UNECE

Independent evaluation report

Terminal Evaluation of Project E340: "Improved sustainable urban development in 17 Norwegian cities"

Implementing period: 2019-2022

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
KS	The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities
NTNU	Norwegian University of Technology and Science
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNCPRD	United Nations Convention on the Rights Persons with Disabilities
UPR	Universal Peer Review
U4SCC	United for Smart Sustainable Cities Initiative
VLR	Voluntary Local Review

Executive summary

This is the final evaluation report of the project "Improved sustainable urban development in 17 Norwegian cities", conducted independently in January – March 2023.

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the *relevance, effectiveness and sustainability* of the project in accordance with a set of evaluation questions that were provided by UNECE. A mixed methodology for data collection and analysis was applied: a desk review of project-related documents was conducted and primary data was collected through key informant interviews. For the purposes of triangulation of data, secondary sources of literature and relevant reports were also reviewed. For the analysis and organization of findings, the evaluation drew from impact assessment and outcome harvesting methodologies. The mixed methodology analysis stemmed from the strategic changes during the project implementation and was a way to ensure that the evaluation questions were answered, and intended and unintended outcomes of the project were captured.

Relevance

The project was found highly relevant for strengthening international collaboration and the Voluntary Local Review (VLR) movement for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The introduction of the VLRs and the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) developed under the United for Smart and Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) programme in Norway has expanded the smart and sustainable cities network to several cities and resulted in the establishment of the Centre of Excellence in Trondheim, which is the first of its kind in the Nordic countries and part of the Network of Centres of Excellence in the UNECE region. The collaboration during the project also enhanced knowledge management and capacity building of UNECE partners, and the key achievements include the development of an online learning platform *City Resilience Training* and the *UNECE guidelines for the development of Voluntary Local Reviews*.

Effectiveness

As for applying the KPIs in Norway, the project was considered less relevant because there were already nationally developed methodologies to measure the progress towards the SDGs and mechanisms to utilize data for evidence-based policy making and budgeting at local and national levels. These factors also led to a medium / low effectiveness of the initially planned project activities, but high effectiveness of spin-off activities that included further analysis of the various tools available for measuring the achievement of the SDGs in Norway and elsewhere and developing learning materials for the benefit of the whole UNECE region.

Sustainability

There is no planned follow-up action for the project. However, the political commitment towards the achievement of the SDGs is high and operational strategies for the implementation of the goals are exemplary at national and local levels in Norway, thus Norway's knowhow and experience can be capitalized on in other countries. It is therefore important that the partnerships that have been established during the project implementation are fostered, and opportunities are created for international networking and mutual learning also in the future.

Recommendations for strengthening the VLR community

1. There is momentum to upscale Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) in the UNECE region and a growing community of practitioners that meet for exchanging experiences and ways of implementing the SDGs at grassroots / local levels. The *City Resilience Training* online course for the implementation of the VLRs, which currently only exists in English, is considered as one of the major, joint achievements of the project that has potential for a wide user community. The UNECE

Housing and Land Management Unit should mobilize additional resources for translating it into more languages, and for ensuring accessibility to it by persons with special needs. The Subprogramme should also explore how to further deepen collaboration and linkages with UNDESA in promoting the VLR movement globally and ways to monitor how the VLRs are updated after pilot phases. This would ensure that the assessments continue to be relevant monitoring tools for the achievement of SDGs at local and national levels in the long term.

2. The Voluntary Local Review (VLR) project planning should routinely include capacity building on public financial management and budgeting at city level to ensure that VLRs inform local policymaking, operational strategies and budgets. This can be done through continued exposure of different partners to other's experiences and networking, and through supporting partners in identifying innovative sources of financing to leverage public financing with private funding sources. Along with data collection and using data in evidence-based policymaking, these are distinct working areas in which Norway could assume leadership and share knowledge with other countries. It is thus important that the UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit continues to capitalize on the expertise in Norway.

3. UNECE has an important role in following up on the achievements for the sustainability of the action even if there are no direct follow up projects for a given initiative. The UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit should ensure continued dialogue between the Urban Development, Housing and Land Management Unit and the project interlocutors and facilitate networking, which are crucial in ensuring that the partners continue to capitalize on each other's expertise in the UNECE region.

Recommendations for programming and project cycle management

1. The UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit should pay more attention to project planning including needs and risk assessments, defining success indicators and the intended outcomes, which is key in ensuring value for money and that projects are owned by the beneficiaries. Defining the intended outcomes and impact at activity / work package level is also a way to ensure that the planned activities serve for long-term strategic purposes, that the project responds to the needs of the intended recipients and that no strategic diversions are needed during the implementation. Defining the theory of change allows monitoring of the project successes and the verification of results during and after the project.

2. While synergy benefits should be sought to avoid duplication of efforts, it is important that project activities and their successes are traceable and verifiable against project plans and budgets. Future UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit plans and reports should link the project activities, the related expenditure, outputs and outcomes more clearly and they should differentiate core project activities, synergy benefits, and complementarities of the related action.

3. Equality principles and rights-based programming should be a standard part of programming in the UN. While efforts were made to include objectives related to gender equality in the project design, they were not tailored to the context and hence were not implemented. Moreover, when the objective is to collect gender disaggregated data, it should be considered for what purpose the data is needed, how it will be used and how it is beneficiary in promoting gender equality among the beneficiaries and stakeholders. It is thus important that in future projects, UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit contextualizes objectives related to equality and equity, otherwise there is a risk that they remain tokenistic and irrelevant to the action.

1. Introduction

This is a final evaluation report of the project "Improved sustainable urban development in 17 Norwegian cities", which was implemented in collaboration with the UNECE, International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the city of Trondheim, Norway, in 2019-2022.

The final evaluation covers the whole project period and has been carried out independently during January and March 2023. For the evaluation, project documents and outputs have been reviewed and key project interlocutors interviewed.

The report is organized as follows. The project, its main objectives and activities are introduced in section two. In section three, the evaluation methodology is presented. Key evaluation findings are described in section four, which are then summarized and discussed in section five: Discussion and conclusions. In the final section, key recommendations based on the evaluation findings are provided.

2. Description of the Project

2.1 Background

As the Agenda 2030 has reached halfway of its implementation, among the key challenges in achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continues to be the lack of data in addressing the national gaps efficiently. While most countries have an adequate national policy framework in place to work towards the achievement of the goals, turning policies into effective practice at all levels in societies remains a challenge. This partly owes to the fact that the SDGs are a complex agenda with inter-linked targets that require cross-sectoral ways of working and breaking policy silos, and partly to the fact that working towards the goals requires effective de-centralization and tailored approaches based on accessible up-to-date local data.

It is against this background that the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and UNECE established a United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) Initiative. Under the initiative, the U4SSC Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) tool has been developed to evaluate the level of cities' smartness and sustainability. The KPIs consist of 92 economic, environmental and socio-cultural indicators for smart and sustainable cities. The overall aim of the tool is to produce standardized and thus comparable data on SDG 11, *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*, which contributes to the achievement of all the SDGs and as such, to the principle of leaving no one behind. As such, the KPIs form a single, standardized and scalable methodology to support cities to integrate the SDGs into urban planning at the local level, and to measure their progress. The utilization of the tool brings together national and local authorities and thus also serves as a means to build the capacities of local authorities on the SDGs. This increases policy coherence at national level and helps to turn national policies into operational strategies more efficiently across the different administrative levels.

Alongside the provision of a self-assessment tool for cities and municipalities, the U4SSC initiative provides for a global platform to advocate for public policy and to encourage the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to facilitate the transition to smart sustainable cities. The platform is an opportunity for exchange and peer learning between local actors, policymakers, experts and other stakeholders regionally and globally.

To date, the KPIs have been used for assessing over 150 cities in different countries and continents.[1] Currently, the initiative joins 16 UN agencies and programmes, and is coordinated by ITU, UNECE and UN-Habitat.

The project "Improved sustainable urban development in 17 Norwegian cities" was developed within the framework of U4SSC and piloted in selected cities in Norway. The project was integrated into the Norwegian government initiative "Norway as a Smart and Sustainable Nation" and implemented as part

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[1] Source: United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) – United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) (itu.int)

of the joint programme "University City 3.0" of the City of Trondheim and the Norwegian University of Technology and Science.

2.2 Project objectives and expected accomplishments/results

Project objective: "To improve sustainable urban development in 17 municipalities in Norway and to establish an innovative ecosystem of public and private partnerships for implementing and sharing of smart and sustainable solutions."

Intended impact: "At least 20 projects (improvement of the cities environment, investment projects into infrastructure etc.) and policies/strategies (strategies for housing, public spaces or other) will be developed by the municipalities which will improve quality of life of the population." The indicators were also expected help "to prioritize, i.e. to choose the most critical issues for the sustainable growth of the city, and to define measures to address them" as per the project concept note.

Intended outcomes: "Improved assessment of sustainable urban development in municipalities in 17 Norwegian cities."

Success indicator: "17 municipalities' performance analysed using KPIs for smart sustainable cities."

Means of verification: The success of the project was to be measured by a number of projects and policies developed by the 17 municipalities based on the recommendations of the KPI evaluation of the cities.

The project also endeavoured to **promote gender equality** among the beneficiaries and within the project team. The related objective and outcome of the project were formulated as follows:

> "The project will [Objective 1.] **introduce a gender lens to the policy making in the field of evidence-based, integrated urban development policy** in the countries-beneficiaries and promote women rights on national and local levels…. In line with the UNECE policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the project will also [Objective 2.] **seek to create a supportive environment for expert participation, tailored towards the needs of both men and women**. In this context, the assessment and certification of challenges will [Outcome 1.] **result in the production of gender-relevant data with the aim of informing policies** to achieve gender equality. Gender balance will be ensured in the project team both on the UNECE and Norwegian sides. The partners will ensure active involvement of women in the participatory process of the KPI evaluation." (Project concept note).

The total budget of the project was EUR 250,000.

2.3 Project strategies and key activities

The project concept note outlined four key activities to be carried out within the project:

A1.1. Collecting and analysing data for 17 Norwegian cities and the preparation of short city profiles.

A1.2. Organizing two advisory missions to Norway.

A1.3. Organizing a validation workshop in Norway.

A1.4. Conducting communication and dissemination activities (preparing press-releases, communicating through social media, presentations at relevant international events, preparation and publication of the final project report).

With regards to activity A1.1., the key implementation strategy was to carry out in-depth city assessments in collaboration with ITU. Other activities were planned to be carried out in collaboration

with UNECE and its main interlocutors, including the Centre of Excellence on Smart Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Urban Development hosted by the University of Geneva.

2.4 Key partners and other key stakeholders

The project was implemented in partnership with UNECE, International Telecommunication Union, and City of Trondheim in collaboration with the Norwegian University of Technology and Science (NTNU) and Research Institute Sintef.

Other key stakeholders included local authorities including mayors in Ålesund, Asker, Bærum, Rana and Trondheim, and the Centre of Excellence on Smart and Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Urban Development in Geneva.

2.5 Link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The KPI methodology and the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) were developed for the purposes of measuring cities' progress towards the SDGs in different countries. Carrying out local reviews, for which methodology was developed jointly by the Centres of Excellence, contributes to generating comparable data particularly on SDG 11. The reviews also increase knowledge on the SDGs with a view that local level collaboration among countries, in this case in the field of urban development, can be a powerful way to facilitate good practice exchanges and joint learning for building smart, green, inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban environments. Collaboration is also needed for identifying solutions for cross-border concerns and the development of national and international statistics and data repositories on the achievement of SDGs. Such actions, when connected to national level data management and analysis, ultimately advance the achievement of the SDGs.

3. Evaluation objectives, scope and questions

3.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose and the objective of the evaluation was to review the implementation and assess the extent to which the project objectives were achieved. The evaluation also assessed the impacts in advancing human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, climate change and disaster risk reduction that the project might have had.

In addition to assessing the project outcomes and the long-term impact of the activities, the evaluation identified lessons learned from the implementation and areas that need further attention. The evaluation was also an opportunity to review and make recommendations for future programming in the light of the special conditions created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.2 Scope of the evaluation and research questions

The final evaluation covered the entire project period. As the project activities were extended to cover international networking and capacity building, the evaluation focuses on activities carried out in Norway and in collaboration with UNECE partners internationally.

No mid-term evaluation has been conducted during the implementation of the project, thus the end-of-project evaluation took stock on the project achievements, their relevance, effectiveness and sustainability during the entire project life-cycle. The evaluation focussed on:

1. The relevance and usefulness of the project in measuring progress particularly towards SDG 11 in Norway; and

2. The relevance and usefulness of the project in strengthening international collaboration, knowledge management and exchange, and peer learning.

The evaluation questions were outlined by UNECE as follows:

Relevance

1. To what extent did the project activities respond to the priorities and needs of the beneficiary cities?
2. To what extent were the activities consistent with global and regional priorities on achieving the SDGs? How relevant were the activities vis-à-vis the programme of work of the UNECE? What value has UNECE's efforts added in this area?
3. How relevant were the activities to attaining major UN global commitments, inter alia, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris agreement?
4. Did the project apply gender, rights based and disability inclusion approaches in the design and implementation of the activities?
5. To what extent have the project activities contributed to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the realization of human rights?
6. How relevant was the project to the target groups' needs and priorities? Was there a focus on leaving no one behind?

Effectiveness

7. Did the project achieve the results expected during the project design in terms of the planned activities, outcome, and impact?
8. What were the challenges / obstacles to achieve the activities, objective, and expected accomplishments set forth?

Sustainability

9. To what extent will the benefits of the project continue after the completion of the project?
10. How likely is stakeholders' engagement to continue, be scaled up, replicated or institutionalized?
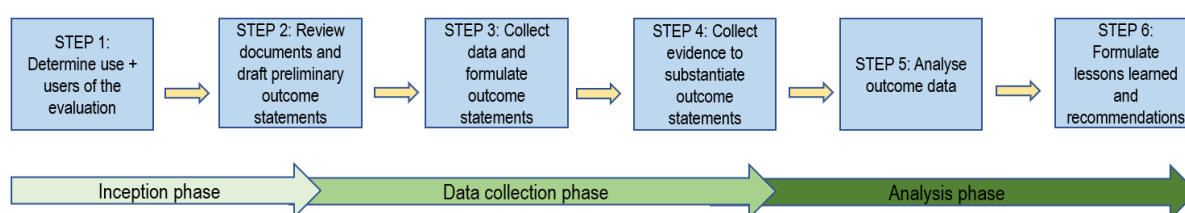11. To what extent do the partners and beneficiaries 'own' the outcomes of the work?

4. Methodology

A mixed theoretical approach drawing elements from both outcome harvesting and impact evaluation was applied. During the evaluation, both intended and unintended outcomes were identified and their impact discussed with the stakeholders.

While impact evaluation typically assesses progress of an initiative against pre-determined objectives, their success indicators and baseline data that is collected in the beginning of an action, outcome harvesting characteristically works backwards by beginning with identifying outcomes and analysing what has changed as a result of the project. Therefore, outcome harvesting is a particularly suitable evaluation approach for analysing policy, advocacy and social change, also in uncertain and unknown circumstances. The choice of this mixed methodology was supported by two specific factors: Firstly, the project had only one, general, progress indicator to measure the achievement of the project objective as per the original project document, which did not allow a systematic review of the specific project achievements at the activity level. Secondly, there were significant positive outcomes that were not foreseen at the project design phase. These outcomes are highly relevant to the project objective but were not necessarily measurable by the indicator. The identification of the preliminary outcomes formed the core of the inception phase and was done in collaboration with the evaluator and the UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit staff. The identified outcomes provided the basis for primary and secondary data collection, which served the dual purpose of verifying the already identified outcomes and potentially identifying more results / outcomes.

As per the theoretical framework of outcome harvesting, the evaluation was divided into six steps in three inter-linked phases: inception phase, data collection phase and the data analysis phase.

Figure 1: Sequencing of the evaluation process

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Scope of the evaluation: gender equality and human rights

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The project aimed at mainstreaming the SDGs into the municipalities and cities, and as such, entailed an in-built focus on equality principles and SDG 5: *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*, both through mainstreaming and considering gender equality as a goal in its own right. In line with the SDGs, the KPIs for smart and sustainable cities include a set of indicators measuring social inclusion and equity. When the voluntary city assessment process connects to decision-making at the municipality and national levels, the project activities can contribute to the national reporting processes of treaty obligations including the Universal Peer Review (UPR), CEDAW and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

As per the project concept note, the introduction of the KPIs at the municipality level contributed to the **[expected outcome 1]**: "production of gender-relevant data with the aim of informing policies", while **[objective 1]**: "introduce a gender lens to the policy making in the field of evidence-based, integrated urban development policy" and **[objective 2]**:"seek to create a supportive environment for expert participation, tailored towards the needs of both men and women", can be understood to relate to *the processes of* project implementation. This division, together with the UNECE Gender Action Plan 2020-2022,[2] has informed the formulation of the data collection design including the interview questions to the project interlocutors.

> **The principles of human rights-based approach**
>
> **Non-discrimination and gender equality:** there should be a (substantiated) commitment to promoting non-discrimination and equality between all individuals in line with the SDGs and their indicators. This means that the principles of gender equality and inclusivity should be embedded and considered in all project activities.
>
> **Inclusion and participation:** individuals and groups should be able to participate as active stakeholders and not as passive recipients of the activities. Right-holders should be respected as experts of their specific needs and engaged at all stages of the project.
>
> **Empowerment and accountability** of the right-holders and duty bearers entails both normative and substantive right for participation. Empowerment and accountability form a mutually reinforcing positive cycle: with empowerment of the rights holders, the relevant duty-bearers can effectively be held accountable for their commitments according to the international treaties and national law and policy.

Table 1: Summary of the objectives of UNECE Gender Action Plan 2020-2022 relevant to the evaluation

RESULT 1. Strengthened advocacy to highlight and mainstream gender equality and women's economic empowerment priorities and commitments in regional and sub-regional initiatives and intergovernmental processes, including in SDG related processes.		
Objective 1: Strengthen advocacy for gender parity in panels and meetings participation and encourage member States, networks of experts and other stakeholders to nominate gender-balanced delegations to UNECE meetings.	Action • Monitor sex disaggregated data on participants to intergovernmental and other meetings and report them annually to the Sectoral Committees and the Commission session.	Output Increased percentage of women participating in intergovernmental meetings.

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[2] An updated Gender Action Plan was not yet available at the time of the evaluation.

	• Continuously encourage member States, networks of experts, public and private institutions, academia and civil society to increase the number of women as members of delegations, including in meetings of EXCOM and in the framework of the International Gender Champions initiative.	
Objective 2: Reinforce intergovernmental outcomes related to gender equality and the economic empowerment of women.	Action • Systematically advocate for strong language on gender equality in documents, decisions and statements, as relevant	Output Gender mainstreaming is discussed at the sessions of the Sectoral Committees and their subsidiary bodies
Objective 3: Promote the reflection of a gender perspective in analytical work including through addressing existing and emerging barriers to gender equality and the empowerment of women in the region.	Action • (Assess project proposals and) Make recommendations for gender mainstreaming.	Output Increased number of projects where gender issues are considered.
Subprogramme 8A: Housing and land management		
Objective 1: Increase the visibility of gender aspects in the housing and land management policies.	Action • To ensure the gender dimension is addressed in the UNECE Country Profiles on Housing and Land Management as part of the analysis of national housing and land management legal framework and policies that ensure equal treatment and non-discrimination for women.	Output An analysis of gender is part of the Country Profiles on Housing and Land Management.

Design of primary data collection

The evaluation consisted of a document review and the collection of primary data from the stakeholders of the project in five cities in which the project was implemented. The primary data collection survey was designed in line with the 11 evaluation questions and an outcome analysis, which was carried out in the inception phase. Questions under the sustainability and relevance of the action are directly linked to the outcomes of the project. Questions related to effectiveness relate to the processes of implementation during the entire project cycle. This division has been considered in the survey design.

The primary objectives of the primary data collection were to:

- Gather views on the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the stated outcomes of the project;
- Identify additional outcomes including outcomes on inclusivity and gender equality by the project implementers and beneficiaries; and
- Identify opportunities and challenges and the related lessons learned during the project.

The secondary objective of the primary data collection was to:

- Verify the outcomes statements through gathering of evidence from the project implementers and beneficiaries.

The data collection methodology entailed a structured survey, which was sent to the respondents prior to interviews by email with a view of giving the interviewees also the option of providing inputs in writing in case online interviews were not convenient.

The survey questions were organized into three clusters. Section 1 of the questionnaire contained basic data of the interviewees, Section 2 included questions related to relevance of the action to the beneficiaries including questions related to gender equality and considerations on marginalized groups and non-discrimination. Section 3 contained questions related to effectiveness of the project, which were divided into a set of statements related to opportunities and strengths, and challenges and weaknesses of the action. Section 4 included questions related to the sustainability of the project activities. In the last, optional section, the interviewees / participants of the survey were given the opportunity to share information that they might wish to add. The survey form can be found in Annex 1.

The following project interlocutors were interviewed in the primary data collection phase:

	Name	Country
1	Kristian Mjøen	Norway
2	Geir Graff	Norway
3	Eline Tonnesson Tveter	Norway
4	Alexandre Hedjazi	Switzerland
5	Matteo Tarantino	Switzerland
6	Juan Valle Robles	Spain
7	Arsen Karapetyan	Armenia
8	Spiro Pollalis	The US / Greece
9	Meerim Kydyralieva	The Kyrgyz Republic

Secondary data collection and review

A desk review was carried out both for the purpose of verifying the outcomes of the project and for the triangulation of the primary data (for a list of reviewed documents, please refer to Annex 5). To that end, the desk review included the revision of key national and international documents including the SDGs Global Indicator Framework,[3] Norway's follow-up of the Agenda 2030 and action plan for sustainable development, Norway's 10th report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Concluding observations on the initial report of Norway of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (7 May 2019), Comments of the Government of Norway on the 5th Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and OECD Measuring distance to the SDG targets – Norway report.

To ensure that the evaluation was carried out according to the UNECE general standards, the Aarhus Convention, the UNECE Policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Accelerating the attainment of SDGs with a gender lens in the UNECE region (2021-2025), Gender Action Plan 2020-2022, and the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, were reviewed.

Data analysis methodology

The design of the data analysis rests on two main elements:

1. Analysis of the project outcomes, and
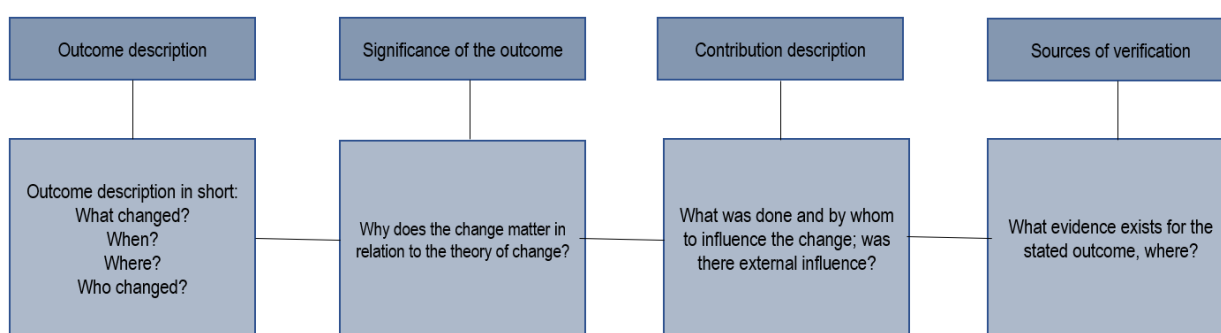2. Analysis of the project implementation cycle from the design to closure of the project.

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[3] "The Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 6 July 2017 71/313: Work on the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Annex Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

The two elements are complementary to each other; while some evaluation questions are closely linked to the outcomes of the project, others are important for the analysis of the process and organization of work during the project implementation.

Among the key analytical tools is the outcome matrix, which was developed in the inception phase (Annex 2). The rationale for developing an outcome matrix was to present the results of the project in relation to the overall project objective and to capture outcomes that were not anticipated in the project design phase.

Following the principles of outcome harvesting, the outcome matrix summarizes the "outcome descriptions", the reasons as to why each stated outcome matters or what difference it makes ("significance of the outcome"), stakeholders that made the outcome happen ("contribution description"), and sources of verification of the outcome statements. All stated outcomes, including institutional and operational changes and policy, norms and social changes, are verifiable by evidence and causally linked to the project activities.

Figure 2: Logic of the outcome matrix

The analysis is organized according to the evaluation questions, and when applicable, further structured according to the achievements and results in the areas of 1) data generation on the SDGs, 2) capacity building and knowledge enhancement on the SDGs, and 3) partnership building for the achievements of the SDGs. In section 6, "discussion and conclusions", the results are summarized and the lessons learned, as arising from the evaluation data, are organized into 1) Key lessons learned in the application of the KPI methodology for data collection and measuring the progress towards the SDGs, and 2) Key lessons learned in the project cycle management.

Table 2: Organization of the project achievements and results and lessons learned

	Achievements / Results	Lessons learned
1	Related to generation of data on the SDGs	Related to methodological strategies to monitor the achievement of the SDGs
2	Related to capacity building and increasing knowledge on the SDGs	Related to partnership building at regional and international levels
3	Related to building of partnerships for the achievement of the SDGs	Related to project planning and project cycle management

Limitations of the evaluation

There were significant challenges in reaching the Norwegian counterparts for the primary data collection, both because of the unresponsiveness of the persons that were contacted for interviews and because of staff changes at the end of the project due to which some key persons were not reachable anymore. The evaluation is therefore not representative of views of all project interlocutors in Norway. The response rate of the contacted international project interlocutors was high. Hence, the evaluation results with regards to project activities on international collaboration and networking can be considered representative and verifying the project outcomes.

5. Findings

Relevance of the project

> **EQ1: To what extent did the project activities respond to the priorities and needs of the beneficiary cities?**

Priorities / needs related to data collection on the SDGs, capacity building and increasing knowledge on the SDGs

Norway is one of the leading countries in the integration of the SDGs into the national policy frameworks and is in many ways exemplary to other countries in mainstreaming the SDGs into different levels of national and local administration. Norway also has a track record in developing community-driven strategies that engage citizens to contribute towards the achievement of the SDGs with a view of leaving no one behind. Examples include innovation camps and other youth-led initiatives to boost the implementation of the goals, which have been coordinated by Asker, Røyken and Hurum municipalities (UNECE 2022, p. 20)

The evaluation data is ambiguous with regards to matching of the initially planned project activities with the priorities and needs of the beneficiary cities in Norway, chiefly because the municipalities had already integrated SDGs into national and local level planning in different ways when the project was introduced in Norway. The Centre of Excellence in Trondheim, together with its partners from the municipalities, was also implementing a parallel Positive City Exchange project through which an SDG city transition framework had been developed. Moreover, the different stakeholders in Norway had worked extensively to ensure that data collection and analysis construct a full feedback loop in which policymakers and managers use the data efficiently from municipality to the national level for the achievement of the SDGs. This taxonomy of indicators was developed by Statistics Norway in response to the need to generate data that can inter-connect the SDGs at different levels.[4] In this regard, to some extent the KPIs appeared to introduce a parallel and in some instances an overlapping mechanism to a methodology that was being tested and used in Norway. As was stated by one interviewee, collecting data against national indicators for sustainable cities resulted in more in-depth analyses than using the KPI methodology of the VLRs. However, there are differences in the knowledge and the levels of implementation of the SDGs between the cities in which the project was implemented: While there were some reservations with regards to the applicability of the KPI methodology in some cities, in others the KPIs highlighted the areas where more indicators were needed in order to develop the local reviews into a more comprehensive methodology that also measures impact, particularly social impact, of different actions that are covered by the current KPIs. Significant positive results of the project include developing a latitudinal analysis of the existing tools and indicators to measure the progress towards the SDGs (on-going in Asker commune), further development of the taxonomy for the implementation of the SDGs, and designing new projects and initiatives that help cities to carry out smart and sustainable city assessments and VLRs elsewhere in the UNECE region.

Priorities / needs related to networking and building of partnerships

A Centre of Excellence was established in Trondheim in 2019. It supports the work of the national Network of Excellence, which is led by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) and which was established for strengthening exchange and peer learning across the Norwegian municipalities. The KS leads a network that operates in several policy areas and as such was already working on developing a Network of Excellence on SDGs. However, the joint project with UNECE was

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[4] See also: Ana María Paz Mendoza, A.M. (2021): "A Taxonomy for Indicators Related to the Sustainable Development Goals: A Norwegian Municipality Case Study." Master's thesis in Industrial Ecology. NU Norwegian University of Science and Technology Faculty of Engineering Department of Energy and Process Engineering (NTNU).

mentioned to have accelerated the operationalization of the network. (Please refer to the Outcome matrix, annex 2, for more information)

Several networking events, including two international conferences that were planned as part of the project activities, took place during the project life. Some of these events were one-off events that engaged city leaders and other stakeholders while others were longer-term collaborative processes, cases in point being the development of the UNECE guidelines and an online course to carry out VLRs. All international collaborators that participated in this evaluation, including experts from US and the Centre of Excellence in Geneva, contributed to the development of these learning materials and considered the work highly relevant, needed, and useful. This was also the case with the two interviewed UNECE interlocutors and users of the learning materials in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. In Armenia, assessments of smart and sustainable cities have only begun but have already created significant interest among the city administrations and other stakeholders in Hrazdan and Gores. In Kyrgyzstan, an assessment has been carried out in the capital Bishkek and the assessments are planned to be expanded to other cities. Guidance that is available online enables the city authorities to further develop their own approaches to the VLRs. In addition, the representatives of the target cities in Norway have contributed to several regional and international activities as representatives of the Network of Excellence from participating in events to designing of support materials in making cities more sustainable and creating knowledge on the SDGs. The Trondheim Centre of Excellence was considered helpful in connecting resources and expertise for city planning and monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs.

EQ2: To what extent were the activities consistent with global and regional priorities on achieving the SDGs? How relevant were the activities vis-à-vis the programme of work of the UNECE? What value has UNECE's efforts added in this area?

The project was implemented as part of the U4SSC, which entailed building of the activities with a view of integrating the Norwegian target municipalities into the global smart and sustainable cities community. The project activities were well aligned with the UNECE's Urban Development, Land Management and Housing programme. In particular, the project was an opportunity to expand the existing Network of Excellence to Norway, and as mentioned above, the new Centre of Excellence was inaugurated in Trondheim under the auspices of the project. In addition, during the project a new initiative, the Forum of Mayors, was launched and two online events were held by the end of 2022 – all events were occasions to strengthen the participation of Norwegian city authorities in the international sustainable cities networks. The Forum of Mayors, which was established as a subsidiary body of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management of the UNECE in January 2023, further strengthens sharing of good practices at local levels and UNECE continues to have an instrumental role in connecting knowledge exchange and facilitating peer learning in the field of smart and sustainable cities. UNECE has also been an important catalyst in the development of learning materials (online course and guidelines) on VLRs, which included expert inputs from Norway and other countries, and which benefit the partners in the entire operational region of UNECE.

EQ3: How relevant were the activities to attaining major UN global commitments, inter alia, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris agreement?

Relevance to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
A distinction is made here between a) the relevance of the project, its design and the implemented activities, and b) the relevance of the city assessments using the KPI for measuring the progress to achieve SDG 11. As for the latter, the methodology has been developed to measure how cities and the services they provide cater for their citizens regardless of social status, income levels, disability status, age, gender, or minority / ethnic status. At the core of the KPIs is to measure the green development of the cities from energy-efficiency of housing and public infrastructure to water, sanitation and waste management, and how they contribute to building of sustainable circular local economies. In this sense, the activities were aligned with and geared towards the achievement of the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement.

Regarding the former, relevance of the project activities to attaining the UN global commitments, the interview data shows some variation from being highly relevant to uncertainty of the relevance of the project activities to achieving the SDGs in Norway.

Relevance related to capacity building and partnerships to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris agreement

The project interlocutors outside of Norway acknowledged the high level of content inputs by the Norwegian counterparts to the joint processes relating to the city assessments including networking events and developing learning materials to carry out the VLRs. In Norway, the Trondheim Centre of Excellence has facilitated cross-sectoral collaboration through connecting academia, city authorities and policymakers. One such example is the "City Resilience Training" online course, to which the Norwegian policymakers and city authorities contributed with lectures and presentations.

EQ4: Did the project apply gender, rights-based and disability inclusion approaches in the design and implementation of the activities?

Collection of gender disaggregated data on the project activities
Despite the specific gender objectives defined in the project concept note, there appears not to have been specific approaches to applying the objectives in the activity planning. Gender disaggregated data on the implementation of the project activities is not available. In the case of developing the online course, though, whether or not to collect gender-disaggregated information on the participants in the course, was debated. A decision was taken against collecting gender-disaggregated data both on the grounds of individual data protection and being sensitive to all genders, and because the course takes place in an online environment for individual learning and is open to all interested persons.

Application of rights-based and disability inclusion approaches
A particular rights-based approach to gender equality or disability inclusion has not been explicitly spelled out in any project related document. The key informant interviews confirmed the absence of such approaches.

While there is a detectable inconsistency in the objectives for promoting gender equality and the related outcomes set in the project planning phase, the absence of specific focus on these areas in the project implementation does not mean that the issues are absent from the policy agendas in Norway. Rather, the situation demonstrates the challenge to apply the standard UNECE operational policies in all settings, in this case in a highly advanced country that has actively contributed to the development of international human rights frameworks and taken measures to mainstream them systematically into different state and local level processes. Norway's welfare state model embeds the notion of rights-based policymaking and the implementation of the related policies, and as such, Norway has a comprehensive legal framework in place for the achievement of international commitments in various human rights topics including in achieving gender equality. The findings of the city assessments made in the auspices of this project reveal that some cities have reached the target of universal basic health care (while others are close to the target) and all municipalities have a considerable social infrastructure including public kindergarten and early childhood education systems in place. Norway's law also provides for equal parental leaves, which is among key social support mechanisms to ensure equal employment and career development.

EQ5: To what extent have the project activities contributed to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the realisation of human rights?

As above, according to the information gathered for the evaluation, there appears not to have been an explicit focus to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the activity design under this project. The city assessments embed indicators for equality and inclusivity, and as such, they contribute to the implementation of all SDGs including data collection for SDG 5 sub-goals and their indicators. In addition to the objective of generating comparable data on the SDGs, the city assessments function as

tools to increase knowledge on the SDGs and their importance as local, national and international instruments for sustainability. An anticipated impact of the project was also to create a supportive environment for expert participation. Norway applies competence-based recruitment processes according to the labour laws and following the trends in other similar High-Income Countries, women's share in higher education is higher than of men's share. Whereas records were not kept for monitoring of the share of women that participated in the project, the Norwegian project interlocutors and the participating experts included both men and women.

EQ 6: How relevant was the project to the target groups' needs and priorities? Was there a focus on leaving no one behind?

Generation of data and leaving no one behind principle

There has not been an explicit focus on vulnerable groups or identification of them within a given location, but as mentioned above, introducing the VLR methodology has highlighted the further need for developing data collection methodologies also on vulnerable groups. Most notably, the currently available methodology does not enable measuring the impact of city planning on different groups, and municipalities together with national authorities are embarking on developing more tools that consider different groups as well as the social impact of the urban-rural divide. Norway is signatory to all major international human rights treaties and a host of regional treaties including the European Convention on Human Rights, European Social Charter and the European Convention on the Protection of National Minorities. Norway also has solid national reporting mechanisms in place to CEDAW, Universal Peer Review (UPR), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, among others. Together these form a strong accountability framework that is adhered to by the national government with the support of the civil society. There have been specific efforts to connect national data collection to policy-making processes, which further advances the achievement of the objectives within the wider human rights framework. An example is to prioritize streetlights in the city planning, which increases security and can thus have a direct impact on reducing gender-based violence.

Capacity building for leaving no one behind

The primary target groups of this project were city authorities and academia (especially for the establishment of a Centre of Excellence in Norway). It did therefore not address vulnerable or marginalized groups directly, neither it was the objective of the project. However, the city assessments help to identify the types of vulnerabilities in urban environments and who are at risk of being affected by them.

Effectiveness of the project

EQ7: Did the project achieve the results expected during the project design in terms of the planned activities, outcome, and impact?

There were two significant strategic changes to the original project plan during the implementation phase: 1) The project period was extended by means of no-cost extension on two occasions, until 31 December 2022; and 2) A decision was taken to conduct in-depth city assessments with the KPI methodology in five instead of the originally planned 17 cities, which is equivalent to approximately a 30 per cent success rate compared to the original target. City snapshots were developed in 34 cities and municipalities, which was not an originally planned activity, but which balances the success rate of carrying out in-depth city assessments using the VLR methodology. The decision to not continue city assessments beyond Ålesund, Asker, Bærum, Rana and Trondheim was based on a cost-efficiency analysis and on the fact that assessments using the nationally developed methodologies were being carried out as well. In addition, there were some key staff changes during the project, which was mentioned to have had an impact on the implementation of the project activities. It is to be noted that the intended impact of the project as defined in the original concept note, was to be "measured by a number of projects and policies developed by the 17 municipalities based on the recommendations of the KPI evaluation of the cities". The project documents reviewed for the evaluation indicate that regular

monitoring of the success of the project has not been based on this initial aim, and new projects as a result of the intervention were not systematically recorded. Thus, it is assumed that the reduction of the number of in-depth city assessments that were carried out made the original impact statement to some extent irrelevant.

Except for the planned number of in-depth city assessments, all initially planned project activities were carried out.

Specific Results / impact related to generation of data on the SDGs

The project activities have been, to a large extend, integrated into the related on-going processes in Norway, and therefore it is challenging to measure the distinct achievements especially on data generation on the SDGs of this project. In general, the stated benefits of introducing the KPIs as a smart and sustainable city assessment tool are two-fold: 1) the methodology allows making comparisons of the urban centres internationally, and 2) the KPIs can feed into the national assessments of the progress on SDGs provided that the country collects data on the SDGs that is otherwise comparable with the data collected with the KPIs for smart and sustainable cities methodology.

As for point two, the project activities in Norway seem to have had limited impact. Whereas national action plans for both the implementation of SDGs and collaboration between municipalities are in place, the municipalities in Norway have considerable autonomy in drafting and implementing the city policies, and many municipalities and cities had adopted approaches to implement the SDGs that fit into their local circumstances already before introducing the KPIs in Norway. The municipalities report to national government authorities according to the obligations of the municipalities set by national laws. In many instances, as reported by the project interlocutors in Norway, the reporting and data collection on the achievement of the SDGs and city development according to the nationally developed and applied methodology results in more comprehensive and applicable data in the Norwegian context than the data collection using the VLR methodology. The national data collection mechanisms are accompanied with mechanisms to feed the data into the local and national management and policy-making structures. As was mentioned by one interviewee, the methodology offered by UNECE is based on the utilization of available data, and while the KPIs cover all 17 SDGs allowing the users of the methodology to assess their cities progress towards the 2030 Agenda as a whole, the methodology is anchored into the achievement of SDG 11 and as such poses some limitations. For example, it does not allow the assessment of causes and effects between urban and rural development, which was mentioned as one of the weaknesses of the tool. Here, it is also important to note that Norway underwent a municipality reform in 2020, which has significantly reduced the number of municipalities through mergers, and which has led to a greater variation in the levels of urbanization and city development within a municipality. This underscores the importance of developing tools that allow data collection and analysis of municipalities with both urban and rural communities. Therefore, the Norwegian municipalities have embarked on collecting data of wider scope than what is required for the KPIs.

Despite these methodological concerns, VLRs were considered an important initiative that should be strengthened and further developed. As was mentioned by the interviewees, the process has potential to be further up scaled provided that it remains as adaptable to local contexts. City assessments have continued with adjusted methodologies and have been carried out in over 100 municipalities and cities across Norway. In addition, the reservations with regards to the KPI methodology as described above has triggered further analysis with regards to evidence and action that is needed to achieve the SDGs. This can be considered as a significant positive outcome of the project, which can lead to more efficient monitoring of the progress towards the achievement of the SDGs in different countries, provided that international collaboration is further strengthened and fostered in the field of monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of the SDGs.

Results / impact related to capacity building and increased knowledge on the SDGs

Based on the testimonies of the project interlocutors and considering that there were already on-going, significant national processes that contributed to the awareness on SDGs, the project has had a medium impact on increasing knowledge on the SDGs in Norway. As for other partners in the UNECE region (Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) and under the U4SSC programming, the contribution of the activities

under the project were regarded as high. To date, VLRs have been introduced in Gores and Hrazdan in Armenia, and in Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan, the project was mentioned as an important pilot initiative that has introduced the SDGs lens into city planning and policies, highlighting the data gaps and the needs for strengthening the national statistics bureau and its collaboration with different ministries.

Results / impact related to building of partnerships for the achievement of the SDGs
There were several significant spin-off activities stemming from the originally planned project activities including the contribution by Norwegian city leaders to the first Forum of Mayors. Furthermore, the project beneficiaries took prominent expert roles beyond their originally intended roles and, for example, supported the planning of city assessments in other countries and regions. The project staff and stakeholders in Norway have also provided several expert inputs to different regional events, which would likely not have taken place without implementing the project in Norway.

The interviewees were unanimous about the importance of the project activities for strengthening international collaboration and coordination, and the most considerable impact of the project has been achieved at the international level in form of knowledge exchange and peer learning. According to three interviewees, particularly useful contribution of the project was the opportunity to learn about the Norwegian experience in urban development. The benefits of such collaboration were described as follows:

- o VLRs and city assessments, by nature, create collaboration at city level, which contributes to local development and decentralization processes. They also empower local decision-makers who have different operational space and decision-making powers in different countries.
- o Norway has a longstanding experience in innovative public-private partnerships. Sharing knowledge, practical knowhow and strategies to finance public services by leveraging public investments with private financing is needed for sustaining pilot projects for city assessments and the action that follows from them.
- o In some countries, VLRs have been the first occasion to introduce the SDGs into city planning. When carried out in collaborative manner and in tandem with opportunities to learn from other city experiences, the assessments can serve as a powerful catalyst to the development of policies and operational strategies that are geared towards the achievement of the SDGs.
- o The assessments have helped the authorities, particularly in countries with weaker national data collection systems, to understand the data gaps and needs for collaborative mechanisms between central statistics bureaus and different ministries.

EQ8: What were the challenges / obstacles to achieve the activities, objective, and expected accomplishments set forth?

Challenges / obstacles related to data collection on the KPIs
No challenges were reported in relation to data collection and producing the in-depth city assessments based on the available data. As described above, some constructive criticism on the KPI methodology in the Norwegian context was expressed, which also led to a decision to re-focus the project activities to developing learning materials and promoting VLRs internationally.

Challenges / obstacles related to capacity building and increasing knowledge on the SDGs
No challenges were reported in relation to capacity building and increasing knowledge on the SDGs. As noted above, the Covid-19 pandemic affected the organization of the planned events, which were carried out successfully online.

Challenges / obstacles related to building of partnerships for the achievement of the SDGs
As above, due to Covid-19 restrictions events were organized online more than what was anticipated in the project planning phase, which did not hamper the achievement of the activity-specific objectives. In fact, organizing online events increased participation and widened the scope of the events, which also resulted in introducing new initiatives such as the Forum of Mayors and the project "Voluntary Local Reviews: Evidence for Greener, Resilient and Sustainable Urban Recovery in Eastern European

[and Central Asian Countries in Transition](#)", which is implemented in Georgia (Tbilisi), Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek), Serbia (Nis) and Tajikistan (Dushanbe).

Additional factors arising from project cycle management

The project design has been flexible with a limited number of expected activities, achievements and success indicators. This has on the one hand provided a great level of flexibility to adapt the project with other related, on-going work at the municipality level. On the other hand, the high-level of flexibility and fluidity in project planning has seemed to lead to some level of confusion regarding roles, responsibilities and the division of labour among the stakeholders, which is particularly important in assessing whether there is a need for external expertise, or whether using internal / national resources would yield the best and most efficient results for completing a given task. Similar concerns were expressed with regards to the organization of the international collaboration between the Norwegian project interlocutors and others and related mainly to the effectiveness of achieving the project objectives and delays caused by occasional unclarity on the roles and responsibilities of each participating agency.

Sustainability of the project

> **EQ9: To what extent will the benefits of the project continue after the completion of the project?**
> **EQ10: How likely is stakeholders' engagement to continue, be scaled up, replicated or institutionalised?**

Scale up, replication and Institutionalization of generation of data on the SDGs

The interviewees were asked whether follow-up projects have been planned and confirmed, and whether they personally intended to continue to work on follow-up, or, on similar activities in the future. As for the city assessments, updating data is crucial in the monitoring of the achievements towards the SDGs, and one interviewee pointed out the need for strategies to validate the assessments also in the future. Monitoring strategies do not exist, which underscores the risk of carrying out assessments as pilot exercises limited to short-term project-based funding.

All stakeholders that participated in the evaluation reaffirmed the importance of the work that has been already carried out for the methodological development of the VLRs and continue to contribute to further upscaling and developing them through different avenues. Referring to evaluation questions six and seven, the evaluation data is ambiguous on the institutionalization of the project in Norway: While at the international level and with the lead of the UNECE, scaling up in-depth city assessments and VLRs continues, it is uncertain to what extent Norway continues to participate in these processes within the UN framework considering both the on-going national processes and other similar regional processes, such as the [European Commission's Beyond, Before or Along study](#) in which Trondheim and Asker were the participating Norwegian members. At the time of this evaluation, the Centre of Excellence in Trondheim is under evaluation with the objective of determining its future and how it is best operationalized.

As for carrying out the VLRs in other countries, in Armenia the foundations have been laid as a result of the project activities, but there is a need for additional resources in order to ensure that the work continues in the initial cities (Gores and Hrazdan), and that the methodology is scaled up to other cities. In Kyrgyzstan, the VLR conducted in Bishkek has resulted in the decision to expand the VLRs to other cities, and the work is beginning in the city of Osh with financing from the Asian Development Bank.

Scale up, replication and institutionalization of capacity building and networking for the achievement of the SDGs

Norway continues to implement its national and local strategies to work towards the achievement of the SDGs in accordance with the Stavanger Declaration; an outcome of the first Sustainable Development Goals lab during [the Nordic Edge](#) that brought together Nordic cities including over 15 Norwegian

municipalities, in 2020. Thus, there are solid institutionalization mechanisms for monitoring the 2030 Agenda as a whole as well as distinct, on-going regional, national and supra-national processes for the achievement of SDG 11. There is also a strong political commitment to develop the smart and sustainable cities agenda, which will continue through different platforms. KS spearheads the national Network of Excellence for smart and sustainable cities, and there are several mechanisms for inter-ministerial collaboration as well as established avenues to connect local levels to national decision-making.[5] KS also works with European partners for climate change adaptation and sustainable city development, and several cities in Norway are members of the Nordic Smart City Network. In addition, for example the Asker municipality is working on VLRs with international partners such as the Institute of Global Environmental Strategies (Japan). Thus, the question in the case of Norway is not whether these processes are institutionalized, but rather how the existing processes would be streamlined for international collaboration, good practice exchange, peer-learning and connectivity in order to ensure that the different initiatives work towards the same goals with maximum effectiveness. Without further, in-depth discussions on specific roles and ways for the Norwegian counterparts to contribute on the international arena, there is some level of risk for not continuing to capitalize on the project results at the city level in Norway.

EQ11: To what extent do the partners and beneficiaries 'own' the outcomes of the work?

A distinction should be made between the commitment towards the achievement of the SDGs and the related national processes, and activities within the project "Improved sustainable urban development in 17 Norwegian cities". As for the former and as described above, there is an evident commitment to implementing the SDGs at different administrative levels in Norway. Considering the high level of autonomy of municipalities, different cities and municipalities have adopted different and innovative approaches to work towards the SDGs. Thus, the ownership of some of the outcomes of the project, including carrying out more city assessments and strengthening networking and collaboration between the municipalities, can legitimately be described as "high" in Norway. As for the latter, the level of ownership of the project-specific outcomes, most notably introducing the KPIs according to the VLR methodology, in Norway cannot be considered high considering other on-going work in the field of SDGs. As for the outcomes related to building of international VLR movement, the commitment to continue working internationally on VLRs and coordinating the implementation of the SDGs in some municipalities is very high, which opens new avenues for future collaboration.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The main contribution of the project "Improved sustainable urban development in 17 Norwegian cities" is in the field of strengthening international collaboration towards better monitoring of the progress towards the SDGs, in particular SDG 11. The expertise that the Norwegian counterparts have brought to developing the VLRs and the related learning materials has been valuable and appreciated by the partners. The project also served as a springboard for many Norwegian city-level counterparts to become active in the international spheres, which has benefited participants both in Norway and elsewhere in the UNECE region. It is also notable that the Norwegian beneficiaries took prominent roles and participated in numerous events and expert dialogues beyond the planned project activities, which further highlights the positive outcomes of the project and the interest among local authorities in working at an international level. In addition, the participation of city leaders from countries with high autonomy at local levels – which is the case in Norway – and from countries with highly centralized decision-making structures, contribute positively to exchange of experiences, peer learning and the empowerment of city leaders.

Key lessons learned – application of the VLRs / KPI methodology for data collection and measuring the progress towards the SDGs

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[5] Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Voluntary National Review 2021. Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/cca592d5137845ff92874e9a78bdadea/en-gb/pdfs/voluntary-national-review-2021.pdf

While all interviewees unanimously agreed on the usefulness of the VLRs, the results and impact of introducing the KPIs in Norway seems lower than the benefits of the project in international networking, peer learning and good practice exchange on the VLR methodology. As was discussed with some interviewees, the KPIs work best in societies in which national data is available. Somewhat paradoxically, though, where national data is available, often national indicators that can be used for similar assessments, also exist. This was also the case in Norway, and some of the indicated weaknesses of the KPI methodology compared to the used national indicators – or national indicators under development – included the strong focus on infrastructure while being weaker on measuring social progress. In addition, the KPIs do not allow the analysis of the impact or urban-rural divide, which is needed in the Norwegian context in which municipalities and other local administrative entities cover large territories from urban centres to peripheries. Therefore, maintaining flexibility in the application of the tool locally is crucial and partnerships with countries such as Norway can contribute to the further development of the tool. To that end, the fact that the KPIs have triggered further (local) analysis on the available methodologies to follow up and monitor the achievement of the SDGs should not be undermined, as more means to produce verifiable, reliable and shareable data on the achievement of the SDGs is needed at all levels.

Among the key challenges seems to be finding ways to update and follow up on the VLRs as well as the potential evidence-based policymaking resulting from them when they are introduced to a city with external, project-based financing. The Forum of Mayors is considered as an important initiative that can play a major role in sustaining VLRs as standard tools for city decision-makers if it is resourced and strengthened, and if city administration representatives at operational and managerial levels are engaged in the processes locally and through peer learning and exchange internationally. The Norwegian example demonstrates the importance of political commitment that is backstopped with resource allocation to both data generation and utilizing the findings. How to support its partners in both conducting VLRs and leveraging public financing with other sources to implement the results is thus among the key questions for UNECE in its support to the achievement of SDG 11.

Key lessons learned – project cycle management

The main identified lessons learned relate to the project design and project cycle management. The project was originally designed to include only four main activities: a series of in-depth city assessments in Norway and networking and visibility activities. In the implementation phase, the project activities were strongly integrated into the Norwegian national processes to enhance collaboration between the municipalities and national level decision-making, and into the various networking and capacity building processes under the U4SSC programme.

While seeking for synergy benefits and streamlining activities by merging and connecting different strands of work to avoid duplication of efforts is beneficiary and can yield better results, in this case establishing the connection between the project budget, project activities, the achieved results, and the added value of the project is a challenge because of the high level of integration of the project to other initiatives in Norway. The original project plan entailed only one progress indicator, which allowed considerable flexibility to steer the project to different directions, and based on the available documentation of the project, it is not necessarily evident that the project beneficiaries and the UNECE have worked towards common project objectives. An additional challenge is the fact that the project has been branded differently from the original title of the project in the Norwegian context, and the same appears to have happened in the context of UNECE, which refers to the project by different titles in its own documentation. For the purposes of monitoring, evaluation and tracking value for money, it would be important that consistency and coherence are maintained when designing, implementing and reporting on project activities. In similar vein, to maintain a clear, sequenced and logical trace of the inputs and outputs of the project, it would be beneficiary to ensure project-related annual plans and success indicators against which progress can be measured and project interlocutors can be held accountable for. These challenges underscore the importance of participatory project design processes by involving both monitoring and evaluation staff and the intended project beneficiaries already in the planning phase.

The absence of focus on gender equality during the implementation can also be considered as a consequence of a possibly non-participatory project planning: the objectives in the field of promoting gender equality as defined in the project concept note were neither achieved nor considered relevant in the Norwegian context, as stated by some interviewed project interlocutors. However, while many interviewees considered the objectives on gender equality not relevant because of the high participation of women in public and professional spheres in Norway, it is to be noted that no country has achieved gender equality or equity between different groups including persons with disabilities and national minorities. Inequality is on the rise also in Norway and the gender pay gap is wider than the European average and in other Nordic countries. Norway has also received a series of recommendations from UNCRPD Committee regarding the further need to strengthen the domestication of the UNCRPD in order to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities, and from the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2022) on the need to take measures for the improvement of the situation of minorities in Norway. Therefore, it is important that project goals related to gender equality, human rights and leaving no one behind in any given project are tailored to the context in which they are being implemented.

Finally, there were no major risks anticipated in the project implementation according to the project concept note. A more thorough risk analysis in the design phase could have mitigated some of the challenges that were experienced during the project implementation arising from methodological concerns related to the KPIs and the need for the city assessments in Norway. In addition, the assessments were carried out by external experts, which was considered both cost-inefficient and potentially unnecessary considering the available in-country expertise. A more thorough design of the activities, including spelling out roles and responsibilities of the different project interlocutors, that is based on adequate needs assessment would likely have led to a more efficient and sustainable project implementation in Norway.

7. Recommendations

Recommendations for strengthening the VLR community

4. There is momentum to upscale Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) in the UNECE region and a growing community of practitioners that meet for exchanging experiences and ways of implementing the SDGs at grassroots / local levels. The *City Resilience Training* online course for the implementation of the VLRs, which currently only exists in English, is considered as one of the major, joint achievements of the project that has potential for a wide user community. The UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit should mobilize additional resources for translating it into more languages, and for ensuring accessibility to it by persons with special needs. The Subprogramme should also explore how to further deepen collaboration and linkages with UNDESA in promoting the VLR movement globally and ways to monitor how the VLRs are updated after pilot phases. This would ensure that the assessments continue to be relevant monitoring tools for the achievement of SDGs at local and national levels in the long term.

5. The Voluntary Local Review (VLR) project planning should routinely include capacity building on public financial management and budgeting at city level to ensure that VLRs inform local policymaking, operational strategies and budgets. This can be done through continued exposure of different partners to other's experiences and networking, and through supporting partners in identifying innovative sources of financing to leverage public financing with private funding sources. Along with data collection and using data in evidence-based policymaking, these are distinct working areas in which Norway could assume leadership and share knowledge with other countries. It is thus important that the UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit continues to capitalize on the expertise in Norway.

6. UNECE has an important role in following up on the achievements for the sustainability of the action even if there are no direct follow up projects for a given initiative. The UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit should ensure continued dialogue between the Urban Development, Housing and Land Management Unit and the project interlocutors and facilitate networking, which are crucial in ensuring that the partners continue to capitalize on each other's expertise in the UNECE region.

Recommendations for programming and project cycle management

4. The UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit should pay more attention to project planning including needs and risk assessments, defining success indicators and the intended outcomes, which is key in ensuring value for money and that projects are owned by the beneficiaries. Defining the intended outcomes and impact at activity / work package level is also a way to ensure that the planned activities serve for long-term strategic purposes, that the project responds to the needs of the intended recipients and that no strategic diversions are needed during the implementation. Defining the theory of change allows monitoring of the project successes and the verification of results during and after the project.

5. While synergy benefits should be sought to avoid duplication of efforts, it is important that project activities and their successes are traceable and verifiable against project plans and budgets. Future UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit plans and reports should link the project activities, the related expenditure, outputs and outcomes more clearly and they should differentiate core project activities, synergy benefits, and complementarities of the related action.

6. Equality principles and rights-based programming should be a standard part of programming in the UN. While efforts were made to include objectives related to gender equality in the project design, they were not tailored to the context and hence were not implemented. Moreover, when the objective is to collect gender disaggregated data, it should be considered for what purpose the data is needed, how it will be used and how it is beneficiary in promoting gender equality among the beneficiaries and stakeholders. It is thus important that in future projects, UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit contextualizes objectives related to equality and equity, otherwise there is a risk that they remain tokenistic and irrelevant to the action.

Annex 1: Evaluation TOR

Self-evaluation of project E340 "Improved sustainable urban development in 17 Norwegian cities"

I. Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to review the implementation and assess the extent to which the objectives of the UNECE project E340 "Improved sustainable urban development in 17 Norwegian cities" were achieved. The evaluation will assess the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the project.

The evaluation will also assess any impacts the project may have on progressing human rights, disability inclusion, climate change and disaster risk reduction in the context of this engagement. The evaluation will finally look at the activities repurposed to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and assess, to the extent possible, UNECE's COVID-19 early response through this project.

The evaluation should identify lessons learned from the implementation of the project and areas that need further attention and provide practical recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of future work on similar topics. The results of the evaluation will allow improving the planning and implementation of future subprogramme projects and activities.

II. Scope of activities for evaluation

The scope of evaluation will cover the full period of the project, from August 2019 to 31 December 2022, as the project was extended from its original July 2021 end date.

The universally recognized values and principles of human rights and gender equality will be integrated into all stages of the evaluation, in compliance with the United Nations Evaluation Group's revised gender-related norms and standards. Therefore, the evaluation will assess how the project activities contributed to gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the realization of human rights, with an emphasis on 'leaving no one behind' and, if needed, it will make recommendations on how these considerations can be better addressed in future activities.

III. Background

UNECE, in cooperation with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), developed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on smart Sustainable Cities (SSCs) in 2016 to evaluate the performance of cities, set priorities for actions, achieve the SDGs at the local level and support the development of evidence-based policies. The KPI evaluation is implemented within a global initiative "United for Smart Sustainable Cities - U4SSC" which brings together 16 UN agencies. In 2018, UNECE signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Organization for International Economic Relations (OiER) to establish a Centre for Excellence on smart sustainable cities to implement concrete projects for investments and public private partnerships in the UNECE region. In 2019, the Government of Norway decided to evaluate 17 Norwegian cities against the KPIs and develop a smart sustainable cities project as part of the initiative of the Government's "Norway as a Smart Sustainable Nation". The project was implemented within the Joint Programme "University City 3.0" of the City of Trondheim and the Norwegian University of Technology and Science. The project partners were the City of Trondheim and UNECE.

The objective of the project were to be achieved through the following activities:

A1.I. Collecting and analysing data for 17 Norwegian cities and the preparation of short city profiles;

A1.2. Organizing two advisory missions to Norway;

A1.3. Organizing a validation workshop in Norway;

A1.4. Conducting communication and dissemination activities (preparing press-releases, communicating through social media, presentations at relevant international events, preparation and publication of the final project report).

Additional activities were implemented beyond the tasks originally planned, as agreed with the donor in 2022, including the development of the Regional Guidelines for the SDG Voluntary Local Reviews, the establishment of the training-learning platform on the VLRs and a series of training session to implement the regional guidelines that were developed.

IV. Issues

The evaluation will answer the following questions:

Relevance
1. To what extent did the project activities respond to the priorities and needs of the beneficiary cities?
2. To what extent were the activities consistent with global and regional priorities on achieving the SDGs? How relevant were the activities vis-à-vis the programme of work of the UNECE? What value has UNECE's efforts added in this area?
3. How relevant were the activities to attaining major UN global commitments, inter alia, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris agreement?
4. Did the project apply gender, rights-based and disability inclusion approaches in the design and implementation of the activities?
5. To what extent have the project activities contributed to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the realization of human rights?
6. How relevant was the project to the target groups' needs and priorities? Was there a focus on 'leaving no one behind'?

Effectiveness
7. Did the project achieve the results expected during the project design in terms of the planned activities, outcome, and impact?
8. What were the challenges/ obstacles to achieving the activities, objective and expected accomplishments set forth?

Sustainability
9. To what extent will the benefits of the project continue after the completion of the project?
10. How likely is stakeholders' engagement to continue, be scaled up, replicated or institutionalized?
11. To what extent do the partners and beneficiaries 'own' the outcomes of the work?

V. Methodology

The evaluation will adopt a theory-driven, utilization-focused and gender and human rights responsive approach. The evaluator is required to use a mixed-method approach, including qualitative data gathering and analysis as the basis for a triangulation exercise of all available data to draw conclusions and findings.

The evaluation will be conducted on the basis of:

1. A desk review of all relevant documents over the period including:
2. Structured interviews and focus group discussions with: member cities representatives, key development partners, relevant staff from UNECE, other stakeholder organizations.

The report will summarize the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation in English. An executive summary (max. 2 pages) will summarize the methodology of the evaluation, key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

All material needed for the evaluation, will be provided to the consultant. In addition to the documents mentioned above in 1), the project manager will provide the list of persons to be interviewed/surveyed. ECE will provide support and further explanation to the evaluator as needed.

The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the ECE Evaluation Policy. A gender-responsive methodology, methods and tools, and data techniques will be selected. The evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations will reflect a gender analysis.

VI. Evaluation schedule[6]

October 2022	ToR finalized
November 2022	Evaluator identified
Early December 2022	Evaluation contract signed. Evaluator starts the desk review
January 2022	Evaluator submits inception report including interview questions
End-January 2022	Data gathering and conduct of interviews, as needed
February 2022	Evaluator submits draft report
March 2022	Evaluator submits final report

VII. Resources

Ms. Gulnara Roll, project manager, will manage the evaluation with the support of the Housing and Land Management Unit staff. The Programme Management Unit (PMU) will provide guidance to the project manager and evaluator as needed on the evaluation design, methodology and quality assurance of the final draft report.

VIII. Intended use / Next steps

The evaluation will be consistent with the UNECE Evaluation Policy. The results of the evaluation will be used in the planning and implementation of future activities of the Housing, land management and population subprogramme in support of the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Paris agreement.

A management response to the evaluation will be prepared by ECE, and relevant recommendations implemented as scheduled in the management response. Progress on implementation of recommendations will be available on the ECE public website.

IX. Criteria for evaluation

The evaluator should have:

- An advanced university degree or equivalent background in relevant disciplines, with specialized training in areas such as evaluation, project management and social statistics.
- Knowledge of and experience in working with intergovernmental processes, particularly on localization of the sustainable development goals.

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[6] Final timetable to be agreed following engagement of the evaluator

- Relevant professional experience in design and management of evaluation processes with multiple stakeholders, survey design and implementation, project planning, monitoring and management, gender mainstreaming and human-rights due diligence.
- Demonstrated methodological knowledge of evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for end-of-cycle project evaluations.
- Fluency in written and spoken English. Knowledge of another language may be an advantage.

Evaluators should declare any conflict of interest to ECE before embarking on an evaluation project, and at any point where such conflict occurs.

Annex 2: Project Outcome Matrix

Outcome description	Significance of the outcome	Contribution description (other interlocutors /stakeholders that contributed to the outcome)	Sources of verification (outputs)
Measuring the achievement towards the SDGs			
In-depth analysis and recommendations in five Norwegian cities using the KPI for smart and sustainable cities (Ålesund, Asker, Bærum, Rana and Trondheim) by ITU in 2021	The development of the profiles helped to streamline city development strategies with national policies and the SDGs, enabled the identification of national and local data gaps in measuring the achievement of SDGs, enabled local authorities to make more evidence-based decisions in sustainable housing and smart cities, and Supported the development of the evidence-based city policies. The analyses also contributed to the creation of synergy benefits with the "Smart Sustainable City and Municipalities Transition Framework - Norway as a Smart Sustainable Nation", and connected city authorities for joint brainstorming and action.	• Trondheim University (under City 3.0 programme) • Sintef • Norwegian Research Council (Forkommune) • City of Trondheim • The Norwegian University of Technology and Science, Trondheim, Ålesund	UN Publication: Smart Sustainable Cities Profiles NORWAY: https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/pub/367509 Research report: Trondheim Municipality, Report 2020 "urban trigger methods" Research report: "Det by-regionale perspektivet: En universell metodikk for tallfesting av bærekraft i leveransesystemer for mat —med anvendelser for lokal prosjektutvikling." https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PnT3nLStqpmAyUxefdWaA2oybv9w4o_r/view
City snapshots developed in 34 municipalities by ITU during 2021	The snapshots contributed to the generation of comparable data on the sustainability of the cities in line with the SDGs, and established a baseline for measuring progress towards sustainable cities and SDGs	• Local officials in each municipality • Organization for international Economic Cooperation • Centre of Excellence, Trondheim	37 city snapshots published in https://u4ssc.itu.int/city-snapshot/

Establishment of Centre of Excellence in Trondheim in 2019	The Centre of Excellence in Trondheim expanded the UNECE's network of Centres of Excellence, which has strengthened the smart and sustainable cities movement. In addition to providing expertise in the development of smart and sustainable cities, the Centre has served as a link between academia and city authorities in Norway.	City of Trondheim	Memorandum of Understanding between UNECE and the Centre of Sustainable Development, Trondheim Kommune)
Establishment of a smart sustainable cities' lab in Ålesund	Ålesund has embarked on stimulating sustainable urban development through technology and business development. The lab works for example on developing digital twins.	NTNU Norwegian Maritime Competence Centre Offshore Simulation Centre (OSC)	https://www.unitedfuturelab.no/en/about-us/
Establishment of a national city network of excellence	The establishment of the national city network of excellence was accelerated as a result of the project activities, and is fully integrated into national structures and led by the KS	Association of Local and Regional Authorities KS Participating municipalities	National network of excellence: https://www.ks.no/fagomrader/barekraftsmalene/barekraftsnettverket/
Establishment of the Leadership Development Programme in 2021	The network has connected and further deepened the collaboration among municipality leaders and local authorities in Norway.	Centre of Excellence Trondheim KS	Leadership Development Programme website: https://sites.google.com/trondheim.kommune.no/barekraftigledelse/hjem?pli=1
Analysis and location of the available SDG indicators (on-going in 2023)	A systematic review and location of the available tools to measure the progress towards the SDGs has been commenced in Asker community as a result of introducing the KPIs in Asker municipality. The analysis stems from the identification of gaps in the KPI methodology and embarks on developing tailored approaches to measure the impact of actions towards the SDGs,	City of Asker	Unpublished documents in Asker city administration.
Development of learning materials that are available and in use in the UNECE region			
Establishment of an e-learning platform and a cours "Development of the SDG Voluntary Local Reviews in the UNECE region"	The course consists of self-learning materials and presentations of local authorities, international experts and academia, which are organised into 3 modules. After taking the course, the user is able to design and carry out VLRs. The course is available in English.	Centres of Excellence in Trondheim and Geneva Inputs from city of Trondheim	https://www.cityresiliencetraining.com/course/enrol/index.php?id=3

Development of the VLR guidelines	The guidelines have helped partners in the UNECE region to design VLRs in their own cities. Drafting the guidelines also further deepened exchange of expertise and experiences among the Centres of Excellence.	UNECE Centres of Excellence in Trondheim and Geneva City of Trondheim and the Norwegian University of Technology and Science	https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/pub/365044
International networking, peer learning and exchange of good practices			
2 advisory missions including the visit of Mr. Kire Ilioski, Director, UNECE Office of the Executive Secretary to Norway on 7 November 2019	The mission of Mr. Kire Ilioski was the first of its kind to Norway and contributed to building of partnerships between municipalities in Norway and the UNECE.	Centre of Excellence, Trondheim City of Trondheim UNECE	Opening of the United for Smart Sustainable Cities Future lab on 7 November 2019 in Aalesund, Norway Outcome statement on the 2nd advisory mission to Norway,Trondheim, 2-3 June 2022 Mission report (prepared by UNECE programme staff)
Establishment of the Forum of Mayors.	The Forum has been found a helpful platform for city leaders across the UNECE region to exchange knowledge both in smart and sustainable city development and in local policy-making.	UNECE Centre of Excellence, Trondheim, Centre of Excellence, Geneva	Geneva Declaration of Mayors: https://forumofmayors.unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/Mayors%20declaration%20booklet.pdf 2 forums of mayors held: 1st 2020, 2nd 2022: 1st forum https://unece.org/forumofmayors 2nd forum 4-5 April 2022: https://unece.org/housing/events/forum-of-mayors-2022
Expert and stakeholder inputs / presentations in several international networking events and conferences including: 1. 2 regional conferences (2021) 2. UNECE Day of the Cities 2019 3. Nordic Circular Summit 2021 4. Trondheim Annual Conference	Workshops and conferences have provided opportunities to discuss future collaboration between the involved municipalities and other partners in UNECE area, leading to tangible ideas on how partners can support each other. Connecting the Norwegian partners with international interlocutors has also resulted in several expert inputs and the Norwegian partners participating as trainers in events: Regional workshop 1: "How will your city look in 2030? Localizing the SDGs and the role of SDG Voluntary Local Reviews in Eastern and Southeast Europe." 8 December 2021 and	Centre of Excellence Geneva Centre of Excellence Trondheim University of Geneva City of Trondheim City of Ålesund City of Oslo	1.Workshop proceedings: the 1st regional workshop 8 December 2021: https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/events/363051 2. Day of the Cities proceedings 8 April 2019: https://forumofmayors.unece.org/events/forum-of-mayors-2019 3. Manifesto for Circular City Life, presented at the Nordic Circular summit: https://www.nordiccircularsummit.com/agenda-2021/circularcitylife 4. Workshop proceedings: the 2nd regional workshop 20 December 2021:

"Leadership and Governance for Sustainable Development" 2-3 June 2022 5. 11th Word Urban Forum (Katowice, Poland; 28-30 June 2022 6. Online workshop "SDG voluntary local reviews: evidence for greener, resilient and sustainable urban recovery in Eastern European and Central Asian countries in transition"	Regional workshop 2: How will your city look in 2030? Localizing the SDGs and the role of SDG Voluntary Local Reviews in CIS countries" 20 December 2022,		https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/events/363560 5.Trondheim Annual Conference "Leadership and Governance for Sustainable Development" 2-3 June 2022 (https://unece.org/housing-and-land-management/events/trondheim-annual-conference-2022 6.11th Word Urban Forum (Katowice, Poland; 28-30 June 2022): https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/events/368211 7.Launch of in an online workshop of the project Voluntary Local Reviews: Evidence for Greener, Resilient and Sustainable Urban Recovery in Eastern European and Central Asian Countries in Transition
Communication and visibility			
1.Trondheim commune and the Centre of Excellence hosted by Centre for Sustainable Development in Trondheim University, have gained international visibility. 2.The Forum of Mayors has become a UN body	Visibility has strengthened partnerships and positioned the Centre of Excellence hosted in Norway as a recognised partner in the global smart and sustainable cities agenda of the UN. Visibility through media and social media, and presentations held and recorded online have ensured that wide range of stakeholders in the UNECE region have benefited from the interventions. For several target communities the project has been the first international partnership and invitations to present in international conferences have been the first opportunities for regional and international partnerships, which has strengthened exchange of best practices and innovation, and peer learning. The activities have gained international and national recognition in the member states as a partner of the	Centre of Excellence, Trondheim Cities of Trondheim, Asker,	A list of social media products (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instragram) Presentations online: Mayor of Aalesund, Norway, Ms. Eva Vinje Aurdal, at the UNECE Day of Cities on 8 April 2019. Mr Morten Wolden, Trondheim Chief Executive, in the 1st Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (Geneva, Switzerland 19-20 March 2020), 2. Roundtable "Pathways to sustainable cities in the UNECE region" and in the 2nd UN Forum of Mayors, Geneva, 4-6 April 2022 Presentations: https://unece.org/regional-forum-2020 https://forumofmayors.unece.org/

intergovernmental committee(s) and the international smart and sustainable cities agenda.			Kris Moen: 1. Forum of Mayors (Side event on "Scaling-up financing for Sustainable Urban Infrastructure – experiences from the UNECE Region, Geneva, 7 April 2022), 2. 11th World Urban Forum (UNECE side event "Scaling-up financing for sustainable urban infrastructure – experiences from the UNECE region", Katowice, Poland, 28 June 2022). Presentations: https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/events/365896 https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/events/368211

Annex 3: Survey form

Final evaluation of the project: "Improved sustainable urban development in 17 Norwegian cities", January – March 2023

Evaluation questionnaire for the Norwegian implementing partners and project targets

Part 1: basic information

1.1 Name:

1.2 Gender (please indicate if female/male/other/prefer not to define):

1.3 Organisation:

1.4 City:

1.5 Role in the project (please select all that apply and add role / title):

- City administration / local authority:
- Academic:
- Member of Network of Excellence:
- Consultant / external expert:
- Member / participant of Leadership Development Programme:
- Other (please specify):

Part 2: Relevance of the project to the beneficiaries

2.1 To what extent did the project activities match with the priorities and needs of your city / organisation? (*please fill an appropriate number from 1 to 5*)

Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being "not relevant", 5 being "highly relevant" and 0 "I don't know":

- In-depth city profiles using the Key Performance Indicators for smart and sustainable cities:
- City snapshots:
- Regional / international networking and participation in international workshops / conferences:
- Establishment of the Centre of Excellence:
- Establishment of Forum of Mayors:
- Development of guidelines "UNECE Regional guidelines for the Development of Voluntary Local Reviews and online course:

2.2 How did the project activities that were relevant to you contribute to inclusivity of vulnerable groups and gender equality in city planning?
Please give explanations

2.2.1   Has gender-disaggregated data on the participants in the project activities (please refer to the list of activities under question 2.1) collected and is it available / accessible? If so, where?

2.2.2   Was data on the participants in the project activities collected and disaggregated by disability status?

2.2.3   Was data on the participants in the project activities collected and disaggregated by minority status?

2.2.4   Can you give examples of how persons with disabilities and / or minority groups in the municipality have participated in the project and / or informed the project implementation?

2.2.5   Can you give good practice examples of the promotion of gender equality, the inclusion of persons with disabilities and minority groups in smart and sustainable city planning as related to the project?

2.2.6   If you were involved in the development of in-depth city profiles or snapshots, did the process lead to identified gaps / needs for improving gender equality?

2.2.7   If you were involved in the development of the development of in-depth city profiles or snapshots, did the process lead to identified gaps / needs for improving access and participation of persons with disabilities? Other marginalised groups?

2.2.8   Can you give examples on how other marginalised groups or groups at risk of marginalisation (for example the elderly, long-term unemployed, drug abusers) have participated in smart and sustainable city planning as related to the project?

2.2.9   Can you give examples on how the city profiles or other project activities increased emergency preparedness especially for risk groups?

Part 3: Effectiveness of the project and its implementation

Please fill an appropriate number from 1 to 5 on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 meaning "I don't agree", 5 meaning "I fully agree", or 0 "I don't know")

Opportunities and strengths:

3.1 The project was useful.

3.2 The project was needed in my municipality / organisation.

3.3. The project helped to identify data gaps and collect data for smart and sustainable city planning.

3.4 The project increased understanding on Sustainable Development Goals among the city authorities.

3.5 The project advanced smart city planning.

3.6 The project helped our community / municipality / city to connect with other cities and national decision-makers.

3.7 The project created new or closer linkages between the city administration, academia and civil society.

3.8 The project created new and useful linkages to other cities abroad (in planning smart and sustainable cities).

3.9 The project connected us to international organisations and partners in new and useful ways.

3.10 The project increased female experts' / authorities' participation in national and international networks and events.

3.11 The project helped us to develop city policies and practices that reach all citizens regardless of their age, gender, level of income, minority status or disability status.

3.12 It is likely that we continue to work on the topics of the project with international partners.

3.13 Other (please specify):

Challenges and weaknesses:

3.12 The project created extra work which I didn't have time for.

3.13 There was not enough funding to implement the project.

3.14 Covid-19 restrictions hindered moving forward with the planned activities.

3.15 There was a lack of responses or significant delays from the partners.

3.16 Our project plan didn't match with the partners' plans.

3.17 The KPIs didn't match with the existing city / municipality policies and management and performance indicators.

3.18: Other (please specify):

Part 4: Sustainability of the project and its outcomes

Please provide explanations

4.1 Are there national / local follow-up projects / plans for follow-up projects (yes / no)?

4.2 If you answered yes, please specify:

4.3 If you have become a member / participant in programmes and networks during the project, how likely is it that you continue to participate in them?

Additional / optional questions:

Please provide explanations

Do you have other comments on the project contents and the implementation of the project?

Do you have suggestions regarding how to develop local, national and international partnerships and collaboration in the future?

In your view, did the project miss some crucial element regarding the SDGs and data collection in the field of smart and sustainable city planning, is there a need to focus on additional elements at the international level?

Regarding the inclusion of marginalised groups or groups that are at risk of being marginalised, what are the priority tools / areas to develop (for example physical accessibility, provision of public information in braille, in audio, or in different languages when there are significant minority groups in the municipalities, innovative solutions for ensuring not leaving behind the elderly, or others)?

Annex 4: List of reviewed documents

	Statutory project documents
1	"Improved sustainable urban development in 17 Norwegian cities". Project Concept Note. final draft 19 July 2021
2	Contribution Agreement, signed 8 August 2019
3	UNECE Technical Cooperation Project Form
4	Letters of extension 9 July 2021 and 10 July 2022
5	Draft Annual Work Plan 16 July 2021
6	Centre for Sustainable Development (SDG City Transitions) in Trondheim Draft Progress /Annual Report for 2020/21
7	Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management Eighty-second session Geneva, 6-8 October 2021 Review of the implementation of the programmes of work 2020 and 2021
8	Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management Eighty-third session, Geneva, 4-5 April 2022 Review of the implementation of the programmes of work 2021 and 2022
9	Final project report (draft) February 2023
	Documents related to the project deliverables
10	Statement by Mr. Kire Ilioski, Director, Office of the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe at the "Simulation Conference. Augmenting the Future", Alesung, 7 November 2019
11	Smart Sustainable Cities Profiles Norway
12	City snapshots, produced in 34 cities
13	Online course: Development of SDG Voluntary Local Reviews in UNECE Region
14	UNECE guidelines for the development of Voluntary Local Reviews
15	Leadership and Governance for Sustainable Development. Conference Programme and Brochure. Trondheim 2-3 June 2022.
16	Voluntary local reviews: evidence for greener, resilient and sustainable urban recovery in Eastern European and Central Asian countries in transition Online Workshop 6 December 2022. Concept Note.
17	UNDESA. Global Guiding Elements for Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) of SDG Implementation
18	U4SSC verification reports published by ITU: 1) Ålesund (June 2020), 2) Asker (September 2020), 3) Trondheim (September 2020), 4) Bærum (September 2020), 5) Rana (September 2020)
19	A selection of social media posts according to the list provided by UNECE
20	Location and categorization of tools and indicators to measure the achievement of the SDGs (unpublished, Asker commune)
	Other supporting materials
21	Aarhus Convention
22	Trondheim Annual Report of the Centre for Sustainable Development
23	D5.7: +Trondheim 2050 Bold City Vision and Guidelines (Vision for Sustainable Urban Transition) +CityxChange | Work Package 5, Task 5.2. Final delivery date 23 June 2022
24	Geneva UN Charter Centres of Excellence and its guidance notes
25	Zhang,L-C., Fosen, J., et al. (2021) A taxonomy for indicators related to the Sustainable Development Goals. Statistics Norway. https://www.ssb.no/en/natur-og-miljo/artikler-og-publikasjoner/_attachment/448340?_ts=1807042d9d8
26	Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Concluding observations on the initial report of Norway 7 May 2019
27	Comments of the Government of Norway on the Fifth Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Norway
28	Norway's tenth report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

29	Norway's action plan for sustainable development
30	OECD Measuring distance to the SDG targets – Norway