SDG 8

PAPER 3

ADVANCING DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL:

Challenges and opportunities for LRGs in the localization of SDG 8

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GLOBAL TASKFORCE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Facilitated by:

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T.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.

LOCALIZING CARE AND THE NEW ESSENTIALS THROUGH SDGs 3, 5, 8 AND 14

The global landscape for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) achievement is increasingly marked by setbacks and tensions. The impacts of overlapping crises — ranging from the pandemic and climate emergency to geopolitical instability — have slowed or even reversed progress on key SDG targets. Simultaneously, the rise of populist narratives and policies fostered by national governments in various countries has further weakened trust in international cooperation, undermining multilateral efforts and commitments to global agendas. This backlash against shared governance frameworks and rights-based development has left adherents to the 2030 Agenda more isolated, with local and regional governments (LRGs) often left to uphold the principles of inclusion, sustainability and justice on their own.

SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) is falling short of its 2030 targets. The pandemic has left long-lasting effects on global health systems, such as a stagnating maternal mortality ratio and reduction in life expectancy, which exacerbate pre-existing inequalities in access to essential services. While some progress has been made in areas such as HIV and tobacco reduction (in 150 countries globally), broader determinants of health — like education, decent employment, adequate housing and clean air — are deteriorating. This calls for an integrated approach to health that combines local service delivery with holistic social policies.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality) remains one of the most stubbornly off-track goals. Parity in political representation will not be reached until 2063. Discrimination persists in legal systems, labor markets (with over 50 percent of countries around the world still maintaining laws that restrict equal access to employment for women) and within the distribution of unpaid care work, which continues to fall disproportionately on women; they spend 2.5 times as many hours as men on such work. Although strides have been made in gender-sensitive legislation (in 56 countries between 2019 and 2023) and in reducing gender-based violence, deep structural inequalities remain. The road to gender equality requires transformative, care-centered policies that tackle both visible and invisible barriers.

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) presents a mixed picture. As the global economy grows at around 5% yearly, working poverty and global unemployment (which was at a historic low of 5% in 2023) have fallen. However, informal work continues to affect over two billion people, and modern slavery (which has increased by 10 million people since 2016), forced labor and child labor are on the rise. The slow pace of productivity recovery and limited progress in universal social protection highlight the need for a new, territorial economic model that champions equity, decent work and community-based livelihoods.

Finally, progress in SDG 14 (Life Below Water) is largely underreported. Ocean acidification and eutrophication continue to increase, thereby endangering ocean ecosystems, and the sustainability of global fishery resources has declined from 90% in 1974 to 62.5% in 2021. Tangible progress has been made due to the implementation of ecosystem-based strategies for marine-area management, the protection of key biodiversity areas and the increasingly comprehensive fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The first binding, international agreement on this matter (the Agreement of Port State Measures, PSMA) was signed by over 100 countries.

Despite growing constraints, LRGs have consistently reaffirmed their commitment to the 2030 Agenda. Through networks such as the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF), LRGs have mobilized to defend multilateralism, champion territorial equality and

demand recognition as co-decision-makers in sustainable development processes.

Across the four SDGs reviewed in the four papers that are part of the 9th Towards the localization of the SDGs report,, LRGs are addressing urgent global challenges through concrete and context-specific initiatives. In Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), LRGs are developing integrated, public health policies that connect healthcare access with other key determinants, such as housing and urban infrastructure, often through community-led and participatory-governance models. In their interventions, LRGs are fostering the well-being of all people. In Gender Equality (SDG 5), LRGs are advancing feminist municipalism by creating care systems, investing in shelters and legal support for survivors of violence, and promoting women's leadership in local decision-making. In terms of Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), LRGs are supporting Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), facilitating formalization pathways for informal workers, using public procurement as a lever to ensure decent labor standards, and promoting local economic development. Regarding Life Below Water (SDG 14), coastal LRGs are fostering symbiosis between urban planning and marine sustainability, coordinating local marine protected areas, addressing pollution through territorial regulation, and strengthening food systems through the sustainable management of small-scale fisheries.

UCLG's concepts of Care and the New Essentials offer a transformative lens to rethink how SDGs are implemented at the territorial level. In response to current global crises and shifting local needs, LRGs are pioneering innovative strategies for public-service provision that reimagine care, inclusion and resilience. The four SDGs under review serve as entry points for operationalizing Care and the New Essentials. The latter includes health services rooted in community well-being, care systems that enable women's full participation, employment strategies that prioritize informality and economic justice, and local marine governance models that protect common goods. As a whole, the New Essentials represent a new development paradigm centered on equality and care.

The papers aim to analyze how LRGs are localizing key SDGs that reflect emerging priorities and interconnected challenges.They highlight how local actions on health, gender equality, decent work and ocean sustainability contribute to redefining development through the lens of the New Essentials.

The objectives of the four papers are as follows:

- **Paper 1 on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)** emphasizes the strategic importance of health in sustainable development, exploring both direct and indirect LRG contributions to health outcomes and their role in shaping holistic, integrated approaches to well-being.

- **Paper 2 on SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** focuses on feminist municipalism, transformative care and ending violence against women and girls (VAWG). It highlights the role of LRGs in implementing inclusive, participatory and rights-based approaches.

- **Paper 3 on SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)** explores how LRGs can drive just transitions by reorienting local economies around decent work, care, the creation of opportunities for all and collective bargaining. They can address informality and structural inequalities through feminist, rights-based, local, economic development.

- **Paper 4 on SDG 14 (Life Below Water)** addresses the challenges and opportunities in localizing ocean governance; overcoming institutional and thematic fragmentation; and stressing LRG leadership in marine conservation, sustainable fisheries and local resilience strategies amid climate threats.

The analyses presented in these papers are grounded in thorough secondary research and the results of the GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey on SDG localization. The papers draw from strategic collaborations within the GTF and beyond, engaging organizations such as the World Health Organization (paper on SDG 3), Public Services International (paper on SDG 8), ICLEI (paper on SDG 14), academic experts and professional networks. This multi-actor approach has led to meaningful interactions with LRGs and local government associations (LGAs), which have enriched both the research process and results. The papers are valuable tools for both advocacy and policy development, as they synthesize local experiences, policy innovations and the institutional knowledge of cities, regions and associations that are active within the GTF.

H. Highlights

VLRs and VSRs are blooming!

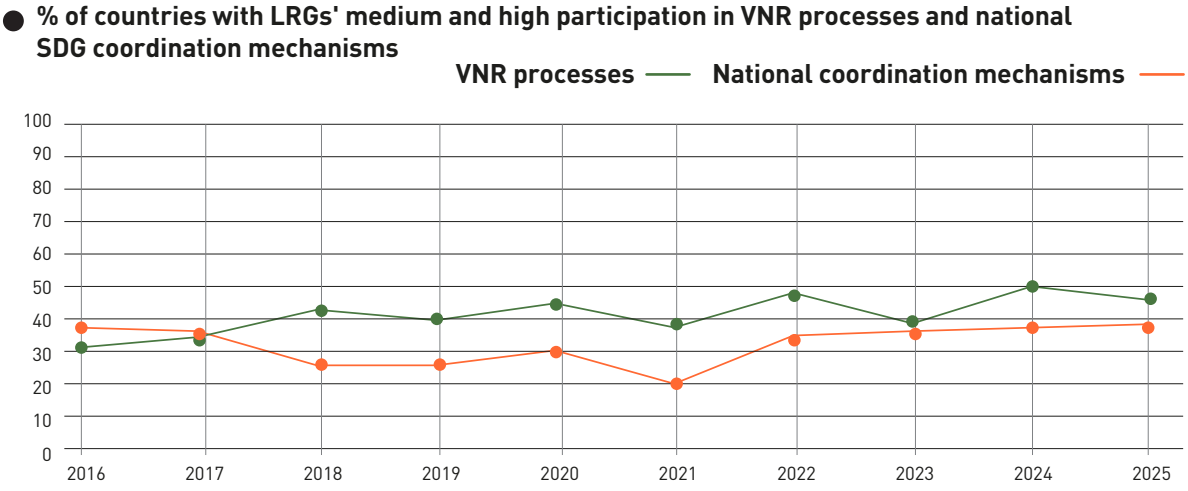
360+ VLRs by 280+ LRGs

45 VSRs in 33 countries

...HOWEVER...

LRG participation in national SDG processes is still very low

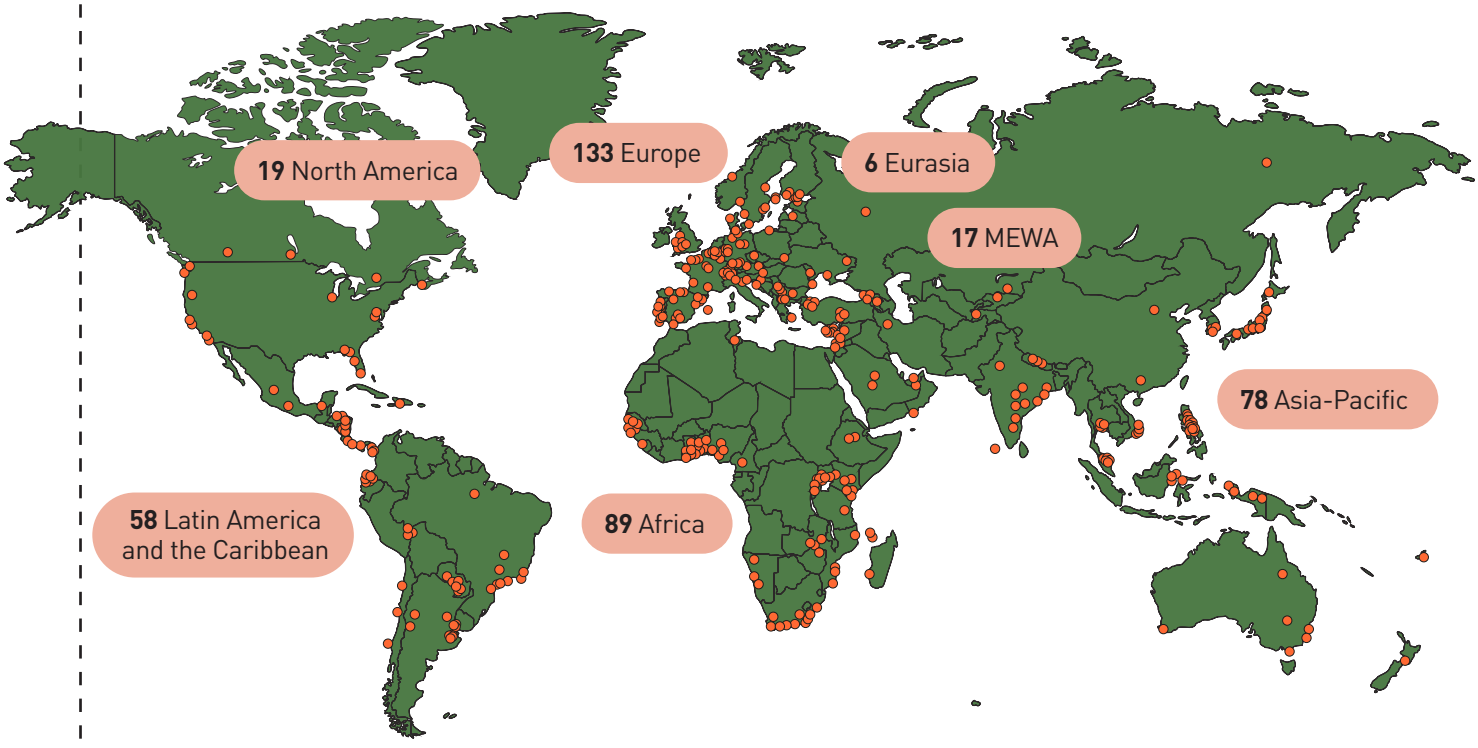
% of countries with LRGs' medium and high participation in VNR processes and national SDG coordination mechanisms



...STILL...

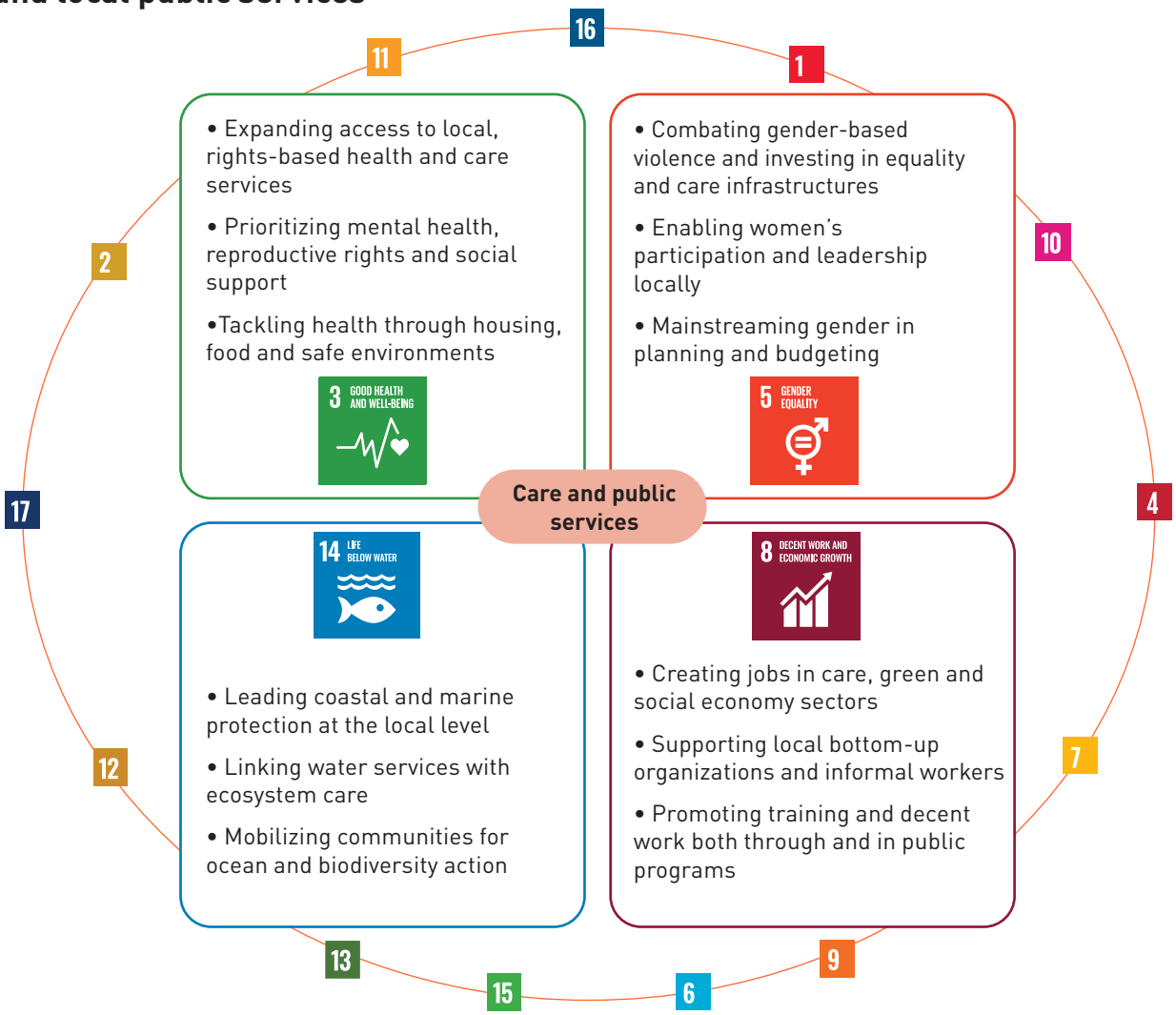
In this report you will find 400+ inspiring LRG practices from around the world

LRG practices included in the papers on SDGs 3, 5, 8 and 14



...CHECK THEM OUT TO LEARN HOW...

LRGs are at the forefront of SDG achievement through care, equality and local public services



...AND FOR ALL OF THE ABOVE...

The GTF has recommendations

Recognize LRGs' leadership

Acknowledge LRGs as essential actors in localizing the 2030 Agenda

Ensure local financing

Secure stable, long-term funding aligned with LRG priorities

Support public local data

Boost disaggregated local data production, access and use

Advance decentralization

Empower LRGs through more competencies and greater participation in SDG governance

Integrate local SDG reporting

Embed VLRs/VSRs into national reviews and processes

Renew multilateralism

Rebuild global systems to give LRGs a seat at the table in international decision-making

Foster new governance models

Promote novel, people- and environment- centered governance models that overcome the current profit-oriented logics

2. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment, poor and unfair working conditions, and uneven economic growth are persistent global challenges falling under Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) that undermine social stability, human rights and well-being. The deficit of decent work opportunities does not only perpetuate poverty (SDG 1). It also exacerbates inequality (SDG 10) in all its forms, weakens social cohesion and limits the potential for sustainability. Within this context, SDG 8 is key to tackling these challenges.

It seeks to ensure that economic growth is inclusive and sustainable (and therefore based on full and productive employment and decent work) to enable dignified, working and living standards for all. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), decent work — with gender equality a cross-cutting objective — includes job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue.[1] It is a broad concept that encompasses all dimensions of work. Local and regional governments (LRGs) can play a critical role in the localization of SDG 8, along with other interconnected SDGs, in their territories and local communities.

Typically, central governments set overall national policy directions. They establish strategic, socio-economic and regulatory frameworks; set industrial relations systems and practices; and define ways to finance and deliver infrastructure and attract investment. Important as they are, national-level policies and programs cannot by themselves fully embrace the diversity, specificities and asks of local communities and territories. LRGs are best placed to do so and therefore play an essential role in localizing SDG context. They are the government entities closest to communities and are well-positioned to address specific challenges and implement targeted solutions that better suit regional and local needs. In this sense, they can play a unique, twofold role: as public authorities, they can shape and implement territorial public policies and drive inclusive, local economic development (LED) in their territories and communities; as employers of LRG staff (the workforce that makes up the bulk

of public service employment worldwide), they can ensure decent work in their workplaces, particularly by engaging in constructive social dialogue and collective bargaining with LRG workers' unions.[2]

For instance, LRGs can develop and implement active labor market policies to generate decent work opportunities in specific sectors and areas of their territories; promote formalization for vulnerable workers in the informal economy; support small enterprises (SMEs); provide local infrastructure development; enable equitable access to quality, local public services; and deliver and promote social equity through enhancing social security and collective bargaining.

This paper is a joint collaboration between the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF) — facilitated by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) — and Public Services International (PSI).[3] Its goal is to contribute to the discussion on localizing SDG 8 within the framework of the 2025 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). It reviews and showcases LRG strategies and good practices worldwide, drawing conclusions and issuing recommendations to further advance SDG 8. The paper accounts for the two key dimensions of LRGs' agency in localizing SDG 8: as public authorities that formulate and implement policy frameworks and programs to support the achievement of SDG 8 in the territories and communities under their jurisdictions; and as employers who have to uphold the principles of SDG 8 and promote decent work within their workplaces. Indeed, many challenges across the world must be addressed in order to achieve the full realization of SDG 8. Localization, under the aegis of LRGs, has immense potential and is fundamental to addressing such deficits.

The paper is mostly based on the results of desk research and is complemented by the analysis of responses and feedback from two surveys on LRGs' SDG 8 implementation.[4] The desk research largely includes documents from international organizations and academic literature, as well as both UCLG and PSI resources. Between February and April 2025, the two surveys of members and affiliates were carried out by UCLG (with 165 responses) and PSI (with 114 responses, of which 28 were complete) respectively.

Following the introduction, sections 2, 3 and 4 present the different sets of SDG 8 targets. Section 2 includes targets related to growth (also with reference to productivity and financing) and employment. Section 3 relates to the set of targets on labor rights and working conditions. Section 4 is about social dialogue, which is a means to discuss and negotiate labor-related issues, included in SDG 8.3. Section 5 presents key conclusions and policy recommendations to enhance the role and effectiveness of the different actors involved in localizing SDG 8 in service of the 2030 Agenda.

3.
ECONOMIC GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT

Under SDG 8, economic growth is not an end in itself, but a means to achieving socio-economic inclusion and generating opportunities for dignified lives. There are still major challenges in achieving the SDG 8 targets. However, the many good practices showcased in this section demonstrate that there are also enormous opportunities for triggering change at the local level.

3.1 Challenges in achieving inclusive and sustainable growth

The assumption that economic growth (SDG 8.1) will automatically lead to widespread benefits through job creation, wage increases, fewer inequalities and better access to public services for all has been widely challenged. Indeed, productivity gains (SDG 8.2) have not been equitably distributed among and within countries. Even though global net wealth per adult has grown around 3.2% per year since 1995, the poorest half of the world's population currently owns just 2% of global wealth, whereas the richest half owns 98%.[5] Economic growth alone does not necessarily reduce poverty and inequalities. Inequitable growth distribution has resulted in wealth concentration in some territories (and by particular groups) and created pockets of poverty in others.[6]

Urban inequalities vary across cities and regions, and they are shaped by a complex interplay of political, economic, socio-cultural and ecological forces, all embedded within specific historical contexts. These inequalities are sustained not only through market dynamics but also through the configuration of social and political relationships, interactions and institutional arrangements operating across multiple scales. For instance, territorial inequalities are particularly notable in South African cities like Johannesburg (with a Gini coefficient above 60), Latin American cities like Belo Horizonte and US cities like Los Angeles (both with a Gini coefficient over 50).[7] Territorial inequalities between urban and rural areas also manifest themselves in the disparity of access to vital public services and infrastructures. For example, Montcada

i Reixac (Spain) features an abundance of infrastructures that serve the nearby metropolis of Barcelona. By contrast, rural underinvestment leads to public service desertification, which Golubac (Serbia) and Morsø (Denmark) are currently experiencing.[8] While globalization was initially seen as an equalizing force, it has instead increased macroeconomic instability and deepened income and wealth disparities. As capital moves from one place to another, countries and territories seek to attract enterprises offering advantages, such as tax breaks, cheap labor, access to resources at low cost and relaxed environmental legislation. These conditions have encouraged several waves of production shifts and employment delocalization from one place to another.[9] This model of globalization does not serve social progress and hardly leads to advancements in SDG 8. Besides, many enterprises are now engaged in long, multi-layered, global, subcontracting chains where the risk of human and labor rights violations is higher, including the occurrence of child and forced labor.[10] **LRGs can be acutely affected by these economic and employment imbalances, as these adversely impact and deplete their communities' well-being and resources.**

Furthermore, urbanization and spatial concentration tend to reinforce pre-existing social and economic inequalities by disproportionately favoring already advantaged groups and widening disparities not only along class lines but also across dimensions of gender, race, ethnicity and age. Additionally, deindustrialization, cheap-import competition and social dumping in strategic industries (jointly with the general shift toward a service economy) have led many decent jobs available in urban and local communities to disappear or become precarious and underpaid even if they add value to the community. **These patterns have also impoverished LRGs and deprived neighborhoods of vital public services, such as access to water, sanitation, education, healthcare, waste management and employment opportunities, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion.[11]**

The power of quality public services to trigger inclusive, sustainable growth has been broadly ascertained.[12] However, neoliberal and austerity-driven policies have led to widespread privatization of public services or their lack of development where they are most needed; and profit is prioritized over equitable access, quality, and decent work creation. Private service operators prioritize services in areas and for communities that are financially affluent, often neglecting those that are less lucrative or marginalized. The case of private bus services in the UK is a clear example.[13] Tourism — the only industry explicitly referenced in SDG 8 (SDG 8.9) — and other sectors are increasingly shaped by neoliberal policies, financialization and unlimited consumption models that prioritize economic growth for some over the preservation of natural resources and the well-being of local populations. Although mass, commodified tourism contributes to around 10% of global GDP,[14] it often creates economic inequalities: profits that benefit corporations over local dealers and service providers.[15]

Following this analysis, **there is a need for a paradigm shift in economic development that prioritizes equity, sustainability and human well-being**. This does not mean rejecting economic growth, but rather calling for a different form of it, one that is inclusive, socially just and environmentally sustainable. In part through the generation of decent employment opportunities, this necessary form of growth actively contributes to reducing existing inequalities and avoids creating new forms of exclusion. This includes making sure that the private sector truly integrates social and environmental responsibilities into all operations and supply chains, respects and upholds human and labor rights, and refrains from profiteering from vital services and public goods, undermining public provision through privatization.

Alarming levels of unemployment and underemployment (SDGs 8.3, 8.6 and 8.b) **illustrate the need to support alternatives to the current model of economic growth**. According to the ILO, in addition to 186 million unemployed people in 2024, 137 million were part of the potential labor force (mainly discouraged workers), and around 79 million workers faced obligations (such as unpaid care) that hinder them from taking up employment. Moreover, 240 million workers are in working poverty, living on less than 2.15 USD per person per day.[16]

Employment opportunities have become outpaced by an expanding global population, urbanization, labor market deregulation, neoliberal and austerity policies, and the transformation of the economy (including the destruction of manufacturing, the assignment of low value to essential public service jobs like health and care, and the impact of digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI) on jobs that can be easily destroyed). A large number of workers in different sectors have no other option but to accept precarious forms of employment. This situation has led to an increase in non-standard forms of employment, such as informal and casual work, zero-hour contracts, triangular employment relationships through temporary work agencies and/or subcontracting companies, and bogus self-employment promoted by the platform economy. Youth unemployment (SDGs 8.6 and 8.b) was at 13% globally in 2023. The percentage of young people not in education, employment or training in the same year was 20%.[17] Informal workers (SDG 8.3) remain a significant part of the labor force: 58.2% globally in 2024. While they are concentrated in developing countries, their presence has also grown in developed nations.[18]

The digital and green transitions, including the rise of unregulated AI, also have relevant implications

for SDG 8. Digital innovations are reshaping the economy and the world of work. **These digital advancements can support SDG 8 targets related to productivity and job safety. However, they also risk widening the technological divide; they destroy replaceable jobs, and they undermine labor rights (e.g. through worker surveillance). These advancements also sharpen psychosocial risks at work if they are not backed by worker-led policies of fair transitions towards digital economies.**[19] Besides, the rise of high-tech employment often comes at the cost of traditional, manual jobs. This calls for proactive policies to mitigate the social costs of lay-offs and displacement and to ensure socially just transitions into other decent employment opportunities. This is especially relevant in the case of older and low-skilled workers, who face greater challenges in adapting to new technologies and (re) entering the labor market.[20]

The green transition is vital for decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation (SDG 8.4), and thus for ensuring planetary sustainability. Yet, like digital transformation, the green transition does not inherently address economic disparities or the woes of precarious work. For example, while transitioning to a more sustainable economy presents opportunities for job creation in renewable energy and sustainable industries, it might also lead to job losses in traditional sectors, which again need to be addressed adequately through public policies that ensures just transitions for displaced workers and communities.[21]

3.2 Local approaches to inclusive socio-economic development and decent job creation

Although economic growth is a key contributor to improving livelihoods, its benefits have been unevenly distributed to a significant extent, and decent work deficits are a global problem. The following subsection touches on viable policy pathways fostered by LRGs and unions that can offer solutions to global social crises through SDG 8 localization.

✱ Local economic development (LED)

LED is one key strategy that lies within the power and capacities of LRGs to respond to challenges in SGD 8 implementation. It promotes endogenous growth by addressing specific local problems such as unemployment, poverty, inequality, skill shortages and lack of investment. At the same time, it creates a virtuous circle of short supply chains whereby local wealth and income remain (and are reinvested) in the territories. LED is a collaborative effort driven by LRGs in dialogue and partnership with businesses, worker organizations and civil society, to enhance local economies through inclusive growth. With the right policy mix adapted to specific community needs, LED can trigger innovation, generate decent work, strengthen social partnerships and build long-term resilience in communities.

The final declaration of the VI World Forum on Local Economic Development[22] (Seville, Spain, April 2025) reaffirms the crucial role of LRGs in tackling global challenges through inclusive and sustainable economic strategies tailored to local contexts. It underscores the role of public services and decent work within an integrated approach that includes a triple transition (ecological, digital and social), innovative financing, caring economies and strong partnerships.

Social value procurement, also known as "community wealth building" in some instances, is an important form of LED, as are territorial pacts for employment.[23] LRGs like London (UK) foster social value procurement, which means evaluating not only the price-to-quality ratios in the public procurement of goods or services but also taking into consideration their broader social, economic and environmental impacts. It leverages public purchasing power to generate value that benefits society as a whole, including decent job creation. In 2021, Mi-

lan (Italy) signed a memorandum of understanding to safeguard work quality in municipal procurement contracts negotiated with major Italian trade unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL). This agreement prioritizes quality over lowest-cost tenders; ensures job continuity and stability (minimum four-year contracts); protects workers' rights during contract transitions; places limits on subcontracting; mandates the application of collective agreements to all workers involved in the procurement contracts; and establishes a public registry of companies that exercise unfair labor practices.

Many LRGs already promote LED at the intersection of economic growth and decent work. For instance, the provincial government of **Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas** (Ecuador) supports local entrepreneurs and rural agricultural producers' associations by promoting agro-productive chains and small and micro enterprises. The goal is to improve their living conditions and generate decent employment. Similarly, **Lincoln** (Argentina) promotes regional products, provides business services to bring them to market, helps entrepreneurs build a brand and provides technology to generate payments with prepaid social cards. By using these cards, public workers contribute to stimulating the commercialization of local products.

Mafra (Portugal) created projects to promote the integration of unemployed people and people with disabilities into active life through the Professional Insertion Office, a support structure for job search — including for youth — that cooperates closely with the local employment center in **Loures**. Ponte de Sor (Portugal) has also worked to enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor market, by creating a specific program for their training and employment. In Germany, the **Berlin** Employment Agency partners with local businesses, trade unions and schools to support youth in the transition from education to employment.

Some LRGs promote formalization and support the livelihoods and rights of informal workers in their communities, including by enabling ways to access social protection, fair wages and decent working conditions. The Brazilian central government, in collaboration with municipalities like Vitoria and Guarulhos, introduced the Individual Microentrepreneur Program, simplifying business registration for self-employed informal workers. The program included a single, low-cost tax that covers social security and health services, and facilitates administrative proceedings, access to banking services and retirement benefits. In India, cities like Delhi have worked with the self-employed women worker organization SEWA to provide legal recognition of and support for informal workers, providing street vendors and domestic workers with identity documents.

Local government associations (LGAs) can also be actors in LED promotion. For example, the **Association of Netherlands Municipalities** (VNG) assists its members in formulating economic policies that correspond to the objectives of SDG 8, encouraging local job creation, fostering inclusive labor markets and enhancing a business-friendly environment. Through decentralized cooperation (i.e. international cooperation and partnerships among LRGs), the VNG has also supported the implementation of reforms aimed at strengthening local governance and fostering integrated, inclusive and sustainable regional development in Algeria.

LED programs can also provide for the basic needs of their communities, such as promoting food sovereignty. **Amman** (Jordan) advanced urban food sustainability by integrating green economy principles into local food systems. The project is part of the municipality's broader strategy to enhance food security, reduce food waste and support climate-resilient urban development. Through partnerships with local and international organizations, the municipality supported projects that have created economic opportunities for women, youth and marginalized groups.

✱ Social and solidarity economy (SSE)

SSE encompasses a wide range of organizations such as associations and cooperatives of self-employed informal workers that aim to increase their bargaining power in order to obtain better prices for their products and services and gain access to forms of social protection. SSE organizations often prioritize social and environmental goals, with a focus on cooperation, solidarity, social inclusion and participation.[24] **Some LRGs have increasingly worked closely with SSE organizations to alleviate poverty and foster formalization, in order to counterbalance the pressures of competitive markets that often favor profits over social and solidarity values.**

Belo Horizonte (Brazil) implemented a social program focused on the food value chain and the promotion of cooperatives. The Popular Restaurants employed cooperative members to provide affordable meals for low-income populations. The Expanded Public Works Programme initiative in South Africa was implemented across four sectors and three spheres of governance (national, provincial and local). It provides poverty and income relief through temporary work for the unemployed, such as socially useful activities in public works, waste management and community services. LRGs in different territories across the world — such as the Provincial Government of **Zamora Chinchipe** (Ecuador) — have also supported job creation by involving local communities in ecotourism and cultural tourism.

However, in some countries (such as Italy and the UK), contracting out labor-intensive public services such as waste collection and domiciliary care to the

SSE has in some cases proven to be a way to circumvent the application of branch collective agreements and to get services delivered at a cheaper rate. This is the case especially when unscrupulous employers use SSE schemes to access public tenders while exploiting vulnerable workforce such as migrant, undocumented and women workers. When employed under such circumstances, these types of workers may also lack the qualifications and skills needed to deliver quality services to the community.[25] In such cases, close oversight and collaboration among trade unions, LRGs and the labor inspectorate (as well as the presence of sound, effective legislation) are key. Likewise, when LRG employers that contract out external services make progressive voluntary commitments to fair labor relations, it can make a real difference. One example is the case of UNISON's Ethical Care Councils Charter.[26]

✱ The care sector and caring economies

Care workers are critical to the reproduction of our societies, yet they are too often invisible, undervalued, underpaid and in precarious working conditions. Poor working conditions and the lack of rights and a voice at work make it impossible for care workers to deliver the quality care that communities need. The commercialization of care has prioritized profit over people. Vulnerable human beings (older people, children, people with disabilities or other groups) are treated as revenue sources, and essential workers are seen as disposable costs.[27]

LRGs and trade unions have vastly contributed to defending the rights of care givers and receivers. They acknowledge that caregiving activities and services (childcare, elder care, healthcare, care for people with disabilities, social service work, education and education support services) are not only vital for thriving, just and inclusive communities but also for efficient economies.[28]

In Trieste (Italy), the municipality transformed the mental health care system into a holistic care service by prioritizing early interventions; transferring patients to community mental health centers and minimizing reliance on psychiatric hospitals. This approach preserved patients' rights and dignity. **California** (USA) launched a 1.7 billion USD initiative to develop the care workforce, with a focus on expanding the number of care providers especially in underserviced regions.

In 2020, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) launched the nationwide "Fix long-term care" campaign to take profit out of long-term elder care. They demanded that the Canadian government take over; invest in long-term elder-care homes; and set a national service quality standard and safe, decent working conditions for staff across all Canadian provinces. The campaign contributed to the 2021 decision by the government of Saskatchewan to invest 80 million CAD in long-term care, starting with municipalizing two facilities through substantial public investment; plan 82 renewal projects; and plan 13 new public elder-care homes in rural and remote areas of the province.

The Secretary of Women's Affairs in Bogotá (Colombia) introduced Latin America's first citywide care system aimed at addressing the care gaps that unequally impact women. The municipality also launched the "Care Blocks" program, where (under a proximity-based approach) women caregivers can access free support services, including childcare, skills training and mental health counselling. This initiative also creates jobs by hiring professionals to provide the services. Since 2015, the municipality of Recoleta (Chile) has focused on creating local public services in areas with the greatest need, where 14% of the population lives in poverty. After a participatory consultation process, Recoleta launched Chile's first popular pharmacy, allowing the local government to directly purchase and provide affordable medicines, and a social security scheme for low-income residents. By 2020, residents saved up to 70% on medication costs. Inspired by this model, 80 municipalities across Chile have since opened their own popular pharmacies, which are now organized under a national association.[29]

The **Kapuas district** (Indonesia) has adopted an integrated approach to healthcare. It focuses on expanding job opportunities and training programs for healthcare workers (including doctors, nurses, midwives and community health workers) in hospitals, community health centers and mobile health units. The district also prioritizes the procurement of medical equipment and infrastructure, supporting the growth of local suppliers and service providers. Ensuring fair wages, benefits and safe working conditions for healthcare personnel is a key commitment, alongside strengthening social protection programs, particularly for those in remote and underserved areas. Additionally, community-based health initiatives are supported to create job opportunities and foster self-reliance. To sustain these efforts, the district has allocated a substantial healthcare budget of 515.5 billion IDR.

LRGs can create jobs within their own territories and institutions by promoting active labor market policies, including those that facilitate professional transitions, vocational training, re-skilling and the return to the labor market for the mid- and long term unemployed. The Menn i Helse ("Men in Health") program was started in 2010 by the city of **Trondheim** (Norway) and subsequently became a national project. It functioned with support from and in cooperation with the **Norwegian Local and Regional Government Association**, the Norwegian Directorate for Health, LRGs and the Norwegian Union of Municipal Workers (*Fagforbundet*). The program encouraged men who need support entering or reentering the job market — including those transitioning to new industries after a debilitating workplace injury — to train and get jobs in healthcare and social care. The project helped to overcome gender stereotypes around employment in healthcare and boosted the employment of men in traditionally female-dominated occupations. Of the over 1,400 men that were trained during two years, 90% gained permanent employment in healthcare and the care sector; they were satisfied with their jobs and were living independently with dignity. Following this successful pilot, 140 Norwegian municipalities adopted this program in 2022, and it has since expanded to Swedish peer municipalities. **Such initiatives prove the success of local tripartite cooperation among LRGs, their workers' unions and national institutions in promoting active labor market policies and creating decent jobs in territories, while improving access to quality public service provision in a critical sector with labor shortages.** As employers, LRGs are pivotal for up-skilling their workforce and dignifying unskilled work. As noted earlier in this paper, they can best do so by entering into constructive social dialogue and collective bargaining with their workers' unions.

✱ Enhancing equitable access to local quality public services through direct provision, remunicipalization and in-sourcing

In addition to the SSE, LED, social value procurement and active labor market policies to foster decent work creation, there are other paramount ways to ensure decent work in the communities all while providing equitable access to local public service provision. They are: directly providing public services through the establishment of new, needed public services ("municipalization"); restoring LRG control, management and ownership of previously privatized services ("remunicipalization"); and the in-sourcing of jobs that may be informal and precarious (hence not decent) under direct, LRG employment with decent working conditions (including social dialogue). **These options offer significant benefits in terms of service quality, expanded and more affordable access, long-term cost-effectiveness, public accountability and decent work creation.**[30]

Successful examples of remunicipalization include waste management in **Oslo** (Norway), **Zanzibar** (Tanzania) and **Alexandria** and **Cairo** (Egypt); hospitals in several Australian localities; services within the disaster-risk reduction and management policy in **Lanuza** (Philippines); energy in **Plymouth** (UK) and **Hamburg** (Germany); water in **Paris**, **Bordeaux** and **Rennes** (France) and **Terrassa** (Spain); and IT in **Thomasville** (USA) and **Birmingham** (UK).[31]

Other LRGs have decided to combat inequalities, advance SDG 8 and foster inclusive LED by privileging direct provision and therefore not tendering out when they have the capacity to provide services themselves. In 2023, the **Autonomous Canberra Territory** (Australia) introduced an Insourcing Framework as part of the government's commitment to promote the well-being of the community by providing more secure employment for workers through the Secure Employment Framework. The Insourcing Framework mandates that any service, good or task the government needs to provide must be considered for in-house delivery first; it will only be tendered out if it can be proven that the government cannot deliver it properly or efficiently. The framework was developed by the LRG in consultation with Australian public service unions. Similarly, in March 2025 the government of the Australian state of **New South Wales** introduced legislation to ban public-private partnerships for the management of acute hospitals, including by future governments.

Quality public services in public hands — with adequate numbers of skilled staff in decent working conditions, with labor rights and occupational safety and health — are a key equalizing factor for communities.

✱ Funding local initiatives

One of the major obstacles LRGs face in providing equitable access to quality local public services for workers, inhabitants and communities is the over-dependence on intergovernmental transfers from central governments and the devolution of competences without adequate financial powers. Indeed, LRGs usually lack the resources to provide the level, coverage and quality of services that the population needs. Very often, as in the case of the Philippines, LRGs face the additional obstacle of caps on their ability to hire adequate numbers of staff for their services.[32] Local public and social financing mechanisms centered on people offer ways for local communities to fund their own development, ensuring resources stay within the territory and directly benefit all residents. **Many LRGs have municipal funds and local public banks to fund key infrastructures, and these models are being revived and revamped.**[33] Besides, LRGs are developing and testing diverse financing mechanisms to foster local development, including social impact bonds, impact investments, microfinance and crowdfunding platforms, local investment pools, local currencies, cross-subsidies, cooperative financial institutions and tax share donations.[34]

Local currencies can also promote the local economy and support local businesses and consumers by protecting them from fluctuations in the currency exchange and stock markets and by securing price and income stability in communities. The *chiemgauer* is a currency in Chiemgau (Germany) that circulates alongside the euro and is intended to encourage spending within the local community. The Bristol Pound was a local currency in Bristol (UK) used to promote spending within the city and support local businesses. In 2020 it was replaced by Bristol Pay, a new community-focused digital payment system. Barcelona (Spain) launched a pilot project for a social currency translated as "Citizen's Economic Resource." It is a digital currency designed to complement the euro and is accepted by various local businesses and institutions within the city. The *léman* is the local currency used to foster local development in the canton of Geneva (Switzerland). Six municipalities of the canton (Carouge, le Grand-Saconnex, Plan-Les-Ouates, Onex, Vevey, Meyrin) also use it for their own transactions. The currency exchange desk is at the Town Hall and citizens can pay a part of their taxes in *lémans*.

In Germany, it is common for municipalities to support public services through cross-financing, especially when income generated from user fees is insufficient. In **Munich**, the public energy provider Stadtwerke München–SWM uses surplus funds from its electricity operations, which constantly generate revenue, to cover the deficits of the local public transport company through cross-subsidization. The transport company faced growing financial shortfalls in covering rural, remote and sparsely populated areas.

Abrantes (Portugal) has two local financing programs that seek to support the creation of qualified jobs in companies in the Tagus Valley Technological Park and provide rent support for companies located in the historic center. **Bologna** (Italy) partners with cooperative banks to provide low-interest loans for cooperatives. New York (USA), which is currently creating its own public bank,[35] issued a social impact bond to finance job training programs for at-risk youth. In order to revitalize neighborhoods, Chicago's (USA) Community Loan Fund offered loans and grants to local real estate developers for projects that include community centers and commercial spaces. The Bank of North Dakota (USA) is a publicly owned bank which supports local priorities via state-level projects.

4.
LABOR RIGHTS AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Global decent work deficits remain a major challenge for workers, households and communities worldwide. Despite some fluctuating improvements in some target indicators, global unemployment, working poverty, gender inequality, informality and the rate of accidents and deaths at work remain major obstacles to the realization of SDG 8. The deterioration of compliance with fundamental labor rights at work is even more alarming. At the same time, the labor income share continues to decline compared to capital remuneration, which deepens and widens existing inequalities.[36] The global decent work deficits affect workers both in the private and public sectors.

4.1
Deficits in implementation of labor rights and adequate working conditions

Target 8.8 aims to **protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers**. Per the international labor rights and jurisprudence of the ILO, five rights are defined as fundamental, which means they amount to human rights and must be upheld by countries and respected by businesses, regardless of whether states have ratified the corresponding ILO conventions. The five rights are freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (SDG indicator 8.8.2); the abolition of child labor (SDG 8.7); the elimination of forced and compulsory labor (SDG 8.7); the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation (SDGs 8.5 and 8.8); and a safe and healthy working environment (SDG 8.8).

According to the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) Global Rights Index 2024,[37] freedom of speech and assembly is constrained in 43% of countries across the world; trade union registration is hindered in 74%; the right to strike is constrained in 87%; workers are denied the right to establish or join a trade union in 75%; and collective bargaining is constrained in 79%.[38] Furthermore, public employees face obstacles and limitations on their right to organize in at least 50 countries.[39] These limitations and violations of workers' rights also occur at a local level.

With respect to child labor, UNICEF notes that in 2020 there were approximately 160 million children in work activities across the world. They are often engaged in hazardous activities, and their schooling is affected by the time they spend working. This situation compromises their future.[40] According to the ILO, in 2021 approximately 27.6 million people were subjected to forced labor globally. Workers endure different forms of forced labor, such as having their passports or other documents confiscated by their employer, becoming trapped in an unending debt situation or being physically confined in buildings or farms.[41] **Child labor and forced labor are present in global supply chains, especially where there are multiple layers of subcontracting and significant informality and lack of rights at work, including the lack of union representation.**

Furthermore, nondiscrimination and pay equity between women and men remains unachieved. **Women are exposed to precarious employment conditions in more than 90% of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 89% of countries in Southern Asia and almost 75% of those in Latin America.[42]** This perpetuates income inequality between genders. This is also generally the case for LRG workers. Women make up the majority of LRG staff, and they remain relegated to low-paid, feminized and horizontally-segregated professions, such as primary education, care, social services, health services, tourism and janitorial services.[43] Discrimination also occurs with regard to age, nationality, disability, ethnic origin, sexual orientation and other features. **Migrant workers — especially when young and undocumented — are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation, as they must often accept precarious working conditions to survive in receiving countries.[44]**

Finally, 2.78 million workers still lose their lives each year due to occupational accidents and work-related illnesses, and 374 million workers experience non-fatal occupational accidents. Globally, lost workdays account for nearly 4% of the world's GDP, with some countries seeing this figure rise to 6% or more.[45]

Poor working conditions, informality and the lack of decent work opportunities trap a significant number of workers worldwide in a poverty cycle and perpetuate inequalities, including at a local level.[46] The global rise in non-standard forms of work and of a new global class of precarious workers[47] — including through the widespread use of unregulated platform-economy technologies for labor market intermediation, both in the public and private sectors — has translated into the rise of new challenges that stand in the way of SDG 8 realization. These challenges usually include poor working conditions (largely due to lack of access to union representation and collective bargaining rights) and therefore low wages, income insecurity, excessive working hours, limited or no social security, health risks and wage theft.[48]

The surge in digital labor platforms that has given birth to the so-called "sharing economy" can bring benefits, such as: facilitating exchanges and services at the neighborhood or city level, promoting human and social relations, and supporting the circular economy.[49] However, when un- or poorly regulated, the platform economy, digital and algorithmic technologies, and AI have worsened working conditions. The effects of which are precariousness, excessive workload, worker surveillance, erratic working time and schedules, and the presence of dominant companies that sidestep labor regulations, refuse to accept their role and responsibilities as employers, and deny workers legal recognition as employees.[50] Workers must therefore constantly be on the lookout for new jobs (often with different companies in parallel), and they are hired as self-employed or one-person microenterprises.[51] This situation allows some digital labor platform companies to avoid their employment and social security obligations.[52]

A lack of social protection is also a major cause of poverty, especially (although not exclusively) for informal and casual workers. Numerous workers and small-scale entrepreneurs do not have access to adequate healthcare, paid leave, unemployment benefits or compensation/coverage for ill health, accidents or pension. This leaves them vulnerable to economic shocks and health emergencies and forces them to pay out-of-pocket for their own social security. According to the ILO, over 4 billion people globally lack any form of social protection and many more have inadequate coverage.[53]

Additionally, wage theft is a major labor issue that affects millions of workers worldwide, across various industries. Its true scale is difficult to measure due to underreporting, but available data highlight its severity.[54] During the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 12 billion USD in wages were withheld from garment workers in the Global South as brands canceled orders and refused to compensate workers for completed work.[55] In the construction industry, particularly among migrant workers, common violations include unpaid overtime, unauthorized deductions and misreported hours. Migrant workers from countries like India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, China and Indonesia often face unpaid wages and illegal recruitment fees, usually due to weak law enforcement, low worker awareness, denial of trade union rights and high informal employment rates.[56]

4.2 Localizing labor rights: Implementation and decent work creation

Within this complex and challenging landscape, LRGs can play a critical, progressive and transformative role by fostering an enabling environment for the implementation of SDG 8 in both the territories and workplaces that fall under their jurisdictions.

Cities such as **Bologna** (Italy) offer funding and workspaces for cooperatives and social enterprises that prioritize decent work conditions. In the spirit of social value procurement, **London** (UK) requires contractors to pay living wages and respect workers' rights as part of procurement agreements. Furthermore, in the UK, many councils signed UNISON's Ethical Care Charter, which entails a commitment to ban zero-hour contracts and ensure the recruitment and retention of a more stable workforce through more sustainable pay, conditions and training levels in care services.[57] **Oakland** (USA) had a community benefits agreement that included requirements for living wages and limitations on the use of temporary workers. In **Niğde** (Türkiye), Niğde Gastronomy House and Niğde Modern Bread Production Facility prioritized women for employment.

✱ Legal and policy instruments

Legal and policy instruments are essential for protecting labor rights because they ensure enforceable standards. They provide accountability mechanisms, which allow workers to seek legal compensation if their rights are violated. Without legal protection, workers would be vulnerable to voluntary, inconsistent and unfair treatment by employers. International frameworks, such as ILO conventions, help set global standards.

To date, the ILO has 191 legally binding conventions that can be used as legal instruments in regions or municipalities of any country that ratified those conventions. The eight fundamental ILO conventions cover: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. With respect to these, if a country is an ILO member, these conventions apply throughout the territory regardless of whether the country's central government has ratified them. LRGs — along with central governments when and where appropriate — can surpass their international commitments and enforce more ambitious policies and regulations to address specific labor issues in a given territory, in order to accelerate SDG 8 implementation. Similarly, ILO recommendations, such as Recommendation 204 on the formalization of informal workers, can be used as instruments for policy formulation. However, they are non-binding. **LRGs can position themselves as legal guardians of workers' rights as well as guarantors of decent work and labor rights in the territories and workplaces they oversee, thus making a major, concrete contribution to localizing SDG 8.**

For example, the Decent and Dignified Work Policy of **Bogotá** (Colombia) promotes workers' rights and is a key mechanism for reducing social segregation. In terms of wage theft, in 2010 **Miami-Dade County** became the first LRG in the USA to pass a county-wide Wage Theft Ordinance. The **state of New York** established the Office of Labor Policy & Standards to focus on enforcing wage laws. The city also launched a Wage Theft Task Force in 2022, bringing together city, state, and federal agencies to investigate violations. New York also uses anonymous hotlines to encourage workers to report violations without fear of retaliation. The law allows workers to file complaints with the county, which can investigate and order full repayment of stolen wages, plus damages.

In 2021, **Seoul** (Republic of Korea) introduced an electronic wage-payment system for construction workers on city projects. Employers must register and pay wages through the system, ensuring transparency and reducing opportunities for wage theft. **Barcelona** (Spain) works with trade unions and NGOs

to provide legal aid and financial support for workers affected by wage theft. The city also funds so-called labor rights defense points, where workers (especially migrants) can seek free legal consultations.

In the context of growing displacement and the pressing need for safe and regular migration pathways, LRGs have become crucial in ensuring that migrants and refugees can access services, develop skills and contribute meaningfully to local economies. The Welcome Center in **Milan** (Italy) is a single point of access to city services dedicated to migrants and refugees, and it accompanies and promotes their path to inclusion. The **Kampala** Capital City Authority (Uganda) supports urban refugees by facilitating their access to healthcare, work permits, vocational training and microfinance. **Freetown** (Liberia) integrated migrants into its urban development policies by ensuring they have access to skills training, healthcare and affordable housing. The Integration Center for Foreigners Northern Regional Directorate established by **Balti** (Moldova) in 2017 serves as a local information desk and provides integration services for migrants in the municipality. The center has signed agreements with the Law Center of Advocates and its territorial representatives function as support units in legal counselling, information and training.

✱ Rights and working conditions of public service employees

By upholding the labor rights of LRG service workers and ensuring decent working conditions (including by negotiating with their employees' unions), LRGs can directly realize SDG 8 in their workplaces.

Sweden provides numerous cases related to shortening working hours and/or increasing salaries. The social services office in **Hjällbo** is participating in a national project on shortened working hours, where employees work six hours a day while earning the same salary. In **Värmdö**, difficulties in both retaining and recruiting social workers have led the local government to try a four-day workweek. In **Botkyrka**, the Swedish Union for Professionals (*Akademikerförbundet SSR*) worked with the municipality to address the issue of social workers resigning due to challenging labor conditions in the profession. As a result of social dialogue, the municipality increased the wages of social workers and case managers by 2,000 SEK per month, covering about 260 workers.

LRGs also step up when national regulations and protections for workers fall short and implementation systems default. Despite the absence of a universal healthcare coverage scheme in Armenia, the municipality of **Yerevan** provides a health insurance package for its workers through municipal procurement with insurance companies. In the USA, several LRGs have raised the minimum wage of the municipal workforce, such as **Atlanta**, **Jersey City**, **New Orleans**, **North Miami Beach** and **Tallahassee**. Some also passed paid family- or parental-leave policies and more generous annual sick leave than was mandated by federal and state regulations. **Tallinn** (Estonia) applied digital instruments to conduct risk assessments of occupational safety and health for their remote workplaces. In Flanders (Belgium), the **Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities** (VVSG) organized a bootcamp in 2024 to help members address long-term employee absences, which are often caused by burnout and third-party violence. Over five days, ten LRGs collaborated with experts to develop reintegration policies. The bootcamp covered vision development, action planning, supervisor training and stakeholder role definition. Participants applied their learnings, such as in **Bruges**, where interview guides were created for supervisors to support sick employees' return to work.

5.
SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Social dialogue is a participatory approach to discussing and defining labor-related issues. It requires the involvement of workers' and employers' organizations (in the case of bipartite dialogue) and also public authorities (in the case of tripartite dialogue). It includes collective bargaining, which is a fair way to define working conditions (including pay) and a fundamental labor right covered by ILO Convention 98. Social dialogue encompasses all types of negotiations, consultations or exchanges of information between (or among) representatives of governments, employers and workers (so-called "social partners") on issues of common interest relating to economic, employment and social policy. At a European level, the European Commission promotes social dialogue by supporting the work of 44 cross-industry social dialogue committees, including that of the LRG sector.[58] The Nordic countries also have a longstanding practice of so-called "local tripartite cooperation." This localized social dialogue practice seeks to foster collaboration to create a culture of cooperation that promotes finding the most effective and appropriate local solutions to specific challenges facing municipalities.[59]

Social dialogue is a system of regulations of industrial relations[60] and is different from societal dialogue, which can include a wider range of actors, such as civic groups, grassroots organizations, associations, cooperatives, academia and NGOs active in local communities. The latter form of dialogue is more about meaningful societal consultation and democratic involvement. It largely remains outside the scope of industrial relations, although in some cases it can help shape public policies that have a labor dimension (e.g. formalization, pathways to transition from education and vocational training into employment, the integration of migrant workers, etc.).

Social dialogue is a cornerstone not only of SDG 8 but also of good governance.[61] Nonetheless, the comprehensive, practical adoption of social dialogue still faces many challenges, even when it exists in law. Plus, its implementation at a territorial level can be difficult. Challenges are compounded when the legal framework restricts social dialogue: limitations on freedom of association or collective bargaining, for example.[62]

While social dialogue and societal dialogue are important at all levels of government, integrated policies and planning are grounded at the local level, where there are more opportunities for establishing synergies among actors in the public sector, private sector and civil society, therefore advancing SDG 8. While social dialogue at an LRG level is not embraced and practiced worldwide, there are good practices at a local, national and European level, which evidence its potential for SDG 8 implementation and provide inspiration for scaling-up.[63]

In **Buenos Aires** (Argentina), both the municipal and provincial governments have implemented initiatives to foster dialogue with unions, businesses and civil society organizations to develop policies that promote decent employment. The municipal Economic and Social Council serves as an institutional space where government representatives and social partners collaborate to design public policies aimed at economic and social development, including job creation. Additionally, the city has introduced job training programs in collaboration with social partners to enhance employability and align with the demands of the labor market. The Provincial Commission on Agricultural Labor brings together government officials and social partners to establish fair working conditions in rural areas. Furthermore, advisory councils have been created in different regions of the province — again with social partners — to design and implement employment policies tailored to regional needs.

In **Bislig** (the Philippines), the local government and the Bislig City Employees Association have established a Collective Negotiation Agreement, which includes the creation of a joint Labor-Management Consultative Council. This council holds regular meetings to promote fair, constructive and balanced labor-management relations. It reviews and approves programs aimed at improving productivity and offers guidance to the mayor and relevant local officials on employment conditions outlined in the Agreement. All costs related to the council's operations are fully covered by the employer.

The **Kempen** region (Belgium) offers an example of how social dialogue can serve as a vital response mechanism during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Welfare Care Kempen (WCK) is an inter-municipal consortium that delivers public welfare and care services; it brings together 27 municipal Public Centres for Social Welfare. A tradition of trust-based social dialogue between WCK's management and trade unions proved instrumental in maintaining the resilience of essential services during the Covid pandemic. The works council at WCK, where workplace and governance matters are regularly addressed with staff representatives, enabled both management and unions to swiftly develop a shared response strategy that redeployed staff rapidly with their consent and prioritized the most vulnerable in the community.

In Belgium's **Walloon Region**, the LRG social partners have undertaken a number of initiatives related to digital skills training, including organizing a range of dedicated and regular workshops and conferences. Since digitalization has further increased the need for reskilling and upskilling workers to adapt to technological changes, the LRG social partners have recognized the impact of new ways of working and using AI, specifically the evolution of AI and its potential impact on workers and citizens. This emphasizes the importance of continuous training so that workers can adapt to new technologies and access higher value-added professions. Concern about the potential displacement of workers by artificial intelligence has led to discussions between LRG employers and trade unions over data protection, digital service accessibility and personal data storage; employers and workers may have differing views on these matters. Social dialogue at a local level is helping social partners discuss complex issues and seek shared solutions, therefore ensuring support for and ownership of the ways forward.

Responding to rising third-party violence and harassment in the LRG sector is an important challenge related to occupational safety and health. At the level of EU social dialogue in the LRG sector, in 2010, EU social partners — the European Public Service Trade Unions (EPSU) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) — agreed to join and adhere to the Multi-Sectoral Guidelines negotiated across particularly exposed public and private sectors (hospitality and food catering, national administrations, etc.); this was also an initiative to localize the implementation of ILO Convention 190. To facilitate and promote local implementation of the Guidelines, the EU LRG social partners launched a two-year EU-funded project (2021-2022) called "Local, Social, Digital," which focused on good practices developed in LRG public service workplaces. This included cases from LRGs in Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Netherlands and the United Kingdom.[64] For instance, in France, local statutory joint occupational safety and health committees have contributed to the prevention of workplace third-party violence and harassment, while playing a consultative role in addressing occurrences. Good practices include a pilot program on Compulsory Prior Mediation in 40 French departments and prevention initiatives with clear protocols for handling threats in small municipalities. In the **Occitanie** regional administration, a policy on third-party violence and harassment outlines protection measures, reporting procedures and support systems, including a trained reporting unit.[65] The agreement was recently renegotiated and re-signed by the EU LRG social partners (EPSU and CEMR) in 2025.[66]

When it comes to SDG 8 localization, territorial employment pacts have also proven to be powerful instruments that support local, tripartite, social and societal dialogue and active labor market policies for decent work creation. In 1997, territorial employment pacts were first introduced in Italy — more precisely in the "third Italy" area comprising the central regions and Emilia Romagna —in response to high unemployment. Given their success, they were elevated to the EU level, where more than 80 partnerships were created; each one received technical support to develop a strategic approach and action plan.[67] The experience gained from these pacts contributed to the European Employment Strategy and influenced pilot initiatives like "Acting Locally" and "Preparatory Measures for a Local Commitment to Employment."[68]

The **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities** (KS), in collaboration with the ministry in charge of local government and the four largest national trade unions, supports programs in municipalities focused on local tripartite cooperation. The Norwegian Municipal Workers' Union, *Fagforbundet*, played a central role. Over half of Norway's municipalities participated, addressing issues like sick leave reduction, full-time work and innovation. Evaluations were positive, with reduced sick leave saving nearly 38 million EUR. Tripartite cooperation lowered municipal operating costs by 2–3.5% in general and helped prevent privatization in three Norwegian municipalities.

One case of constructive societal dialogue involves street vendors and domestic workers, who constitute a significant portion of the informal economy in many countries. **São Paulo** (Brazil) offers good practices for both types of workers. First, the municipal government established Permanent Street-Vending Commissions to institutionalize dialogue among street vendors, authorities and civil society, paving the way to formalization. This not only provided the vendors with immediate benefits but also created conditions for them to endure changes in administration that led to restrictive regulations and permit revocations. In response, vendors formed the Forum

of Street Vendors of the City of São Paulo. The forum sparked new legislation that defined street vending parameters, outlined permit criteria, and re-established the commissions and a citywide municipal council to oversee implementation. This initiative underscores the important role that progressive LRGs play in creating sustainable programs that can resist eventual setbacks. Second, in 2017, the Union of Domestic Workers of São Paulo (STDMSP), a municipal-level union reached a milestone when it signed a collective agreement with the Union of Domestic Employers of the state of São Paulo (SEDESP). This agreement, which was renegotiated in 2021, regulates employment relationships in order to improve working conditions by establishing a minimum wage above the national level and ensuring weekly rest periods. The meetings, consultations and negotiations proved instrumental in formulating demands and finding common ground, which demonstrates the effectiveness of collective bargaining. While LRGs were not formally involved in the negotiation of this bilateral agreement, the role of the state of São Paulo was nonetheless fundamental. It facilitated dialogue between the two local social partners, keeping the political space open to progressive social negotiations at a time when the national-level landscape was unfavorable. This highlights the crucial agency and political soft power LRGs can wield to support the implementation of SDG 8, even by indirect means.[69]

6.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The persistent global challenges of unemployment, precarious working conditions, decent work deficit and uneven economic growth underscore both the critical relevance of SDG 8 and the fact that the road to achieving economic growth with decent work is long. That is why this SDG must be urgently localized, with LRGs exercising critical agency as public policy makers, public service providers and employers. Economic growth alone cannot meaningfully advance SDG 8, unless it is inclusive, equitable and rooted in decent work. The failures of top-down, extractive and profit-first economic models highlight the need for transformative approaches that are both place-based and people- and worker-centered. Furthermore, national policies and legal frameworks often neglect the "decent work" aspect of SDG 8 and/or fail to embrace and address the complexities of labor and social issues in territories, local communities and workplaces.

Because of their proximity to communities, direct responsibility for public service provision and jurisdiction over important workplaces, LRGs are uniquely positioned to accelerate and meaningfully localize SDG 8. Through levers that include LED, decent work creation policies, territorial social dialogue, collective bargaining with their employees' unions and engagement in societal dialogue with local community actors, LRGs can promote formalization, champion social justice, develop care-centered territories and promote rights-based public employment strategies', hence pioneering innovative, forward-thinking, ambitious and progressive approaches that can pave the way for other LRGs and levels of government. To effectively address SDG 8-related challenges and provide context-relevant solutions, LRGs can also complement and compensate for the failures and ideological hostility of other levels of government.

These efforts succeed best when rooted in social dialogue, cross-sector collaboration and a clear commitment to labor rights, equity and climate action. The paper also emphasizes the potential of local public service workers and their unions as co-creators of sustainable, resilient economies and inclusive development strategies. To meaningfully advance the 2030 Agenda, the localization of SDG 8 must be elevated as both a political priority and a practical strategy, supported through adequate resources, legal frameworks and multilevel governance coordination.

To achieve inclusive and sustainable development, these recommendations call on all spheres of governance and institutional actors to shift the economic focus from narrow, GDP growth metrics to a holistic agenda centered on human well-being, human and labor rights, care, equitable access to local quality public services and multidimensional, inclusive prosperity. Additionally, the following set of recommendations structured by stakeholder group aims to provide concrete policy actions tailored to their distinct roles and capacities.

For international organizations (United Nations agencies, international financial institutions, the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-Operation or OECD, ILO, etc.):

- Place SDG localization, and in particular SDG 8 localization, at the center of the priorities of the multilateral system. Acknowledge LRGs, their associations and trade unions as key social partners and agents, decision-makers and critical partners to international organizations and national governments in their policy dialogues and monitoring mechanisms, including those led by the ILO, the United Nations Development Program and the OECD. LRGs must be treated as policymakers, not just policy implementers, and their workers and unions must be treated as service provision experts.

- In international financial institutions and development agencies and funds, mandate localization funding — specifically earmarked to support LRG-led and union-backed decent work and local economic development strategies — and mandate technical support frameworks.

- Continue strengthening the adoption, implementation and monitoring of international legal frameworks (especially ILO Conventions and UN human rights instruments) by supporting Member States in building institutional capacity at all levels and providing targeted guidance to LRGs and social partners to effectively apply these standards in local contexts.

For national governments:

• Adopt binding frameworks for multilevel governance, mandating the inclusion of LRGs in the design, implementation and monitoring of all SDG 8-related strategies (including employment and entrepreneurship programs for youth, migrants, and informal workers).

• Remove legal and political obstacles to freedom of association and collective bargaining and create an enabling environment that encourages social and societal dialogues at the LRG level.

• Ensure legal domestication of ILO conventions at all levels of governance. National governments must not only ratify but also resource the implementation of ILO conventions in coordination with LRGs and labor unions.

• Adopt frameworks for social value procurement nationwide and for in-house first policies to create decent work on LRG premises.

• Encourage and build the capacity of LRGs to build a practice and culture of social dialogue and collective bargaining with their staff unions.

• Support the co-creation of territorial employment pacts with LRGs, unions and employers that are focused on local industrial policy, green and digital transitions, and the care economy — ensuring regional resilience and reducing inequalities across territories.

• Involve LRGs in institutionalizing national-local social dialogue platforms — supported by ministries of labor, local government, planning and local development — with an explicit mandate to monitor and improve public sector labor conditions, address informal work and expand decent jobs at the territorial level.

For LRGs and their associations:

• Reorient economic policy objectives toward human well-being and multidimensional development to lead locally grounded transformations that prioritize decent work, sustainability, equality and care.

• Address territorial inequalities through progressive, local redistribution policies, leveraging tools and approaches such as local economic development, the social and solidarity economy, care-centered public policies and inclusive financial innovation. Special attention should be paid to women, youth, migrants, informal workers and persons with disabilities.

• Ensure dignified employment within the public sector, guaranteeing labor rights, fair wages, occupational safety and health, and access to social protection. Expand and strengthen direct public service provision by LRGs, promoting municipalization, remunicipalization and insourcing of public service jobs, whenever possible.

• Engage in constructive social dialogue and collective bargaining with unions representing LRG service workers, also keeping in mind that quality local public service provision goes hand in hand with decent work opportunities for those service providers.

• Actively engage local actors — trade unions, cooperatives, grassroots organizations, civil society and the private sector — in societal dialogue to co-create sustainable employment strategies and inclusive economic models.

• Implement digital and green transitions that are just and equitable, both ensuring reskilling and protection for workers affected by economic transformation and promoting universal access to new opportunities.

• Champion multilevel governance, engaging proactively with national and international actors not only to access funding and partnerships but also to shape policy agendas, frameworks and regulatory environments that affect local economic conditions and labor conditions.

For unions of public service workers:

• Champion the full spectrum of the Decent Work Agenda, including the promotion of labor rights, social protection, safe and healthy working conditions, and inclusive access to employment opportunities.

• Strengthen strategic partnerships with LRGs at local, regional, national and continental levels, engaging in regular social dialogue and co-developing policies that foster sustainable local economies and inclusive labor markets.

• Proactively reach out to non-unionized and informal workers, particularly those in precarious or underserved sectors, to organize them and expand the protective reach of trade union representation and to empower collective voice.

• Act as bridges between workers and governance processes, facilitating inclusive participation in local development planning and monitoring, particularly for marginalized groups including youth, migrants and women.

• Engage actively in digital transformation processes, both to defend workers' rights in evolving labor markets and to innovate organizing strategies — using digital platforms to train, mobilize and represent workers.

• Participate in international and regional trade-union networks, bringing global labor innovations and solidarity to the local level, and exchanging good practices in areas such as collective bargaining, platform work regulation and just transition strategies.

NOTES

ADVANCING DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LRGS IN THE LOCALIZATION OF SDG 8

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