

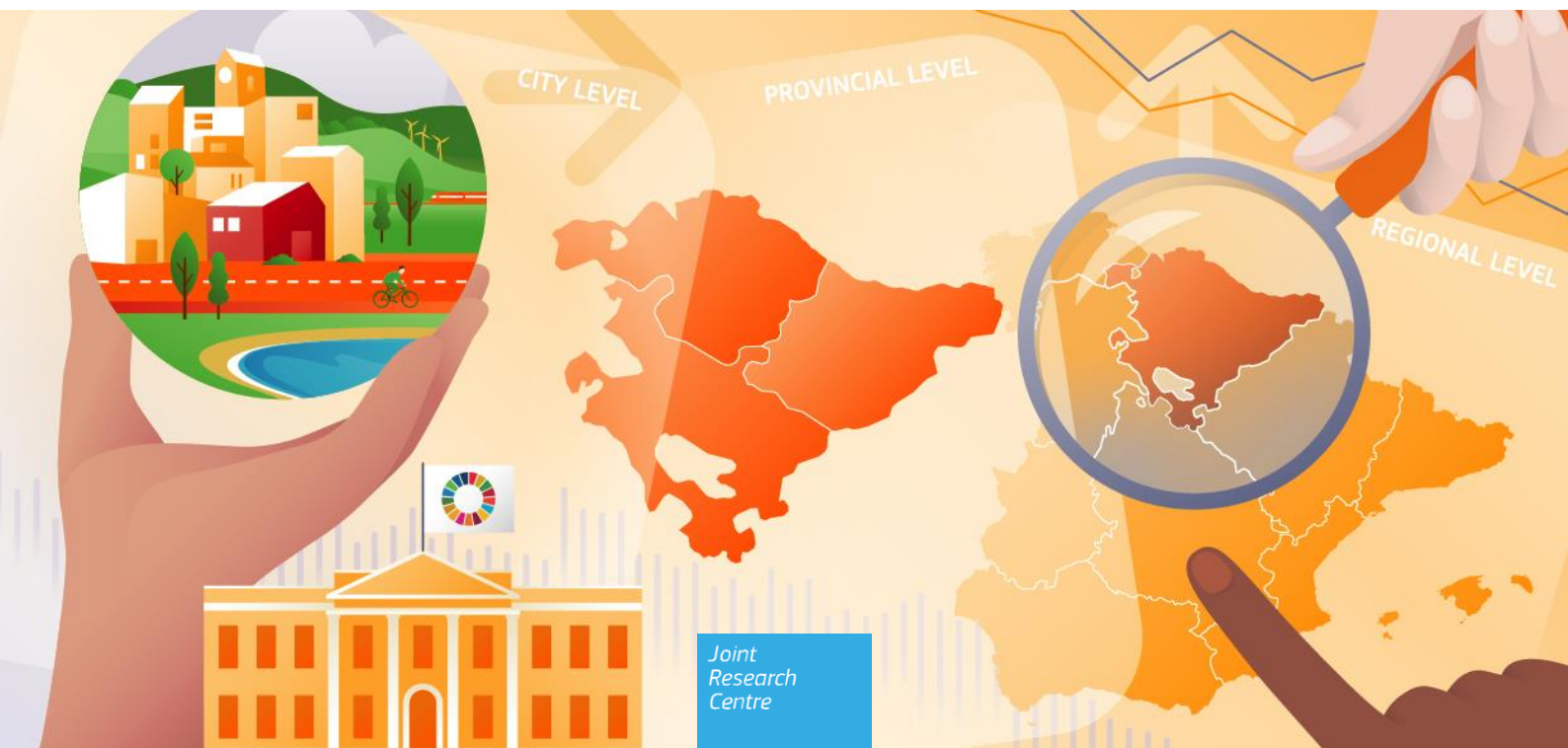
# SDG localisation and multi-level governance: lessons from the Basque Country

*A sub-national approach for better governance through SDGs*

Andoni Hidalgo Simón

Alice Siragusa and Paola Proietti (eds.)

2021



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Your insight has been unvaluable, you are the forces keeping the Basque SDG Ecosystem alive and in good shape – Eskerrik asko zuen eskuzabaltasunagatik eta zuen ekarpenengatik!

Author

**Andoni Hidalgo Simón** – Managing Director, Euroiker

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## **Abstract**

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) have been blossoming in the last years as a useful tool for sub-national entities (mainly cities, but not only) for implementing the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

These actions are the manifestation of the very dynamic global movement promoting SDG localisation, departing from the acknowledgement that local administrations play a vital role in the implementation of the Global Agenda. Despite the fact that the 2030 Agenda has been designed by the United Nations and managed principally at country level, it will only deploy fully its potential if implemented also bottom-up, involving a wide range of stakeholders and levels of administration, and engaging with grassroots actions.

VLRs are not only a tool for better policymaking, but also a great opportunity to foster city-regional diplomacy and cooperation. The enthusiasm with which VLRs have been embraced by several platforms involving sub-national entities reflects the fact that SDG localisation and VLRs are seen as a way to fulfil the traditional aspiration for sub-national entities to *have a seat at the global table*.

The case of the Basque Region, which was among the first sub-national organisations in the world to adopt a consistent SDG localisation strategy, reflects well this dual use of VLR (tool for better policy making and instrument for external action). It is a very clear example of multi-level, multi-stakeholder effort to use SDGs and their architecture to enhance cross-sector alliances within the administration and among multiple stakeholders in the quadruple helix and use the Global Agenda to re-position the Region in the international sphere.

This report describes the various actions and initiatives developed in the Basque Region for the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which constitutes a pioneering exercise on the establishment of what this report defines as an 'SDG ecosystem'. From this experience, the report draws recommendations useful for other regional authorities.

## **Executive summary**

This report contributes to the discussion on the role and experiences of sub-national governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. The report analyses the localisation of the 2030 Agenda in the Basque Country and provides recommendations and reflections useful for other European regions.

The 2030 Agenda calls for institutional cooperation among different levels of governments as a key element for the achievement of the SDGs. This is recognised by several Communications of the Commission and by the commitment of the President Ursula Von der Leyen to integrate fully the SDGs in the EU policies.

Since 2016, various regional and other sub-national governments have been carrying out awareness-raising activities, developing cooperation projects, establishing SDG strategies and publishing Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs).

However, in many of these European and global experiences, the territorial perspective is somehow neglected. Instead, local 2030 Agendas and SDG Voluntary Reviews should take into consideration and link the urban or metropolitan problems with the challenges experienced by neighbouring municipalities or entities of different levels.

The Basque 2030 Agenda, its ecosystem and monitoring tools, represent a global reference on how to implement and monitor the SDGs at subnational level. The Region has also used the Global Agenda to reposition itself in the international arena. Therefore, the case of the Basque Region analysed in this report also reflects well this dual use of local reviews as a tool for informed policymaking and for international diplomacy.

The Basque government has been developing the Basque 2030 Agenda since 2016. It has created a real 'SDG ecosystem' implementing various actions and initiatives in cooperation with a number of subnational institutions and stakeholders. The Basque government has used multi-level, multi-stakeholder efforts to implement the SDGs. Moreover, the Basque SDG ecosystem architecture enhanced cross-sector alliances within the administration and among multiple stakeholders in the quadruple helix (public authorities, industry, academia, citizens).

This report analyses the Basque SDG ecosystem from a territorial perspective providing a clear interpretation of its different levels and interlinkages. Starting from the experience of the Basque Country, this report proposes a sub-national approach for the SDG governance and suggests a decalogue for the next VLR generation that should take into consideration the territorial approach.

In addition to this report, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) is releasing two reports on the use of urban and regional indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, since October 2020, the JRC has been working with a group of European cities to validate the methodology proposed in the first European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews (Siragusa et al, 2020): Bratislava, Oulu, Porto, Reggio Emilia, Seville, Valencia, Turku and Helsinki. Knowledge and insight from this work will feed the second edition of the European Handbook, planned for publication in 2022. This edition of the European Handbook will include an update of the state of the art on local reviews, a consolidated guidance indicator set and policy recommendations on viable strategies for the future.

# 1. Introduction: Context of the Basque SDG localisation experience

## 1.1 Motivation for this research and structure of the report

SDG localisation offers sub-national authorities an opportunity to establish a new culture of planning. The 2030 Agenda provides a ‘common language’ to communicate between institutions and with citizens using a system of concrete goals, targets and indicators that promote interoperability between departments and various levels of the administration. This *common language* encompasses economic, social and environmental considerations in a consistent way and supports accountability and transparency for all levels of government.

Moreover, this system of goals and indicators is globally set and the efforts made at local and regional level can be comparable and shared with institutions and bodies from around the world. Therefore it gives regions and cities the chance to foster international diplomacy (Pipa and Bouchet 2020), making possible to *tell their own story about sustainable development*.

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) offer a possibility to subnational governments (both regions and municipalities) to implement the SDGs on the ground while opening the door to dynamic and adaptive planning, which takes into account uncertainties and allows updating policies and strategies (Sachs 2020).

VLRs also offer the possibility of systematising multidimensional thinking. This allows all levels and departments of institutions integrating their knowledge to face issues in their proper scales: some challenges are best approached from a ‘micro’ scale, while others – due to their nature or their implications, for example the ones related to climate change – can only be approached from a more national or global scale.

This report covers the development of SDG localisation in a European region – the Basque Country – with many specific features in terms of competencies, institutional framework, stakeholders – which makes it an interesting example to draw useful policy recommendations from.

In recent years, various regional or sub-national entities have been carrying out VLRs. Despite the fact that researchers and practitioners are increasingly calling for VLRs to link the problems of the city or metropolitan area with the challenges experienced by neighbouring municipalities or with entities of different levels, the territorial perspective has been usually neglected (Ortiz-Moya et al, 2020). This is precisely the most important element of this report – and perhaps its most novel perspective: the activities for localising the SDGs are analysed from a territorial perspective, integrating the actions of various levels of administration and stakeholders.

This perspective sheds some light on the next generation of VLRs in sight of the “Decade of Action”<sup>1</sup>, and beyond. Even if by 2030 not all Goals will be entirely fulfilled – and the Millennium Development Goals experience is a reference on this – it is crucial that institutions from all levels and stakeholders from all sectors learn to work together in a systematised, consistent, and mutually-reinforcing way.

A key message from the SDGs is that they show us the way for joint, transversal work for making global goals a reality at the local level. Therefore, the lessons drawn from this report would be valuable for helping other territories achieving the 2030 Agenda, but also to define the path for a fruitful cooperation in a longer term, in sight of future global agendas.

### *Goals of the report*

This report shows a local example of SDG implementation. In particular, it:

- Shows the multi-faceted approach taken in the Basque region.
- Draws some useful conclusions in the context of the JRC work on VLRs.
- Elaborates recommendations for a European VLR system based on multi-level cooperation that will enable an effective SDG implementation in the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/>

## 1.2 The Basque Region – Specificities for the SDG localisation

The experience of SDG localisation in the Basque Country could not be fully understood without taking into account some special characteristics: namely, its geographical features, its policy competence regime, and the balances of its institutional architecture. This chapter analyses the basic aspects of these regional specificities, which will facilitate the understanding of the tools put in place to localise the SDGs.

The UN Resolution ‘Transforming our world’, which adopted the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs, recognises that the humankind is facing “a time of immense challenges” - to name some of them: rising inequalities, unemployment, global health threats, natural resource depletion, and climate change - which the Resolution recognises as “one of the greatest challenges of our time” that might bring more frequent and intense natural disasters and spiralling conflicts.

Many scholars and researchers highlight that the world is facing these challenges in a key moment of global transition towards the digital era, which offers new opportunities but also poses some uncertainties and threats. Among them, Jeffrey D. Sachs points out in his latest work “The Ages of Globalisation” that the world is now entering the 7<sup>th</sup> era of Globalisation - the Digital era, which follows the Industrial era of the XIX and XX Centuries - where the SDGs must become the guiding principle in order to achieve a global balance to accomplish economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

According to Sachs, the keys for understanding and managing the transition between different eras have always been three: geography, technology, and Institutions. Following these patterns, the next sections will analyse the geographical and institutional framework of the Basque Region.

We will start from the geographical features (especially, the territorial density), which is an important element that conditions what we will call ‘the Basque SDG ecosystem’. In a further section, we will analyse the Institutional context, which has deep historical roots and it is one of the keys for understanding the complexities of the multi-level framework that defines the singularity of the Basque SDG localisation case.

### *Geography: scope and main features*

The Basque Region is a small, densely populated territory (7,234 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of 2,1 million - 4.6% of Spain’s national population – and a population density of 300 inhabitants / km<sup>2</sup>) located in the northern coast of Spain, close to the French border.

**Figure 1** The Basque Region



Source: own elaboration (created with mapchart.net)

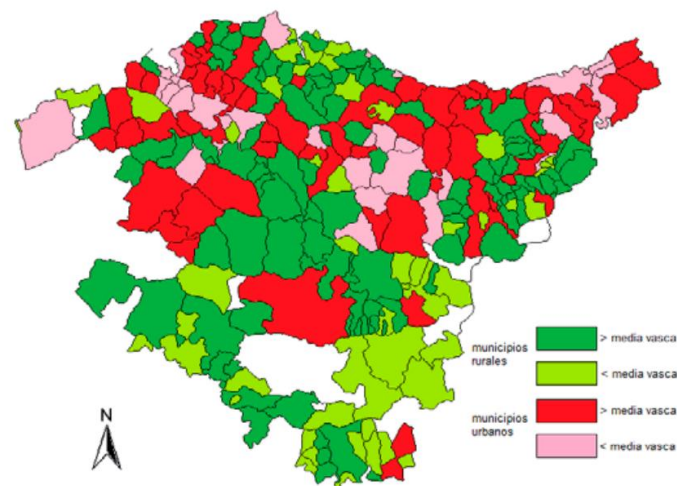


In addition to its small size, one of the most relevant features for the SDG localisation case is that - as shown in Figure 2 - it is **a very dense territory**, with 251 municipalities and very strong urban-rural connections. Among the most pressing challenges, it is possible to mention:

- Strong demographic pressure - with a combination of long-life expectancy (85.4 years for female and 78.9 for male population), low fertility rate (1.2%) and ageing population (23% of the population is nowadays more than 65 years old, and this is expected to grow to 26% by 2025 and 33% by 2050).
- High energy dependency - 93% as of 2020;
- High exposure to climate change, as a vast extension of the territory is at risk of floods and draughts.

Traditionally, the Basque Region has been a **heavily industrialised territory**, with GDP exceeding the Spanish average and being among the high-ranked EU regions. According to the European Commission's Regional Innovation Monitor Plus database, the available Eurostat figures show, in 2018, a GDP per capita in purchasing power standards (PPS) of 36,300 euro, value which is far above the national (28,100) and EU (31,000) average (Eurostat, 2020).

**Figure 2** Geographical distribution of the Basque Region according to population growth 2001.

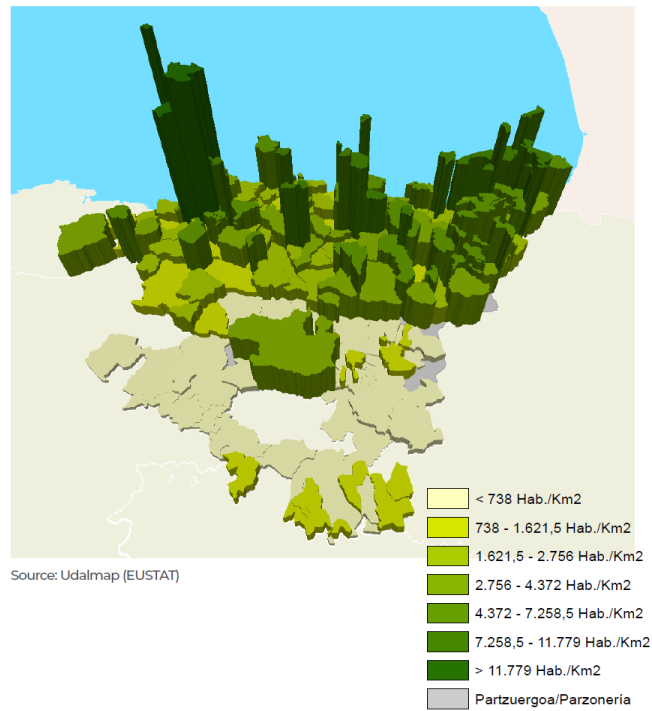


Source: (Ruiz Urrestarazu et al., 2019)

Areas in dark or light green are considered 'rural' (municipalities with less than 10.000 inhabitants) while areas in dark / light red are considered urban. Taking into account the above-mentioned population density and that, aside the three capital cities there are 248 other municipalities, it can be said that the urban-rural boundaries are overall quite blurred (urban rural classification based on regional definition).

Historically, the Basque economy has traditionally been strongly manufacturing-based, but this has changed in the latest years, when the Region has been experiencing a slow swift towards a higher weight of the services sector. Nowadays the strongest industrial sectors of the Basque economy are still machinery, aeronautics and energy but new technologies and research and development (R&D) initiatives are also becoming very relevant, and the same applies to technology parks (source: European Commission).

**Figure 3** Urban density in Basque municipalities



Source: Basque Urban Agenda 'Bultzatu 2050'

The Basque Region is **an eminently urban territory**, with three urban nodes – Bilbao, Donostia-San Sebastián and Vitoria-Gasteiz – located within short distance from each other, and with a compact network of mid and small size towns. The density of population (see Figure 3) varies – the metropolitan area of Bilbao can reach urban population density of up to 7,153 inhabitants / Km<sup>2</sup>), but overall, it can be said that more than 80% of the Basque population lives in cities (Source: Basque Statistical office, which defines an urban area as “entities with more than 10,000 inhabitants”).

**Box 1** The 'Basque City' concept: the breeding ground for SDG implementation

Because of the 'compactness' of the territory, the day-to-day reality of many Basque citizens is often managed by different administrations at different levels (they have their place of residence in one territory, work in another, and develop their leisure activities in a third one). This represents significant practical challenges.

The Basque Urban Agenda (Bultzatu 2050, adopted by the Basque Government in 2019) defines the Basque Region as "a polycentric urban region, which culturally forms the Euskal Hiria (Basque City), establishing a reference framework with a strong shared identity in social, business and civic matters" (Gobierno Vasco 2019). This implies a common ground for a multi-level governance system requiring strong cooperation and coordination between municipalities (Calzada 2018, 2016), provincial councils, and the Basque government.

The 'Basque city' concept was first developed from the literature perspective by the writer Bernardo Atxaga as "a utopic concept or an allegory<sup>2</sup>". In the Summer Schools 2005-2007 of the University of the Basque Country the term was socialised linking up with the ongoing social innovation policies (Calzada, 2005, 2006, 2007). However, it was in 2012, in the 'Basque City Congress' organised by the Basque Government (annually gathering of national and international experts on urban / regional development) when many scholars analysed the numerous challenges for developing a city-region model. So far, the event was very much related to urbanism and it was targeted to architects and technical professionals. Against this backdrop, Dr. Calzada, acting as the scientific director of the 2012 Basque City Congress renamed it as 'Basque City-Region Congress', introduced the concept from a social innovation point of view, and called for a quadruple system set -Urban System (Sustainable City), Relational System (Connected City), Socio-Cultural System (Creative City) and Socio-Political System (Participative City)- that would need to be developed through multi-level policies (Calzada 2011b, 2011a)

This idea of a city-regional framework leading to multifaceted innovative cooperation has been useful for this study in order to systematize the various cooperation examples already existing in the city-region, and which form the 'breeding ground' that has led to the development of the current Basque SDG ecosystem (see next chapter). To mention only some of these collaborative examples (without being exhaustive):

- From the connected city point of view, the Basque City-Region has a long tradition of industrial cooperatives (Goodman 2020), and a solid Cluster culture since early 90s (Konstantynova 2017). This collaborative tradition sets the ground for the creation of alliances (SDG 17) linked to economic growth (SDGs 7, 8, 9).
- From the socio-cultural perspective, an exemplary project was the 'Guggenheim effect', fruit of a multi-level, multi-stakeholder alliance (this was an example of a unique State-Regional-Provincial-Municipal cooperation) and the transformation of Bilbao -and the whole Region- from an industrial decadent reality into a dynamic cultural hub, setting the ground for the development of SDGs 4, 16).
- From the urban system perspective, the Basque Region has a long tradition in territorial planning - its first Territorial Planning Guidelines (*Directrices de Ordenación Territorial* - DOT) date from 1997, and have recently been reviewed in 2020, establishing the framework for territorial transformative actions for the next 20 years. In addition, initiatives with a strong social development focus, such as the Basque Urban Agenda have set the ground for the development of SDGs 10 and 11, and also of SDG 5 through an extensive analysis of the gender implications of urban regeneration policies (De Gregorio Hurtado 2020).
- From a sustainable city perspective, the City-Region developed in 2015 its long-term (2050) Climate strategy (Gobierno Vasco 2015), setting the ground for SDGs 12, 13 and 15. The city-region has also hosted some key international events, such as the 8th European Sustainable Cities & Towns Conference, which led to the adoption of the Basque Declaration (see [here](#)), a landmark document to create productive, sustainable and resilient cities for a liveable and inclusive Europe (8th European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns 2016).
- From a participative City perspective, Basque NGOs have been active in decentralised cooperation projects in many areas of the world (Unceta et al. 2012), setting the ground for action on SDGs 1, 2, 3, 10 and 17).

<sup>2</sup>

See text of Atxaga's lecture on this topic: <https://www.atxaga.eus/en/testuak-textos/otra-mirada>

### *Institutions: the basic framework for SDGs implementation*

Following profound historical and cultural reasons which are not within the scope of this study, the Basque Region enjoys overall a high degree of policy-making autonomy level, being almost autonomous in several policy areas.

The share of competencies is regulated by the Spanish Constitution (approved in 1978) and the Regional Statute (approved on 1979). According to the Spanish Constitution - which sets out the power share between the central State and the 17 Autonomous Communities - there are two types of competencies:

- Exclusive: where all the functions or powers of a matter (legislation, development, and execution) belong either to the State or to the Autonomous Communities.
- Shared between the central state and the autonomous communities:
  - In some cases, the central state is responsible for the basic legislation and the autonomous communities are competent for development and execution.
  - In others, the competence of the state is legislation and development, and the autonomous communities only have execution powers.

In case of conflict, the state rules will prevail over those of the autonomous communities in all areas which are not attributed to their exclusive competence.

According to the Autonomy Statute of the Basque Country, the Region has sole (exclusive) jurisdiction in the following matters, among others:

- Education (including, general organization of the educational system and general teaching programming)
- Employment and social welfare: the Region has competencies for labour intermediation, active employment policies and economic protection against unemployment. Also, although overall competence is only recognized for the execution of labour legislation, the Region has exclusive competence for the promotion, economic development and planning of the economic activity of the Basque Country
- Culture
- Research and consumer protection
- Industry (management of industrial sectors, regulation of industrial or manufacturing processes) excluding industrial and intellectual property, for which the Region only has executive powers and industries subject to special rules for reasons of safety, military or health interest, for which the Central State has exclusive competencies. Industrial promotion policies are also primarily assigned to Central Government
- Territorial planning, urbanism, agriculture and farming
- Transport, tourism, policies regarding children, youth and elderly, etc.

The Region has also its own police forces, health system, public university and elects its 75-member Regional Parliament by universal suffrage every 4 years.

As per the areas for which the central state has legislative competencies and the Region has development and executive competencies, these include (among others): environmental policies, fisheries, bank & insurance, mining, and geothermal resources.

Finally, the areas for which the Region only has executive competencies include (among others) labour legislation, intellectual property, organization of the transport of goods and travellers with destination and origin in the autonomous community, industrial and polluting discharges.

### *The key: Full tax autonomy*

This level of competencies is complemented by a perhaps most important feature, recognised both by the Regional Statute and by the Spanish Constitution: **the Basque Country has its own Autonomous Treasury or tax system**. The exercise of this power takes place through a decentralised scheme: Province authorities - see map below - are responsible for tax collection and manage them in a coordinated manner with the Regional Government.

Tax relations between Spain's Central Government and the Basque Country (validated by European Court of Justice<sup>3</sup> by Judgement of 11 September 2008) are regulated by 140 year-old '*Economic Agreement or Convention*' (in force since 1878), according to which the Regional Government provides the national authorities of Spain with a yearly quota to cover the expenses in those areas for which the competence has not been transferred to the Basque authorities (e.g. defence, foreign affairs, international diplomacy, infrastructures – ports, airports, high speed rail, etc.).

In practice, this means that, even for the areas of 'shared' competency, for which the Region has only 'development' or 'executive' powers, the capacity to bring forward policy implementation initiatives is very wide, since Basque authorities have total spending autonomy. As explained in other chapters of this report, this has very important implications on the capacity to localise SDGs.

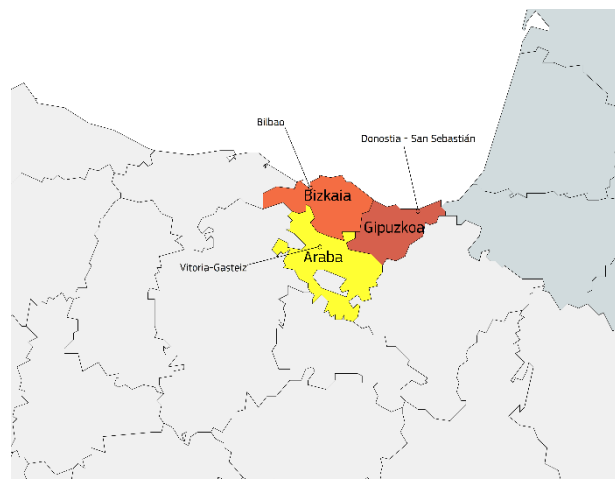
The specific regional policy-making powers have varied over time through the development of the Regional Statute of Autonomy and various court rulings from the Spanish Constitutional Court (which has redefined, for instance, some of the competencies in education that have become 'shared competencies'). The overall tendency is to combine the full development of the Regional Statute (which as of today, 40 years after its approval, is not yet fully deployed, since some competencies are still to be transferred) and the negotiated exercise of 'shared' powers, which takes place at political level – between political parties – in the Spanish Parliament.

At Regional level, policymaking is managed in substance by the Basque Government, the Regional Parliament and the Regional own judicial system (led by the High Court of the Basque Country, which exerts its regional jurisdiction and is composed by Civil and Criminal Court, Contentious Administrative Court and Labour Court).

Basque public authorities have therefore extensive powers to develop regulations to make most of the SDGs a reality in the territory. From this perspective, the SDG localisation process is often presented by public authorities not just as an opportunity for improving policymaking, but also as an exercise of responsibility to deploy the global goals on the ground. In addition, the SDG implementation at regional level is also seen as an opportunity to increase transparency and accountability.

The internal Institutional framework has also an important feature: the three Provinces (Araba, Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia (see Figure 4) benefit from a high degree of autonomy, decision-making power, and spending capacity. Each of the 3 provinces has its own executive (President and 'Ministries', which in some areas, such as taxation, have very extensive powers) and legislative power (the so-called '*Juntas Generales*', elected by universal suffrage every 4 years – usually, elections at Province level happen at the same time of Municipal elections, which do not coincide with Regional election cycles).

**Figure 4** The three Basque Provinces



Source: own elaboration (created with mapchart.net)

The Provinces (called '*Territorios Históricos*' or Historic Territories) have exclusive competences in the following fields (Article 37.3 of the Autonomy Statute of the Basque Region):

<sup>3</sup> See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:62006CJ0428&from=en>

- Organization, regime and operation of their own institutions
- Preparation and approval of their budgets
- Territorial demarcations of supra-municipal scope that do not exceed the provincial limits
- Regime of provincial and municipal assets
- Municipal electoral regime

Overall, Provinces enjoy shared policy-making powers with the Regional government in the following fields: Agriculture, forestry, culture, urban planning, environment (conservation of the natural environment), industrial development, employment, social policies, subsidies to companies, etc. The representative bodies of the Province authorities (called '*Juntas*') are elected through universal suffrage. These bodies have their own President and sectorial policy 'Ministers'.

This complex internal institutional framework has important consequences on the need for multi-level coordination in order to implement SDG-related policies.

## 2 The Basque SDG ecosystem

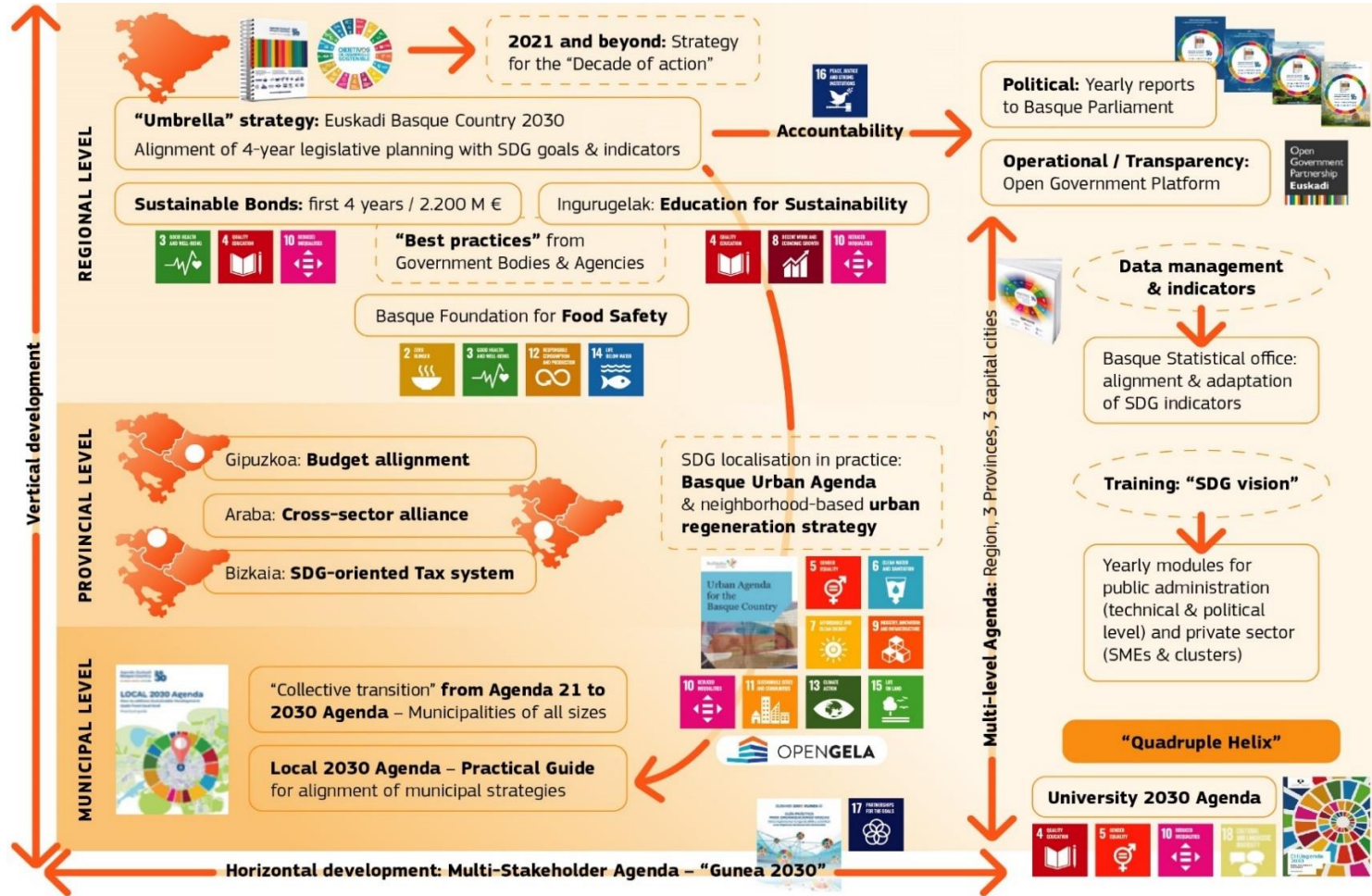


Figure 5 The Basque SDG ecosystem

Source: own elaboration.



Since 2017, a series of initiatives have been launched in the Basque country to localize the 2030 Agenda. Some of them have been promoted by the Regional Government, provinces, or municipalities, while others have been promoted by other entities or organizations. Due to the interrelation of the diverse initiatives and the fact that together they form a coherent scheme, it is more adequate to talk about a Basque SDG Ecosystem.

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*In the context of the localisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an ‘SDG ecosystem’ is the co-ordinated design, implementation and monitoring of multilevel, multi-stakeholder strategies, initiatives and actions for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals on the ground. An SDG ecosystem contributes to better policymaking by establishing a coherent, consistent, and mutually reinforcing collaborative framework with a strong territorial approach.*

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As shown in Figure 5, this framework is structured around the actions for the localisation of the SDGs carried out for the ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ development. Although some of the initiatives are ‘overarching’, while some others are more directed towards specific goals, all bring particular contributions to the bigger picture. As in every ecosystem, all components are equally essential to keep the balance and provide elements for the implementation of SDGs. This chapter analyses each of these actions and describes their main elements:

#### **Vertical development:**

- The Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda - hereinafter EBC2030 - which is the ‘umbrella’ strategy that emanates from the highest level of the administration – the regional government
- Several initiatives for ensuring accountability of the EBC2030 both at political and operational level
- Three specific initiatives – driven by the Basque Governmental departments or Agencies – focusing on specific goals of the 2030 Agenda
- The Multilevel Agenda, which gathered representatives from the three administrative levels (Regional Government, Provinces and the three Capital cities)
- A specific initiative carried out by the 3 provincial governments or ‘historic territories’ these are not the only initiatives taken at this level, but they have been selected due to their diverse approach towards SDG implementation)
- The various initiatives developed at municipal level
- The strategy ‘bridging’ regional government and municipal action: the Basque Urban Agenda and the neighbourhood regeneration initiatives

#### **Implementation activities:**

- Data measurement (statistics and indicators): the work being done by the Basque Statistical office on SDG target concerns both the measurement and the development of indicators
- Training activities both at political (mayors) and technical level (civil servants from all institutions), including specific initiatives involving the private sector

#### **Horizontal development:**

- The ‘Euskadi 2030 Gunea’ Guide (Gobierno Vasco 2020), is the result of a pilot project developed by 17 stakeholders (industry, civil society, institutions...)
- Completing the ‘Quadruple Helix’
- The initiatives support the active involvement, on the SDG implementation, of academia.



## 2.1 Vertical development

### 2.1.1 Overarching Government Strategy: 'Euskadi Basque Country 2030'



The vertical development of the Basque SDG Ecosystem starts from the Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda (EBC2030) adopted in May 2018 (Euskadi Basque Country 2018b).

The EBC2030 Agenda is presented as “the Basque Contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. In its introductory remarks the EBC2030 mentions that “*the Sustainable Development Goals do not tell us what we must do, but rather define a context that helps us improve our public policies and set priorities in accordance with our territorial reality*”. This is the spirit underlying the EBC2030: it takes a pragmatic approach and focuses on identifying what could be the contribution of the Government’s 4-year legislative programme to the SDG specific goals.

This document reviews the main initiatives included in the Government program for the 2017–2021 legislature, placing the 15 overall Regional priorities under the light of the 17 SDGs, and establishing 100 precise targets and a scoreboard of 50 indicators, presented in a comparative table with the indicators established by the UN and the European Union.

The Agenda is conceived as a ‘living’ document that is set but evolves over time. There are two additional elements of the Basque Country 2030 Agenda that deserve to be highlighted:

- The EBC2030 Agenda does not create new organizations. The process is based on an in-depth assessment of the existing work and the additional effort that could be made. This explains the importance of accountability initiatives (analysed in the following section of this report).
- Clear leadership at the highest level. Another of the notable elements of this Agenda is the commitment acquired by the President’s office, who acts as catalyst and coordinator of the project. The work was developed under the leadership of the Secretary for External Action, belonging to the Department of the Presidency.

#### *The process that led to the EBC2030 Agenda – the breeding ground*

The preparation of the EBC2030 Agenda was partly favoured by the October 2016 regional elections. The period from autumn 2016 to early 2017 represented a ‘break’ in regulatory activity in the government. It allowed reflecting on the possibilities for action, seeding the ground for in-depth consultation process and ‘challenging’ traditional data and contents, to give them more solidity.

In parallel to the consultation processes, a number of operational working groups were created to develop the technical work. The EBC2030 draft contents were developed internally within these groups and then circulated to the various governmental departments for wider consultation. This internal work was combined with frequent contacts with different external stakeholders (e.g., industry, civil society, etc.) which helped to confirm the existence of *SDG-related initiatives*, even if they did not have an ‘SDG-brand’. This contributed to the creation of a ‘**common language**’ between governmental departments and external stakeholders, allowing to compare efforts that were being made until then, and start build something new together by identifying areas for improvement and topics in which further work could be performed.

The above-mentioned ‘regional breeding ground’ (see Box 1) was therefore very important at this stage to create the conditions to develop the EBC2030 Agenda and hence the Basque SDG Ecosystem to flourish.

After the 2016 elections, the Government Program was adopted in 2017, but it was still too soon to give it a clear SDG look. As the EBC2030 consultation process went on until 2018. The opportunity to put the existing plan under the SDG lens became clear, instead of adopting a roadmap towards the 2030 Agenda. The EBC2030 was thus officially adopted in April 2018.

**Box 2** Tracking the leadership

When assessing a VLR model, it is essential to keep track of the process that led to its approval, as this can provide a lot of information on the political legitimacy from the local or regional administration (UCLG Community of Practice on VLRs and UN-Habitat 2020).

Research and international benchmarking on the process for setting up and running a VLR have led to two general approaches (Deininger et al. 2019): the so-called 'hub-and-spoke' model, where leadership is taken by a policy leader or a central office which coordinates most, if not all, of the VLR process; and the 'Commission working group' – the creation of a specific department for coordinating the SDG implementation efforts. In the Basque case the approach has come from a combination of both methods, since – as shown in the description of Figure 5 – its full development has implied a high degree of cooperation among various stakeholders.

Nevertheless, if we look at the 'Overarching' initiatives analysed in this chapter, a clear leadership and 'hub and spoke' model emerges, since it was the External Action Department of the Basque Government who launched, coordinated and made dynamic the elaboration of the EBC2030, Multilevel and Gunea 2030 Agendas.

Most cities and regions have chosen a top-down approach, giving the initial responsibility of developing the VLR to either governmental departments or city halls. European exceptions to this were the cases of Bristol (Fox and Macleod 2019) and Canterbury (Canterbury SDG Forum 2019), which relied on external alliances with academia, civil society, and other stakeholders to set up their VLRs, and Gothenburg (Sandra C. Valencia 2019), which relied on a University-led study which was subsequently validated by the City Hall. In the international sphere, the pioneering cities of Kitakyushu (City of Kitakyushu and Institute for Global Environmental Strategies 2018), Shimokawa (Shimokawa Town 2018) and Toyama (Toyama City and IGES Institute for Global Environmental Strategies 2018) also relied on the International IGES Institute to draft their first VLRs, together with the Japanese Government and City Hall representatives.

This was not the case in the Basque Region, which took a similar model to city-regions such as New York City or Helsinki, assigning the task of developing the VLR to a specialised internal department. The case of New York City is probably the most similar to the Basque Region, as the leadership corresponded to the Mayor's office for International Affairs.

This internal leadership does not mean that other stakeholders were not consulted on the EBC2030 Agenda. For instance, the External Action Department used extensively, during a one year and a half consultation process, existing Platforms such as:

- The Interdepartmental External Action Committee (which was used for submitting the EBC2030 drafts to other Departments and gather contributions)
- The External Action Department's Interinstitutional Committee -composed of the Basque Government, the Provincial Councils, the 3 Basque Capital cities and the Association of Basque Municipalities (Eudel), which was used for the EBC2030 consultation process, but also played a key role in the development of the Multilevel Agenda
- The External Action Department's Advisory Committee, which gathers stakeholders from civil society, industry, Academia, etc. and it is chaired by the Basque President.

### ***New challenges in the Decade for Action: The new Government and its strategy***

After the last regional elections, the new Regional Government (which entered into office in October 2020) made the decision to create a new General Secretariat, called 'Social Transition and the 2030 Agenda', whose task is to coordinate the Government's political action with the UN 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

The new Secretariat marks a logical transition in the management of the SDG localisation. Initially the management of the 2030 Agenda corresponded to the foreign relations departments, specialists in international diplomacy and in situating local actions on a global level. In this new phase, the focus is on the coordination of internal policies and dissemination – inside and outside the Government – of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda *as tools to improve the management of regulatory action*.

This step, which entails a greater capacity of coordination internally at the Government, is facilitated if the task is entrusted to a more 'internal' unit of the Government, better placed to act in a transversal way than the foreign relations department.

This has been the parameter of action that has been followed in the Basque Country. It should be noted that both Secretariats, the Foreign Action and the newly created one, remain under the Department of the Presidency, under the close observation of the President of the Basque Government, which guarantees an organizational capacity and an authority with respect to the various government departments.

The New Secretary General will take over the role of the External Action Secretary and will focus on coordinating actions, dynamizing and systematizing SDG localisation initiatives all over the administration. The first challenge will be the elaboration of a framework document called "Basque Programme of SDG Priorities: Social contract and proactivity"<sup>4</sup>.

The main objective of this new framework is to move to a new phase on SDG implementation and make progress from 'alignment' towards 'proactivity'. This includes:

- A wide dissemination of the 2030 Agenda in the grassroots organisations and civil society
- Institutional coordination and collaborative governance
- The deployment of a series of flagship initiatives, which would include many of the elements mentioned in this report, as the creation of a wide 'Basque SDG Forum', involving institutions and stakeholders at all levels
- The development of a consistent set of multi-level indicators.

#### Connection with the Spanish VNR

The EBC2030 Agenda makes no specific reference to the Spanish VNR, which was presented for the first time in the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. A mention to the contributions of the various Autonomous Communities was made in that VNR (Gobierno de España 2018), but, perhaps due to changes in the Central Government along the VNR elaboration process, there was no structured dialogue between administrations.

Nevertheless, the Spanish Secretary of State for Agenda 2030 created in 2020 the 'Sectorial Committee with the Autonomous Communities', allowing the improvement of communication between national and regional authorities on the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda.

This Sectorial Committee is the competent cooperation body between the Central State Administration, the Autonomous Communities, and the Local Administration (represented by the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces) in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Its tasks include, among others, the following:

- Articulate exchange of information and good practices for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the different levels of Government
- Follow-up draft laws and draft regulations of the Central Government or Autonomous Communities on 2030 Agenda implementation

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<sup>4</sup> Still to be published at the time this report was launched.

- Establish specific cooperation plans between Autonomous Communities, seeking to eliminate duplications and achieve better efficiency in public services
- Establish mechanisms for the exchange of information, especially of statistical content

The establishment of this Committee was a step forward in the territorial coordination for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Spain, in the framework for the second round of the VNR at the 2021 High Level Political Forum. In sight of the preparation of this VNR and the forthcoming Spanish Strategy for Sustainable Development, a constructive dialogue has been established between Basque regional and Central state authorities.

### **Box 3** International Diplomacy

The international networking on SDGs is often mentioned as a mean for local and regional authorities to connect with the global community, share their experience and needs with peers and have a seat at the global table. From the Basque perspective, special focus has been placed on the need to 'territorialise' the SDGs, providing a decentralised perspective, assuming that SDGs are an essential element for achieving territorial cohesion.

The Basque Region has developed significant efforts on international diplomacy in order to disseminate its SDG-related initiatives. Two significant events were the presentation of the EBC2030 Agenda at the 2018 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), and the presentation of the Basque Sustainable Bonds (see chapter below for more details) by the Basque Regional President in the 2019 HLPF. Both opportunities arose thanks to the work being developed through International Networks such as the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments<sup>5</sup> and the UN Major Group of Local Authorities<sup>6</sup>.

Other organisations working on SDG implementation where the Basque Region is particularly active are:

- REGIONS 4 - Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development – Organisation of which the Basque Region holds the Presidency now<sup>7</sup>
- UCLG, United Cities and Local Governments - organisation where many different Basque organisations from different government levels take active part<sup>8</sup>
- OECD, which has mentioned repeatedly the Basque case as a best practice in its reports on Territorial approach to SDGs (OECD 2020)
- ORU-Fogar, United Regions Organisation<sup>9</sup>, which has recently recognised the Basque Social protection model as a best practice in the IV Award for Good Regional Practices 2020<sup>10</sup>
- Platforma, the pan-European coalition for development cooperation - organisation in which the Basque Region is represented at two levels: The Basque Regional Agency for Cooperation and the Association of Basque Municipalities for Cooperation<sup>11</sup>
- UNDP-Art, The initiative for the Articulation of Territorial Networks (ART) of the UN Development Program (UNDP)

## **2.1.2 Accountability**

### **2.1.2.1 Political accountability**

The EBC2030 Agenda foresees a governance mechanism based on three pillars:

1. The various Government Departments will be involved in the follow-up and monitoring of the Agenda through the Interdepartmental External Action Committee.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.global-taskforce.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/localauthorities>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.regions4.org/our-work/sdgs/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.uclg.org/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.regionsunies-fogar.org/en/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://regionsunies-fogar.org/en/activities/regional-best-practices-database/515-basque-social-protection-model>

<sup>11</sup> <https://platforma-dev.eu/es/category/sdgs-es/>

2. The other Basque Institutions would be involved through the Inter-Institutional Group, gathering representatives from all Government departments, the three Provincial Councils and the three Capital cities.
3. The Basque Government would produce a yearly report reflecting the fulfilment of the commitments in the EBC2030 Agenda and present it to the Regional Parliament.

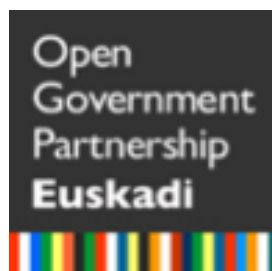
So far, four follow-up reports have been submitted covering the years 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 (Euskadi Basque Country 2017, 2018a, 2019, 2020).

**Figure 6** The 4 follow-up reports presented to date



The reports enumerate precisely the actions that have been developed yearly (either legislative initiatives, organisational arrangements, or other type of actions). It has to be noted that the Basque Parliament has created a specific working group on Agenda 2030, with representatives from all political parties.

### 2.1.2.2 Public accountability – Open Government



In addition to the close follow-up from the political level, the Department for Better Governance of the Basque Government set up a web tool which includes all actions for the implementation of the Legislature Programme according to their respective SDG, and the tracking of progress. This platform, which is open for public consultation, includes cross-sectorial references to the related work being done in other areas or departments of the Government, therefore favouring the transversality and 'silo-breaking' perspective. This provides an excellent tool for the training activities carried out by the Regional Institute of Public Administration (see section below).

**Figure 7** Example of the Open Government website: Policy Goal, starts date (and foreseen finish date), sectorial department involvement, SDG addressed, related indicators.



Source: <https://www.ogp.euskadi.eus/>

This transparency mechanism is part of the efforts developed in the context of the 'Open Government' Strategy, which includes an Action plan with 5 strategic actions:

1. Uniform institutional accountability: Builds collaborative standards regarding the publication of information (what; how and when; and under what principles) for all levels of government;
2. Open data and Linked Open data platform: Identify data sets which are most frequently demanded by citizens (including research staff from universities);
3. I-lab for citizen participation: public-private collaboration promoting citizen participation by the development and use of innovative methodologies;
4. Open Eskola (open school for citizens): Defines models for engaged citizenship and agile-responsive administration;
5. Basque integrity system: Fosters the development of good practices in public management.

In 2016, the Basque Country joined the 'Open Government Partnership' Platform<sup>12</sup>, thus providing an international scope to this inter-institutional, multi-level transparency system.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/basque-country-spain/>

### **2.1.3 Governmental bodies and agencies: three specific examples**

#### **2.1.3.1 Sustainable Bonds**

The Basque Government has developed a framework for sustainable bonds which allows issuing bonds linked to both green and social projects. Four editions of Sustainable Bonds have been launched so far, with the aim of financing programs helping to make the SDGs a reality in the territory.

The total amount has been 2,200 M€ in the last 4 years, of which 83% allocated to social and 17% to environmental investments. In all editions, demand has exceeded offer by a large margin.

According to the Basque Government's Framework for the emission of Sustainable Bonds<sup>13</sup>, the projects should fall within one of the following categories:

- Affordable housing
- Access to basic services, in particular Education and Health
- Socio-economic progress
- Job creation
- Clean transport
- Prevention of contamination
- Sustainable management of water
- Conservation of maritime and terrestrial biodiversity
- Energy Efficiency
- Adaptation to climate change

These bonds have been subjected to an external evaluation by the European environmental, social and governance rating agency (Sustainalytics) which has evaluated them as a solid, credible, and transparent financial products.

Recent policy papers (Leonard et al. 2021) have called for the EU to become a global standard-setter on green bonds, taking into account that the segment currently remains a niche. The Basque initiative could be a good example for other regional Governments.

These Bonds have also been a tool for international diplomacy: they were presented in the 2018 and 2019 sessions of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and some dissemination tours have also been organised to potential investors from various countries such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, etc.

#### **2.1.3.2 Ingurugela and education on sustainability**

Ingurugela is a network of public facilities that support teachers and schools by coordinating environmental education plans and programs in the non-university educational system. Since its creation in 1989 by the Basque Government's Departments for Education and Environment, the Ingurugela network has been working on taking sustainability criteria to non-university educational centres. It focuses on two sectors: infant and secondary school, and vocational training (it must be noted that in this last field -VET- a similar very dynamic work on alignment to SDGs has been developed by TKNIKA, the Basque Centre of Research and Applied Innovation in Vocational Education and Training)<sup>14</sup>.

Teachers have been considered as key promoters of the concept of sustainability (Agirreazkuenaga 2019). This is why in its early years, the Ingurugela network was key in the launch of what was called 'School Agenda 21'<sup>15</sup>.

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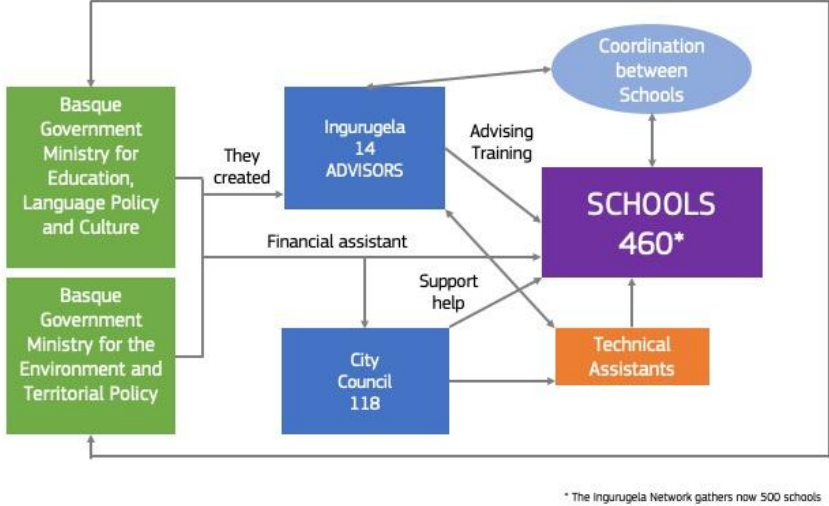
<sup>13</sup> Marco para la emisión de Bonos Sostenibles (Gobierno Vasco)

<sup>14</sup> TKNIKA – see <https://tknika.eus/en/> - is an organization depending on the Basque Government's Education Department – which is working to foster the Basque Vocational Education and Training model at EU level with a SDG-focused approach to life-long learning.

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.euskadi.eus/web01-a2inghez/en/contenidos/informacion/a21e/en\\_def/index.shtml](https://www.euskadi.eus/web01-a2inghez/en/contenidos/informacion/a21e/en_def/index.shtml)

In addition, Ingurugela has developed an extensive network with municipalities – especially those members of the Basque Network of Municipalities for Sustainability (see chapter on municipalities below). Through this network, the School Agendas 21 have been coordinated with the Local Agendas 21.

**Figure 8** The School 21 framework



Source: elaboration based (Agirreazkuenaga 2019)

To achieve this, the Ingurugela centres establishes bi-annual plans together with the network (Figure 8) and provides advice and training to individual schools in a 5-stage development process: (i) Organization and planning, (ii) Awareness and motivation of the professionals, (iii) Diagnosis of each school’s situation, (iv) Action plan, (v) Communication and evaluation.

The involvement of all actors can be done in different ways. For instance, in a hypothetical case the Municipality X is carrying out a local Plan on recycling and wishes to start promoting awareness-raising on the subject. The local authorities of Municipality X get in touch with Ingurugela, who in its turn contacts with the local municipal school in order to elaborate a joint action to implement issues related to recycling in educational projects. The same would apply at supra-municipal level (counties, etc).

This is an excellent example of what has been mentioned in Section 1 of this report as the ‘breeding ground’: the Ingurugela network has been working for years on the development of public policies and actions, which - without being branded as ‘2030 Agenda localisation actions’- have paved the ground for the development of the SDG Ecosystem. This represents a significant asset, for instance, to Regional authorities when implementing the ‘Education for sustainability’ Goals and targets included in the EBC2030 Agenda. The fact of having a consolidated network facilitating the desired outcomes and speeding up the implementation processes is a very useful asset. This is of course not only true for SDG 4, 12 or 13, but also for all the potential interconnections (SDG 3, SDG 5, SDG 11, SDG 16, etc.).

Following the world leadership from UNESCO, the Ingurugela Network has been working in the last years on the transition from School Agenda 21 to School Agenda 2030, integrating wider aspects of economic and social sustainability, in addition to the traditional ones focusing on environmental considerations. One potential problem being considered in this transition is that SDGs are so varied and detailed that it would be very difficult for schools to systematize the approach. A possible formula to overcome this is the clustering of the SDGs for example according with the ‘Eco-productive’ or ‘Eco-social’ perspectives.



### 2.1.3.3 The Alliance against food waste

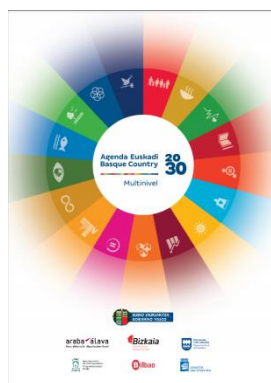
Launched in 2018 and coordinated by Elika (Basque Foundation for Food Safety), this is an interesting example on how public bodies can provide dynamism and leadership towards the creation of very productive alliances. Elika's patronage is formed by representatives from at least three different governmental departments (Agriculture, Health, Finance) and are in very close contact with the department of environment in order to explore common ground.

The alliance against food waste combines a wide scope. Participants include among others the Basque Government, municipalities, retail companies, universities and research centres<sup>16</sup>. Its detailed action plan includes the creation of various working groups that meet at least twice a year and keep an operational structure (6-8 people), dealing with issues such as:

- *Information and data sources* – which is essential to have a solid analysis of the problem and its evolution, and to know the points of the agri-food chain where there is more waste.
- *Awareness, outreach, and training* – among other priorities, its focus is to achieve the greatest possible adherence to the Manifesto against food waste.
- *Development of guidelines and good practices*.
- *Support and promotion of research* – priority will be given to actions carried out in a coordinated manner between food chain operators and research centres.

This initiative involves a great diversity of public and private stakeholders in pursuit of a very specific objective: to join forces to halve food waste by 2030, which corresponds to the SDG target 12.3: which calls by 2030 to “halve per capita food waste worldwide (...) and reduce food losses in production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses”.

### 2.1.4 The Multilevel Agenda



As mentioned above, the Institutional framework in the Basque Country includes mid-level entities, the provinces that have a very important framework of competence mainly in budgetary areas, but also regulatory aspects. Therefore, any policy-making initiative in the Basque Region that does not take the provinces into account would remain incomplete.

The Basque Multilevel Agenda was developed under the leadership of the External Action Service of the Basque Government, which gathered a group of high-level representatives from various Departments of the Regional Government and from Province and City-level (representatives from Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Araba Province Councils and from the three Capital cities: Bilbao, Donostia-San Sebastián and Vitoria-Gasteiz).

It is important to underline that this process was not a ‘consultation’ but a real co-creation exercise that lasted for almost two years, involving high-ranked political managers from all institutions, as well as technical staff with sufficient knowledge of the initiatives carried out in relation to each of the 169 SDG targets.

The year and a half-long exercise started in late 2017 with a first period of mutual information and awareness-raising to all Institutions about the deployment of this joint activity. In 2018, a two-step process was set up:








- First, by organising, individual meetings between the involved institutions and the Basque Government's External Action Service where each participating institution shared the steps given so far for the development of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in their territory (and within their competences) and the results obtained in the process. A total of 40 individual meetings took place between April and October 2018.
- Once the basic elements were solidly established, an inter-institutional operational working group was set up in October 2018, gathering representatives both from the technical and political level of the Institutions.

<sup>16</sup> The complete list of the members of the platform <https://www.zerodespilarro.eus/plataforma/>

These high-level meetings were less frequent, (six multi-stakeholder meetings) with a high degree of preparatory work in between them. They focused on a three-step work:

- An analysis of the SDG targets and goals defined by the EBC2030 Agenda, putting them in perspective with the respective competences of the various levels of administration involved.
- An exclusion of those targets that could only be addressed from a single level of Institution. Only the 'common' goals, corresponding to the joint action of more than one level of administration were selected for further discussion.
- The final product was a Multilevel Agenda establishing a 'common vision' in which the 7 Institutions identify spaces for joint action only in those areas for which at least two level of Governments have competencies. The result of this exercise was a publication establishing 50 goals, 204 reference documents and 258 relevant actions

**Figure 9** Example of Multilevel Agenda Target, including stakeholders involved (in this case, all 7 Institutions), existing strategies and identified specific actions

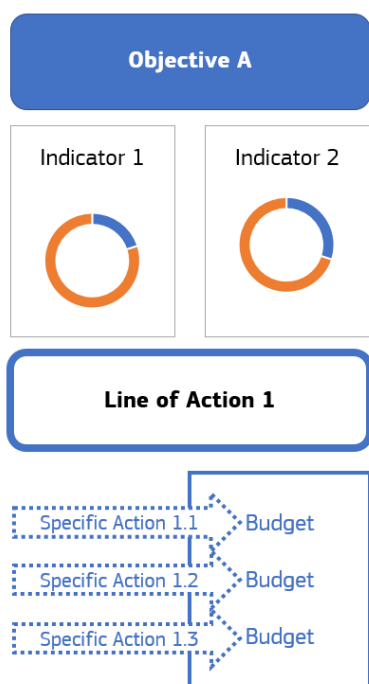
TARGET 13	PLANS / REFERENCE DOCUMENTS
<p><b>Eradicate violence against women and girls.</b></p> <hr/> <p style="color: #e67e22; text-align: center;"><b>MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE</b></p> <hr/> <p>Driving stakeholder:</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Necessary stakeholders:</p> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; gap: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> </div>	<div style="background-color: #2c4e64; color: white; padding: 5px;"><b>ACTIONS</b></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law amending Law 4/2005 on equality of women and men to reinforce prevention and the response to gender violence against women.</li> <li>• Aurre! I Provincial Plan to deal with violence against women in Gipuzkoa.</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>13.1.</b> Development of programmes providing attention to the victims of gender violence, their sons, daughters and those in their care, information and guidance, attention in situations of emergency, specialised social attention in non-urgent situations, shelter in municipal flats, resources to protect children in cases of gender violence (Onarpen Programme; Aurre! Plan).</li> <li><b>13.2.</b> Creation of a programme of preventive actions and coordination with the Ertzaintza (Basque Police Force) Victim Support Department.</li> <li><b>13.3.</b> Campaigns to educate and raise awareness on gender abuse and violence.</li> <li><b>13.4.</b> Specialised service of information and attention to the women victims of domestic violence or for reasons of sex.</li> <li><b>13.5.</b> Development of early intervention programmes, based on the evidence used when providing attention to defenceless families and minors (Incredible Years, Safe Care and AVI Programmes).</li> <li><b>13.6.</b> Incorporation of the gender perspective to intervention with minors, especially youths. Programme of attention to situations of domestic abuse by men in young people and adolescents.</li> </ol>

Source: own elaboration based on (Euskadi Basque Country 2018b)

## 2.1.5 Provincial level

In addition to the actions undertaken at Basque Government level, the Provincial authorities have undertaken different actions to localise the SDGs within their administrations, taking very diverse approaches. For the sake of brevity and in order to select the richest possible array of activities, this report provides information on three specific actions, one per Province: the SDG-based budgeting tool set up by the Gipuzkoa Province Council, the multi-stakeholder alliance fostered by Araba Council, and the work on tax policy for SDGs being developed by the Biscay Council.

### 2.1.5.1 Gipuzkoa: SDG-oriented budgeting



Over the last years, the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa modified its way of preparing the budget and started to have results-oriented budgets, adopting a management system that aligns policy planning (objectives) and budgets. The aim is to make the institution as a whole, and each department in particular, aware of how budget programming can lead to the achievement of specific objectives.

- These objectives are clearly defined and can be derived from the overall Strategic Management Plan or specified by the department itself.

- Indicators are selected in relation with each objective, and are revised every year, in order to allow a precise track of the progresses toward each objective.

- General lines of action (major tasks or projects) are defined and specific actions are assigned to them.

- Lastly, a budget is linked to each of the actions.

Departing from this scheme, the alignment of the budgeting to SDGs follows three different phases:

1. The first one is an analysis of the previous experiences at organisational level and the assignment of each line of action to (maximum 2) SDGs. For each SDG, a 'weight' (%) is assigned, based on the link between the line of action and the Goal / targets. This allows the

organisation to have a first approximation of how much is spent on each SDG, an estimation of the degree of accomplishment of the lines of action for each SDG and a disaggregated information on the SDG-related actions for each Department;

2. The following phase consists of a formulation of targets and indicators for the organisation as a whole (preceded by an international benchmarking among similar national or international organisations) and a precise definition of SDG goals and indicators for each specific action;
3. A third phase would be the evaluation of the results achieved and the specific policy planning from a pragmatic, budget-based approach (leading to questions such as: How much have we spent on each SDG and target? Has this spending been effective according to the indicators? Is there any target with no specific action assigned? Do we need to modify existing actions or create new ones in order to fulfil the Goals?)

This would be the end goal: specific budget for the concrete actions is assigned with equally specific SDG targets. The plan is to assign specific goals to the 2021 budget '*a posteriori*' (this is, once it has been adopted). But for the coming years, the system will be in place and it will allow to develop upfront SDG-and goal-oriented budgets.

### **2.1.5.2 Araba: Multi-stakeholder alliance**

In addition to their participation in other initiatives, such as the Multi-level Agenda and the Open Government initiative, through the 'Open School' pioneering experience (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), the Province of Araba has pushed the SDG implementation through the multi-stakeholder alliance (called '*Alianza Alavesa por el Desarrollo sostenible*').

The process was initiated in 2016-17 through a wide consultation process called *Agora*, which gathered a big number of varied representatives from Academia, Industry, and civil society -more than 300 stakeholders- which jointly evaluated the various challenges for the territory. This consultation process revealed a wide variety of already ongoing initiatives (although they were not 'branded' as SDG actions) already taking place and seeded the ground for the creation of the province SDG Alliance, which was officially launched in September 2018.

In 2019, the first meetings were convened and given the wide variety of stakeholders, the focus was initially placed on the generation of trust from the various actors and the establishment of a common reference framework. The first phase focused on highlighting the way in which the various stakeholders had approached the SDGs, which was very diverse. This taught participants that the 'internalisation' of the SDGs can be very different depending on each organisation's point of departure and context.

The next phase was the creation of 17 Groups (of 4 or 5 members each), addressing one single SDG goal. This initiative (which is still ongoing) is an example of how very diverse stakeholders can identify a great potential for concrete and transformative actions in the territory, including a large component of awareness-raising not only at the level of citizenship, but also within the Institutions involved in the development of these specific tasks.

### **2.1.5.3 Bizkaia: Tax collection adapted to SDGs**

As stated in section 1 of this report, the Basque Country has its own Autonomous Tax system in which Province authorities play a key role as responsible authorities for tax collection.

The Provincial Council of Bizkaia is developing, in collaboration with the University College London and the economist Mariana Mazzucato, a project whose objective is to change the regulatory framework and align fiscal policies in Bizkaia with the SDGs, creating a model that is transferable to other administrations.

This would mean adapting to the SDG principles the most powerful instrument available to the provincial authority, the tax collection, by making the various actors, as far as possible, comply with the Agenda 2030. The criteria for the new tax regulation correspond to the Province's current challenges: climate change, socio-demographic challenges and economic development & innovation.

The initial plan is to open a public consultation period and present a new tax regulation by June 2021. The objective is to determine, within complete legal certainty, the conditions under which SDG-compliant companies, projects, and investments could access a differentiated tax treatment.

The new tax regulation would create "the world's first tax system that explicitly meet SDGs<sup>17</sup>", setting requirements that must be met so that it is understood that a certain action is aligned with compliance with the SDGs, and establishing measurement and certification mechanisms.

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<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/news/2020/jun/iipp-enters-agreement-biscay-government-sustainable-development-goals-led-economic>

## 2.1.6 Municipalities: The Basque sustainable network

The SDG localisation process does not stop at the Province level: on the contrary, Basque Municipalities have shown a very dynamic role in that aspect.

The Basque Network of Sustainable Municipalities – Udalsarea 2030<sup>18</sup> has been undertaking a very strong leadership for implementing sustainability parameters at local level since its establishment in 2002. Udalsarea 2030's initial aim was to accompany municipalities in their first Local Sustainability Plans, which emerged in the first 2000s.

This network, which initially gathered only 16 municipalities, nowadays engages up to 191 from a total of 251 in the Region. The network also triggered the creation of a monitoring & assessment system for the municipal sustainability plans in a joint platform, generating common resources and methodologies, therefore favouring the engagement of municipalities towards sustainability.

The process for enlarging the 'purely environmental' scope of the Agendas 21<sup>19</sup> to encompass social and economic sustainability aspects was originated already in 2010s.

Part of this process was the approval, in 2011, of the Common methodology for the assessment of local sustainability action plans, a document that is the predecessor of the currently developed initiatives for assessing the contribution of the Basque Municipalities to the 2030 Agenda (see below).

Another important milestone on this path was the adoption of the Basque Declaration in 2016, on the occasion of the 8<sup>th</sup> European Conference of Sustainable Cities and Towns, held in Bilbao. Mayors and representatives of European cities and towns committed to 15 pathways to support and accelerate the Socio-Cultural, Socio-Economic and Technological Transformations needed to ensure a decent quality of life for the population "whilst respecting the limits of our local and global ecosystems and available natural resources" (8th European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns 2016, 3).

In the recent years there has been significant progress in this collective transition from Sustainability Plans / Agendas 21 towards wider SDG approaches, and Udalsarea 2030 has established two heterogeneous technical working groups (according to the degree of evolution of each Municipality's Plans) in which local authorities analyse together the challenges for moving forward on the adoption of Local 2030 Agendas.

Two publications from Udalsarea 2030, which is assisted by the Basque Environment Agency Ihobe<sup>20</sup> as Technical Secretariat, deserve to be mentioned:

- 'Contribution by the Basque Network of Municipalities for Sustainability to the Sustainable Development Goals' (Udalsarea2030 2018), which conducts a detailed analysis of the 169 goals, establishing the level of knowledge/contribution from the Basque municipalities as a whole. The report (of which a second edition is currently being prepared) reflects the situation of the Basque local authorities with respect to the 2030 Agenda and identifies the challenges that the SDGs raise regarding the measurement, comparison, and implementation of concrete measures in the sustainability policies of municipalities. A common set of indicators has been established and it is followed-up and monitored through the e-Mugi service, an internal application where municipalities belonging to the Udalsarea2030 Network can consult joint data and perform an initial analysis of their contribution as a baseline to start the SDG localisation process. This system requires strong coordination efforts but provides significant 'economies of scale', especially for smaller municipalities
- 'Practical guide towards 2030 Local Agendas' which provides an easy-to-follow 5-step path for municipalities to implement their own 2030 Agenda (Udalsarea2030 and Gobierno Vasco 2019).

1. **Mapping SDG-related goals** in order to prepare the process for establishing a Local 2030 Agenda. Depending on the existence of different types of plans at local level, their period of validity and the local authority context, the needed approach will variate:

For instance, if there is an existing, well developed Municipal Strategy Plan, the added value will come from an alignment systematisation of this plan under the light of the SDG principles.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.udalsarea21.net/>

<sup>19</sup> Agenda 21 is a non-binding action plan launched by the United Nations following the Rio Summit in 1992. It also involves other multilateral organizations and governments at national and local levels.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ihobe.eus/local-sustainability>

If there are some sectoral plans (Agendas 21, mobility plans, youth employment plans, gender equality plans, strategies for urban planning, etc.), these can be used as the basis for alignment with the 2030 Agenda.

If a benchmark scenario does not exist or it is outdated, the recommended approach will be to prepare the Local 2030 Agenda from scratch.

2. **Establishing SDG target at local level:** Udalsarea 2030 offers 80 benchmark targets, selected by member Municipalities from the 169 UN targets as a ‘maximum’ applicable for the Basque context, to allow local authorities to localise the Agenda once the Goal mapping has been finalised.
3. **Strategic formulation of the Plan:** The next proposed step is to define a **vision** or “a set of general ideas to provide the reference framework for the municipality in the coming years” on the **specific targets** chosen. Thirdly, it is advised to set a scoreboard of indicators. For this third task, Udalsarea2030 offers a set of 32 indicators, selected from an initial list of 110 Local Sustainable Development Indicators associated with the SDGs. Obviously, a given local authority can decide, either from specific expertise derived from previous experiences or because of specificities of the local context, which indicators better adapt to its local reality.
4. **Preparing the Local Agenda 2030 Plans:** In this phase the Strategic lines, Policy programmes and Actions are established, based on the preparatory work being developed in the previous steps.
5. **Measuring the local authority’s contribution** to the SDGs: This can be done either by assessing the advances per each individual SDG, or by assessing periodically the degree of implementation of the overall Plan and measuring the steps given.

These common steps allow for some degree of flexibility from one Municipality to another, but it also paves the ground for a high degree of comparability, replicability, and uniform mechanisms for accountability.

### 2.1.7 Hitting the road: Dissemination of the Local 2030 Agendas in small municipalities



In the Summer – Autumn 2020, the work done by Udalsarea 2030 for the implementation of Local 2030 Agendas was complemented by the setting up of the ‘Our local 2030 Agenda’ service.

The rationale for such a service was to offer a way forward in the SDG localisation plans for small cities and towns that were willing to establish a Local 2030 Agenda but, for different reasons, did not yet take the decision to go forward.

A public tender was launched, and three consultancies (one per Province) were tasked to contact the municipalities and offer a 3 hour ‘collective brainstorming’ session for assessing the existing municipal plans, explore their compatibility with the SDGs and establish a common ground for what could be the genesis of their Local 2030 Agenda.

This service, which was offered for free to Municipalities and paid to the consultants by the Basque Government’s External Action service, reached out either directly or indirectly, through supra-municipal Counties, to roughly half of the Basque Municipalities (120 out of 251).



## 2.1.8 A specific SDG development - SDG 11, the Basque Urban Agenda, and the bottom-up urban regeneration initiatives

### 2.1.8.1 Context: More than buildings

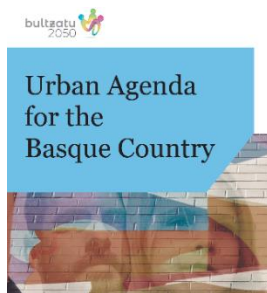
In addition to the mentioned actions, there is a specific sector in which the Basque Region stakeholders have been particularly active in the last years: urban regeneration. This sector of activity combines three specific features:

The spheres of intervention (housing and territorial planning) are in many cases of exclusive competence for the Region.

The action that can be undertaken is very transversal (encompassing environmental, economic, and social benefits: energy savings, CO2 emission reduction, job creation, protection of vulnerable collectives, promotion of healthy indoor environment, etc), going well beyond SDG 11.

A Global and European priority: The New Urban Agenda, adopted by UN Member States in Quito in 2016, was one of the first significant milestones at global level in order to 'materialise' the SDGs into a concrete achievement. In addition, the above-mentioned transversal benefits have transformed building renovation and urban regeneration projects into a high priority at EU level in both policymaking<sup>21</sup> and project deployments.

### 2.1.8.2 A tool for an urban territory



The adoption of the Basque Urban Agenda Bultzatu 2050 in November 2019 was the result of a wide consultation process with cities, provinces, and other stakeholders (industry, civil society, and academia). It has a broad temporal perspective, with a horizon until 2050, and concerns the main challenges that the increasingly urban Basque Region faces, offering a strategic and operational tool to Basque municipalities to develop urban strategies for sustainable development.

It does not try to establish an obligation for each city to have its Urban Agenda, but rather to provide a common framework for the territory, bringing together a series of instruments that are made available to the Municipalities so that they can implement specific actions. In addition, the fact that this Urban Agenda is approved by a Regional Government opens new possibilities *from cities to territories*, since the type of actions that can be carried out from a competency perspective are much wider. When considering Urban policy development, cities often have *their hands tied* due to partial policy-making competencies. From the Basque Region perspective, on the contrary, most of the policies can be developed. The fact that these policies are also being discussed in the International framework (the European one) contributes further to frame the debate.

### 2.1.8.3 Global support to a growing movement

A further element that needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that the adoption of the Basque Urban Agenda was coordinated with the UN-Habitat office in Spain. UN-Habitat has been promoting Urban Agendas in the last years due to their multidisciplinary nature. Until recent times, urban policies were mainly developed at country level and focused on urbanization needs, territorial policies to organize the 'urban exodus' (creation and planning of urban surroundings, infrastructures etc). However, in recent years a fundamental change has been observed: governments from different levels have started strategic tools - not 'documents', but tools, that propose cross-sectional approaches to the urban reality. It is no longer a matter of national sectoral policies (transport, spatial planning, etc.) or 'city policies', but of 'policies from cities' or 'general policies within cities'. And this requires new governance tools, because the intervention of various levels of the administration it is also necessary.

For this to be developed, there is a strong need of real-life, tailor-made, flexible data. This flexibility is not only taken from the data itself, but also from the sources (cooperation of multiple stakeholders to get other types of relevant data that could help to go further than the official indicators, in a more disaggregated manner). The ability to count on different actors to set indicators, collect data and use them is a way to show flexibility.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, see the EU renovation wave [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/energy-efficient-buildings/renovation-wave\\_en#documents](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/energy-efficient-buildings/renovation-wave_en#documents)

Urban Agendas –after all– are a further way for cities to *tell their own story* in the global level, and to develop a new culture of governance and new way of planning also in their own territory.

**Box 4** Urban regeneration with gender perspective

The Basque Urban Agenda incorporates as a supporting document a very innovative and extensive guide for the application of the gender perspective to urban regeneration processes, by Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado: “Regeneración urbana con perspectiva de género en el marco de la Agenda Urbana del País Vasco. Bultzatu 2050” (De Gregorio Hurtado 2020).

In this respect, the guide aims at generating collective learning processes in local communities through the design and implementation of urban regeneration strategies with a gender approach. The document proposes a reflection open to all relevant actors in relation to this issue in the Basque territory.

The starting point is to acknowledge that when we ask ourselves ‘who is left behind?’ in urban regeneration, the answer to this question is often ‘women’.

The guide proposes to put into place a methodology for urban regeneration with gender perspective based in the learning and experience provided by the Urban Acquis of the EU<sup>22</sup> (European Conference “URBAN Future” 2005). It also sets out some practical examples, taking a tour of the various specific aspects that are carried out in an urban regeneration process. For instance, when addressing interventions in the physical space of the city, the difficulties faced by women taking care of small children must be taken into account, as it is well known that women generally assume care tasks. The same applies to mobility planning – caretakers mobility faces different, bigger challenges. Another example is the link between mobility and security (on-demand stops of public bus services during the night, in order to minimize walking tours that women have to do at night, quality street lighting, etc.).

Other important element is for instance of social nature. Recent research (The Lancet, 2018) states that Spain will be among the countries with the longest life expectancy in the world by 2040. Given that women's life expectancy is longer than men's, this will generate issues of dependency and solitude. It is therefore very important from a gender perspective that urban regeneration strategies create urban environments where older people – and older women – can stay active and remain autonomous for as long as possible. Issues linked to improvement of the accessibility of buildings and proximity services and retail are key in this respect. This has also been reflected in a recent research from the European Commission (Goujon et al. 2021).

Another key element, in addition to the already mentioned universality of the approach, is its durability – the gender thinking in urban regeneration processes must come to stay.

Lastly, it is important to integrate the gender perspective in the participative processes, and to give more voice to women in topics such as education on sustainability and climate change issues. This has been backed by recent initiatives such as HerCity<sup>23</sup>, a toolbox jointly launched by Global Utmaning together and UN-Habitat aiming to provide municipal leaders, actors and decision-makers with elements for youth and gender-sensitive urban planning and design.

These kinds of analysis are especially interesting because they could contribute to develop a number of gender-based innovative indicators for measuring SDG5, by bringing many new ways at looking at the problem, and further ways to measure it.

<sup>22</sup> The [Pact of Amsterdam](#) which establishes the ground for the Urban Agenda for the EU- recognises gender equality as one of the cross-cutting issues

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.globalutmaning.se/hercitytoolbox/>



#### **2.1.8.4 Bottom-up: action in the neighbourhoods**

An operational SDG ecosystem should always keep the question of ‘Who is being left behind?’ under consideration from a transformative perspective, pointing out realities that must be changed.

For this reason, the Basque Government set up a regional strategy for urban regeneration through a network of pilot projects in vulnerable neighbourhoods, running in parallel to the development of the Regional Urban Agenda. This strategy was established based on the result of an extensive survey undertaken in 2012 and reviewed in 2020<sup>24</sup>, which identified that 31% of Basque population lives in areas qualified as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘very vulnerable’ (the indicators were – among others – parameters such as unemployment, level of revenue, age, dependency rate, building stock: age and lack accessibility).

These actions go well beyond SDG 11. For example:

- SDG 4: Education for sustainability: Increase awareness of homeowners on the multiple benefits of energy efficiency.
- SDG 5: Energy poverty and accessibility issues disproportionately affect women with low income acting as heads of households either as single parents or living alone at pension age.
- SDG 7 and 3: Urban regeneration activities combine building refurbishment with wider actions in the neighbourhoods, such as intelligent Transport systems and promotion of clean transport.
- SDG 7 and beyond: Focus on energy savings in the built environment / RES supply must be combined with others: Accessibility, neighbourhood regeneration (social fabric), health, etc, are more important for ‘convincing’ neighbours to undertake renovations.
- SDG 8: Open, accessible physical one-stop-shops at neighbourhood level to multiply the job opportunities for residents. Jobs should be created where it is needed (e.g., construction sector, services, social assistance, technical services for urban regeneration). Projects are also an opportunity for improving vocational training & long-life learning. In addition, the district approach provides opportunities for higher involvement from private sector (providing projects of high volume, more attractive for investments).
- SDG 10 and leave no one behind: Prior to approving the interventions, a social diagnosis should be carried out, covering a range of social, economic, and cultural aspects of homeowners. This includes issues as energy consumption, household living conditions, quality of life, lifestyle, and citizens’ individual characteristics (access to health care services, culture and leisure, education, etc). This kind of diagnosis might contribute to avoid gentrification of regenerated neighbourhoods;
- SDG 16 on multi-level governance is key: Involvement of Regional authorities provides stability, vision, and ambition to projects (as well as favours the replication of these initiatives in other municipalities).

The intervention model is based on the Opengela pilot project (see Box 5) and foresees the development of a replicable scheme of a set of measures (building refurbishment, interventions in the neighbourhood infrastructure, improvement of accessibility, connectivity, nature-based solutions, etc) which will be coordinated with the objectives, milestones and indicators established in the Basque Urban Agenda and the ECB2030 Strategy.

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<sup>24</sup> “Diagnóstico de necesidades de renovación del parque edificado de Euskadi”, Basque Government, 2011, 2020 - <https://www.euskadi.eus/informacion/regeneracion-urbana/web01-a2lurral/es/>

**Box 5** The Opengela project

The Opengela project<sup>25</sup> started in May 2019 in two pilot neighbourhoods, Otarkoaga in Bilbao and Txonta in Eibar, and it is supported by the Horizon 2020 Programme of the European Union.

This project has set up district offices (also known as One-Stop-Shop – OSS) that provide advice to neighbours on the renovations underway in their buildings, giving them logistical support, informing communities about technical and financial solutions, etc. Building renovation activities focus on energy efficiency improvements, but social dimension is also addressed (accessibility, health, comfort, security, neighbourhood identity).

Each OSS employs 1 to 3 permanent staff (depending on the size of the neighbourhood and the number of buildings which are being renovated) and provide turnkey solutions to homeowners throughout the entire renovation process.

The aim is to develop an integrated economically viable, scalable, and replicable renovation service for private residential buildings in the whole Basque Region. Similar projects are already taking place in other cities.

In practice, the staff provides a personalized approach to all kind of hurdles which could potentially hinder projects. Also, special attention is given to awareness-raising on the multiple benefits of building renovations (health, comfort, etc.). Energy Efficiency is very rarely the main trigger to convince neighbours to renovate their buildings.

Another important element of the OSS is that the staff knows the neighbours (they carry out a wide diagnosis covering social, economic, and cultural aspects) and can offer them a ‘non-institutional space’ for getting in touch within their neighbourhood. In addition, the offices are also used as a social and knowledge hub: training courses, seminars and conferences are organised on topics related to urban regeneration.

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<sup>25</sup> [www.opengela.eus/en](http://www.opengela.eus/en)

## 2.2 Implementation activities

### 2.2.1 Awareness-raising: Training activities

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda in any administration is an exigent process, requiring far-reaching perspectives, a transversal approach (silo-breaking and joint work with different levels and departments of the administration) and strong coordination efforts. This requires a high degree of commitment among civil servants, at all levels.

This commitment would be impossible without a strong awareness-raising exercise, in order to provide a clear view of the implications of the 2030 Agenda for each Institution and department.

In this section, some of the training activities developed by the Basque Government are briefly presented. In general, the Basque experience on SDG training has shown that regional authorities and municipalities of all sizes can benefit to a great extent from the lessons that adopting 'an SDG vision' at all levels of administrations, since this provides long-lasting benefits in their SDG localisation processes in many aspects:

- **SDGs make very visible the benefits of adopting a transversal view to policymaking**, by showing the inter-connections that specific goals can bring to policy planning.
- **Staff is trained on exploring alliances** (new, often unsuspected), not only from the public-private perspective, but also from the public-public one.
- The possibility, through SDG-focused training activities, to **develop a sense of belonging among civil servants**.
- The possibility to **apply innovative thinking among staff** by making them 'leave their zone of comfort': notably by promoting integral (encompassing the three dimensions of sustainability – economic, social, and environmental) and long-term thinking (further than political cycles), also fostering innovation and proactive identification of new social demands and challenges.
- Last but not least, SDG training should also focus on the **methodological efforts implied from applying the 'no one left behind' principle** (the mapping of potential 'left behind' collectives or groups, the structured necessary steps to alleviate these situations, and the establishment of indicators to monitor progress).

The experience from the Basque Region underlines the need to widely disseminate such training, addressing the widest audience possible, and not only to volunteers. If SDG trainings address only those with a personal interest, there is a high risk of *preaching to the converted* – a reduced number of already engaged civil servants.

The SDGs are a complex Agenda, often leading to difficult changes for administrations in operational activities and policymaking. Therefore SDG training should include practical elements, presented in a very to-the-point and appealing way: for example, explaining in a very structured manner *what the 2030 Agenda is and is not* and how the transformations need to be developed. Public administrations should consider not only *what they can do for the SDGs* (how can Institutions contribute to deploy Goals and Targets), but -most importantly – *what the SDGs can do for them* – how an SDG vision can change the way policies are designed and implemented (through greater policy coherence).

#### 2.2.1.1 Basque Institute for Public Administration

Following the objectives described above, in 2017 the Basque Government set up a series of on-line training activities for its civil servants, with the coordination of the Basque Institute for Public Administration (IVAP – *Instituto Vasco de Administración Pública*). IVAP has long-standing experience on providing training to all levels of regional public bodies. Nowadays, it provides 600 courses per year on a wide range of topics.

The first training seminar started in December 2017. Between 2018 and 2020 six on-line training modules were offered every year (three in Spanish and three in the Basque language). More than 200 civil servants have followed at least one module.

The courses aim to foster an 'SDG view', so that civil servants perceive the 2030 Agenda as a tool for improving their daily work and to make better public policies

The content of a standard course is the following (source: IVAP – *Instituto Vasco de Administraciones Públicas*):

1. Introduction: the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
  - 1.1 Basic concepts, background, and pillars of the 2030 Agenda
  - 1.2 What the SDGs are and are not, and what opportunities and challenges they pose for the Basque public administration
  - 1.3 The architecture of the SDG system: Objectives, targets, and indicators
2. Main actors for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda
  - 2.1 Who does what to implement the SDGs, both internationally and in the Basque Country
  - 2.2 Alliances: the keys to develop the Agenda
  - 2.3 Specific cases of alliances both internationally and in the Basque Country
3. The SDGs as a tool to improve public policies
  - 3.1 The key role of sub-national entities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda
  - 3.2 Localization of the SDGs: What is it and what is it for?
  - 3.3 International and local examples of public policy strategies within the framework of the SDGs
4. Looking to the future: opportunities for the Basque public administration

The total duration of the courses is 20 hours (estimated). Digital content is loaded on the Training web platform, including voluntary reading material, videos, practical exercises, etc. Despite being on-line seminars, frequent contact is fostered among participants through the 'Debate Forum', a virtual space where civil servants can share experiences, ask questions to the course tutor, etc.

#### **2.2.1.2 Other training activities: EUDEL and Vitoria-Gasteiz**

This is not the only training initiative set up in the Region. Recently, the town of Vitoria-Gasteiz kick-started a series of face-to-face training sessions for 400 civil servants. These five-hour sessions allow for very fruitful debates among colleagues from different departments.

On the other hand, EUDEL, the Association of Basque Municipalities, organised in 2019 a series of high-level training sessions for Mayors. The gatherings -lasting three hours each- were organised in the capital cities (Bilbao, Saint Sebastian, Vitoria-Gasteiz). The attendance rate was successful: a total of 85 mayors attended.

#### **2.2.1.3 Training for the private sector**

The Basque Government has also promoted SDG training activities for the private sector.

The Basque industrial environment is very heavily dominated by SMEs, and companies are very often grouped in clusters (see Box 1). This was the reason why the Regional Government reached an agreement with the UN Global Compact and the three Basque Provincial Business Associations to set up a combined training – information management system on SDGs. More specifically, the agreement foresaw:

- The setup of an online training platform for Basque companies.
- Adaptation of the content of training modules to the reality of local companies, together with the establishment of a monitoring system on the use of online training.
- Adaptation and customization of the SDGs online management tool; and establishment of a monitoring system on the use of that tool.

On the other hand, in 2019 the Government's Business Development Agency (SPRI) organised a series of dissemination seminars for clusters.

## 2.2.2 Data and indicators visualisation: work with Basque Statistics office

The Basque Statistic office, Eustat (established in 1986) is an autonomous organ attached to the Department of Economy and Finance.

Its strategic tasks are defined in a multi-year planning - the Basque Statistics Plan (which is approved every four years, and which is the result of consultations and reflection between various government departments and other stakeholders).

After the adoption of the 2019-2022 Plan, Eustat launched the statistical operation 'Indicators of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' which aimed at aligning available regional data with the framework established by the United Nations, including a trend identification taking 2015 as reference year. This data, available on the Eustat's website<sup>26</sup>, will be subject to frequent updates and even be expanded as new indicators are included.

New indicators will come from two sources: a) the progressive disaggregation which Eustat is promoting in order to measure more precisely certain goals (disaggregation by smaller geographical areas, by gender, age groups, income, etc.); b) new statistical indicators for those goals still pending quantification.

In the recent years, activities have been developed in four areas:

1. Coordination with the Spanish Statistics Institute: In 2019, a working group gathering statistical agencies from the 17 Spanish Autonomous Communities was set up in order to carry out coordinated work in the development of SDG indicators. This collaborative framework aimed to agree on a common methodology to, on the one hand, ensure a uniform calculation of the UN indicators while, on the other hand, allow for flexibility and comparability in the territorialisation of the indicators. The final aim is to get a common and homogeneous set of indicators and a standard methodology.
2. Develop a series of indicators more adapted to the regional reality, and that correspond to those developed by the Basque Government in its strategic documents (for example, the Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda). This task would consist in 'adapting' the existing indicators as well as developing new ones which are more pertinent to the local reality.
3. Thirdly, work is being done on the disaggregation of the indicators, from a triple perspective: those identified by the UN (by gender and age range) and the territorial one (by provinces).
4. Lastly, an important focus is being placed on the visualisation of the developed indicators, through Eustat's website.

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<sup>26</sup>

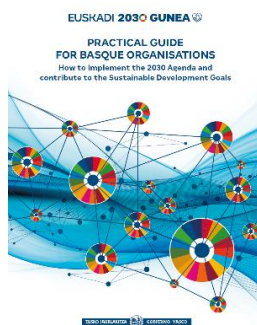
<http://www.eustat.eus/indic/ods.html>

## 2.3 The 'horizontal' development: 2030 GUNEA

The Basque SDG ecosystem also includes the development of a horizontal pilot project, Gunea 2030 ('Zone 2030'), which counted on the participation of 17 different stakeholders (see Annex 1 for the complete list of stakeholders participating) coming from several institutions, industry, academia, and civil society.

This exercise has some similarities with the ones developed in other European cities such as the Bristol SDG Alliance<sup>27</sup> and the Canterbury SDG Forum<sup>28</sup>. It has produced very positive results, but the specific fruits of this experience still need to be fully gathered.

### 2.3.1 A novel pilot project with a clear goal



Gunea 2030 was a concrete pilot-project, conceived with the specific purpose of setting the scene for a co-creation process among diverse stakeholders. The final product is a methodological guide (Gobierno Vasco 2020) consisting of three main parts:

1. First, it assesses the benefits that any Basque organisation could reap from engaging with SDGs
2. Second, it identifies and selects 28 common Goals for all types of organisations, and 56 sectorial targets (gathered in joint working sessions out from the initial 169 SDG targets)
3. Third, it establishes a joint path for approaching the SDGs from any kind of organisation, proposing concrete steps in order to integrate the SDGs in an organisation's strategic plan, Annual report, or management system.

Lastly, the Guide also offers practical examples on how the 17 stakeholders faced their own *SDG implementation experiences*.

### 2.3.2 A valid Forum for very dynamic civil society

In addition to gather industry and public sector organisations, Gunea 2030 integrated several representatives from the civil society. Basque NGOs have traditionally been very active, especially in social areas and development for cooperation.

The Agenda 2030 has opened up a number of possibilities for the civil society stakeholders, which have been very active both embracing the SDGs, communicating on them to grassroots society and using them as a tool for channelling their demands to public authorities. Special efforts have been deployed to underline that the development of the SDGs on the ground should not be left only in the hands of public administration – it is up to the citizens' responsibility to make the transformational Agenda become reality. The Gunea 2030 project was an opportunity to highlight some innovative projects in this respect.

For instance, one of the NGOs participating in Gunea 2030 –the UNICEF Basque Committee– created some years ago ALIA-ODS, a platform in which newspapers, TVs and radios committed to disseminate the 2030 Agenda. UNICEF also organised specialised training sessions for media representatives on the SDGs.

Another example of a very dynamic NGO is UNESCO Etxea, the Basque Association for UNESCO, which has been campaigning on the need to raise awareness about the 2030 Agenda at all levels. In the context of Gunea, they shared the 'People at the centre' initiative, consisting of a task force created with the support of the Basque Development Cooperation Agency around the concept of 'nobody left behind'. The reality of several vulnerable groups in the Region was assessed and reflected in a report and a communication campaign to highlight those situations to the general public and policy makers.

Thirdly, EDE Foundation, a network of social organisations, shared the experience of Olakoeta Etxea, a centre to provide temporary accommodation for refugees and migrants also serving as platform to promote their

<sup>27</sup> [https://www.swidn.org.uk/news/what-is-the-bristol-sdg-alliance?clid=CjwKCAjwr\\_uCBhAFeiwAX8YJgcSiUyCRtirzYeZRvFkbsENRoXkrkJMofXuhxjZbBEINLuW\\_RPHcRoCeloQAoVd\\_BwE](https://www.swidn.org.uk/news/what-is-the-bristol-sdg-alliance?clid=CjwKCAjwr_uCBhAFeiwAX8YJgcSiUyCRtirzYeZRvFkbsENRoXkrkJMofXuhxjZbBEINLuW_RPHcRoCeloQAoVd_BwE)

<sup>28</sup> Canterbury SDG Forum, "Canterbury Sustainable Development Goal Forum: Initial Reports on Local Implementation of the Goals" (Canterbury, 2019)

social integration and personal care, with a specific focus on migrant women, therefore addressing SDGs 1, 5, 8 and 10.

### **2.3.3 Appetite for more**

Guinea 2030 is a clear example of an SDG implementation activity where *the process is as valid as the outcome*. The main elements to be highlighted are the following:

- Trust-building and leadership were essential to involve the various stakeholders.
- Real cases that inspire: the fact that each member of the group –Institutions, private companies, NGOs– shared a real experience was also very well perceived, since it contributed to ‘bring SDGs to the ground’.
- Leadership matters: In addition to the fact that this group was convoked and coordinated from the Basque Government’s External action service, the fact that all partners involved in meeting represented managerial staff of the organisations contributed to increase trust.
- Depth, more than wideness: Other international examples of multi-stakeholder platforms provide good examples of wide-ranging stakeholder consultation projects. Nevertheless, despite being a small group, the depth of the conversations in Guinea 2030 was a very important element. Participants gathered and discussed their approaches to the SDGs for more than a year, and this was a foundation of the uniqueness of this exercise.
- For the future, this space needs to be designed, departing from a co-creation process but aiming for higher, wider results. This ‘design’ should involve mission, vision, and objectives, so that the very diverse organisations can be empowered during the process.

A possible *future Guinea* – without leaving behind its multistakeholder approach – should allow ‘sectorial working groups’. For instance, a company that is giving its first steps on adopting the SDGs will learn little from an NGO or a University. But on the contrary it will learn a lot from another company that has been in the same situation months or years before. All would benefit if some actors used their experience to ‘guide’ others along the way. The group would need to evolve into a sort of ‘lighthouse’ that guides the entry into the SDGs world for the different stakeholders.

The first Guinea experience served its first purpose very well, but its potential for reaching further objectives should definitely be explored more.

## 2.4 Completing the ‘Quadruple Helix’

### 2.4.1 University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU)



In 2019, the Basque Country University adopted its 2030 Agenda (University of the Basque Country 2019), where it takes a wide look at all its activities, not only educational, but also in the fields of research, culture, development cooperation, etc. The University uses the SDGs as a methodological tool to classify them in four *concentric circles*: Campus Planet, Campus Inclusion and Campus Equality, with a fourth, ‘central’ one called i3 (for the Basque words for ‘Studies, Research, Sustainability’).

For each of the areas or Campus several axes of action and numerous specific actions are foreseen, and a scoreboard of 58 indicators is proposed. Those range from ‘Percentage of women in charge of research groups’ to ‘Percentage of buildings with level A, B or C energy efficiency certificates’ or ‘rate of employment of former students at three years’. It is important to note that this Agenda was elaborated with the cooperation of various external stakeholders, and the University itself contributed to the consultation process for the overarching Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda. In addition, the University also participated in the above-mentioned Gunea 2030 pilot project.

One of the most interesting elements of this Agenda is the adoption of a *18<sup>th</sup> SDG on Cultural and linguistic diversity*. The reason behind this is that the development of the Basque language (Euskera), Basque culture and plurilingual capacitation is a critical aspect for the Basque University, and it was felt that “a cultural and linguistic parameter that was not specifically laid down in the SDGs” (Sáez de Cámara et al, 2021).

Under the assumption that “protection of cultural linguistic diversity and the use of and respect for local minority languages, just like biodiversity, constitute evident factors of sustainable development”, the Basque Country University resolved to adopt this extra Goal by suggestion of the UPV/EHU UNESCO Chair of World Linguistic Heritage (UNESCO 2018).

It is interesting to note the text proposed by the UNESCO Chair for this SDG18, the Goal is to “*Guarantee the presence and recognition of all languages and cultures for the development of people and societies*”, and the targets would be the following:

1. Empowerment of minority language communities
2. Promote effective language policies
3. Integrate local languages in educational systems (primary and secondary school)
4. Promote bilingual / multilingual educational models ensuring effective teaching of the minority language
5. Make new technologies available in all languages, especially minority ones
6. Ensure the presence of minority languages in media
7. Promote the use of the languages of the different communities in public services, especially in the field of health and justice, especially in the case of indigenous communities.



### 3 An adapted methodology for VLRs and SDG localisation: a proposal based on the Basque experience

In this section – and based on what was outlined in previous chapters – this report analyses the main elements that could be scaled up from the Basque Region to other European VLR models, including aspects of internal management, organisational coordination between different levels of administration, and engagement of stakeholders.

#### 3.1 Why producing a VLR? Reasons and benefits

The reasons for local or subnational entity to engage in the development of a VLR can be varied, but starting from the experience of the Basque Country, they can be summarized in seven elements:

1. **Responsibility:** In the case of the regional Government, the high levels of competence in many of the policies affecting the SDGs and their specific goals have made the development of SDG strategies an exercise of responsibility towards better policymaking.
2. **Comparability:** SDGs have also been perceived at all levels, from Regional Government, Municipalities, and other stakeholders as a ‘highway’ for positioning themselves in the international arena, making their actions on this field easily comparable through a “common communication code”.
3. **Transversality:** The SDGs are perceived as a management tool that contribute to break silos between various departments of a given administration, but also between different administrations and stakeholders. Various SDG implementation initiatives, such as the Multilevel 2030 Agenda and Gunea 2030, have proved to be very innovative and effective in fostering cooperation between local actors.
4. **Mainstreaming sustainability:** In the recent years, many efforts have been made to adopt strategic local agendas in environmental matters (such as Local 21 Agendas). The VLRs represent a good opportunity to enlarge the scope of local agendas and encompass other areas of sustainability – economic and social aspects – and establish consistent and long-lasting municipal and regional strategies.
5. **A trigger for ‘sustainability market-pull’:** Given the dynamism of the SDG ecosystem in the Region, institutions can use VLRs as tools to attract the private sector towards sustainability-friendly actions. Initiatives such as the Basque Sustainable Bonds – mentioned in section 2.1.3.1 – and the forthcoming Biscay provincial SDG-oriented tax Regulation will act as multipliers of this SDG domestic alignment from institutions and other stakeholders.
6. **Transparency and accountability:** SDGs can be very useful communication tools, not only between administrations, but also between those and other stakeholders and society. By establishing open data management systems and trustworthy indicators, VLRs can become a powerful tool for increased transparency and political legitimacy for all levels of Government.
7. **A way to learn to establish alliances:** A well-functioning SDG ecosystem can contribute to make as many stakeholders as possible ‘speaking the same language’ (targets, goals, indicators), therefore making it easier to create even unsuspected alliances.

#### *Challenges*

Being a multi-level Agenda, governance challenges risk being one of the most important stumbling blocks. The main challenges encountered were: a) the existence of diverse competences for policymaking in diverse institutional levels – which in the Basque case, as we have seen, have sound historical roots and b) the lack of a long-term view on the SDG implementation agenda.

The first mentioned challenge could be solved by the strong leadership of ‘Centre of Government’ (OECD and SDSN 2019) who ensured that the SDGs were integrated in the day-to-day business of various Institutions. In the Basque case, the initial leadership was taken by the Secretariat for External Action (belonging to the Presidency Department), which, rather than creating new structures, took a ‘whole of government’ approach and started a wide consultation process among all departments in order to develop the Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda. As we have seen above, this ‘whole of Government’ approach is maintained in the newly created 2030 Agenda Secretariat.

On the second challenge mentioned, one specificity of the Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda is that – as opposed to other regional or local strategies- it does not take a long-term view (2050 or even 2030), but a short-medium sight (just the four years of the Government’s legislative term).

If on the one hand, this short-term sight took off the needed strategic vision that could perhaps have contributed to the overall alignment of the actions from other levels of government, on the other hand it contributed to focus on specific actions, those identified in the Legislative Plan, encouraging other administrations to adopt the same pragmatic perspective. In the case of the coordinated efforts carried out with provinces, this ‘day to day’ focus was useful for finding common ground for the elaboration of the Multilevel Agenda. As highlighted in previous chapters, the specific actions from the three Provinces (budget alignment of SDGs, alliances with stakeholders, taxing policies) derive from this pragmatic approach. An extra reason for overcoming possible governance issues and foster coordination was the fact that the immediate application of suggested actions was ‘easy to be seen’, therefore providing an opportunity to claim transparency towards the citizenship by the establishment of tools and processes.

### **3.2 VLRs: How to build-up the process, who to involve and why**

When analysing who to involve in VLR strategies – or in the germination of an SDG ecosystem – a combination of top-down and bottom-up leadership is key.

**Top-down leadership** matters especially in a multi-level Agenda, as the impulse should be durable and multi-faceted. In the case of ‘high level’ strategies (the Euskadi Basque Country Strategy, the Multilevel Agenda, and the Euskadi Gunea 2030), the process was initiated and managed in the first years by the strong piloting from the Basque Government’s External Action Service. This is important not only for the multi-level perspective, but also from the multi-stakeholder one. When entities of diverse origins are involved in multi-stakeholder forums (Gunea 2030), great attention must be paid to establishing an environment of trust. From this perspective, the leadership of the governmental entity that coordinates these meetings is very important. It is essential that empathy can be generated and that an environment of humbleness is promoted, where both the ‘individual ego’ of the leaders and the ‘collective ego’ of the organizations take a back seat.

But other levels of **bottom-up leadership** are also needed. For instance, the potential contributions from governmental bodies or agencies should be taken into account. Those can provide the necessary input (as the Basque Environment Agency) or flexibility and connections / alliances (as the Basque Foundation for Food Safety) that government departments, often busy with the day-to-day policy making, can struggle to provide.

Another example is given by the role played by the Association of Municipalities for Sustainability in order to facilitate a collective vision of the contribution to SDGs. Udalsarea2030 elaborated its 2018 report (Udalsarea2030 2018) where aggregated information on existing plans and indicators was provided. The managing work from the Association and the leadership from the front-running municipalities was also essential. At this level, the influence can be fostered if they are led by ‘ambassadors’ of the 2030 Agenda, believing on the benefits that an SDG approach can bring, looking for transversal solutions and for pragmatic alliances. The experience of the Flanders Municipal Association, for instance, highlights the need for ambassadors or “people who know the 2030 Agenda, talk to colleagues and partners about it and take initiative” (Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities 2020).

Awareness-raising must be considered as an essential element for the development of VLRs, since the personnel of the administrations is fundamental to develop the SDGs and transformative policies. In those activities, not only the ‘big’ leadership of personnel with political responsibilities, but also the **leadership of administrative heads of departments**, is key.

Last but not least, the **quadruple-helix perspective** must also be integrated – the voice of civil society and universities should also be taken into account to ensure that VLRs comply with democratic and transparency principles.

## 4 Recommendations: A Decalogue for the next VLR generation

Departing from the Basque experience, the new Voluntary Local Reviews should:

1. **Be part of something else:** VLRs should develop into full-fledged ecosystems – it is not enough for a city to commit to the SDGs, it must look towards the territory, and multi-level governance must be part of the equation.
2. **Promote cooperation, no competition:** Different levels of government are developing their Voluntary Reviews (VLRs), but this should not lead to hierarchical models or to competition among Institutions. VRs should work towards mutual improvement. Especially in Europe, this must be understood (see recommendation n.10). It should not be forgotten that *VRs, Agendas, Strategies, or pilot projects are just tools for achieving the ultimate goal*, which is the achievement of the SDGs on the ground.
3. **Be based on sound training at all levels:** Training on SDGs should be promoted at all levels - especially among policymakers (i.e., politicians) and policy-implementers (i.e., civil servants), with the maximal flexibility possible.
4. **Include the multistakeholder perspective throughout the process**, not only at the beginning through consultations. The Gunea 2030 experience and its 18-month consultation process shows that multistakeholder involvement should not necessarily be ‘wide’, but ‘deep’. Co-creation dynamics should be promoted, since they allow a high degree of trust building and a profound common understanding.
5. **Provoke 4 questions:** Cities and regions should not just ‘acknowledge’ their contributions to SDGs, but also make real commitments so that the 2030 Agenda is truly transformative, based on its main principles (transforming our world, leave no one behind, transversality, search for alliances). The basic 4 questions any VLR implementer should ask him/herself should be: 1) Am I leaving anyone behind? 2) Am I thinking transversally, involving other departments? 3) Am I looking for (meaningful) alliances? 4) Am I transforming my reality or my Institution?
6. **Be pragmatic but based on solid assessments:** The ‘Decade for action’ is an open invitation for VLRs to move on from the ‘SDG-alignment’ (or ‘assessment’) phase into a more proactive one. This is a very positive move, but SDG alignment efforts – especially in multi-level VLRs – represent the basis for future work that must not be forgotten. Alignment without implementation is sterile, but implementation without prior alignment could be counterproductive.
7. **Grounded on policy coherence:** A solid system of ‘whole of government’ policy coherence is essential, including the following elements: A solid framework (both at horizontal and vertical levels), guided by leadership and compromise, being implemented through concrete instruments and procedures, ensuring transparency, and having a world-wide vision (Futuro en Comun 2020).
8. **Match top-down strategies with bottom-up actions:** The 2030 Agenda is a global strategy that will only become fully operational if implemented locally. The same thinking should apply to multi-level VLRs. As the case of the Basque Urban Agenda shows us, ‘umbrella’ strategies need to be coupled with grassroots actions on the ground, in a consistent, coherent, and mutually reinforcing framework of actions.
9. **Have a Territorial Ecosystem approach:** The next generation of VLRs should take a broader territorial vision, leaning towards VSRs (Voluntary Subnational Reviews) based on multi-level coordination, and multi-stakeholder involvement – a SDG Ecosystems. A Regional approach that respects the decision-making powers at all levels should be considered.
10. **Be facilitated by multi-level international fora:** The inter-territorial cooperation should be fostered by the creation of National and International Fora involving multilevel actors and promoting the exchange of views and experiences and better policymaking. A good reference in this respect would be the Partnerships established for the Urban Agenda for the EU where Member States, cities, regions, and other stakeholders worked together in specific areas<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>29</sup>

<https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/en/urban-agenda>

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## List of abbreviations and definitions

<b>CEMR-CCRE</b>	Council of European Municipalities and Regions - <i>Conseil des communes et régions d'Europe</i>
<b>EBC2030</b>	Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUH</b>	European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews
<b>Eurostat</b>	European Statistical Office
<b>Eustat</b>	<i>Euskal Estatistika Erakundea</i> - Instituto Vasco de Estadística
<b>FEMP</b>	<i>Federación Española de Municipalidades y Provincias</i> (Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces)
<b>HLPF</b>	United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
<b>IAEG-SDGs</b>	Inter-Agency Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goals
<b>INE</b>	<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadística</i> (National Statistics Institute)
<b>IVAP</b>	<i>Instituto Vasco de Administración Pública</i> (Basque Institute of Public Administration)
<b>JRC</b>	Joint Research Centre
<b>LGA</b>	Local government association
<b>NSO</b>	National Statistics Office
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>ONS</b>	United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics
<b>REDS</b>	<i>Red Española para el Desarrollo Sostenible</i> (Spanish Network for Sustainable Development)
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UCLG</b>	United Cities and Local Governments
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UN-SDSN</b>	United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network
<b>UNDESA</b>	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
<b>VLRs</b>	Voluntary Local Reviews
<b>VNRs</b>	Voluntary National Reviews

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