

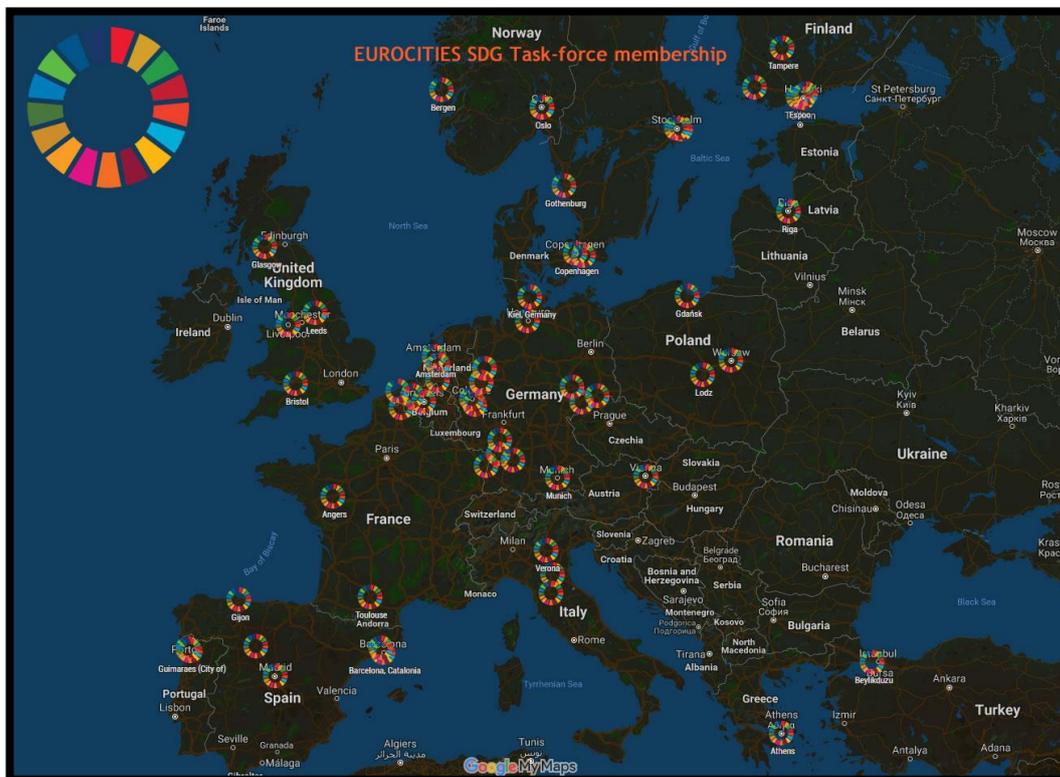


Cities leading the way in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in EURO CITIES task-force



Highlights from the EURO CITIES Task-Force. On 3 July 2019, 60 representatives from over 35 cities gathered in Brussels to discuss together how to best localise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensure a durable future for Europe.

On 3 July, EURO CITIES Secretary General inaugurated the EURO CITIES task force on the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which brings together 58 European cities. Opening the morning session of the meeting, she insisted that “cities are leaders and active makers of the Agenda 2030 and SDGs, and that 65% of goals require cities active involvement”. To ensure this, she emphasised, cities need to shift towards a governance that can support a sustainable transition.



SDGs matter equally to Europe and its cities

The meeting of the task-force was a chance to discuss these aspects and debate how to move forward and accelerate the transition. Cities are already experimenting with new models that can pave the way to circular economies in tune with nature and for the well-being for all. To achieve this, they are also pioneering sustainability principles inside their own local administration, with the aim of renewing the decision-making process. As the discussions showed, a political momentum around those practices is needed to further catalyse change, and it will require the contribution of all.

Several presentations from European stakeholders and leading practitioners enriched the discussion, providing tools to both interpret the Agenda 2030 and implement it at the local level.

Said El Khadraoui, EC European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC), highlighted how the Agenda 2030

can lead the way to a much-needed integrated approach. As the major global risks are very much interconnected, in order to avoid or mitigate them, it is fundamental to rethink the way strategies and policies are designed and implemented. In this sense, he argued, the Sustainable Development Goals, are a great step forward and a major attempt to overcome these challenges by adopting a holistic approach.

As Europe loses its grip and leadership in the global economy, the SDGs can be an important driver to make Europe a leader in the quality of life. To do so Europe must espond to issues such as economic growth bias, unsustainable consumption and trade patterns. Most importantly, it must include all the stakeholders in the finance value chain, from the single individual to the investment banker, to finance and achieve the SDGs.



Recognising these points and going beyond, Masha Smirnova, EUROCIITIES, highlighted the need to support and empower local authorities to locate objectives and become actors of change.

This requires locally-relevant EU governance, tools and policy shifts for a sustainable decentralisation. Some of these proposals put forward by EUROCIITIES to the European Commission Multistakeholder platform on Sustainable Development and have already been partly integrated into the European Commission's Reflection Paper on a Sustainable Europe, a document that shall guide the continent on matters of sustainability.

To implement the 2030 Agenda in cities new tools are being developed

The meeting showed that cities are taking concrete steps, building strategies and setting targets for 2030.

To this end, cities are also transforming their governance structures in a way in which can enable a sustainability transition and provide the capabilities for the contribution of all the stakeholders.

Demonstrating that cities are on the right track, Louis Meuleman, Member of the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration, argued that having effective public administration & governance (at all levels) is a key enabler for implementing the SDGs. In a world in which the level of urgency is high and responses need to be quick, these models are inadequate, and he therefore proposed 'real-time' collaborative multi-level governance, where representatives of all relevant levels convene around an urgent challenge. A clear example are 'inter-administrative dossier' teams between national, regional and local authorities already exist in the Netherlands.



Sometimes the challenges are political. Sometimes they are technical. Pilar Vizcaino Martinez from the Joint Research Center presented a forthcoming handbook for local authorities for the preparation of Voluntary Local Reviews which will provide an overview of methods and data that can support the implementation and monitoring of urban contribution to the 2030 Agenda. Cities such as Helsinki and Bristol, are already leading the way in this area, and described to other interested cities how they managed to be the first cities in the world to submit their Voluntary Local Reviews to the UN in 2019.

The discussions showed that indicators are often the major barrier for implementation, and Stefano Marta, OECD, shed light on their project to develop an OECD localised indicators framework for SDGs. To create something relevant, they are mapping all the work on local SDGs indicators by other institutions, but also take into account bottom-up inputs from cities and regions, and input from a few pilot cities.

EUROCITIES SDGs task-force members are championing new ways of governing the city



The presentations and discussion from the first part of the meeting provided excellent food for thought for the second part of the meeting in which participants discussed success factors and common challenges towards the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, with a specific focus on ‘transformative governance’. As Pietro Reviglio, EUROCITIES, showed in his presentation, European cities are taking SDGs seriously and are active makers of the Agenda 2030.

From the various subgroup discussions, it became clear that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in cities typically begins with the development of communication activities, a general narrative around the city and its commitment to sustainability.

However, several cities are taking further steps towards designing strategic plans in line with the implementation of the SDGs. Some cities are linking the development of these strategies with a new, more suitable cross-sectoral governance structure to strategically address the difficult challenge of implementation. Some pioneers are walking the extra mile, experimenting with budget allocation based on SDGs.

United under a common framework and a global language of sustainability, European city leaders are taking the necessary steps to carry forward state-of-the-art, evidence-based policy decisions, defending the idea that scientific and measurement tools, when designed and managed considering local needs, can be an added value and contribute to improving the lives of European citizens.

While some specific goals of the 2030 Agenda (11,16,17) are often associated with the local context, the discussion showed us that all the objectives have an urban dimension, and almost all of them are relevant to cities.

To reconcile citizens with politics, and humans with the planet, European cities are working together, driving the transformation in their administrations towards a sustainable transition that has the potential to go way beyond the local context.

In the following months, EUROCITIES task-force and its 58 cities will continue working on these themes through mutual learning activities. These will include activities on how to further develop and commit to Voluntary Local Reviews, as well as how to develop indicators to monitor and evaluate SDGs implementation. Next Autumn the task-force will publish a report gathering the success factors and common challenges for the implementation of the Agenda. Bringing forward this paradigm shift requires both vision, leadership and perseverance. Cities do not lack these qualities and are already developing concrete solutions to support this shift.

