer reviewers involved. He provided a background of German DDC, explaining that development co-operation at the state level emerged in the 1960s, while municipal development co-operation is a more recent phenomenon. He pointed out that federal states have issued several declarations and position papers on DDC. Municipalities often collaborate with the Service Agency Communities in One World on the topics of DDC and localising the SDGs. Referring to the OECD report, Mr. Steinhilber expressed his appreciation for the policy recommendations. According to him, the value of using the 2030 Agenda lies in guiding policy priorities, incentivising new partnerships with like-minded cities and regions, and as a tool to set goals and targets at the local level. Finally, he explained that promoting a policy dialogue on the tangible results and benefits of DDC projects can help raise awareness and political support among citizens and policymakers at home and abroad, ultimately leading to more successful development co-operation initiatives.

Erica Gerretsen, Director DG INTPA, European Commission, thanked the OECD for the collaboration on the topic of DDC, which she described as being part of the EC's DNA. According to her, there is a growing recognition of the importance of local governments in development and governance at the EU level, which she described as key to achieving the SDGs. To support the efforts of local governments, the EC launched the Partnerships for Sustainable Cities programme in 2018, which supports 57 partnerships of local governments in EU member states and partner countries. She explained that the collaboration between INTPA and the OECD led to the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for city-to-city partnerships. This framework allows for the analysis of effective and sustainable city-to-city partnerships, focusing on policies, strategies, governance, data, financing and stakeholder engagement, as well as a comprehensive assessment of a partnership's contribution to the 2030 Agenda. It also unpacks the complexity of SDG 17 at the subnational level, in order to monitor progress for cities and regions. Looking ahead, she invited cities and regions to become part of the EU Global Gateway Strategy.

Panel discussion with spotlight on key DDC actors

Markus Delfs, Regional Director Germany-North, GIZ, explained that GIZ is actively involved in co-operation with subnational governments, working with various partners, including NGOs, academia, and the private sector. Going forward, Mr. Delfs said that there is a need to consider whether DDC should remain sectoral or be more integrated into central activities. He explained that in the changing co-operation environment, European and democratic values are increasingly contested. Therefore, according to him, anchoring DDC with civil society within Europe and Germany is vital. Local and regional governments, which are closer to civil society, have an important role to play in this context, including the involvement of small and medium-sized enterprises. He stressed, however, that bringing different levels of government together is not without its challenges. National and European integration can be complex and resource-intensive. Engaging subnational governments requires additional attention and may have some efficiency costs. GIZ aims to facilitate these alignment processes to maximise benefits and minimise costs for effective implementation.

Melanie Habelitz-Wollgam, Head of Unit; International relations, Development Cooperation, Africa and Middle East; Bavarian State Chancellery, Germany, presented the Bavarian approach to

decentralised development co-operation. In response to the refugee crisis in 2015, the Bavarian government started to engage in projects in African countries. Bavaria decided to focus its activities both geographically and thematically in areas where the state has relevant competencies, such as vocational training, agriculture and the environment. The state is involved both in project financing, with an annual budget of EUR 12 million, and in non-financial contributions to DDC. She also explained the change in terminology from development aid to development co-operation over the past decades, and expressed her vision that one day, all types of activities should simply be summarised as co-operation.

Verena Schwarte, Department of International Affairs and Global Sustainability, City of Bonn, Germany, explained that Bonn has been actively involved in DDC since the late 1990s, going beyond twinning with European cities. Bonn's activities focus on practical issues relevant to municipal action, such as climate change, renewable energy, disaster prevention and gender equality. Bonn has seven partnerships with cities on different continents, and all partnerships are based on city council decisions, giving the city a clear mandate and political support. In each of these partnerships, Bonn also works very closely with partner associations and other civil society and academic partners to ensure continuity when leadership changes. Funding for DDC has improved in Germany thanks to organisations such as Engagement Global. Ms. Schwarte also explained that multi-level co-operation is crucial in DDC. In addition, the long-term perspective of town-twinning is valuable for Bonn, as it provides continuity in challenging times. In addition, these partnerships enable international networking and advocacy work, raising the profile of cities in the implementation of the SDGs. She concluded by highlighting the solidarity shown in the partnerships with Ukrainian cities, as evidence of the impact of DDC.

Maria Pilar Moreno Fernandez, Head of Decentralised Development Cooperation and Education, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Spain, presented the Spanish approach to decentralised development co-operation. She explained that Spain has a decentralised model of development co-operation. According to her, Spain has achieved a high level of co-operation in the planning of its development initiatives, with the full participation and approval of the autonomous communities and local governments. Currently, Spain is focusing on improving coordination in monitoring and evaluation. The country launched a pilot project in 2018 to monitor DDC activities, aligning 33 indicators with the SDGs to improve transparency, accountability and communication. While these indicators do not directly measure progress in partner countries, they serve as a tool to showcase activities across autonomous communities, local authorities, and the central government. The Basque Country, Catalonia and two other autonomous communities, as well as four large local governments, are actively involved in this project. Finally, she highlighted the municipality of Fuenlabrada as an inspiring example of town twinning. Each year, the municipality organises a seminar attended by around 40 officials from Latin American cities, showcasing its municipal services and offering support to partner cities to replicate them.

Fabrizio Rossi, Secretary General, Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), thanked the OECD for producing three insightful reports that can help raise awareness and understanding of the importance of DDC. He underlined the urgency of accelerating efforts towards the SDGs. Looking ahead to the HLPF, he underlined the need to build citizens' confidence in local and regional governments and recognise their excellent work, including in the field of decentralised development co-operation. Mr Rossi underlined that the SDGs cannot be achieved without the involvement of local and regional governments. He stressed the need to support their DDC efforts with monitoring and evaluation frameworks, roadmaps and tools. According to him, investing in knowledge and policy analysis, as is being done through the CEMR platform, is crucial. The CEMR platform currently has 29 partners, including many active local and regional governments such as the Basque Country and Flemish cities. He thanked DG INPTA for its support to the platform and concluded by stressing the need to invest in building the institutional and operational capacity of these regional and local governments engaged in decentralised development co-operation.

In her intervention, **Neila Akrimi, Director of Strategies and Development, VNG International and Chair of the UCLG Capacity and Institution Building (CIB UCLG) Working Group,** explained that the Working Group has been at the forefront of advocating for the recognition and involvement of local governments in development co-operation. It has developed policy papers calling for dialogue and inclusion of the importance of local governments in co-operation efforts worldwide. These papers focus on five key points in line with the OECD reports: i) recognising local governments as key actors and giving them a formal seat at the table in international, regional and national discussions, ii) recognising DDC as a development approach, whether in a sectoral or systemic form, iii) empowering local governments to play their role in international co-operation in an effective and sustainable manner, iv) strengthening decentralised co-operation in financing systems, and iv) advocating for the recognition of the importance of decentralised co-operation at the policy and advocacy level. Finally, she expressed the hope that the new OECD reports and monitoring tool will pave the way for further discussions on the implementation and outcomes of DDC.

In the Q&A session and open discussion that followed, **Stefano Marta, Head of the Smart and Sustainable Cities Unit, OECD**, explained that the monitoring and evaluation framework just launched consists of two lists of indicators: a comprehensive list of 57 indicators suitable for developed countries, and a list of 25 basic indicators that are easier to collect in developing countries to meet their needs. The report also aims to advance the measurement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDGs 11 and SDG 17. In addition, **Rachel Morris, Policy Analyst, Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD**, explained the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) and its role in tracking Official Development Assistance (ODA). The CRS includes markers for climate adaptation, mitigation, gender and the recently introduced SDG markers for projects targeting specific Sustainable Development Goals. In response to a question on the future of city-to-city partnerships, particularly in relation to climate action, **Fabrizio Rosso, Secretary General of CEMR**, explained that city-to-city partnerships need to be mission-driven, going beyond mere synergies, and adopting a long-term, mission-driven approach. They should be community-based, mobilising communities around local leaders. Finally, co-operation should be long-term and sustainable, which poses challenges in terms of funding.

2 A renewed role for cities and regions to drive the SDGs through troubled waters

Preliminary results of the OECD-SDSN-CoR survey

Mr. Lorenz Gross, Economist/Policy Analyst at the OECD, Mr. Eamon Drumm, Senior Programme Officer at SDSN, and Mrs. Audrey Parizel, Policy Officer at the Committee of the Regions, presented preliminary results of an OECD-SDSN-CoR survey on the role of the SDGs for cities and regions in an uncertain geopolitical context. They explained that the survey follows two previous surveys jointly conducted by the OECD and the CoR in 2019 and 2021. The objective of the 2023 survey was to take stock of the progress made by cities and regions in implementing the SDGs, assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on the SDGs and analyse how current crises such as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine are affecting the work on the SDGs and in particular the areas of cost of living, energy and food. The results of the survey will be used to support the OECD Programme on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs, produce an OECD-SDSN policy paper and a CoR map showcasing the commitment of EU regions and cities on SDGs.

The presentation highlighted that awareness-raising campaigns are the most prevalent action adopted by cities and regions to implement the SDGs. Political leadership emerged as a critical success factor in localising the SDGs, and most local and regional governments (LRGs) rely on local, national, and qualitative data for SDG monitoring, while other data sources are used less frequently. Furthermore, the presentation underscored that the SDGs have become a pivotal framework for LRGs to navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, with measures to support vulnerable populations being a common response to price increases. Notably, SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) has gained particular significance for 75% of LRGs, given the rise in electricity prices in the EU, leading to increased focus on shifting from fossil fuels to zero-carbon sources of energy and enhancing building energy efficiency as key strategies/policies for LRGs. Lastly, the presentation emphasised that local and regional food production stands out as a prevailing action toward achieving sustainable food systems. For example, inflation has driven 31% of LRGs to attach greater importance to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), while more than 50% do not view it as a primary concern.

Panel discussion on the results of the survey

Markku Markkula, **President of the Helsinki Region, Finland,** and **Vice-President of the European Committee of the Regions**, emphasised the importance of local engagement and collaboration in achieving SDGs. He discussed the collaborative efforts of six major Finnish cities, including Helsinki, towards the SDGs in the European context. Mr. Markkula highlighted the need for cities to set ambitious

goals for climate and biodiversity, among other dimensions of sustainability. He stressed the significance of better data for tracking progress and noted that no European city has yet fully achieved the SDGs. He shared his city's experience in preparing a voluntary local review involving various stakeholders and citizens to inform city strategies. Finally, Mr. Markkula underscored the importance of indicators and data to evaluate progress and encouraged localising efforts in partnership for effective SDG implementation.

Rafał Trzaskowski, Mayor of Warsaw, Poland, acknowledged the significance of local engagement and regional collaboration in achieving the SDGs. He emphasised the role of regions and cities in implementing the SDGs at the European Union (EU) level and highlighted their proactive involvement as a successful factor in SDG localisation. Mr. Trzaskowski underlined the importance of indicators for tracking progress and stressed that monitoring is crucial for credibility. In addition, he stated that local and regional authorities are key actors in addressing climate and environmental challenges and turning them into opportunities across various policy domains, aligning with the objectives of the EU Green Deal and the SDGs. Mr. Trzaskowski mentioned the EU's commitment to implementing the SDGs through a comprehensive approach, involving regional and local levels. He pointed to the essential role of local and regional authorities in achieving over 65% of SDG targets, as well as energy-related actions taken by his city and other regions to ensure energy security, cost-effectiveness, and inclusion for vulnerable citizens. He concluded by emphasising the necessity of including the perspectives of local leaders in shaping effective policies for SDG implementation.

Asier Aranbarri Urzelai, Director of Social Innovation for the Basque Country, Spain, highlighted the importance of a robust system of global and local governments for the 2030 Agenda. He echoed the significance of involving local, regional, and non-state governments in the process to localise the SDGs and improve global governance. He emphasised the Basque Country's commitment to the 2030 Agenda, focusing on social, climate, energy, and economic transformations. He mentioned the Basque programme for recovery from COVID-19, the support for vulnerable groups facing high energy costs, and the response to the social impact of Russia's war against Ukraine. These programmes collectively address unemployment, energy affordability, and social consequences. Mr Aranbarri Urzelai concluded by affirming that these initiatives align with the 2030 Agenda's principles and objectives, contributing to a greener, digital, and inclusive future for the Basque Country.

Junko Ota, Policy Researcher and Council Member from the City of Kitakyushu, Japan, reflected on the utilisation of the SDGs in various cities and regions in Japan. She discussed Kitakyushu's transformation from a polluted steel city to an environmental model city, emphasising their focus on large-scale offshore wind power generation for climate change, economic growth, and energy security. Qualitative data was highlighted as crucial for evaluating progress on the SDGs and understanding context-specific challenges. Kitakyushu's approach included a three-stage framework, starting with an SDGs cloud platform and progressing to a certification system for small and medium-sized enterprises, promoting adherence to international standards. Ms. Ota underscored unexpected positive outcomes, such as population movements from Tokyo to other Japanese cities due to the pandemic, benefiting cities like Kitakyushu. She concluded by emphasising the need for ongoing efforts to attract and retain residents to add value beyond COVID-19 considerations.

The Q&A session discussed various aspects of localising the SDGs, as well as the challenges faced by local and regional governments. **Pilar Moreno** mentioned the importance of coordination between autonomous communities and the central government in Spain, sharing the announcement that the Secretariat of Local 2030 would operate from Bilbao as of 2024. **Hanne Albert, from the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, Belgium**, raised queries about qualitative assessments for tracking SDG progress, highlighting the need for storytelling to complement quantitative data. **Michel Hidalgo Bordegarai, from the Basque Country** (Spain), discussed Bilbao's efforts to host the Local 2030 Secretariat and emphasised the significance of local action in achieving the SDGs. The conversation then shifted to **Markku Markkula**, who underscored the importance of integrating the SDGs into budgeting

processes at the local and regional levels. **Audrey Parizel, from the European Committee of the Regions**, stressed the need for tailoring sustainability initiatives to local contexts and fostering collaboration between local governments and the private sector. **Aziza Akhmouch, Head of the Cities, Urban Policies and Sustainable Development Division at the OECD,** emphasised the interconnectedness of the SDGs and the challenge of capturing systemic trade-offs, underlining the value of a territorial approach. The discussion also touched on the impact of SDG implementation on the labour market and the importance of focusing on innovative products, services, and processes to achieve SDGs. The Q&A session concluded with a consideration of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of youth, exploring strategies for addressing this issue. The comprehensive exchange highlighted the multifaceted nature of SDG localisation, ranging from political leadership and financing to innovative solutions and community engagement.

3 Towards the review of SDG 11

UN-Habitat perspective on SDG 11

Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat, presented the key findings and policy implications of the SDG 11 report that UN-Habitat is preparing for the HLPF in July 2023. Ms. Suri highlighted the relevance of the SDGs, in particular SDG 11, which aims to make cities and communities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, and mentioned that failure to achieve SDG 11 represents a collective failure with adverse impacts on many other SDGs, including those related to health, education, livelihoods, income, climate, economic growth and innovation. Ms. Suri explained that multi-sectoral governance and multi-level responses are needed to accelerate progress and break the downward spiral on SDG 11 and that local and regional governments play a crucial role in this process. She reinforced that many of the improvements seen in actions taken to achieve the goals and targets (e.g. enhancing methodologies, building capacities, strengthening the focus on localisation and the VLRs movement), as well as in the data, are the result of the collective efforts of all involved, including improvements in methodologies, capacity building, focus on localisation and the movement of Voluntary Local Review Reports (VLRs). Regarding the report in preparation, Ms. Suri mentioned that it puts a lot of emphasis on the changes needed for the next phase by 2030, including to make progress on specific issues, such as access to adequate, safe and affordable housing, basic services, and slum upgrading, as well as access to public transport. She also addressed the issue of national urban policies and the lack of sufficient information on the quality of these policies. In her conclusion, Ms. Suri emphasised the importance of localisation, particularly the need for further joint action from the national to the local level in pursuit of the global goals.

Panel discussion

Ricardo Rio, Mayor of Braga, Portugal and Rapporteur on the SDGs, European Committee of the Regions, presented the main activities adopted by the city of Braga to achieve SDG 11. Mr. Rio explained how Braga uses the SDGs as an essential tool in managing the city, utilising it to monitor progress and identify areas where more initiatives are needed (e.g. monitoring and evaluation, network engagement, sustainability reporting, raising awareness, budget integration, policy alignment, data production and inclusive governance). As a member of the OECD Champion Mayors Initiative for Inclusive Growth, Mr. Rio believes that the concept of inclusive growth is integral to the SDGs. He also mentioned a relevant project in Portugal, conducted in association with the Catholic University and Opal, which provides annual sustainability reports for several cities. Mr. Rio is also a member of the European Committee of the Regions and discussed the role of the committee in supporting the implementation of the SDGs by advising the European Commission on how to adapt policies and funds to promote the localisation of the SDGs. Mr. Rio emphasised the importance of policy alignment between levels of government for the effective implementation of the SDGs and concluded by highlighting the relevance of participating in the High-Level Political Forum, where all EU institutions present a voluntary review of the EU, as a positive step towards inclusive governance.

Laia Pinós Mataro, Deputy Head of Unit, Secretariat General, European Commission, provided some insights from the ongoing EU Voluntary Review and discussed how the European Commission recognises the crucial role that local and regional authorities play in the implementation of the SDGs, particularly pointing out that many cities and regions are already putting the SDGs at the centre of their strategies. Ms. Mataro highlighted that the European Commission is preparing the first European Union Voluntary Review on the implementation of the SDGs, and this work stems from a commitment to the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development, which have been placed at the centre of the EU policy. Ms. Mataro explained that the Voluntary Review aims to increase the visibility of the European Union's work by highlighting the efforts made internally and externally. She showcased that the review will also highlight the challenges faced by the European Union and areas where increased efforts are needed. Ms. Mataro explained that while progress has been made on some SDGs since their adoption, challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis have slowed down progress. In her conclusion, Ms. Mataro reinforced that the European Commission is committed to implementing the SDGs through a comprehensive whole-of-government approach and its six core ambitions and that the Commission is preparing to present the Voluntary Review at the HLPF in July 2023.

Riina Jussila, Sustainable Development Officer, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UNDESA, explained the political process and overall plans on the SDG11 review, in particular with regards to the linkages to other goals and to the SDG Summit. Ms. Jussila indicated that 2023 is crucial for the SDGs, as the trajectory of the goals was off track before the pandemic and continues to be. However, she sees a great opportunity to gain momentum in the run-up to the SDG Summit and implement meaningful change. Ms. Jussila explained that UNDESA will serve as the secretariat for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July and for the SDG Summit. She also noted that there is an increasing focus on the role of local and regional governments in the SDGs at the UN, and that the HLPF will have two sessions focused on the city level, plus several side events addressing local issues. Ms. Jussila reinforced that the UN Secretary-General is very much involved in the preparations for the SDGs Summit, making a call for a rescue plan for people and the planet, and calling for results on three main points: support to developing countries in implementing the SDGs, national commitments from each country for designing concrete action plans, especially on poverty and inequality, and deeper engagement with national stakeholders, emphasising the need for meaningful partnerships and involvement of a diverse range of actors. Ms. Jussila also mentioned the Global Sustainable Development Report, which will be officially launched at the SDG Summit and emphasised urban and peri-urban development as one of the six entry points for transformation. Finally, Ms. Jussila encouraged local and regional governments to respond to this new openness with more vigorous and impactful actions on the SDGs.

Marcos Diaz Ramirez, Economist, OECD, presented how the OECD localised indicator framework for the SDGs and OECD visualisation tool have been used to measure the distance to the SDGs in regions and cities and support the SDGs implementation (e.g. OECD territorial dialogues on SDGs with 11 pilot cities and regions and synthesis reports on [A Territorial Approach to the SDGs](#) and [Regions and Cities at a Glance](#)). Mr. Ramirez also explained that there are about 135 indicators that allow to cover at least one aspect of each of the 17 SDGs for both regions and cities, but the coverage is still higher for regions than for cities. For instance, while 122 indicators (covering 59% of the subnational SDG targets) are available for regions, only 56 indicators (covering 32% of the subnational SDG targets) are currently available for cities. Mr. Ramirez presented the next steps, reinforcing that the OECD aims at updating the framework and tool with most recent data available, covering some SDG targets that still have important data gaps (e.g. climate, digital inclusion, and accessibility indicators) and including time series and measuring progress over time. In the conclusion, the presentation also highlighted the importance of raising awareness, as little is known on the distance and progress of cities and regions towards the SDGs, particularly due to the lack of comparable data. As a follow-up step, the OECD will present results on SDG 11 using a comparable definition of cities at the upcoming HLPF in July 2023 and update the online database.

During the **Q&A session**, Riina Jussila highlighted the absence of a mechanism for critical analysis or consolidation of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), citing challenges like the lack of a shared database.

Marcos Diaz Ramirez responded to a query about unconventional sources used in the localised indicator framework, detailing the use of satellite imagery and data from various UN agencies. **Laia Pinós Mataro** clarified the link between the European Green Deal and SDGs, mentioning that the Green Deal is a cornerstone in implementing at least 12 SDGs. Finally, **Ricardo Rio** shared insights about the importance of urban-rural partnerships for SDG localisation, emphasising the need to balance rural and urban aspects within functional urban areas and fostering connections with surrounding cities and rural areas in Portugal.

4 Cities for Sustainable Food Systems

FAO perspective on cities for sustainable food systems

Ms. Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, FAO, highlighted FAO's central role in food-related matters. She commended the focus on cities for sustainable food systems, acknowledging the significance of SDG 11. The impact of urbanisation on food consumption and access was underscored, with urban dwellers consuming up to 70% of global food and this trend expected to continue. Ms. Semedo emphasised the critical need for collaborative efforts across various levels of government to reform food systems. Multi-level food governance and institutionalisation of food strategies were stressed, with FAO supporting the establishment of multi-level governance mechanisms and providing guidance on integrated urban planning. Ms. Semedo pointed out the importance of reducing food waste and promoting urban and peri-urban agriculture, referring to examples from different regions' efforts to manage food waste and enhance local food production (e.g. the food liaison advisory group set up in the municipality of Lima, Peru, and the Farmer's market in Medellin, Colombia). She also emphasised the need to educate populations about healthy choices and making such choices accessible and affordable, acknowledging the challenges of balancing undernutrition and obesity. In this endeavour, Ms Semedo urged actors and all levels to increase availability and affordability of healthy diets through measures such as labelling, subsidies, and urban food system coalitions. She also encouraged building stronger and more effective partnerships between organisations, governments, and stakeholders to support sustainable urban food systems transformation and underscored the significance of focusing on urban food systems as a priority area, mentioning the upcoming FAO flagship report on the impact of urbanisation on food security and nutrition. The keynote speech concluded on the potential for cities to contribute to sustainable food systems and advising collaborative action to ensure access to nutritious food, address climate change, and preserve biodiversity.

Panel discussion

Ms. Anna Scavuzzo, Vice-Mayor of the City of Milan, Italy, shared her insights and experiences regarding the city's efforts to promote sustainable food systems. As the Vice Mayor responsible for education and food policy, she highlighted the significance of collaborative approaches among cities and regions. Milan's food policy, approved in 2015, prioritised access to healthy food, sustainable production, food education, waste reduction, and local food systems. Through practical initiatives like school campaigns, Milan has ensured nutritious meals for children, educated families on sustainable diets, and reduced food waste. The city also established "zero food waste hubs" in coordination with various stakeholders to collect and redistribute surplus food to the vulnerable population. These actions are aligned with SDGs 2, 12.3, and 17, highlighting the pivotal role of cities as laboratories for innovative solutions to global challenges. The Milan Food Policy Pact, a network of over 260 cities, has further enhanced the collaborative sharing of ideas and practices among cities worldwide. In times of crisis, such as the pandemic, local perspectives and resilience are crucial, showcasing cities' ability to contribute to sustainable growth and positive change.

Mr. Peter Defranceschi, Head of Brussels Office & Global City Food Programme , ICLEI, highlighted the pivotal role of cities in integrated urban sustainability and food systems. He emphasised that food is intricately linked to all the SDGs and stressed the need for a comprehensive understanding of urban food policies. Mr Defranceschi commended the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact as a prime example of global city collaboration, sharing best practices and rewarding progress. He underscored ICLEI's City Food programme, focusing on resilient urban-rural food systems, and the AFRI Food Links project, which promotes multi-level food governance, supports businesses, and enhances food environments, particularly in African cities. Mr Defranceschi demonstrated the power of sustainable public procurement to align with various SDGs, stressing the importance of food education and healthier, more sustainable food choices.

Mr Koen Deconinck, Economist in the Trade and Agriculture Directorate, OECD, focused on agriculture and food systems mainly with a national perspective. Around two years ago, the OECD published a report titled **[Making Better Policies for Food Systems](#)**. This report highlighted a growing understanding of interconnected issues in the realm of food. He emphasised that historical compartmentalisation in dealing with these challenges, such as between the Ministries of Agriculture, Public Health, and Environment, is no longer tenable, advocating for a more comprehensive and cooperative approach to policy-making. He presented the triple challenge of food systems: ensuring food security and nutrition, promoting livelihoods throughout the supply chain, and addressing environmental sustainability, which is intricately tied to many SDGs. He highlighted the role of cities as local laboratories and expressed the need for alignment and collaboration between cities and national governments. Mr Deconinck also discussed the importance of food fortification programmes and green procurement, and raised the significance of resilient food systems beyond simply food security. Finally, he highlighted the unprecedented shocks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and called for more comprehensive approaches to building resilience in food systems, possibly through periodic dialogues involving stakeholders from various levels of government and the supply chain.

During the Q&A session, participants discussed the role of local and regional governments in advancing sustainable food systems through the framework of the SDGs. The discussions underscored the significance of multi-level governance, data-driven decision-making, and a comprehensive approach to SDG localisation. Questions also led to the topics of environmental impact measurement, citizen engagement, and well-being promotion through healthy diets. The interconnectedness of soil health, circular food systems, and human well-being was emphasised as part of these conversations. Challenges related to measuring the effects of sustainable food systems and strategies for citizen engagement and food waste reduction were also raised. The participants stressed the need for rigorous measurement, evaluation, and collaboration among stakeholders to achieve holistic sustainability outcomes in the food system.

Conclusion of the roundtable and next steps

In her closing remarks, **Aziza Akhmouch**, **Head of the Cities, Urban Policies and Sustainable Development Division, OECD,** thanked all participants for the contributions they provided throughout the sessions. In particular, she highlighted the role of the roundtable in raising the profile of LRGs by sharing not only success stories, but also the challenges encountered when working on the SDGs. She commended Germany for "opening its books" for the first DDC review and thanked LRGs for sharing insights on their SDGs and DDC efforts. She expressed her hope that the overarching frameworks and policy standards presented at the roundtable could inspire many LRGs' approaches on SDGs and DDC. In terms of next steps, she highlighted the ongoing OECD SDG pilot case studies with Bolzano, Italy; Paraná, Brazil; and Córdoba, Argentina, as well as the Basque Country, Spain, which will be published in 2023 and 2024. In addition, Ms. Akhmouch invited participants to attend the next edition of the Roundtable and events related to the OECD Programme to raise the profile of cities and regions working with the

SDGs. Finally, she thanked the OECD team involved in the event and the colleagues at the European Committee of the Regions for hosting the roundtable.