

## Bureau Position

### ***11 key messages on the SDGs: Regions delivering Europe 2030***

#### **Introduction**

On 25 September 2015, the United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a global action plan for people, planet, prosperity and universal peace in larger freedom all around the world. In doing so, world leaders committed to taking bold and transformative steps to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path by 2030<sup>1</sup>.

Five years later, at the start of the Decade of Action for delivering the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda, the world is not on track for achieving most of them<sup>2</sup>. Significant progress has been made in a number of areas but much more needs to be done to fight inequalities and address the climate emergency<sup>3</sup>.

The European Union (EU) itself has made good progress towards the goals. However, evidence shows that this progress has been uneven and, in some areas, remained insufficient or even reversed<sup>4</sup>. The need for action is clear. If the EU is to succeed in its commitments to the SDGs it must accelerate efforts to reduce inequalities and combat climate change, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Increasing the pace and scale of implementation efforts has become ever more important at this time of crisis. Undermining prospects for realising the SDGs, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the structural inequalities within and among countries, bringing to the fore the urgent need for further cooperation, stronger solidarity and resolute actions to build a more fair, sustainable, prosperous and resilient society.

The only way to successfully navigate this journey is to work together. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are a critical dimension of the 2030 Agenda and we will only move closer to realising its vision if we make the engagement of local and regional authorities, civil society – especially young people –, local communities, academia and other relevant actors more effective.

Local and regional authorities play a crucial role in achieving a sustainable future and accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It is estimated that the achievement of 65 % of the 169 targets of the 17 SDGs depends on the regional and local action. Yet, municipalities and regions are not always meaningfully engaged in the implementation,

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly Resolution, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development* A/RES/70/1 (2015), available from: [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations (2019), *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/>.

<sup>3</sup> According to an independent group of scientists appointed by the UN Secretary-General, a world of improved well-being and free from poverty is within reach. However, urgent action is needed to reconfigure the relationship between people and nature in a sustainable manner and avoid that rising inequalities, climate change and biodiversity loss reverse the development gains of the last two decades. See: Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development*, (United Nations, New York, 2019), available from: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR\\_report\\_2019.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The Eurostat annual report on the SDGs, *Sustainable development in the European Union. Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context*: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-books/-/KS-02-19-165>.

follow up and review of the global goals. And very often they lack the tax authority that would allow local and regional authorities to adopt their own policy measures, thus maximising responsibility and accountability.

A concrete example of how to achieve multilevel action to achieve the SDGs is the implementation of regional carbon budgets as well as multi-tier support, assistance and strong incentives to maintain these budgets. Common indicators, multilevel ownership including a fair division of burden while maintaining the highest ambitions possible for each and every region will be a key strategy to ensure progress from local to global scale.

## **Key Messages**

Acknowledging the importance of the 2030 Agenda as a globally agreed mandate for transformation towards a sustainable and resilient future for everyone.

Stressing the central role played by local and regional authorities in advancing the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

Reiterating our commitment to working together with national governments, international institutions and other stakeholders to support the achievement of the SDGs at local, regional, national, European and global level.

The Assembly of the European Regions calls upon the European Commission, the European Parliament and Member States to:

1. Ensure that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals are prioritised in the EU's strategic agenda and embedded within its policies, programmes and funding instruments. This should include the development of an overarching EU SDGs Strategy with specific targets and timeline for greater coherence and coordination across all EU action and levels of government.
2. Support the localisation of the SDGs so delivery is place-based and therefore able to effectively meet people's needs. This will require: incorporating the sub-national development contexts in the SDGs follow up and review at national level; greater alignment of national SDG strategies and local and regional sustainable development plans; and meaningful engagement of local and regional authorities in the processes for implementation and review of the SDGs, notably the Voluntary National Reviews.
3. This localisation should be achieved through a whole-of-government approach, anchored in structured, inclusive and accountable multi-level and multi-stakeholder mechanisms involving private sector, academia, foundations, traditional leaders and civil society at European and national level for coordination and follow up of the SDGs. The sub-national level would ideally be vested with tax authority to adopt their own policy measures, thus maximising responsibility and accountability.
4. Ensure the territorial dimension is integrated in the analysis and monitoring on the SDGs throughout the European Semester cycle, and that local and regional authorities are involved in this policy coordination process.
5. Commit enhanced support to local and regional authorities for the localisation of the SDGs through a stronger cohesion policy and other relevant EU funding programmes. This entails a close alignment of the national programmes with the 2030 Agenda.
6. Support data collection and disaggregation at territorial level so the progress against the goals in our regions is properly monitored, to enable full accountability and better policy-making, leaving no one behind.

7. Invest in mutual learning and capacity-building of local and regional authorities for implementing the SDGs.
8. Step up support for local and regional efforts to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights through a reinforced cohesion policy.
9. In pursuit of a climate-neutral and sustainable economy, work closely with and fund local and regional authorities in the implementation of the European Green Deal, including the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the new Industrial Strategy and the Circular Economy Action Plan, the Farm to Fork Strategy, and the EU Climate Law.
10. Provide financial support to all European regions facing challenges in energy transition through a robust Just Transition Fund in order to ensure the EU ambition to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 is reached leaving no one behind.
11. Ensure the involvement of local and regional authorities in the design and implementation of future “Next Generation EU” investment programmes, in line with the principles of partnership, multilevel governance and place-based approach, to promote their vital role in reducing economic, social and territorial disparities in the EU and driving the necessary transition towards a green, digital and fair Europe, in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.