

Report:

Awareness and Use of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Among Voluntary Social Associations in Middelfart Municipality

April/may 2026

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Background

As part of efforts to strengthen the local implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through civil society engagement, Middelfart Culture & Library and the Middelfart Volunteer Centre conducted a small qualitative study in april/may 2026 among voluntary social associations¹ operating in Middelfart Municipality, Denmark.

The purpose of the study was to explore:

- Associations' awareness of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- The perceived relevance of the SDGs in a local voluntary context.
- Existing activities that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.
- Motivation and support needs for future engagement with the SDGs.
- The potential for networking and local learning initiatives.

The study included 10 voluntary social associations and was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide.

Methodology

The interview guide covered six thematic areas:

1. Awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals
2. Relevance to the associations' activities
3. Actions and existing practices
4. Motivation and future opportunities
5. Collaboration and learning
6. Final reflections

The study was designed as an initial needs assessment and should therefore not be considered statistically representative. Instead, the findings provide valuable insights into the perspectives, experiences, and needs of local voluntary organisations.

¹ **Definition of Voluntary Social Associations:** For the purpose of this report, *voluntary social associations* are defined as non-profit, community-based organisations that rely wholly or partly on voluntary engagement to address social needs, strengthen community cohesion, and improve the well-being of individuals and groups. These organisations typically operate independently of public authorities and may provide activities such as social support, community-building initiatives, inclusion programmes, volunteer visitor services, integration activities, health and well-being initiatives, and support for vulnerable or marginalized populations. Voluntary social associations play an important role in civil society by creating opportunities for participation, fostering social inclusion, and contributing to local social sustainability. Their activities are generally driven by social objectives rather than commercial interests and are often delivered through the efforts of volunteers, members, and local communities.

Findings

1. Awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals

The study revealed a generally limited awareness of the SDGs among participating associations.

Seven out of ten organisations had previously heard of the SDGs, while three had no prior knowledge of them. None of the participants considered their knowledge to be extensive, and most described their understanding as limited or superficial.

Knowledge of the SDGs was primarily acquired through the media. The municipality, library, volunteer centre, and other associations were mentioned less frequently as sources of information.

The findings indicate that the SDGs have not yet been systematically integrated into the work of local voluntary organisations.

Key Findings

- 70% had heard of the SDGs.
 - 80% assessed their knowledge as limited or very limited.
 - The media was the primary source of information.
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2. Relevance to the Associations' Work

The participating organisations generally expressed interest in the SDGs but found it challenging to translate them directly into their everyday activities.

Three associations considered the SDGs directly relevant, five regarded them as potentially relevant, and two saw little connection to their work.

The goals most frequently identified as relevant were:

- SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Many participants requested practical examples of how small voluntary organisations can work with the SDGs in everyday practice.

Key Findings

- 80% could see potential relevance in the SDGs.

- There is a demand for concrete local examples.
 - Small organisations need targeted and accessible support materials.
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3. Existing Actions and Practices

None of the participating organisations currently use the SDGs as an explicit strategic framework. However, the study showed that most already carry out activities that directly contribute to several of the goals.

Examples include:

- Initiatives addressing loneliness and social isolation.
- Volunteer visitor and befriending programmes.
- Community cafés and social meeting places.
- Integration and language-support activities.
- Inclusive social communities for vulnerable groups.

Seven organisations also stated that their core values closely align with the intentions and principles of the SDGs.

Key Findings

- 60% contribute indirectly to the SDGs.
 - 70% identified a strong alignment between their organisational values and the SDGs.
 - Existing activities particularly support SDGs 3, 10, and 11.
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4. Motivation and Future Opportunities

The study identified a positive interest in engaging more consciously with the SDGs in the future.

Four organisations expressed a clear interest in further engagement, while five were open to exploring the possibility.

The most important motivating factors were:

- Increased visibility of the organisation's work.
- Access to support and guidance.
- Opportunities for collaboration with other stakeholders.
- Improved access to funding opportunities and grant programmes.
- Shared learning and capacity building.

Associations particularly requested introductory sessions, workshops, and easy-to-use support materials.

Key Findings

- 90% were positive or open towards further engagement with the SDGs.
 - Practical support is preferred over theoretical information.
 - The SDGs are viewed as a useful framework for project development and funding applications.
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5. Collaboration and Networking

Half of the participating organisations expressed a desire to join a local SDG network, while three additional organisations were open to the idea.

Participants emphasised that any network should be:

- Practice-oriented.
- Time-efficient and manageable.
- Based on peer learning and exchange of experiences.
- Supported by practical tools and examples.

The municipality, library, volunteer centre, and other social organisations were highlighted as natural collaboration partners.

Key Findings

- 80% were positive or open towards network participation.
 - Peer learning and practical tools are essential.
 - Cross-sector partnerships are considered highly valuable.
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6. Final Reflections

The findings suggest that some organisations still perceive the SDGs as abstract and global in nature. However, most participants believed that the goals can be translated into meaningful local action when linked to concrete activities and community initiatives.

The goals most strongly associated with the organisations' work were:

- SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Participants particularly highlighted their work on well-being, social inclusion, community building, and the prevention of social isolation as contributions to the SDGs.

Overall Assessment

The study demonstrates that voluntary social organisations already make significant contributions to several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through their everyday activities.

The primary challenge is not a lack of action, but rather a limited awareness of how existing activities contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

There is therefore considerable potential to strengthen engagement through information, capacity building, networking opportunities, and practical support.

Follow-up Initiatives

Based on the findings, Middelfart Culture & Library and the Middelfart Volunteer Centre jointly developed a number of follow-up initiatives:

1. Development of a short introduction to the SDGs specifically targeted at voluntary associations.
 2. Delivery of workshops featuring practical local examples and case studies.
 3. Creation of simple support materials, including posters, icon packs, and guidance templates.
 4. Establishment of an informal local network with two to three annual meetings.
 5. Support for integrating SDGs into project descriptions and funding applications.
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Pilot Workshop: “The SDGs and My Association”

As a direct follow-up to the study, Middelfart Culture & Library and the Middelfart Volunteer Centre will host a pilot workshop in September 2026 entitled:

“The SDGs and My Association”

The workshop aims to:

- Introduce the SDGs from a local perspective.
- Highlight existing SDG-related activities within local associations.
- Inspire new initiatives and partnerships.
- Facilitate dialogue on future networking and learning activities.

The programme includes presentations on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, national initiatives such as UGE17 (Week 17), local experiences from the library and voluntary sector, and a participatory workshop focusing on future opportunities.

The workshop represents the first step towards establishing a local learning and collaboration community around the SDGs in Middelfart Municipality.

Outlook

Voluntary organisations play a crucial role in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by translating global ambitions into concrete local action.

The study demonstrates that civil society already contributes significantly to social sustainability, well-being, inclusion, and community development.

Through targeted support, knowledge sharing, and cross-sector partnerships, these contributions can be strengthened further, helping to ensure stronger local ownership of the SDGs and supporting progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

Appendix A: Workshop Invitation

The SDGs and My Association

Middelfart Culture & Library and the Middelfart Volunteer Centre invite you to join us for an inspiring afternoon at the Oasis Café at Middelfart Library.

While enjoying coffee served in vintage china, sitting at beautifully decorated upcycled tables, and sharing refreshments, participants will be introduced to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and explore how voluntary organisations can actively engage with them.

As a voluntary association, you are already helping to create a better world. Together we will explore and articulate both existing and new ways in which your organisation contributes to sustainable development and stronger local communities.

Participation is free of charge. Registration is required for catering purposes.

Programme

16:00 – 16:05

Welcome and introduction to the programme.

16:05 – 16:30

Introduction to the Sustainable Development Goals and UGE17

by Thomas Sture Rasmussen (<https://db.dk/forfatter/thomas-sture-rasmussen/>)

Thomas Sture Rasmussen is one of the key driving forces behind the DB2030 network, which brings together a range of SDG-focused organisations, library associations, and local libraries.

He is also the initiator of UGE17 (Week 17), an annual nationwide sustainability initiative running towards 2030. The initiative has already achieved significant public engagement. In November 2023, Thomas Sture Rasmussen was nominated for the Danish Sustainable Development Goals Award.

16:30 – 16:40

SDG activities at Middelfart Culture & Library

by Kamilla Uttrup.

16:40 – 16:50

SDG initiatives in volunteer centres and voluntary associations

by Susanne Juhl Passe.

16:50 – 17:20

Interactive workshop: “What are your dreams and ambitions?”

17:20 – 17:30

Summary and closing remarks.

Further information about the Sustainable Development Goals can be found at:

<https://www.verdensmaalene.dk/de-17-verdensmaal>