State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2022:

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

1 NO POVERTY

2 ZERO HUNGER

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

5 GENDER EQUALITY

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

13 CLIMATE ACTION

15 LIFE ON LAND

14 LIFE BELOW WATER

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16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

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IGES

State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2022: Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

Institute for Global Environmental Strategies

State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2022:
Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

List of Acronyms

HLPF: High-Level Political Forum

IGES: Institute for Global Environmental Strategies

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean

LRG: Local and Regional Governments

NUA: New Urban Agenda

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

UCLG: United Cities and Local Governments

UCLG-MEWA: United Cities and Local Governments Middle East and West Asia

UN: United Nations

UNECA: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

UNDESA: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNECE: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

UNESCAP: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme

UNSG: United Nations Secretary General

VLR: Voluntary Local Review

VNR: Voluntary National Review

VSR: Voluntary Subnational Review

WHO: World Health Organisation

Acknowledgements

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to impact the world in 2021. Nevertheless, a record number of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) have presented a Voluntary Local Review (VLRs) in 2021. For many of them, this year's review was their second or third edition. VLRs are a process through which LRGs conduct a voluntary assessment of their progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Modelled on the reviews conducted by national governments—referred to as Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)—VLRs emerged in 2018 as a bottom-up exercise to demonstrate the key role of subnational levels of governments in delivering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In subsequent years since then, a growing number of LRGs have joined the VLR movement.

This report is the third of an annual series initiated by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) in 2020 to assess how far the VLR movement has progressed to date. It explores the VLR reports published in 2021, focusing in particular on 36 reports presented by cities (and written in either English or Spanish, as identified by the authors). The analysis is structured along two main themes: first, how VLRs are reflecting the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic; and second, how VLRs accelerate the localisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This report then looks back at the four years of the VLR movement to reflect on how cities are conducting successive VLRs and the emerging different approaches that have developed since 2018. The report concludes that VLRs are helping to identify the challenges ahead for cities as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in few instances, supporting post-COVID-19 recovery plans. It also determines that VLRs work as a framework to articulate the localisation of the 2030 Agenda by structuring a method to translate global ambitions into the local context. Finally, it identifies several distinct approaches to the VLR process, ranging from storytelling to choosing desired futures, that reflect the specific needs of local governments.

Based on this analysis, this report concludes that local governments are turning to VLRs in greater numbers because VLRs help LRGs think about the SDGs at the local level, to advance horizontal integration within the local administration, to facilitate vertical cooperation between different levels of government, and to communicate with local stakeholders and the global community. These benefits make VLRs a unique instrument to facilitate the local implementation not only of the SDGs, but also of other global agendas to advance a more sustainable, just and equal future for all that leaves no one behind.

1.
INTRODUCTION

1.1.
Now more than Ever: Accelerating Actions toward the SDGs

Humanity is half-way through the deadline to deliver the ambitious goals set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, the emergence of exceptional challenges is complicating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the ground. In March 2022, António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) noted that "our world is suffering from the impact of unprecedented emergencies caused by the climate crisis, pollution, desertification and biodiversity loss, the COVID-19 pandemic, by new and ongoing conflicts, and by the ungoverned development of new technologies."[1] Altogether, these and other challenges are slowing progress towards the SDGs, leaving many targets seemingly out of reach.

The United Nations' 'Sustainable Development Goals Progress Chart 2021'[2] shows the global deterioration of some of the targets of several SDGs, in particular: SDG 2 on Zero Hunger; SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities; SDG 13 on Climate Action; SDG 15 on Life on Land; and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. The Progress Chart 2021 only indicates three Goals containing targets with sufficient progress and on track to be achieved by 2030: SDG 3 on Health and Well-being; SDG 7 on Clean and Affordable Energy; and SDG 17 on Partnerships for the Goals. The majority of the analysed targets are either experiencing limited or no progress, or will require substantial actions to accelerate their implementation and bring them on track to meet the 2030 deadline. When disaggregating the data by regions, it is easy to appreciate the uneven development between different parts of the world, unfortunately leaving many behind.

But there is hope. The 2030 Agenda "provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future." Delivering the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their 169 Targets was never going to be an easy task, with efforts

continuing at all levels of governments as well as by civil society, despite adversities and setbacks. Countless national, regional and local governments are seizing the opportunity to redouble their work on sustainable development through post-COVID-19 recovery plans. Recent events such as the 2021-2022 energy crisis[3] have stressed the importance of accelerating the transition to decentralised and renewable sources of energy. Climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic encouraged many local governments to build more sustainable cities and communities, and increase their resilience to future unexpected shocks. Humanity is recalibrating its relationship with nature to learn to live in harmony with the diverse life on earth.

The deadline for the global agenda is 2030. For that reason, the United Nations launched in 2020 the so-called 'Decade of Action' to remind the global community that there are only 10 years left to save the world. The Decade of Action encourages all segments of society to think how to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and ensure that all the Goals are met. The Decade of Action is structured around three essential levels of action: first, global action; second, local action; and third, individual people action. Combining these three areas of action will put the world on track to delivering the promises made by the 2030 Agenda.

The Decade of Action recognises the leading role of local governments on implementing the SDGs.[4] Cities have long been key to sustainable development and the fight against climate change, often adopting more ambitious carbon reduction targets than national governments.[5] Cities have been at the forefront of coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as of implementing plans to build back better in a more sustainable manner.[6] Cities are also gaining recognition in global debates on sustainable development as key agents propelling sustainable transitions.[7] Nevertheless, it is worth repeating the now well-known fact that local and regional governments are directly responsible for realising more than 60% of all targets that make up the 17 SDGs.[8]

As part of their SDG work, local and regional governments (LRGs) have voluntarily embarked on reviewing their efforts towards localising the SDGs through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). VLRs are "a process in which local and regional governments initiate voluntarily and assessment of their progress of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This makes it possible for local and regional governments to share experiences, challenges, and lessons learnt as well as to open their door for new partnerships, filling the gap of means of implementation for their local vision."[9] VLRs mirror the assessments conducted by national governments, which are encouraged by the 2030

Agenda to evaluate their progress in implementing the SDGs through Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and report to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) taking place in New York every year. But unlike VNRs, VLRs have no official recognition within the review and follow-up architecture of the 2030 Agenda.

The VLR movement originated in 2018, when four pioneer local governments presented the first ever local reviews at the HLPF: New York City, in the US; and Kitakyushu, Shimokawa and Toyama, in Japan. Committed to the SDGs, and willing to show their active work on sustainable development, these four local governments followed a process similar to that of VNRs at the local level. They aligned their policies with the SDGs; identified gaps, synergies and trade-offs in their means of implementation; showcased good practices; engaged with stakeholders; and monitored progress towards their prioritised SDGs.[10] In subsequent years since then, the number of LRGs joining the VLR movement has grown: 25 VLRs were presented in 2019, 35 in 2020, and 49 in 2021, totalling almost 100 regional governments, cities, and towns (figure 1).[11]

Hallmark events have punctuated the years following the launching of the 2018 VLRs, both recognising the importance of and providing guidance on the local review processes. The upsurge of VLRs in 2019 was reinforced by the "Voluntary Local Review Declaration" led by New York City, and supported by the Brookings Institution, Global Citizen, C40, Hilton Foundation, Project Everyone, UN-Habitat and the UN Foundation. The signatories to the declaration commit, among other things, to conduct a VLR and present it to the HLPF.[12] Originally, 22 cities joined the declaration in 2019, and this number has grown to include 68 LGRs. Also in 2019, the Brookings Institution launched its SDG Leadership Cities Network, made up of 17 cities, as a forum to share good practices among frontrunner cities.[13]

2020 saw the publication of official guidelines on conducting a VLR process, three of them by different UN agencies. UNESCAP launched the "Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews."[14] UCLG and UN-Habitat introduced the first volume of the VLR Guidelines that compared existing VLRs; they followed up with a second edition in 2021 that focused on vertical integration between national and local governments.[15] UNDESA published the "Global Guiding Element for Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) of SDG Implementation" establishing the components to be included by VLRs.[16] The European Commission Joint Research Centre (EU JRC) authored the "European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews" focusing specifically on the European context.[17] Two more regional UN-made regional guidelines have been published since then: the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) launched its own

guidelines in 2021,[18] followed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in 2022.[19]

The importance of VLRs in accelerating SDG implementation has been noticed by the global community. For instance, the "Summary by the President of the Economic and Social Council of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council" at both its 2020 and 2021 sessions, highlighted the role of VLRs maximising SDG localisation efforts.[20] Furthermore, the Ministerial Declaration of the 2021 HLPF noted "voluntary local reviews are a useful tool to show progress and foster exchange in local implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals."[21]

The Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) has supported the VLR movement from its beginnings. IGES assisted and co-authored the VLRs of Kitakyushu, Toyama, and Shimokawa in 2018, and of Hamamatsu in 2019. In addition to this work, since 2020, IGES has produced an annual report series entitled "State of the Voluntary Local Reviews." The first volume, "Local Action for Global Impact in Achieving the SDGs" explored the pioneering role played by cities and regions who were early adopters of the VLR process and their contribution to localising the SDGs. The second volume, "From Reporting to Action" stressed the increasing action-oriented element of the VLRs published in 2020. This third volume, entitled "Overcoming Barriers to Implementation," continues the work of previous volumes and focuses specifically on how local governments are operationalising the localisation of the 2030 Agenda through their VLRs.

This aim of the report is to contribute to the growing wealth of knowledge about VLRs. By looking critically at VLR reports presented in 2021, as well as reviewing discussions with relevant staff responsible for the VLR process in selected cities, this report discerns emerging trends and ongoing challenges for the VLR movement. It reflects on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected progress towards implementing the SDGs in general, and the development of VLRs in particular, as well as on the role VLRs are adopting in localising global agendas.

The report is organised as follows. First, the report details its methodology and themes of inquiry. Second, it provides an overview of the VLRs presented in 2021, highlighting their main characteristics and the trends that have emerged. Third, the report explores how VLRs have tackled the problems derived from the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery efforts. Fourth, it analyses how VLRs are helping to localise global agendas. Fifth, the report looks at the four first years of the VLR movement, discussing different approaches to the VLR process. The report concludes by asking what are the benefits of VLRS, and how VLRs can help

Voluntary Local Reviews 2018-2021
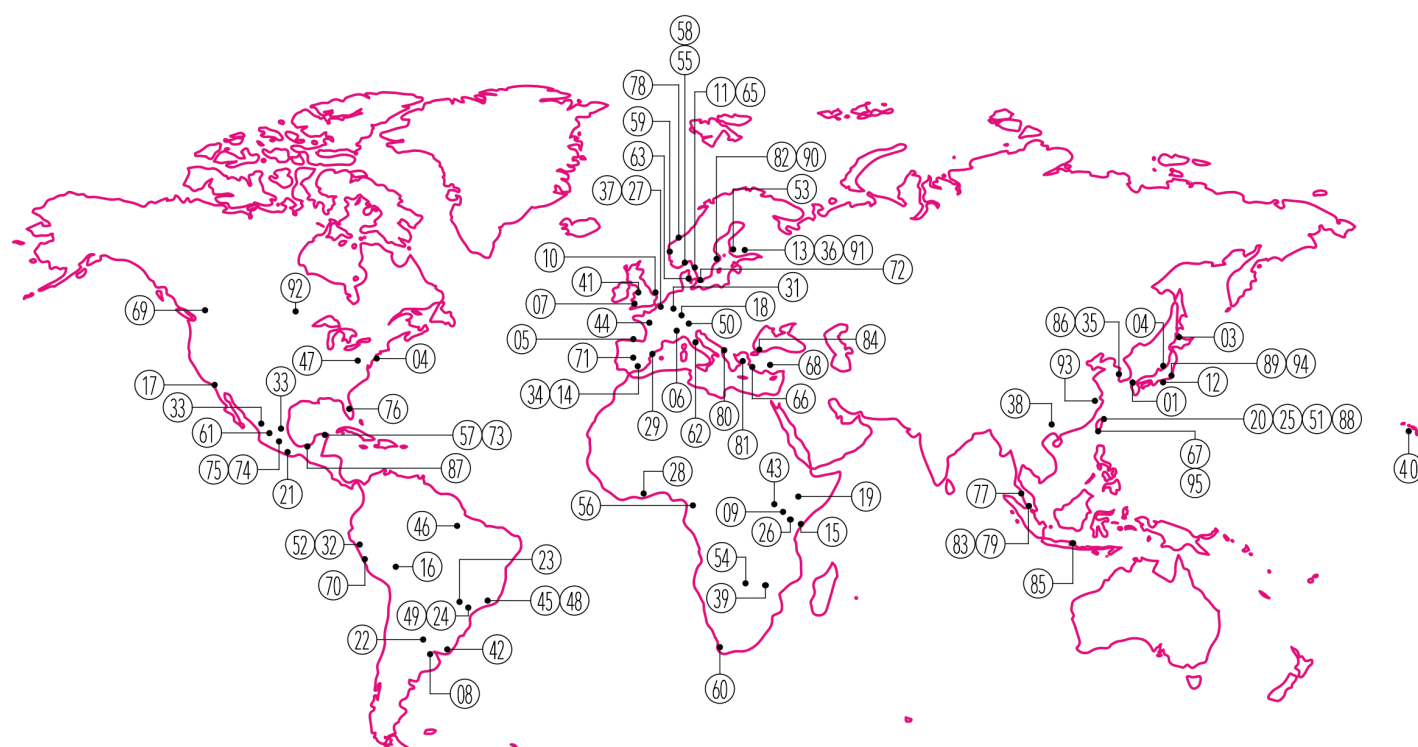
2018

(01) Kitakyushu
(02) New York
(03) Shimokawa
(04) Toyama

2019

(05) Basque Country
(06) Besançon
(07) Bristol
(08) Buenos Aires
(09) Busia
(10) Canterbury
(11) Gothenburg
(12) Hamamatsu
(13) Helsinki
(14) Jaén
(15) Kwale
(16) La Paz
(17) Los Angeles
(18) Mannheim
(19) Marsabit
(20) New Taipei
(02) New York
(21) Oaxaca
(22) Santa Fe
(23) Santana de Parnaíba
(24) State of São Paulo
(25) Taipei
(26) Taita Taveta
(27) Wallonia

2020

(28) Accra
(29) Barcelona
(05) Basque Country
(30) Belo Horizonte
(31) Bonn
(08) Buenos Aires
(32) Chimbote and New Chimbote
(33) Ciudad Valles
(34) Córdoba
(35) Dangjin
(36) Espoo
(37) Ghent
(38) Guangzhou
(39) Harare
(40) Hawai'i
(14) Jaén
(41) Liverpool
(42) Montevideo
(43) Ngora
(44) Niort
(45) Niterói
(46) Pará
(47) Pittsburgh
(48) Rio de Janeiro
(49) City of São Paulo
(50) Stuttgart
(25) Taipei
(51) Taoyuan
(52) Trujillo
(53) Turku
(54) Victoria Falls
(55) Viken
(27) Wallonia
(56) Yaounde
(57) Yucatán

2021

(58) Asker
(29) Barcelona
(05) Basque Country
(59) Bergen
(08) Buenos Aires
(60) Cape Town
(61) Durango
(62) Florence
(37) Ghent
(63) Gladsaxe
(64) Guadalajara
(65) Helsingborg
(13) Helsinki
(66) Izmir
(67) Kaohsiung
(68) Karatay
(69) Kelowna
(70) Lima
(17) Los Angeles
(71) Madrid
(72) Malmö
(73) Mérida
(74) México City
(75) México State
(20) New Taipei
(76) Orlando
(46) Pará
(77) Penang Island
(78) Romsdal
(49) City of São Paulo
(79) Shah Alam
(80) Shkodra
(81) Skiathos
(82) Stockholm
(83) Subang Jaya
(84) Sultanbeyli
(85) Surabaya
(86) Suwon
(87) Tabasco
(88) Taichung
(25) Taipei
(89) Tokyo
(90) Uppsala
(91) Vantaa
(55) Viken
(92) Winnipeg
(93) Yiwu
(94) Yokohama
(95) Yunlin County

Figure 1: Map of Identified VLRs 2018-2021.

cities accelerate progress to meet the 2030 deadline. The report also includes brief summaries of all the studied VLR reports, highlighting particularly good practices in each of them. It hopes to serve as a reference guide for future LRGs embarking on conducting a VLR.

1.2.
Methodology of the Study

This report continues the methodology of the previous editions of the IGES "State of the Voluntary Local Reviews" series.[22] It focuses on analysis of the VLR reports produced by local governments as part of their Voluntary Local Reviews within the 2021 calendar year.[23] The authors have identified 49 VLR reports published in 2021.[24] Thirty-seven reports had an English version,[25] seven were written in Spanish, two in Norwegian, and one in Albanian, Italian and Turkish respectively. Forty reports were presented by cities, eight by regional or county governments, and one by a district within a city.

Due to the greater number of VLR reports presented in 2021 when compared to previous years, and to allow

for their in-depth analysis, two basic criteria for selecting cases were established. First, and in contrast to past editions of the 'State of the Voluntary Local Review' series, this year's study focuses specifically on VLRs produced by municipal governments—i.e. cities or towns. This is because local governments have been taking a leading role in localising the 2030 Agenda in recent years, as highlighted by UN Secretary General António Guterres in his remarks to kickstart the decade of action.[26] Second, in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the VLR reports, this year's report excludes VLRs written in languages other than English and Spanish. Thus, the present study surveys a total of 36 VLR reports (figure 2).

However, to better comprehend how the VLR movement has developed in 2021, section 2 of the report considers all of the 49 reports published by local governments, both regional and municipal, regardless of the language of the report. This hopes to provide a clearer picture of where the VLR movement stands in terms of breadth and scope, as well as to acknowledge the efforts by all LRGs in implementing the 2030 Agenda. For reports not written in English, analysis was limited to classifying the authoring LRG in terms of region and population size as well as identifying the reviewed SDGs. Therefore, section 2 provides a landscape of the 2021 group of VLRs, highlighting the traits of the reports and their approach to the local review process. Subsequent

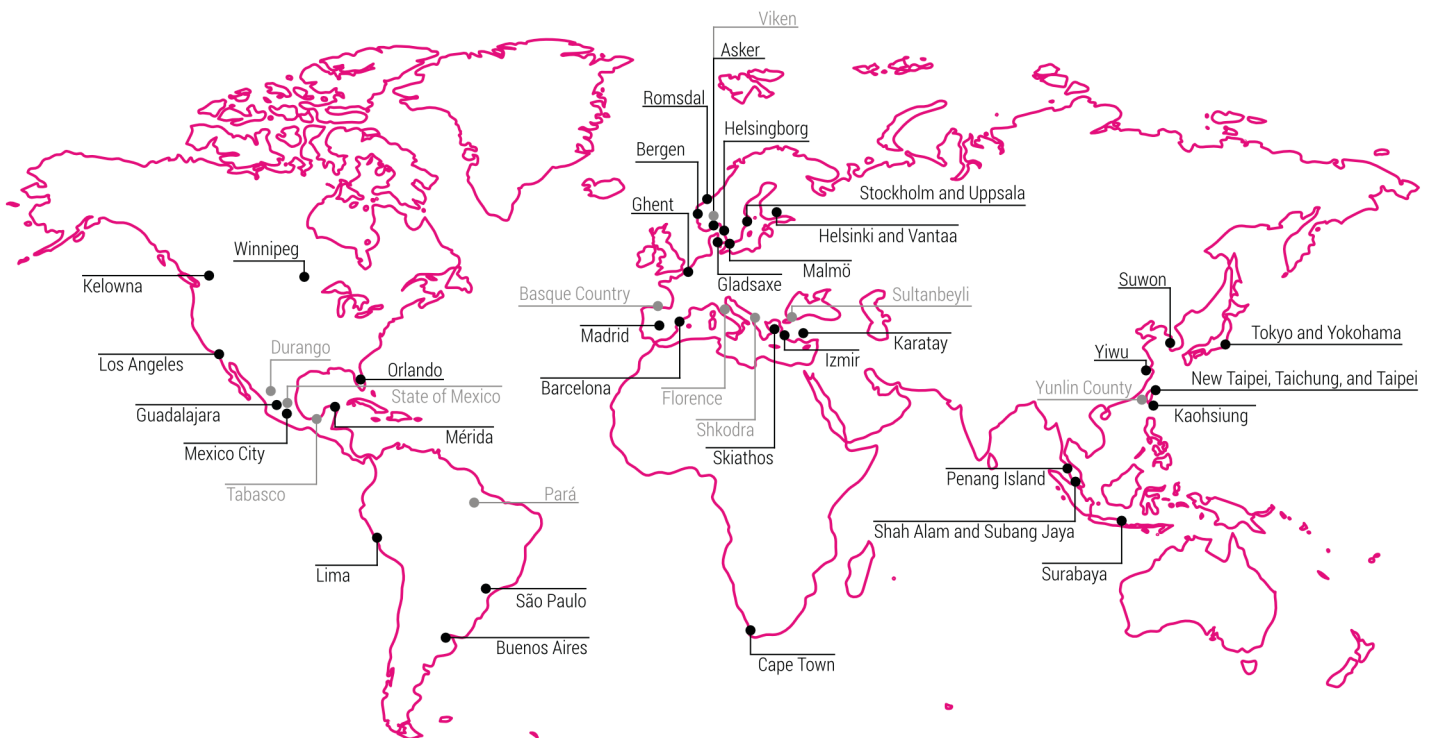## Voluntary Local Reviews 2021

Figure 2: Map with all the identified VLRs published in 2021. ● Studied VLRs; ● non studied VLRs.

sections provide a more detailed analysis, focusing specifically on VLRs written in English or Spanish.

As noted in the introduction, humanity is still grappling with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic; simultaneously, given the proximity of the 2030 deadline, all levels of government need to expedite progress towards localising the SDGs. For this reason, this report is structured around two themes: (1) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SDG localisation efforts; and (2) how local governments are operationalising the localisation of the 2030 Agenda. Although these two themes have been the subject of recent academic and policy debates,[27] the report looks at them through the lens of Voluntary Local Reviews.

The first theme of analysis is how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted SDG localisation efforts in general and how VLRs have responded to the new challenges that emerged during this unprecedented time. This is an important issue to discuss since even before COVID-19, progress toward some goals was lacking. Furthermore, there is a danger that post-pandemic recovery plans might relegate sustainable development to a secondary role in order to prioritise only economic growth, thereby leaving behind environmental protection. Therefore, it is worth asking how VLR cities have coped with COVID-19 and how they are planning to build back better and increase urban resilience.

The second theme of analysis explores how cities are localising the 2030 Agenda through the VLRs. In particular, it focuses on four critical aspects of the VLR process that intersect with SDG localisation, as recognised by researchers and practitioners:[28] (1) motivation to conduct a VLR; (2) stakeholder engagement processes; (3) aligning the SDGs with local policies; and (4) monitoring progress. The report approaches this theme of analysis by looking for in-text references to these four aspects to grasp how cities are operationalising their SDG localisation work. However, this method is limited by the information displayed in the reports themselves, and cannot account for the behind-the-scene work done by cities when conducting their VLR and their SDG localisation work overall.

Alongside these two themes, this report looks back at the VLR movement from its origins in 2018. First, it explores the differences and similarities of cities that have conducted two or more VLRs, by comparing their different editions and how they have changed over that time. The objective is to better understand how cities carry out regular reviews of progress toward the SDGs and how this can potentially be embedded on their own reporting and monitoring structures. Second, and building upon the work of previous editions of IGES' 'State of the Voluntary Local Reviews' series,[29] this report presents basic approaches to the VLR

process, providing practical examples that can help cities that are considering reviewing their SDG work to better plan for their own VLR processes. This reiterates the idea that there is no single way of conducting VLRs, showing successful examples of cities which adopted a wide range of approaches and methods.

Moreover, to better understand the work involved in developing VLRs, the authors carried out semi-structured interviews with relevant staff members responsible for conducting the VLR in 13 selected cities. This approach sheds light on the process and outcomes of VLRs. The selected cities were: Asker, Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Helsinki, Los Angeles, Malmö, Mérida, New Taipei, Orlando, Shah Alam, Winnipeg and Yokohama. Among them, Buenos Aires has conducted three consecutive VLRs while Barcelona, Helsinki, Los Angeles and New Taipei presented their second edition in 2021. The remaining cities were first timers.

In line with previous editions, this report presents a summary of the main findings of the 35 analysed VLR reports, which are compiled in Appendix 1. The summary of the VLR reports intends to serve as a guide for researchers, policymakers, and the global SDG community to find examples of existing VLRs that can relate to their own objectives and approaches to localising the 2030 Agenda. Each summary is made up of a brief overview of the VLR report, followed by a section spotlighting a particular good practice. Overall, this report hopes to inspire action and guide policy change, expanding the reach of the VLR movement and empowering other cities to take on the challenge of conducting a VLR.

2.
THE VLRS OF 2021

This section identifies the principal characteristics of the VLR reports presented by municipal governments in 2021. The 2021 group of VLRs represent a wide array of LRGs with regard to geographical region, population size, and development stage. Some 18 VLRs were presented by LRGs in in Europe, followed by 16 in Asia, 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean, four in Northern America, and one in Africa.[30] Perhaps to increase the number of African LRGs committing to conduct a VLR, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), together with UCLG Africa and UN-Habitat, launched at the beginning of 2022 the "Africa Voluntary Local Review Guidelines" as a tool to guide the VLR process tailored to the African context.[31] UNECA also opened a website dedicated to African VLRs and developments in the localisation of the 2030 Agenda in the region, bringing together the five VLRs published to date by African LRGs.[32]

Compared to cities, VLRs by regional governments constitute a lower share of the total number of VLRs presented in 2021. Eight VLR reports were put forward by regional governments: the State of Durango, the State of Mexico, Romsdal Country, the State of Tabasco, Viken County and Yunlin County presented their first VLR. The State of Pará launched its second consecutive VLR report, while the Basque Country introduced its fifth consecutive SDG monitoring report. It may seem that VLRs are gaining greater traction among municipal governments due to the more prominent role given to cities in global debates on sustainable development in recent times.

For the first time, there was a stand-alone district conducting a VLR, namely, Sultanbeyli, a district of Istanbul. The remaining 39 VLR reports were by municipal governments. Among them, and also for the first time, a metropolitan government made a VLR, in this case Tokyo Metropolitan Government. In terms of population size, the smallest municipality was Skiathos at 6,619 people (2011), while the largest was Tokyo with almost 14,000,000 inhabitants (2022).[33] Large-sized cities with a population between 1,000,000 and 10,000,000 made up the majority of VLRs by municipal governments (17 out of 39). Eight VLRs were authored by small-sized cities with a population under 250,000 inhabitants, and thirteen by mid-sized cities, those with population over 250,000 and under 1 million. Two megacities, large cities with a population surpassing 10 million people, conducted a VLR in 2021 (São Paulo and Tokyo); however, both Lima and Mexico City have a population close to 10 million.

Although the majority of cities were first timers (31 out of 39), there were eight cities that launched their second, or even their third VLR in 2021. Two cities, Buenos Aires and Taipei City, completed their third consecutive VLR in 2021, while six cities presented their second edition (Barcelona, Ghent, Helsinki, Los Angeles, New Taipei, and São Paulo). As such, there is a growing number of local governments integrating the VLR process into their policy appraisal mechanisms. By facilitating regular reviews of progress to attain the SDGs, VLRs support LRGs' efforts towards evidence-based policymaking.[34] Cities, therefore, are following the path indicated by the 2030 Agenda to national governments that encouraged regular reviews of their progress in localising the SDGs and to present their results through Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

Given that VLRs have established themselves as a powerful communication tool, targeting both the local and global communities, it is pertinent to reflect on the language used to write the VLR reports. In line with the "leave no one behind" principle, VLRs are helping LRGs to improve existing/create new ways to engage with stakeholders. VLRs also provide for greater transparency and accountability to citizens by making available reports that highlight progress toward particular policy goals and that distil statistical data in an easy-to-understand manner, even for those not used to read complex and overtly technical monitoring reports. At the same time, VLRs are bringing local efforts to a global audience by allowing cities to participate in international events on sustainable development, which have, for the most part, being limited to national governments.

This duality between reaching out to local and international audiences is revealed in the language used in the VLR reports. Among the 2021 group of VLRs, there were a greater number of VLR reports written in the local language rather than in English—as has been common in previous years. A total of 39 reports were written in one single language: 27 reports in English, seven written in Spanish, two in Norwegian, and one in Albanian, Italian, and Turkish respectively. Eight reports were written in both English and the local language. Two cities published their reports in three languages: Barcelona (Catalan, English, and Spanish) and São Paulo (English, Portuguese, and Spanish). The remaining five LRGs published their reports in two languages: the Basque Country, Buenos Aires and the State of Durango in English and Spanish; Helsinki in English and Finnish; Malmö in English and Swedish; Karatay and Sultanbeyli in English and Turkish; and Suwon in English and Korean.

Malmö's VLR explicitly acknowledges this dichotomy between local and international audiences as part of the lessons learnt while conducting its first VLR. The report encourages other cities to ask "are you writing for international, national or local readers? Preferably,

THE VLRs OF 2021

VLRs by Region

18

16

4

10

1
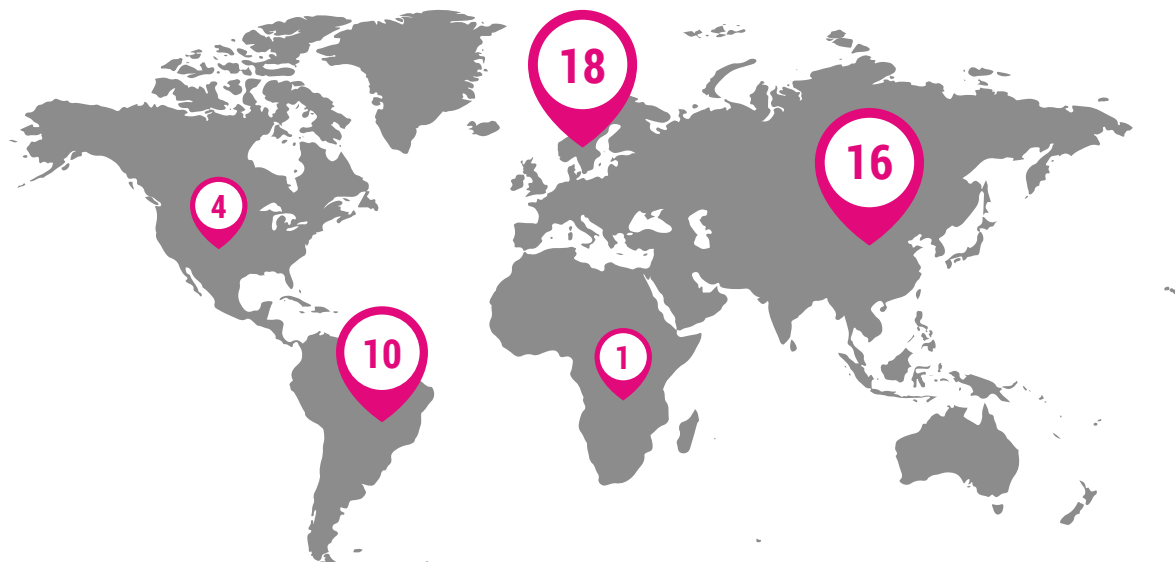
VLRs by Language of the Report

27

7

1

2

1

1

10

English
Spanish
Albanian
Turkish
Norwegian
Italian
English & Local Language(s)

VLRs by Level of Government

Municipal Governments	Regional Governments	Districts within a City
40	8	1
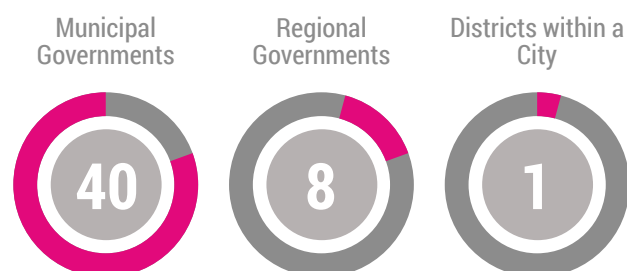
VLRs by City's Population

8 ——— <250,000
6 ——— 250,000 - 500,000
7 ——— 500,000 - 1,000,000
17 ——— 1,000,000 - 10,000,000
2 ——— >10,000,000
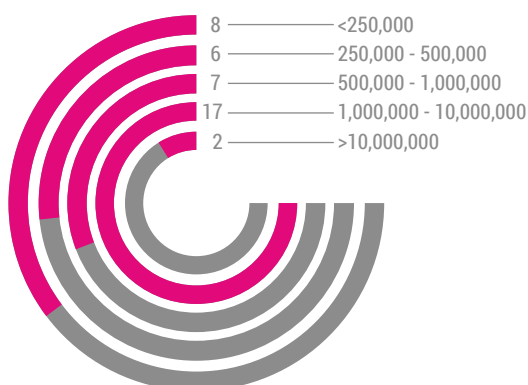
VLRs by Largest and Smallest City

Skiathos

6

thousand inhabitants

Tokyo

14

million inhabitants
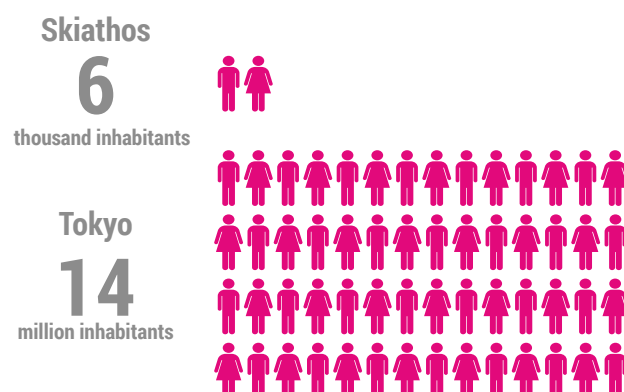
choose target group early on, as your choice of target group governs how you need to structure your report and the level of detail at which you should present recommendations."[35] Nevertheless, Malmö recommends that "if you choose to focus mainly on an international level, consider how you can continue to apply the more detailed lessons learned internally in your own organisation,"[36] thus stressing the ultimate local character of VLR processes.

The 2021 group of VLRs display great variety in their approach to the VLR process and reporting. Despite the publication in 2020 of UN-made guidelines on VLRs,[37] LRGs are producing reports that better fit their own needs, and as such, there is not a one-size-fits-all template or approach. In line with previous years,[38] the reports share some common elements. They usually begin by introducing the LRG and its work on sustainable development and the SDGs, describing how the 2030 Agenda is embedded into local strategies. The reports also feature exemplary projects that are advancing the SDGs on the ground, and review progress toward the SDGs.

The many forms of VLRs presented in 2021 shows that local reviews have a wide range of uses, beyond simply tracking progress by analysing indicators. In other words, not every VLR necessarily chose a complex set of indicators and provided historical data to identify trends. When looking at the reviewed SDGs (Table 1), 19 VLRs presented in 2021 reviewed all the global goals individually. Other cities chose to review SDGs in thematic groups; for example, Helsinki assessed its progress through three themes (people, economy, environment) presenting indicators that covers one or more SDGs. Only two cities aligned their SDG review with the prioritised SDGs by the 2021 HLPF (Buenos Aires and Malmö). This breaks with the trend followed by VLRs between 2018 and 2020, which favoured the alignment of local reviews with the SDGs

prioritised by the HLPF.[39] Fourteen LRGs focused their review on their respective prioritised SDGs. On the other hand, fourteen VLRs did not monitor progress toward any SDG. Instead, these VLRs paid attention to other aspects of SDG localisation, including policy alignment, vision setting, stakeholder engagement processes, or baseline setting. This aspect will be discussed in greater detail in section 5.2 of this report.

It is worth mentioning, that among the 49 VLRs of 2021, the most reviewed global goal was SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-being, with 33 VLR reports tracking progress towards its attainment. It was followed by SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities, with 31 reports reviewing both of them. Perhaps this indicates the prevalence of COVID-19 and concurrent efforts by cities to curb the spread of disease (especially since the appearance of more highly-contagious variants), to relaunch economic growth, and to increase urban resilience. The following section 3 delves deeper into the posture of VLR reports to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, the 2021 group of VLRs demonstrates that local reviews have grown in complexity since the year 2018. None of the VLRs published in 2018 reviewed all 17 SDGs, whereas seven out of 24 of the VLRs presented in 2019 did so, and 17 out of 35 in 2020. LRGs are taking the opportunity provided by the VLR process to accelerate efforts to localise the 2030 Agenda through different means—such as policy alignment, fostering horizontal and/or vertical collaboration, monitoring progress, forging new partnerships, etc. This is a testament to LRGs growing ambitions in delivering the SDGs to their citizens, and their commitment to contribute towards realising the 2030 Agenda. Ultimately, the increasing number of VLRs prove how LRGs are striving to take local action so as to achieve a global impact.

SDGs

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
2021 HLPF[40]	●	●	●					●		●		●	●			●	●
Asker																	
Barcelona	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Basque Country	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bergen			●					●			●		●	●			
Buenos Aires	●	●	●					●		●		●	●			●	●
Cape Town	●	●				●		●	●		●		●				●
Durango	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●
Florence	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ghent	●	●	●	●	●												
Gladsaxe																	
Guadalajara																	
Helsingborg	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Helsinki																	
Izmir	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kaohsiung	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Karatay	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kelowna	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Lima	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Los Angeles	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Madrid	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Malmo	●	●	●						●			●				●	●
Merida	●	●	●	●	●			●	●		●		●			●	●
Mexico City	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●					●	●
Mexico State																	
New Taipei																	
Orlando		●	●			●	●			●		●	●		●		●
Pará	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Penang Island		●	●	●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●				●
Romsdal																	
Sao Paulo	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Shah Alam	●										●	●	●		●		
Shkodra	●	●	●	●	●						●	●			●		●
Skiathos																	
Stockholm	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●
Subang Jaya			●	●	●	●		●			●	●			●		
Sultanbeyli																	
Surabaya			●	●	●	●		●			●	●			●		●
Suwon																	
Tabasco			●	●	●	●		●			●		●			●	
Taichung	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Taipei			●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●					●
Tokyo																	
Uppsala																	
Vantaa	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Viken																	
Winnipeg	●	●	●	●				●		●	●		●			●	●
Yiwu																	
Yokohama	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Yunlin County	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	29	29	33	28	28	25	23	31	24	24	31	29	30	20	24	26	30

Table 1. Analysed VLRs and their reviewed individual SDGs. Source: compiled by the authors based on VLR reports.

3.
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE SDGS AND THE VLR PROCESS

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has severely hurt societies all over the world since 2020. Over these two years, as of 31 March, 2022, there have been more than 480 million documented positive cases of COVID-19 and over 6 million related deaths worldwide.[41] While the rapid development of vaccines raised hopes of bringing the pandemic under control, new and more easily contagious variants of concern caused an unprecedented surge of cases during the winter of 2021-2022.

The pandemic has spotlighted the growing inequalities underlying contemporary society. For example, unequal vaccination rates show the gap between high- and low-income countries. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports that as of 30 March, 2022, 3 in 4 people (roughly 71%) in high-income countries have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. This rate plummets to 1 in 7 people (around 15%) in low-income countries.[42] Not only vaccination rates, but interconnected and multifaceted inequalities have expanded across all aspects of society because of COVID-19. The gaps between genders, social classes, access to health coverage, or countries, among many others, have widened over the past two years.[43] However, there are opportunities for rebuilding back better from the pandemic. Recovery plans can translate the SDGs into concrete actions to advance a decarbonised and more resilient society working within planetary boundaries.[44]

Local communities, both urban and rural areas, have also suffered from the ill effects of the novel coronavirus pandemic. Although at the beginning of the pandemic, COVID-19 cases concentrated disproportionately on cities, followed by mid- and small-sized cities and rural areas in subsequent months, until the level of infections increased among urban and rural areas alike.[45] While the measures put in place to slow down the spread of COVID-19 might have had positive impacts on urban environments, the situation also exacerbated existing structural inequalities in cities, lowering municipal tax revenues, putting strain on small and medium businesses, and heavily affecting more vulnerable populations.[46] In terms of urban planning and design, the COVID-19 pandemic has stressed the importance of SDG 11 by providing affordable and quality housing and public

transport systems, and upgrading slums. Moreover, it has renewed interest in building quality public spaces and bringing more nature to cities, in line with target 11.7 of the SDGs, which calls for "providing access for safe and inclusive public spaces."[47]

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected local progress towards the SDGs. Already some of the VLRs presented in 2020 had reflected the impact of COVID-19 on their daily operations and sustainable development strategies. However, the usually long process to conduct a VLR, as well as the availability of data sufficiently recent to gauge early impacts, limited how much the 2020 group of VLRs could reflect the disruptions and opportunities consequence of the pandemic. For instance, Barcelona's 2020 VLR reflected early impacts on SDGs 1, 3, 4, 8, 11 and 16. São Paulo's 2020 VLR included a section detailing some of the measures adopted to halt the spread of COVID-19. Espoo noted in its methodology the disruptions brought to the VLR process by the pandemic, and in particular to the planned stakeholder engagement processes. The State of Hawai'i referred to the importance of green recovery to manage the new post-COVID-19 world.[48]

Given the longer time perspective, the 2021 group of VLRs presents a more detailed view of the effects of COVID-19 on local governments. For example, as noted earlier, SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-being was the most reviewed goal by the 2021 group of VLRs. Cities took the opportunity provided by their VLR to highlight the measures put in place to guarantee the good health of citizens throughout the pandemic and to set out lessons learnt from implementing those measures. Besides reviewing SDG 3, the 2021 group of VLRs have predominantly focused on analysing the overall effects of COVID-19 on local economic, social and environmental conditions, how the pandemic has affected progress towards the goals, as well as detailing the various measures to control the spread of COVID-19 that were implemented.

Most of the analysed VLR reports acknowledge the negative impact of COVID-19 across all SDGs, in particular on key socioeconomic indicators. Helsinki highlights that the coronavirus pandemic has "put a great deal of strain on Helsinki residents in all population groups. Inequalities between population groups in Helsinki are already greater than elsewhere in the country, and the inequalities have become even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic."[49] Other cities like Subang Jaya observes the burden posed on public finances due to reduced tax revenues.

Ghent, which presented its second consecutive VLR in 2021, takes its review as an opportunity to "take a first look at the possible impact of the coronavirus."[50] Ghent's 2021 VLR focuses on SDGs 1 to 5. When reviewing each SDG, the VLR includes a section noting the "impact of the coronavirus crisis." For example, the

report notes an increase in poverty levels (SDG 1), as well as more hunger and an increased need for food aid (SDG 2) in the city. At the same time, the VLR also remarks some good practices that have emerged locally, both from the city council and the civil society, noting the initiatives that make Ghent proud as a community. Regarding SDG 4, among many other good practices, the VLR report highlights how it has striven to overcome learning deficits as a consequence of COVID-19.

New Taipei's 2021 VLR includes a section detailing some of the initiatives implemented during the coronavirus crisis to continue progress towards the SDGs. For instance, to ensure that progress toward SDG 2 is not interrupted during the pandemic, New Taipei City Government implemented a programme to distribute food boxes to disadvantaged populations. This system provided food to those in need while also allowing for social distancing using direct deliveries to people's homes, thereby limiting contact with others outside the household.

To a lesser extent, VLR reports have reflected plans to build back better. This might be due to the evolution of the coronavirus pandemic during 2021, including new variants of concern. This has meant that local governments still need to focus their attention on limiting the number of cases and safeguarding local health systems rather than fully dedicating themselves to recovery efforts. Nevertheless, some VLRs were already instrumental in shaping recovery plans aligned with the SDGs or bringing in the "leave no one behind" ethos.

Tokyo's VLR sets a vision for "Future Tokyo" aiming at building a more sustainable and resilient society, post-COVID-19. The proposed initiatives incorporate measures to accelerate climate action, to revitalise local communities, or to improve connectivity for both in-person and virtual interactions, to name but a few. The city of Orlando uses its VLR as "an exploration for systemic recovery, acting as a catalyst to involve all stakeholders in a way that creates ownership and cultivates incentives to advance our shared vision for social, economic and environmental prosperity."[51] To achieve this objective, Orlando's VLR creates a framework based on the SDGs and an architecture to engage with the city's stakeholders to ease its recovery efforts.

Humanity is still recovery from the millions of human losses caused by the novel coronavirus disease and the pandemic's overreaching impacts on social, economic, and environmental aspects of life. Cities are tirelessly working to overcome the countless challenges that have emerged over the past two years. Simultaneously, they are also finding ways to bring the SDGs into their local policies with a renewed impetus. Due to the nature of local data, which is costly to produce and might lag years behind the current situation, it is still too early to fully grasp how much COVID-19 has affected progress towards the SDGs, in part because many of the targets reviewed by the 2021 group of VLRs used data from 2019 or 2020. Nonetheless, aware of the challenges ahead, cities have redoubled their pledge to localise the SDGs, as is clear when reviewing the VLRs presented in 2021.

4.

LOCALISING GLOBAL AGENDAS THROUGH VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS

As noted elsewhere, achieving the SDGs needs local action.[52] Nonetheless, the delivery of these universal goals demands a process of localisation to transpose the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development from the global to the local level, and from framework to action. The 2030 Agenda itself recognises this when indicating that "each government will also decide how these targets should be incorporated in national planning processes, policies and strategies."[53] This provides great degrees of flexibility to all levels of government to better consider how to make the SDGs pertinent to the national, regional, and local reality. In this spirit, cities need to follow a similar process, translating the SDGs to their own context, identifying areas of competence, embedding the SDGs into policies (or conversely, thinking how existing sustainable development strategies align with the SDGs), and finding the available data at the local level to track progress.

But this is easier said than done. The 2030 Agenda outlines 17 SDGs comprising 169 targets whose progress is to be measured through 231 indicators.[54] There are two kinds of targets: (1) 'outcome targets' pointing to the ideal state to be achieved by 2030; and (2) 'means of implementation' targets specifying how to achieve those outcomes.[55] For example, SDG 11 includes seven outcome targets and three means of implementation targets. Outcome targets include target 11.1 "adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums" or target 11.4 "strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage." Means of implementation targets contain, among others, target 11.a "support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning."[56] This example shows the ambitious, yet complex, nature of the SDGs, with both practitioners and scholars agreeing that cities are faced with substantial capacity and knowledge gaps when localising the SDGs.[57]

The VLR process has consolidated itself as a tool to localise global agendas, and one that operationalises the steps to translate the SDGs to the city level: its power relies on their capacity to link local actions with global objectives and vice versa. Ultimately, VLRs

allow local governments to make sense of the SDGs.[58] This section explores how VLRs are bridging the gap between global agendas and on-the-ground action by looking at four fundamental aspects of SDG localisation, highlighted by the literature and practitioners alike:[59] (1) motivation to conduct a VLR; (2) stakeholder engagement processes; (3) SDG alignment; and (4) monitoring, tracking progress, and indicators. The objective is to provide practical examples from the 2021 group of VLRs to serve as a reference for future cities embarking on their own VLR journey. Although the main data for analysis is the publicly available VLR reports, interviews with relevant staff helped to further clarify the main trends observed in the reports.

4.1.

Motivation to conduct a VLR

The first step to understand the role of VLRs on localising global agendas is to ask why local governments are turning to local reviews in the first place.[60] Although for many people, the reasons why cities are taking on the challenge to conduct a VLR might be self-evident, it is important to explore the underlying motivations given the amount of work, capacity and resources needed to accomplish such an endeavour. Based on our analysis, the key motivations can be listed as follows: (1) to increase engagement with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and with global debates on sustainable development; (2) to baseline current performance and ongoing SDG work to better direct future efforts; (3) to enhance sustainable initiatives; and (4) to communicate with internal and external stakeholders, fostering peer-learning and sharing best practices.

The global engagement and baseline for local performance categories are interrelated, but they respond to different expectations of how VLRs entwine with local policy objectives. The former is outward-oriented, emphasising the global role of cities and international stakeholders, while the latter is inward-oriented and aims at improving planning efforts in line with the SDGs. Needless to say, both forms of involvement with the 2030 Agenda are not mutually exclusive and can be self-reinforcing; cities usually redouble efforts on SDG localisation as part of or after their VLR processes and their participation in international forums. The third category applies primarily to cities with a long tradition of sustainable development. In this case, cities connect their past efforts with the SDGs, updating strategies based on the 2030 Agenda. Finally, the fourth category concerns

a city's ambition to share its successes and failures to ensure mutual learning.

It is hardly surprising that the main motivation driving cities to conduct a VLR process is their explicit desire to engage further with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite the initial emphasis put on national governments as the agents in charge on delivering the SDGs, cities are well aware of their leading role.[61] Helsinki reflects on this aspect by noting that "originally, the aim of the actions taken by the cities was to make the world and the UN understand that the Agenda 2030 goals can never be achieved without the local level."[62] Through VLRs, cities are claiming a voice in the national and global conversations on sustainable development.

Thanks to VLRs, cities are creating their own spaces at forums traditionally exclusive to national governments like the HLPF. Moreover, local efforts are recognised by national governments, who are referring to VLRs in their VNRs. This, in turn, not only helps to facilitate vertical integration between different levels of government. but also provides a platform for LRGs to speak at global forums.

Consistent with this trend, there was a growing number of VNRs presented at the 2021 HLPF that included references to VLRs. For example, the Government of Sweden collaborated with four cities (Helsingborg, Mälmo, Stockholm, and Uppsala) to time their VLRs with the country's VNR. The VNR includes a section dedicated to the four Swedish VLRs, showing their respective main messages and lessons learnt. México's VNR recognises the efforts of the country's eight local and regional governments that have presented a VLR up to 2021 (Durango, Guadalajara, Mérida, México City, México State, Oaxaca, Tabasco,

and Yucatán); six of them were launched in 2021. Japan's 2021 VNR showcases the work of Japanese VLRs as good practices to accelerate the localisation of the 2030 Agenda.

At the same time, international organisations and city networks are opening additional spaces for listening to the voice of LRGs in global forums. UN-Habitat and UCLG co-organised the 'VLR-VSR Days' during the 2021 HLPF. Together with VLRs, this event also supported Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs), a distinct form of local review in which different local governments partner together to conduct a join assessment of their SDG work.[63] This event tapped into issues relevant to the VLR and VSR processes, such as data and indicators or local efforts for metropolitan areas.[64] Overall, this indicates the increasing international recognition of the role of subnational levels of government on sustainable transitions in general, and on SDG localisation in particular.

For cities submitting their VLRs for the first time, their initial VLR functions as a touchstone that facilitates future work on SDG localisation. The VLR becomes an instrument to align existing policies with the SDGs, identify gaps in means of implementation, and set a baseline against which to measure progress. Mérida remarks that the city "adheres to [the VLR] exercise out of conviction, with a strategic analysis of the actions aimed at the sustainable development of the municipality, with the purpose of obtaining in this first assessment a timely overview of the scope of the process almost three years after [the] implementation [of its municipal strategy], in order to determine the steps to follow in the near future."[65] Therefore, the first-cycle of VLR lays the foundation for future work by

helping to identify optimal pathways to expedite sustainable transitions.

In line with accelerating the localisation of the SDGs, cities also link their VLR process with their overall long-term sustainability efforts. Often, cities have spearheaded sustainable development policies, even ahead of national governments, to curb GHG emissions or adopt climate change adaptation measures.[66] Gladsaxe underscores their past, present, and future work on sustainable development given that "in Gladsaxe the Sustainable Development Goals reinforce the development of sustainable growth and welfare. Our vision is founded on the same thoughts as the Sustainable Development Goals with social, environmental and economic sustainability as an integral part of our vision for many years."[67] Taipei City's 2021 VLR, the city's third consecutive local review, further stressed commitment to fighting climate action and focuses primarily on SDG 13.

Finally, VLRs are also a powerful communication tool for both internal and external stakeholders. In the opening statement for Helsingborg's VLR, the city's mayor encapsulates this sentiment when saying that "our purpose in producing this report is to learn from others while also sharing our own experiences. (…) Producing a VLR creates an opportunity for dialogue and mutual learning within the city's organisation, together with other cities and with decision-makers in the international forums and our own government."[68] Cities usually showcase their good practices, lessons-learnt, successes and failures in their reports not as self-promotion but to expand the body of knowledge and practice on sustainable transitions.

Overall, cities are conducting VLRs because of their power to accelerate sustainable development policies in line with the 2030 Agenda and to make their efforts visible to local, national and global stakeholders. The SDGs become the common language spoken by cities in the conversation on sustainable development, opening new spaces to showcase their activities. Additionally, VLRs allow peer-learning and the establishment of a community of practice on sustainable development at the local and international levels, thereby enabling new partnerships.

4.2.
Stakeholder engagement

The core principle of the 2030 Agenda is to leave no one behind. The SDGs are supposed to help to achieve a better world for everybody, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion and belief

systems, age, socioeconomic background, education level, place of origin, disability status or lived experience. For this reason, stakeholder engagement, participation, and inclusion processes are a cornerstone of VLRs.[69] Both participation and inclusion processes create a bottom-up opportunity for marginalised segments of the population to have a seat at the table and a voice when it comes to decision-making.

Evidence from the analysis of VLR reports suggests that, for the most part, cities are leveraging existing engagement processes and embedding them into their SDG work. This is possibly due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has limited the ability for large groups of people to gather safely at workshops or other public meetings, so using existing engagement processes enables the SDGs to be mainstreamed across local participatory platforms. It facilitates effective implementation while being a cost-effective way to reach out to local communities.

Stakeholder engagement can take many forms and can serve many purposes, as demonstrated by the 2021 group of VLRs. For instance, in the case of Winnipeg, stakeholder engagement allowed structural inequalities to be recognised, and also acknowledged the specific needs and contributions of marginalised communities. In other cases, such as Subang Jaya or Orlando, stakeholder engagement supported more inclusive and participatory forms of decision-making. Overall, engaging a wide range of actors—ranging from not-for-profit groups to the business community or academia—as part of VLRs increases ownership of the SDGs and incentivises additional actions by the community and civil society.

As a rule of thumb, the stakeholder engagement process should reach out first to traditionally marginalised communities that for too long have been left behind.[70] This ensures that their needs are prioritised when building inclusive visions for the future, thereby integrating underrepresented voices in decision-making. Winnipeg's VLR made a conscious effort to "address crucial gaps that currently exist in terms of reflecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation perspectives, priorities, and experiences in relation to sustainable development."[71] Beyond acknowledging structural inequalities, Winnipeg's VLR also features the work done by "indigenous peoples and organizations [who] are at the forefront of realizing the SDGs through the services and supports they provide to individuals and neighbourhoods facing hunger, housing insecurity, violence, and other forms of economic and social marginalization and exclusion."[72] Each section includes short case studies showing how indigenous organisations are advancing the SDGs locally.

Moreover, by reaching out to a wide range of local actors, cities are able to listen to the needs of their

citizens, and then reflect their aspirations into concrete policies. Subang Jaya undertook several stakeholder engagement exercises, involving a wide range of actors, as part of the development of its sustainability strategy and its VLR. This participatory process helped to assess Subang Jaya's strengths and weaknesses and to identify priority areas for its future SDG strategies. A milestone of Subang Jaya's stakeholder engagement process was the VLR Workshop, which "conven(ed) leaders from across Subang Jaya's civic and community organizations, business and foundations, academic institutions, and government agencies to review Subang Jaya's SDGs and set the agenda for the next stage of Subang Jaya's VLR journey."[73] The workshop raised awareness among participants on SDG localisation, not only building new partnerships to enhance current efforts but also to celebrate good practices already taking place in the city.

Orlando also implemented an intensive engagement effort for both its VLR and the update of its "Green Works Orlando Community Action Plan," the city's main plan to advance urban sustainability and resilience. This was a fundamental component of its enabling environment to localise the SDGs. First, community leaders were appointed to a "Green Works Orlando Taskforce." The process unfolded through different engagement mechanisms: (1) "focus area roundtables" focusing on specific topics elucidated new sustainable strategies and identified key partnerships to carry them out; (2) "community involvement roundtables" including residents to identify priority areas for the short- and medium-term; and (3) "public workshops and surveys" to gather additional inputs to shape the update of the plan.[74] These stakeholder engagement efforts, together with the alignment of the city's policies with the SDGs, resulted in changes to the original "Green Works Orlando Community Action Plan."

Orlando's VLR also brings visibility to grassroots initiatives advancing the SDGs. In keeping with target 17.17, which encourages effective partnerships, the VLR spotlights actions by civil society or other local actors for each reviewed SDG. For SDG 2, the VLR describes an initiative by Infinite Zion Farms, an African-American owned and operated non-profit,[75] to turn vacant lots into urban farms providing healthy food options locally produced by the community. From its beginnings of managing one single lot, the initiative has organically expanded promoting the redevelopment of abandoned land in West Orlando. Moreover, this initiative goes beyond SDG 2, since it provides learning opportunities and reduces existing socioeconomic inequalities, thus playing a part in advancing SDGs 4, 5 and 10.

In summary, cities are striving for engaging with their citizens. In recent times, growing demands for new participatory forms of policymaking, greater transparency in decision-making processes, as well as accountability to citizens are all stressing the importance of engaging with communities. Despite the limitations imposed by measures implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19, cities are finding creative ways to engage with all components of society and to recognise their role in advancing sustainable development; e.g. online tools have provided cost-effective alternatives to traditional workshops. The SDGs promised to leave no one behind and therefore, meaningful stakeholder engagement processes should ensure that no one feels left behind.

4.3.
Aligning local policies with the SDGs

Duties take on by cities are vast, complex, and vary depending on the country. Generally, cities manage land use, public transport systems, take care of open and green spaces, and provide other basic services, from waste management to education or childcare, to name but a few. Moreover, many cities have tasked themselves (if not compelled by their respective national governments) to implement climate adaptation and mitigation policies and to advance sustainable development. As such, cities have already established policies and strategies for many aspects covered by the SDGs. The bottom line is that, in most cases, SDG localisation does not begin with a tabula rasa scenario.

However, this does not mean that cities are working on every aspect of the SDGs. Municipal actions might be scattered across different departments, creating unnecessary redundancies while also leaving other aspects unaddressed. Moreover, there exists the danger of wasted opportunities for maximising synergies or avoiding unnecessary trade-offs—i.e. positive or negative interactions between policies.[76] Aligning municipal policies and strategies with the SDGs allows for the identification of ways to multiply synergies while limiting trade-offs. This exercise can further coordinate policies between different departments, and can support the implementation of a gap analysis to determine what aspects of the 2030 Agenda remain unattended.

SDG alignment is an integral part of a VLR process. Reviewed VLR reports, especially those of first-timers, usually detail how each city aligned its policies with the SDGs. The analysis of VLR reports reveals that there is not a uniform approach to this work. This can be seen in the cases of two cities, Madrid and Mérida.

While Madrid included the SDGs in municipal policymaking by matching the interventions outlined by the Operative Programme of the Municipal Government (POG, using its Spanish acronym) with relevant SDG targets, Mérida aligned its policies with the 2030 Agenda in different stages in response to the changing socio-political context.

Madrid created its own SDG localisation methodology to embed the goals of the 2030 Agenda into local policymaking. To begin with, Madrid's methodology takes into account temporal and spatial considerations. First, while the SDGs have 2030 as deadline, the city's strategies have a shorter timeline—usually four years, coinciding with municipal electoral cycles, with current strategies going from 2019 to 2023. Second, Madrid acknowledges the need for multi-level collaboration between municipal, regional, national and European authorities.

Following this line of reasoning, the city's alignment process sets the boundaries of SDG action within its own competences. The multi-scalar aspect of the SDGs is evident in the case of public transport. Public transport is fundamental to the 2030 Agenda, interlinking with multiple SDGs, significantly with SDG 3, 7, 9, 11, and 13.[77] However, in Madrid, responsibilities for public transport are shared between the regional and municipal governments. Furthermore, while the municipal government is in charge of buses and shared bicycles, it is the regional government that is at the helm of metro and regional railway systems. This example illustrates the significance of recognising your own competences when articulating SDG action plans ensuring that consideration is directed towards better cooperation with other levels of government.

Once the city had delimited temporal and spatial constraints, Madrid's methodology follows a six-steps process to embed the SDGs into municipal strategies (Figure 3). First, each area of government reviews the different interventions encompassed by the POG. Second, interventions by the POG are aligned with the goals and targets set out in the 2030 Agenda. Third, different interventions are structured into 24 strategic

lines of action, which are then grouped into six overreaching strategies. Fourth, targets, indicators and baseline values were defined in agreement with all areas of government. Fifth, the first draft of the alignment project is made available for public consultation with stakeholders. Finally, the original draft is reviewed based on the suggestions received during the public consultation process and is approved by the city council.[78]

The City of Mérida approached SDG alignment in incremental steps. By 2018, the city has already developed its Municipal Development Plan 2018-2021 (PMD, using its Spanish acronym) considering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That same year, the city took part in the state board for the 2030 Agenda of México. In 2019, Mérida aligned its PMD with the SDGs by assessing how the city's six strategic pillars relate to the 17 SDGs; for instance, the "Mérida's Sustainable Future" strategy relates to SDGs 6, 7, 11, 13, 15 and 16. This alignment also identified how many of the programmes comprised by the six strategic pillars advances each SDG. This work was complemented by a consultation process with municipal departments to help identifying areas of action relevant to SDG targets.

Two milestone processes happened in 2020. First, the establishment of the 'Monitoring and Implementation Authority of the 2030 Agenda of the Municipality of Mérida' (OSI, using its Spanish acronym). The OSI is a democratic mechanism to accelerate the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs that brings together different departments of the municipal government with civil society stakeholders. Second, local authorities decided to update the PMD to reflect the rapid changes and shifting priorities brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this update, the SDGs played a leading role as part of the city's fight against COVID-19 and its recovery plan. In 2021, Mérida presented its first VLR (July 2021), and its new PMD 2021-2024 was already fully aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

These two examples illustrate how cities are approaching SDG alignment in practice. Overall, by

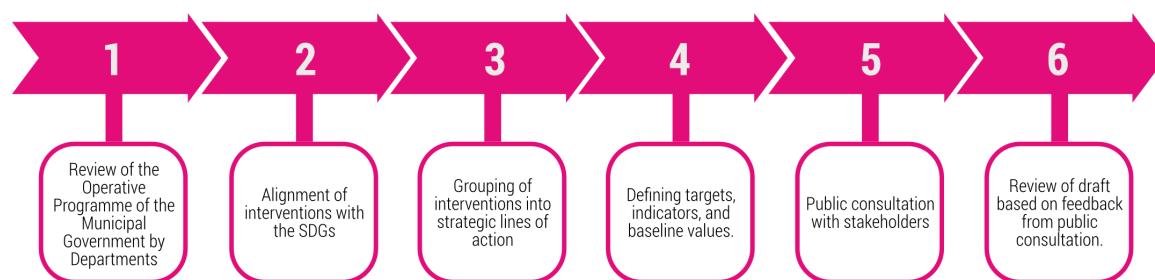| 1	2	3	4	5	6
Review of the Operative Programme of the Municipal Government by Departments	Alignment of interventions with the SDGs	Grouping of interventions into strategic lines of action	Defining targets, indicators, and baseline values.	Public consultation with stakeholders	Review of draft based on feedback from public consultation.

Figure 3: Madrid's methodology to align municipal policies with the SDGs.

taking the 2030 Agenda as a framework to inform local policymaking, cities are oiling the wheels of sustainable development, and envisaging innovative ways to localise the SDGs. By their very nature, SDG alignment exercises provide a great overview of a city's actions, and can work as an organisational principle to make the most of the local capacity to deliver the 2030 Agenda. In the long run, SDG alignment allows for a wholistic approach to sustainability, mainstreaming social, economic and environmental considerations across all areas of government.

4.4.
Monitoring, tracking progress and indicators

The 2030 Agenda underscores the importance of review and follow-up mechanisms to know whether national governments are moving the right direction or whether they are on the wrong track in their SDG journey. This process helps to "identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors and support countries in making informed policy choices."[79] To facilitate monitoring of progress, together with the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets, the 2030 Agenda provided a set of 232 global indicators. Nonetheless, the 2030 Agenda encourages each member state to develop their own set of nationally-relevant indicators to complement the global indicators.

Cities replicate this review and follow-up process at the local level in their VLRs. However, monitoring and evaluation are among the most complex tasks facing cities when conducting local reviews. To begin with, not all of the global indicators proposed by the 2030 Agenda are always pertinent to cities. More often than not, data is not readily available at the local level for certain indicators. Besides this, not every city enjoys the same statistical capacity nor the budget to gather, process and analyse complex sets of data.

While cities already have in place mechanisms to evaluate the performance of their policies, these might not be aligned with the SDGs, especially if such mechanisms preceded the advent of the 2030 Agenda. An important component of SDG localisation is to transpose existing evaluation mechanisms to the SDGs, defining locally pertinent indicators for those aspects that were not previously taken into consideration. Ideally, indicators need to be backed up by appropriately disaggregated data that is gathered at sufficient intervals to obtain a representative time perspective to assess the improvement or deterioration of progress towards targets and goals.

Analysed VLR reports display a diverse range of approaches to monitoring progress and the selection of indicators. The City of Cape Town's VLR created a traffic light assessment system that simultaneously reflects trends and data availability for selected indicators. This systems provides five levels of progress and assessment capacity: (1) "data available and showing a positive trend;" (2) "data available and showing little change over the reporting period;" (3) "no clear discernible (or mixed) trend (including where data insufficient);" (4) "data available and showing a negative trend;" and (5) "no city level data available."[80] To complement the traffic light assessment, the VLR report includes a statistical appendix detailing each of the selected indicators. For each indicator, the appendix includes the proxy used by the City of Cape Town to monitor progress, the source, and data from 2014 until the most recent year available.

When available, cities choose to use nationally-defined indicators for their monitoring framework, such as the cases of Shah Alam or Yokohama. Shah Alam resorted to the nationally defined set of indicators, the Malaysian Urban Rural National Indicators Network for Sustainable Development (MURNInets),[81] which were already aligned to cover the 17 SDGs. For its part, Yokohama used the "Regional Revitalization SDGs Local Index List," a set of indicators created by the Regional Revitalization Promotion Secretariat of the Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan.[82]

In few instances, VLRs use international defined indicators, either the ones defined by the 2030 Agenda or by resorting to other relevant standards, like the case of Taipei that used ISO 37120 indicators developed by the World Council on City Data (WCCD).[83] The most common approach, however, is to define their own set of local indicators that translate the spirit of the SDGs to locally measurable data; examples of this approach include Buenos Aires, Orlando and Vantaa.

Ultimately, creating a robust framework to monitor progress will have a ripple effect on a local government's governance structure and policymaking capacity. It will provide for the basis for evidence-based policymaking and to better know where to direct efforts. It can further be integrated in existing or create new policy appraisal mechanisms to gauge the development and effect of policies. Moreover, it allows local governments to be accountable to their citizens, demonstrating the progress in social, economic and environmental development.

5.
LOOKING BACK: FOUR YEARS OF VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS

More than 100 VLR reports have been presented between 2018 and 2021. In general, the available VLR reports vary greatly in their level of complexity and approach to SDG localisation. Overall, they reflect the standing of a city in relation to sustainable development at large and the SDGs in particular. Putting into perspective the VLR movement over these four years reveals that the local review process is a multifaceted one, bringing together planning document and local strategies, actors from inside and outside the municipal government, and data to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

This section looks back over the last four years of VLRs to discern how the reviews have changed over time. To do so, it first explores cities that have conducted more than one voluntary review cycle. It then provides an overview of different approaches to the VLR process that have emerged since 2018.

5.1.
Review Cycles

Conducting a VLR requires enormous effort by local governments. It is a difficult and long exercise, demanding a great amount of work, additional funding and human resources. This concludes with the presentation of the VLR report, in some cases at the HLPF. These reports present a snapshot of current standing and policies at a point in time, and summarise SDG work up to the date of publication. However, once the report is published, cities continue their work on the SDGs. The VLR process has, in most cases, helped to identify blind spots in local policymaking in need of urgent action. Unforeseeable events, such as the coronavirus pandemic, shift priorities and create a completely different context than that reflected in past VLR editions. For this reason, regular reviews of progress are recommended. This allows for a better integration of the 2030 Agenda in regular governance processes, ensuring that the SDGs framework is referenced in updated policies and providing the latest data on progress towards targets.

Between 2018 and 2021, nine cities have produced more than one VLR. Two of them, Buenos Aires and Taipei, have presented three consecutive local reviews in 2019, 2020 and 2021. The remaining seven cities have conducted two VLRs: Barcelona (2020 and 2021), Ghent (2020 and 2021), Helsinki (2019 and 2021), Los Angeles (2019 and 2021), New Taipei (2019 and 2021), New York (2018 and 2019), and São Paulo (2020 and 2021). This section looks into these cities to identify the different meanings and uses of VLR processes as they become cyclical and are integrated into local governance and policy appraisal structures. Its objective is to discern whether a larger picture is emerging across these VLRs and how this can influence future strategies to localise and monitor the implementation of the SDGs.

Given that VLRs are heavily influenced by VNRs, it is valuable to compare national and local review cycles. Cyclical monitoring of progress is built into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which encourages state-led regular reviews to be presented at the HLPF in the form of VNRs.[86] While many countries have presented two VNRs between 2016 and 2021, only 12 have conducted three national reviews.[87] In a shorter period of time (national governments enjoyed a two-year head start), cities have followed suit and carried out regular reviews of progress. Cities that have conducted more than one VLR until 2021 have done so more frequently than national governments; out of the eight cities, five have presented annual reviews while three have adopted a two-year cycle. This might indicate that VLRs are becoming an integral part of local SDG implementation strategies instead of a stand-alone exercise for reviewing of progress.

UNDESA recommends that countries provide an overview of progress of all SDGs, and also encourages a deeper analysis of a country's own priority SDGs, showcasing good practices worth sharing at the global level. Moreover, every year, the HLPF carried out an in-depth review of selected SDGs. UNDESA touches on review cycles when stating that "if countries are doing their second and subsequent voluntary national reviews, it would be desirable to include the progress made since the previous review, along with any specific efforts that have been undertaken to address recommendations from the previous review."[88] Cities, for their part, have followed a different path. Although some cities have aligned the reviewed SDGs with the ones recommended by the HLPF (Table 2), predominantly, VLRs have evaluated their own priority goals and targets.

Buenos Aires has assessed different SDGs in each of its three VLRs, aligning with the SDGs recommended by the HLPF, but has included additional SDGs when necessary to highlight the city's own priorities. For its 2019 VLR, even though that year's HLPF did not include SDG 5 among the main recommendations,

Buenos Aires decided to review its progress due to the great importance of achieving gender equality for the city. Due to the absence of prioritised SDGs in the 2020 HLPF, Buenos Aires selected six SDGs deemed fundamental for better understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the city and to initiate efforts for building back better. The 2021 VLR assessed the nine recommended SDGs by the HLPF. Moreover, in line with its commitment to fight climate change and to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, Buenos Aires has focused on SDG 13 in every of its VLRs. Since 2020, Buenos Aires' VLR report includes an annex with key indicators, trends, and short- and medium-term targets for all 17 SDGs, to complement the information provided for the prioritised SDGs.

The VLR has become one of Buenos Aires' main communication documents targeting both internal and external actors. After three editions, the VLR goes beyond demonstrating the city's commitment to localising the SDGs. It is a testament to the local government's ambition to foster transparency and to be accountable to citizens, while also working as a vehicle to monitor progress and evaluate strategies and their impact on the SDGs. At the governance level, the VLR enables a fluid dialogue between different departments, helping to identify synergies and trade-offs between policies by bringing together different internal processes. Furthermore, it is expected that the VLR will provide learning material for other cities working on the SDGs; Buenos Aires highlights good practices that are easier to replicate in other contexts in its VLR reports.

The shorter time span between reviews (usually every one or two years) enables VLRs to become an instrument to scaffold local implementation of the SDGs. For instance, São Paulo's first VLR prepared the framework to implement the SDGs, exploring means of implementation, aligning existing policies to the SDGs, and engaging with a wide range of stakeholders. Its second VLR focuses on reviewing progress toward the SDGs and setting a baseline against to which monitor progress in future reviews.

Los Angeles also adopted a scaffolding approach to its two VLRs. The city's localisation efforts date back to 2018, when the city begun aligning its policies with the SDGs. This crystallised into Los Angeles' first VLR report, published in 2019. This VLR sets the stage for the city's subsequent work on SDGs. The VLR mapped municipal strategies with the SDGs and reviewed eight SDGs—the six SDGs prioritised by the 2019 HLPF plus two SDGs of special relevance for Los Angeles, SDGs 5 and 11.

The 2019 VLR report included an exhaustive analysis of all 17 Goals and targets with Los Angeles' actions. This exercise reviewed one by one all targets classifying them into five categories: (1) target not applicable; (2) the target applies literally; (3) the target applies but is rewritten to match LA's context; and (4) the target is replaced with a relevant local target with similar intent; and (5) a target is added to respond to specific local needs. For example, target 10.5 on "improving the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and strengthen the implementation of such regulation" was deemed not applicable since the city has no actual competences for its implementation. At the same time, Los Angeles added a target to SDG 5 to "end all forms of discrimination against LGBTQIA+ persons and ensure that LGBTQIA+ persons have equal access to services, education, and employment opportunities," creating a space to address the needs of sexual minorities, who are not explicitly recognised in the 2030 Agenda.

As part of its SDGs and VLR strategy, Los Angeles already provides a wealth of information on progress towards the goals on a dedicated website with up-to-date data and trend analysis on indicators for all 17 SDGs.[89] In 2020, Los Angeles launched an additional online database focusing on activities to advance the SDGs by the local government and other stakeholders.[90] Resting on the work initiated in 2019, Los Angeles' second VLR delves deeper into the possibilities offered by non-conventional platforms for reporting and monitoring. The 2021 VLR was launched in webform,[91] with an accompanying 'traditional'

New York

New York was a pioneer in the VLR movement, presenting its first local review in 2018 and its follow-up in 2019. The 2018 edition maps the city's OneNYC strategy to the SDGs, laying the ground for future work on the 2030 Agenda. It reviews SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15. The 2019 edition continues the work of the previous edition, focusing on reviewing six additional SDGs, in that case, those prioritised by the 2019 HLPF.

Los Angeles

Los Angeles 2019 VLR laid down the foundations for the city's SDG journey. It aligned policies to the SDGs, identified indicators for monitoring progress, and provided examples of good practices. Los Angeles also created an online platform with progress and indicators for all 17 SDGs, with regular updates on targets as more data becomes available. The city's second VLR builds upon this work and presents 'SDGs in Action' to share Los Angeles' experience with other cities worldwide facing similar problems. It also features the city's post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery work and its plans to build back better.

Helsinki

Helsinki published its first VLR in 2019. The VLR aligns the city's 2017-2021 strategy with the SDG framework by using a two-steps process: first, it maps the strategy's themes with the SDGs; second, it maps the SDGs with the strategy's objectives. The VLR reviewed SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16. The second VLR, published in 2021, intends to further mainstream sustainability across the city's operations, and showcases various good practices. The city launched a companion website to its VLR,[84] summarising the 2021 VLR report and providing indicators for three aspects of sustainable development (people, economy and environment).

Ghent

Ghent launched its first VLR in 2020, exhaustively reviewing the 17 SDGs. The review identified those areas Ghent where is on track to meet the 2030 Agenda, as well as flagging those in need of further work. Ghent changed gears in 2021 and focused on one of the five "Ps" of the SDGs, namely People (the other four Ps are Planet, Prosperity, Partnerships and Peace). The five SDGs reviewed are SDGs 1 to 5. This second VLR thus emphasises stories and narratives of the city's actions on SDGs.

Barcelona

Barcelona's 2020 VLR served to localise the 2030 Agenda and to initiate the review and monitoring of progress. In its first VLR, the city determined that 139 of the targets contained in the SDGs were relevant to the local reality. These global targets were then localised into "Barcelona targets" to measure the city's efforts across the 17 SDGs. The 2021 VLR builds upon this work and reflects on the advancements made over the previous year since the publication of the first edition. It updates progress on indicators and updates the policies in place to localise the SDGs. To complement its second VLR, Barcelona launched a dedicated online platform to monitor progress.[85]

New Taipei

New Taipei City joined the VLR movement in 2019, and published its second review in 2021. Its first VLR followed the structure recommended for the VNR format, prioritising the city's action toward SDG 11 and offering a shorter overview of the remaining goals. New Taipei's 2021 VLR focuses on the city's response to COVID-19 and the progress of the city's strategies on sustainable development implemented since 2019. This second VLR adopts a unique approach to reviewing the SDGs. Each programme implementing the 2030 Agenda is analysed based on a core SDG, noting its synergies and trade-offs with other goals. This highlights interlinkages between the 17 SDGs and the need to carefully consider how to maximise co-benefits while minimising pernicious effects on other targets.

Taipei

Taipei has produced three consecutive VLRs in 2019, 2020 and 2021. The first VLR zooms in the city's main strategies and their alignment with the SDGs. The city develops a four-steps methodology for the VLR based on promoting the institutionalisation of the SDGs, choosing indicators, mapping policies with the SDGs, and disseminating the main findings. The VLR also reviews seven priority SDGs. The 2020 edition expands this work and adds four SDGs to the seven already under review in the 2019 edition. Moreover, the VLR explores the impact of COVID-19 and assess how it might disrupt work on localising the SDGs. The 2021 edition changes its approach and dedicates itself primarily to examining the city's climate action and the interlinkages with other SDGs.

São Paulo

São Paulo's 2020 VLR created the framework to accelerate the localisation of the 2030 Agenda. It mapped pertinent stakeholders, helped to create partnerships, designed an enabling governance environment, and aligned the SDGs into local policies. The 2021 edition continues this work by focusing on reviewing progress towards all SDGs. It links SDG targets with municipal goals and pertinent indicators, including for each of them the base 2015 value, the latest available value, and the goal to be achieved by 2030. The VLR also describes how São Paulo is planning for building back better.

Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires uses its VLR to bridge the gap between the global and the local aspects of the 2030 Agenda. Through its VLR, Buenos Aires is accountable to its own citizens by monitoring its advances in sustainable development and ensuring that nobody is left behind. The VLR also demonstrates to the global community the city's contributions to the SDGs, tracking progress, and providing good practices for peer-learning with other cities.

report. The website offers an interactive experience that helps the user to grasp what is going on in Los Angeles in terms of SDG efforts while also connecting the city's entire SDGs' online ecosystem. The 2021 VLR reviews the 17 SDGs while emphasising the narrative element of the "SDGs in Action" in Los Angeles.

Helsinki was also one of the first cities to venture into the VLR movement. Its first VLR laid down the foundations for subsequent work. It looked at the city's main strategy, mapping actions to the SDGs and reviewed progress towards five goals. The second edition goes even deeper to question what the SDGs mean for Helsinki. As part of this exercise, Helsinki changed its approach to reviewing progress towards the SDGs. While on the 2019 edition, Helsinki reviewed five prioritised SDGs, the second edition groups the goals across three themes—people, environment and economy—and reviews them in unison. This approach responds to the intrinsic interlinkages existing across all 17 SDGs and the fact that progress towards one goal usually implies progress toward other SDGs.[92] This conscious decision to look at the SDGs together makes the 2030 Agenda more relevant to the city and its priorities—de facto localisation of the global goals—

enabling greater policy integration and more innovative policymaking.

The cases of Buenos Aires, Helsinki, Los Angeles and São Paulo exemplify the trends emerging from follow-up VLRs. In continuing with their VLR journey, cities are displaying ambitious innovation when it comes to facilitating efforts on the SDGs. The lack of official requirements for VLRs enable local governments to find ways that better suit their governance system, local and national context, and existing traditions on sustainable development policymaking. In some cases, consecutive VLRs facilitate the progressive steps required to localise the SDGs; in others, they take a deep dive into different aspects of the SDGs, highlighting narratives or changing point of views. This indicates that with each consecutive local review, cities are restyling their approach to VLRs.

The commitment of cities to cyclical reviews of progress highlights the potential of VLRs to embed themselves in governance structures—ranging from policy appraisal to monitoring progress or planning future strategies—thus, accelerating localisation of the SDGs. In the end, the legacies and successes of first forays into the VLR process further encourage cities to intensify their SDG actions.

City	Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
HLPF	2018						●	●				●	●			●		●	6
	2019																		6
	2020	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	(17)[93]
	2021	●	●	●					●		●		●	●			●	●	9
Barcelona	2020	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
	2021	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Buenos Aires	2019				●	●			●		●			●			●		6
	2020			●	●	●						●		●			●		6
	2021	●	●	●					●		●		●				●	●	9 (☆)
Ghent	2020	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
	2021	●	●	●	●	●													5
Helsinki	2019				●				●		●			●			●		5
	2021																		0
Los Angeles	2019				●	●			●		●	●		●			●	●	8
	2021	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
New Taipei	2019				●		●	●	●			●	●			●	●	●	11
	2021																		0
New York	2018						●	●				●	●			●			5
	2019				●				●		●			●			●	●	6(☆)
São Paulo	2020																		0
	2021	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Taipei	2019			●			●	●				●	●	●				●	7
	2020			●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●				●	11
	2021			●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●					●	10

Table 2. Cities with more than one VLR process and their reviewed SDGs. Source: compiled by the authors based on VLR reports. A star (☆) denotes that the review aligns with the SDGs prioritised by the respective HLPF.

5.2.
Approaches to the VLR process

VLRs originated spontaneously as bottom-up exercises to demonstrate local and regional governments' commitment to the 2030 Agenda as well as to accelerate their progress toward the localisation of the SDGs. When four pioneer cities presented the first ever local reviews in 2018, there were no official guidelines tailored to the needs of local governments. Although these four cities followed UNDESA's[94] recommendations for VNRs, they translated the voluntary review process to their own unique characteristics. Kitakyushu took stock of its long history of innovating in sustainable development. New York aligned its 'OneNYC Plan 2050' with the SDGs. Shimokawa engaged with its population to design a roadmap to 2030. Toyama reviewed its masterplan to improve its strategies to advance a low-carbon society. The cities and regional governments that followed in 2019 continued defining what it means to conduct a VLR. It was not until 2020 that official UN-made guidelines were published.[95]

This lack of official guidelines allowed for great flexibility. Frontrunner cities conducted local review processes tailored to their needs and context while effectively mobilising their own resources. As cities joined the VLR movement in subsequent years, they enjoyed a growing body of knowledge and examples of good practices, while existing city networks created an evolving community of practice to foster peer learning. At the same time, cities continued experimenting with ways to make the VLR process work for them, to solve their long-lasting issues, and to accelerate their sustainable transitions.

Despite sharing some recurrent elements (such as the commitment to leave no one behind and to evidence-based review and monitoring) VLRs have thrived thanks to the freedom allowed by the format to local and regional governments. This freedom is maximising the transformative potential of VLRs, which are no longer a stand-alone exercise but rather, are being integrated into local governance structures.

With more than 100 VLRs published between 2018 and 2021, it is possible to observe different approaches to the process. A number of cities prioritise key components of SDG localisation, such as policy alignment with the 2030 Agenda, stakeholder engagement processes, or deciding on indicators and monitoring progress as the bedrock of their VLRs. Other cities prefer to use their VLR, especially if it is their first foray into the SDGs, to set a vision for their future (either to 2030 or beyond). In some cases, cities also use VLRs to set a baseline against which to benchmark future progress, as a first step toward implementing the SDGs. In more recent examples, cities are focusing on telling stories about their sustainable development journey and how it intersects with people's lives.

This section provides examples of different approaches to the VLR process (Figure 4). Since some of them correspond with aspects of localisation already discussed in section four, what follows will focus on three complementary approaches: (1) choosing a desired future; (2) setting baselines; and (3) storytelling. This section does not intend to create an exhaustive taxonomy of VLRs. Quite the contrary, it aims at presenting a set of strategies for VLR process to illustrate the wide array of possibilities opened to cities when they work on localising the SDGs. Moreover, these approaches do not present themselves in isolation, but are usually combined depending on the objectives of each city's VLR. Ultimately, this section hopes to inspire creative approaches in future VLRs.

Aligning policies to the SDGs

Choosing a desired future

Engaging with society

Monitoring progress

Setting baselines

Storytelling

Figure 4: Different approaches to the VLR process: aligning policies to the SDGs; choosing a desired future; engaging with society; monitoring progress; setting baselines; and storytelling.

Choosing a Desired Future

The SDGs present a universal future for humanity to be reached by 2030. However, part of the localisation of the 2030 Agenda implies that each city, region and nation should think about what that ideal future looks like. For this reason, many cities use their VLR, particularly their first edition, to envision what they want to become in the short- and mid-term. Both the town of Shimokawa and the municipality of Asker developed a new vision for their future in their first VLRs.

A pioneer in the VLR movement, the town of Shimokawa presented its VLR in 2018. The VLR process helped to articulate a method to set a vision for where the town wants to be by 2030 that embedded the ethos of the SDGs. The city conducted a series of 13 workshops facilitated by external experts to reimagine Shimokawa around the principles laid out by the 2030 Agenda. The workshops helped to define basic ideas for the future, connect them to the SDGs, and to discuss concrete actions to achieve that vision.[96]

One of the workshops specifically centred on setting guiding parameters for achieving the town's desired future by asking "what we want more of and less of in Shimokawa by 2030, and what we absolutely want to see happen by then."[97] These questions encouraged the participants of the workshop to imagine all the possibilities available to Shimokawa that can be achieved thanks to the SDGs. Participants' responses were grouped and analysed, and connections and synergies were found between them. Finally, these responses became the basic structure of the town's vision, entitled "The Shimokawa Challenge: Connecting People and Nature with the Future." The Shimokawa Challenge boiled down the 17 SDGs to seven Shimokawa Goals, reflecting the town's current challenges and main assets (Figure 5).

Asker was formed after three smaller municipalities, namely Asker, Røiken and Hurum, merged in 2020. The case of Asker is unique because the VLR was part of the process to design the main policy frameworks of the new municipality. In her opening statement to Asker's VLR, the Mayor Lene Conradi states that "if the municipality is to succeed in translating the global goals into local actions and practices, the SDGs must be integrated into all management, planning and governance."[98] With that in mind, the new city created

– Shimokawa Vision 2030 –
The Shimokawa Challenge: Connecting People and Nature with the Future

Figure 5: Shimokawa Vision 2030 and the 7 Shimokawa Goals. Source: Shimokawa Town and IGES (2018, p. 32).

a new vision for itself structured around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To build the new Asker municipality on the SDGs, the city took the global aspirations put forward by the 2030 Agenda and set about turning them into concrete local actions. The centre of that process is the creation of a new vision for Asker, that is shared by all members of the community and crosses political party lines. Moreover, through this process, Asker engrained the SDGs into its foundational policies and strategies.

Setting Baselines

Achieving the SDGs is an exciting journey. Although the destination is clear—a more sustainable, just and equal world—the beginning of that journey varies from place to place. Therefore, when monitoring progress towards the SDGs, it is paramount to know the starting point to better plan the route. A common approach of many VLR reports is to set a baseline for all SDGs and targets. This provides the basis for structuring subsequent SDG localisation strategies. Knowing the point of departure helps to better understand the areas in which a city is excelling or falling behind; it also supports evidence-based policymaking by setting a benchmark for progress. The VLRs of Pittsburgh and Shah Alam elucidated their respective standing points,

setting baselines that included not only quantitative data, but also partners working on the SDGs and ongoing policies.

The city of Pittsburgh presented its first VLR in 2020. Pittsburgh believes that "VLRs are a way to benchmark progress not only towards the SDGs but also towards other municipal sustainable development frameworks in place in the city. Therefore, the VLR offers an intersectional opportunity, becoming a tool to know where we stand in our resilience journey and how to shape operations to better continue this work."[99] In line with this sentiment, the VLR reviews all 17 SDGs and current municipal actions to selected targets. Pittsburgh also wanted to have a better understanding of how its own operations were contributing to the SDGs. As part of their SDG mapping exercise, all city employees were asked which of the SDGs their work directly contributes to. This revealed the interlinked nature of the SDGs, since actions usually influenced more than one SDG. Each reviewed SDG includes a pie chart showing the "City Department Self-Alignment" that helps to identify gaps in implementation and plan for the future.

Shah Alam's first VLR was published in 2021 to capture the city's ongoing actions to advance the SDGs. One of the key components of Shah Alam's VLR process was a comprehensive assessment that included setting the city's baselines. This aimed at

creating a database highlighting the city's actions and stakeholders, as well as identifying challenges and opportunities.[100] This goes beyond the common understanding of baseline setting as establishing a quantitative reference point against to which measure progress. Furthermore, the assessment exercise reviewed existing policies and aligned them with the SDGs to identify policy gaps and blind spots. This results in a thorough review of five priority SDGs (1, 11, 12, 13 and 15) that provides trends for selected targets, current issues and challenges, implemented initiatives, and recommendations for future plans.

Storytelling

Planning documents and appraisal reports are often obscured and filled with complex statistics and jargon, making them unintelligible to the average citizen. A person looking at a chart showing growing poverty rates or gender discrimination might worry about worsening conditions. However, behind these numbers are people who have fallen into poverty, who feel discriminated against, and whose future is in jeopardy. While nobody questions the importance of data in achieving the SDGs, there are more elements to consider when localising the 2030 Agenda. To accelerate sustainable transitions, it is crucial to bring people on board.

Many cities consider their VLRs as a communication tool fostering creative ways to engage with the public. Telling stories of a city's sustainability journey, of people in need of help, of overcoming barriers in implementing policies, and of successes in achieving the SDGs might inspire individuals and other stakeholders to commit themselves to more sustainable lifestyles. Storytelling bridges the gap between abstract quantitative figures and people's real-life experiences. Genuine social and environmental consciousness cannot be forced onto individuals, but it can be nurtured from within them. Hence, the evocative qualities of stories can help citizens to better understand the issues facing their places of residence, encouraging them to act.

Ghent and Los Angeles have populated their VLRs with different stories. Ghent believes that "a VLR holds the power to tell stories, which are often a stronger communication tool than statistic reports. Through authentic stories you can communicate more effectively to both, the local and the global community. VLRs touches minds as well as hearts."[101] While storytelling was already part of the city's first VLR (published in 2020), it was the 2021 edition that delved deeper into Ghent's collective work on sustainability and the projects, peoples, and institutions making it possible.

The VLR report presents a series of projects that were chosen in consultation with key stakeholders. After describing the goals and objectives for each project, the VLR details how it works in practice, who the partners are, and who the project is working for. The VLR report further highlights the current outcomes and how the project has evolved, as well as mentioning the aspects of the project making Ghent proud. The review of each project is completed with an analysis of future ambitions, the challenges ahead, and the role of municipal authorities. This comprehensive overview of each project brings to the forefront the active role of civil society in localising the SDGs.

The Los Angeles VLR spotlights three projects on the topics of people, planet and prosperity. These projects are narrated in a non-conventional manner, highlighting personal experiences and interlinkages, as well as how each project affects the lives of Angelenos. For instance, the spotlight on people, entitled "humanising our housing crisis," focuses on the issue of housing insecurity. The VLR introduces the problem, how it affects different SDGs (in this case, SDGs 1, 10, 11 and 17), and presents data on the issue. Then, it moves on to tell the personal story of Soraya, "a caring and attentive mother to six children,"[102] and the challenges she faces with her housing situation. Her experience is explained through a timeline of her journey, from the moment when she is made a part-time employee by her job of 13 years to the exacerbated struggles once the COVID-19 pandemic erupted.

The VLR concludes her story with three "can you imagine if Soraya…" questions: (1) "received temporary financial assistance when her job hours were reduced?" (2) "connected with free legal services and case management when she first received an eviction notice?" and (3) "had access to free mental health support for herself and her children to help navigate their housing challenges?"[103] Overall, Soraya's story transposes one of the city's main challenges from numbers to a relatable experience. It makes the reader realise that anybody can be Soraya at any time, and hence, fosters a better understanding of the importance of advancing all 17 SDGs.

6.
CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

This report assessed the 2021 group of VLRs. First, it provided an overview of 49 VLR reports, as identified by the authors, to better understand the direction the VLR movement has adopted in this year. Second, it focused on thirty-six VLR reports presented by cities in 2021, written in either English or Spanish, across two main themes: how they have reflected the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how VLRs are localising global agendas. Furthermore, the report looked back to the origins of the VLR movement to analyse cities that have conducted two or more review cycles and different approaches to the VLR process. This analysis highlights that VLRs are supporting cities' efforts to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in a few instances, to inform post-COVID-19 recovery plans. It also underscores the growing integration of VLRs into local planning, both as a tool to monitor progress and to support evidence-based policymaking.

In light of the above, this concluding section asks two remaining questions. First, why local governments are turning in greater numbers to VLRs? And second, what's ahead for the VLR movement? By answering these questions, this concluding section thinks carefully about how VLRs can help to overcome barriers to implementing the SDGs at the local level.

6.1.
Why Voluntary Local Reviews?

Four years have passed since Kitakyushu, New York, Shimokawa and Toyama presented their VLRs at the 2018 High-level Political Forum in New York. VLRs originated spontaneously as a bottom-up exercise to show the contribution of local governments in advancing the 2030 Agenda. Since then, the number of VLRs has increased every year, surpassing the hundred mark in 2021. From towns to megalopolis, from districts of cities to regional governments, from North to South, and from East to West, VLRs are a world-wide phenomenon, reshaping how local and regional governments approach sustainable development.

The lack of an officially prescribed methodology—at least not until 2020 when the first UN-made guidelines were launched—enabled great flexibility and diversity in approaches, sparking the creativity of LRGs to devise VLR processes tailored to their own unique needs. Some LRGs prefer to focus on all or some of the components of SDG localisation, like policy alignment or stakeholder engagement, while others are setting baselines or imagining a new, more sustainable, vision for their future. LRGs are also experimenting with new approaches to disseminate their VLRs, as seen in a number of accompanying online platforms in Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Helsinki, the State of Hawai'i, Los Angeles and New Taipei.

A key question to understand the upsurge of VLRs is to ask: what are the benefits of conducting a VLR? Local governance is already awash with countless strategies and governance processes. Regions, cities and towns of every size already have a plethora of masterplans, sectoral plans, climate action plans, and other policies and strategies, many of them designed to advance particular aspects of sustainable development. Moreover, VLR processes require a great deal of effort, additional funds and staff dedicated to gather data, reach out to stakeholders, and coordinate and draft the report. Undoubtedly, the benefits outweigh the challenges and the cost of conducting a VLR, as proven by the ever-growing number of regions, cities and towns joining the VLR movement year after year. Looking back at the more than 100 VLRs conducted

between 2018 and 2021, five main benefits stand out: (1) to kickstart sustainable development; (2) to think about the SDGs; (3) to advance horizontal integration; (4) to advance vertical cooperation; and (5) to communicate (Figure 6).

Taken together, these five benefits hold the potential to expedite the delivery of the SDGs. They are a testament to the power of VLRs to implement on the ground the universal ambitions outlined by the 2030 Agenda and to crystallise the global repercussions of local efforts. At the time of writing, there are less than eight years left to the 2030 deadline. The time has come for LRGs to intensify efforts to implement the SDGs. And VLRs can become the mainstay to overcome barriers to implementation.

To kickstart sustainable development: For cities without a long tradition of sustainability policies, a VLR can support the creation of policies aligned with the SDGs that embeds the three pillars of sustainable development. It provides structure to design, implement, and monitor sustainable policies.

To think about the SDGs: A VLR brings a new way of thinking about sustainability streamlining the localisation of the SDGs. It helps to find synergies and trade-offs between different goals and targets, and therefore, streamlining efforts.

To advance horizontal integration: The silo approach of much local governance blinds opportunities to accelerate sustainable development. More often than not, there lacks coherence and integration between local actions. A VLR makes visible missed possibilities to leverage co-benefits and to minimise trade-offs.

To advance vertical cooperation: To advance vertical cooperation: The common language of the SDGs facilitates the dialogue between national and subnational levels of government. It enables better coordination of policies, reporting and monitoring, ultimately accelerating the delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

To communicate: VLRs are a powerful communication tool with both internal and external actors, mainstreaming the SDGs across municipal departments as well as with the general public.

Figure 6: Five benefits of conducting a VLR.

6.2.
What's ahead for the VLR Movement?

Cities that are pursuing VLRs are at the forefront of using cutting-edge practices to accelerate sustainable development. They have realised of the positive impact of the SDGs on local development and are redoubling efforts to deliver them to their citizens. At the same time, these local efforts have global consequences given that LRGs' work on SDGs support the global fight against climate change, injustice, inequality, poverty, hunger, discrimination, etc.

For the most part, LRGs' work on VLRs has focused predominantly on aligning local policies with the SDGs and on monitoring progress. This has already resulted in multiple positive side effects such as the creation of new partnerships for the goals (both with local and external stakeholders), national and international peer-to-peer collaborations, and in some cases, innovations in sustainable development policymaking. Overall, there is potential for the VLR process to accelerate progress toward the SDGs more generally, and this potential can be further leveraged by turning crisis into opportunity. Both the new reality brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgent need to fight climate change present opportunities to mainstream sustainable principles and the SDGs across all areas of local action. To take advantage of this opportunity, the VLR process needs to strengthen three aspects: first, the engagement with citizens; second, horizontal and vertical integration; and third, the localisation of global agendas in general, including the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda among others. These three aspects are worth considering for future VLRs.

First, VLRs offer a unique opportunity to bring citizens on board with regards to sustainable development. Carefully planned stakeholder engagement processes can provide a more robust assessment of the local progress towards the SDGs by including often marginalised (and therefore, voiceless) groups in decision-making. Examples such as Shimokawa in 2018 or Bristol in 2019 can serve as inspiration to other local governments. This is especially pertinent when considering the social repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic and the need to build back better and grow the resilience of communities.

Second, VLRs have demonstrated their power to attain horizontal integration within the local government, and to a lesser extent, vertical integration with national governments. VLRs have created internal communication mechanisms in many local governments outlasting the VLR process itself. This has mainstreamed the SDGs across all municipal departments and helped to leverage synergies between existing policies. However, the challenge of how to conceptualise the vertical integration between VNRs and VLRs still remains.104 Even though cases of strong vertical integration were first observed among the VLRs published in 2020, there seems to be limited progress among the 2021 group of VLRs, with some notable exceptions such as Sweden. In this regard, it is also pertinent to note the issue of fiscal decentralisation. There is danger that local implementation of the SDGs is turning into a de facto unfunded mandate for many local governments, whose budgets are already stretched thin. LGRs would benefit if central governments could allocate resources or provide other financial incentives to help offset the costs of implementing the SDGs and conducting a VLR.

Third, in localising global agendas, VLRs can maximise LRGs' contribution to fighting climate change. This topic has become even more relevant after the publication of the 2022 IPCC Sixth Assessment Report "Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change,"105 which noted that VLRs were an important tool to advance the implementation of integrated policies linking climate change with wider sustainability objectives at the local level.

What started with four local governments in 2018 has become a movement taking the world by storm. VLRs have consolidated themselves as a process to localise global agendas. As humanity sprints towards the 2030 deadline, local action is needed more than ever, and VLRs enable transformative actions to achieve the SDGs.

–appendix–

ANALYSIS OF THE 2021 GROUP OF VLRs

This Appendix summarises the analysed VLR reports. Each summary includes two sections: a general overview of the main elements of each VLR report and a spotlight on a particular significant component in each report. These summaries present different examples and perspectives that can help guide other cities in identifying solutions that may potentially be appropriate to their own context. The themes selected accentuate a wide range of approaches and components in VLRs as demonstrated by the 2021 group of VLRs, ranging from setting baselines, to attaining policy coherence and discovering different approaches to the VLR process.

- **Baseline Setting:** Kelowna, Madrid

- **Impact of COVID-19:** Ghent, Helsingborg, Lima, New Taipei, Penang Island

- **Integrating Climate Action into the SDGs:** Shah Alam, Taipei

- **Integrating the SDGs:** Malmö, Stockholm, Tokyo, Yiwu

- **Localisation of Global Agendas:** Mexico City, Suwon

- **Means of Implementation:** Asker, Gladsaxe, Mérida, Uppsala

- **Monitoring Progress:** Guadalajara, Karatay, São Paulo, Winnipeg

- **Online Tools:** Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Helsinki, Los Angeles

- **Partnerships for the Goals:** Yokohama

- **Policy Coherence:** Orlando, Vantaa

- **Vertical Integration:** Subang Jaya

- **VLR Process:** Cape Town, Kaohsiung, Skiathos, Surabaya, Taichung

Asker

Name of VLR Report: Agenda 2030 in Asker. Voluntary Local Review

Population: 96,088 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

The case of Asker is paradigmatic because it is a new municipality, resulting from the merger of three smaller localities, that integrates the SDGs into its policies. Asker's VLR report provides an overview of the city's steps to date to accelerate the localisation of the SDGs and their influence in shaping the new municipality. This process crossed political lines and brought all residents on board with the city's sustainable transition.

The VLR report emphasises the SDGs governance structure that was put in place by the new municipality, and highlights practical examples of innovative projects taking place in Asker. The report also delineates the municipality's policy environment following the merger, including how Asker has coordinated with the national government, and the city's take on the principle of leaving no one behind. The VLR report also provides a snapshot of Asker's current standing on selected indicators across the three pillars of sustainable development.

Spotlight on: Means of Implementation

The new Asker Municipality devised a robust governance structure to implement the SDGs, articulating its means of implementation in eight different aspects: (1) data harvesting and management, (2) planning systems that are fully on-point to helping achieve the Goals, (3) action plans and budgets to allocate the resources needed to facilitate change, (4) Sustainable Asker, a programme supporting organisations with implementing processes, coordination, collaboration and partnerships for the Goals, (5) innovation projects for sustainable value creation, (6) citizenship – evolving as a co-creation municipality, (7) democratic innovation, and (8) arenas for co-creation and community work.[106] This comprehensive list includes fundamental components of how the SDGs have been localised in Asker and range from policy and budget alignment to stakeholder engagement processes. The VLR report further elaborates on each of the eight aspects of Asker's means of implementation and cite concrete examples of how these are put into practice.

Barcelona

Name of VLR Report: Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report on the Barcelona 2030 Agenda: Voluntary Local Review 2021

Population: 1,636,732 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

Barcelona released its second consecutive VLR in 2021. This VLR was developed with a view to achieve three main objectives: (1) mainstream the SDGs across all areas of the city's administration, (2) monitor the progress achieved over the past year since the release of Barcelona's first VLR to inform stakeholders about evidence-based policymaking, and (3) clear the way for Barcelona to take part in the global conversation on sustainable development.

The 2021 VLR is built upon the work of the 2020 edition. The report provides updates on events that have played out at the local level, including the enabling environment created to achieve the Goals, new programmes launched, and updated progress on all 17 SDGs. The VLR also details how the city's budget aligns with the SDGs, detailing the amount and percentage of the municipal budget dedicated to each of the Global Goals, and reflects on how COVID-19 has impacted the city's trajectory. Finally, the report monitors the progress of each SDG, highlighting current actions being implemented.

Spotlight on: Online Tools

To complement its VLR report, Barcelona launched a trilingual site in Catalan, English, and Spanish dedicated to the city's work on the 2030 Agenda. Referred to as the 'Barcelona Agenda 2030',[107] the site includes information on all 17 SDGs and indicators, as well as local actions. The section on indicators is built on an open source platform by 'Open SDG', a collaboration between the U.S. Government, the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS), and the non-profit 'Center for Open Data Enterprise', together with the Open SDG community itself.[108] This online platform provides detailed and up-to-date information for all the targets Barcelona addresses in its VLR. Moreover, each SDG has a dedicated page on the Barcelona Agenda 2030 site featuring information on specific measures taken by the city that are linked to relevant municipal programmes, creating a database of SDG actions that serves to inspire other members of the SDGs community seeking to accelerate progress.

Buenos Aires

Name of VLR Report: Buenos Aires City Voluntary Local Review 2021. Localization of the 2030 Agenda in Buenos Aires City

Population: 3,075,646 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

One of only two cities to have conducted three VLRs, Buenos Aires has reviewed its progress toward the SDGs annually since 2019. This new edition builds upon the work of previous VLRs and examines the city's sustainable development practices against the background of the drastically shifting environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The review explores SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, and 17, as recommended by the 2021 HLPF. The report also includes data on all 17 SDGs to better gauge the city's overall progress toward the goals of the 2030 Agenda. The VLR report provides a baseline for the city's selected targets and indicators, as well as the most recently available figures together with the targets to be achieved by 2025 and 2030. Moreover, the VLR report summarises Buenos Aires's approach to localising the SDGs and the methodology used to measure progress.

The Buenos Aires 2021 VLR highlights the objectives adopted by the Chief of Government for the period between 2021 and 2023 for each of the nine reported SDGs. These objectives are definitive goals set by the city with measurable outcomes to ensure accountability to its residents for the progress achieved. For instance, as part of its work on SDG 1, Buenos Aires has committed itself to providing '12,000 families with new or improved housing (2023)'.[109] This approach responds to the local government's desire to be accountable to its residents, for which the VLR is also a fundamental part.

Spotlight on: Online Tools

Buenos Aires's VLR aims at becoming a powerful tool for peer-learning and forging new partnerships with other cities. The VLR is connected with the city's Federal Urban Cooperation Platform,[110] an online tool comprising exchange kits containing practical information about Buenos Aires's good practices that can be replicated in other cities and that complements the information provided in the VLR report. In addition to connecting with this online platform, the VLR report includes hyperlinks to other relevant policy documents and initiatives, creating an immersive learning experience for the reader. For instance, Buenos Aires connects SDG 10 on reducing inequality to its 'Hello, I am a migrant!' strategy and to the city's pledge to advance human rights.

Cape Town

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review 2021 City of Cape Town: A Review of the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Population: 4,710,000 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

Cape Town is the first city in South Africa to release a VLR of the SDGs. The VLR is part of the city's commitment to confront climate change, for which effects are already being felt in the city, as well as emerge from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Cape Town's VLR has been developed to support and create sustainable development policies, open up communication and build and solidify partnerships, as well as to inspire and encourage all segments of society to work on aligning their actions with the SDGs to create a more sustainable city.[111]

The VLR is aligned with Cape Town's priorities as outlined in the city's current long-term strategy. The VLR report assesses the city's actions on the SDGs, focusing on SDGs 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, and 17, and illustrates data for each of the nine priority SDGs, as well as examples of policies. The VLR assesses Cape Town's progress through a traffic-light assessment tool, and concludes with a detailed statistical annex using data from 2014 (or the first year available thereafter), linking global indicators with those at the local level.

Spotlight on: VLR Process

The VLR report offers a comprehensive overview of the methodology followed by Cape Town in conducting the VLR process. The report includes detailed explanations of the benefits of conducting a VLR, Cape Town's approach to localising the SDGs, and the institutional framework created to develop the VLR. The VLR process also incorporated collaborative actions with different municipalities in the country, national departments and agencies, and other external partners, as well as international organisations, such as UNDESA, UN-Habitat, and UCLG. The experience gained through Cape Town's VLR fed into UNECA's Africa VLR Guidelines published in 2022.

Ghent

Name of VLR Report: The Ghent Sustainability Report 2021, Focus on People. Voluntary Local Review

Population: 260,341 (2018)

Overview of the VLR Report

This is the second of two VLRs released by Ghent. Its first edition, published in 2020, presented a detail overview of the city's actions toward all 17 SDGs and a detailed quantitative assessment based on data on its current standing and ongoing trends. Ghent's 2020 VLR provided a baseline and outlined existing challenges and areas of opportunity for improvement. This second VLR report takes readers on a sightseeing journey through Ghent, switching gears to focus on SDGs 1 to 5, the very essence of which are people.[112]

Ghent adopts a novel approach to the VLR process, one that speaks to stories on the ground of the city's work on the SDGs. The VLR reviews the progress of existing programmes by all elements of society, from the city government to civil society, educational institutions, small companies, and others. Each SDG that is reviewed begins with an overview of that SDG backed up with pertinent data to provide a better context for actions and illuminate trends. The VLR report also highlights programmes, noting how the programme has evolved, identifying target stakeholders, and accentuating what makes Ghent proud. Overall, this strategy encourages ownership of the SDGs among stakeholders, as they are an integral part of the city's sustainable journey that is recognised at the global level.

Spotlight on: Impact of COVID-19

Ghent had already conducted a preliminary assessment of COVID-19's impact on the city in its 2020 VLR, with particular focus on SDG 11 and how the pandemic affected vulnerable populations. The 2021 VLR report focuses on specific impacts on the five reviewed SDGs, presenting new data to better demonstrate new post-COVID-19 trends and identify elements in need of urgent action. For example, COVID-19 had a pernicious effect on SDG 1. The city has witnessed an increase in the number of people in need of welfare support (in particular, recipients of living wages), fracturing the downward trend achieved up until 2019. This analysis reveals the importance of the SDGs in articulating recovery plans, but more importantly, of the stories highlighted through the VLR report.

Gladsaxe

Name of VLR Report: The 2030 Agenda on the Local Level: A Voluntary Review from Gladsaxe Denmark

Population: 69,681 (2019)

Overview of the VLR Report

Central to Gladsaxe's VLR is a commitment to sustainable development that covers the social, economic, and environmental dimensions. This commitment led Gladsaxe to become Denmark's first local authority to integrate the SDGs into its guiding strategy. Acknowledging that delivering the SDGs requires strong partnerships, Gladsaxe is helping to create shared sustainability values among stakeholders, encouraging and facilitating their actions.

The VLR report introduces Gladsaxe's approach to the SDGs, highlights good practices, and tracks progress toward to two selected indicators. Gladsaxe has aligned its six strategic goals with the SDGs. For instance, the municipality's goal of 'equal opportunities to succeed' aligns with SDGs 3, 4, 8, and 17. Under this goal, Gladsaxe focuses on three concrete measures to achieve the municipality's overall goals. Importantly, the VLR offers three key recommendations to other cities starting out on their SDG journey: (1) include all areas of the organisation – not just one branch, (2) integrate the SDGs into core operations – not as an add-on, and (3) be specific and get started.[113] These three recommendations acknowledge the significance of inter-departmental work, the idea of really bringing the SDGs on board in municipal operations, and of setting measurable targets and avoiding delays in localising the SDGs.

Spotlight on: Means of Implementation

Gladsaxe has created a governance system to support the implementation of the SDGs. The SDGs are incorporated into the municipal strategy, budget, and management systems. This is complemented by a robust monitoring system capable of reacting to changes in the development of the city. Moreover, Gladsaxe believes that work on the SDGs extends well beyond flagship projects and strategies: it needs to be thoroughly embedded into the work and tasks of all employees. This is achieved by 'not micro-managing the details but by developing the visions of the future together – and bringing the ideas into action.'[114] This approach increases ownership of the Goals and inspires people to explore innovative ways to act.

Guadalajara

Name of VLR Report: Guadalajara 2030: Revisión Local Voluntaria sobre la Implementación de la Agenda 2030 y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible

Population: 1,385,629 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

Guadalajara conducted its VLR to crystalise the commitment of the local government to the 2030 Agenda as well as to the New Urban Agenda. Guadalajara highlights specific actions in the short- and medium-term to achieve a more sustainable future. The city is engaging a wide range of local, national, and international stakeholders in its VLR to discern which challenges will maximise Guadalajara's contribution to global sustainability.

Guadalajara has integrated the SDGs across the six axes of its Municipal Plan for Development and Governance: (1) 'prosperous and inclusive' is aligned with SDGs 1, 2, 8, 9, 10 and 12, (2) 'in community' with SDGs 3, 4, 10 and 11, (3) 'with quality public services' with SDGs 9, 11, 12 and 15, (4) 'orderly and sustainable' with SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15, (5) 'honest and well-managed' with SDGs 9, 11 and 17, and (6) 'safe, just and at peace' with SDGs 11 and 16. Alongside these six axes are three cross-cutting themes that are also aligned with the SDGs: (1) 'equality between women and men' with SDGs 3, 5, 8, 10 and 17, (2) 'human rights' with SDGs 10, 16 and 17, and (3) 'citizen participation' with SDG 16.[115]

Spotlight on: Monitoring Progress

Guadalajara proposes its own indicator system to monitor progress. Referred to as the 'Citizen Security Index' (Índice de Seguridad Ciudadana in Spanish), this index, which is aligned with the city's overall priority objectives, covers social and environmental dimensions, as well as the quality of public spaces and vulnerability of the population. The index is then applied to the city's 441 communities, which are evaluated with a traffic-light system to determine the needs in each community. For example, communities at the orange level of this system require priority support as they face multiple challenges.

Helsingborg

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review of Helsingborg

Population: 113,816 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

Helsingborg viewed its first VLR as an opportunity to open up dialogue at three different levels: first, with the international community to claim a spot in the global conversation on sustainable development; second, with other cities to learn from their good practices and share its own successful strategies; and third, with the city's stakeholders, civil society, and across departments to brainstorm more optimal ways to advance its own sustainable objectives. But most importantly, Helsingborg conducted its VLR as part of its commitment to guarantee a high quality of life for its residents while minimising its environmental footprint.

The VLR illustrates Helsingborg's plan to localise the SDGs, referred to as the Quality-of-Life Programme. This plan articulates four main directions for the city that reflect the aspirations of its residents in the form of 'we want' statements, i.e. 'we want responsible action for a sustainable future', 'we want everyone to participate', 'we want lifelong activity', and 'we want an equal Helsingborg'.[116] Each of these four directions comprises three main focus areas that are aligned with relevant SDGs. The VLR report reviews all 17 SDGs and includes the development and analysis of selected indicators, and highlights innovative projects implemented to address current gaps.

Spotlight on: Impact of COVID-19

Helsingborg's VLR concludes by presenting the probable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs. Given that the impacts of COVID-19 are still unfolding, Helsingborg's VLR gives thought to the different ways in which the pandemic is changing the parameters in which the city operates on its sustainability journey. For example, in relation to SDG 11, Helsingborg notes that as telework becomes a normal part of the work landscape, so too is demand for larger houses increasing. This is also decentralising the geography of labour; and therefore, if this trend continues, Helsingborg will need to reconsider the distribution of public services and amenities. Teleworking may also impact SDG 7 due to higher daytime demand for energy in homes and less in the city centre, where most offices are located.

Helsinki

Name of VLR Report: From
Agenda to Action: Implementation
of the UN Sustainable
Development Goals in Helsinki
2021

Population: 658,864 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

Helsinki released its first VLR in 2019, aligning two of
the city's main guiding strategies, 'The Most
Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy
2017-2021' and 'Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035' to the
SDGs. The report highlighted Helsinki's level of
performance in attaining the SDGs and identified
future challenges.[117] The VLR opens by positioning
itself with respect to the city's 2019 VLR and the
achievements of the Helsinki City Strategy between
2017 and 2021. Building upon this work, the 2021 VLR
details how Helsinki has integrated the SDGs into its
governance structure and its core values as
encouraged by SDG16.

The 2021 VLR reviews all 17 SDGs. It groups the SDGs
across three main pillars of sustainable development,
which work as the themes structuring the city's review:
environment, people, and economy. SDGs 6, 7, 13, 14,
and 15 are grouped under the environment, while SDGs
2, 3, 4, 5, and 10 focus on people, and SDGs 1, 8, 9, 11,
and 12 fall under the economy. SDG 16 and 17 are
integrated throughout the three pillars. Each theme
provides links to relevant city-level programmes and
reports that are also simultaneously connected to
relevant SDGs. For example, under the environmental
theme, the city reviews its own actions on the climate
and energy, which are linked to SDGs 7 and 13. Every
theme includes a trend analysis of pertinent indicators,
highlights challenges and successes, and sets up new
development targets. Finally, each theme concludes
with examples of Helsinki's actions.

Spotlight on: Online Tools

To complement the VLR report, Helsinki launched its
2021 VLR as a website[118] covering content similar to
the VLR report, but organised in a more accessible way
for the general public. For example, a section on
indicators featuring the most recent data on Helsinki's
local indicators can be found under each of the three
guiding themes. This allows users to select different
indicators and time periods to better understand
trends. The VLR website also includes a news section
to display current events related to the city's SDG
journey.

Kaohsiung

Name of VLR Report: 2021 Kaohsiung City Voluntary Local Review

Population: 2,753,530 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

In Kaohsiung, all of the city's strategies, and more significantly, the city's four priority policies to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, are infused with references to sustainability. Kaohsiung City's first foray into the VLR movement explores how the SDGs can be applied to its policies and strategies, taking the five key areas of its governance structure and aligning them with the SDGs. For example, the area of 'quality of life' corresponds to SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, and 11, while 'peace of mind' is covered by SDGs 5, 13, 15, and 16. The VLR reviews in detail each of these key governance areas, showcasing current projects that help advance priority SDG targets. This approach gives rise to a detailed overview of the city's work on the SDGs and opens up possibilities for peer-learning. The VLR report concludes by setting 2020 as a baseline for all 17 SDGs with short- and mid-term targets to 2025 and 2030.

Spotlight on: VLR Process

To develop its first VLR, Kaohsiung adopted a methodology with four levels to review the different measures in place to implement the 2030 Agenda: (1) Level 1: Kaohsiung's overall vision on sustainable development, (2) Level 2: Kaohsiung City's policy priorities in relation to the SDGs, (3) Level 3: SDG priorities in Kaohsiung's sustainable development, and (4) Level 4: Other SDG policies and evaluation indicators of Kaohsiung City.[119] These four levels provide a framework for reviewing Kaohsiung's operations, starting with the overall vision and moving toward more granular policies and monitoring indicators. Moreover, a review of Level 3 included a stakeholder engagement process that covered both internal (cross-departmental) and external (citizen's cafes) dimensions.

Karatay

Name of VLR Report: Karatay Sustainability Report 2021 Voluntary Local Review

Population: 363,177

Overview of the VLR Report

Given the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in advancing a more sustainable future, Karatay Municipality has begun to restructure its operations to better meet and achieve the SDGs, forming new directorates to support its work on localising the SDGs and reflecting their spirit at the local level.

An important component of Karatay's VLR is capacity building. United Cities and Local Governments Middle East and West Asia (UCLG-MEWA) conducted a training session in Karatay on April 2021,[120] where the key principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the role of VLRs in accelerating its implementation were presented. The session highlighted the key role of local actors in helping to achieve the objectives of global agendas and how cities are responsible for delivering on many of the promises set out in the SDGs. Interactive discussions during the session helped to operationalise different aspects of the VLR process, such as cross-departmental work and the alignment of policies with the SDGs.

Spotlight on: Monitoring Progress

Karatay's first VLR sets a baseline for tracking future progress. The VLR reviews the 17 SDGs, providing historical data on selected indicators, and outlines concrete goals to meet by 2030, as well as strategies that are currently being implemented. Overall, the VLR lays out a wide range of actions for advancing all 17 SDGs with a roadmap to localise the 2030 Agenda in Karatay.

Kelowna

Name of VLR Report: Global Goals, Local Action: Kelowna's Voluntary Local Review

Population: 144,576 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

Kelowna frames its VLR around two hallmark events that shaped 2020: the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. Both events highlight underlying inequalities in socioeconomic structures that exacerbate the living conditions of marginalised populations. Yet, the VLR recognises that leaving no one behind means including the claims of marginalised populations in policymaking.

In line with this spirit, the VLR is the result of an extensive consultation process with academia, indigenous groups, the regional and national government, civil society, and other key stakeholders. The consultations aimed to find the most appropriate set of indicators for the city—i.e., indicators that reflect the heterogenous background of its population and are geographically and culturally relevant to the city. The VLR narrowed down the indicators through two approaches. First, ongoing policies were aligned with the SDGs and ongoing indicators and metrics were identified to assess such policies. Second, Kelowna solicited monitoring data that was already being collected by other organisations; if no data was readily available, the city engaged in consultations with stakeholders to track down data.

Spotlight on: Baseline Setting

Kelowna's first VLR is positioned as a baseline report, revealing progress toward the 17 SDGs at the municipal level. The city reviewed each of the 17 SDGs, their targets and indicators independently to identify 28 community-level indicators that better represent the reality on the ground in Kelowna. For example, given the history of the city with systemic racism and exclusion, special efforts were made to consult with indigenous organisations to create these indicators. The review includes trend analyses on progress, ongoing challenges, and examples of implemented policies. Each chapter concludes with an analysis of synergies and trade-offs highlighting the interdependencies of the SDGs. Together with the 17 chapters dedicated to each SDG, the appendixes complement certain indicators, namely, SDGs 1, 2, 7, 12, and 13.

Lima

Name of VLR Report: Informe Local Voluntario 2021

Population: 9,674,755 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

Lima presented its first VLR in August 2021 as part of the city's efforts to localise the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Lima's SDG localisation strategy has been supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and its VLR process to localise the SDGs is also part and parcel of this support. Lima's VLR process includes awareness raising campaigns, the creation of a database with municipal indicators to track progress, alignment of the city's budget with the SDGs, and stakeholder engagement processes with civil society.

The VLR report describes what the SDGs mean for Lima and details all aspects of its localisation process, paying special attention to initiatives focused on leaving no one behind, such as the elderly, indigenous groups, and people with disabilities. Lima's first VLR analyses the performance of the 17 SDGs and lists related policies for each target. Moreover, the VLR report reviews how the 2030 Agenda is embedded in local territorial planning, as Lima was simultaneously updating its new Municipal Strategy for the period 2021-2035 (referred to as Plan de Desarrollo Concertado 2021-2035 in Spanish). The 10 objectives of the city's new plan are already aligned with the SDGs. The VLR report concludes by presenting the implementation challenges facing Lima in the years ahead before the 2030 deadline.

Spotlight on: Impact of COVID-19

Lima's VLR report dedicates one chapter to analysing how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the city. The analysis is divided into two themes: impacts of the pandemic on the city and responses put in place by local authorities to support the population. The first theme details the evolution of the pandemic in the city and analyses the evolution of infection rates, number of deaths, effects on the city's health system, and the socioeconomic aftermath resulting from the measures put in place to limit the number of infections. The VLR report also analyses the emergency plans launched by local authorities in March 2020 to face off against the pandemic. This plan included measures to mitigate negative economic impacts on vulnerable populations, to guarantee the health and well-being of its residents, and to increase social participation to better reflect the needs of the population during this difficult time. The VLR report links to a dedicated website featuring a compilation of the latest information on resources available to residents.[121]

Los Angeles

Name of VLR Report: Los Angeles Sustainable Development Goals. 2021 Voluntary Local Review of Progress Toward the Sustainable Development Goals in Los Angeles

Population: 4,041,707 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

Los Angeles released its first VLR in 2019. This second edition, launched in 2021, builds upon the city's previous VLR, reflecting on the added challenges brought by COVID-19 and how the pandemic has affected the implementation of the SDGs in Los Angeles. Furthermore, the VLR reinforces the city's commitment to bolster efforts based on the 2030 Agenda during this decade of action to shape a more resilient and equal city where no one is left behind.

The VLR paints a meticulous picture of local actions implemented since 2019. It pays special attention to explaining some of the measures implemented by the city to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, such as setting up testing and vaccination facilities and accelerating the move toward a 'contact-free' government to ensure that residents can still reach out to city departments in a safe and secure manner. The VLR also sets out how Los Angeles is approaching its own post-COVID-19 recovery based on green and just values. This edition of Los Angeles's VLR reviews all 17 SDGs with data and exemplary policies implemented in the city. The VLR concludes by noting the interrelated character of the SDGs and the need for policies that recognise such interconnectedness.

Spotlight on: Online Tools

Los Angeles launched its 2021 VLR simultaneously both as a more typically styled report and as an online and interactive platform.[122] The online version of the VLR features three main components: a digital and interactive version of the VLR report with an overview of all 17 SDGs; an open access data platform with detailed data on the city's own set of indicators for the SDGs, where all data can be visualised online or downloaded as a CSV file; and finally, an online database of SDG programmes carried out by the city and other stakeholders that are linked to relevant SDGs to which Angelenos can submit programmes for inclusion. Overall, this online platform helps maintain the latest data and information on activities and accelerates the localisation of the SDGs in Los Angeles.

Madrid

Name of VLR Report: Estrategia de Localización de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible de la Agenda 2030 en la Ciudad de Madrid

Population: 3,305, 408 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

Madrid's journey to localise the SDGs begins by embedding them into policymaking and creating a review and monitoring framework. Madrid's strategy centres on defining key strategic actions, goals, and indicators, considering methodology for implementing strategic actions, and establishing a review and follow-up framework for assessing progress annually.

In line with guidelines from the Spanish government, Madrid's strategy emphasises the formulation of wide-range policies capable of tackling different SDGs simultaneously. The localisation report defines six wide-ranging strategies encompassing 24 lines of actions. Paramount to this approach is the city's aim to maximise synergies between policies and the SDGs to accelerate the achievement of local goals. This requires extensive cross-departmental coordination to allow cross-cutting policies to be devised. Therefore, the SDG localisation report recognises the need to strive for policy coherence to accelerate Madrid's sustainable actions.

Spotlight on: Baseline Setting

Madrid's SDG localisation strategy includes a review and follow-up monitoring mechanism, as well as a baseline against which to measure future progress. The localisation process yielded 104 targets and 160 indicators corresponding to different targets and indicators in the 2030 Agenda, with 2015 set as the baseline. However, on a few rare occasions, no baselines have been set due to a lack of available data. Madrid has also set goals for 2030 with numerical targets, although in some instances, no quantitative targets have been defined. In this case, indicators will be evaluated based on how they change over time, without seeking to achieve a specific numerical target.

Malmö

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review City of Malmö 2021: A Review of the City's Steering towards the Sustainable Development Goals

Population: 350,647 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

Malmö's first VLR reflects on how its actions are steering the city toward the SDGs. A distinctive feature of Malmo's first VLR is that the city regards this as a provisional, rather than final report, preferring to focus inwardly on its own management systems.[123] Therefore, the VLR is inward oriented insofar as it focuses on assessing internal procedures, work, and strategies as the first step on a longer journey to achieve the SDGs.

The report reviews a number of city-wide strategies, focusing on their capacity to guide strategic actions to accelerate the localisation of the SDGs. This review is performed under the lenses of the 2030 Agenda's principle of leaving no one behind and explores how current policies encourage their implementation at the local level. A stakeholder engagement process with internal actors (representatives from departments and local companies) complemented the review of documents, providing a clearer picture of the work done by the city on the SDGs and identifying areas for improvement. To monitor progress, Malmö has combined national and local indicators, depending on availability and level of disaggregation. These indicators are supplemented by a qualitative assessment of programmes and implemented strategies. The VLR report reviews nine SDGs that coincide with those selected by the 2021 HLPF, namely, SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, and 17.

Spotlight on: Integrating the SDGs

Malmö's approach to integrating the SDGs into local policymaking includes aligning the city's budget with the 2030 Agenda. Referred to as 'The Malmö Model', this strategy positions the city's budget as a local 2030 Agenda plan. Embedding the SDGs into the municipal budget allows sustainability to be deeply integrated into the city's core management processes. The VLR report states that 'for the budget to constitute Malmö's local 2030 Agenda plan, it is therefore assumed that sustainability reporting, with follow-up and analysis of the SDGs, will be applied systematically in the various elements of the budget process as one of a number of items of basis for decisions for preparation of the budget, as well as in the fora where the City Council goals are finally formulated.'[124] Therefore, this model works as a systematic approach in mainstreaming SDG actions across all aspects of the local government from a long-term perspective.

Mérida

Name of VLR Report: Primera Revisión Local Voluntaria: Alcances y Retos de la Agenda 2030 en el Municipio de Mérida

Population: 921,771 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

Mérida has progressively embedded the 2030 Agenda across its municipal strategies and policies. This work was summarised in the city's first VLR, which reviews means of implementation, governance structure, and local progress toward prioritised SDGs. The VLR focuses on reviewing the actions adopted by the municipal government during the 2018-2021 administration and anticipates future actions to be taken in subsequent administrations to continue localising the SDGs.

Moreover, Mérida acknowledges the important role of external stakeholders by dedicating a section of its VLR report to highlighting actions that bring together a wide array of stakeholders in localising the SDGs. As part of the VLR process, the local government invited civil society, the business community, and academic organisations to be part of its SDG journey. This engagement process, which took place over five meetings, acknowledged their contribution to sustainable development in the city and ensured that the VLR reflected input from relevant actors. Ultimately, Mérida has been able to establish the 2030 Agenda as a regulatory framework to design, guide, and implement public policies to advance sustainable development.

Spotlight on: Means of Implementation

Mérida's VLR report reveals how the city has sought to improve the means of implementation through policy coherence, stakeholder engagement, new partnerships, and monitoring progress to achieve the 2030 Agenda. To start, Mérida has gradually integrated the SDGs into local governance structures, as described in section 4.3 of this report. This process identified synergies and trade-offs between different strategies, with an objective to mainstream the 2030 Agenda across operations and with multiple actors, both internal and external. All in all, this has created a governance structure naturally inclined to facilitate the implementation of the SDGs, taking full advantage of municipal assets as the city faces its most pressing challenges.

México City

Name of VLR Report: Ciudad de México, Ciudad Innovadora y de Derechos. Informe Local Voluntario 2021

Population: 9,209,944 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

Mexico City employs its VLR to accelerate the localisation of global agendas and meet local commitments to sustainable development. The city embarked on its VLR to compile the strategies, programmes, and initiatives implemented by the local government to localise the SDGs. This allows stakeholders to recognise the current state of progress and identify challenges in becoming an innovative city focused on advancing human rights. The VLR report summarises in a single document the city's vision, work, challenges, and opportunities ahead to facilitate future work on sustainable development.

The VLR reaffirms Mexico City's commitment to promoting human rights and sustainability at a critical moment given the harm brought by COVID-19. As such, the VLR identifies the added challenges resulting from the pandemic in the implementation of its strategies in order to better plan for building back better.

Spotlight on: Localisation of Global Agendas

The VLR articulates the vision of Mexico City for a more sustainable future in six axes of government, and maps them to the SDGs and other global agendas, such as the New Urban Agenda (NUA). These six axes (equality and rights; sustainable city; improved mobility; Mexico City, America's cultural capital; zero aggression and more security; and science, innovation, and transparency[125]) are used as a means to clarify goals and identify ways to further improve the quality of living standards in line with sustainability principles. Each of the six axes is comprised of different priority areas, which include programmes positioned to develop concrete targets that are aligned with pertinent SDGs and other global agendas. For example, one of the priority areas within the first axis, equality and rights, is the 'right to equality and inclusion'. This priority area includes different programmes, such as 'spaces without discrimination', which is aligned with SDGs 3, 5, 8, 10, and 16, as well as with NUA.

New Taipei

Name of VLR Report: 2021 New Taipei SDGs Voluntary Local Review

Population: 4,008,113 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

New Taipei launched its first VLR in 2019, following up with a second edition in 2021. Overall, New Taipei's work on the SDGs helps to reaffirm the city's dedication to sustainable development. The 2021 VLR uses the same framework outlined in New Taipei's first local review, first assessing policies on SDG 11, and then running through initiatives impacting other SDGs. Given the interconnected nature of the SDGs, policies are aligned to core SDGs, indicating trade-offs and synergies with other goals. For instance, New Taipei's ambition to achieve carbon neutrality contributes to advancing SDGs 8, 11, 12, and 14, but with potential trade-offs in SDGs 2, 3, 4, 6, and 12. By taking synergies and trade-offs into consideration, New Taipei is better prepared to maximise positive interlinkages while minimising negative ones.

The VLR concludes with relevant indicators to measure progress. New Taipei has created its own set of indicators, referred to as 'NTC indicators', that match national and global indicators. The VLR report describes each NTC indicator, presents progress over the past few years, and states mid- and long-term goals to 2025 and 2030.

Spotlight on: Impact of COVID-19

In line with the 2021 HLPF's emphasis on 'sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic',[126] New Taipei City's second VLR attaches particular importance to the fight to curb the spread of COVID-19. Despite the added difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to cities worldwide, New Taipei continued to work on the SDGs and reimagined existing sustainable actions in the battle against COVID-19. New Taipei believes that the pandemic has made the principle of leaving no one behind more relevant than ever. The VLR includes a section entitled 'COVID-19: We Are All in This Together' with selected measures put in place to alleviate the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in an environmentally conscious manner. To support its work on SDG 1, New Taipei doubled the number of resources offered to vulnerable populations, an action that shared synergies with SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 14, 16, and 17.

Orlando

Name of VLR Report: Orlando and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Voluntary Local Review of Progress

Population: 307,573 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

Orlando's first VLR showcases the city's progress toward the SDGs. For many years, Orlando has been a proponent of sustainable development. The city updated its sustainable development strategy in 2018, referred to as 'Green Works', aligning it with the 2030 Agenda. This VLR is a vehicle for self-reflection, identifying areas where the city can improve while simultaneously sharing some of its successful initiatives.

The VLR report focuses on nine priority SDGs, namely 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 13, 15, and 17. These Goals were selected against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic because they are deemed fundamental to a sustainable and just recovery. Moreover, the VLR provides a unique opportunity to strengthen coordination with relevant actors, both vertically with other levels of government (such as the State of Florida and the federal government, as well as global sustainability networks), and with civil society. For instance, in a review of each of the SDGs, the VLR report recognises efforts by civil society with highlights of selected initiatives. Finally, as part of its VLR, Orlando localises the indicators of the SDGs to the city's own context, and creates a system to track progress toward delivering the city's sustainable ambitions to its residents.

Spotlight on: Policy Coherence

A key component of the methodology in Orlando's VLR was to increase ownership of the Goals. For Orlando, this meant to strengthen cross-departmental coordination, reaching out to city staff and other partners to better understand the unique ways they approach efforts to localise the SDGs. This was built upon the work conducted as part of the city's Green Works strategy, which also helped all departments and divisions to optimise and modernise how they implement sustainability on the ground. The VLR states that this emphasis on policy coherence helped 'to view the Global Goals not as an additional burden, but as an interconnected interpretation of the excellent work they are already doing and as a chance to refine processes to work toward more whole-of-government coordination'.[127] Hence, the VLR helped to strengthen existing efforts to increase coordination across departments.

Penang Island

Name of VLR Report: Penang Island Voluntary Local Review

Population: 722,384 (2010)

Overview of the VLR Report

At the heart of Penang Island's first VLR is a commitment to leaving no one behind and contribute to delivering the global ambitions set by the 2030 Agenda in a local context. The City Council of Penang Island has positioned itself to create an 'intelligent, liveable and happy (ILHam) City'.[128] As such, Penang Island employs the SDGs to deliver this vision and guide the city's development in a way that confronts its most pressing issues, such as rapid urbanisation, gentrification, and the challenges posed by climate change.

Penang Island has aligned its Penang2030 Vision with the SDGs. The methodology followed for the report consists of four tiers: (1) vision of creating an intelligent, liveable and happy city, (2) corresponding SDGs for the city's vision, (3) selection of 11 SDGs as development priorities, and (4) other SDGs related policies and assessment of indicators.[129] These four tiers are articulated around the principle of leaving no one behind. The VLR report reviews the city's priority SDGs, namely 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 17. The review is based on an analysis of data on the progress of actions and highlights several of the policies implemented.

Spotlight on: Impact of COVID-19

Penang Island's VLR includes a section dedicated to evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on the city. To start, Penang Island acknowledges the need to balance measures to minimise the pernicious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic with sustainable development, and recognises the challenge of restoring economic growth while maintaining environmental protection. The VLR report highlights measures taken to limit the impact of COVID-19 on the localisation of the SDGs, focusing on SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, and 17. For instance, in the context of SDG 5, the VLR report notes the disproportionate negative impact of the pandemic on women who have experienced job and income loss and seen an increase in domestic violence. To counteract these adverse effects, Penang Island employs 'Gender Responsive and Participatory Budgeting' (GRPB) to empower women to take part in budgeting decisions in the city.

São Paulo

Name of VLR Report: Report of Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals in São Paulo

Population: 12,400,232 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

This is São Paulo's second consecutive VLR and is a step forward in the city's SDG journey. São Paulo has positioned itself globally as a key player in this decade of action. Through its VLRs, the city hopes to accelerate concrete actions to implement the SDGs at the local level, always taking into consideration the global repercussions of those actions.

The 2020 edition focused on localising the 2030 Agenda by, for example, mapping the city's policies against the SDGs, engaging with stakeholders, and reviewing existing means of implementation. The 2021 VLR begins by reiterating São Paulo's commitment to a sustainable and just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This second edition focuses on creating a monitoring framework and assessing progress toward the SDGs. The report, therefore, provides an exhaustive overview of all 17 SDGs.

Spotlight on: Monitoring Progress

As mentioned above, the main emphasis of São Paulo's 2021 VLR is on monitoring progress. This focus is built upon the work done for the first VLR that established 135 municipal goals. The sections reviewing the 17 SDGs begin by contextualising each SDG and what it means for the city. This includes examining existing strategies and clarifying the import of any given SDG for São Paulo. The analysis of each SDG is structured at two levels of detail. The first level looks very closely at and provides a comprehensive analysis of a single municipal goal to illustrate the city's monitoring approach. This analysis includes the indicator chosen to measure progress, the formula to calculate that indicator, data and related municipal programmes. The second level provides a general overview of all the municipal goals and indicators, including base values in 2015, latest available data, and the goal to be achieved by 2030. This monitoring strategy creates a system to guide how progress is measured in the years leading up to 2030 and serves as the basis for evidence-based policymaking, as a result of the up-to-date compendium of data that facilitates identifying ongoing challenges, strengths, and shortcomings.

Shah Alam

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review 2021: The Implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Shah Alam City

Population: 740,750 (2017)

Overview of the VLR Report

In line with Shah Alam's long tradition with sustainable development policies, the city released its first VLR in 2021 to reaffirm its commitment to localising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In recent years, Shah Alam's sustainability work focused on its low-carbon city plan and its dedication to local climate action. Yet, the VLR helped strengthen all three dimensions of sustainable development in the city's current and future strategies.

Shah Alam's VLR report introduces the national and local framework guiding the localisation of the SDGs as well as the city's profile. Then, it presents the city's SDG roadmap, already published as a separate report, and the enabling environment. The report also reviews progress toward five prioritised SDGs, namely 1, 11, 12, 13, and 15. The report concludes with highlights on the city's planned future actions and a reflection of how to truly leave no one behind. In light of this work, Shah Alam's VLR serves multiple purposes. First, with this VLR, the city is creating formal and informal governance networks to accelerate SDG actions that break policy siloes and allow synergies and trade-offs between strategies to be identified. Second, the VLR also ensures that the city stays accountable to its residents and is more transparent in all its practices. Finally, the VLR illustrates several of the city's good practices to encourage peer-learning with other cities.

Spotlight on: Integrating Climate Action with the SDGs

Fighting climate change forms the cornerstone of Shah Alam's current direction. Shah Alam's 'Low Carbon City Action Plan' pledges to cut GHG emissions by 45% by 2030 (from 2015 baseline levels). This is a tremendous challenge given that Shah Alam is growing rapidly and its population is expanding. The city has taken part in international programmes, such as the SDGs Frontrunner Cities Programme funded by the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund. Its VLR reflects the city's low carbon development ambitions by prioritising four environmental SDGs, in particular SDGs 11, 12, 13, and 15. Shah Alam's low carbon city framework not only structures actions based on SDG 13, but is also an integral part of SDGs 11 and 12. Therefore, the VLR helps realise wider synergies between different aspects of sustainable development by finding interlinkages between climate action and concrete targets for different SDGs managed by separate departments. Shah Alam's work on climate change mitigation was also featured in Malaysia's 2021 VNR.[130]

Skiathos

Name of VLR Report: Skiathos Voluntary Local Review 2020

Population: 6,610 (2011)

Overview of the VLR Report

Skiathos launched its first ever VLR in October 2021, a report that included data and information on actions taken to monitor and localise the SDGs up to 2020. The VLR emphasises the municipality's commitment to leaving no one behind. To meet this commitment, Skiathos has launched the 'Skiathos 2030 Vision: Agenda 2030 in Action' as a comprehensive blueprint to implement the SDGs at the local level. The Skiathos 2030 Vision was incorporated into Skiathos's Business Plan in 2021, which includes six strategic goals inspired by the SDGs, such as Goal 4, 'a city that protects its natural environment', and reflects SDGs 7, 13, 14, and 15.

The VLR reviews each of the six municipal strategic goals in turn, maps concrete actions for relevant SDGs and establishes a set of locally available indicators to track progress. Data from 2019 and 2020 provides a base for a preliminary trend assessment through the application of a traffic-light system categorising each indicator into four categories: on track, moderately increasing, stagnating, and decreasing.

Spotlight on: VLR Process

To conduct its first VLR, Skiathos developed methodology after a thorough review of international VLR handbooks, academic literature, and other examples of VLRs in order to meet international standards. The methodology includes four steps: (1) 'Localisation' to translate the 2030 Agenda into the local context; (2) 'Gathering Data and Assessment' to map out existing strategies and plans with the SDGs, analysing how each of them contribute to advancing the 2030 Agenda; (3) 'Implementation' to identify actions needed to deliver on the promises of the SDGs, preparing for their execution while also determining indicators to measure progress; and (4) 'Monitoring' to create a framework to track progress. Overall, this four-step approach to the VLR process structures the main components of work on the SDGs into actionable and progressive steps that can serve as a blueprint for other cities that want to commence their VLR journeys. Finally, the VLR highlights that producing a VLR report is a 'first but vital component of a long-term process'.[131]

Stockholm

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review City of Stockholm 2021

Population: 978,770 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

The City of Stockholm aims to become a leader in sustainable development, both in general and in the implementation of the SDGs in particular. This is part of the city's 'Vision 2040 Stockholm – City of Opportunities,' which integrates the 2030 Agenda across municipal operations. The Vision 2040 Stockholm is built upon three overreaching goals, each of them linked to the SDGs: (1) 'A modern city with opportunities for everyone' connects with SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 16, (2) 'A dynamic and sustainably growing city' reflects SDGs 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, and 15, and (3) 'A financially sustainable and innovative city' encompasses SDGs 9, 12, and 17.[132]

The VLR report analyses the SDGs under each of the goals set forth in Vision 2040 Stockholm. For each of the strategic Goals, the VLR details Stockholm's overall intentions and focuses on how the city advances each of the prioritised SDGs, and includes selected indicators and a detailed assessment of the city's current standing. The report also highlights the interlinkages between each reviewed SDG and other goals and targets.

Spotlight on: Integrating the SDGs

Stockholm employs a project-based approach to integrating the SDGs into municipal strategies. The VLR report reasserts that all SDGs and their targets are interrelated, and therefore, implementation must consider synergies and trade-offs. The city translates this standpoint into planning strategies that have positive effects across several SDGs. The VLR report exemplifies this approach with six projects that leverage co-benefits to simultaneously advance more than one SDG. For instance, the city has set a goal for 'urban planning with focus on sustainable development in the Stockholm district of Skärholmen'.[133] The project aims to create an urban development model that prioritises the interests of the city's residents and promotes a fine living environment. The project has been applied to the redevelopment of Skärholmen, a district that has witnessed the construction of new housing units in recent years. The project is committed to taking this opportunity to create a vibrant and safe community with respect shown to socioeconomic equality. Overall, this project integrates values that contribute toward achieving SDGs 3, 4, 10, 11, and 16.

Subang Jaya

Name of VLR Report: Subang Jaya Voluntary Local Review 2021: Implementing the 2030 Agenda in the City of Subang Jaya

Population: 898,830 (2019)

Overview of the VLR Report

For many years, Subang Jaya has been a strong proponent of local sustainable development. The city's first VLR commits further to its goal of taking local actions to confront global challenges. The VLR is, therefore, action oriented, and hopes to elucidate more optimal ways to continue implementing the SDGs at the local level. At the same time, the VLR aims at becoming an instrument for peer-learning, showcasing some of the city's best practices that potentially can inspire other local governments to improve their policies.

The VLR report begins by introducing the city and its SDG framework. The VLR report then goes on to describe the VLR process and the policy enabling environment in the city. In this section, the VLR report dedicates special attention to the SDG alignment process. The Subang Jaya City Council Plan for the 2020-2035 period consists of six strategic thrusts, each aligned with several SDGs. For instance, thrust 3 focuses on sustainable development, and is aligned with SDGs 3, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16. The VLR report reviews seven focus Goals, namely, SDGs 3, 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, and 16. The review of each SDG highlights existing projects and monitors progress toward selected targets.

Spotlight on: Vertical Integration

Malaysia has integrated the VLR process into the national SDG Roadmap. The VLR report states that 'For Malaysia, the VLRs preparation have also been aligned to the Malaysia SDG Cities Roadmap framework, where Urbanice Malaysia and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government have set the direction for cities to transform and set their local policies, blueprints, strategies and actions to be aligned to the SDG targets that will subsequently meet the aspiration for a sustainable urban nation'.134 This coordination with the national government includes, among other aspects, the use of a national set of indicators referred to as the 'Malaysia Urban Rural National Indicators Network for Sustainable Development (MURNInets)' that has translated the indicators of the 2030 Agenda into the local context.

Surabaya

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary
Local Review Surabaya City 2021:
Improving Sustainable
Development towards a Resilient
Post-pandemic Community

Population: 2,874,314 (2020)

Overview of the VLR Report

Surabaya is Indonesia's second largest city, and in
2021 became the first city in the country to conduct a
VLR. The VLR illustrates how the city is working to
attain the SDGs while facing local challenges. The VLR
report introduces Surabaya, the methodology followed
to conduct the VLR, and the governance structure
enabling the localisation of the SDGs. It then goes on
to review nine priority SDGs.

Surabaya's VLR also aligns itself with Indonesia's VNR,
which was presented to the 2021 HLPF. However, the
priority SDGs of Indonesia's VNR and Surabaya's VLR
differ; nevertheless, both the VNR and VLR analyse
SDGs 3, 8, 12, and 17. Surabaya analyses five
additional SDGs relevant to the city, namely, SDGs 4, 5,
6, 11, and 15. On top of these priority SDGs, Surabaya
includes a statistical annex setting the baseline for
indicators and the target to be achieved by 2030 for all
SDGs, with the exception of SDG 14 on life below
water.

Spotlight on: VLR Process

Surabaya's VLR report includes one chapter dedicated
to explaining the methodology followed by the city in
conducting its local review. The city followed
UNESCAP's 'Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines on
Voluntary Local Reviews'[135] and IGES's 'Shimokawa
Method for Voluntary Local Reviews'[136] to guide the
overall process. The city adapted these two guidelines
to the local context, resulting in a 10-step process: (1)
Institutional ownership and arrangement, (2) Linking
priorities and structuring delivery, (3) Gathering data,
(4) 1st public consultation: gathering inputs from
stakeholders, (5) Measuring progress, (6) Report
writing, (7) 2nd public consultation: validation of data
and draft report, (8) Finalisation process, (9) Submit as
VLR, and (10) Advocate and communicate.[137]
Furthermore, the report is structured according to
UNDESA's recommendations for VNRs.

Suwon

Name of VLR Report: Suwon SDGs Action Report in Line with UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Implementation of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in Suwon 2020

Population: 1,185,569 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

To confront the challenge of wrangling with the consequences brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and fighting climate change, Suwon has aligned its guiding strategy with the SDGs. The VLR report shows how the city is advancing the 2030 Agenda at the local level, which resulted in the creation of the city's own 10 SDGs. Suwon has developed a people-centric framework conducive to advancing sustainable development at the local level—thus reflecting the principle of leaving no one behind. The city has also created mechanisms to empower residents to participate in local policymaking. For instance, among other measures, the 'Citizens' Group for Urban Policy Planning' brings issues of concern to residents up for discussion with local officials. The city has also created a participatory budgeting system to allow residents to voice their needs and influence budgeting decisions. The VLR report dedicates most of its pages to reviewing the city's own SDGs.

Spotlight on: Localising Global Agendas

Suwon approached work on the 2030 Agenda by developing its own 10 SDGs, each with its own targets, namely, SDG 1: Responding to Climate Change with Good Energy for All; SDG 2: Healthy and Harmonious Biodiversity; SDG 3: City with Transparent and Clean Water Cycle; SDG 4: Healthy and Sustainable Agriculture and Food; SDG 5: Quality Jobs and Industrial Innovation; SDG 6: Sustainable Consumption and Production; SDG 7: Promoting Happiness through Welfare, Health and Education; SDG 8: Gender Equality and Multicultural Society; SDG 9: Sustainable City and Culture for All; and SDG 10: Promoting Justice, Peace and Harmony through Self-governance.[138] Each of these corresponds with one or more of the UN SDGs. For instance, the UN SDGs 1, 3, and 4 are embedded in Suwon's SDG 7. This localisation process allows Suwon to make the Global Goals relevant to the local context in a way that responds to the city's unique characteristics and needs. The VLR report presents data as well as implemented policies relevant to each of Suwon's 10 SDGs.

Taichung

Name of VLR Report: 2021 Taichung City Voluntary Local Review

Population: 2,816,667 (2020)
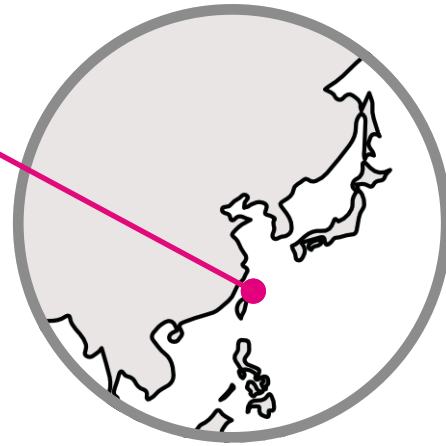
Overview of the VLR Report

Taichung's VLR opens by acknowledging the importance of ensuring sustainable development in local policymaking, demonstrating the city's commitment to mainstreaming sustainable values across its operations. The VLR supports the city's efforts to embed the ethos of the 2030 Agenda in its policies and implement the SDGs. The city has set 'sustainable happiness, rich Taichung' as its future vision, stressing the interrelationships between the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Taichung's VLR report introduces the city and its current sustainability ambitions. Then, the report aligns the 17 SDGs with the city's primary strategy and its three main goals (each of them encompassing several SDGs), and the 12 strategies guiding their implementation. The VLR report reviews all 17 SDGs, focusing on the city's priority targets. The review of each SDG consists of an analysis of trends of pertinent indicators as well as representative projects in place to advance each Goal. The VLR report concludes by presenting exemplary case studies helping Taichung to accelerate the localisation of the SDGs.

Spotlight on: VLR Process

Taichung designed a VLR process conducive to maximising the potential benefits of a local review process. The city began by identifying current challenges across the three dimensions of sustainable development, linking them to future solutions that could be implemented in the city. Following this assessment, the VLR process was divided into five steps: (1) Analyse the advantages and challenges in the city, (2) Establish the strategic framework of sustainable development, (3) Scrutinise the projects of sustainable development and establish target specification, (4) Diversified consulting, and (5) Present the VLR.[139] The third step included mapping existing policies with the SDGs as well as setting targets to be achieved by 2030 through an internal process consisting of 22 meetings bringing together representatives from all bureaus. These five steps structured a VLR process that created a solid foundation for the city's future work on localising the SDGs. The report's annex provides additional information on the indicators selected to measure progress toward each Goal, pertinent programmes related to concrete targets, and the offices responsible for their implementation.

Taipei

Name of VLR Report: 2021 Taipei City Voluntary Local Review: Climate Action in Taipei

Population: 2,553,798 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

This is the third consecutive VLR by Taipei. Previous editions focused on reviewing progress toward the city's priority goals (namely, SDGs 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 17 in 2019, and adding a review of SDGs 4, 5, 8, and 9 in 2020). Both the 2019 and 2020 editions employed a similar structure analysing trends and presenting exemplary policies to produce a concise assessment of the city's progress in implementing the SDGs.

This third edition switches gears to focus on Taipei's climate actions as they relate to the SDGs. The VLR is built upon the city's commitment to reach net-zero emissions by 2050 while achieving the local implementation of the SDGs by 2030. The VLR report explores interlinkages between SDG 13 and other SDGs, highlighting the affinity between different social and economic objectives with environmental goals. The VLR also examines Taipei's six major strategies to achieve net-zero status by 2050, which include, among others, the promotion of zero-carbon buildings and the establishment of guidelines to guarantee low-carbon procurement.

Spotlight on: Integrating Climate Action with the SDGs

By focusing on SDG 13, Taipei's 2021 VLR highlights the city's efforts to integrate climate action across relevant strategies that fall under the domain of other SDGs. This approach to reviewing the SDGs from a climate action perspective shows how climate action goes beyond what is usually expected. For example, the city has set itself a goal to encourage climate literacy in the population, which connects primarily with SDG 4 on quality education and secondarily with SDG 17 on partnerships for the Goals. This objective is implemented through two main projects: the Taipei City School Environmental Education Center which coordinates educational activities to raise awareness about environmental concerns, and the establishment of 'immersive environmental educational facilities' to encourage the public to get involved in protecting natural spaces.[140]

Tokyo

Name of VLR Report: Tokyo Sustainability Action

Population: 13,972,039 (2022)
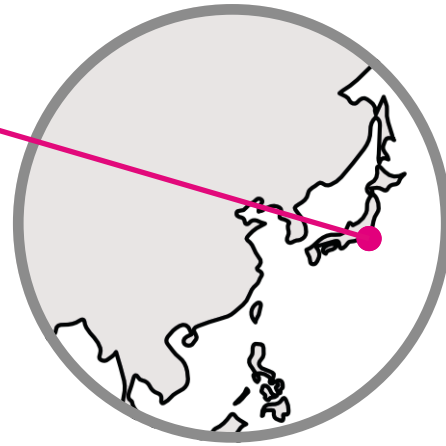
Overview of the VLR Report

Tokyo's first VLR report reviews the city's main strategy, 'Future Tokyo: Tokyo's Long-term Strategy', launched in March 2021. Underlying this strategy is the 2030 Agenda's principle of leaving no one behind, and aims at guiding the development of the city to 2040. The strategy presents a roadmap to achieving the SDGs locally.

The strategy was formulated to maximise Tokyo's contribution to combating two of the major challenges facing humanity at this time: COVID-19 and climate change. At the same time, the Future Tokyo strategy pays special attention to Japan's most pressing issues, that of an ultra-ageing and shrinking population and the diminishing global presence of the Japanese economy. Against this backdrop, the Future Tokyo plan comprises 20 visions to be achieved by the 2040s. The plan's 20 + 1 strategies and 122 projects will articulate the implementation of those 20 visions.

Spotlight on: Integrating the SDGs

The main emphasis of Tokyo's VLR is on aligning the Future Tokyo strategy with the three pillars of sustainable development and the SDGs. For example, the 'Smart Tokyo: TOKYO Data Highway' strategy aims to maximise the use of digital technology in creating a sustainable and smart city and to enable administrative procedures to be completely processed online by the 2040s. To achieve these visions, the strategy details two policy goals for 2030, namely, the achievement of the TOKYO Data Highway and the digitalization of administrative procedures.[141] The VLR continues on to detail the strategy, objectives, and main implementation stages. This vision responds to the economic pillar of sustainable development and aligns with SDGs 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 17.

Uppsala

Name of VLR Report: Uppsala and Agenda 2030: Voluntary Local Review

Population: 177,074 (2019)

Overview of the VLR Report

Uppsala's first VLR describes the process to integrate the 2030 Agenda into the city's policies. To do so, the city has worked across all SDGs and targets, identifying those relevant to reality on the ground. The report presents the means of implementation in Uppsala as well as practical examples of programmes being implemented in the city that advance the SDGs.

Part of Uppsala's work on aligning the SDGs consisted of mapping the city's nine objectives set out in 2016. This mapping exercise illustrated which objectives were aligned with the SDG targets. For example, Uppsala's first objective of a fair and sustainable economy encompasses SDGs 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, and 16. The VLR reviews each of the city's nine objectives. Each section begins with the question of what Uppsala can do in relation to the overall Goals, and provides concrete examples of actions that allow the city to create its own local targets reflecting the spirit of the relevant SDG targets but that are adapted to its own context.

Spotlight on: Means of Implementation

Uppsala's VLR reflects on the factors that enable success in sustainable development. The VLR articulates this into six keywords defining its work on the SDGs: (1) Ambition - Create impetus for change through political vigilance, (2) Capacity - Mobilise cooperation in matters where more people have influence, (3) Knowledge - Make the differences between mapping and analysis visible, (4) Focus - Direct efforts to those areas or groups that have the greatest need, (5) Learning - Monitor and evaluate efforts to get a clearer picture of needs, and (6) Integration - Make sure that the benefits of the new become part of the ordinary.[142] Altogether, these six keywords have become the pillars of the city's means of implementation as they hold the potential to reshape governance structures while touching upon different aspects of localising the SDGs, such as monitoring progress or engaging with stakeholders.

Vantaa

Name of VLR Report: Sustainable Vantaa Belongs to Everyone: Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Vantaa 2021

Population: 239,216 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

Vantaa released its first VLR to coincide with the end of the city's 2018-2021 strategy. The VLR, therefore, not only reaffirms Vantaa's commitment to sustainable development, but also serves to evaluate the progress made during the 2018-2021 period using the 2030 Agenda as an assessment framework. Based on that assessment, Vantaa's VLR draws recommendations for future plans that integrate the SDGs.

Given this overall objective, the main component of Vantaa's VLR is a review of the 17 SDGs. The VLR assesses all 17 SDGs individually, presenting the latest data on pertinent indicators to illustrate how the city is performing. For instance, when evaluating SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy, the VLR includes data on electricity consumption by sector and the energy mix of the city's district heating system. The analysis of the city's strategy revealed that while there are a wide range of programmes dedicated to advancing the targets of SDGs 8, 10, and 11, the city lags behind on SDGs 6 and 14. The conclusions of the VLR will frame the development of Vantaa's forthcoming strategies.

Spotlight on: Policy Coherence

A key aspect of Vantaa's VLR process was the emphasis on policy coherence and cross-departmental work. A cross-administrative management team responsible for determining Vantaa's strategies and themes[143] was in charge of the VLR report. Moreover, as part of the VLR process, the city established a working group with representatives from each department. This working group was responsible for choosing indicators to track progress and selecting the measures used to illustrate the city's work on localising the 2030 Agenda. The VLR process also included a mapping exercise connecting the city's strategy with the SDGs and their targets, which further highlighted the interconnectedness of the Goals and the need for better policy coherence to ensure their timely implementation. The report concludes that despite ongoing efforts to attain policy coherence, 'in the future, it would be important to have wide-ranging discussion with departments and units, as well as to organise open forums to ensure that the report contains the most relevant information for achieving the SDGs'[144] to provide a more detailed picture of the city's activities on the SDGs.

Winnipeg

Name of VLR Report: Winnipeg and the SDGs: A Voluntary Local Review of Progress

Population: 749,607 (2021)

Overview of the VLR Report

Winnipeg's first VLR was conducted by two NGOs: the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and United Way Winnipeg. The VLR is built on the work of Peg, a community indicator system examining the evolution of the city's well-being. The VLR is action oriented, and recognises that the 2021 report is but one step toward implementing the SDGs locally.

The VLR report reviews progress toward SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16, and 17 based on Peg. Moreover, the VLR pays special attention to the city's social dynamics and includes a dedicated section on the 'human rights of Indigenous peoples, truth and reconciliation, and the SDGs'. In particular, the report acknowledges that it 'does not adequately reflect First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation perspectives, priorities, and experiences in relation to sustainable development', and a great deal of work remains to ensure that 'Peg, as a community indicator system that is designed to reflect all residents of Winnipeg, continues to move forward in a spirit of truth, reconciliation, and collaboration'.[145] This aligns with the 2030 Agenda's emphasis on leaving no one behind.

Spotlight on: Monitoring Progress

The VLR draws on Winnipeg's long tradition of tracking progress. The VLR uses Winnipeg's Community Indicator System, known as Peg, which covers a wide range of subjects throughout eight themes—built environment, basic needs, economy, education and learning, health, natural environment, social vitality and governance, and demographics—with some indicators appearing across more than one theme. Peg's indicators were decided a decade ago through an intensive consultation process with over 800 participants from different backgrounds. The chosen indicators reflect the main concerns of the community at the time, and help to measure the evolution of the city's wellbeing. Based on this long tradition of data-driven monitoring on well-being, Peg has been used to track the development of Winnipeg in a similar fashion to that of many VLRs.[146]

Yiwu

Name of VLR Report: Harmony Innovation Opening up Development, Sustainable Development Road for Small & Medium Cities. UN SDGs Yiwu Voluntary Local Review

Population: 1,859,390 (2020)
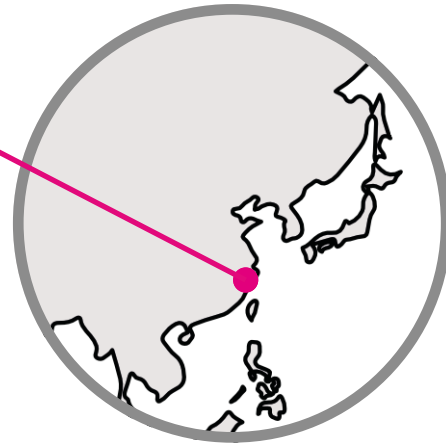
Overview of the VLR Report

Yiwu is a city in Zhejiang province, located between Hangzhou and Ningbo. Yiwu released its first VLR in 2021 focusing on five SDGs. Each of them has been translated to meet the objectives of Yiwu's sustainable development objectives: (1) SDG 1 on the continuous reduction of the poverty rate, (2) SDG 4 on quality education, (3) SDG 8 on sustainable economic growth, (4) SDG 11 on business-friendly and liveable urban and rural living environment, and (5) SDG 17 on building the world's capital of small commodities. Each SDG is reviewed independently, presenting basic data to assess progress and summarising specific measures put in place by local authorities. For instance, one of the measures highlighted as the city's SDG 17 is a railway project connecting Yiwu with Europe via the Xinjiang section of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Spotlight on: Integrating the SDGs

Yiwu adopts two different methods to integrate the SDGs into the city's priority areas. First, the VLR aligns the city's strategic objectives with the SDGs. For instance, the objectives of 'building the city by prospering commerce' and 'developing the city in a sustainable way'[148] reflect the spirit of SDGs 8, 9, 11, and 12. Subsequently, the VLR details measures that advance specific SDGs, linking each of the 17 SDGs to programmes already being implemented. SDG 5, for instance, includes three different measures, such as increasing the proportion of women entrepreneurs and workers, helping women move out of poverty by providing employment in the processing sector, and safeguarding women's rights with all stakeholders in society.[149]

Yokohama

Name of VLR Report: Voluntary Local Review 2021 Yokohama: Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Population: 3,766,056 (2022)

Overview of the VLR Report

Committed to delivering the 2030 Agenda, Yokohama has aligned its municipal strategy with the SDGs. The city was selected to be part of the SDGs FutureCities initiative in 2018, a programme launched by the Government of Japan to support local efforts to attain the SDGs. Yokohama's first VLR is a compilation of those actions, containing a review of the city's enabling environment, tracking progress toward the Goals and targets, reflecting on available means of implementation, and setting a baseline for national indicators designed by the Government of Japan to reflect the local reality of the country.

To coordinate work on the SDGs, Yokohama has established an SDGs promotional headquarters in the city, headed by the Mayor. The headquarters facilitates internal cooperation between departments to encourage collaboration in addressing cross-cutting issues. Altogether, the VLR report paints a detailed picture of Yokohama's efforts to localise the SDGs, portraying good practices and ongoing programmes aimed at encouraging action in other cities.

Spotlight on: Partnerships for the Goals

Yokohama has a long tradition of city-to-city collaboration in sustainable development. Accordingly, Yokohama's VLR helps to extend the city's work on creating partnerships to achieve the SDGs. The VLR report exemplifies Yokohama's work on city-to-city collaboration through two initiatives: the Y-PORT Programme and the Innovative Urban Solutions scheme. The Yokohama Partnership of Resources and Technologies (Y-PORT) Programme fosters peer-learning between Yokohama and other cities in Asia. Based on Yokohama's experience in overcoming a wide range of urban problems in the past (such as rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation resulting in environmental pollution), the Y-PORT Programme connects the private sector with Asian cities to transfer knowledge and technologies to solve urban issues. The Innovative Urban Solutions Scheme aims to bring smart solutions for urban management to cities in emerging countries. Taken together, these two examples are based upon the three tenets of involving the private sector from start, co-creating solutions and offering technical assistance tailored to local situations.[150]

Endnotes

1. The "Secretary-General's remarks to the Economic and Social Council on the follow-up to the "Our Common Agenda" Report" can be found at: https://www.un.org/sg/en/node/262634

2. This progress chart presents the trends of 38 selected targets across all 17 SDGs, and therefore, it is not reflecting the full extent of the global progress towards the SDGs. Moreover, it uses data from 2019 and 2020 (and in some instances, from 2017), and might not fully grasp the full impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs. The information can be accessed at: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/progress-chart-2021.pdf

3. For an early assessment of the energy crisis see: Gilbert et al. (2021)

4. However, local action to advance global agendas is not a new issue. Cities were also engaged in Agenda 21 among others. This topic was already covered in past volumes of IGES' "State of the Voluntary Local Review" series. To avoid unnecessary repetitions, the reader can refer to: Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020, 2021).

5. Elmqvist et al. (2019).

6. UNESCAP (2021).

7. Bizikova & Pinter (2017)

8. This has been repeatedly noted by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) in its work on territorialising the SDGs. See, for example: OECD (2020).

9. IGES Online Voluntary Local Review (VLR) Lab. Available at: https://www.iges.or.jp/en/projects/vlr/about

10. For a more detailed analysis of the VLR process and its implications for local governance, please refer to previous editions of IGES' "State of the Voluntary Local Reviews" series. See: Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020, 2021)

11. The authors have made every effort to find VLRs by local and regional governments, and have cross-tabulated the reports hosted on four different online repositories of VLRs by UNDESA, UN-Habitat, UCLG, and IGES. These numbers represent the combined total of all the VLR hosted by these repositories by 25 April, 2022. In going through these databases, the authors have also looked for documents that align with the principles of Voluntary Local Reviews of reviewing goals, policy alignment and monitoring progress, among others. The online repositories can be accessed at: https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews, https://unhabitat.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews, https://www.gold.uclg.org/report/localizing-sdgs-boost-monitoring-reporting, and https://www.iges.or.jp/en/projects/vlr

12. The text of the declaration with the list of signatory LRGs can be found at: https://www1.nyc.gov/site/international/programs/voluntary-local-review-declaration.page

13. For more information, visit: https://www.brookings.edu/project/local-leadership-on-the-sustainable-development-goals/

14. UNESCAP (2020).

15. UCLG & UN-Habitat (2020).

16. UNDESA (UNDESA, 2020b).

17. EU JRC (2020).

18. UNECE (2021).

19. UNECA (UNECA, 2022).

20. ECOSOC (2020, 2021a).

21. ECOSOC (2021b, p. 14).

22. The core of the research is based on a desk study of publicly available reports as part of LRGs' VLR process. For more information, please refer to the 2020 and 2021 editions of the 'State of the Voluntary Local Reviews" series (see: Ortiz-Moya et al., 2020, 2021).

23. This method is consistent with that of recent research on Voluntary National Reviews. See, for example: Elder (2020) and Elder and Bartalini (2019).

24. By cross-tabulating the abovementioned databases by UNDESA, UN-Habitat, UCLG, and IGES.

25. This includes bilingual reports that are published in English and in another language.

26. The 'Remarks to High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development' of September 2019 given by the UN Secretary General can be found at: https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-09-24/remarks-high-level-political-sustainable-development-forum

27. For recent work on the impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs, see, for example: Barbier & Burgess (2020) or Fenner & Cernev (Fenner & Cernev, 2021) Regarding SDG localisation, see: Guarini et al. (2021), Krantz & Gustafsson (2021), or Wiedmann & Allen (2021).

28. These aspects are repeated throughout the literature on SDG localisation. See, for example: Valencia et al. (2019) or UNESCAP (2020).

29. See: Ortiz-Moya et al., (2020, 2021).

30. This division into regions follows the Statistics Regions used by the Statistic Division of the United Nations. Similar to last year's report, the Americas have been divided into North America and Latin America and the Caribbean to gain a more granular perspective. The classification can

be accessed at: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49#geo-regions

31. UNECA, (2022).

32. The website, which includes the VLR guidelines and the five reports presented by LRGs in Africa, can be accessed at: https://www.uneca.org/?q=voluntary-local-reviews-in-africa/documents. For a more detailed analysis of the VLR movement in Africa, visit: https://sdg.iisd.org/news/african-vlrs-informing-multiple-frameworks/

33. Data from Japan's official online statistic repository, available online at: https://www.e-stat.go.jp

34. This was highlighted in previous editions of the State of the Voluntary Local Reviews. See for example, Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020).

35. City of Malmö (2021), p. 64-65.

36. City of Malmö (2021), p. 65.

37. This aspect has been already discussed in the introductory section of this report. The guidelines were authored by UNESCAP (2020), UCLG & UN-Habitat (2020), UNDESA (2020b), and by the EU JRC (2020).

38. See for example, Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020, 2021). These general characteristics also match the recommended structure for VLR reports by UNDESA (2020b).

39. See for example, Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020, 2021) for a complete list of SDGs reviewed each year and their alignment with the HLPF.

40. Complete information about the 2021 HLPF can be found at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021

41. According to the "COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineers (CSSE)" at John Hopkins. Accessed on April 1st, 2022. Accessible at: https://publichealthupdate.com/jhu/

42. Data from UNDP's "Global Dashboard for Vaccine Equity," accessed on April 1st, 2022. Accessible at: https://data.undp.org/vaccine-equity/

43. Nevertheless, it may still be too early to fully grasp the real impact of the pandemic. For an early assessment see: UN (2020). For a more recent analysis see: UN (2021)

44. See: Zusman et al. (2021).

45. This is based on USA data reported by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from its 'Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) of November 20, 2020. Accessible at: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6946a6.htm Cuadros et al. (2021) also reported similar findings in 2021.

46. See, for example: Cole et al. (2020) or Sharifi and Khavarian-Garmsir (2020).

47. See: Sepe (2021). For a complete description of SDG 11 and its targets, see: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11

48. For a more detailed overview of how the 2020 group of VLRs tackle the impacts of COVID-19 see Ortiz-Moya et al. (2021).

49. City of Helsinki (2021, p. 15)

50. City of Ghent (2021, p. 8)

51. City of Orlando & ICLEI (2021, p. 6)

52. See, for example: Masuda et al. (2021), OECD (2016), Stafford-Smith et al. (2017), UCLG & UN-Habitat (2020).

53. UNGA (2015, paragraph 55, p. 13)

54. The "Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" can be accessed at: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/

55. Bartram et al. (2018)

56. All information on SDG 11 can be found at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11

57. Taajamaa et al. (2022).

58. Taajamaa et al. (2022).

59. See for example: UNESCAP (2020), Valencia et al. (2019).

60. This aligns with previous research on policy appraisal or on policy integration that considers assessing motivation an important factor of analysis. See for example: Turnpenny et al. (2009) or Tosun and Lang (2017).

61. Arguably, the growing importance of local governments in implementing global sustainability agendas begun with Agenda 21 (Garcia-Sanchez & Prado-Lorenzo, 2008).

62. City of Helsinki (2021, p. 6).

63. VSRs have emerged in parallel to VLRs. Both instruments are complementary of one another, and offer different perspectives into SDG localisation. While VLRs are conducted by one single LRG, VSRs are made by Local and Regional Government Associations (LRGAs). 9 LRGAs produced a VSR in 2021: Cape Verde, Ecuador, Germany, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe. For more information see: UCLG (2021).

64. All information about this event can be found at: http://uclg-unhlocalreporting.org/

65. Ayuntamiento de Mérida (2021, p. 4).

66. Elmqvist et al. (2019).

67. Gladsaxe Municipality (2021, p. 5).

68. City of Helsingborg (2021, p. 1).

69. This is recognised by a number of VLR guidelines. See: Koike et al. (2020), ESCAP (2020).

70. ESCAP (2020).

71. United Way Winnipeg & IISD (2021, p. 10).

72. United Way Winnipeg & IISD (2021, p. 14).

73. Urbanice Malaysia & Subang Jaya City Council (2021, p. 24).

74. City of Orlando and ICLEI (2021, p. 11).

75. More information can be found on its website: https://www.infinitezionfarms.org/

76. Brand et al. (2021).

77. UNDESA (2021)

78. Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2021, p. 18).

79. UNGA (2015, p. 32).

80. City of Cape Town (2021, p. 17).

81. Urbanice Malaysia & Shah Alam City Council (2021). MURNInets own website can be accessed at: https://murninetsv2.planmalaysia.gov.my

82. City of Yokohama (2021).

83. Taipei City (Taipei City, 2021).

84. See: https://sustainable.helsinki/

85. The platform can be accessed at: https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/agenda2030/en

86. UNDESA (2020a).

87. Between 2016 and 2021, a total of 59 countries have presented two or more VNRs; twelve of them have done so three times, namely: Azerbaijan (2017, 2019, 2021), Benin (2017, 2018, 2020), Colombia (2016, 2018, 2021), Egypt (2016, 2018, 2021), Guatemala (2017, 2019, 2021), Indonesia (2017, 2019, 2021), Mexico (2016, 2018, 2021), Niger (2018, 2020, 2021), Qatar (2017, 2018, 2021), Sierra Leone (2016, 2019, 2021), Togo (2016, 2017, 2018), and Uruguay (2017, 2018, 2021). Source: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/

88. UNDESA (2020a, p. 34)

89. The "SDG Data Reporting Platform" was launched in 2019. It us accessible at: https://sdgdata.lamayor.org/

90. Accessible at: https://sdg.lamayor.org/get-involved/sdg-activities-index

91. Accessible at: https://sdg.lamayor.org/2021VLR

92. The interlinkages between SDGs have been widely discussed in academic circles. See, for example: Dawes et al. (2022) or Zhou et al. (2022).

93. The 2020 HLPF didn't choose any priority SDG due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The theme was "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development" and national governments could choose the SDGs that better reflect this ambition depending their own needs. More information available at the 2020 HLPF's website: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020

94. UNDESA (2020a).

95. UNDESA, UNESCAP, and UN-Habitat together with UCLG published guidelines in 2020; see UNDESA (2020b) and UNESCAP (2020), and UCLG & UN-Habitat (2020). Nevertheless, already in November 2019 the city of Bristol had launched a handbook reflecting on its VLR experience in order to support efforts by other British cities. See: MacLeod and Fox (2019). Other significant publications on VLRs from 2020 are: EU JRC (2020), Koike et al. (2020), Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020), and Pipa & Bouchet (2020) to name but a few.

96. For a more detail overview of the workshops, see Shimokawa's VLR: (Shimokawa Town & IGES, 2018, p. 15)

97. Shimokawa Town & IGES (2018, p. 15)

98. Asker Kommune (2021, p. 4)

99. Ortiz-Moya et al. (2021, p. 19)

100. Urbanice Malaysia & Shah Alam City Council (2021)

101. Quoted in Ortiz-Moya et al. (2021, p. 18)

102. City of Los Angeles (2021, p. 23).

103. City of Los Angeles (2021, p. 25).

104. The "State of the Voluntary Local Review 2021" focused on this issue. See: Ortiz-Moya et al. (2021).

105. See: IPCC (2022).

106. Asker Kommune (2021, p. 38)

107. The site can be accessed at: https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/agenda2030/en

108. For more information, please visit: https://open-sdg.readthedocs.io/en/latest/

109. Buenos Aires Ciudad (2021, p. 24)

110. The Federal Urban Cooperation Platform can be accessed at: https://cooperacion-urbana-federal.buenosaires.gob.ar/

111. City of Cape Town (2021, p. 11).

112. City of Ghent (2021, p. 3)

113. Gladsaxe Municipality (2021, p. 19)

114. Gladsaxe Municipality (2021, p. 11)

115. Gobierno de Guadalajara (2021, p. 5)

116. City of Helsingborg (2021, p. 6)

117. See: City of Helsinki (2019).

118. The VLR Website can be accessed at: https://sustainable.helsinki/

119. Kaohsiung City (2021, p. 12)

120. More information about the session can be found at: http://uclg-mewa.org/the-tra%C4%B1n%C4%B1ng-on-mon%C4%B1tor%C4%B1ng-the-sdgs-held-%C4%B1n-karatay/

121. See: https://coronavirus.munlima.gob.pe/#accionesgnrles

122. The online version of the VLR can be accessed at: https://sdg.lamayor.org/2021VLR

123. City of Malmö (2021, p. 19).

124. City of Malmö (2021, pp. 27–28).

125. Ciudad de México (2021); translated from the Spanish by the author.

126. See the official website of the 2021 HLPF for more information, accessible at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021

127. City of Orlando & ICLEI (2021, p. 9).

128. City Council of Penang Island (2021, p. 17).

129. City Council of Penang Island (2021, p. 23).

130. Government of Malaysia (2021, p. 103)

131. Municipality of Skiathos (2021, p. 8).

132. City of Stockholm (2021, p. 14).

133. City of Stockholm (2021, p. 58).

134. Urbanice Malaysia and Subang Jaya City Council (2021, p. 5).

135. See: UNESCAP (2020).

136. See: Koike et al. (2020).

137. Surabaya City (2021, p. 12).

138. Suwon Council for Sustainable Development (2021, p. 5).

139. Taichung City (2021, p. 20).

140. Taipei City (2021, pp. 42–42).

141. For more information, see: Tokyo Metropolitan Government (2021, p. 17).

142. Uppsala Kommun (2021, p. 93).

143. Vantaa City Council (2021, p. 8).

144. Vantaa City Council (2021, p. 50).

145. United Way Winnipeg and IISD (2021, p. 10).

146. Peg can be accessed at: https://www.mypeg.ca

147. Yiwu City (2021, p. 22).

148. Yiwu City (2021, p. 13).

149. Yiwu City (2021, p. 17).

150. City of Yokohama (2021, p. 38).

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