

Localizing the SDGs in Flanders: pilot project

By: VVSG (Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities)

Cooperation and coordination across government levels is a challenge in Belgium and that certainly holds for the implementation of the broad 2030 Agenda. In the region of Flanders, local authorities are taking the lead and demonstrate that their active involvement is crucial for the achievement of the SDGs. Local authorities, however, face different challenges, have different budgets, capacities and competences. Therefore, we need to 'localize' the SDGs. But how to target local policy planning towards the Agenda 2030? How to structurally integrate sustainable development into strategic municipal plans? How to monitor progress? To figure this out, VVSG has set up a pilot project (2017-2019). With a diverse, but highly motivated group of 20 municipalities, VVSG is going through an intensive trajectory of exploring, developing and testing methods and tools for localizing the SDGs and strengthening their governance capacity for sustainable development. An advisory board composed of representatives of CSOs, knowledge institutions, the private sector and VVSG colleagues was set up to monitor the pilot project. The pilot project has resulted in a series of tools and recommendations on how to integrate the SDGs into local policy documents, such as election manifestos, the context analysis, the administrative memorandum and the multi-annual strategic plan. An extensive, but user-friendly set of 205 local SDG-indicators - adjusted to the context of local authorities in Flanders - and an accompanying manual was developed, enabling them to establish a baseline and monitor progress. In cooperation with the main software providers of the Flemish municipalities, VVSG has developed a set of SDG-codes which are integrated into the software packages that municipalities use for monitoring and reporting about their policy actions. The developed tools stimulate municipalities to step up their sustainability efforts, to transcend silo-thinking, to adopt an integrated, holistic approach and to embrace long term planning. The pilot project has generated an SDG dynamic in the 20 pilot municipalities, with the SDGs popping up in election manifestos and governing agreements, the SDGs used as a framework for strategic planning and awareness raising activities and participation trajectories based on the SDGs being rolled out. This dynamic is now spreading all over Flanders and even internationally, since most of the tools have been translated into English.