



Municipal international cooperation

# VVSG strategic plan

2027 - 2036

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VVSG's Strategic Plan 2027-2036 outlines how the organisation intends to make best use of the federal grant for development cooperation. This plan offers a look ahead to the next 10 years and describes the VVSG's vision & mission in the field of development cooperation. It includes both short-term and long-term goals, strategies to achieve these goals, an indicative budget, and provides insight into the intended partners, partner countries and beneficiaries.

# 1. Organisational structure

## Background

The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) was **founded on 1 January 1994** and resulted from the split of the Association of Belgian Cities and Municipalities (VBSG), which had been active since 1913. This split resulted in three regional associations: the VVSG in Flanders, the Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie (UVCW) in Wallonia and Brulocalis in Brussels.

The VVSG is the **representative member organisation** of Flemish local governments, including cities & municipalities, OCMWs, police zones, assistance zones, autonomous municipal corporations, welfare associations and various partnerships. Since its inception, the VVSG has developed into the lynchpin for supporting and representing Flemish local authorities in general and local politicians and employees in particular. Specifically, the VVSG supports about 7,500 politicians with a local mandate and about 200,000 employees in local administrations.

### Mission



The VVSG aims to be the supporter of its members and to make the local level co-leading.

The VVSG organises itself in **all areas that fall within the competences of Flemish local authorities**, ranging from waste, the economy, security and digitalisation to poverty, childcare, integration and development cooperation. To achieve its mission, the VVSG works in these domains around **three core roles**, namely advocacy, knowledge sharing and networking.

## Core roles



### Advocate

The VVSG represents and defends local governments on many policy issues



### Knowledge Sharing

The VVSG supports and strengthens local governments with advice, training, publications, communication.



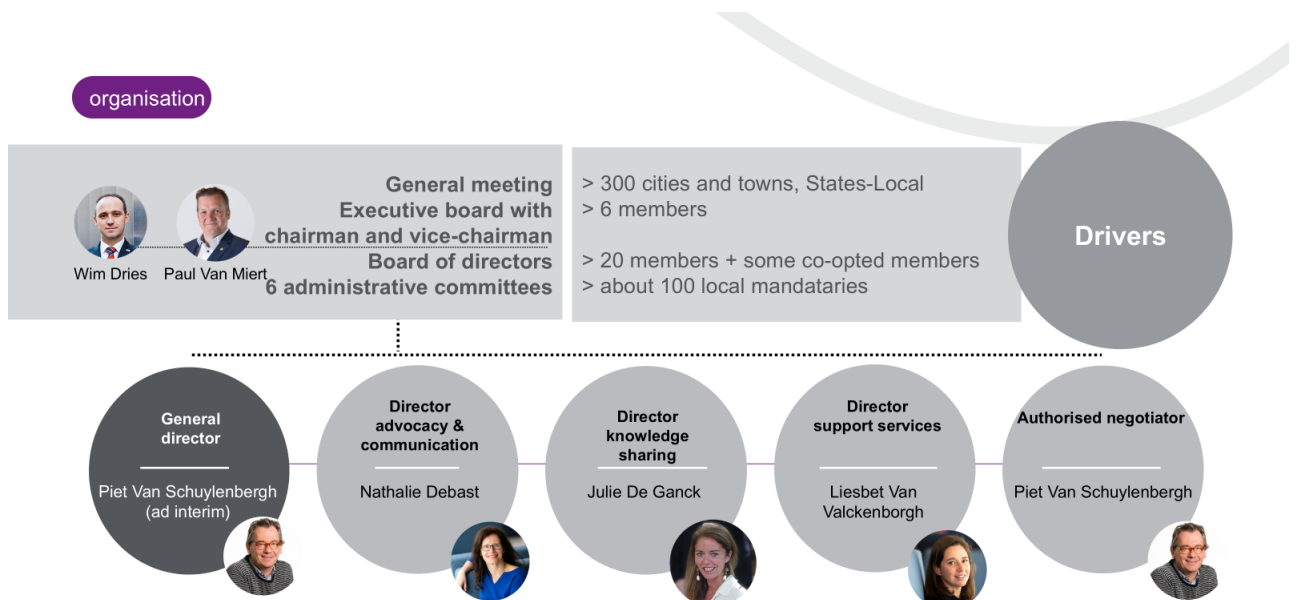
### Network builder

The VVSG brings local governments and their partners together and provides cross-fertilisation of knowledge and good practices.

The VVSG is a **non-domain-specific actor in the development cooperation sector**. This means that the VVSG's unique added value of technical expertise and political know-how is not limited to development cooperation, but focuses on all domains and competences of Flemish cities and municipalities. Development cooperation is only a small part of it.

## Organisational structure

The VVSG has an administrative arm, steered and supported by directors from various governing bodies.



## Drivers

The VVSG is managed by **various governing bodies**. These bodies determine the strategic direction of the organisation. The composition of the governing bodies follows the municipal legislature, with a review of the composition of the bodies every six years, taking into account the outcome of the municipal elections. The composition of the governing bodies will be renewed during 2025 following the municipal elections on 13 October 2024.

The selection of local mandate holders in the VVSG's governing bodies is done on the basis of party political proportions, gender, municipal types and geographical distribution.

The **General Assembly** is the highest decision-making body of the VVSG, with representation from all members of the VVSG. The General Assembly meets twice a year.

The **governing body** (former Board of Directors) sets the organisation's strategic priorities and takes decisions not reserved to the General Assembly. It appoints the chief executive officer, composes the Executive Board and oversees policy implementation. The governing body meets monthly and consists of a balanced group of more than 20 local mandate holders.

The **Daily Board** carries out day-to-day management and makes operational decisions within approved budgets. This body consists of six local mandate holders, with Wim Dries, mayor of Genk, as **chairman** on 31 December 2024. Urgent decisions are later ratified by the governing body.

Since 2019, **Administrative Committees** have been supporting the VVSG to fulfil its advocacy role. The substantive preparation of policy dossiers is done by six thematic Administrative Committees, each consisting of about 20 local politicians and experts. In this way, the VVSG wants to work to maximise support among its members for the positions taken. They strengthen the governing body and the formation of the vision from the members for the VVSG regarding powerful government, security, living together & caring for each other, quality environment, innovative & digital government and the municipality in the world/Europe.

#### administrative committees



Powerful boards



Safety



Living together and caring for each other



Quality living environment



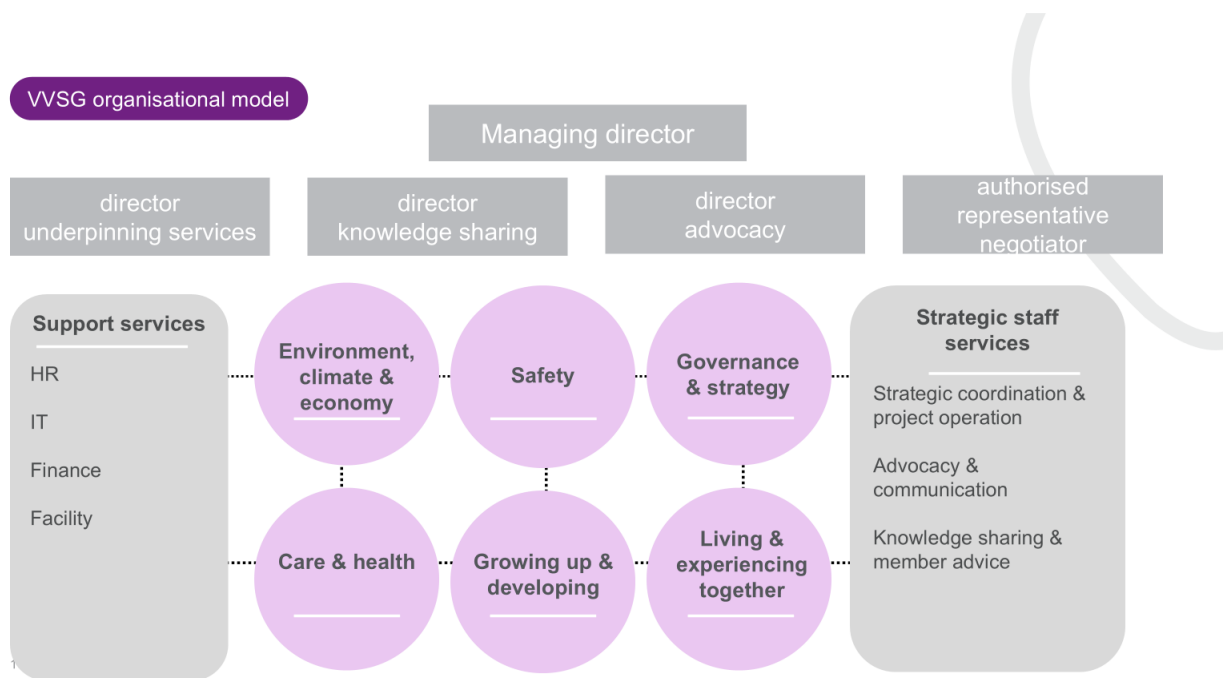
Innovative and digital governance



Municipality/city in Europe and the world

## Organisational model

The VVSG has 233 employees on 31 December 2024, representing 210.9 FTEs. A few years ago, the VVSG was restructured internally in order to achieve its mission in a more decisive way. Since then, the VVSG has operated according to a matrix model.



The **Executive Committee** consists of the general manager, 3 directors organised around the VMSG's core processes (advocacy, knowledge sharing and support services) and the authorised negotiator. The Executive Committee meets every fortnight.

In addition, there are **six thematic services**:

- Governance and strategy
- Care and health
- Growing up and developing
- Living and experiencing together
- Safety
- Environment, climate and economy

These various services offer advice, training, networking and guidance on a multitude of topics for local administrations, in addition to the day-to-day aspects of advocacy. Thus, VMSG staff handle more than 13,000 requests for advice from members (local administrations, intercommunal and police zones, CPASs...) every year, and the organisation reaches a large audience (587 training courses for more than 25,000 employees in 2023) of politicians, civil servants and employees from the sector through its training offer.

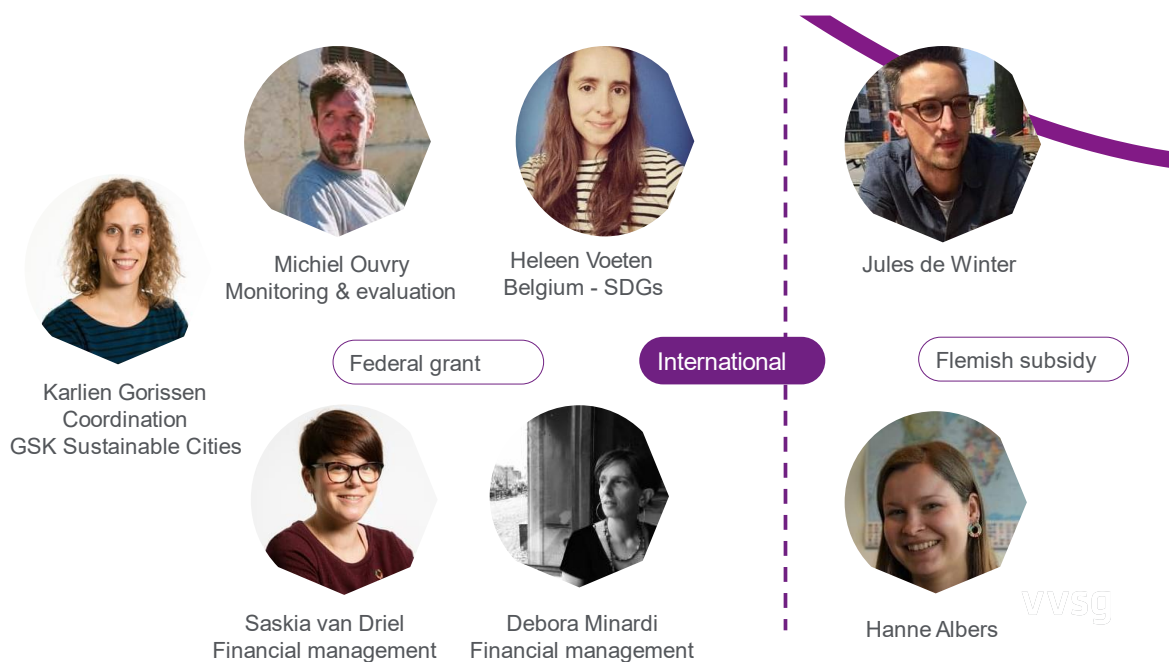
The managers of these departments, the heads of service, together with the directors, form the **Strategic Committee**. The Strategic Committee ensures alignment and vision within the organisation and meets fortnightly (alternating with the Executive Committee meetings).

The **Governance & Strategy** thematic **department** works on policy themes aimed at strengthening the administrative capacity of local government. These include supporting Flemish local authorities in their personnel policy, digitalisation, financial policy, intermunicipal cooperation, citizen participation, political organisation and European & international cooperation. Team International falls integrally under this service. The head of

service is Nathalie Dumarey. On 31 December 2024, 43 colleagues work within this service around the following 6 programmes:

- Stronger in Europe/the world
- Stronger governance
- Stronger organisation
- Strong employers
- Stronger through the digital transition
- Stronger through cooperation

The **International team** working on development cooperation will consist of 7 people on 31 December 2024, accounting for **6 FTEs**. The salary costs for these employees are 100% financed by subsidy programmes of the Flemish government (Department of Foreign Affairs) and federal government (DGD). The DGD programme employs 5 people, accounting for 4.2 FTE (end 2024). The programme has one programme coordinator, one person responsible for Monitoring & Evaluation and one person working specifically around the translation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to local policy in Belgium. In addition, two colleagues (together accounting for 1.2 FTEs) take care of the financial monitoring of the programme. The work of the two colleagues working on the grant from the Flemish government is complementary to the work of the colleagues on the federal grant programme. The integrated approach between the two programmes is expressed first and foremost in the implementation of the Belgium component regarding the local translation of the SDGs into the policy of the Flemish local governments. In addition, the follow-up of the various country programmes from the federal subsidy programme is also shared among the entire VVSG-International team, which means that colleagues in the Flemish programme are also involved in the follow-up of town twinning and collaborations with umbrella associations of cities and municipalities.



## Organisational management

The VVSG is a not-for-profit association that derives its revenues from membership fees (35%), subsidies (55%) and its own activities such as study days, trainings, publications,... (10%). A certified auditor guarantees an annual supervision of the association's accounts. The VVSG aims to remain a financially healthy organisation. The VVSG therefore launched a trajectory in 2024 to ensure that the share of subsidies from higher authorities and other institutions does not become too large in the overall budget. Besides being a service organisation, the VVSG is also an advocate for local governments. Too much dependence on other governments through subsidies could hinder the organisation from taking on this fundamental role.

Based on the need for a manageable and professional career and remuneration policy, in recent years the VVSG has taken the necessary steps to build a new job house, coupled with a new pay house. This renewed structure forms the basis of the entire HR policy, running from A to Z (from recruitment and selection to welcoming, remuneration, talent development, functioning and employability, etc.). The VVSG chooses to give its employees a great deal of freedom in organising and performing their work (working independent of time and place, flexibility, etc.) and at the same time expects staff to deal with this professionally and responsibly.

The VVSG is committed to working transversally across policy themes and services. Employees are encouraged to work across themes and services. The VVSG attaches importance to the SDGs and tries to bring this to all staff and services in an integral way. The VVSG also opts for great openness. It highly values transparency, not only externally, but also internally. Staff forums, departmental meetings, a weekly debriefing, the extensive internal website, etc. serve this purpose. The VVSG further develops a sustainable policy that combines Fair Trade and ecological principles in its services, accommodation and travel.

As an organisation, the VVSG has a strategic plan that gives the organisation direction for a six-year period, aligned with the municipal legislature. This strategic plan is drawn up participatively with input from VVSG employees and local directors and officials and monitored via annual sheets and during biennial staff forums. The period 2024 - 2025 will be used to write a new strategic plan to take effect from 2026.

## Follow-up DGD programme

Since 2001, the federal government (DGD) has supported operations around municipal international cooperation (for the first few years still through the VBSG - the Association of Belgian Cities and Municipalities). The VVSG acts as coordinator and administrator of this programme. The contributions that the cities and municipalities receive in subsidy through this federal programme are entered in their municipal budget as subsidy and paid in instalments - depending on the financial agreements per city link - to their partner municipality. This makes the grant subject to the internal financial procedures within the municipality. This also provides the opportunity to pre-finance the programme from within the municipality. The VVSG checks the expenditure statement and the financial flows of the subsidy at the municipalities. During this control, invoice by invoice is checked whether it is justified according to the principles of good stewardship and in accordance with the DGD

spending criteria. The VVSG respects municipal autonomy, which means that both substantive and financial monitoring of municipal partnerships is primarily in the hands of the local authorities themselves. The VVSG imposes some obligations on partners within the framework of the subsidy programme, mainly linked to reporting obligations towards DGD, but otherwise tries to work mainly from a supportive and advisory role.

## 2. Vision and mission on global cooperation

In the past, the VVSG organised several participatory visioning exercises on global cooperation with all stakeholders involved from Flanders and the Global South. The basic vision from 2011 was updated during regional meeting moments in 2015, national meeting moments in 2022 & 2023 and a participatory track in 2024.

The VVSG works in one **OECD-DAC sector, namely 'Government & Civil Society - Public sector policy and administrative management'**.

The VVSG bases its vision on the principle of **decentralisation**, which is recognised worldwide as an important basis for effective governance. In addition, the VVSG applies the principle of **subsidiarity**, whereby powers are allocated to the most appropriate and closest level of government. As democratically elected governments, cities and towns are closest **to the population**. This proximity allows them to better respond to the local needs and requirements of residents, while making them the most accessible and approachable to their communities. As a result, they play a **crucial role within the governance landscape**.

### Vision

The VVSG believes in the power of **good local governance** as a **foundation for a sustainable, inclusive and democratic society**. Governable local governments play a crucial role in improving the living conditions of their citizens. Local governments are a **strategic partner** to achieve **sustainable development**. To this end, they pursue a coherent sustainable development policy, prioritising cooperation and commitment.

**Good local governance** is an interplay between strong local governments and engaged citizens, aimed at strengthening democracy, inclusion and sustainable development. Local governments formulate policies and provide quality services that meet community needs, while encouraging citizen participation and involvement. This process requires competent and motivated politicians and civil servants who ensure strong internal functioning and forward-looking policies. Citizens play a crucial role in this by taking up their rights and duties, participating in policies and contributing to a better living environment through participatory structures. In addition, good local governance is essential in decentralisation processes, where it leads to improved service delivery, combating poverty and inequality, and adapted solutions to complex challenges such as climate change and urbanisation. This is a long-

term perspective in which mutual empowerment of government and citizens is central, with the aim of improving everyone's quality of life.

Local governments play a crucial role as **strategic partners in achieving sustainable development**. For instance, as much as 65% of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) achievement directly depends on the involvement and commitment of local governments worldwide. They are the tier of government closest to citizens and therefore ideally placed to initiate and anchor change at the local level. They hold the key to translating issues such as poverty reduction, climate action, inclusive cities and sustainable economic growth into concrete actions at the local level. By adopting coherent sustainable development policies that focus on cooperation and engagement, local governments can have a tangible impact on the lives of their residents and contribute to global goals. Investing in the capacity, knowledge and cooperation of local governments is not only necessary but also strategically indispensable to achieve sustainable progress globally.

In addition, local governments provide a unique **connection** between actors and territories. This enables them to forge partnerships beyond administrative boundaries and sectoral silos. Thus, local governments play a key role in multilevel **governance**, where different levels of government - local, regional, national, international - work together. Local governments take a **territorial approach**, taking into account the specific needs and opportunities of the wider region. By developing innovative policies and working from a vision focused on inclusion and sustainability, local governments are not only implementers but also directors of change. Moreover, local governments adopt a **multi-actor approach**, actively involving not only governments, but also citizens, businesses, knowledge institutions and civil society organisations. Bringing these diverse partners together creates innovative solutions and supported actions that ensure broad impact and long-term results. Local governments are thus not only implementers, but also directors within a complex network of actors and interests, in which cooperation and co-creation are central.

### Mission

The VVSG supports Flemish local governments and municipalities from the Global South to contribute to **good local governance through international cooperation and agendas, such as the (post) Agenda 2030**. From our role as advocate, knowledge provider and networker, we help local governments develop **future-oriented and sustainable solutions**. Through international cooperation from a colleague-to-colleague approach, we promote governance strength, encourage the exchange of good practices and ensure that lessons are widely shared to strengthen local democracy and service delivery. Through cooperation with **umbrella associations** of cities and municipalities, the VVSG creates a catalytic effect among local governments in Global South countries.

The power of municipal international cooperation is harnessed to strengthen a **territorial** approach that focuses on the connection between local governments and neighbouring municipalities/territories. It also collaborates with various other **levels of government** and various actors to develop **integrated** local policies in **co-creation**. Together with sister associations and local partners, we create space for diverse visions of local governance,

while respecting the local context. Thus, we contribute to inclusive decision-making and concrete improvements in the living conditions of citizens worldwide.

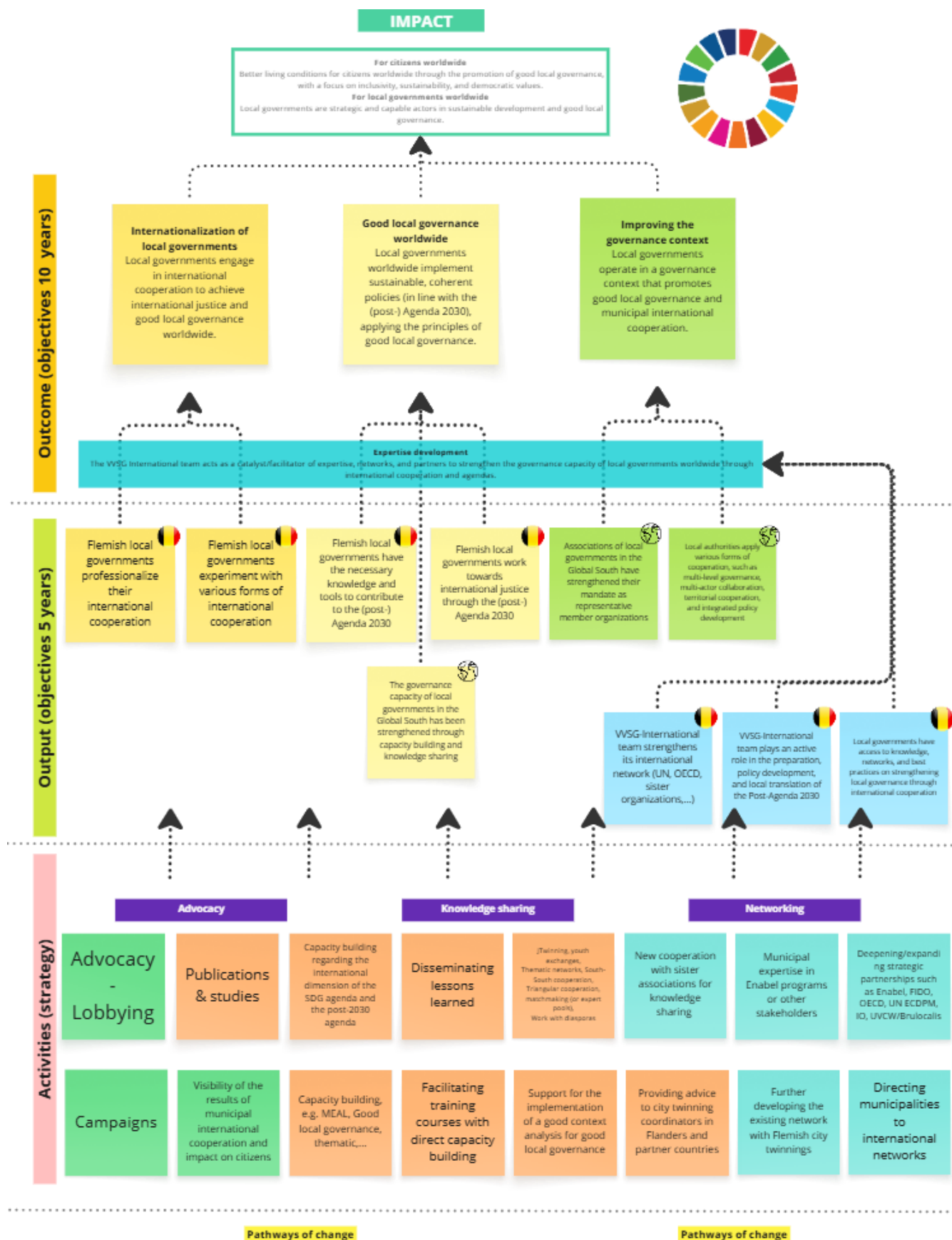
The VVSG sees cities and municipalities worldwide as essential actors in strengthening local governance. By adopting a **colleague-to-colleague** approach, the VVSG promotes **international municipal cooperation** in research, capacity building and knowledge sharing. This contributes to strengthening the governance capacity of local governments and enables innovative solutions.






The VVSG encourages the sharing of practical experiences, data and new insights across national borders, contributing to improved decision-making and policy-making at local, national and international levels. The VVSG promotes partnerships between local governments, civil society organisations, academic institutions and international actors to develop sustainable and widely supported solutions. Municipalities play a key role in this thanks to their direct connection with the population and their ability to achieve a **multiplier effect**. Inclusiveness is central to this.

Municipal international cooperation, also known as decentralised cooperation, enjoys increasing **international recognition as a crucial pillar in sustainable development and global solidarity**. Several international frameworks and networks explicitly highlight the role of local governments in addressing global challenges and achieving sustainable development goals, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the New Urban Agenda, Platforma & CEMR, the Covenant of Mayors etc.

Together with local governments, the VVSG wants to contribute primarily to **the realisation of SDG 16**, which includes all 'governance' themes (e.g. municipal finance, transparency, citizen participation, etc.), **SDG 11** around sustainable cities and **SDG 17** around partnerships (e.g. town twinning). These are the main objectives in each programme component. Via a thematic angle, other SDGs could also be contributed to in second line (e.g. SDG 2 on food policy, SDG 5 on gender, SDG 6 on water management).

### 3. Medium (5 years) and long (10 years) term goals



Objectives	
<b>Strategic objective 1</b> (10 years)	<b>Internationalisation of local governments</b> Local governments deploy international cooperation to achieve international justice and good local governance worldwide
The VVSG believes in the added value of international municipal cooperation and therefore wants to encourage Flemish local governments in the first place, but by extension cities and municipalities worldwide, to pursue a global policy of which international cooperation is a key element. Via international municipal cooperation, the VVSG wants to increase the administrative power of local governments worldwide.	
Objective 1 (5 years)	Flemish local governments and their international partners <b>professionalise their cooperation (town twinning)</b> 
The VVSG wants to professionalise the international partnerships between all Flemish local authorities and their international partners through networking and knowledge sharing. It is about supporting municipal partnerships in Project Cycle Management, monitoring & evaluation (making the shift towards outcome-oriented evaluation and learning), improvement of and guidance to (international) networks, etc.	
Objective 2 (5 years)	Local governments <b>experimenting</b> with different forms of international cooperation 
Town twinning remains an effective form of municipal international cooperation to work on good local governance. Yet within Flanders, we see a stagnation in the number of town-twinning partnerships around about 30 town-twinning partnerships (about 10% of Flemish local governments). In order to lead more Flemish municipalities towards more easily accessible and reciprocal forms of international cooperation, the VVSG, together with local governments, will continue to test which new international forms of cooperation can work to increase the governance power of local governments.	
<b>Strategic objective 2</b> (10 years)	<b>Good local governance worldwide</b> Local governments worldwide adopt sustainable coherent policies (in line with the (post-) Agenda 2030) using the principles of good local governance
The VVSG wants to increase the administrative capacity of local governments both in Belgium and in partner countries (including through town twinning). Like the 2030 Agenda, its successor (from 2031) will provide a framework to make local policies more coherent and sustainable.	
Objective 1 (5 years)	Flemish local governments have the necessary <b>knowledge and tools to contribute to the (post-) Agenda 2030</b> 
The VVSG and Flemish local governments want to continue their existing operation in Belgium around the local translation of the SDGs until 2037. From 2031, the focus will shift to the post Agenda 2030. Flemish local governments will continue to align their policy planning, monitoring and reporting instruments with the (post-) Agenda 2030.	
Objective 2 (5 years)	Flemish local governments work <b>towards international justice through the (post-) Agenda 2030</b> 
The (post-) Agenda 2030 provides a shared compass for global and local challenges. While translation into local policies is crucial to realise impact, the global dimension of the agenda should not be lost sight of. After all, local actions are not separate from global contexts such as climate change, inequality and migration. In the future, Flemish local governments will pay even more explicit attention to this with global projects on, for example, human rights, sustainable procurement policy, ethical banking, etc.	
Objective 3 (5 years)	Governance capacity of <b>local governments in the Global South</b> strengthened through capacity building and sharing 
Decentralisation gives local governments in the Global South more powers, but they often lack the capacity to turn these into sustainable policies through good governance. Through capacity building and knowledge sharing within city linkages, governance capacity is strengthened. This approach is pragmatic and aligns with local policy plans, enabling policy and knowledge exchange.	
<b>Strategic objective 3</b> (10 years)	<b>Improving governance context in partner countries</b>

	Local governments operate in an administrative context that promotes good local governance and municipal international cooperation.	
Local governments worldwide operate within a decentralised governance context where sufficient autonomy and resources have been transferred to implement quality sustainable development policies.		
Objective 1 (5 years)	<b>Associations of local governments in the Global South</b> have been strengthened in their mandate as representative member organisations	
National associations of local governments in the Global South are the sister organisations of the VVSG. They share the same mandate and play a crucial role in representing municipal interests within decentralisation processes. Besides supporting their members through knowledge sharing and networking, through advocacy they are committed to improving the administrative context in which local governments in partner countries operate.		
Objective 2 (5 years)	Local governments apply <b>various forms of cooperation</b> , such as multi-level governance, multi-actor cooperation, territorial cooperation and integrated policy development	
Local governments work together to tackle complex challenges. <b>Multi-actor governance</b> involves cooperation between local, regional, and national governments. <b>Multi-actor cooperation</b> involves joining forces with various stakeholders, such as citizens, businesses, and civil society organisations, for example in neighbourhood development projects. <b>Territorial cooperation</b> focuses on partnerships between municipalities or regions. Finally, <b>integrated policy development</b> provides a framework for cooperation between policy domains to tackle complex issues efficiently and holistically.		
<b>Cross-cutting strategic objective 4 (10 years)</b>	Team VVSG-International is a catalyst/facilitator of expert ise, network and partners to strengthen the governance capacity of local governments worldwide through international cooperation and agendas	
Team VVSG-international builds its own knowledge, skills and network around international municipal cooperation and good local governance, and uses this knowledge for the benefit of Flemish local governments and municipalities from the Global South, sister associations of cities and municipalities and networks.		
Objective 1 (5 years)	Team VVSG-International strengthens its (inter)national	
Team VVSG-International and Flemish local authorities use the (inter)national networks (e.g. PLATFORMA-CEMR, CIB-UCLG, OECD, UN, GSK Sustainable Cities, FRDO) to professionalise their own work on good local governance. In addition, Flemish local governments are also seen internationally as pioneers in working around international municipal cooperation and international agendas.		
Objective 2 (5 years)	Team VVSG-International plays an active role in <b>preparation, policy-making &amp; local translation</b> of the <b>Post- Agenda 2030</b>	
The voice of Flemish local governments will be included internationally in the development of the Post- Agenda 2030, as well as the accumulated expertise around the local translation of this new international framework.		
Objective 3 (5 years)	Local governments have <b>access to knowledge, networks and case studies on local governance strengthening</b> through international cooperation	
The VVSG builds up expertise on local government empowerment through international cooperation and disseminates it to and facilitates local governments' access to it. VVSG-International ensures that Flemish and international partners are equally heard.		

## 4. Strategy

To promote good local governance worldwide through international cooperation, the VVSG International team will focus on the **3 roles of the VVSG**, namely networking, advocacy & knowledge sharing. All activities in function of the upcoming federal grant programmes can be categorised under these 3 roles. Specifically, the VVSG will work through the following strategies to achieve its objectives:

The VVSG will continue to support **town twinning between Flemish local governments and municipalities from the Global South**. Town twinning is a powerful instrument to build an equal partnership between two local governments, with institutional and organisational strengthening in both directions. Through a colleague-to-colleague approach, the twinning works on mutual capacity building and strengthening of democratisation

processes. Within the twinning, a thematic focus (e.g. local economy, food) can trigger internal processes around governance capacity. Much attention is paid to policy co-creation with a focus on specific target groups such as women and youth. However, the VVSG also focuses on **experiments in new forms of international cooperation** (e.g. thematic networks, deployment of municipal expertise in programmes by Enabel, diaspora working, triangular cooperation). **Cooperation with umbrella associations** of local governments is becoming increasingly important, on the one hand to support existing twinning or new forms of international cooperation, but also to improve the administrative context and further disseminate the lessons learned from the programme to all local governments in a given country. The professionalisation of these various forms of cooperation through, among other things, training courses, studies, conferences, publications and



learning paths remains an important strategy in the programme.

In addition, the VVSG will pay attention to **advocacy and knowledge sharing around the (Post-) Agenda 2030**. Working groups, campaigns, networking events and training sessions should give Flemish local governments tools to make their policies sustainable through this international agenda.

In the future, the VVSG will also increase its own knowledge around strengthening governance and strengthen and develop **strategic partnerships** to this end (e.g. with UVCW/Brulocalis, Enabel, FIDO, OECD, UN,...).

To live up to its advocacy role, but also provide support to local governments around this, the VVSG will put even more effort into demonstrating & raising visibility for the **impact of municipal international cooperation**.

## 5. Financial plan

The VVSG's International team currently works 100% on grant programmes. For development cooperation, the VVSG receives grants from 2 governments, namely the federal government (DGD) and the Flemish government (Department of Foreign Affairs).

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Federal government</b>	€ 1.183.968	€ 1.228.031	€ 1.291.099	€ 1.391.794	€ 1.417.110
<b>Flemish government</b>	€ 168.000	€ 168.000	€ 248.000	€ 248.000	€ 206.250
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 1.351.968</b>	<b>€ 1.396.031</b>	<b>€ 1.539.099</b>	<b>€ 1.639.794</b>	<b>€ 1.623.360</b>

As an Institutional Actor, the VVSG can count on full funding for the implementation of its DGD programme. The participating Flemish municipalities use their own municipal resources for the personnel costs of the global official who monitors the federal programme. In addition, the Flemish municipalities provide additional resources for town twinning, but also for strengthening support for global themes in their own municipality. This also includes financial grants given by municipalities to NGOs and fourth pillar initiatives on their territory.

For its federal grant programme for 2027-2036, the VVSG assumes a budget retention compared to the 2022-2026 period. However, the VVSG will proportionally reduce the share of administrative costs in favour of operational costs. In the indicative financial plan, the VVSG assumes 3% inflation annually.

<b>At 5 years</b>	<b>2027</b>	<b>2028</b>	<b>2029</b>	<b>2030</b>	<b>2031</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Administration costs</b>	€ 163.699	€ 168.610	€ 173.668	€ 178.879	€ 184.245	€ 869.101
<b>Management costs</b>	€ 21.276	€ 21.915	€ 22.572	€ 23.249	€ 23.947	€ 112.959
<b>Operating costs</b>	€ 1.194.853	€ 1.230.699	€ 1.267.620	€ 1.305.648	€ 1.344.818	€ 6.343.638
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 1.379.829</b>	<b>€ 1.421.224</b>	<b>€ 1.463.860</b>	<b>€ 1.507.776</b>	<b>€ 1.553.010</b>	<b>€ 7.325.699</b>

<b>At 10 years</b>	<b>2032</b>	<b>2033</b>	<b>2034</b>	<b>2035</b>	<b>2036</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Administration costs</b>	€ 189.772	€ 195.465	€ 201.329	€ 207.369	€ 213.590	€ 1.007.527

Management costs	€ 24.665	€ 25.405	€ 26.167	€ 26.952	€ 27.761	€ 130.951
Operating costs	€ 1.385.162	€ 1.426.717	€ 1.469.519	€ 1.513.604	€ 1.559.012	€ 7.354.015
Total	€ 1.599.600	€ 1.647.588	€ 1.697.015	€ 1.747.926	€ 1.800.364	€ 8.492.493

## 6. Countries

By 2024, the VVSG is **active in 6 countries (Belgium, Benin, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Senegal)**, all funding sources combined.

For the **period 2027-2036**, the VVSG will **limit itself to a maximum of six countries in the Global South and a Belgium component**. As written down in the VVSG-International partnership policy, the VVSG focuses its operations on countries where Flemish twinning municipalities are active. The VVSG explores the possibility of (permanently) involving one English-speaking country to test alternative forms of municipal international cooperation here. The VVSG does not rule out new collaborations in French- or Spanish-speaking countries, but notes that the threshold for Flemish local governments to exchange internationally decreases with English-speaking countries. In the 2022-2026 programme, the VVSG is active in Rwanda (partly in function of this experiment on alternative forms of international cooperation). A thorough evaluation in 2025 will show whether this country will continue to be included or possibly a new English-speaking country will be involved (in which cooperation with sister association and presence of Enabel is a requirement). The full list of criteria for the selection of partner countries, can be consulted in the VVSG partnership strategy.

The 4 countries in which the VVSG and the Flemish local governments will certainly remain active after 2026 are **Belgium, Benin, Ecuador and Senegal**. In these countries in the Global South, the cooperation with the Flemish town twinning is running well, and in Benin the cooperation with the umbrella association of Beninese local governments is also added. The operation in the countries Nicaragua and Rwanda will be thoroughly evaluated with the partners involved, after which a decision will be taken on the possible continuation of a federal subsidy programme as from 2027. The active town twinning programmes in Nicaragua have less freedom of movement due to central government interference, which puts pressure on the smooth implementation of the town twinning programmes. In Rwanda, too, local governments move within a tight national framework, which affects the experimental space for alternative forms of international cooperation. Depending on interest from Flemish cities and municipalities in function of their town twinning programmes and/or new forms of international cooperation, the VVSG will **investigate whether Morocco (presence of town twinning), a new English-speaking country (instead of Rwanda for an experiment) or Namibia (presence of town twinning)** can be involved. However, the VVSG will be careful not to be active in more than 6 Global South countries.

## 7. Partners

The VVSG has 2 types of partners for development cooperation (both involved in the federal grant programme). These are local authorities and associations of cities and municipalities. More information can be found in the partnership policy of the VVSG and VVSG-International.

### **1. Local governments**

The partners of the VVSG are in the first instance its members, the Flemish cities and municipalities, and in the second instance their partner municipalities. Flemish local governments themselves can choose to enter into a twinning or other form of international cooperation with one or more partner municipalities from the Global South in order to strengthen each other's administrative capacity through capacity building and knowledge sharing. Flemish local governments looking for a partner are supported by the VVSG, which provides a detailed step-by-step plan for identifying and selecting suitable partners. This process, which takes two years on average, includes drawing up a municipal profile, formulating selection criteria and organising an identification visit.

The success of municipal international cooperation lies in the inclusive collaboration between officials, politicians and civil society across municipalities. Interactions across municipalities are based on equality, reciprocity and solidarity, with both communities learning from each other. The VVSG not only guides the start-up process, but also supports during implementation with monitoring and capacity building.

The cooperation extends beyond the federal grant programme. After the end of the grant programme, the link continues, embedding long-term results and mutual trust. Thus, international municipal cooperation contributes to sustainable global impact at the local level.

### **2. Umbrella associations of local governments in the Global South**

Associations of local governments are crucial partners in municipal international cooperation. These organisations, which are unique in each partner country and often have regional ramifications, fulfil a similar role to the VVSG: they provide services and represent the interests of local governments. Governed by mayors and municipal politicians, they are an important link in strengthening local governance and promoting decentralisation processes.

VVSG's sister associations play a key role in increasing the administrative capacity of local governments and disseminating good practices in partner countries. Their position allows them to share expertise and experience widely, not only within their own membership, but also with Flemish municipalities. The VVSG works closely with these associations to support and strengthen town twinning in partner countries. They are also an essential pivot to promote the administrative context through their unique mandate and position as representatives of local governments. The VVSG is exploring whether it can also work more closely with the local sister association in Senegal and Ecuador over the next 10 years.

If desirable for the realisation of its objectives, the VVSG may enter into additional partnerships. Here we are thinking, for example, of synergy partners such as Enabel. The existing framework agreement between the VVSG and Enabel could be refined to deploy

municipal expertise in Enabel's programmes in the partner countries (in keeping with the objective of internationalising Flemish administrations).

By 31 December 2024, the VVSG maintains active partnerships with

- 12 townships;
- 2 sister associations
- 2 SDG partnerships.

## 8. Target

VVSG's approach emphasises the broad impact of efforts around good local governance, leveraging local governments and their associations to reach both direct and indirect beneficiaries (multiplier effect).

### **Direct beneficiaries:**

- **Local governments in Belgium and the Global South:** Ranging from the civil service level to political administration and civil society. The civil service level includes various services ranging from strategic and thematic services to those that support and facilitate internal processes.
- **National associations of local authorities:** organisations that support and strengthen local authorities, both inside and outside Belgium.

### **Final beneficiaries:**

- **Residents of Belgium and the Global South:** End users of improved local public services and policies, with direct impact on their quality of life.
- **Other levels of government and actors within a local government ecosystem:** To ensure a multi-level, multi-actor and territorial approach, partners such as regional and federal governments, civil society organisations and private actors also benefit from this cooperation and strengthening.



