

FLANDERS, BELGIUM

A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals in Flanders, Belgium



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Preface

We, the OECD, the Region of Flanders in Belgium, and the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG), are delighted to introduce the results of the policy dialogue that we conducted over two years with more than 100 stakeholders to strengthen a territorial approach to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Flanders, Belgium.

In today's highly uncertain policy environment, the SDGs are more relevant than ever. In shaping long-term recovery measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SDGs offer a valuable framework to build a more sustainable and resilient society in a shared responsibility across levels of government. Climate change, demographic pressure, digitalisation and its impact on the future of work, and natural resources depletion are exacerbating regional and local development challenges in Flanders and require a holistic approach to policymaking.

Flanders shaped its Vision 2050 and Focus 2030 strategies through a SDGs lens. Vision 2050 is a forward-looking policy document aiming for an inclusive, open, resilient and internationally connected region that creates prosperity and well-being for its citizens in a smart, innovative and sustainable manner. Focus 2030 is specifically designed to adapt and implement the SDGs in Flanders and provides a holistic framework with more concrete mid-term objectives to be achieved by 2030. It considers the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda as an indivisible whole and a useful tool to identify priority actions, explore synergies and manage trade-offs.

The OECD report *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals in Flanders, Belgium* provides policy guidance to implement both Vision 2050 and Focus 2030 through a multi-stakeholder and multi-level governance approach. The SDGs can help achieve the seven transition priorities that Flanders identified in its Vision 2050, namely circular economy, smart living, industry, lifelong learning, caring and living together, transport and mobility, and energy. With the support of VVSG, municipalities are emerging as important engines for achieving the 2030 Agenda in Flanders while mainstreaming the SDGs in policy processes, raising awareness among citizens and engaging with civil society organisations and businesses.

Throughout the policy dialogue underlying this report, we shared our experience with a wide variety of stakeholders in Flanders and learned from peer policymakers in Bonn (Germany), Córdoba (Argentina) and Viken (Norway). We have worked with numerous municipalities and institutions from public, private and non-profit sectors to build consensus, discuss the policy recommendations and scale up success stories.

We are proud of this journey and the results that we achieved together, and we look forward to continued collaboration to support the implementation of the policy recommendations in the future.



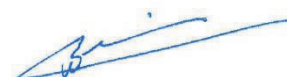
Lamia Kamal-Chaoui

Director, Centre for
Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions
and Cities, OECD



Julie Bynens

Secretary-General, Chancellery
and Foreign Affairs Department,
region of Flanders (Belgium)



Wim Dries

President of VVSG and Mayor of
the city of Genk (Belgium)

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The report was drafted by a core team of OECD policy analysts comprised of Stina Heikkilä, Antonio Canamas Catala and Lorenz Gross of the CFE, and co-ordinated by Stefano Marta, Coordinator of the OECD Programme on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs, under the supervision of Aziza Akhmouch, Head of the Cities, Urban Policies and Sustainable Development Division in the CFE. The report benefitted from the support of Marcos Díaz Ramírez, Statistician, who provided guidance in the analysis of the local SDGs data for the region of Flanders, Belgium.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

BREEAM	BRE Environmental Assessment Method
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CFE	OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities
CGSLB-ACLVB	General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (Dutch: <i>Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België</i> , French: <i>Centrale générale des syndicats libéraux de Belgique</i>)
CIFAL	International Training Centre for Authorities and Leaders (French: <i>Centre international de formation des autorités et leaders</i>)
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DBZ	Department of Foreign Affairs (Dutch: <i>Departement Buitenlandse Zaken</i>)
DDC	Decentralised development co-operation
DGE	Directorate-General for European Affairs
EC	European Commission
EU-LIFE	LIFE programme of the European Union
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
EWI	Flemish Department of Economy, Science and Innovation (Dutch: <i>Economie, Wetenschap & Innovatie</i>)
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FWO	Research Foundation Flanders (Dutch: <i>Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen</i>)
GDP	Gross domestic product
GNI	Gross national income
GVA	Gross value added
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HR	Human resources
IBR-IRE	Institute of Registered Auditors (Dutch: <i>Instituut van de bedrijfsrevisoren</i>)
ICT	Information and communication technology

IMCSD	Inter-Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Development
IMEC	Interuniversity Microelectronics Centre
IT	Information technology
ITF	International Transport Forum
LRG	Local and regional governments
LRM	Limburg Reconversion Society (Dutch: <i>Limburgse Reconversie maatschappij</i>)
Minaraad	Environmental and Nature Council (Dutch: <i>Milieu- en Natuurraad van Vlaanderen</i>)
MORA	Mobility Council (Dutch: <i>Mobiliteitsraad van Vlaanderen</i>)
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCT	Patent Cooperation Treaty
PM	Particulate matter
PMV	Participation Company Flanders (Dutch: <i>Participatiemaatschappij Vlaanderen</i>)
PPP	Purchasing power parity
R&D	Research and development
RDPC	Regional Development Policy Committee
SALV	Strategic Advisory Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (Dutch: <i>Strategische Adviesraad voor Landbouw en Visserij</i>)
SAR WGG	Strategic Advisory Council on Welfare, Health and Family (Dutch: <i>Strategische Adviesraad voor het Vlaamse Welzijns-, Gezondheids- en Gezinsbeleid</i>)
SARC	Strategic Advisory Council for Culture, Youth, Sport and Media (Dutch: <i>Strategische AdviesRaad voor Cultuur, Jeugd, Sport en Media</i>)
SARO	Strategic Advisory Board for Spatial Planning (Dutch: <i>Strategische Adviesraad Ruimtelijke Ordening</i>)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SERV	Social-Economic Council of Flanders (Dutch: <i>Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen</i>)
SMEs	Small- and medium-sized enterprises
UN	United Nations
USD	United States dollar
VCDO	VOKA Charter for Sustainable Entrepreneurship (Dutch: <i>Voka Charter Duurzaam Ondernemen</i>)

VIB	Flemish Institute for biotechnology (Dutch: <i>Vlaams Instituut voor Biotechnologie</i>)
VITO	Flemish Institute for technological research (Dutch: <i>Vlaamse Instelling voor Technologisch Onderzoek</i>)
VLAIO	Flanders Innovation and Entrepreneurship Agency (Dutch: <i>Vlaanderen Agentschap Innoveren & Ondernemen</i>)
Vlor	Flemish Education Council (Dutch: <i>Vlaamse Onderwijsraad</i>)
VNR	Voluntary national review
VOKA	Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Dutch: <i>Vlaams netwerk van ondernemingen</i>)
VVP	Association of Flemish Provinces (Dutch: <i>Vereniging Vlaamse Provincies</i>)
VVSG	Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (Dutch: <i>Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten</i>)
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

Global demographic, climate and digitalisation megatrends are changing the policy environment in Flanders, Belgium. With strong economic performance, low unemployment and a well-educated labour force, Flanders is using the SDGs to respond to these megatrends in pursuit of the seven transition priorities outlined in its Vision 2050 policy framework, namely circular economy, smart living, industry, lifelong learning, caring and living together, transport and mobility, and energy. The SDGs provide a common language and framework to mobilise Flemish cities and municipalities, private sector, civil society and youth in such a transition process. A territorial approach to the SDGs can accelerate the transition to more sustainable pathways in Flanders if federal, regional, provincial and local sustainable development strategies are strategically aligned, and sufficient funding from both public and private sectors is ensured for innovative sustainability solutions.

Key findings

Flanders performs strongly on SDGs overall, although megatrends are challenging the future of its sustainable development

- **Flanders performs above the average of OECD regions in the majority of the SDGs.** The region is particularly strong in poverty and inequality reduction, health, research and development (R&D) and productivity:
 - 13% of the population in Flanders is below the 60% of national median disposable income threshold (getting close to the 12.3% end value for this indicator of SDG 1).
 - The region exhibits a satisfaction rate of 90% with its healthcare system, well above the end value of 77% for this SDG 3 indicator.
 - The number of patent applications per capita in Flanders is 60% higher than the average of OECD regions.
- **Energy, environmental protection and sustainable cities and communities remain key challenges for the region:**
 - In 2017, only 13% of Flanders's electricity production stemmed from renewable sources compared to an average of 40% for OECD regions.
 - High car dependency (52 motor vehicles per 100 people, above OECD average) contributes to air pollution (PM 2.5 levels above the World Health Organization's (WHO) 10 micrograms threshold).
 - Emissions related to electricity production exceed 280 tons of CO₂ equivalent per gigawatt-hour, compared to a suggested end value of fewer than 90 tons, which leaves significant potential to improve energy production efficiency.
- **Megatrends are poised to challenge sustainable development outcomes for the years to come.** The population has grown by 6.5% in the last 10 years, mostly in the periphery of urban

areas, and this urban sprawl has led to an increase of transport flows and air pollution in Flanders. The population is projected to continue to grow in the next decades. An ageing population is expected to raise the demand for health services and put pressure on public finances. Lastly, climate change will lead to a rise in temperatures, shift energy demands and might cause economic disruptions through heat island effects, summer storms, whirlwinds and serious water shortages.

A mature sustainable development policy framework

- **Flanders has a solid policy framework based on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs to respond to and leverage megatrends.** Flanders' Vision 2050 contributes to the 2030 Agenda by setting an aspiration for a sustainable region and 7 transition domains to achieve it, while Focus 2030 guides the implementation of the SDGs, identifies 48 context-relevant goals and sets mid-term objectives towards 2030. From these two overarching strategies, public agencies have derived a number of policy plans (e.g. the Energy and Climate Plan 2021-30).
- **Strong R&D and a dynamic business climate are providing Flanders with key assets to achieve the SDGs.** With 2.7% of its gross domestic product (GDP) spent on R&D, the region belongs to the 20% of OECD regions that have the highest share of R&D expenditure. It also pursues an active cluster policy that facilitates co-operation between companies, knowledge institutions and the government with a view to increasing competitiveness in transition areas such as sustainable chemistry or energy.
- **Many municipalities started integrating the SDGs in their policy planning processes and multi-year strategic plans.** Supported by VVSG, 180 of the 300 Flemish municipalities incorporated the SDGs in their new multi-annual policy plans. For example, Ghent used the SDGs to conduct its socio-economic and environmental context analysis to feed its next multi-year strategic policy plan.

Multi-level governance challenges and opportunities

- **Co-ordination across levels of government, including on indicators, is challenging.** In Belgium, each level of government has its own strategy and set of goals related to its core responsibilities. When these are not aligned, opportunities for leveraging action at all levels are missed. The first Belgian Voluntary National Review (VNR) preparation, co-ordinated through the Inter-ministerial Conference for Sustainable Development, did involve federal and regional governments but municipalities only to a lesser extent.
- **To embrace the transformative element of the 2030 Agenda 2030, Flanders – through Vision 2050 – put in place a new governance model inspired by transition management principles.** Such a model builds upon system innovation, long-term goals, stakeholder engagement and lessons from experimentation. It is organised around “transition spaces” encompassing partnerships, platforms (online and offline) and learning communities. Contrary to previous long-term strategies, Vision 2050 is the guiding policy for all sectoral policies implemented through seven concrete transition processes. The new model thus seeks to enhance horizontal co-operation between policy domains based on the engagement of all relevant stakeholders.

A multi-stakeholder commitment to the SDGs across public and private sectors

- **Civil society is a key partner of the federal, regional and municipal governments on the 2030 Agenda in Belgium.** In particular, many Flemish municipalities are using the SDGs to engage civil society, including youth, in the policymaking process in innovative ways, for example through the sustainable municipality week organised by VVSG. In addition, the SDG Voices campaign, an initiative organised by the Federal Institute of Sustainable Development (FIDO) and

The Shift (a network of companies, non-governmental organisations [NGOs] and other organisations), nominates six organisations every year – private, public and non-governmental – to raise awareness about the SDGs among Belgian citizens.

- **Private sector actors in Flanders are mainstreaming the SDGs into their core business.** For instance, the Flemish Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VOKA) supports more than 150 businesses that adhered to the VOKA Charter. These businesses therein commit to being evaluated by an expert committee that will review whether at least ten actions defined in their SDG action plan have been implemented.

Policy recommendations

To fully leverage a territorial approach to the SDGs in Flanders, the region should:

- **Strengthen synergies across the seven transition priorities of Vision 2050 through the SDGs.** The SDGs' holistic framework helps go beyond a silo-approach and explore policy complementarities and synergies such as between the Circular Economy, Industry 4.0, Transport and mobility and Energy.
- **Use the SDGs as a framework to enhance strategic alignment between federal, regional, provincial and municipal sustainable development strategies.** The 2030 Agenda should also be used to strengthen interaction with stakeholders and coherence between internal and external actions, in particular between territorial development policy in Flanders and decentralised development co-operation activities.
- **Ensure the development of coherent SDG reporting tools across levels of government,** including by directly involving the region and the municipalities in the VNR process and in defining indicators that can be of common use, interest and relevance.
- **Use the SDGs as a budgeting tool to ensure the necessary resources are allocated to achieve the Vision 2050 and Focus 2030 strategies.** The SDGs could help convene policymakers from different areas and manage trade-offs in budget allocation discussions. The latter would require adopting budgetary reporting mechanisms to communicate to stakeholders how financial decisions are taken and how they translate into specific actions towards achieving the SDGs.
- **Create an open data platform where civil society can be involved in monitoring progress towards the SDGs** and hold governments accountable for their 2030 Agenda commitment. Furthermore, transparent reporting on the progress made by all levels of governments will allow citizens to provide their input and feedback.
- **Strengthen private sector involvement into initiatives related to the SDGs.** Key measures could strive to ensure widespread dissemination and uptake of good practices related to sustainable public procurement, and scale up de-risking initiatives to enhance private sector investments in sustainability, for example through incentives and insurance schemes to encourage public-private research institutes to invest in innovative sustainability solutions.
- **Continue to support existing efforts of cities and municipalities to implement the 2030 Agenda holistically.** This includes extending direct support on the SDGs to all 300 municipalities in Flanders, building on VVSG's SDG pilot project, requiring the alignment of local policies and plans to the SDGs through the policy cycle, increasing awareness-raising actions to involve all local services and policy domains in local governments, and reinforcing international development co-operation (Local Global Policy).

1 Vision 2050 and Focus 2030: A policy framework conducive to sustainability in Flanders, Belgium

The region of Flanders, Belgium, a key engine of the national economy with a strong focus on the service sector, has developed a conducive policy framework for sustainability in recent years. Flanders has developed two overarching strategies, Vision 2050, focusing on seven transition priorities, and Focus 2030, guiding the adaptation and implementation of the SDGs. Flemish cities and municipalities take a key role in mainstreaming the SDGs in local policies through their local development plans, while decentralised development co-operation, namely co-operation between Flemish local and regional authorities and peers in developing countries, is another important facet of the 2030 Agenda implementation in Flanders.

Key facts about the region of Flanders, Belgium

Flanders is one of the three regions of Belgium and a key economic engine of the country. The Dutch-speaking region is located in the northern part of the country and shares borders with France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Flanders extends over an area of 13 522 km² (44% of the Belgian territory) and was home to a population of 6.58 million Flemings in 2019, which corresponds to 57% of the population of Belgium. Flanders is a highly urbanised region with an average population density of 484 inhabitants per km² in 2019, up from 436 inhabitants per km² in 2000, notably high in the “Flemish Diamond”, which is the central area between Antwerp – Flanders’ largest city and metropolitan area –, Brussels, Ghent and Leuven (Statistics Flanders, 2019^[1]). In 2019, Flanders accounted for 58.8% of the national gross domestic product (GDP) of USD 547 144 million (constant prices, constant purchasing power parity [PPP], base year 2015), while the Brussels-Capital Region and Wallonia, the two other regions of the country, contributed 18.2% and 23.0% respectively (OECD, 2020^[2]).

Belgium displays intra-regional differences in economic and social performance. With a regional GDP per capita of USD 48 822 in 2018 (constant prices, constant PPP, base year 2015), Flanders lied between the Brussels-Capital Region (USD 82 565) and Wallonia (USD 34 562), slightly above the country average of USD 47 881. In the OECD well-being framework, Flanders exhibits the best results among Belgian regions in 10 out of 11 dimensions, notably in the areas of health, community and civic engagement (OECD, 2018^[3]). Differences in economic output make Belgium the country with the 10th-highest regional disparities in GDP per capita among OECD countries (OECD, 2018^[4]) but such disparities also exist within Belgian regions. The five Flemish provinces (Antwerp, East Flanders, Flemish Brabant, Limburg and West Flanders) for instance exhibit intra-regional differences in a number of economic indicators, including unemployment, education and GDP per capita. Unemployment rates range from 2.5% in West Flanders to 4.1% in Antwerp (2018 value), but remain below the country average of 5.8% in all provinces (Statistics Belgium, 2020^[5]). In terms of educational attainment, Limburg had the lowest rate of people with tertiary education at 28.7% compared to 44.3% in Flemish Brabant in 2013 (OECD, 2017^[6]). This divergence has intensified over the past years. Between 2004 and 2013, the share of people with tertiary education increased by 1.3 percentage points in Limburg, while it grew by 8 percentage points in West Flanders (OECD, 2017^[6]). Both metropolitan areas in Flanders, Antwerp and Ghent, have a GDP per capita which is significantly higher than the regional average of Flanders (USD 59 083 and USD 58 366 respectively in 2018) (OECD, 2020^[2]).

In the last two decades, employment has overall been rising in Flanders, notably in the service sector. In 2017, the employment rate among the working-age population in Flanders reached 67.5%, more than 4 percentage points above the country average following an upward trend. Between 2003 and 2018, the number of people employed in the region went up by 18% percentage points. The backbone of the Flemish economy is the service sector, whose importance has steadily been increasing. Between 2003 and 2018, employment has notably grown in information and information technology (IT) services (+106%), administrative and support services (+93%) and social services (+69%), while employment declines were registered in the manufacturing sector, in particular in the textile and clothing sector (-55%), in IT, electronic and optical products manufacturing (-43%) and in the transport sector (-44%) (Statistics Flanders, 2020^[7]).

The tertiary sector is the backbone of the Flemish economy and trade. In terms of economic output, services accounted for 73.3% of regional GDP in 2016, mainly through real estate and business services (23.8%) and wholesale and retail (13.6%). The secondary sector contributed another 25.8% to Flanders’ GDP, which was complemented by a 0.9% distribution of the primary sector (Flemish Department of Finance and Budget, 2018^[8]). Flanders is home to Europe’s largest petrochemical cluster, which accounts for 10% of all employment and 30% of all industrial investments as well as half of the region’s research and development (R&D) expenditure. Further important economic sectors are the automotive industry, healthcare and technology. The Flemish economy is characterised by a strong export-orientation benefitting from its central location in Europe, four international seaports, three international airports, the

world's densest road network as well as its river and canal network. Flemish exports of goods amounted to EUR 328 billion in 2018 and have increased steadily year on year since 2003 with only 1 contraction during the recession year of 2009. In 2018, Flanders accounted for 83% of overall Belgian exports in 2017 and a market share in world trade standing at 2%. The 5 most important export products in 2018 were vehicles, petroleum products, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and plastic products together accounting for 46% of Flemish exports (Statistics Flanders, 2019^[9]). Major export markets for Flemish goods and services are France, Germany and the Netherlands that together accounted for around 42% of overall Flemish exports in 2017 (Flemish Department of Finance and Budget, n.d.^[10]).

Flanders is home to 5 universities and several strategic research centres in the technology sector. Flanders' higher education system includes 5 universities, including 1 Dutch-language university in Brussels and 13 University colleges (EC, 2020^[11]). Four of these universities (University of Leuven, Ghent University, Free University of Brussels and Antwerp University) were among the top 250 universities in the QS World University rankings in 2020. Flanders further hosts 4 large strategic research centres (Flanders Make, Imec, VIB and VITO) that are active in the areas of nanoelectronics, digital technology, life science and manufacturing and employ more than 7 000 scientists and researchers (Flanders Investment and Trade, n.d.^[12]). In addition, 6 in 10 R&D employees work in the private sector, contributing significantly to the nearly 51 000 full-time equivalents employed in research in development in Flanders (Statistics Flanders, 2019^[13]).

Box 1.1. Key features of Belgium's multi-level governance framework

The country's federal structure of government has gradually but significantly evolved over the past decades towards greater devolution of decision-making power to the six federated entities, made up three regions (Brussels-Capital Region, Flemish Region and Walloon Region) and three communities (Flemish Community, French Community and German-speaking Community). The process of federalisation started in the 1970s to better take into consideration linguistic, cultural and socio-economic differences, in particular between the regions of Flanders and Wallonia. Six constitutional reforms took place in 1970, 1980, 1988-89, 1993, 2001 (Revision of the Constitution Special Act and Lambermont Agreement) and the last one in 2011, which has been in effect since its implementation from 2012 to 2014.

At the federal level, the legislative power is exercised by the Federal Parliament, composed of two assemblies: the Chamber of the Representatives and the Senate. Following the 6th Belgian state reform, members of the Senate, the upper house which serves as a chamber of the communities and regions, are designated by the federated entities (50/60) or co-opted (10/60), and no longer elected (Art. 67 of the Constitution). Senators have no veto powers over federal legislation. At the state level, there are five legislatures, all elected for a five-year term and five governments, elected by the Parliament, which in turn elects a president: the Flemish Parliament and Government (representing both the region of Flanders and the Flemish community, which were immediately combined into one Flemish federated entity since its creation), the Walloon Parliament and Government, the French Community Parliament and Government, the Brussels Region Parliament and Government, and the German-speaking Community Parliament and Government. At the local level, provinces and municipalities are governed by regional legislation since the federalisation of the country.

The organisation, responsibilities and financing differ from one region to another, according to regional decrees (Flemish and Walloon regions) and *ordonnances* in the Brussels-Capital Region (for municipalities). Belgian federalism severely limits the scope for governments to interfere in each other's areas of competency. However, there are inter-governmental co-ordination mechanisms. A Concertation Committee, which includes the prime minister, minister presidents of federated entities,

and ministers of finance of federal and federated entities, plays a decision-making role. It also formalises the distribution of budgetary efforts across the different levels of government. Moreover, the local governments (municipalities, provinces) are represented by their associations in their respective region (a "united" national association also exists) and participate in committees at the federal level, although no formal consultation mechanism is in place.

Subnational governments in Belgium also have a high degree of fiscal autonomy. Subnational government expenditure amounts to USD 12 300 per capita in Belgium compared to an OECD average of USD 6 800 (2016 values). In Belgium, this is equivalent to 49.8% of total public expenditure and 26.5% of GDP. This marks a significant increase of 7 percentage points since 2013, partly due to the implementation of the 6th federalisation reform in 2014. In comparison, across the OECD, subnational government expenditure accounts for 40.4% of total public expenditure and 16.2% of GDP. In addition, 88.7% of total public investment was carried out by subnational governments, compared to an OECD average of 56.9%. The proportion of public investment carried out by subnational governments in Belgium is thus the highest among OECD countries.

Sources: OECD/UCLG (2019^[14]), *2019 Report of the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment - Country Profiles*, http://www.sng-wofi.org/publications/SNGWOFI_2019_report_country_profiles.pdf; OECD (2018^[4]), *Regions and Cities at a Glance 2018 – Belgium*, OECD, Paris, <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/BELGIUM-Regions-and-Cities-2018.pdf>.

Flemish policies and strategies for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

Vision 2050: Seven transition priorities to respond to megatrends

Vision 2050 is the latest update to the Flemish government's sustainable development strategy and covers the 2014-19 legislative period. Adopted in 2016, it constitutes a forward-looking policy document outlining a vision for Flanders as "an inclusive, open, resilient and internationally connected region that creates prosperity and well-being for its citizens in a smart, innovative and sustainable manner" (Government of Flanders, 2019, p. 12^[15]). The government also decided to incorporate sustainability as a strategic change principle in its Vision 2050, which should guide future projects and actions in the region.

The Department of Public Governance and the Chancellery led the development of Vision 2050, with preparations having started in 2015 through an analysis of megatrends. The aim was to identify the most relevant megatrends for the region and to which the Flemish government needs to respond. Megatrends brought forward for stakeholder consultations to inform the development of the vision were:

- Demographic trends (e.g. ageing and youth population, migration).
- Scientific and technological trends (e.g. disruptive technologies).
- Ecological trends (e.g. climate change and natural resources).
- Economic trends (e.g. shift of the world's economic centre to the east, technological disruption, changing consumer-producer relationships).
- Political and administrative trends (e.g. changing geopolitics, the transformation of governments and institutions).
- Social trends (e.g. individualisation and diversity).

The stakeholder consultations led to the identification of seven key action areas, called "transition priorities" in Vision 2050 (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1. Transition priorities for the Government of Flanders outlined in Vision 2050

Transition priority	Description
Circular economy	In a circular economy, we are more efficient with raw materials, energy, water, space and food by closing cycles in a smart manner. Natural resources are reused wherever possible. Smartly designed products based on biodegradable and recyclable materials will form the basis of smart material cycles in order to create less waste and reduce resource consumption.
Smart living	It is more comfortable to live where 80% of people's daily needs are within walking or cycling distance. The proximity and inter-weaving of functions of smart living maximise comfort and convenience. New housing and infrastructure must respond to such needs; optimal use of information and communication technology (ICT) ensures smart and sustainable buildings, neighbourhoods and cities.
Industry 4.0	Flanders strives to become a leader in new technologies and concepts in industry 4.0, such as 3D printing, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, robotics and other innovations. In so doing, it can strengthen its competitiveness and maintain prosperity in a rapidly changing world.
Lifelong learning	Talent and knowledge are the key driving forces behind progress and innovation. For this reason, Flanders will stimulate the development of competencies and talent by responding to the demand for skills in a changing economy and society, and provide everyone with the opportunity to fully develop their potential.
Caring and living together in 2050	Flanders must give young people every opportunity, with the best possible start and support in life, but it also needs to provide its ageing population with an adequate quality of life through the use of innovation. Flanders aims to invest in a new model of care which is patient/client-centred and tailored to the needs of society.
Transport and mobility	Flanders is working on a smoother, safer and more environmentally friendly transport system, which is why technological innovations in transportation and logistics must be embedded quickly to increase flexibility within Flanders and thus reduce their environmental impact.
Energy	Flanders focuses on the transition to a low-carbon, sustainable, reliable and affordable energy system. That system maximises the use of renewables and provides a realistic energy mix.

Source: Department for Public Governance and the Chancellery (2018^[16]), "Vision 2050: A long-term strategy for Flanders", https://do.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20181127_Vision2050.pptx.

Vision 2050 is one part of the Flemish government's broader plan to implement its commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Other measures include: the translation of the SDGs into Flemish goals for 2030 through Focus 2030; implementation through a new governance model; development of an adapted monitoring and reporting system; integration of the SDGs in internal operations and management of public institutions; enhanced stakeholder involvement and partnerships and co-operation with cities, municipalities and provinces (see following sections).

Focus 2030: Transposing the SDGs to the Flemish context

Focus 2030 is a key strategy guiding the adaptation and implementation of the SDGs in the context of Flanders. It identifies 48 goals relevant to Flanders to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The 48 goals are not a one-to-one fit with the SDGs but they are mapped to the SDG framework. Some existing objectives related to sustainable development have also been updated and new goals have been defined to better match the SDGs, which are seen as an indivisible whole with equal importance, as prescribed by the 2030 Agenda.

The Department for Public Governance and the Chancellery developed Focus 2030 in collaboration with government representatives and all administrative levels and policy domains in Flanders. As such, it is based on a screening of relevant policies, plans, strategies, documents and previous studies. The 48 goals are clustered among 4 themes providing an appropriate long-term focus for Flanders and hereby making the connection with Vision 2050, namely: i) a new economy; ii) for an inclusive society; iii) within the environmental boundaries of the planet, and; iv) with an open and flexible government working in partnerships. This clustering is also in line with the "5 Ps" of the Agenda 2030: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. Focus 2030 is intrinsically linked to Vision 2050 as the 2030 goals are essential to achieving the goals outlined in Vision 2050. The first political approval of Focus 2030 was obtained in

March 2018, upon which an official request was made for advice from Flanders' Strategic Advisory Councils.¹

The main regional policies contributing to the 2030 Agenda in Flanders

Both Vision 2050 and Focus 2030 are overarching strategies that encompass all policy domains. While Vision 2050 is a long-term strategy that guides all Flemish policies to incorporate sustainable development, Focus 2030 specifically addresses the SDGs and provides a holistic framework with more concrete mid-term objectives to be achieved until 2030 that fall within the competencies of the Flemish government. These mid-term objectives still need to be aligned with sectoral policy plans that are currently under preparation by the Flemish government.

Two important policy domains contributing to the 2030 Agenda in Flanders are environment and spatial development, and science and innovation. The policy area on Environment and Spatial Development (*Omgeving*) covers a range of policy areas and work by government agencies relevant to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda (Table 1.2). Two of the department's agencies, namely those of waste management and housing, have already started to develop policies explicitly addressing the transition priorities included in Vision 2050 (Circular economy and Smart living). Another important policy domain contributing to the 2030 Agenda and Vision 2050 in Flanders is Science and Innovation. The region of Flanders strongly promotes scientific research and stimulate an attractive business climate and innovative, entrepreneurial society in Flanders.

Table 1.2. Selected regional policies contributing to the implementation of the SDGs in Flanders

Examples of existing policy areas	Examples of policies in action		Policy topics in draft stage	Corresponding SDGs
 DEPARTEMENT OMGEVING "Omgeving" Department: spatial development, environment, energy, climate, green economy, animal welfare	Air quality policy plans; Integrated local spatial mobility; Clean Power for Transport; Energy and Climate Plan; Education for Sustainable Development	Green Deals for a green economy (e.g. shared mobility, procurement); Labo Ruimte laboratory for complex spatial issues; Flemish partnership 'Water for Development'; Pro water cross-border collaboration	Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030; Air Quality Policy Plan 2020-2030; Policy Plan Space Flanders	
 VLAAMS ENERGIEAGENTSCHAP Flemish Energy Agency	Energy poverty action programme; Renovation Pact	BE-REEL! (EU-LIFE funded multi-stakeholder project to help implement climate and environment legislation on energy-efficient building renovations)	Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030	
 Flanders ENVIRONMENT AGENCY Flemish Environment Agency	Integrated Water Policy Management; Water and air monitoring and reporting; Supervision of sewage infrastructure; Drinking and greywater management; Advice on environmental permit applications	Klimaatportal Vlaanderen – climate change information; Waterinfo.be – flooding information; Curieuzeneuzen.be – citizen science project to measure air quality	River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027	
 WE MAKE TOMORROW BEAUTIFUL OVAM Flemish waste management agency (OVAM)	Waste regulation, product policy, soil remediation and asbestos removal; Waste management; Integrated policy to waste, materials and circular economy; Marine litter; Soil remediation	Mooimakers.be – Flemish initiative against litter and illegal dumping (in partnership with Fost Plus and VVSG); Green deal circular procurement	Asbestos removal plan (by 2040); Strategic transition priority towards a circular economy; Soil remediation	

Examples of existing policy areas	Examples of policies in action		Policy topics in draft stage	Corresponding SDGs
 Vlaanderen is wonen Flemish Housing Agency	Rent subsidies and premiums; Social housing; Housing quality; Renovation and home adaptation grants; Guaranteed housing insurance; Guidance support local housing policy	Three projects for the priority transition “Smart housing and living”; Huurschatter.be – rent simulations	New framework for social home purchasing; Framework for modest housing; Expansion of social letting agencies; Adjustment of social housing rent calculations; Antidiscrimination in the private rental market; Optimisation of the housing quality policy	
 FLEMISH LAND AGENCY Flemish Land Agency	Flanders Action Programme for the Nitrates Directive 2015-2018; European Rural Development Policy (CAP) 2014-2020; Area-based and integrated land development	Water-Land-Schap – multi-stakeholder programme to solve problems with water in rural areas together with end-users (e.g. residents, farmers)	Flanders Action Programme for the Nitrates directive 2019-2022; European Rural Development Policy (CAP) 2021-2027; Open space programmes for food, climate adaptation, access to land, etc.	
 RESEARCH INSTITUTE NATURE AND FOREST Research institute for Nature and Forest	Mapping ecosystem services; Monitoring biodiversity changes; Action plan for quick response to invasive species; Exploring green-blue networks	ALTER-net ecosystem research; eLTER forest and nature research; IPBES ecosystem assessment Flanders	Strategy development for ecosystem services; Research on climate change and biodiversity; Design of monitoring network for soil carbon stock; Quicker detection of invasive species	

Source: Government of Flanders (2018^[17]), “Policy domain ‘Omgeving’ and the SDGs”, [https://do.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Departement Environment-SpatialDevelopment-.pdf](https://do.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Departement%20Environment-SpatialDevelopment-.pdf).

To operationalise the work on science and innovation as a driver of sustainability in Flanders, five agencies deal with different types of support. The Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), a public research council, acts as a one-stop-shop for research institutes and universities, while the Flanders Innovation and Entrepreneurship Agency (VLAIO) provides business development support. In addition, the Participation Company Flanders (PMV) is responsible for investment, loans and guarantees. There is also one agency specifically focusing on access to finance in Limburg (LRM) due to its historic position as an economically lagging province, while the agency Botanic Garden Meise acts as a centre of excellence for science and horticulture. The Flemish Department of Economy, Science and Innovation (EWI) also collaborates with and provides financial support to four strategic technological research institutes. These include: VITO (for materials, clean-tech and sustainable development); IMEC (for digital technologies, and nanoelectronics); Flanders’ Make (for technological development in manufacturing); and VIB (for biotechnology). In 2017, EWI carried out a “bottom-up” analysis of the most popular R&D themes funded to help tackle SDG-related challenges (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3. Estimated public expenditure on R&D for the top five “bottom-up” themes in Flanders (2017)

Top five “bottom-up” theme	Public research institutes (through FWO) (EUR, millions)	Private actors (through VLAIO) (EUR, millions)
Health	144.3	64.1
Inclusive and secure society	106.8	4.5
Digital and industry	97.6	118.4
Climate, energy and mobility	70.9	70.0
Food and natural resources	353.6	68.5

Source: Department of Science, Economy and Innovation (2018^[18]), “Sustainable Development Goals in R&D policy”, https://do.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20181127_BestPracticeEWI.pdf.

The Flemish region pursues an active cluster policy. For example, the so-called spearhead clusters are large-scale and ambitious initiatives that facilitate mutual co-operation between companies, knowledge institutions and the government with the goal to increase companies’ competitiveness in strategic areas for Flanders. The spearhead clusters are supported with a maximum of EUR 500 000 funding support available per year for up to 10 years. Fifty percent of the matched funding must, however, be provided by the private actors. In addition to the spearhead clusters, Flanders also supports the project Innovative Business Networks, which are smaller initiatives that often arise bottom-up from companies that want to focus on specific innovative emerging products and sectors. Innovative Business Networks are funded for a maximum of 3 years with up to EUR 150 000 per year (50% matched private funding). Both structures, the spearhead clusters and the Innovative Business Networks common research agendas for industry, build collaborative innovation projects. The spearhead clusters have evolved into large cross-sectoral network organisations. Some of them address the SDGs in their planning, such as CATALISTI (for sustainable chemistry), Flux50 (on the energy transition), Flanders’ Food (for the agro-industrial sector), or the Blue Cluster for Maritime Economy. Some smaller business networks contribute to the Flemish cluster policy as well, such as Flanders Bike Valley, Air Cargo Belgium, Smart Digital Farming, Power to X (for hydrogen applications), Groen Licht Vlaanderen (lighting technologies) and offshore energy.

Mainstreaming the SDGs in the policy processes of Flemish municipalities and provinces

Flemish municipalities are using the SDGs framework to strengthen the implementation of their policies, promote cross-departmental collaborations and engage new actors. While Flemish municipalities have a long tradition of engaging in so-called “Local Global Policy”, the 2030 Agenda represents a shift towards a more holistic development agenda, taking sustainable development and the SDGs to the core of local development strategies and going beyond North-South co-operation. To co-ordinate their work around the SDGs, municipalities set up working groups with members from different services and involve representatives from offices dealing with sustainability, Local Global Policy, communication, environment and policy co-ordination. Sometimes locally elected councillors are also part of the working groups.

Several Flemish municipalities started to mainstream the SDGs in local policy development processes. In light of the last local elections in October 2018, many local administrations have seized the opportunity to integrate the SDGs in the new six-year policy plans that the newly elected municipal councils adopted in 2019 (covering 2020-25) as part of the Flemish policy and management cycle for municipalities.² Municipalities have also been supported by the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) in this endeavour, including 20 municipalities participating in VVSG’s SDGs pilot project (see Chapter 3 for more details).

In Ghent, the local administration used the SDGs as an analytical framework for the 2018 context analysis that feeds into the preparation of the multi-year policy plan. The context analysis, which gives an overview of the current state of affairs in the municipality with regard to, amongst others, demography, economy, social and technological features, looks at key indicators in all policy domains over the 2013-18 period. To match the context analysis with the 2030 Agenda, the city mapped the SDGs to the different sections of the context analysis to get an understanding of their baseline situation. In the annex to the context analysis, an SDG register was added where themes and words used in the context analysis were linked to the relevant SDGs. The main findings were published in a booklet disseminated to all the local parties before the elections. The city administration is further analysing current urban development projects through an SDGs lens. One example is the redevelopment of the old city docks, where a strong focus is put on sustainable building standards (BREEAM), energy efficiency and sustainable mobility. Another example is the Gantoise eco-neighbourhood, which, together with its residents, aims to become CO₂ neutral.

In Harelbeke, the SDGs were used to develop a joint Memorandum between the city's advisory councils. This joint Memorandum put forward before the local elections outlines recommendations reached through a consensus among all the advisory councils. To launch its work on the 2030 Agenda, the city administration also organised a kick-off meeting and a workshop around the five pillars of the 2030 Agenda (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership). In addition, thematic walks to different places in the city representing People, Planet and Prosperity were organised, bringing together representatives from different municipal services and the local police force to brainstorm on possible actions to promote these three dimensions. Through this form of citizen engagement, those representatives were able to contribute their own ideas and suggestions and provide new inputs for the work of the city administration on the 2030 Agenda. The city further launched an online platform to crowdsource ideas from citizens to promote the SDGs. The ideas were included in an inspirational report on local actions for the SDGs presented to policymakers. The city also linked its strategic planning to the SDGs based on an "impact analysis" of areas where the city sees potential for improvement. Finally, Harelbeke has been elected by the federal government as one of the SDG Voices 2020.

In Roeselare, the 2030 Agenda helped to trigger a more collaborative and integrated approach to local development in the city. While many sustainable development initiatives already existed, the SDGs framework helped to make the goals an overarching policy tool for the city, by labelling different policy initiatives with the SDGs for example. Systematically using the SDGs further helped to strengthen the impact of the local team working on sustainable development. As a result, the SDGs were integrated into the city's next multi-year policy plan, with strong links between them and the Smart City concept under the slogan "Roeselare 'Smart' Sustainable City". Similarly, the municipality of Balen has used the SDGs to improve cross-departmental collaboration and the municipal staff is gradually incorporating the SDGs in their work.

In Edegem, the 2030 Agenda has influenced the municipality's approach to development co-operation, directing it towards a stronger focus on peer learning. Specifically, the SDGs have provided new impetus and insights to the city-to-city partnership and twinning programme with the town San Jerónimo in Peru. In that context, the universality of the 2030 Agenda helped to shape the vision towards a peer learning approach; going beyond a North-South knowledge transfer. As a result, Edegem was able to benefit from its Peruvian partner city by gaining knowledge on new methods of hospitality and quality social service provisions. Similarly to Ghent, the SDGs were also used to carry out a context analysis and provide inputs to the Edegem's next policy plan. Following extensive awareness-raising initiatives on the SDGs within the administration and council, the municipality managed to generate a higher degree of willingness among the municipality's services to consider the SDGs in the next policy plan right from the start.

The Flemish provinces have also started to integrate the SDGs in their new policy plans for the next six-year period. Some provinces, such as Flemish Brabant and Limburg for example, have started to raise awareness of the importance of the SDGs within their administrations as well as among citizens. The province of Antwerp also declared its intentions to work with sustainability as a core value of its

organisational structure, working culture and decision-making, while subscribing to the SDGs. In the province of West Flanders, the SDGs have been included in every step of the process of formulating the policy plan for the upcoming legislative period.

Box 1.2. Why a territorial approach to the SDGs?

The 2030 Agenda was not designed specifically for cities and regions, but the latter play a crucial role to achieve the SDGs. The OECD estimates that at least 105 of the 169 targets underlying the 17 SDGs will not be reached without proper engagement and co-ordination with local and regional governments as cities and regions have core responsibilities that are central to sustainable development and well-being (e.g. water services, housing or transport). They also discharge a significant share of public investment (60% in OECD countries), which is critical to channel the required funding to meet the SDGs. Although the SDGs provide a global framework, the opportunities and challenges for sustainable development vary significantly across and within countries, regions and cities. However, they are also an integral part of the solution as the varying nature of sustainable development challenges, therefore, calls for place-based solutions tailored to territorial specificities, needs and capacities. Place-based policies incorporate a set of co-ordinated actions specifically designed for a particular city or region and stress the need to shift from a sectoral to a multi-sectoral approach, from one-size-fits-all to context-specific measures and from a top-down to a bottom-up approach to policymaking. Based on the idea of policy co-ordination across sectors and multi-level governance, whereby all levels of government and non-state actors should play a role in the policy process, they consider and analyse functional territories, build on the endogenous development potential of each territory and use a wide range of actions (OECD, 2019^[19]).

The SDGs can help to advance conceptually the shift towards a new regional development policy paradigm and provide a framework to implement it because:

- The 2030 Agenda provides a long-term vision for strategies and policies with a common milestone in 2030, while acknowledging that targeted action is needed in different places since their exposure to challenges and risk vary widely, as does their capacity to cope with them.
- The interconnected SDGs framework allows the promotion of policy complementarities and the management of trade-offs across goals. Indeed, the SDGs enable policymakers to address the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development concomitantly, building on the synergies and taking interlinkages into account.
- The SDGs allow to better implement the concept of functional territories, a common framework that neighbouring municipalities can use to strengthen collaborations and co-ordinate actions.
- The SDGs can be used to promote multi-level governance and partnerships, including the engagement of various stakeholders in the policymaking process.

OECD's analytical framework for *A Territorial Approach to the SDGs*

The OECD has identified four critical megatrends influencing the achievement of the SDGs in cities and regions: i) demographic changes, in particular urbanisation, ageing and migration; ii) climate change and the need to transition to a low-carbon economy; iii) technological changes, such as digitalisation and the emergence of artificial intelligence; and iv) globalisation and the related geography of discontent. The SDGs provide a framework for cities and regions to respond systemically to such global megatrends. The proposed OECD framework foresees three key areas, policies and strategies, actors, and tools, for cities and regions to implement a territorial approach to the SDGs.

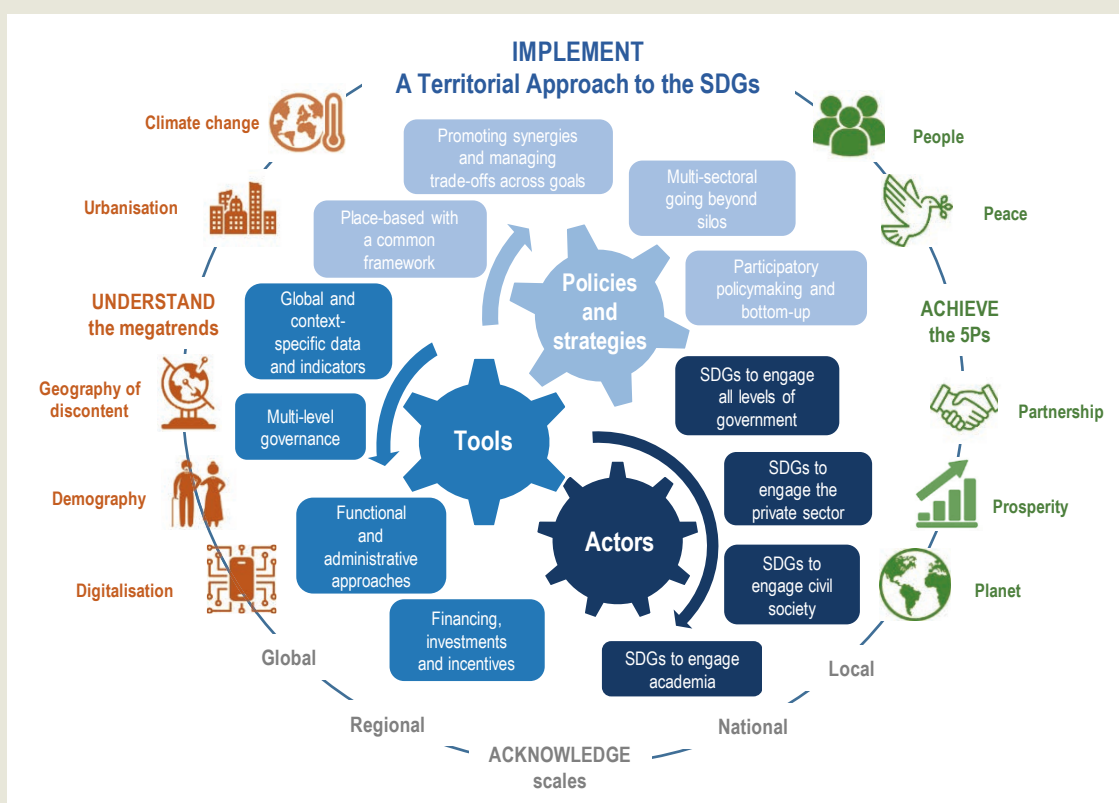
Policies and strategies

Cities and regions can use the SDGs as a means to shift from a sectoral to a multi-sectoral approach, both in the design and in the implementation of their policies. The SDGs can help to bring various departments of a local administration together to strengthen the collaboration in policy implementation. Regional policy aims to effectively address the diversity of economic, social, demographic, institutional and geographic conditions across cities and regions. It also ensures that sectoral policies are co-ordinated with each other and meet the specific needs of different regions and provides the tools that traditional structural policies often lack in order to address region-specific factors that cause economic and social stagnation (OECD, 2019^[19]).

Tools

The effective implementation of a territorial approach to the SDGs implies the combined use of a variety of tools. These span from a solid multi-level governance system to global and context-specific data for evidence-based policies. They also consist of combining functional and administrative approaches to address territorial challenges and opportunities beyond borders, as well as investment and incentives, in particular for the private sector to contribute. Multi-level governance represents a key tool to promote vertical co-ordination (across levels of government) and horizontal co-ordination (across ministries and departments) – both within the local, regional and national governments and between the governments and other key stakeholders. National governments can also use the SDGs as a framework to promote policy coherence across levels of government, align priorities and rethink sustainable development through a bottom-up approach.

Figure 1.1. OECD's analytical framework for *A Territorial Approach to the SDGs*



Actors

A participatory policymaking and bottom-up process is one of the core elements of a territorial approach to the SDGs. Shifting from a top-down and hierarchical to a bottom-up and participatory approach to policymaking and implementation is key for the achievement of the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda requires a more transparent and inclusive model that involves public as well as non-state actors to co-design and jointly implement local development strategies and policies. The SDGs provide cities and regions with a tool to effectively engage in multi-stakeholder dialogues with actors from the private sector, civil society, as well as schools and academia.

Sources: OECD (2020^[20]), *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis Report*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e86fa715-en>; OECD (2019^[19]), *OECD Regional Outlook 2019: Leveraging Megatrends for Cities and Rural Areas*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264312838-en>.

Linking decentralised development co-operation to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

Another important facet of implementing the SDGs in Flanders is decentralised development co-operation (DDC). DDC refers to development co-operation activities and partnerships between cities and regions from (often developed) countries and their counterparts from (often developing) partner countries. The Flemish government is one of the most active regional governments in OECD countries on DDC, with a steadily growing budget for official development assistance (ODA). Between 1995 (EUR 5.3 million) and 2016 (EUR 55.6 million), the budget increased by more than 10 times (OECD, 2018^[21]). While development co-operation has been a regional competency since 1993, the region established the Flemish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2015, which is now responsible for this policy domain through its Department of Foreign Affairs (DBZ). Between 2006 and 2016, Flanders provided targeted support in health (including sexual and reproductive health and rights), education, agriculture and development education. Sector priorities for bilateral DDC activities are determined in close collaboration with the partner countries in light of their 2030 Agenda focus areas and are outlined in country strategy papers. For example, activities in Malawi focus on agriculture, the partnership with Mozambique is targeting health and sexual and reproductive rights, while the collaboration with South Africa is concentrated on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and climate change.

Flemish development co-operation policy goes beyond a sectoral approach when addressing the SDGs. As the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing Development call for cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary and integrated work, its focus lies on system change, stimulation of (societal) innovation and increased attention on multi-actor partnerships, while policy coherence and leaving no one behind are central guiding principles. In March 2018, the Flemish government approved a reformed framework decree for development co-operation, which made it easier to focus on sustainable change processes and involve diverse actors in the 2030 Agenda. This means, for instance, that development education is no longer limited to youth and educational projects, but can focus on broad-based systemic change.

To stimulate actions to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs has launched different initiatives. It continues to collaborate with VVSG, a key partner providing capacity building for municipalities in DDC projects. VVSG also supports the localisation of the SDGs in cities and municipalities in Flanders. As part of its activities, the association implemented an SDG pilot project between 2017 and 2019 that was funded partly by DBZ and partly by the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the federal government. DBZ has further launched a call for proposals on the Agenda 2030 in Practice initiative, allocating EUR 1 million to 6 DDC projects over 3 years. The eligibility criteria included the collaboration of at least two partners from different sectors working on an innovative approach to stimulate behavioural and system change related to the SDGs.

Another initiative taken was a stakeholder consultation called "Inspiration for action", aiming to collect practical examples for the implementation of the Agenda 2030. The focus themes were "co-creation", "innovation", "innovative finance" and "bringing the private sector on board".

Box 1.3. Decentralised development co-operation to promote healthcare, agriculture and food security: The case of Flanders

In 2018, the OECD and European Commission produced a joint study called *Reshaping Decentralised Development Co-operation: The Key Role of Cities and Regions for the 2030 Agenda* (OECD, 2018^[21]), in which the region of Flanders was one of four selected case studies. The report, developed through a multi-stakeholder policy dialogue over 15 months, highlights the unique role of local and regional authorities in development co-operation.

In the case of Flanders, one of the key features highlighted in the report is the fact that the regional government acts as a traditional (national) donor, with significant amounts of ODA transferred both to national governments in partner countries and to multilateral organisations (e.g. FAO, the Food and Agricultural Organization) and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Another prominent feature of the Flemish model is the active role played by cities and municipalities, supported by the Association for Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG). The study estimates that over two-thirds of municipalities have a politically elected councillor in charge of DDC. The study further elaborated how municipal authorities engage in a wide range of activities from capacity-building and city-to-city collaboration to providing funds to local NGOs.

With regards to the localisation of the SDGs, the linking-up between regional, provincial and municipal levels is noted as an important aspect of DDC in Flanders. The Flemish region emphasises decentralisation in its DDC work and collaborates with both national and local governments in partner countries. Being a regional government gives Flanders a strategic advantage in this regard, although the report recommends that the peer-to-peer learning aspect and direct engagement with local authorities in partner countries could be strengthened in the Flemish DDC programmes, where the lack of capacity in partner countries' local institutions in partner countries is a key bottleneck. Finally, Flanders' DDC has a long-term focus on specific sectors in target countries and supports donor co-ordination through the World Bank's Multi-Donor Trust Fund.

Being a model largely based on financial assistance (Official development assistance, ODA), the OECD-EC report recommends that the Flemish government further integrates non-ODA components in their DDC activities, such as knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning, in order to help capacity building and avoid implementation bottlenecks at the local level. In addition, the report concludes that more active and co-ordinated involvement of provinces and municipalities in the partner countries could help to build synergies and complementarities in terms of DDC activities in the region.

Source: OECD (2018^[21]), *Reshaping Decentralised Development Co-operation: The Key Role of Cities and Regions for the 2030 Agenda*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264302914-en>.

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Notes

¹ Strategic advisory councils are institutional bodies that provide independent advice to the Flemish government. They include non-governmental representatives from the private sector, academia and civil society.

² Examples provided come from presentations given by selected cities and municipalities during the OECD fact-finding mission, 26 November 2018, Brussels, Belgium, <https://do.vlaanderen.be/oecd-fact-finding-mission-in-flanders-26-28-november-2018-0>.

2 Sustainable development challenges and opportunities in the region of Flanders, Belgium

Flanders' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) performance is above the average of OECD regions for a majority of targets. The region's results are particularly good in the indicators of poverty and inequality reduction, education, research and development (R&D) expenditure and employment as well as economic indicators including labour productivity. Policy areas where Flanders has space for improvement include energy, notably its reliance on fossil fuels, car dependency and air pollution. The SDGs provide a framework to analyse interlinkages between different policy areas and address the megatrends affecting the region of Flanders, in particular population growth and urbanisation, climate change and technological progress.

Measuring the distance to the SDGs in the region of Flanders, Belgium

The following assessment of the Flemish SDGs performance, based on the OECD localised SDG indicator framework uses the structure of the five critical dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, namely People, Prosperity, Planet, Partnership and Peace (Figure 2.1). It is based on a selection of 71 indicators covering all 17 SDGs.¹ Further information on the methodology of the assessment can be found in Box 2.1.

Figure 2.1. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals



Source: UN (2020^[1]), *Sustainable Development Goals*, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>.

Box 2.1. OECD methodology for measuring cities' and regions' distance to the SDGs

The OECD has developed a framework to localise the SDG targets and indicators and measure the distance of regions and cities to each of the 17 SDGs. This consensual, comparable and standardised framework allows to benchmark performances within countries and across regions and cities to support public action across levels of government.

In the context of OECD countries, around 105 out of the 169 SDG targets have been identified as very relevant for regions and cities. Through an extensive literature review and expert consultation, the 169 SDG targets from the UN indicator framework have been classified by their level of relevance for subnational levels of government (place-relevant) and advanced economies (OECD-relevant). Subsequently, a subset of these SDG targets has been selected based on its applicability to the context and specificities of OECD countries. The result is a selection of 105 SDG targets and 135 indicators for OECD regions and cities (also referred to as the “subnational SDG targets”).

With its 135 indicators, the OECD localised framework covers at least 1 aspect of each of the 17 SDGs for both regions and cities. Nevertheless, the coverage in terms of indicators and targets is higher for regions than for cities. Although the set of indicators aims to cover the broad spectrum of all 17 SDGs, the coverage in terms of indicators also varies widely across SDGs.

In order to evaluate the achievements of a city or region on the SDGs, the OECD localised framework defines end values to shed light on the global trends in OECD regions and cities towards the SDGs, based on available indicators and to provide technical guidance for governments on a possible way to use the SDGs indicator framework as a tool to advance local development plans and sustain evidence-based policies. By defining end values for 2030, regions and cities can assess where they stand today and seize how much distance they have to travel to reach the intended end value. When they are not inferable from the UN framework, the OECD defines end values for indicators based on the knowledge of experts in the field or, alternatively, based on the best performance of regions and cities in that indicator. The OECD localised indicator framework attributes end values to 88% of its indicators, of which 65% are defined using the criteria of “best performers”. The framework also normalises the SDGs indicators from 0 to 100 – where 100 is the suggested end value of an indicator to be achieved by 2030 – and aggregates headline indicators that belong to the same SDG to provide an index score towards each of the 17 SDGs. The distance to the target or goal is the number of units the index needs to travel to reach the maximal score of 100 (Figure 2.2).

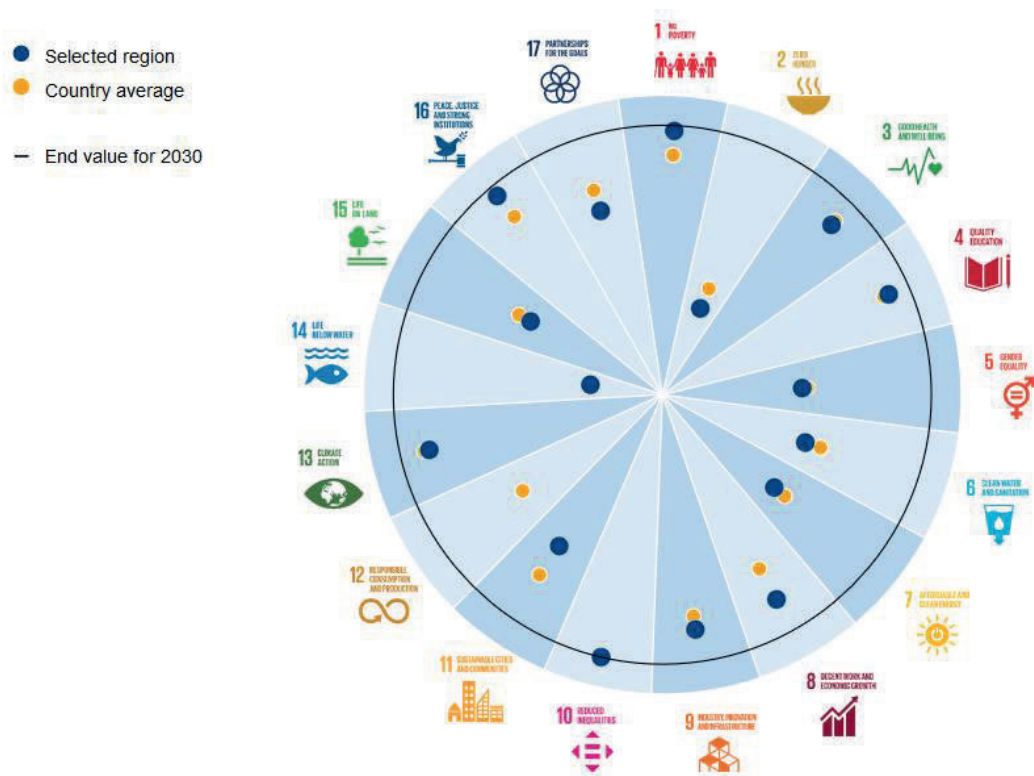
Selection of indicators used to assess the region of Flanders’ achievements on the SDGs

The indicators of the OECD localised indicator framework used for the analysis of the region of Flanders were chosen based on the availability of data for the region and a context-relevance assessment of the indicators conducted by the region’s representatives. The assessment consisted in a survey on the different SDGs indicators proposed by the OECD whereby the representatives of the region of Flanders assessed how relevant the indicator is to help to measure the SDGs at the local level in their city (from 0 to 5; where 0 stands for “Not relevant” and 5 stands for “Very relevant”). The most relevant indicators were then prioritised for this report. However, the analysis also considers some indicators with a lower relevance rating to provide complementary information on specific policy areas.

Source: OECD (2020^[2]), *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis Report*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e86fa715-en>; OECD Stats (2019^[3]), *Regions and Cities*, https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=REGION_DEMOGR#.

Overall, Flanders SDG performance is above the average of OECD regions in the majority of indicators across the different SDG targets. The results are particularly good in the indicators of poverty and inequality reduction, education, research and development (R&D) employment and expenditure as well as labour productivity. Policy areas with room for improvement are energy, notably Flanders’ reliance on fossil fuels and nuclear energy, environmental protection, particularly the protection of biodiversity, car dependency, and sustainable cities and communities, more precisely air quality levels and housing affordability.

Figure 2.2. Flanders and the SDGs – Distance to the end values



Note: Index from 0 to 100 (100 is the end value: black circumference); Darker dot: Region of Flanders' result; Lighter dot: Country average of Belgian TL2 regions. For more details about the methodology for building SDG indexes, see OECD (2020^[2]).

Source: OECD (2020^[4]), *Measuring the distance to the SDGs in Regions and Cities (visualisation tool)*, <http://www.oecd-local-sdgs.org/>. (Accessed on 10 June 2020)

People: Strong performance in health and education, but gender disparities in part-time employment and R&D

The region exhibits positive outcomes in the indicators of SDG 1 No poverty. Only 13% of Flanders' population are living below the 60% of national median disposable income threshold, significantly below the OECD average of 20.4% and close to the suggested end value of 12%. Transfers and taxes are an important factor in that context, as they largely contributed to the decrease in poverty rates (national poverty line) by close to 60%, which is more than in 85% of OECD regions. The average disposable income per day of the first quintile (equivalised household, in USD purchasing power parity [PPP], constant prices of 2010) reached USD 36.3 in 2013, the latest year where data was available for most OECD regions. Flanders thus already reached the suggested end value for this indicator (USD 30.2). In addition, around half of the Flemish population is satisfied with the government's efforts to deal with poverty – around half of the population – a level of satisfaction that lies within the top 20% of OECD regions.

Table 2.1. OECD indicators used to assess the dimension People in the region of Flanders

SDG	Indicator
	Average disposable income per day of the first quintile (equivalised household, in USD PPP, constant prices of 2010)
	Percentage of the population living below 60% of national median disposable income
	Decrease in poverty rates (national poverty line) due to transfers and taxes (%)

SDG	Indicator
	Percentage of the population satisfied with efforts to deal with poverty
	Productivity (gross value added [GVA] per worker) in agriculture, forestry and fishing (ISIC rev4) (in constant 2010 USD PPP)
	Change in cropland (from 1992 to 2015, percentage points)
	Cropland as a percentage of the total area in 2015
	Infant mortality rate (number of deaths of children 1-year-old or younger per 1 000 live births)
	Satisfaction with life as a whole (from 0 to 10)
	Percentage of people satisfied with the availability or quality of healthcare
	Active physicians rate (active physicians per 1 000 people)
	Hospital beds rate (hospital beds per 10 000 people)
	Percentage of the population from 15 to 19 years old enrolled in public or private institutions
	Percentage of the population from 25 to 64 years old with at least tertiary education
	Gender gap in the rate of young population (from 18 to 24 years old) not in education, employment or training (NEET) (percentage points)
	Percentage of the population that believe women are treated with respect and dignity in their country
	Gender gap in employment rate (male-female, percentage points)
	Gender gap in part-time employment incidence (female-male, percentage points)
	Female R&D personnel as a percentage of total R&D employment

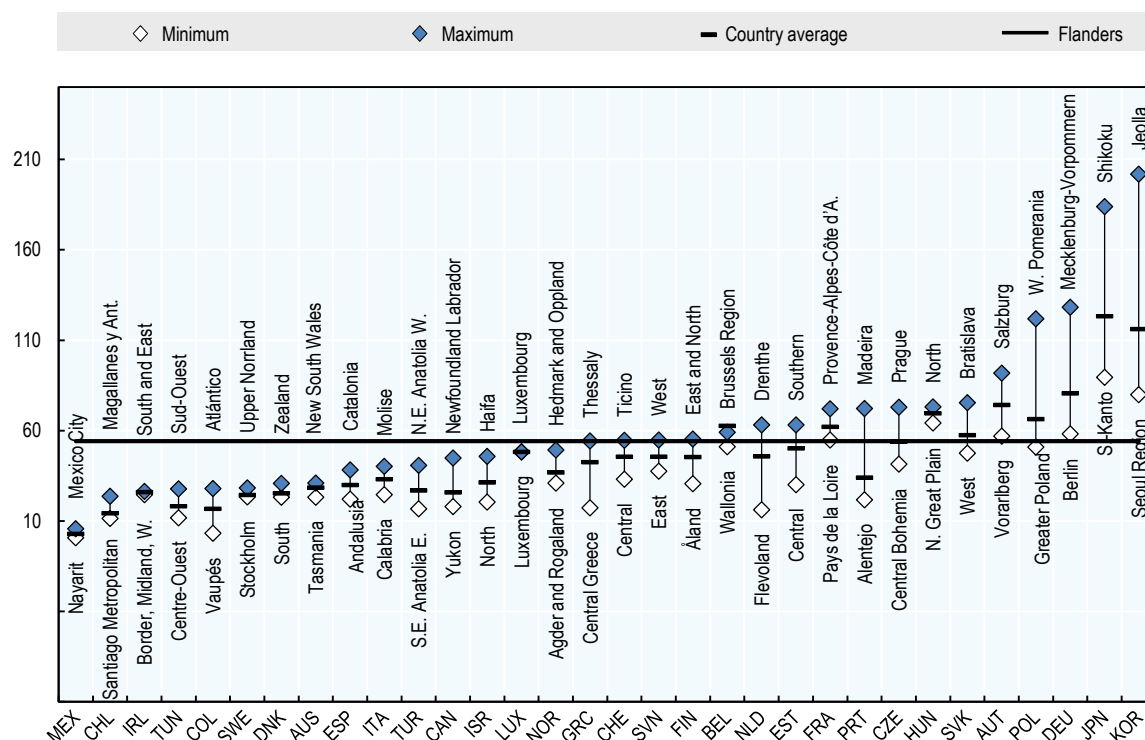
Source: OECD (2020^[2]), *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis Report*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e86fa715-en>.

Flanders' labour productivity in the primary sector exceeds the OECD regions' average, although cropland has significantly decreased over the past two decades. Flanders' labour productivity in agriculture, forestry and fishing in 2016 amounted to a value of USD 53 000 (in constant 2010 USD PPP) which was more than USD 10 000 above the OECD regional average. On the other hand, the region also registered one of the largest declines in cropland among OECD regions in the period between 1992 and 2015 (-9.1 percentage points). Nevertheless, due to its high levels of cropland in 1992, cropland still accounted for 66% of the total area of Flanders in 2015. On average, only 32% of the total area of OECD regions is cropland.

Flanders performs above the OECD regional average in most indicators of SDG 3 Good health and well-being. The satisfaction with life in the region, which reached 7.2 on a scale from 0 to 10 (where 10 is the highest satisfaction) between 2008 and 2018, is among the highest in OECD regions. Similarly, Flanders exhibits a very high satisfaction rate with the healthcare system. Between 2008 and 2018, more than 90% of the Flemish population was satisfied with the availability and quality of healthcare – 24 percentage points above the OECD average. These high satisfaction rates are in line with the health resources available in Flanders. For example, the number of hospital beds and doctors per 10 000 people rank among the top 30% of OECD regions (Figure 2.3). The only two health-related indicators where Flanders has not yet reached the suggested end values are infant and child mortality rates. The region's infant mortality rate of 3.6 deaths of children 1-year-old or younger per 1 000 live births was lower than the regional OECD average of 5.9 deaths. There also remains a little gap to the suggested end value for 2030, which is defined at 2.8. The same applies to the child mortality rate. While Flanders' child mortality rate of 8.1 deaths per 0 to 4 year-old population in 2017 was lower than the regional OECD average of 11.8, it would need to be reduced by close around 25% to reach the end value of 6.3 by 2030.

Flanders is on a good path towards achieving SDG 4 Quality education. In 2017, 92% of its 15 to 19 year-old population were enrolled in public or private institutions. The region thus ranked among the 15% of OECD regions with the highest enrolment rates in that age group. Beyond that, more than 41% of the population from 25 to 64 years have completed at least tertiary education compared to a regional OECD average of 31%. The gap to bridge to the end value of 46% is thus only 5 percentage points.

Figure 2.3. Hospital beds rate (hospital beds per 10 000 people), 2015



Note: Netherlands (2002); Australia (2012); Belgium, Italy, Slovenia (2013); Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Turkey (2014); Austria, Colombia, Chile, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, Norway, Switzerland (2016).

Source: OECD (2020^[5]), *OECD Regional Statistics (database)*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/region-data-en>.

Although Flanders' gender gap in employment is below the OECD regions' average, large gender disparities exist in part-time employment and R&D occupation. Compared to the other OECD regions, the gender gap in the employment rate between male and female (7.7 percentage points) is among the lowest 30% (2017 values). However, when only taking into consideration part-time employment, gender disparities between male and female employment are very distinct. The share of women working in part-time jobs in 2015 was 33 percentage points higher than the corresponding share of men. Only 10% of OECD regions exhibited a larger gender gap in this employment category. Accordingly, Flanders still has a long way to go to reach the end value of a zero percentage point difference. Flanders' gender gap is also pronounced in R&D. In 2015, the share of female research and development personnel as a percentage of total R&D employment stood at 34% compared to an end value of 50%. Overall, between 2008 and 2018 around 90% of the Flemish population believed that women in their country are treated with dignity. This value is higher than both the OECD average (66.5%) whilst there remains a small gap to the end value of 100%. On a positive note, there is practically no gender gap (-0.5 percentage points) in the rate in the young population (from 18 to 24 years old) not in education, employment or training (NEET)

Planet: CO₂ emissions from electricity generation, car density and environmental protection are pressing issues in Flanders

Flemish citizens express a high degree of satisfaction with the water quality in the region. Concerning SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation, Flanders belongs to the 50% of OECD regions that registered a reduction of the volume of water bodies between 1992 and 2015. The overall decrease in the volume of water bodies was however only marginal, amounting to -0.11 percentage points over that period. Yet it needs to be considered that the share of water bodies in Flanders (1.07% of the total area) is already lower

than the OECD regional average of 3.1%. The OECD localised indicator framework further measures the achievements in SDG 6 through the level of satisfaction with water quality, which in the case of Flanders, is high. Between 2008 and 2018, on average around 86% of the Flemish population stated to be satisfied with the water quality compared to the average of OECD regions (80.7%).

Table 2.2. OECD indicators used to assess the dimension Planet in the region of Flanders

SDG	Indicator
	Percentage of the population satisfied with the quality of water
	Change in water bodies (from 1992 to 2015, percentage points)
	Water bodies as percentage of the total area in 2015
	Number of motor road vehicles per 100 people
	Percentage of the population satisfied with efforts to preserve the environment
	CO ₂ emissions per electricity production (in tons of CO ₂ equivalent per gigawatt-hours)
	Change in cooling degree days needed to maintain an average building indoor temperature of 22°C, from 1970-84 to 2004-18
	Protected coastal area as a percentage of the total coastal area
	Change in tree cover (from 1992 to 2015, percentage points)
	Tree cover as a percentage of the total area in 2015
	Terrestrial protected areas as a percentage of the total area

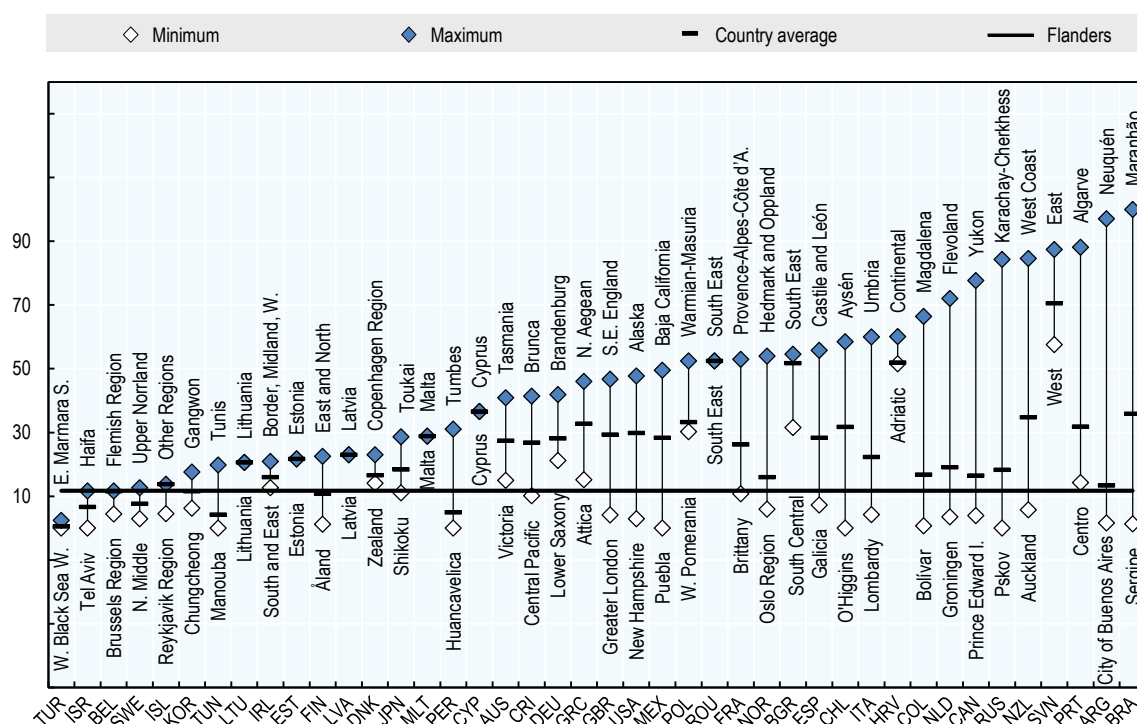
Source: OECD (2020^[2]), *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis Report*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e86fa715-en>.

Although Flanders' population is satisfied with the region's efforts to preserve the environment, high car dependency and CO₂ emissions from electricity generation are pressing environmental challenges. In 2017, Flanders registered 52 vehicles per 100 people, which exceeds both the average of OECD regions (39.6) and the suggested end value (34 motor road vehicles maximum). This has an impact on Flanders' performance *vis-à-vis* SDG 13 Climate action. Over the past decades, global warming has affected the temperatures in Flanders. Seven more cooling degree days were needed in the region to maintain an average building indoor temperature of 22°C, from 1970-84 compared to 2004-18. The emission of CO₂ is an important contributory factor to the effect of global warming in that context. In Flanders, the CO₂ emissions per electricity production exceeded 280 tons of CO₂ equivalent per gigawatt-hours in 2017 compared to an end value of fewer than 90 tons, which leaves a significant challenge ahead regarding the efficiency of electricity production. Around 45% of OECD regions exhibit lower CO₂ emissions per electricity production (in tons of CO₂ equivalent per gigawatt-hours). Overall, however, the satisfaction of Flanders' population with the efforts of the government to preserve the environment (64% between 2008 and 2018) is higher than on average in OECD regions (52.4%).

Flanders protects its terrestrial and coastal areas less than OECD regions on average. SDG 14 Life below water and SDG 15 Life on land are areas in which Flanders is lagging behind compared to the average of OECD regions. Around 12% of coastal areas in Flanders were under protection in 2017. In comparison, the average of OECD regions in 2017 was 19.6% and the end value is defined at more than 42% leaving a significant gap to close for Flanders until 2030 (Figure 2.4). In the case of terrestrial protection, a similar pattern can be observed. 16.4% of the total area of Flanders had the status of terrestrial protection in 2017, whilst the average of OECD regions (19.3%) and the end value (37.6%) both exceeded Flanders' value. Moreover, Flanders has registered a decrease in its tree cover of 0.6 percentage points between 1992 and 2015, while the end value for 2030 (2.4 percentage points) points in the opposite direction. In 2015, Flanders' tree cover (10.8% of total area) was already significantly lower than the average tree cover in

OECD regions (37.7%), which also bears implications for SDG 13 as the restoration of trees is one of the most effective strategies for climate change mitigation (Bastin et al., 2019^[6]).

Figure 2.4. Protected coastal area as a percentage of the total coastal area, 2017



Source: OECD (2020^[5]), OECD Regional Statistics (database), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/region-data-en>.

Prosperity: Strong economic performance and low inequality but backlogs for sustainable cities

Electricity production in Flanders relies heavily on fossil fuels and nuclear power. In terms of SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy, Flanders still has a certain gap to close in order to reach the defined end values for 2030. In 2017, around 13% of its electricity production stemmed from renewable sources compared to a regional OECD average of 40% and an end value of more than 80%. The share of coal was 4.2% in the same year and hence close to the suggested outcome of 0% in 2030. However, the largest share of energy in Flanders is still based on fossil fuels (46%), while a significant part stems from nuclear power (37%). The majority of OECD regions is already closer to reaching the end value for clean energy than Flanders, with at least 82% of electricity production coming from renewable sources.

Table 2.3. OECD indicators used to assess the dimension Prosperity in the region of Flanders

SDG	Indicator
	Percentage of total electricity production that comes from renewable sources
	Percentage of total electricity production that comes from coal
	Percentage of total electricity production that comes from fossil fuels (natural gas and oil, excluding coal)

SDG	Indicator
	Percentage of total electricity production that comes from nuclear power
	Employment in knowledge-intensive services as a percentage of total employment
	Percentage of labour force with at least secondary education
	Unemployment rate (%)
	Gender gap in the unemployment rate (percentage points)
	Long-term unemployment incidence (%)
	Part-time employment incidence (%)
	Percentage of young population (from 18 to 24 years old) not in education, employment or training (NEET)
	Youth unemployment rate (%)
	Productivity (GVA per worker) in manufacture (ISIC rev4) (in constant 2010 USD PPP)
	Employment in high-technology manufacturing as a percentage of total manufacturing employment
	R&D expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) (%)
	R&D personnel as a share of total employment
	Patent applications (Patent Cooperation Treaty, PCT) per 1 000 000 people
	Percentage of the labour force with at least tertiary education
	Average disposable income per equivalised household (in USD PPP, constant prices of 2010)
	Gini index of disposable income (after taxes and transfers) (from 0 to 1)
	Ratio between the average disposable income of top and bottom quintiles
	Median disposable income per equivalised household (in USD PPP, constant prices of 2010)
	Percentage of population living below 50% of regional median disposable income
	Decrease in Gini index due to transfers and taxes (%)
	Decrease in poverty rates (regional poverty line) due to transfers and taxes (%)
	Percentage of households' expenses dedicated to housing costs
	Percentage of the population satisfied with the quality of public transportation systems
	Difference between built-up area growth rate and population growth rate (percentage points)
	Exposure to PM2.5 in µg/m³, population-weighted (micrograms per cubic metre)
	Percentage of the population satisfied with the quality of air
	Percentage of people exposed to more than 10 µg/m³ (micrograms per cubic metre) of PM2.5

Source: OECD (2020^[21]), *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis Report*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e86fa715-en>.

Flanders is characterised by a high share of knowledge-intensive employment and low rates of unemployment but long-term unemployment and part-time employment exceed the average of OECD regions. Flanders' achievements in SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth are positive but also leave potential for improvement. In 2017, 85% of Flanders' labour force had at least secondary education, which means that the region has already reached the suggested end value of this indicator. In addition, employment in knowledge-intensive services accounted for 47% of total employment in 2016, close to the end value of 48%. In that year, Flanders' share of employment in knowledge-intensive services was higher than the equivalent shares in more than 80% of OECD regions. Furthermore, the region's unemployment rate of 4.4% in 2017 already undercut the defined end value of 5%. The region also exhibited only a relatively small gender gap in its unemployment rate (0.6 percentage points) compared to the OECD

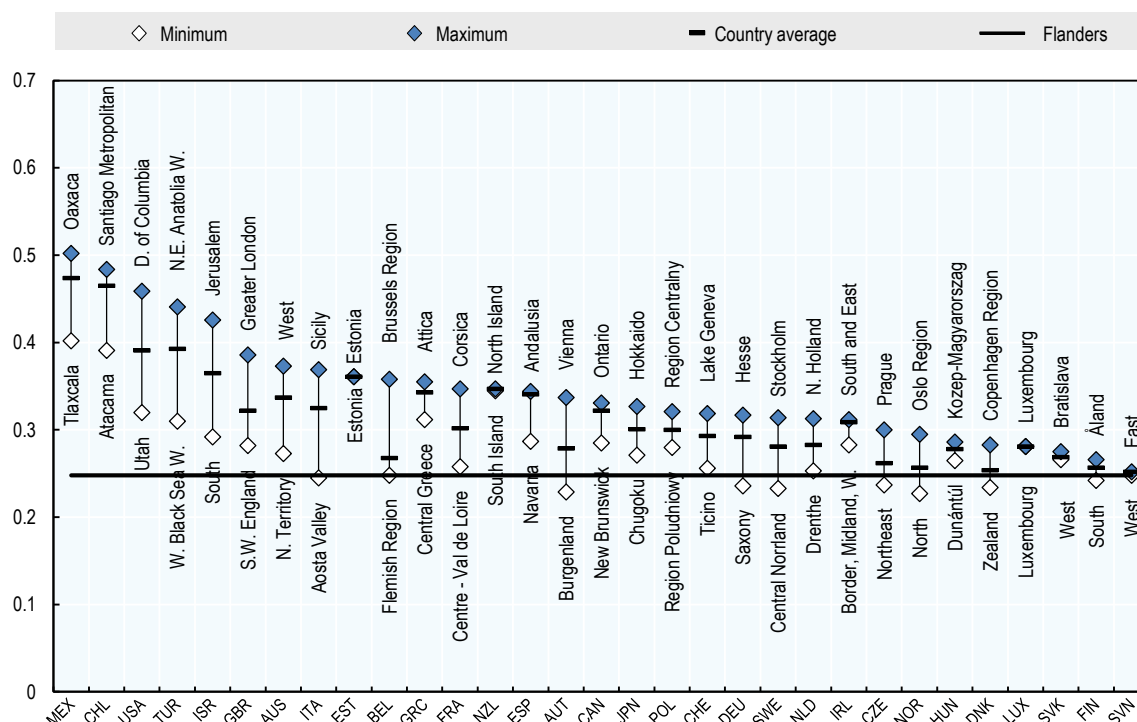
average (2 percentage points). However, incidences of long-term unemployment (38% of total unemployment in 2015) and part-time employment (25% of total employment in 2015) are significantly more frequent than on average in OECD regions. They thus represent a policy area to be tackled in order to reach the end values by 2030 (i.e. 26% of long-term unemployment or less, 15.4% of part-time employment or less). Unemployment among the youth (12.8% in 2017) and the share of the young population between 18 and 24 years not in education, employment or training (NEET, 11.7% in 2014) are below the average of OECD regions and lie slightly above the end values of 10.8% and 10.6% respectively.

Flanders is among the OECD regions that are the closest to reaching the end values for SDG 9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure. Nearly 45% of Flanders' labour force has at least completed tertiary education, which is an important prerequisite for the development of a knowledge-based and innovative economy. Moreover, spending 2.7% of its GDP on research and development, Flanders belongs to the 20% of OECD regions with the highest R&D expenditure and comes close to achieving the end value of 2.9% or more. R&D personnel as a share of total employment (2.5%) exceeds the OECD average (1.5%) by 1 percentage point. In line with those results, Flanders exhibits a per capita number of patent applications (137 per 1 000 000 people) significantly above the regional OECD average (85 patent applications per 1 000 000 people). There remains, however, a certain gap to the end value (208 patent applications per 1 000 000 people). In addition to its achievements in innovation-related indicators, Flanders has a high productivity level in manufacture (measured as GVA per worker) of around USD 131 000 (2016 value in constant 2010 USD PPP), which already exceeds the 2030 end value of USD 126 000. Nevertheless, high-technology manufacturing only accounts for less than 0.98% of all manufacturing employment in Flanders, while the suggested end value for 2030 is set at 2% or more.

Flanders exhibits a low degree of income inequality. The Gini index of income after the deduction of taxes and transfers in Flanders (0.25) is overall lower than in more than 90% of OECD regions and already reaches the end value of 0.28 (Figure 2.5). Transfers and taxes play a crucial role in that context as they lead to a reduction of Flanders' Gini index by more than 60% compared to a situation without any redistribution. As a comparison, the average of OECD regions for this indicator stands at 41.2%. Accordingly, regional poverty rates decline by more than 45.7% due to transfers and taxes, which means that Flanders exceeds the end value set for 2030 (39.5%). Overall, the income distribution is more equal than on average in OECD regions, which is mirrored in the ratio between the average disposable income of the top and bottom quintile, which amounts to 3.6 compared to the average of OECD regions (6.9). Overall, only around 12% of Flanders population live below 50% of the regional median disposable income of around USD 27 000 (PPP, constant prices of 2010) – a value, which is lower than both the average of OECD regions (18.2%) and the end value (13.1%).

Flanders does not reach any of the end values of SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities. Pollution is an area where Flanders is particularly lagging behind other OECD regions. 100% of the population are exposed to more than 10 µg/m³ (micrograms per cubic metre) of PM_{2.5}, while the end value is set at 0%. The average exposure to PM_{2.5} in Flanders reaches 13.5 µg/m³ and is thus higher than the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines on air quality (World Health Organization, 2018^[7]). Accordingly, the satisfaction with the quality of air in Flanders (75% satisfaction rate on average between 2008 and 2018) is below the OECD regions' average and more than 15 percentage points lower than the suggested end value of around 91%. Housing costs are another area where Flanders has not yet reached the end value. Households in Flanders have to spend on average 28% of their expenses on housing, which is more than in 70% of OECD regions. Connectivity and transportation are other important factors that can contribute to more sustainable cities and communities. In Flanders, the satisfaction with the quality of public transport systems between 2008 and 2018 reached 67.9% on average, which exceeds the average of OECD regions (59.7%) and leaves only a small gap to the 2030 end value of 73%.

Figure 2.5. Gini index of disposable income (after taxes and transfers) (from 0 to 1), 2013



Note: Japan (2009), Slovenia (2010); New Zealand (2011); Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, United States (2014); United Kingdom (2015).
Source: OECD (2020^[5]), OECD Regional Statistics (database), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/region-data-en>.

Peace and Partnership: Flanders is a safe and tolerant place to live, but room for greater trust in institutions

With very low homicide rates, Flanders is perceived by its population as a rather safe place to live but incidents of assaults and muggings occur more often than in other OECD regions. In 2016, Flanders registered 1 homicide per 100 000 residents. The region has hence already achieved the end value of 1.06 or fewer homicides per 100 000 and exhibited a homicide rate significantly below the OECD regions' average of 5.5. In addition, three out of four Flemings state feeling safe walking alone at night around the area in which they live. The perception of safety at night is thus higher than in two-thirds of OECD regions, which are averaging at 66.5%. Self-reported survey data on assaults points out some challenges en route to achieving SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions. Between 2008 and 2018, around 4.3% of the Flemish population stated to have been assaulted or mugged in the previous 12 months, which puts Flanders among the third of OECD regions with the lowest achievements regarding this indicator on assaults.

In terms of confidence in the judicial system and the government and corruption perception, the region of Flanders exhibits achievements slightly above the OECD average. Between 2008 and 2018, on average 49% of the Flemish population stated having confidence in judicial systems and courts, which corresponds to the average of OECD regions (49%) but is below the end value of 58.7%. Furthermore, 50% of Flemings believed that corruption is spread throughout the government, which is more than 10 percentage points lower and thus better than the average of OECD regions. Flanders has also already reached the suggested end value of 51% based on the best performing regions. Moreover, between 2008 and 2018, 49% of the Flemish population had confidence in the national government (Figure 2.6), thereby reaching the end value

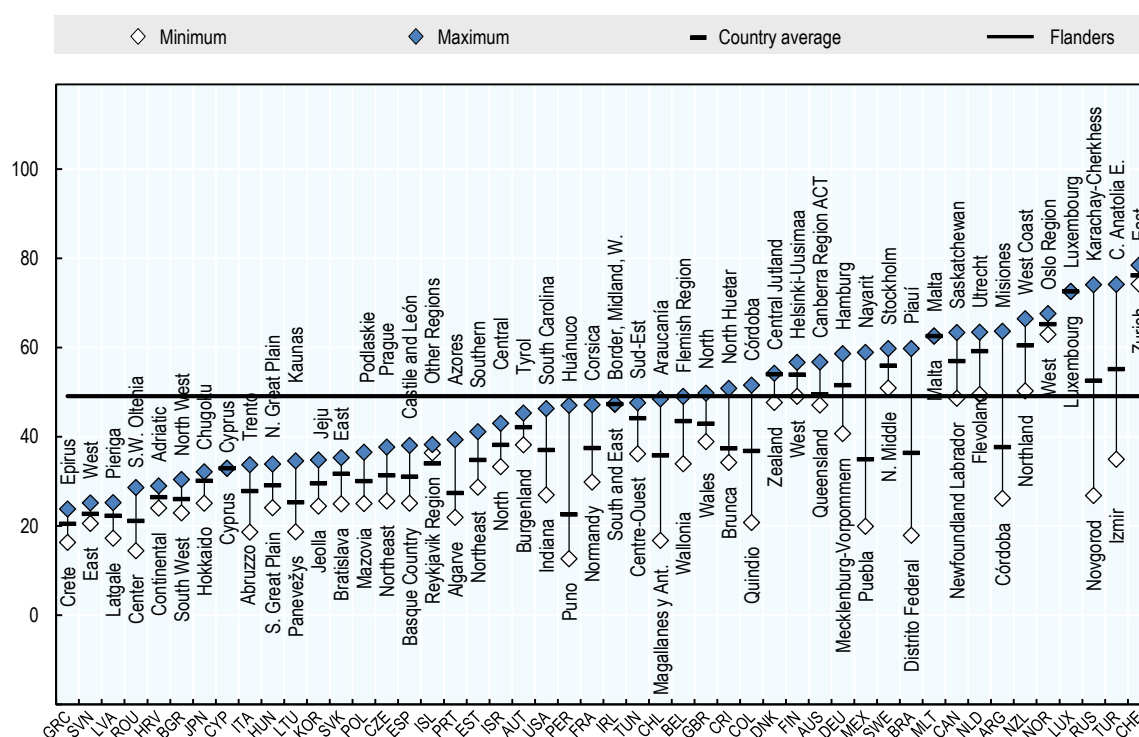
of 48% and lying above the average of OECD regions (40%). In view of a confidence rate below 50%, there remains nevertheless potential for improvement regarding this indicator.

Table 2.4. OECD indicators used to assess the dimensions Peace and Partnership in the region of Flanders

SDG	Indicator
16	Homicides per 100 000 persons
	Percentage of the population that have been assaulted or mugged in the previous 12 months
	Percentage of the population that feel safe walking alone at night around the area in which they live
	Confidence in the judicial system and courts
	Percentage of the population that believe corruption is spread throughout the government in the country
	Percentage of the population that have confidence in the national government
	Percentage of the population that believe their place of residence is a good place to live for migrants
	Percentage of the population that believe their place of residence is a good place to live for gay or lesbian people
17	Share of PCT co-patent applications with foreign regions (in percentage of co-patent applications)
	Percentage of households with broadband Internet access

Source: OECD (2020^[2]), *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis Report*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e86fa715-en>.

Figure 2.6. Percentage of the population that have confidence in the national government, 2008-18



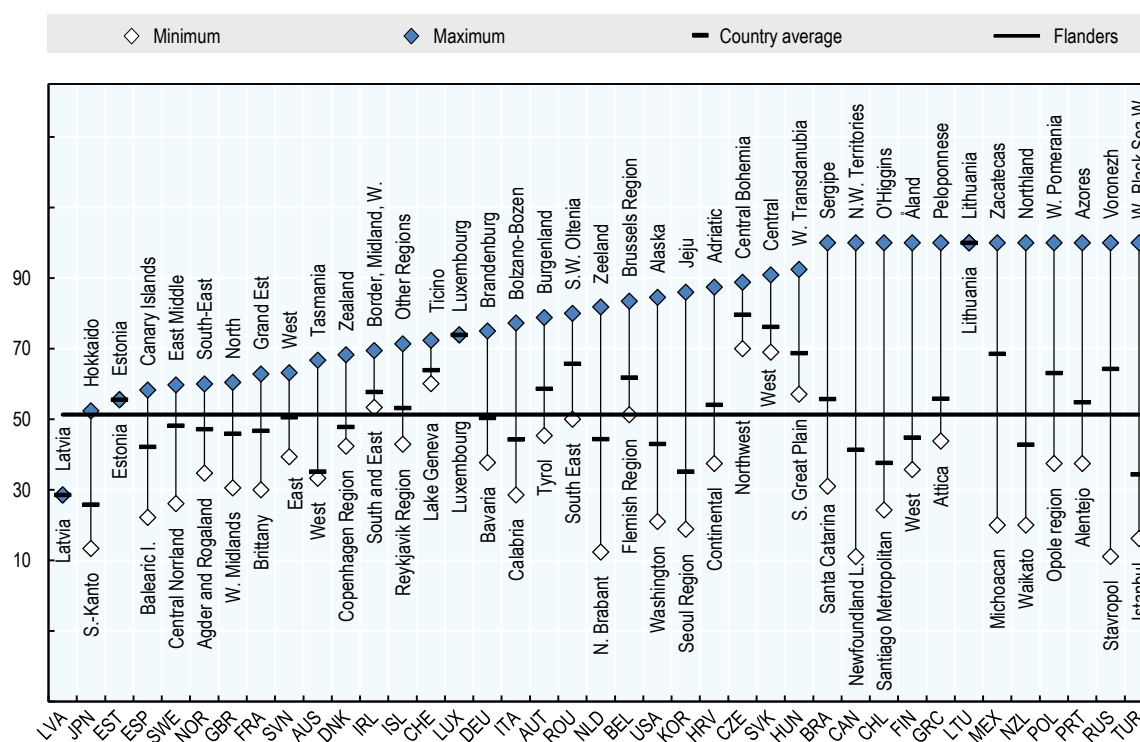
Source: OECD (2020^[5]), *OECD Regional Statistics (database)*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/region-data-en>.

The vast majority of Flemings believe their place of residence is a good place to live for gay and lesbian people as well as for migrants. Between 2008 and 2018, on average more than 80% of the region's population stated that they believe their place of residence is a good place to live for gay or lesbian people

while the equivalent value for migrants amounted to 71%. In both cases, tolerance is more pronounced than in OECD regions on average. This is particularly the case for tolerance towards gay and lesbian people, where Flanders exhibits a higher share of tolerance than 90% of OECD regions, while the tolerance level towards migrants is only slightly higher than on average in OECD regions (71% in Flanders compared to the average of OECD regions of 66%). Nevertheless, Flanders has not yet reached the end value of 100% in either of the 2 indicators.

Flanders' files less co-patent applications with foreign regions than the average of OECD regions. Fifty-one percent of PCT co-patent applications, an indicator that reflects how knowledge sharing between regions can enhance access to innovation and foster sustainable development, are done with foreign regions (in percentage of co-patent applications). The region of Flanders is hence among the OECD regions with average results regarding this indicator, lagging behind the end value of 78.9% but also the average of OECD regions (52.9%) (Figure 2.7). Another indicator to measure connectivity within the dimension partnership is the connectivity of households to broadband Internet. Around 84% of Flanders' households had access to the Internet via broadband in 2016, which is close to the end value of around 86%. In comparison, the OECD regions' average stood at 74%. Consequently, Flanders ranks among the 30% of OECD regions with the highest share of broadband Internet accesses.

Figure 2.7. Share of PCT co-patent applications with foreign regions (in percentage of co-patent applications), 2015



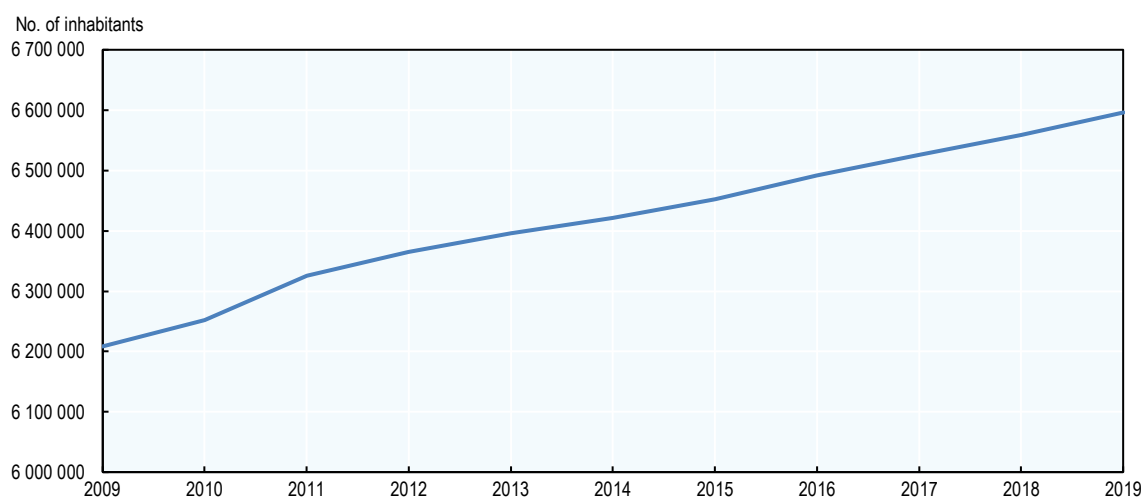
Source: OECD (2020^[5]), OECD Regional Statistics (database), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/region-data-en>.

The SDGs: A means to respond to interlinked sustainability challenges and megatrends in Flanders

In Flanders, immigration, population growth and ageing will increase the demand for land, products, services and energy, which will have a particular impact on SDG 11. Each year, the population of Flanders

grows by around 30 000 people, translating into a total increase of 6.5% over the last 10 years (Figure 2.8). Projections estimate a further population increase in Flanders in the next decades. The population growth also coincides with the ageing of the population. Since the turn of the century, the share of the population aged 65 and above has gone up from 16.7% in 2000 to 18.2% in 2010, and up to 20.2% in 2019 with increases being particularly high in coastal municipalities (Statistics Flanders, 2019^[8]). A consequence of the ageing population is increasing pressure on public finances due to retirement and pension payments and a higher demand for health services (SDG 3).

Figure 2.8. Population growth in Flanders, 2009-19



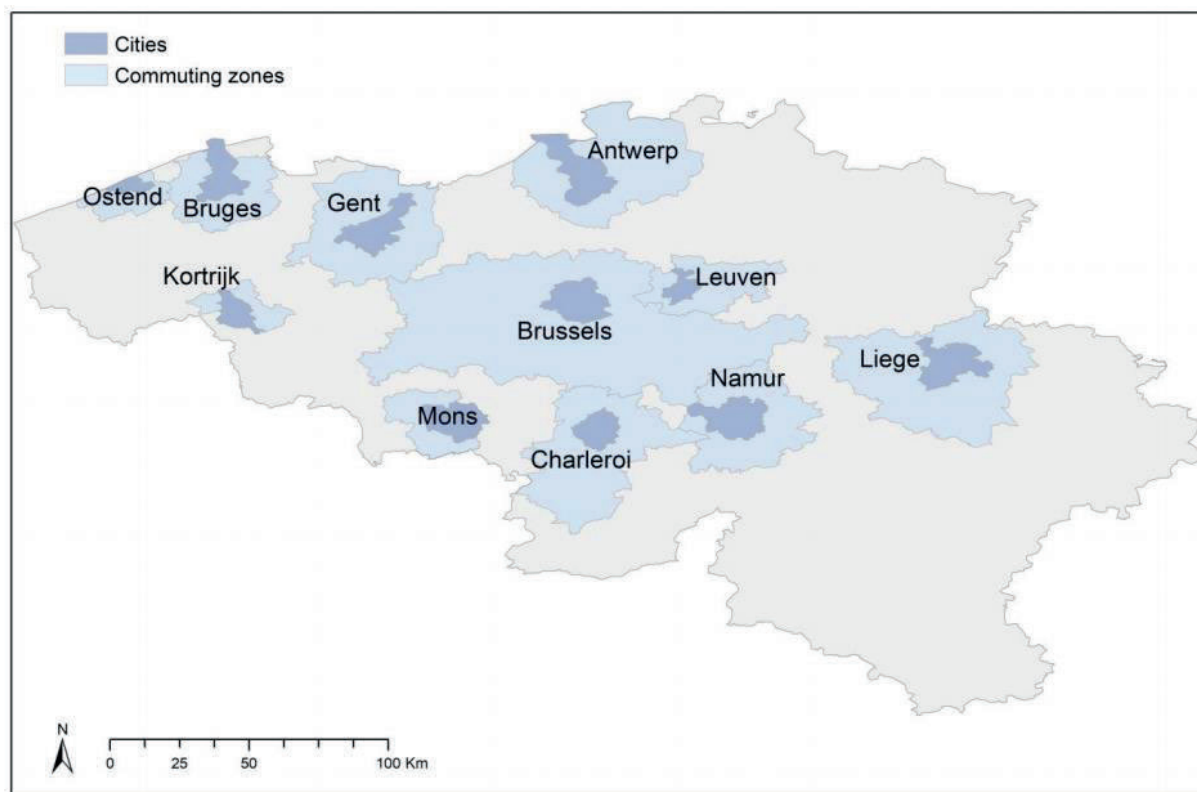
Source: OECD (2020^[5]), *OECD Regional Statistics (database)*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/region-data-en>.

Flanders' strong educational and economic performance provides good pre-requisites to achieve the social dimension of sustainability. High productivity levels, low unemployment rate, a high degree of tertiary degrees and knowledge-intensive employment are achievements that also have an impact on the social sustainability in the region, *inter alia* through a low share of relative poverty as well as distributional measures and taxes, which lead to good results in the SDG dimensions related to people and prosperity. The two Vision 2050 transition priorities related to i) lifelong learning and dynamic professional career and ii) healthcare and welfare, underline possible interlinkages between the economic and social dimension of sustainability. While ongoing learning efforts and education provide the basis for a successful knowledge-based economy, economic strength can facilitate access to welfare and improve the well-being of people.

Air pollution and the challenge to reduce CO₂ emissions, especially in the transport sector, is one of the main issues in the region. Population growth in Flanders occurs via large cities, causing sprawl and an increasing degree of urbanisation, with direct environmental externalities related to increasing transport fluxes and higher air pollution. In 2008, Flanders CO₂ emissions per capita were the second-highest among benchmark regions,² with the main source of CO₂ emissions stemming from the transport sector (OECD, 2017^[9]). As shown in Figure 2.9, Flanders is characterised by large and partially interconnected commuting zones between Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and Leuven, cities that are the main engine for the economic development in the region. On the other hand, the commuting flows between those cities are a major contributory factor to air pollution in Flanders overall and the metropolitan areas in particular. At the same time, they are also more affected by air pollution than the more rural part of Flanders. The functional urban areas of Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent all exhibit a population exposure to particulate matter PM_{2.5} between 14.1 and 14.3 µg/m³ (2017 value), which exceeds the Flemish average and WHO air quality guidelines. Taking into consideration the high per capita exposure to PM_{2.5} and its per capita rate of road

traffic vehicles compared to the average of OECD regions, Flanders will be facing increasing challenges to achieve SDGs 11, 12 and 13 by 2030.

Figure 2.9. Map of functional urban areas in Belgium



Source: OECD (2019^[10]), *Functional Urban Areas - Belgium*, <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/regionaldevelopment/Belgium.pdf> (accessed on 18 June 2020).

Transportation and its impact on air quality have negative effects on urban residents and call for a functional approach to solving the problem. Increasing the attractiveness of public transportation as an alternative to the private car for the daily commute within and across Flemish metropolitan areas and smaller municipalities could be a way to lower air pollution levels and CO₂ emissions. A transformation into a more environmentally friendly transport system could thus also be a way to improve the current state of play as already foreseen in the Vision 2050 and Focus 2030 strategies. Moreover, in a region of close interconnected centres of economic activity such as Flanders, where commuting flows connect various parts of the region, local policies cannot stop at the border of each municipality. Instead, the circumstances in Flanders call for a functional approach to several policies, based on where people work and live rather than mere administrative boundaries, in order to foster co-operation between neighbouring municipalities. The SDGs can play a crucial role for such partnerships, providing municipalities with common targets and guidelines that facilitate both communication and policy co-ordination among municipalities, *inter alia* in the area of transportation. They can also act as a means to engage and collaborate with the private sector.

Climate scenarios for Flanders point to a rise in temperature that will shift energy demands and consumption. Temperatures and the change in cooling days in Flanders are already on the rise as shown in the previous section. This issue will become even more relevant in the future, as it is estimated that in the period 2071-2100, the winter temperature in Flanders will increase by 1.5°C to 4.4°C and the summer temperature by 2.4°C to 7.2°C, compared with the period 1961-90 (National Climate Commission Belgium,

2016^[11]). Thus, summers will have many more hot days than in the period 1961-90. In fact, the annual and seasonal temperatures and the frequency of heatwaves have already increased significantly since the 1990s. The rising temperatures might cause an increase in energy demand (particularly for cooling) and thus impact Flanders' progress on SDG 7. In view of its current heavy reliance on fossil fuels, there are huge potentials for a reduction of Flanders' CO₂ emissions into the atmosphere, if the region manages to increase its renewable energy supply by further exploiting the potential solar panels, biomass and wind energy. Such a shift could also create synergies with SDGs 11 and 13 while mitigating the effects of rising temperatures and an increase in the seasonality of precipitation could lead to phenomena such as heat island effects, summer storms, whirlwinds and serious water shortages, causing disruptions in the Flemish economy and potentially increasing the number of fatalities (National Climate Commission Belgium, 2016^[11]).

Technological progress has thoroughly changed the society in Flanders and could help provide answers to challenges such as climate change, competitiveness and inclusiveness. With its high share in R&D employment and expenditure, its patent application rate above OECD average and the share of broadband Internet connections, Flanders is one of the frontrunners among OECD regions in technology and innovation. Industry 4.0 has been selected as one of its transition priorities and offers a potential to further strengthen the Flemish competitiveness. In particular, information and communication technology (ICT) applications can make existing processes or practices more efficient and generate environmental gains through digital rather than physical solutions, albeit also being a big energy consumer (ICT today accounts for 20% of the global energy use). Other technologies that could help overcome current challenges include the factory of the future (new production processes based on electronics, intelligent knowledge systems, automation and robotisation), which is considered a key element for Flanders to remain competitive with low-wage countries. Nanotechnology, which is already applied in the Flemish water treatment, alongside more efficient energy production, improved energy conversion and storage, and reduced material requirements and waste, can also contribute to strengthening the environmental dimension of the SDGs. Technological progress and new technologies also provide the opportunity to promote social inclusion for instance by accessibility to education through digital devices, improved healthcare or facilitated social participation of the disabled through new forms of mobility such as autonomous driving. However, the increased usage of technologies can also have potential negative impacts of an increased digital divide by gender, age, educational attainment and income, considering that in OECD countries, 32% of 55 to 65 year-olds have no computer experience or have failed core ICT tests, compared with 5% of 16 to 24 year-olds (OECD, 2019^[12]).

The circular economy is a means to create synergies between economic and environmental sustainability in Flanders. Implementing a circular economy is one of the key goals of the region of Flanders, which wants to further decouple economic growth from the consumption of raw materials and its environmental impact (Government of Flanders, 2019^[13]). It is among the policy objectives of Focus 2030 and was selected as the first transition priority in the region's Vision 2050. The Flemish waste management agency has set up a number of initiatives and projects on the circular economy, including on capacity building, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder engagement (OECD, forthcoming^[14]). Flanders' commitment to the circular economy provides the region with good pre-requisites to consolidate its position as a front-runner in a policy area of increasing importance and potential for economic growth. Achieving a circular economy would also create synergies with the environmental dimension of the SDGs with a positive impact on pollution levels (SDG 11), the use of resources (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13) and life below water (SDG 14) as well as life on land (SDG 15).

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Notes

¹ While a total of 135 indicators are available for the measurement of the SDGs in both regions and cities in OECD countries, the coverage varies depending on the type of geographical unit to which each indicator is associated. While 122 indicators (covering 59% of the SDG subnational targets) are available for regions, only 56 indicators (covering 32% of the SDG subnational targets) are currently available for cities. Although the set of indicators aims to cover the broad spectrum of all 17 SDGs, the coverage in terms of indicators also varies widely across SDGs.

² OECD (2017^[9]) benchmarks the Flemish region to similar “front-runners” used in the Flemish government’s own outlook from 2014. These include regions in Denmark, Finland, France (Midi-Pyrénées), Germany (Baden-Württemberg, Bayern), Greece (Attica/Athens), the Netherlands (Oost Nederland, West Nederland, Zuid Nederland), Poland (Pomorskie), Spain (Basque country), Sweden and the United Kingdom (North West England, East of England, South East England, South West England, Scotland).

3

The SDGs to strengthen multi-level governance for sustainability in Flanders and Belgium

While there has so far been no explicit co-ordination mechanism across levels of governments for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Belgium, Vision 2050 provides an innovative governance model inspired by transition management principles aimed at strengthening horizontal co-ordination and accelerating progress towards Flanders' priorities. The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) plays a key role in supporting Flemish cities and municipalities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, many of which are starting to use the SDGs to shape their policies and engage with civil society. Flemish public institutions also seek to drive markets towards sustainability through sustainable public procurement. Private companies have also started to incorporate the SDGs into their core business, supported by Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VOKA) Charter for Sustainable Entrepreneurship.

A multi-level governance framework to implement the SDGs in Flanders, Belgium

Co-ordination mechanisms for the SDGs across levels of governments could be strengthened

In Belgium, all governments must pursue sustainable development as a general policy objective, as granted by the Belgian Constitution (Article 7a), which states that: *“in the exercise of their respective competences, the federal state, communities and regions pursue the objectives of sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental dimensions, taking into account intergenerational solidarity”*. This article of the constitution was adopted in 2007, following a long tradition of sustainable development in Belgium. Against this background, each government develops its own strategy for sustainable development. While information sharing, whereby different actors keep each other updated about their respective strategies, is a common practice, there is limited harmonisation between governments on the content of the strategies (e.g. shared goals or activities). Information sharing mainly takes place through existing structures such as the inter-ministerial committees and the consultation committee.

There is so far no explicit co-ordination mechanism for the implementation of the SDGs in Belgium. However, co-ordination of activities related to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs take place through institutional bodies that were already in place prior to the development of the 2030 Agenda, such as the Inter-Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Development (IMCSD) that co-ordinates the different governments' sustainable development policies within Belgium, including the development of the national strategy on sustainable development. IMCSD also co-ordinates the internal dimension of the Voluntary National Review (VNR), which encompasses the process to develop it and its promotion within the country. A body called COORMULTI co-ordinates the Belgian position vis-à-vis United Nations (UN) organisations, including the VNR's presentation to the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). Finally, the Directorate-General for European Affairs (DGE) co-ordinates input to European Union (EU) institutions.

In the Belgian context, co-ordination between federal and regional levels, including the harmonisation of indicators at all levels, is challenging. One key reason for this is that each government has its own strategies and set of goals linked to its own competencies. This means that strategies are not necessarily co-ordinated or aligned, even if regular updates are provided across different governments. The first Belgian VNR preparation, co-ordinated through the Inter-ministerial Conference for Sustainable Development, involved federal and regional governments but, to a lesser extent, municipalities.

Comparable data and indicators across levels of government would help to better align priorities and reporting in Belgium. Both the regional and local governments already draw inspiration from UN and Eurostat indicators for their plans and strategies. Moving forward, a system of complementary indicators is envisaged. Monitoring of the Focus 2030 indicators will take place at the department level in the Flemish government, with different departments responsible for identifying and monitoring indicators relevant to their domains, while municipalities are also developing their own frameworks. The need for enhanced co-ordination is acknowledged and there is a willingness for municipalities to be more actively involved in the work with indicators at all levels. To date, it is unclear what will be expected from municipalities by higher levels of governments when it comes to reporting on the SDGs. For this reason, greater involvement of municipalities in national and regional SDGs processes is also required by decree.

Another actor in the field of multi-level governance is the Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP). Through its participation in stakeholder meetings regarding the Focus 2030 strategy, VVP informed the provinces about the strategy and consulted them about the 2030 goals for Flanders. VVP also organises regular meetings where the representatives of local governments, provinces and the Flemish government come together to discuss policies, initiatives and actions related to the 2030 Agenda.

A new governance model for Flanders inspired by transition management principles

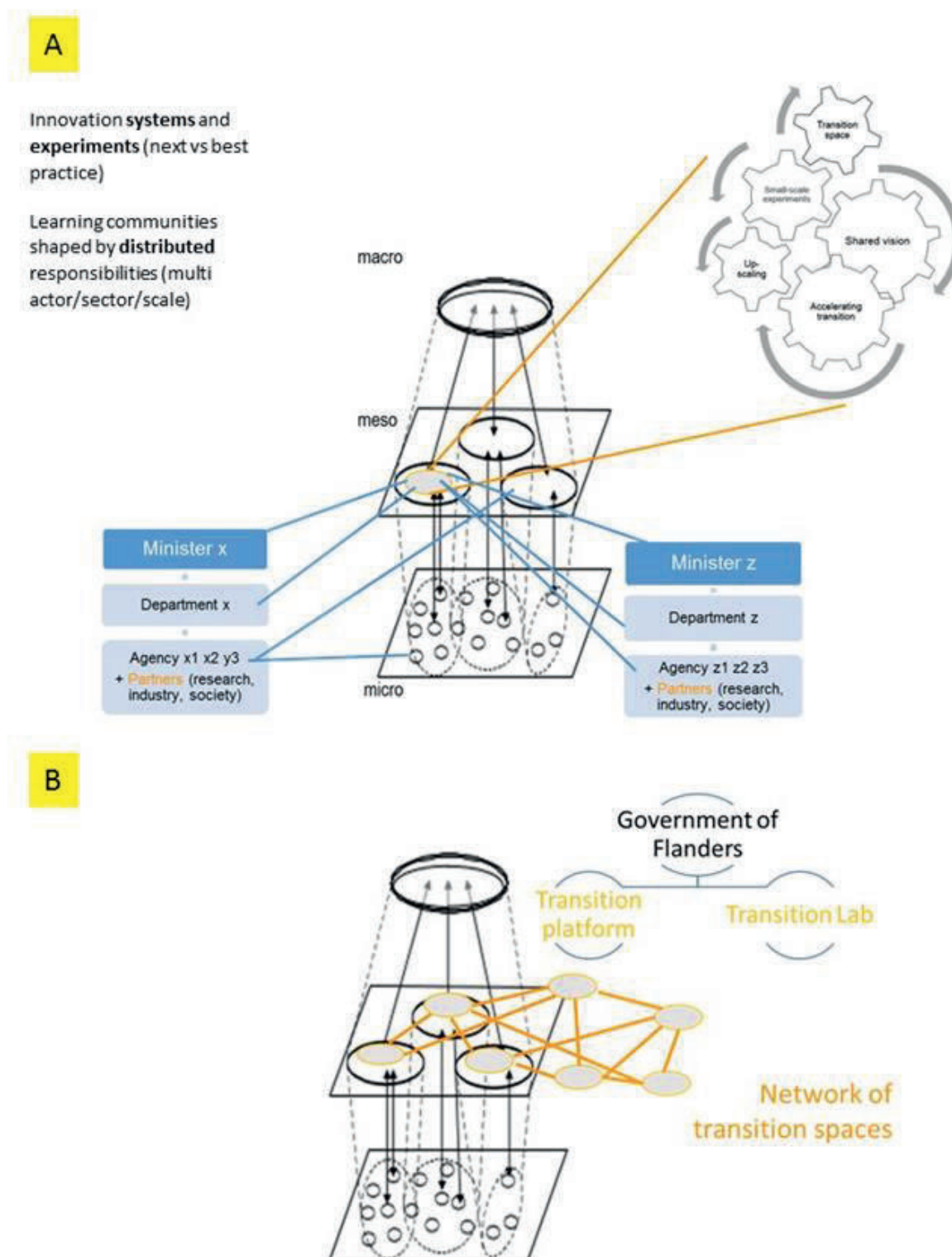
While the development of future-oriented visions to strengthen policy coherence has been common practice in Flanders for over 25 years, Vision 2050 provides a new and innovative governance model aimed at accelerating progress towards the seven transition priorities included in the vision. Contrary to previous long-term visions, Vision 2050 is the guiding policy for all sectoral policies implemented through seven concrete transitions processes: i) circular economy; ii) smart living; iii) industry 4.0; iv) lifelong learning; v) caring and living tougher in 2050; vi) mobility, and vii) energy. The new model thus seeks to enhance the horizontal co-operation between policy domains based on the involvement of relevant stakeholders.

To implement Vision 2050 and promote synergies among policy sectors, the Government of Flanders experimented with a new governance model inspired by transition management principles. These principles focus on system innovation, taking into account a long-term perspective, involving stakeholders in the transition process and learning from experiments and innovative initiatives. The model is organised around “transition spaces” (Figure 3.1). Each transition space encompasses partnerships, platforms (online and offline), learning communities and experiments that are created around the transitions. Beyond that, there is a number of relevant actors in each transition space, which are the transition manager, the responsible ministers and external stakeholders. Together, the transition spaces form a network that connects the micro-level (multi-stakeholder partners) with the macro-level (the Flemish government, the private sector, civil society, etc.). Various sources and studies have been used as an inspiration for the design of this governance model. Sterling (2015^[1]), for instance, places a strong emphasis on public participation and accountability in innovation, allowing for multiple and diverse innovation pathways to emerge while avoiding technological “lock-in” where few interests dominate the innovation space. The model also builds on findings from evaluations of previous sustainability strategies and research by the Flemish Policy Research Centre on Sustainable Development, as well as work by Jan Rotmans, a frontrunner scholar in transition management. By experimenting with innovation systems, the government aimed to identify the “next” state-of-the-art practices rather than good practices.

One of the most advanced experiments within the new governance model is the transition process Circular Flanders¹ - a multi-stakeholder partnership that promotes circular economy. Circular Flanders is a partnership of public authorities, including the Flemish Environment Agency, companies, civil society and knowledge actors, created in 2016 (OECD, forthcoming^[2]). One example of an initiative developed by Circular Flanders is the Green Deal Circular Procurement, a public-private learning network to help speed up the transition to a circular economy through public procurement. In 2017, when the project was launched, 52 facilitators (government departments, employer organisations, research institutes, private companies, financial institutions and civil society organisations among others) from Circular Flanders connected 101 buyers to around 150-200 circular economy projects. Circular Flanders estimates a market potential for the circular economy of EUR 1.3 billion in public procurement alone.

The Flemish Housing Agency and its partners are also experimenting with transition management principles to involve the private sector in addressing Flanders' priority transition Smart Living. Their work on Smart Living focuses on developing sustainable neighbourhoods that are conducive to sustainable lifestyle choices (e.g. living and working in the same neighbourhood) while experimenting with new private financing mechanisms to increase the availability of affordable housing.

Figure 3.1. Flanders' new governance model



Source: OECD elaboration based on Department for Public Governance and the Chancellery (2018_[3]), *Vision 2050: A Long-term Strategy for Flanders*, https://do.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20181127_Vision2050.pptx.

The role of the strategic advisory councils for the 2030 Agenda in Flanders

Strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement is not a new feature of Flemish policymaking. There is a long history of strategic advisory councils at both federal, regional and local government levels. Currently, there are nine strategic advisory councils that provide independent advice to governments on policy issues under different thematic policy areas.² Their members are from academia, private sector and NGOs. Their advice is provided either on the request of the Flemish government or on their own initiative.

Advisory councils were officially requested to input into the Vision 2050 and Focus 2030 strategies. In addition, there are advisory councils for specific groups, such as the Women's Council, the Youth Council and the Council for the Elderly, and the Advisory Council for Innovation and Enterprise. Some of the most active councils in the 2030 Agenda are the Social-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV), the Flemish Environmental and Nature Council (Minaraad) and the Strategic Advisory Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (SALV). The Flemish Youth Council has also been active in stakeholder consultations about Focus 2030.

SERV, the main advisory body to the Flemish government on socio-economic policies, has developed the joint Pact 2020 with the Flemish government, with 20 goals for 2020. The goals focus on increasing welfare, well-being and quality of life, strengthening labour markets and making the government apparatus efficient. SERV has also drafted what is called a "platform text 2030" that outlines guidelines for the policy areas of the economy, labour market, education, energy and social policy, aimed to help achieve both the 2020 Pact targets and the Vision 2050. In its advice on the draft of the Focus 2030 strategy in April 2018, the council expressed the concern that pre-existing commitments were not sufficiently taken into account in the formulation of the Focus 2030 target framework, and that some targets remained too vaguely defined. SERV also pointed to the need to better link the targets of the Focus 2030 strategy with other long-term plans, such as the Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030, the Flanders Space Policy Plan, the Mobility Plan, the Air Plan and the Housing Policy Plan, as well as to the European 2030 strategy.

The Flemish Environmental and Nature Council raised some remarks regarding the level of ambition in the Focus 2030 targets, especially those concerning the environment, and stressed the fact that other long-term plans, for example for climate, have not been sufficiently incorporated in Focus 2030. This remark was also echoed in the advice provided by SALV in the Focus 2030 consultation and is expected to be addressed once the other long-term plans are approved and adopted. The Flemish government approved the Flemish Climate and Energy plan in December 2019, whose targets are linked to Focus 2030.

VVSG support to Flemish cities and municipalities in the 2030 Agenda

VVSG plays a key role in strengthening capacities among cities and municipalities on a wide range of policy areas, including the 2030 Agenda. Through its Team International, VVSG has been supporting the localisation of the SDGs since 2015, including by developing knowledge and communication products explaining the SDGs, as well as advocacy tools such as the Declaration of Commitment towards the SDGs that has been signed by local politicians since 2016. VVSG is further promoting local ownership by showing how the SDGs can offer a good framework to fulfil the main mandate of municipalities, as formulated in Article 2 of the Municipal Decree (*Decreet Lokaal Bestuur*). The article states that all municipalities and Public Centres for Social Welfare (located in municipalities) are to "sustainably" contribute to their citizens' well-being. In that context, VVSG's vision is one of systemic change rather than the consideration of the SDGs as a window-dressing opportunity for municipalities.

From 2017 to 2019 VVSG coordinated an SDG pilot project aiming to experiment with the integration of the SDGs in local policies and promote coherence for sustainable development. Throughout the project, VVSG provided intensive support to the first group of 20 municipalities located in different areas of the region, having different population sizes and level or experience with the SDGs. The project has three main tracks designed to move towards a coherent, integrated and broad-based policy on sustainable

development: i) communication and awareness-raising; ii) politics (advocacy and awareness-raising for elected council members); and iii) policy planning.

Together with the 20 pilot municipalities, VVSG develops practical tools and guidelines to integrate the SDGs into local policy. These are promoted and disseminated to all Flemish municipalities. Due to different local contexts, priorities and levels of ambition, there is no one-size-fits-all approach or common roadmap for all municipalities. Instead, they develop different scenarios for localising the SDGs, for instance through the mandatory local context analysis, which gives an overview of the current state of affairs in the municipality with regard to, amongst others, demography, economy, and social and technological features. Taking the diversity of municipalities into account, VVSG developed recommendations based on five scenarios, ranging from a basic integration through the creation of an SDGs register at the end of the context analysis – to a throughout integration of the SDGs by structuring the entire context analysis around the 17 SDGs or 5 pillars of sustainable development. VVSG is also active in promoting SDG checks for new policies or project in municipalities, which includes the analysis of possible positive and negative impacts of new policies and potential spillover effects across goals. VVSG has also developed an inspirational guide to integrating the SDGs into policy planning. Finally, VVSG is also supporting municipalities in monitoring progress towards the SDGs, by developing amongst others a catalogue of indicators. The project also contributed to multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance of the SDGs through its advisory board. The board met twice a year to provide feedback to the pilot projects and consisted of external experts from organisations such as VOKA, 11.11.11, the province of Antwerp, VNG International and the Flemish government, as well as VVSG experts.

Prior to the local elections in October 2018, VVSG produced a set of recommendations for local political parties on how to integrate the SDGs in their party manifestos. In addition, the association provided orientation sessions for all newly elected councillors. As a way to stimulate political commitment, participants could choose to be photographed with the SDG(s) that they wish to prioritise in their municipality. In view of regional, federal and European elections in May 2019, VVSG drafted a memorandum with “municipal demands” that used the SDGs as a visionary compass and international framework put forward to regional and national governments. The memorandum consisted of demands related to nine relevant strategic topics (e.g. municipal finance, climate, smart cities, etc.) and a tenth demand on sustainability as a cross-cutting area.

As of early 2019, VVSG considered having reached around 180 of the 300 Flemish municipalities in their work on supporting the localisation of the SDGs. Through the experiences of the municipalities, VVSG identified specific challenges and opportunities regarding the 2030 Agenda and the localisation of the SDGs. For example, while many actors have started to map existing policies against the SDGs and raise awareness, additional efforts are needed when it comes to developing integrated and holistic policies across different policy areas based on the SDGs. In that regard, the transformative potential of the SDGs is not yet fully captured in many strategies. A key challenge moving forward will be to reach those cities and municipalities that are currently less active, considering that the first 20 pilots tended to be frontrunners.

Box 3.1. Promoting synergies through the SDG Circle Exercise

During their workshops to raise awareness of the SDGs in cities and municipalities, VVSG often uses the so-called SDG Circle Exercise (Figure 3.2). The idea behind the exercise is to visualise how the SDGs can be linked to existing policies, plans and internal operations of the municipality, as well as to regional, national and global agendas. Furthermore, the Circle Exercise invites municipalities to think about future activities to enhance their contribution to the SDGs.

To carry out the exercise, the main participant (municipal council, service office, project, etc.) is at the core of the SDGs circle, with all the SDGs surrounding it. The first step is to put existing projects and initiatives in the section(s) of the circle corresponding to the SDG(s) to which they are linked. The participants are then asked to think about ways in which the existing projects could become “SDG-proof” or which additional measures could be taken to enhance the municipality’s contribution towards the SDGs. VVSG uses two versions of the circle. One has three layers where the projects can be linked with the internal, local and global level (Figure 3.2), while the other version only includes the core and the SDGs. The three different levels require considering how projects contribute to the SDGs internally (e.g. human resources [HR], office buildings, procurement policy) and externally towards actors in the municipality (local policy) and globally (global policy).

The Circle Exercise has become a popular tool used by many actors in Flanders, such as the strategic advisory councils, government agencies, provinces and municipalities. Two examples are the municipality of Balen and the city of Harelbeke, which have used the tool to raise awareness and to generate inputs to the context analysis carried out as part of the preparations for the next multi-annual policy plan.

Figure 3.2. Game Board 17 SDGs: Core theme and the 3 levels of the Circle Exercise



Source: VVSG (2019^[41]), *SDG-cirkeloefening (SDG circle exercise)*, <https://www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/sdg-cirkeloefening>.

The SDGs as a tool to engage the private sector and civil society

The private sector is engaging with the SDGs in Flanders

Private sector actors in Flanders (and in Belgium at large) are incorporating sustainability into their core business. In 2018, the jury of the Belgian Sustainability Reporting Award organised by the Institute of Registered Auditors (IBR-IRE) since 2009 noticed a new trend, with companies taking a more strategic view on sustainability. The top-performing companies assessed by the jury were observed to “articulate a broader understanding of the sustainability impacts of their operations as well as impacts up and down their value chain”. The jury also took into account how the sustainability reports in the 2018 edition incorporated the SDGs (Institute of Registered Auditors, 2018^[5]).

The Government of Flanders has set up an incentive scheme to de-risk investments towards more sustainable cleantech energy technologies. The Government of Flanders is using, for instance, a guarantee scheme for businesses in the geothermal sector to invest in projects on clean-tech energy technologies. If it turns out after drilling that the estimated energy production is not achieved, the government can pay back some of the costs. The companies contribute to the scheme by paying a premium. The latter helps to deal with the significant investment required for drilling for geothermal resources by lowering the risks of such investments (Box 3.2)

Box 3.2. VITO's geothermal energy project pilot

The Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO), a research and technology organisation in the area of cleantech and sustainable development, has developed the first large-scale deep geothermal energy project in Flanders. After about a decade of research and pilot projects, VITO completed its first geothermal power plant at the Balmatt site in Mol, Antwerp province. The installation pumps up hot water from between 3 000 and 4 000 metres below ground, extracts its heat and re-injects the water back into the underground. The project's total cost was at around EUR 30 million (of which EUR 15 million for the drilling) and was funded by Vito and the Government of Flanders. The project inspired local and multinational private enterprises to invest in the further exploitation of geothermal energy in this region of Belgium.

Many private companies are using the guidelines provided by the SDGs framework to go beyond “green-washing”. This has also witnessed good practices emerging in light of the 2030 Agenda. For instance, the General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (CGSLB-ACLVB) assessed that private companies are using social dialogue to contribute to the SDGs instead of using the SDGs only as a marketing tool. The Antwerp World Diamond Center, another important private sector actor in Flanders, analysed that the SDG framework provides companies and governments with a set of guidelines on which they can set their sustainability agenda and avoid what the company refers to as “rainbow-washing”. There are further local examples of businesses that provide solutions for the SDGs, such as the co-operative EnerGent, which was launched in 2013 by a group of residents living in the Macharius neighbourhood. Since its foundation, EnerGent, with its 800 local members, accounted for the installation of around one-third of all new solar panels installed in the city of Ghent.

The VOKA Charter for Sustainable Entrepreneurship (VCDO)

Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VOKA) has made relevant efforts to integrate the SDGs into its own governance, as well as into its support to Flemish businesses and entrepreneurship. Established in 2004, VOKA brings together 8 Flemish Chambers of Commerce and represents more than

18 000 businesses (corresponding to 65% of private sector employment in Flanders). Recently, VOKA reworked its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Charter to base it on the SDGs. The chamber also created the VOKA Charter for Sustainable Entrepreneurship in collaboration with CIFAL Flanders (*Centre international de formation des autorités et leaders*), another active player supporting both private and public institutions to implement the SDGs in the region. For example, CIFAL Flanders has supported both local governments (e.g. provinces) and government agencies in developing sustainability strategies using the SDG Circle Exercise (Figure 3.2)

The VOKA Charter offers companies the opportunity to work on sustainable entrepreneurship using an action plan based on the SDGs. Each company that subscribes to the charter commits to: i) proactively integrating sustainable entrepreneurship in its policy; ii) setting objectives and concrete actions that fit in with the SDGs; iii) reporting on results achieved to an expert evaluation committee; and iv) communicating externally about completed actions. Every year, members of the charter have to prove to an expert evaluation committee that they have successfully implemented at least ten actions defined in their action plan. If a company has implemented at least one action per SDG for three consecutive years, it can further receive an international UN certificate. There are currently 150 Flemish companies and organisations participating in the VOKA Charter.

Using public procurement to influence business behaviour

In Flanders, public institutions seek to drive markets towards sustainability through sustainable public procurement. Both the Flemish government and municipalities apply sustainable public procurement (SPP) practices to ensure that public spending helps to support responsible business conduct that promotes social and environmental goals (Boxes 3.3 and 3.4). The Flemish government has been working on SPP since 2008 when the region designed its first action plan. In January 2016, a plan for a co-ordinated policy for public procurement was adopted, aiming for effective and efficient use of public procurement to contribute to the achievement of all policy objectives. The strategic goals of the Public Procurement Plan 2016-2020 are in line with the six priorities of the recent European Commission initiative on public procurement (European Commission, 2017^[6]) and include: i) professionalisation of public procurement; ii) increasing sustainable and innovative procurement; iii) increasing small- and medium- sized enterprises (SME) participation in public procurement; iv) achieving end-to-end e-procurement; v) enhancing integrity in public procurement; and vi) using procurement as a tool for strategic projects. The Government of Flanders also supports local authorities through opening up its framework agreements, including by providing model tenders and specifications and by co-financing the SPP Helpdesk for local governments, hosted by VVSG.

Box 3.3. Sustainable facility management in the Agency for Facility Operations of the Flemish government

A good practice example from the Agency for Facility Operations of the Flemish government

The Agency for Facility Operations of the Flemish government aims to be a pioneer in sustainable facility management. The department is responsible for the provision of a wide range of works, goods and services for the Flemish administration, including information and communication technology (ICT), real estate, housing and workplace design, catering, cleaning, procurement, logistics and information management. The Herman Teirlinck office building, the main seat of the Flemish government, is the largest passive office complex in Belgium and is a symbol for the Flemish government's commitment to leading by example.

The agency also has its own sustainability strategy based on the SDGs, developed with support from CIFAL Flanders, looking at how to integrate the SDGs in all aspects of its business from internal

operations to the global impact. The agency recognises the need to go beyond a business-as-usual approach to translate the political agenda into actions for sustainable facility management within the Flemish government. One of its guiding principles is to strengthen co-operation within the supply chain of products and services in order to seek innovative solutions to meet future challenges regarding its facility operations. It further seeks to stimulate a circular economy, for instance through concrete measures implemented in public procurement procedures, to facilitate access by SMEs. Furthermore, some framework agreements are partly conceived as partnerships in which the contractor and contracting authority co-operate to realise certain sustainability goals. Finally, the agency regularly uses competitive procedures that include negotiations to optimise the offers from a sustainability point of view. In 2018, the agency won the European Procura+ Awards recognising the outstanding environmental, social and economic impacts of the procurement.

Box 3.4. The Promoting Socially Responsible Work Wear project

A toolbox for sustainable procurement by VVSG and the city of Ghent

The toolbox for sustainable procurement was developed through a collaboration between VVSG and the city of Ghent, as well as The Global Picture, an advisory firm working on sustainable and circular procurement, with support from the EU Platforma project and the Flemish government and released in 2018. It aims to help institutional buyers (governments, hospitals, inter-municipal associations and municipalities) to apply sustainable procurement practices. The toolbox promotes practices that go beyond only looking at product specifications (e.g. organic cotton) and, instead, targeting “socially responsible supply chain management”. This means that the supplier at least respects International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, national employment conditions and human rights in its production and further pays living wages to workers. The toolbox guides its users through principles of socially responsible supply chain management and the different means of verification and proof available for purchasers and suppliers in the specification of the tender and during the execution of the contract.

The development of the toolbox included analyses of existing good practices in Flanders and federal government institutions, as well as of existing market instruments (labels) and practices. It also considered how EU procurement legislation can be interpreted to allow for the integration of socially responsible chain management in public procurement. The study found that sustainable chain management is a fairly new and evolving field. The toolbox thus takes a learning-by-doing approach. In practice, this means that the key goal is to urge suppliers to gradually improve their chain management rather than providing proof upfront in the tender proposal, which is reflected in the main principles of the toolbox, namely that: i) each tenderer has the same access to the contract: everyone can register, regardless of how much effort has already been undertaken in the field of socially responsible chain management; and ii) each tenderer engages in a process of continuous improvement in the field of socially responsible chain management. Accordingly, the tenderer does not need to provide evidence of practices before the start of the contract; however, they must commit to doing so once the contract is signed and then report within a set time period after the signature.

The toolbox guide describes how the city of Ghent used the toolbox in its framework agreement for purchasing workwear, linen, work shoes, gloves and other protective equipment, seeking to ensure that all purchased products are produced in a socially responsible manner. Since the products have very different supply chains, they were divided into five different lots. In the lot for sustainable workwear, the city applied additional sustainability criteria including end-of-life and CO₂ efficiency in delivery.

The guide constitutes a good practical example of how public purchasing power can influence market behaviours and engage with private sector actors in the 2030 Agenda. At the same time, this endeavour allows the city of Ghent to address several SDGs simultaneously (notably SDGs 8, 12 and 17).

Source: VVSG & the City of Ghent (2018^[7]), *Toolbox Socially Responsible Workwear – A Guide for Public Purchasers*, <http://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Toolbox-VVSG-EN.pdf>.

Using the SDGs as an engagement and awareness-raising tool for citizens and youth

Civil society plays an active role in the SDGs in Belgium and Flanders. This can be witnessed for example through the SDG Voices campaign organised by the Federal Institute of Sustainable Development (FIDO) and The Shift (a network organisation with members from around 250 companies, NGOs and other organisations). Inspired by the appointment of SDG advocates by the UN at global level, the Belgian SDG Voices campaign nominates six organisations every year – private, public and non-governmental – to spread awareness about the SDGs to Belgian citizens. In 2017, three of the eight ambassadors were NGOs active in Flanders, including for instance 11.11.11, an important civil society coalition in Flanders that advocates for the implementation of the SDGs (Box 3.5). Municipalities have also been actively engaging with civil society and local citizen through different campaigns, like for example the sustainable municipality week in 2018, 2019 and 2020 organised by VVSG.

Box 3.5. Perspective 2030: A civil-society-led nationwide campaign

Perspective 2030 is a nationwide campaign co-ordinated by the two civil society coalitions 11.11.11 (Flemish organisations) and CNCD-11.11.11 (French and German-speaking organisations). It includes a wide range of civil society partners such as NGOs, trade unions, strategic advisory councils and international organisations. The main goal of the campaign is to make sure that politicians at all levels (local, regional, national) live up to their commitment to implement the SDGs and include the goals in all their policies.

Following the first VNR presented by Belgium in 2017, Perspective 2030 made the following proposal to step up all governments' efforts to implement the SDGs:

1. Include the SDGs in the Belgian legislation and budget, making it mandatory to check whether expenses are in line with the SDGs.
2. Establish a mechanism to check if and how efficiently the SDGs are implemented, with enhanced involvement of the civil society in the monitoring process. In this regard, Perspective 2030 urges all the Belgian governments to work together to set up a National Commission for Sustainable Development.
3. Provide sufficient financial resources to implement the SDGs. In particular, Perspective 2030 requests the Belgian government to live up to the commitment of 0.7 % of the gross national income (GNI) to be spent on development co-operation.

Perspective 2030 calls for a clear change of status quo, for example ceasing government support for energy provision using fossil fuels and levying taxes on flight tickets and carbon emissions.

Source: Platform 2030 (2017^[8]), Programme 2030 pour le Développement Durable: Les Trois Recommandations de la Société Civile Belge, https://www.cncd.be/IMG/pdf/perspective2030_-_recommandations_-_fr_et_nl.pdf (accessed on 14 January 2019).

Many Flemish municipalities are using the SDGs to engage with their citizens in innovative ways in order to raise awareness about the 2030 Agenda. For example, in 2017, the city of Ghent was selected as one of the first ambassadors for the national SDG Voices campaign, organised by the Federal Institute for Sustainable Development and the network organisation The Shift. As part of their campaign work, the city of Ghent organised “friendly competitions” where it challenged neighbouring cities to come up with innovative solutions to trigger behaviour change around issues of poverty, hunger, health, education and gender equality (SDGs 1 to 5). The city of Genk, for instance, was challenged to take pictures with the slogan “everybody is a feminist” to raise awareness on SDG 5. One of the highlights arising from this challenge were pictures taken during a football match between the cities of Ghent and Genk, where football fans held signs with the slogan and started to talk about feminism. The rationale behind this approach was that communicating the SDGs “as SDGs” would only reach traditional stakeholders, whereas presenting them in a football arena would reach an entirely new audience. Other successful challenges included the competition with the city of Sint-Niklaas (SDG 2) on having as many participants as possible in the “40 days without meat” campaign, and the Ghent-Liege school “marathon” challenge (SDG 4), which involved organising lessons in as many locations outside the school as possible. Over 84 organisations (e.g. local businesses and NGOs) opened up their doors to host school lessons in and around Ghent. The city’s participation in the SDG Voices campaign led to both local, national and international results. Many local citizens became acquainted with the SDGs, participating either physically (6 000 people) or online. Ghent also won the UN SDGs Action Award for communication and saw a multiplication of positive reactions and new initiatives forming locally, such as the citizen-led proposal to have a plastic-free month in the city for example.

Flemish municipalities are further involving youth in the work in SDGs. For instance, the city of Harelbeke supported setting up a junior council and took an innovative approach to engaging local citizens and children in solving urban issues already before the 2030 Agenda (Box 3.6). Together with local businesses and volunteers, the city of Ghent created an educational offer consisting of an interactive workshop for children between 6 and 10 years old, which describes the problem of water pollution in Bangladesh. A workshop on the usage of plastic was subsequently made available for teachers to be used as an additional pedagogical tool to teach sustainability.

Box 3.6. Involving youth in the 2030 Agenda – The High Five initiative in Harelbeke

Improving the air quality around the school environment

In 2018, the municipality of Harelbeke started the so-called High Five initiative out of the recognition that traffic congestion at drop-off and pick-up times led to poor air quality around schools. Through the science project *Curieuzeneuzen* (Curiosities) by the Flemish Environment Agency, local air quality measured by local citizens is reported to an online portal, which is used for the project.

The city decided to involve students and their families in reducing traffic congestion and shifting towards a more sustainable local mobility. By investigating where students live around their schools and analysing the optimal travel routes by walking or cycling, yellow poles were placed along the optimal routes as “check-in” points. Each student participating in the initiative got a special bracelet with an identification number and was registered on the High Five online platform. By giving a “high five” to the yellow check-in poles, students collect points on the online portal and get rewarded for their sustainable travel choice. The web portal also shows fuel savings and CO₂ reductions from each trip made by cycling or walking compared to by car.

VVSG was selected as one of Belgium's six SDG Voices in 2018, which led to the organisation of the Week of the Sustainable Municipality. The week aims to give a "human face" to the SDGs by showcasing local heroes contributing to the SDGs (e.g. citizens, schools, companies, associations). In 2018, 80 municipalities participated in the campaign, appointing over 650 local heroes. In 2019, the numbers increased to 95 municipalities and 700 local heroes, while the 2020 edition registered 86 participating municipalities. The week also provides a great opportunity to connect with national and global level campaigns, including "ACT4SDGS" by the United Nations. The initiative gains a lot of attention in both traditional and social media. The third edition in 2020 focuses on the topic of "corona heroes". Based on its awareness-raising experiences, VVSG has published a catalogue with 50 practical examples related to the SDGs for cities and municipalities. The association also regularly publishes articles and holds thematic sessions on the SDGs with different municipalities.

The Flemish Youth Council has also been an active voice in the SDGs. In 2018, its members (together with the Wallonia youth council) represented the Belgian youth delegation at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York, where one of the council's delegates gave a speech about the involvement of the youth council in the national VNR process, delivering a message to policymakers to "stop thinking of youth as the future and start thinking of youth as actors of today" (Van Hoyweghen, 2018^[9]).

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Notes

¹ See <https://vlaanderen-circulair.be/en>.

² The nine strategic advisory councils are: Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV), Flemish Education Council (Vlor), Strategic Advisory Council on Welfare, Health and Family (SAR WGG), Strategic Advisory Council for Culture, Youth, Sport and Media (SARC), Strategic Advisory Council on Agriculture and Fisheries (SALV), Mobility Council (MORA), Social-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV), the Flemish Environmental and Nature Council (Minaraad), Strategic Advisory Board for Spatial Planning and Immovable Heritage (SARO), Flemish Housing Council.

4 Policy recommendations and action plan

This chapter suggests policy recommendations to enhance the territorial approach to the SDGs in the region of Flanders, Belgium, and tackle challenges that hinder sustainable development. The recommendations span from enhancing strategic alignment between federal, regional, provincial and municipal sustainable development strategies to ensuring the development of coherent SDGs indicator frameworks and reporting tools across levels of government, as well as continued support for cities and municipalities to implement the 2030 Agenda holistically. An action plan provides concrete and practical steps for implementing the recommendations, as well as inspirational examples from international practices.

Policy recommendations and action plan

Box 4.1. The OECD Checklist for Public Action to facilitate and uptake the implementation of the SDGs

The OECD Checklist for Public Action is directed to governments at all levels to facilitate the implementation of a territorial approach to the SDGs. The checklist provides action-oriented recommendations around five main categories:

- **Planning, policies and strategies:** Use the SDGs to define and shape local and regional development visions, strategies, plans and re-orient existing ones. Cities and regions should use the SDGs to address local challenges that require a holistic approach, such as clean forms of urban mobility, affordable housing, gender equality, access to green spaces, balanced urban development, clean water and sanitation, air quality, solid waste management, territorial inequalities, or service delivery.
- **Multi-level governance:** Use the SDGs as a framework to align policy priorities, incentives and objectives across all levels of governments as well as to manage trade-offs and promote synergies across policy areas. In particular, regions and cities should be engaged in the process of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to reflect progress at the subnational level and address regional disparities. Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) can also drive better multi-level governance of the SDGs and shed light on local initiatives.
- **Financing and budgeting:** Mainstream the SDGs in budgeting processes to ensure adequate resources are allocated for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to foster policy continuity across political cycles. Governments should allocate financial resources based on the identified place-based policy priorities and local challenges, and use the SDG framework to foster multi-sectoral programmes and priorities.
- **Data and information:** Leverage SDGs data and localised indicator systems to guide policies and actions for better people's lives, and to showcase the performance and positive stories of cities and regions. In particular, for more comprehensive assessment and policy responses, cities and regions should combine data and indicators at different scales, including administrative boundaries (unit for political and administrative action) and functional approaches (economic geography of where people live and work).
- **Engagement:** Use the SDGs as a vehicle to enhance accountability and transparency through engaging all territorial stakeholders, including civil society, citizens, youth, academia and private companies, in the policymaking process. Cities and regions should use a combination of various tools to engage local stakeholders, such as awareness-raising campaigns, networking opportunities but also de-risking investments in SDG solutions through grants or loans, as well as fiscal incentives for innovative solutions towards sustainability.

Source: OECD (2020^[1]), *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis Report*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e86fa715-en>.

Box 4.2. OECD Action Plan for a territorial approach to the SDGs in Flanders

The main objective of the action plan is to provide Flanders with a menu of options for the implementation of the OECD recommendations contained in the SDGs pilot case. The action plan sets out a series of specific actions aiming to support Flanders' implementation of the SDGs. In particular, it identifies:

- **Objectives:** The action plan presents a number of objectives for each of the recommendations, in terms of expected outcomes.
- **Practical steps:** The action plan includes a set of actions that can be useful in advancing towards the achievement of the objectives.
- **Possible champions and partners:** This section refers to the stakeholders, institutions or organisations that can play a (leading) role in the execution of the actions.
- **International experiences:** These experiences include relevant practices carried out in the field of localising the SDGs by cities, regions and national governments as well as international organisations that can serve as inspiration. These experiences are not expected to be implemented as such, but to provide the region/municipality with a set of examples for the design and development of the suggested actions.
- **Timeline:** To implement the recommendations efficiently, it is necessary to prioritise the recommendations within the short, medium and long term. These time scales are indicative and should be updated as actions are being implemented.

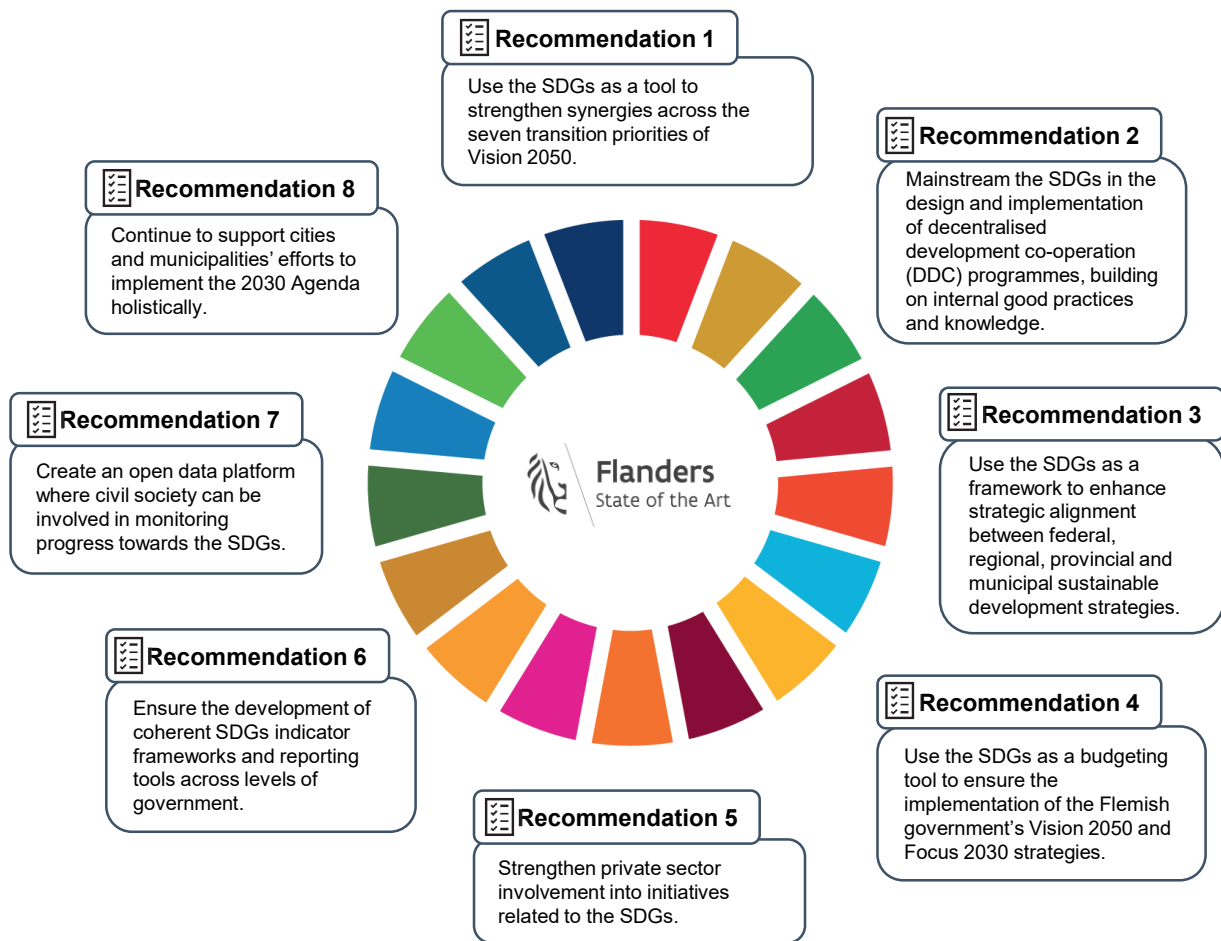
It is important to note that:

- *Actions are not compulsory or binding:* Identified actions address a variety of ways in which recommendations can be implemented and objectives achieved. They represent suggestions, whose adequacy and feasibility should be carefully evaluated by Flanders in an inclusive manner, involving stakeholders as appropriate. In turn, the combination of more than one action can be explored, if necessary.
- *Resources for implementation should be assessed:* The implementation of actions will require human, technical and financial resources. When prioritising and assessing the adequacy and feasibility of the suggested actions, the resources needed to implement them should be carefully evaluated, as well as the role of stakeholders that can contribute to the implementation phase.
- *The action plan is a dynamic tool:* It needs to be updated as actions start to be implemented and as new potential steps and objectives emerge.

Eight key recommendations for Flanders

The eight key recommendations and associated actions outlined in this chapter provide Flanders with strategic directions and a menu of options for the implementation of the OECD recommendations. While some measures constitute actions that the region can take in the short run, some require joint efforts with key stakeholders, from different levels of government, but also from civil society and the private sector. Importantly, Flanders could use the SDGs as an opportunity to enhance strategic alignment between the development strategies of the different levels of government and continue to support cities and municipalities to implement the 2030 Agenda holistically.

Figure 4.1. Eight key recommendations for a territorial approach to the SDGs in Flanders



Planning, policies and strategies

Figure 4.2. Action plan to use the SDGs to strengthen synergies across sustainability drivers in Flanders

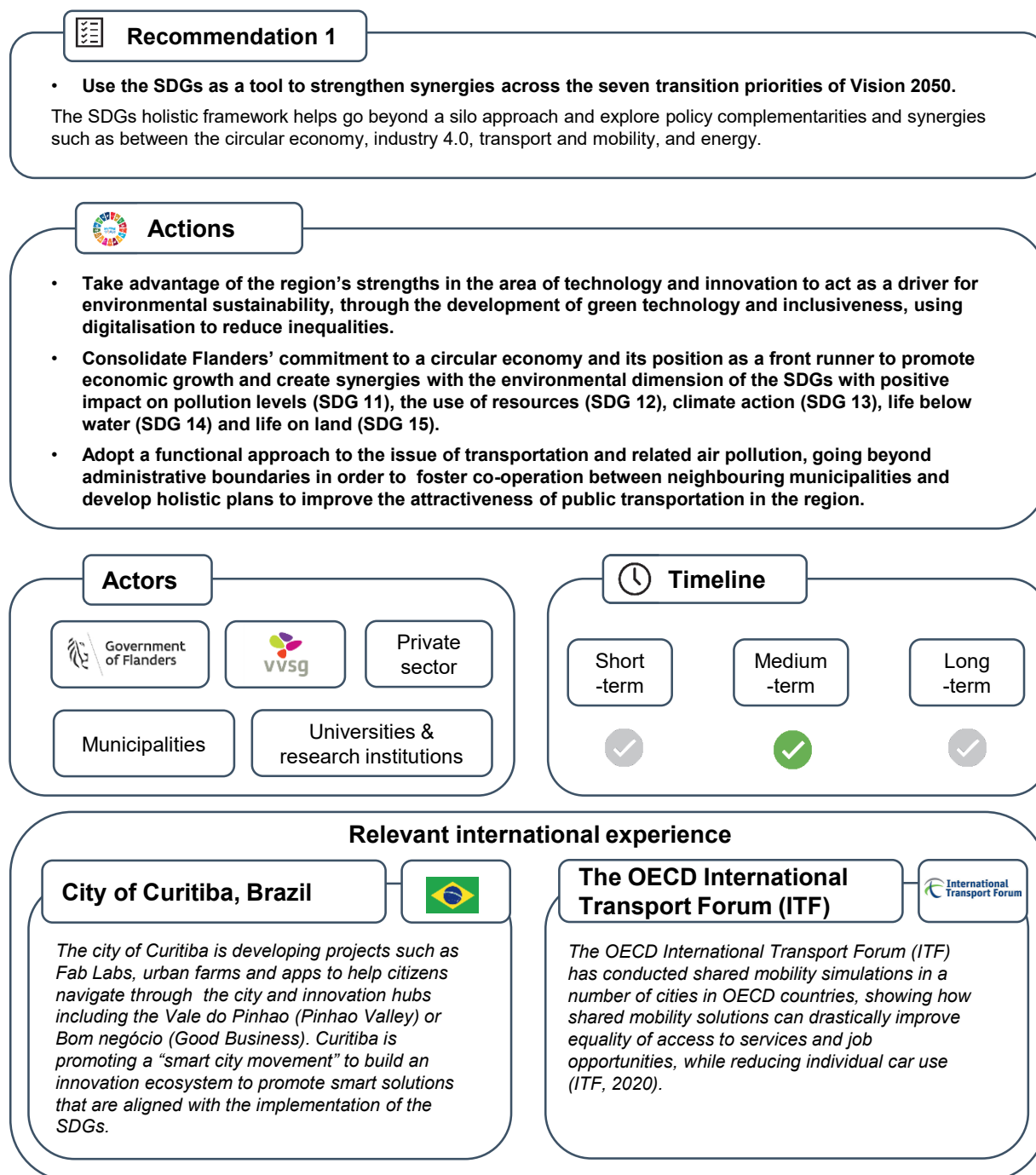
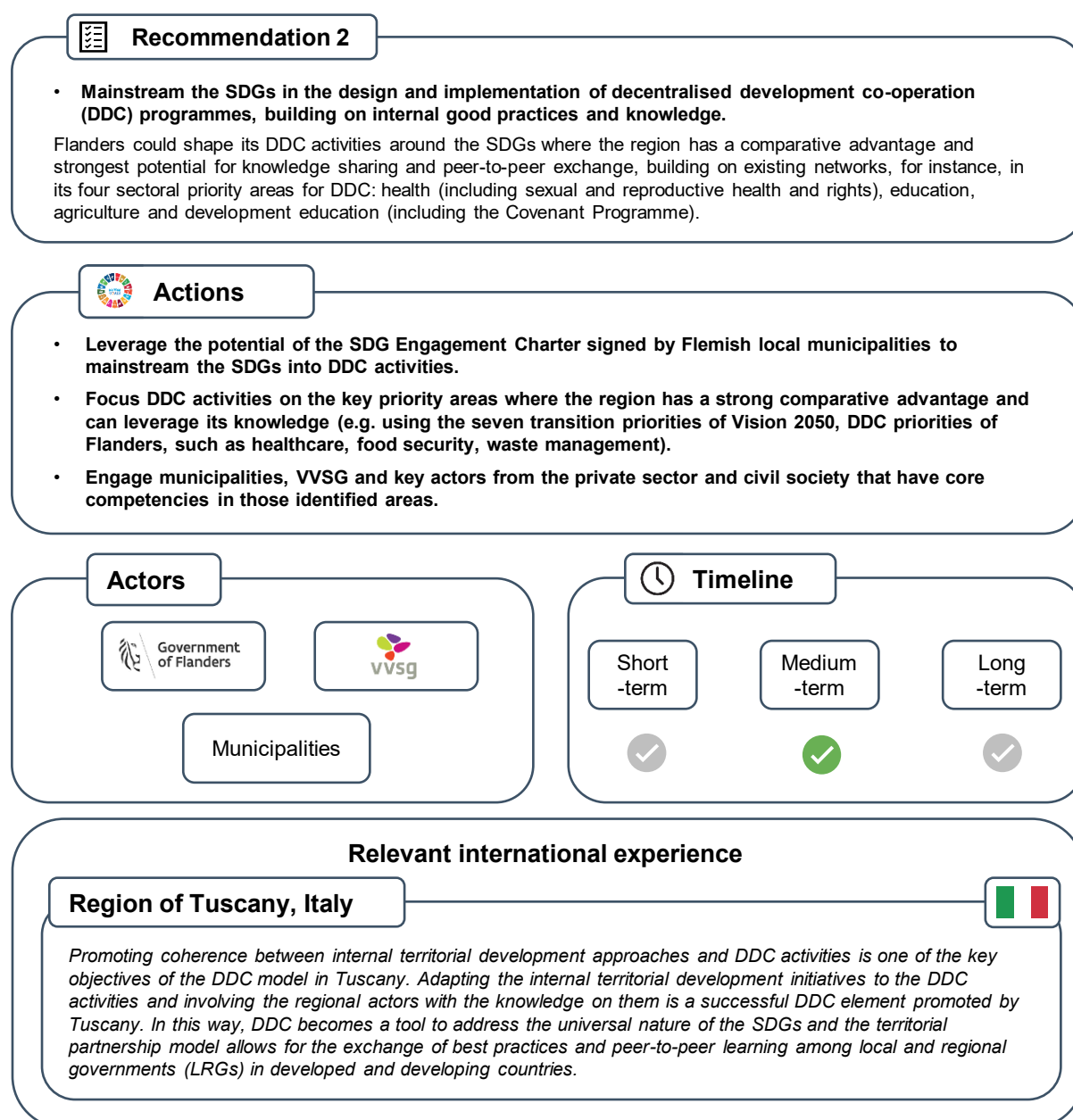
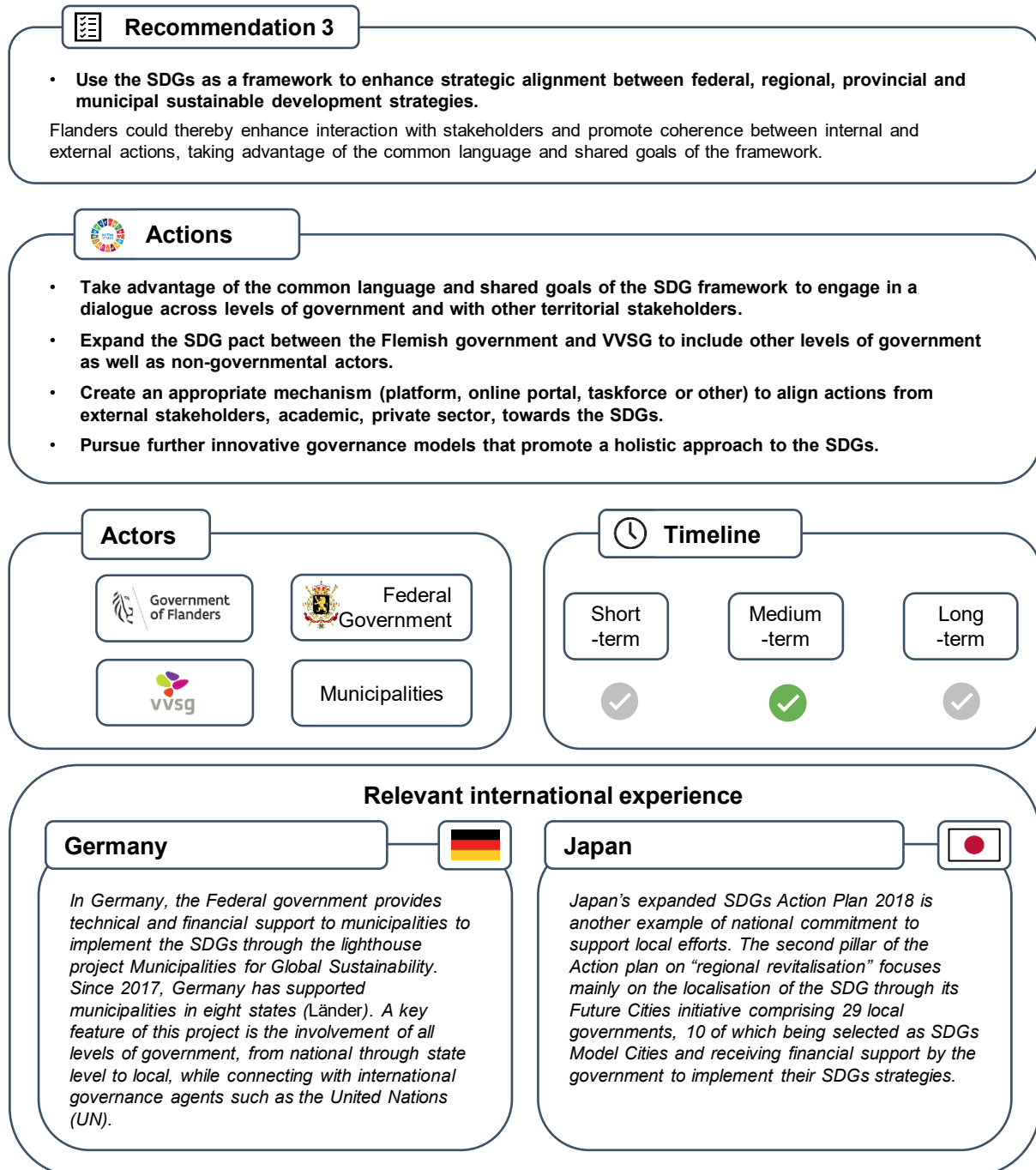


Figure 4.3. Action plan to mainstream the SDGs in decentralised development co-operation programmes



Multi-level governance

Figure 4.4. Action plan to use the SDGs as a framework to align sustainable development strategies



Financing and budgeting

Figure 4.5. Action plan to use the SDGs as a budgeting tool

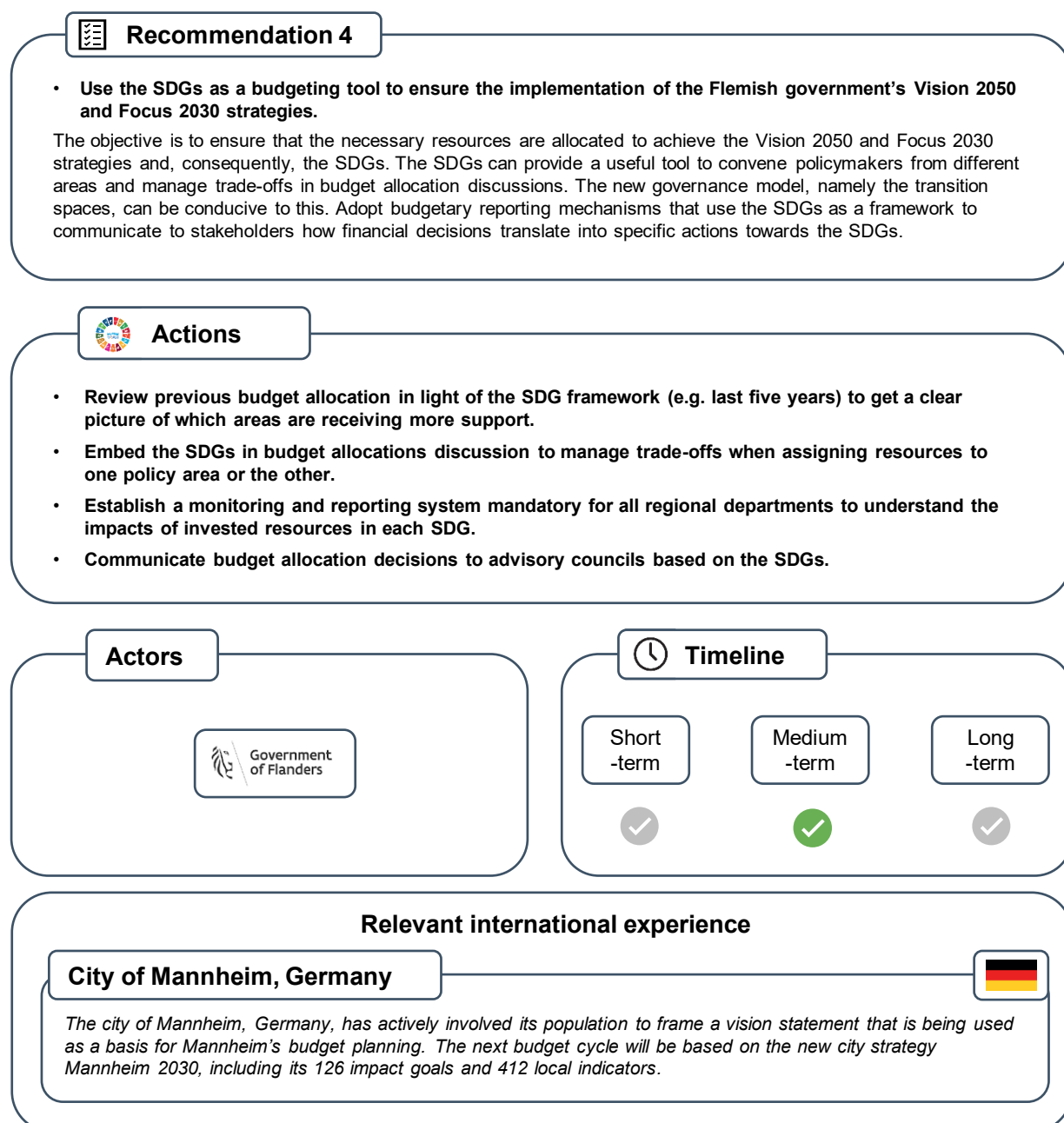
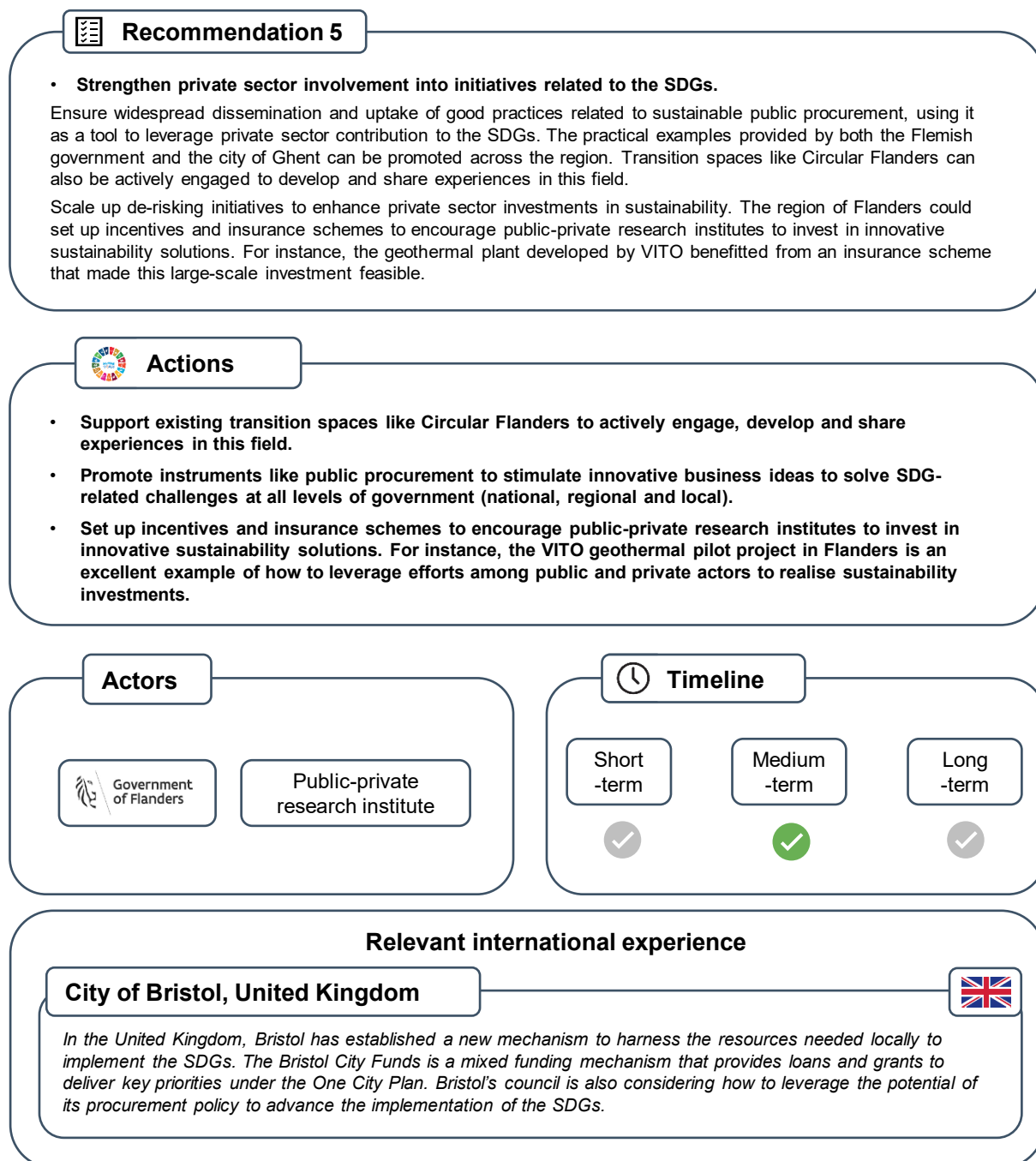


Figure 4.6. Action plan to leverage private sector involvement in initiatives related to the SDGs



Data and information

Figure 4.7. Action plan to ensure coherent and multi-level SDG indicator frameworks and reporting tools

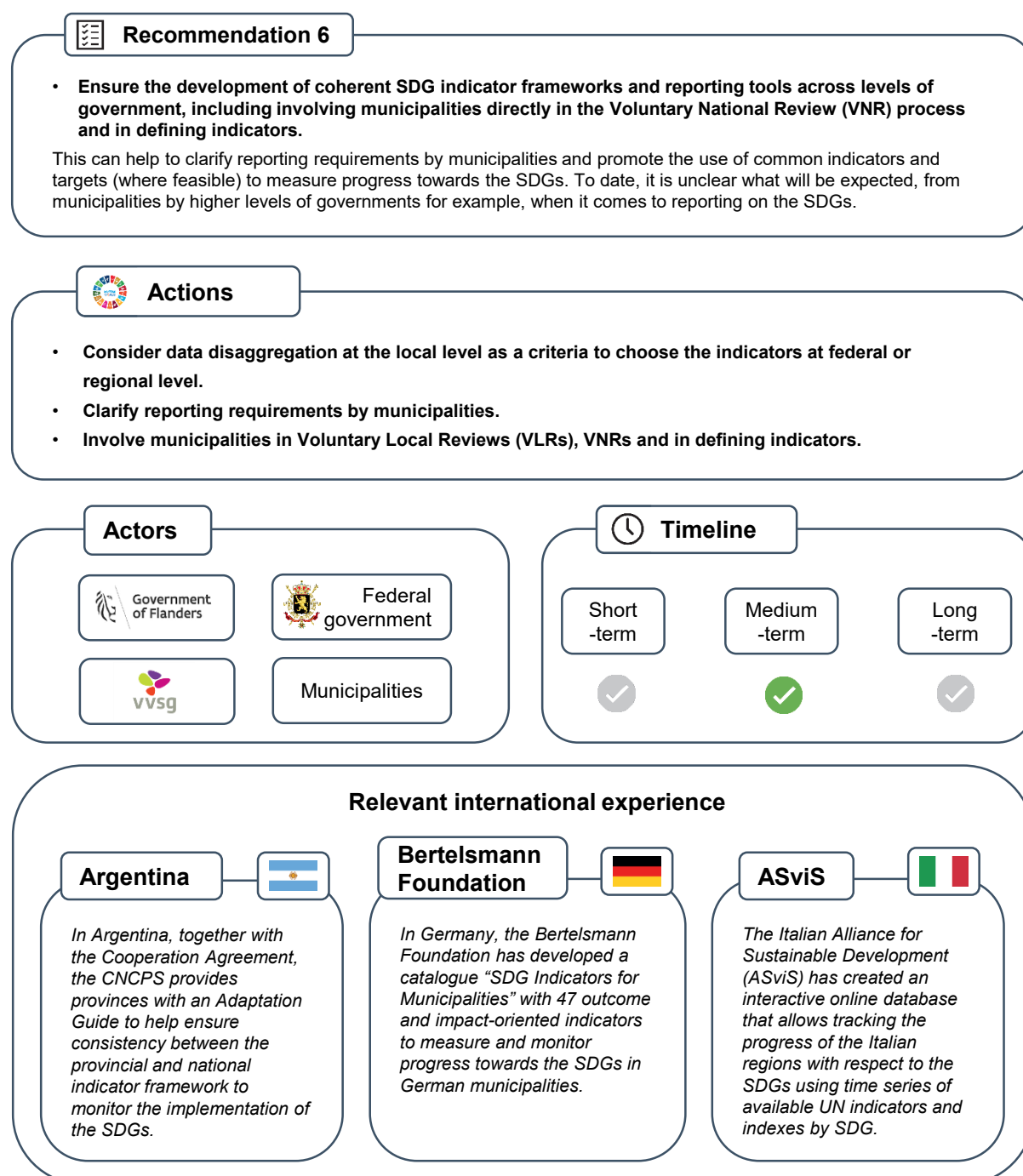
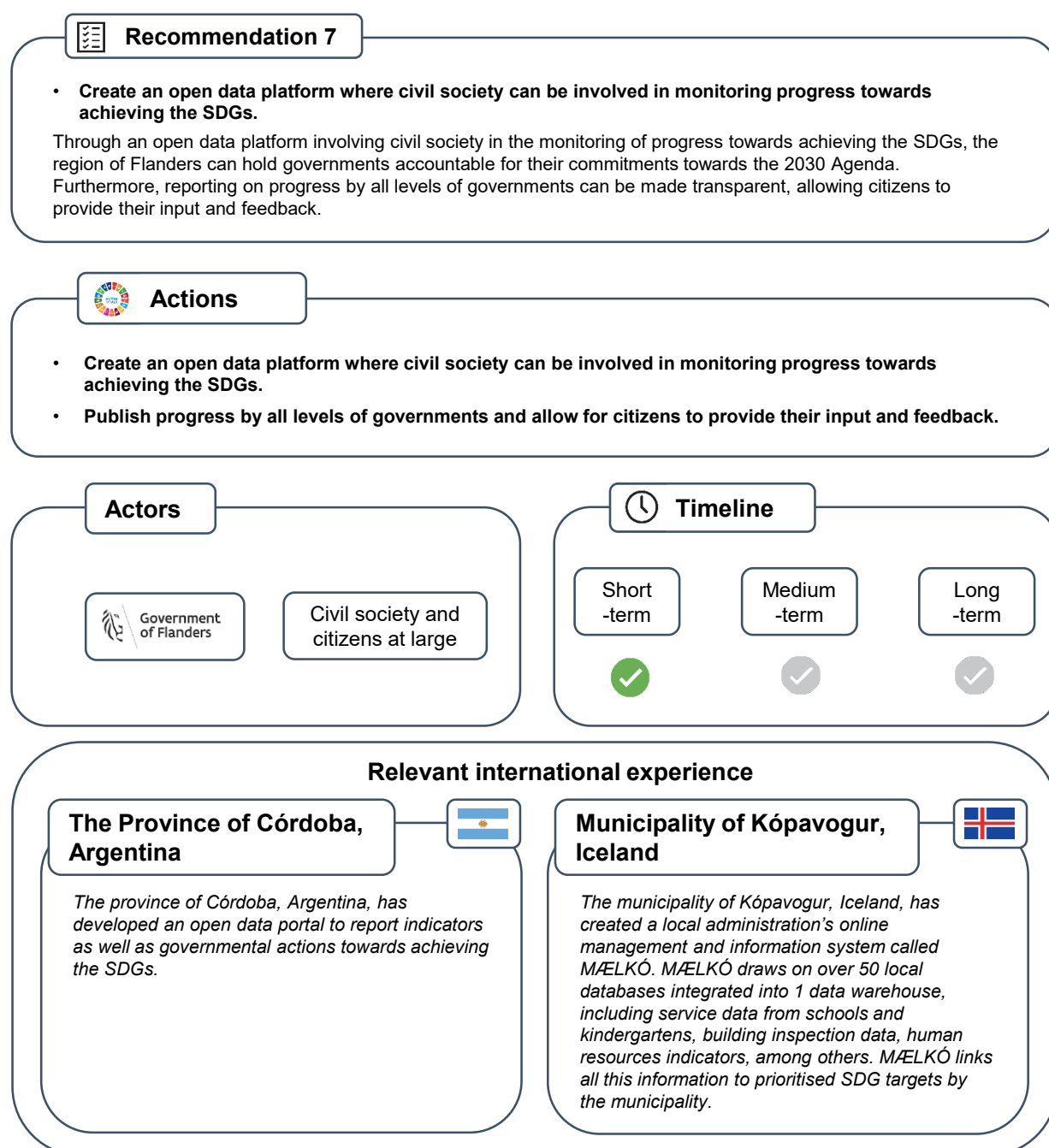
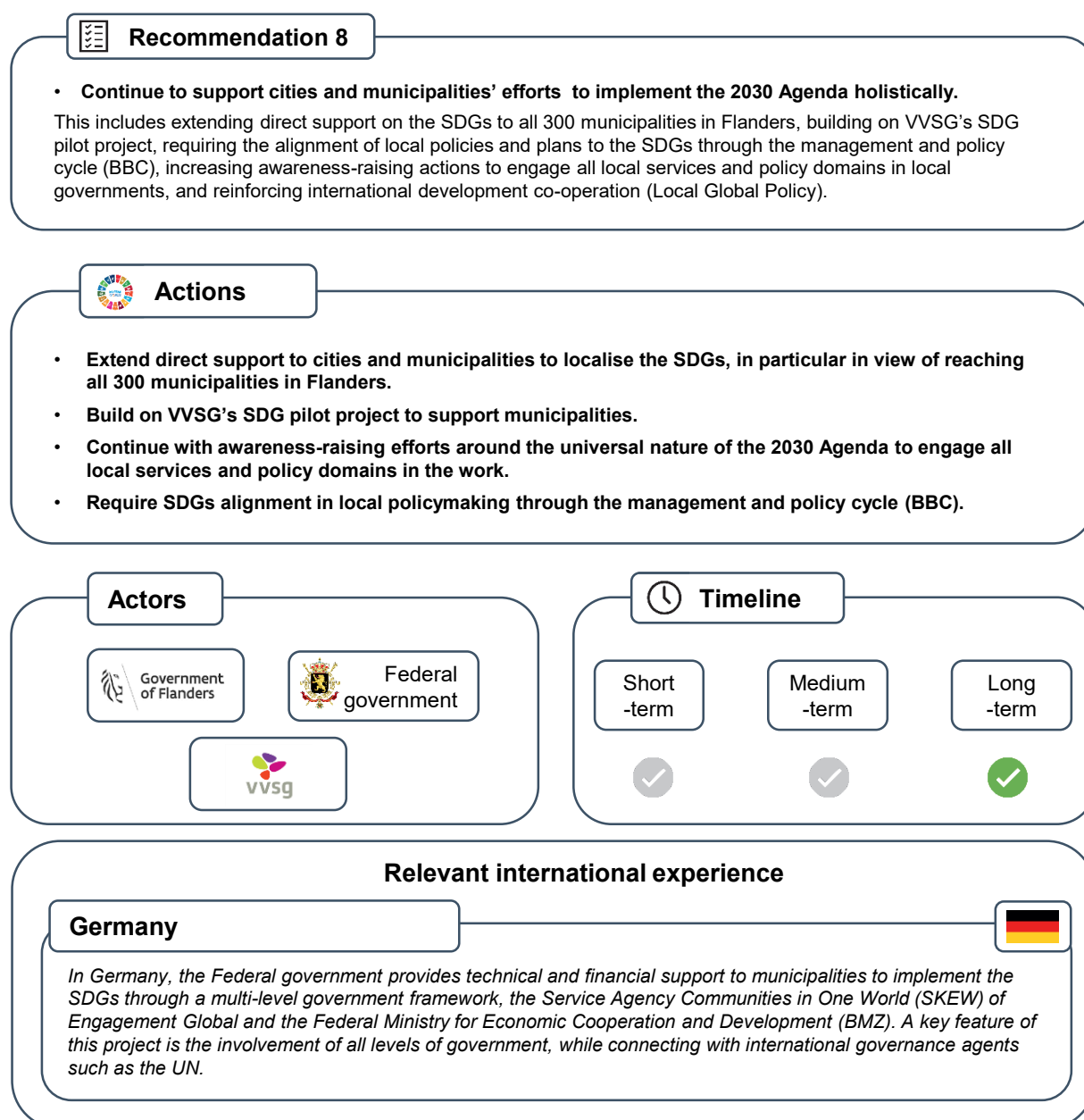


Figure 4.8. Action plan to create an open data platform with civil society for SDG progress monitoring



Engagement

Figure 4.9. Action plan to support cities and municipalities to implement the 2030 Agenda holistically



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- ITF (2020), “Shared Mobility Simulations for Lyon”, *International Transport Forum Policy Papers*, No. 74, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/031951c3-en>. [2]
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