

The Bureau of the Congress

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Localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals

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Summary

In 2023, the United Nations will hold its annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2023 and the SDG Summit in September 2023 in New York. The latter will mark the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This recommendation and its appendix represent the Congress contribution to the United Nations SDG Summit.

The United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development was adopted on 25 September 2015 with the aim of building a socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable and economically prosperous society.

While the main responsibility for the implementation of Agenda 2030 lies with member States, the Council of Europe's role is to assist and facilitate member States in their contribution to SDG implementation. The Congress, as an assembly representing the interests of local and regional authorities, is responsible for the territorial dimension of the implementation of SDGs.

As two-thirds of the SDG targets can only be implemented at local or regional level, localisation of SDGs is an urgent priority. The Congress is committed to helping local and regional authorities to achieve the 2030 Agenda and, with its 130,000 European and local authorities, offers a platform where cities and regions can share best practices for implementing and monitoring the SDGs.

Action required : for decision

¹ This document is classified confidential until it has been examined by the Bureau of the Congress
² L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
 EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
 SOC/G/PD: Group of Socialists, Greens and Progressive Democrats
 ILDG: Independent Liberal and Democratic Group
 ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
 NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

Furthermore, through its statutory and cooperation activities, the Congress's work addresses 12 of the 17 objectives³ defined in the United Nations Agenda 2030. The Congress also regularly contributes to the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Geneva and the High-Level Political Forum in New York, focused on the implementation of the Agenda 2030.

In the context of the mid-term review of the Agenda 2030, the Congress calls on national governments to accelerate the localisation of SDGs by giving local and regional authorities proper autonomy of action and proper means for implementing the Agenda 2030 in the communities, by encouraging Voluntary Local and Sub-national Reviews and by engaging local and regional authorities in the design and implementation of National SDG Action Plans and Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

³ SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals).

PRELIMINARY DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

1. In 2023, the United Nations will hold its annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2023 and the SDG Summit in September 2023 in New York. The latter will mark the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
2. As two-thirds of the SDG targets can only be implemented at local or regional level, localisation of SDGs is an urgent priority. The SDG Summit must give a new momentum to this process.
3. In this respect, as an assembly of local and regional authorities with a leading role for localisation of SDGs, the Congress is convinced that:
 - a. multi-level governance is key to achieving the SDGs; it is a shared responsibility of all levels of government and requires constant dialogue and consultation with all local actors, such as municipalities and regions, their national associations, the private sector and civil society; and
 - b. citizens must always remain at the heart of the action.
4. Considering the abovementioned, the Congress calls on national governments to:
 - a. accelerate the process of localisation of SDGs and give local and regional authorities proper autonomy for action and decision making, which includes proper competencies and the financial and budgetary autonomy required to achieve the goals in their respective areas;
 - b. encourage local and regional authorities to conduct Voluntary Local or Sub-national Reviews and involve them in the design, development and implementation of National SDG Action Plans and Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs);
 - c. give a political voice to local and regional authorities to raise awareness about the SDGs, enabling their participation in relevant international forums, such as the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, HLPF and the SDG Summit;
 - d. involve youth in decision making and all the activities that lead to the achievement of SDGs; and
 - e. build stronger partnerships with all local actors, including civil society and the private sector, in order to implement the Agenda 2030.
5. The Congress is ready to continue its involvement in the work of the Council of Europe, its member States, its Committee of Ministers and its other institutional actors, by sharing its knowledge of local and regional authorities and the tools at its disposal and promoting implementation of SDGs.

APPENDIX 1

The Congress contribution to UN High-Level Political Forum and SDG Summit (July and September 2023)

Introduction

1. The United Nations Agenda 2030 lists 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action to all countries to end poverty, improve health and education, reduce inequalities, take action to combat climate change, encourage economic growth, and ultimately improve the well-being of the citizens and the communities they live in.
2. In 2023, the United Nations will hold its annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2023 and the SDG Summit in September 2023 in New York. The latter will mark the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
3. The HLPF is the central United Nations platform that meets annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council for eight days, including a three-day ministerial segment and every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly for two days. HLPF includes presentation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), an assessment made by individual countries to show progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda.
4. The sets of SDGs to be reviewed in-depth in 2023 are Goals 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).
5. To review the implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Europe, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) will hold its annual Regional Forum in March 2023. The outcomes of the UNECE Regional Forum will contribute to the HLPF on Sustainable Development in July and the SDG Summit in September 2023.

The Council of Europe and the Agenda 2030

6. The Council of Europe contributes to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 through a human rights-based approach based on its pan-European dimension, institutions, normative framework and capacity for action.
7. Most of the Council of Europe's activities are relevant and are aligned with relevant SDGs, thus directly contributing to the implementation of Agenda 2030. While recognising that the main responsibility for the implementation of Agenda 2030 lies with member States, the Council of Europe's role as an international organisation is to assist and facilitate member States in their contribution to SDG implementation.

The Congress and SDGs

8. Since two-thirds of the SDG targets can only be implemented at local or regional level, the Congress promotes localisation of SDGs together with local and regional authorities and their associations.
9. Through its statutory and cooperation activities, the Congress's work addresses 12 of the 17 objectives defined in the United Nations Agenda 2030. The Congress regularly contributes to the HLPF and SDG Summit.
10. To successfully implement the SDGs, the Congress cooperates with a wide range of actors both internal and external to the Council of Europe. In 2019, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution calling for greater synergies between the two institutions in the implementation of the SDGs.
11. Outside of the Council of Europe, the Congress cooperates with a variety of international organisations representing local and regional authorities, such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and European institutions, such as the European Committee of the Regions, the

Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE), the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), and others.

12. Over the past two decades the Congress has developed its activities in different areas that directly relate to the achievement of SDGs, such as the promotion of human rights, the fight against discrimination, gender equality, local and regional governance, public ethics, citizen participation, migration management and social inclusion.⁴

13. The Congress views the concept of sustainability in a broad sense of the democratic, social, and economic sustainability based on three key principles: achieving SDGs is the shared responsibility of all levels of government, local and regional authorities must have proper competences and financial autonomy to achieve the Goals and citizens must always remain at the heart of the action.

SDG implementation: a shared responsibility

14. Achieving the SDGs is a shared responsibility of all levels of government: global, European, national, local, and regional.

15. SDG implementation is a shared responsibility which requires mobilisation of municipalities and regions, civil society, businesses and other local stakeholders. As such, the Congress strongly advocates for multi-level governance and an active role for local and regional authorities in the implementation of SDGs.

16. Multi-level governance systems increase the quality of decisions, generate lasting solutions and allow greater resilience in the face of crises.

17. Insights from local and regional authorities allow better sustainability in policies to be developed. It is the conviction of the Congress that it is impossible to implement a policy nationally if its implementation fails locally. National governments must establish a constant dialogue with regional and local authorities on implementing SDGs, through effective consultation mechanisms to ensure proper implementation of the SDGs.

Empowering territorial authorities

18. Local and regional authorities must also be empowered to act. They must have the necessary freedom to make decisions and take action, which means that they must have their own powers, budgetary autonomy and the freedom to decide on how to use local resources. It is only then that local and regional authorities will be able to adapt strategies and embed them in a dynamic local context.

19. Local and regional authorities need the competencies, skills and tools to implement and monitor the SDGs, adapted to their local context and their needs. National associations of local and regional authorities can help develop these tools and foster learning and experience sharing at the local level. For example, in Germany and Italy, national associations set up portals with city-level indicators to measure SDG implementation. Such tools help local governments understand where they stand, and what more can be done.

20. Mayors and councillors are the level of governance closest to the citizens and enjoy the highest level of trust within the current national political landscapes. They also represent the most direct point of contact between governments and citizens. They are the intermediaries that can help bring European values and national policies closer to the people and ensure that people in their communities understand and participate in the implementation of SDGs.

Putting citizens at the heart of the implementation of Agenda 2030

21. Citizens must be at the heart of the implementation of Agenda 2030. Local and regional authorities bear the primary responsibility for addressing citizens' needs as the authorities closest to them. Citizens must therefore be engaged in local decision making on the issues of community

⁴ Congress Thematic Activities: Contributing to the UN Agenda 2030 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/sdg>

development. They must be co-owners of the decisions on integrated territorial planning and the use of resources of their communities.

22. Citizens look to their local authorities for guidance, support, opportunities and ultimately protection. Towns are a tier of government that is the closest to citizens, and mayors and councillors are on the frontlines dealing with societal challenges, driven by multiple recent crises – war in Ukraine, COVID-19, migrant crisis, natural disasters, inflation, social crisis. Cities and regions have been playing a central role in the crisis management and experience shows that involving local authorities leads to building resilient governance systems, that lead to inclusive and peaceful societies.

Multi-level involvement in VNRs for better coordination and ownership

23. All levels of government responsible for putting national policy into practice must be involved in VNRs. National authorities must integrate findings from local and regional authorities to fully benefit from the knowledge and innovation at the local level.

24. There is a growing realisation on the part of local authorities that SDG strategy development and implementation should come bottom-up. Over 2020 and 2021, the total number of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) available worldwide has more than tripled with the biggest progress by far registered in the European region, where there is a long tradition of local self-governance (*Towards the Localization of SDGs, 2022, UCLG*).

25. VLRs ensure ownership of the Agenda 2030 by local authorities and can be a useful tool, because they reflect the realities on the ground, show what is working in the local communities and the progress toward target indicators, share best practices and allow the mayors to develop public policy.

26. Evidence shows that VLRs and localisation of SDGs leads to “better vision of localization processes, more attention from national governments and sometimes even better coordination with the involvement of local government associations in national mechanisms. Such reporting processes also strengthen the dialogue between local governments and international institutions” (*Towards the Localization of SDGs, 2022, UCLG*).

Amplifying territorial voices

27. The Congress must defend and amplify local and regional voices, make local initiatives for the SDGs visible in different international forums, such as the HLPF, the SDG Summit, and CoE Summit for Heads of State, and strongly advocate for the empowerment of local and regional authorities. With the authority to act, the skills to implement and the voice to share their experience, local and regional authorities can be powerful actors in building a sustainable future.

Youth involvement is key

28. All levels of government must increase their efforts to involve youth in decision making and all the activities that lead to the achievement of SDGs. Youth is very active and politically involved when it comes to environmental and inequality issues and their views must be integrated in the design and implementation of public policies. At local, regional, and national levels, structures for youth participation such as youth councils, youth parliaments, and youth forums should be encouraged. Such structures can serve as an effective platform for consultation with young people’s associations and organisations. Young people’s involvement is key to having a healthy democratic society and achievement of the SDGs.

Localisation of SDG – the Congress’ pledge

29. There is an urgent need to accelerate localisation of SDGs and the Congress is ready to continue its involvement in the work of the Council of Europe, its member States, its Committee of Ministers and its other institutional actors, by sharing its knowledge of local and regional authorities and the tools at its disposal and to help implement SDGs.