



A SUSTAINABLE WORLD STARTS LOCALLY!

Flemish SDG report inspires cities and municipalities to act sustainable

A sustainable future for our planet and its inhabitants. How can we, as local governments, help realise this? In 2015, the United Nations defined the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to be a guide in realising that ambition. The SDG report of the Flemish provinces, cities and municipalities (2023) offers you a whole range of rich insights and inspiring practical examples that show how together we can turn the SDGs into concrete actions.

The report clearly indicates that sustainability for Flemish local governments is anything but a hollow concept. On the contrary, sustainability in Flanders is alive and kicking! Witness the many initiatives taken locally to work towards a greener, healthier, more inclusive, safer and more equal society.

As hopeful as these local examples are, at the same time they make it clear that we still have a long way to go. That is what the indicators in the report on the 17 SDGs tell us. They form the basis for the data analysis on which the Flemish SDG report is grafted and show in

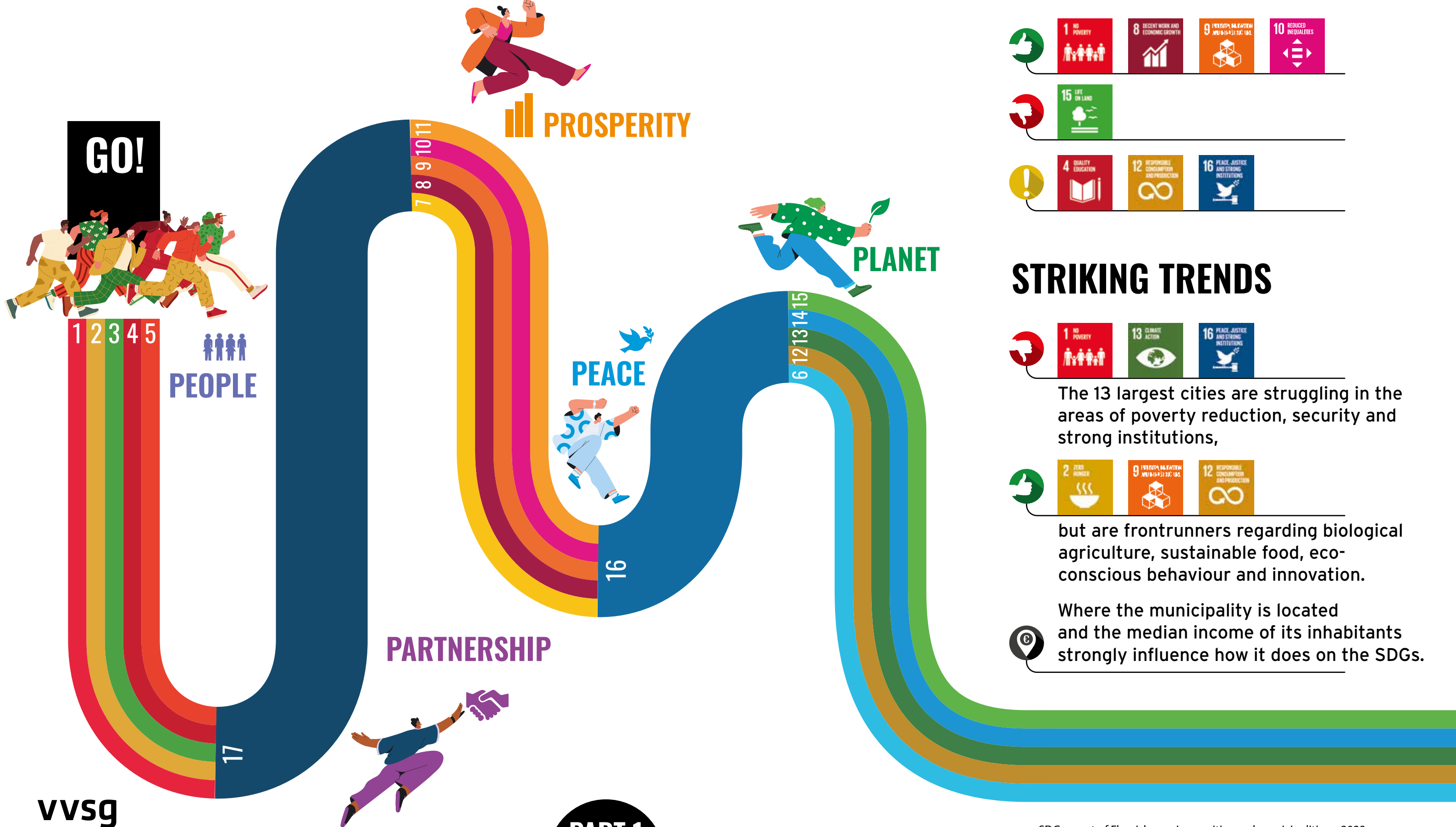
a clear manner where the strengths, but also the areas for improvement for our cities and municipalities lie. How was the report compiled? For each SDG, you can read how Flemish cities and municipalities score based on a dataset of more than 200 indicators. This information is supplemented with innovative strategies taken at the local policy level and some practical examples. These concrete cases show how creative and clever local governments can be to give shape to the SDGs. Let both the figures and the practical examples be a source of inspiration. So that together, as Flemish cities and municipalities, we can realise local policies that are permeated by sustainability.

Because creating a sustainable future is up to all of us. It requires actions that start bottom-up. The local level is exactly where we can really get sustainability moving. And where we - together as local governments - can make a difference. The figures and trends in this synthesis report confirm it. Now it is a matter of shifting up a gear. And getting all our citizens, partners and neighbours on board.

Check out the summary infographic on pages 3-6.
Read the highlights from the report on pages 7-13.



A SUSTAINABLE WORLD STARTS LOCALLY!



PROGRESS OF FLEMISH CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES ON THE SDGs



STRIKING TRENDS



The 13 largest cities are struggling in the areas of poverty reduction, security and strong institutions,



but are frontrunners regarding biological agriculture, sustainable food, eco-conscious behaviour and innovation.

Where the municipality is located and the median income of its inhabitants strongly influence how it does on the SDGs.

GET INSPIRED BY

FIGURES

- > 200 indicators
- Data for 2010-2021
- % Scores for each SDG topic


THEMES OF SDG11
Sustainable cities
and communities

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---|------------------------|
| cleanliness
and nuisance |  |  | cars |
| air quality |  |  | safe cycling |
| greenery
in the municipality |  |  | affordable housing |
| recreation for youth |  |  | sustainable mobility |
| sustainability
of housing |  |  | culture
and leisure |

BOECHOUT 
investing in cycling

 **BERINGEN**
integrated
poverty policy



 **IZEGEM
WEVELGEM**
depaving and
more green,
water-permeable
spaces

 **HARELBEKE**
SDGs as a framework
for multi-annual policy plan

LEUVEN 
security and strong social fabric
through youth empowerment

2030 AGENDA
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REFRESHING IDEAS



community-based health guides, energy desks,
gender budgeting, smart bike lanes, repair cafés,
mobile service delivery, sustainable heroes, ...

vvsg



Figures that speak for themselves

Sustainability is a verb. Achieving tangible results requires action rather than words. Cities and municipalities in Flanders have taken this at heart.

During the policy term 2020-2025, 2 out of 3 municipalities integrated the SDGs into their Policy and Management Cycle. Some municipalities even used the 5 pillars of sustainable development (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace & Partnerships) or the 17 SDGs as the starting point for their context analysis and/or multi-annual policy plan.

The SDG declaration of commitment is also doing well among local governments. 118 have already signed it. It indicates a municipality's willingness to both act in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way. And to use the 2030 Agenda as a guide in doing so. More than 170 of the 300 municipalities already participated in one or more editions of the 'Sustainable Municipality Week'. During this campaign week, they celebrate local 'sustainable heroes'. Heroes, because they give a local face to the 17 global goals.

Trends that set the tone



The promising evolution of SDG 1

A number of interesting trends have emerged in recent years. For instance, almost all Flemish municipalities have been making progress on poverty indicators since 2014. A significant drop in the number of people with an income below the critical poverty line illustrates this.

The 13 largest cities generally score worse on poverty. Yet they have managed to take steps forward. They owe this improvement to a large extent to the sharp fall in the number of inhabitants with payment difficulties.

Indicators obviously provide only part of the full picture. For instance, despite the positive scores for SDG 1 indicators, poverty in Flanders remains a major social challenge. The SDG report uses additional data and practical examples to frame such context. For example, the chapter on SDG 1 illustrates how the city of Beringen is engaged in cross-cutting poverty reduction and how data on child poverty continue to point to a major challenge for SDG 1.

By 2021, 12.7% of children were born into disadvantaged families. In 2010, the figure was 8.6%. In the 13 largest cities, the situation is even worse. There, the median is 17.4% children born into underprivileged families.

The worrying state of SDG 15

The following figures speak volumes: in more than 90% of Flemish municipalities, paving is increasing. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult for rainwater to seep into the soil. A disturbing phenomenon that increases the risk of flooding and drought.

In 80% of municipalities, green space is decreasing. There are also the following striking observations: municipalities with relatively more young or more affluent inhabitants do better. Municipalities with a larger population score low on available green space. However, this score is compensated by an increase in the area filled in as an ecotope and by newly created forests.

Whether there is cause for hope? Initiatives are indeed being taken to combat paving. For instance, municipalities are partners of the Flemish government to realise the objectives of the Blue Deal. Which goes for 1 m3 of depaving per inhabitant by 2030 and for capturing 1 m3 of additional rainwater that can be reused or infiltrated on site.





Local governments as role model for SDG 5

Something is moving within Flanders in terms of gender equality. Not least among the local administrations themselves. For 10 years, more than half of their staff have been women. We see an interesting evolution among the top earners in local administrations. In 2014, only 36% of them were women. In 2019, this figure rose to 46%.

Where the shoe pinches, however, is at the political level. Although there are 47% women in the Flemish Parliament, female representation is a lot less at local level. For instance, a total of 2,845 women (38%) are active in municipal councils. And in the College of Mayor and Aldermen, that figure drops to 648 (34%).

However, there is a bright spot at the provincial level: the number of female deputies rose to 40% in 2018. And this compared to 30% in 2012. In the provincial councils of Antwerp, Flemish Brabant and East Flanders, the situation evolved to a more or less equal distribution of women and men by 2022.

An example that can already inspire.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



The SDG that directly speaks to local governments



Overall, the indicators of SDG 11 are moving in the right direction. This means that progress was made in many areas, such as sustainable personal transport, sustainable housing and recreation opportunities for young people. An important observation: the 13 largest cities and large municipalities score best on mobility. Satisfaction with public transport, in turn, is strongest in and around cities and municipalities located along major train routes.

Sustainable housing is on the rise. In almost all Flemish municipalities, there is an increase in the number of solar panels, insulation and green roofs. But there is and remains much work to be done. Flanders' target to strongly renovate 3% of homes will still require a lot of concerted efforts.

However, affordable housing is an issue for more and more people in our society. Only in 1 out of 6 municipalities did housing become more affordable in relation to income. In 28% of municipalities, more than half of residents spend a third of their income on rent or loan repayments. These are figures that refer to the state of 2020, but indicate that initiatives are more than necessary.

And what about residents' satisfaction with the offer of cultural and leisure activities? This appears to be stronger the greater the number of inhabitants. The following figures illustrate this: in the 13 largest cities, 80% of residents are satisfied. In the smallest municipalities, this figure drops to 47%. As a side note: smaller municipalities score better in terms of their library and leisure offerings for young people.

There is other good news: emissions in Flanders are decreasing. For example, particulate matter (PM2.5) values were halved in 2020 compared to 2000. And nitrogen oxides (NOx) values were almost 60% below 2000 levels in 2020. With these figures, Flanders meets all European emission targets.

Nevertheless, differences between municipalities are clearly noticeable. For instance, there is a tendency for air quality to decline in cities and municipalities with a higher than average population. In that category of municipalities, the standard of at least 1 in 4 indicators for particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide or soot was not met. The same applies to the 13 largest cities.

Local voices that inspire

Today, Flanders counts many inspiring practical examples that show that every municipality, big or small, can make a difference. The five selected examples below illustrate this. Be sure to dive into the extensive report where you will discover dozens more. These cases can also give your city or municipality ideas to shift the local sustainability engine into a higher gear.



HARELBEKE

SDGs as a framework for multi-annual policy plan



PEACE & PARTNERSHIP

Harelbeke grafted its multi-annual strategic plan onto the SDGs. Employees of the city, the Public Centre for Social Welfare, Zorgbedrijf and the police zone thought together about sustainable actions within the framework of the 5 Pillars of sustainable development. It inspired participants to formulate, comment on and vote on policy proposals on a digital participation platform. Staff and elected officials then jointly determined the priority SDGs for the policy plan and formulated goals in line with those SDGs. The city of Harelbeke is therefore a real pioneer in terms of localizing the SDGs.



BERINGEN

integrated poverty policy



PEOPLE

With a poverty index of almost 13%, the city of Beringen is making poverty reduction a priority. Thus, the city appoints a poverty coordinator who bridges the various local actors. Via a poverty forum people in poverty are given a platform. Moreover, in order to achieve a shared vision and language around combating poverty, the city introduced a poverty test that screens the impact of policy decisions on people in poverty. Municipal services are also screened annually for accessibility, and this is done by residents with poverty experience.



IZEGEM WEVELGEM

depaving and more green, water-permeable spaces



PLANET

In Wevelgem, streets were completely depaved to turn it into a green campus site. On that site you will now find water buffers in addition to a lot of local greenery. There a BTES field was also constructed so that buildings on the site can be sustainably heated and cooled. The neighbouring municipality of Izegem is fully committed to raising awareness by participating in the Flemish 'Tile Removal (Tegelwippen) Championships'. In 2021, the city also published a brochure on water permeability. In it you will find inspiring and practical tips on how to create sustainable gardens, terraces and squares. Izegem is also creating a green cycling and walking zone by depaving the north bank of the local canal and opening up the Mandel River.





LEUVEN

security and strong social fabric through youth empowerment



PEACE & PARTNERSHIP

Leuven promotes safety and social fabric through youth empowerment. In the Leuven neighbourhood of Casa-blanca, committed young people, under the guidance of youth workers, a group of committed young people are working towards social interaction and positive image building for the neighbourhood. Together with external partners, they set up actions that make the neighbourhood more pleasant. Some examples include the launch of a litter campaign, the upgrading of the community centre and a joint sports action with the local police. An exchange programme with Morocco has also been launched in which young people work for a local orphanage. Thus, they develop new competences, their self-confidence grows and they feel empowered to take up their role as ambassadors of their neighbourhood.



BOECHOUT

investing in cycling



PROSPERITY

Boechout takes a participatory approach. When streets, cycle routes and traffic intersections are reconstructed, residents, police and the local mobility council all give their input or advice. That approach already ensured that the needs of vulnerable road users received due attention. Boechout constructed several comfortable and clearly marked bicycle lanes. It realised smooth bicycle crossings, maximised bicycle parking facilities, introduced bicycle streets and invested in two bicycle sharing systems. For permits for home construction or plot subdivision the municipality systematically imposes conditions for smart crossings, intersections free of speed humps and curbs without height differences. Municipal staff are also encouraged to use bicycles: the municipal government has significantly reduced its car fleet, invested in service bicycles and developed a cycle-lease plan for its staff.



Read the full SDG report of Flemish provinces, cities and municipalities. More info and tools on the local translation of the 2030 Agenda can be found at <https://www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/sdg-documents-in-foreign-languages>.

Now it's up to you!

This synthesis report came about by summarising the SDG report of more than 100 pages and selecting from current trends and numerous practical examples. However, let one thing be clear: in reality, much more is happening in Flanders today than is described in this synthesis.

Flemish local governments have positioned themselves in recent years as pioneers in the local translation of the 2030 Agenda. That there is still a long way to go to achieve the ambitious goals is certain. But let that be precisely what drives us to continue together down the road we have embarked on. Together we can do more than we think. Together we can make sustainability a reality. So that it benefits both our planet and the people who have inhabited it for thousands of years.

For Flemish local governments, a great opportunity presents itself with the local elections in 2024. For instance, the new Policy and Management Cycle offers a great opportunity to embed the SDGs in the context analysis and the multi-annual strategic plan. Municipalities can also apply an SDG check to their projects, incorporate the SDGs in their subsidies to local actors, or appoint SDG ambassadors among their elected officials. The vast wealth of data from the SDG report (available to each individual municipality) can be food for reflection and discussion.

The ball is now in every city and municipality's court. We are invited to continue on the sustainability path we have embarked on. We cannot waste any more time. Our moment for a more sustainable world is now.

The SDG report of Flemish provinces, cities and municipalities was prepared by the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) and the Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP). They were supported in this by IDEA Consult and United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) who were responsible for data collection, data analysis and support to the general drafting of the report.

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2030 AGENDA

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