UNITED KINGDOM

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is a unitary monarchy with an asymmetrical decentralization system, composed of four constituent countries: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Local governments are governed by the devolved nations and by the UK government for England. Therefore, organization, responsibilities and finances as well territorial and decentralization reforms differ from one nation to another as well as within England.

England has a two-tier subnational government system whereas in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there is only one tier of local authorities. England has 35 local governments at the intermediary level, comprising 26 county councils, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and 8 combined authorities. At the local level, England has 317 lower tier authorities responsible for local services. In Wales, there are 22 local authorities, 32 in Scotland, and 11 in Northern Ireland (formerly 26). In addition, there is a structured sub-municipal level of approximately 9 500 parish councils in England, 735 community councils in Wales, and 1 200 in Scotland.[1]

Unless otherwise indicated, all the information in this profile is taken from the previously published Voluntary National Review (VNR).[2]

1. NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

The SDGs are reflected in the **UK Government's Programme of Work** and each government department has embedded the Goals in its Single Departmental Plan. Scotland's **National Performance Framework (NPF)** is the main mechanism for localizing and implementing the Goals in Scotland. Wales's efforts have been shaped by the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** which integrates the SDGs into domestic legislation through Wales's own 7 sustainable development goals. Northern Ireland has incorporated the three dimensions of sustainable development; economic, social and environmental, into the **Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)** strategic plans. This has resulted in the principles of sustainable development being embedded in the Northern Ireland Executive's highest- level strategy, the **Programme for Government (PfG)**.

1.1 NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS

The **Secretary of State for International Development** has overall leadership and policy oversight for the SDGs, with the **Minister for Implementation** in Cabinet Office playing an important role in ensuring a coordinated cross-government approach to the implementation of the SDGs. Officials in the UK government's **Department for International Development (DFID)** and the **Cabinet Office** co-chair a **cross-government group**, which meets regularly and provides a platform to coordinate SDG implementation.

1.2 VNR ELABORATION PROCESS

The **Department of International Development (DFID)** was in charge of drafting the 2019 VNR, working closely with the other parts of UK government including the Cabinet Office; the devolved administrations; and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the UK's national statistical agency. The DFID organized sectoral consultation sessions. The report has been produced through collaboration with and input from the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as from the civil society and the private sector. It is worth noting that over 270 case studies were received from a wide range of groups, including non-governmental organizations.

1. See: https://www.sng-wofi.org/reports/SNGWOFI_2019_report_country_profiles_DEC2019_UPDATES.pdf
2. See: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23678UK_12072019_UK_Voluntary_National_Review_2019.pdf (2019)

1.3 MONITORING

UK data for the SDG indicators is reported to the UN by the **Office for National Statistics (ONS)**, the UK's national statistics agency. This data is open, transparent and accessible via the ONS' National Reporting Platform.[3] The ONS has been able to source good data on most of the SDGs – reporting data on 74% (180 of the total 244) of SDG indicators as of 2019.
"**Open SDG**" is a reporting platform developed for managing and publishing data and statistics related to the SDGs. Built exclusively with open source libraries and tools, it is freely available for any country or organization to reuse and can be hosted and maintained using free services. The Open SDG platform is the result of collaboration between the US Government, the ONS in the UK, and the non-profit Center for Open Data Enterprise. Several other countries around the world have adopted the platform, including Ghana, Poland, Armenia and Rwanda.

2. LRGs INVOLVEMENT IN SDG LOCALIZATION

Local government associations have raised awareness among their members and contributed with positive experiences to the 2019 VNR, by submitting cases via the website launched by the Department of International Development of UK (DFID). In particular, the Scottish government worked with the **Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)** to provide inputs to the VNR.
As well as agreeing a common strategic approach for the SDGs, COSLA has worked with the Scottish Government on the meaningful localization of the Goals by councils and communities and ran a summit on localizing the SDGs in early 2019.
The **Welsh Local Government Association** promotes local democracy in Wales. Local authorities were one of the early adopters for the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and have produced a range of targeted resources to help councils adapt to a new way of doing business.

2.1 LRGs PARTICIPATION

▶ **In the VNR process**

None	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong

2019

Comments: COSLA contributed to the UK 2019 VNR and to the Scottish VNR published in 2020 (GTF Survey 2021).

▶ **In national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation**

None	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong

2019

This assessment is based on the information collected in the VNR and in the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments' annual survey on the localization of the SDGs.

2.2 VNR REFERENCES

There is a subsection on "Local delivery" in the 2019 VNR, which highlights that "65% of the 169 Global Targets need local stakeholders to be involved if they are to be achieved" and that "there are great examples of local communities taking responsibility for sustainable development and reaching out to help others do so too" (see VNR, 2019, p. 16-18). It contains different examples and practices from LGAs and LRGs for SDG implementation.

2.3 SPECIFIC PROJECTS AND CASES

▶ In Scotland, the local government association **COSLA** has also been engaged in the SDG localization process at the national level. It co-signed the National Performance Framework and this is now being used to mainstream the SDGs into Scotland's existing medium and long-term plans at the national and local levels.

▶ In England, the local government association and Early Intervention Foundation will work together to deliver a new Early Years Social Mobility Peer Review Programme, which will identify, share and promote good practice and knowledge across local authorities on how to improve early language outcomes.

3. See: https://sdgdata.gov.uk/

► The **Bristol**'s City Office stands out as a pioneer in SDG localization. The city is widely seen as the UK's most sustainable city and it has carried out a number of initiatives to achieve the SDGs. Bristol has committed to supporting SDG implementation through the appointment of an SDG Ambassador to the City Cabinet. The city also actively participates in the Bristol SDG Alliance, which is made up of various stakeholders. In 2018, the city also published a report about localizing the SDGs in Bristol. On top of this, in 2019, Bristol published its One City Plan, which has been aligned to the SDGs.[4] The city has also led a wide consultation process, with the aim of producing a report on Bristol's progress towards achieving the SDGs. It has done this in parallel with the preparation of the UK government's national review and was the first UK city to undertake a review of this kind.[5]

► **Canterbury** City Council and the Canterbury SDG Forum have submitted reviews of the city's progress towards achieving the SDGs.[6]

► **Dundee** City Council has mainstreamed the SDGs into its local budget and aligned its local strategies with the SDGs.[7] To implement SDG 11 the Council intends to: build 1,000 new affordable homes; develop the city's electric vehicle charging infrastructure and the Council's own fleet of electric vehicles; improve neighbourhood bus services, develop a financially sustainable model of accessible transport and implement a range of 'active travel' projects.

► The 2030hub in **Liverpool** was set up to help support the UN's Local2030 initiative. It aims to raise awareness of the Goals and the value they can add, facilitate innovation and bring together domestic and international actors to deliver against the SDGs.

► A pioneering "pop-up" hostel by Salvation Army Ilford and **Redbridge** Council, aimed at tackling homelessness in Ilford, received planning permission in 2018. Project Malachi aims to create a temporary hostel for rough sleepers and homeless people to rebuild their lives. It will use recycled shipping containers to create and provide training to teach bicycle repair skills to people classified as 'No Recourse to Public Funds' by local authorities, meaning they are not able to claim most benefits, tax credits or housing assistance paid by the state.

► **Aberdeenshire** Council has created a WorkPlus programme for young people experienced in care, providing them with an eight-week paid work placement in the local authority alongside employability and job-searching support.

► Led by International Service, the Bring the Global Goals to **York** project aimed to embed the SDGs locally, conducting rapid assessment of city strategies and plans and their alignment with the SDGs, analyzing the results and recommending ways to strengthen Goal delivery at a local level. The project increased understanding of the Goals amongst city stakeholders and their relevance to the UK and specifically at a city level. This was demonstrated through the inclusion of the Goals in all new strategies and plans, through the lens of the city's One Planet York framework.[8]

► **Sustainable Food Places** (previously Sustainable Food Cities) is a partnership programme led by the Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming. Following a selection process, six cities have been selected from a shortlist of 12 to receive funding to employ dedicated Sustainable Food City officers over the next three years. The cities are: Belfast, Bournemouth, Cardiff, Liverpool, Newcastle upon Tyne and Stockport. All of them will share £1 million as seed funding to help them improve access to local, affordable and sustainable food.[9]

2.4 VOLUNTARY SUBNATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL REVIEWS (VSRs / VLRs)

Bristol and **Canterbury** published their VLR in 2019.[10] In 2019 as well, a **Handbook on VLRs** for UK cities was published by the Cabot Institute for the Environment at the University of Bristol in partnership with the City Office of Bristol City Council.[11] **Liverpool** and **Scotland** published their VLRs in 2020.[12]

2.5 MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Means of implementation are presented as part of the analysis of the progress made towards SDG 17, in the VNR, 2019, p. 204-212.
In England, the £1.6 billion **Stronger Towns Fund**, launched in 2019, is aimed at creating new jobs, training local people and boosting economic activity in England, with communities having a say on how the money is spent.
The **Cardiff Capital Region City Deal** was agreed in 2016 between the UK government, the Welsh Government and the ten local authorities in South East Wales. With £1.2 billion investment it aims to deliver up to 25,000 new jobs and leverage an additional £4 billion of private investment.

4. See: https://www.bristolonecity.com/sdgs/
5. UCLG, 2019, Towards the Localization of the SDGs, https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/Localization2019_EN.pdf
6. UCLG, 2019, Towards the Localization of the SDGs, https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/Localization2019_EN.pdf
7. UCLG, 2019, Towards the Localization of the SDGs, https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/Localization2019_EN.pdf
8. See: https://www.york.gov.uk/sustainability-1/one-planet-york-1
9. See: https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/about/
and https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/uk-aims-100-sustainable-food-cities-three-years-first-six-announced/202591/
10. See: https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/Bristol%20(2019)_0.pdf; https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/Canterbury%20(2019)_0.pdf
11. It is available here: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/07/uk-cities-voluntary-local-review-handbook.pdf
12. See: https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/liverpool_2020.pdf; https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/scotland_2021.pdf.
Scotland's VLR is a collaborative effort between the SDG Network Scotland, the Scottish government and COSLA.

3. RELEVANT INFORMATION

General comments: In 2016, the UK adopted the **City and Local Government Devolution Act**, which provides a national legal framework to devolution and City Deals.

3.1 WOMEN PARTICIPATION

In the 2014-2017 election period, 28.4% (1,511 out of 5,328) of councillors were women, down from approximately 31% in 2007-2011. In the 2017 local council elections in England, 28.6% (681/2,385) of elected councillors were women. Whilst in Wales in the 2017 local elections, 28.6% (359/1,254) of councillors were women. Following the most recent local elections in Northern Ireland in 2014, 25.1% of councillors were women. In Scotland, the percentage of female councillors elected in 2012 was 23.9%.[13]
COSLA has launched a story sharing campaign and a safe online space which aims to provide peer support both for women considering entering local government and those already active within it. COSLA has also identified actions to improve women's representation in local government.

3.2 COVID 19

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, **COSLA** has redeployed a very significant part of its staff to deal with the pandemic's contingency. Building upon its previous role in environmental crises such as major snowstorms (as local roads are a municipal competence), COSLA has integrated the Scottish Government crisis centre known as the **Resilience and Recovery group (SGoRR)** during the first phase of the pandemic. Moving quickly to online meetings, meetings with ministers and senior officials have been organized at the height of the crisis, as well as almost weekly emergency meetings with the 32 Scottish Leaders (mayors). Somehow, the COVID-19 crisis has improved the level of cooperation between municipalities and the Scottish Government. In addition to the emergency financial provisions to deal with aspects of COVID-19 response, the Scottish budget for 2021-2022 is structured around the "build back better" principle. Nonetheless, according to COSLA's assessment, this is nearly enough to meet the increased demand for local services during and in the wake of the pandemic.[14]

4. SDG INDICATORS[15]

5.5.1. (b) Proportion of seats held by women (%) in local governments		34.3 (2019)
6.1.1. Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services (%)	**Urban**	-
	Rural	-
6.2.1. (a) Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (%)	**Urban**	99 (2020)
	Rural	94 (2020)
11.1.1. Proportion of population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (%)		-
11.6.1. Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed (%)		99.5 (2015, London)
11.6.2. Air pollution – annual means of particulate matter in cities (population weighted)		10.3 (2016)
11.b.2. Proportion of local governments that have adopted local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national strategies (%)		100 (2021)

13. See: https://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Country_profiles/United_Kingdom.pdf.
14. Answer of COSLA to the GTF Survey in 2021.
15. The data used for this table come from the UN SDG Indicators Database. See: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/UNSDG/IndDatabasePage
More information on the country's progress towards the SDGs here: https://country-profiles.unstatshub.org/gbr