Answer to question number 2:

In every Greek municipality there is a specialized elected person on social issues.

In addition, both European Projects on the field and Projects of the European Strategic Framework Reference are being implemented in the majority of Greek Municipalities. Moreover, Social Action Plans have been launched by local authorities in conformity with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a result of those Action Plans, “Centers of Creative Work for Disabled People and other Social Services” have been created within the municipalities focusing, amongst other, on vocational training, mentoring, consulting, energy saving practices and social support actions.

In Greek municipalities, especially after the recent migratory/refugee crisis of 2015 affecting Europe, there are many Non Governmental and Civil Society Organizations working really hard in cooperation with the Municipalities on human rights protection under difficult circumstances. In fact there are programs of hosting refugees and people in poverty that have been acknowledged as a best practice (such as the ones in Livadia and Athens).

Stakeholder’s Engagement and commitment: Local and regional authorities

As all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have targets directly related to the responsibilities of local governments, particularly to their role in delivering basic services, their involvement in that respect is absolutely essential. In the context of the 325 municipalities and 13 regions of Greece, there are numerous key policies, services and actions all over the country related a number of SDGs.

Localising the SDGs:

The local authorities acknowledge and declare that their scope, operation and policies aim at strengthening social cohesion and promoting environment-friendly local development. In fact, the municipalities have developed policies and established mechanisms for the relief of local societies, amongst others, through partnerships allowing them to take swift action in front of critical challenges.

In this context, the municipality of the city of Athens has developed a series of policies and initiatives that align with SDG 11, and aim to support the most vulnerable populations of the city, address issues of transparency and (social & digital) innovation, as well as establish and promote a sustainable and resilient forward-looking strategy for the Athens of 2030. The Municipality has managed to build a robust system for critical relief and welfare services (SDGs 2, 3) as well as a system of data collection, rationalised administrative procedures and logistics (SDG 16), and has done so with the support of a wide range of partnerships (SDG 17) with civil society institutions and the private sector.

Beyond supporting with food and other basic needs over 20.000 people per week, the Municipality of Athens has also recently established a network of one-stop-shops for health care, psychological, social and legal services, while also implementing a series of initiatives for children, youth and senior citizens, and migrants (actions related directly to SDGs 2, 3, 10) and has forged noteworthy partnerships that have provided significant results (most noticeable in the tourism sector) addressing the SDG 8.

In the same spirit, the Municipality of Thessaloniki, the second largest city of Greece and an important administrative, cultural and business centre in the northern part of the country (Region of Central Macedonia), is promoting urban agriculture by allocating small plots to vulnerable groups, and the Municipality of Trikala, a medium-sized city located in the mainland of Greece (Region of Thessaly), has established five social structures, the Social Restaurant, the Social Grocery, the Social Pharmacy, the Homeless daily-care Center and the Homeless Overnight Structure.

In addition to the socio-economic crisis, another new big challenge for local governments is the refugee crisis. As the local communities are the first affected by the refugee influx, the local authorities are making efforts to manage the impact on their communities by implementing policies and projects that aim to help the newcomers integrate as quickly as possible to the local societies. In this regard, the Municipalities of Thessaloniki and Livadeia, a city of central Greece (Boeotia regional district), launched respectively two programmes supported by the UNHCR and funded by the European Union Civil Protection and the Humanitarian Aid. Both projects, “REACT” and “ESTIA”, aim to ensure decent living conditions, and provide health care and education to refugees and their children.

The achievement of SDGs 11, 13 and 17 is of utmost importance for the people and the institutions active at the local level. In this perspective, the local authorities try to initiate policies and systems designed to ensure the wellbeing of people, to strengthen the urban economy and tackle the impacts of climate change. The Municipalities of Athens and Thessaloniki (both selected in 2014 to join the 100 Resilient Cities (100RC) – Pioneered by Rockefeller Foundation network), as well as Trikala, provide three good examples of adopting strategies intended to make their cities resilient, that is, capable of absorbing any future shocks and stresses to their social, economic and technical systems and infrastructures, so as to still be able to maintain essentially the same functions, structures, systems, and identity.

The Athens Resilience Strategy aims to a city that is open, green, proactive and vibrant, setting forth concrete actions that address issues of maintenance, safety, efficiency and accountability, crisis preparedness and management. This can be reached though eco-social policies that elevate the role of local government and give it its rightful place as an important player in economic development, social welfare, environmental adaptation and technological innovation. It is worth mentioning that one or more of the colorful 17 SDG pictograms appear in each page/action of the Strategy, creating in this way a clear correspondence between the Resilience Strategy Actions and the Sustainable Development Goals. By embedding and/or creating transparent links with international, as well as national or municipal strategic documents and guidelines, the Athens 2030 Resilience Strategy is proposing an integrated, holistic and dynamic framework that can provide support to the city’s systems, as well as the capacity to monitor their performance that can then provide feedback for better planning, prioritising and implementing the technical plans and annual budget. Thus, the Municipality can efficiently and effectively address its challenges in a horizontal, equitable and sustainable way.

Furthermore, the Athens Resilience Strategy has been working towards promoting SDG 13. Technical support is requested from the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, of which Athens is a member, in order to help the city develop a Climate Action Plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change. The first step of the process concerned the development of a GPC (Global Protocol for Community-Scale Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventories)-compliant greenhouse gas inventory. This inventory, apart from setting a baseline for Athens, permits the monitoring of activities planned or already under implementation and the evaluation of their outcomes, while allowing for corrective actions, when necessary. Great significance has been given to adaptation; the climate adaptation action plan is crucial for increasing the city’s resilience to climate risks, improving the quality of life and ensuring a sustainable future for the next generations. The Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan outlines concrete steps for mitigating the most vulnerable populations’ health risks as well as the city’s economy and urban quality of life in the face of increasing temperatures, flash floods and bad air quality. The Plan, being compatible with the objectives of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, sets the target for cutting Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions by 40% until 2030. The main activities concern energy upgrades of the city’s very old building stock, public lighting and promotion of sustainable mobility options. The development of this plan is fundamental to the city’s resilience. The use of green and blue infrastructures in the city and the adoption of nature-based solutions for cooling the city are crucial measures with multiple co-benefits and a potentially very high resilience dividend.

On March 2017, Thessaloniki launched the project Resilient Thessaloniki – a strategy for 2030, which aims to enhance the city’s urban resilience. The Integrated Green Cities is another project that aims at integrated management of urban green space, by educating and reinforcing environmental awareness and mobilisation of the citizens. In the field of new technologies and e-government, the municipality of Thessaloniki has established an infrastructure for spatial information to support environmental community policies, and has created an open data platform, in which all of the city agencies can contribute by sharing their data, which are in this way made available to citizens, researchers, companies and public bodies. The purpose of this project is to provide innovative e-service of access, viewing and downloading the geospatial data of Thessaloniki.

Trikala constitute a smart city model. Technology-powered solutions are integrated into the daily life of the municipality, and government services through e-governance are delivered to citizens. From free Wi-Fi service throughout the city to tele-health care for the elderly, from driverless buses to the e-Dialogos platform where citizens can participate in the public life of the city and its decision-making, Trikala is using technology to increase transparency and improve citizen services.

Linked to SDGs 7.2, 11.6, 12.3, 12.5, 12.8, is the initiative of the Municipality of Halandri, in the northern part of Athens, which along with the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), and within the framework of the Horizon 2020 programme Waste4Think, have developed a pilot-scale programme for the separate collection at the source and the valorisation of household food waste for the production of useful products and energy. 800 informed citizens dispose their food waste to brown bins, accessed through a key, in biodegradable bags. The collected biowaste is dried and shredded, so that its weight is reduced by a factor of 4-5. The generated FORBI (food residue biomass) product is used by NTUA to generate gaseous and solid biofuels, electricity, compost, activated carbon or animal feed. This management practice, coupled with an effort to collect recyclables in separate streams, will reduce the waste ending up in landfills by 80-90% with obvious environmental, economic and social benefits. The successful implementation for more than one year now has led the municipality to plan its gradual expansion to cover the whole city.

On clean and affordable energy (SDG 7), the municipality of Tilos, a small island of the Dodecanese, which has received the EU Sustainable Energy Week 2017 Energy Islands’ Award and the Citizens’ Award, provides a first-rate example of the use of renewable energy sources at a local level. The TILOS project (Technology Innovation for the Local Scale) demonstrates how islands can move away from relying on expensive and polluting oil-based energy imports, avoid power cuts and contribute towards renewable energy growth. The TILOS project has designed a battery-based storage system that will in effect turn the island into a resilient RES-based micro grid using only wind and solar power. This project can serve as a model for other islands around the world that are dependent on supply from the mainland or from larger islands nearby.

Even though more effort is needed for comprehensive SDG-aware policies at the local level, some municipalities, like Agios Dimitrios, at the southern sector of Athens, have already published a Sustainability Report, according to the G4 Guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative, setting 2016 as a reference year, and adopting the 10 principles of the UN Global Compact. The report presents the city’s sustainable development strategy and initiatives, and it was based on a Materiality Analysis process, in which all the stakeholders were actively involved. In addition, the municipality has decided to take action towards the promotion of the SDGs by including initiatives and actions aiming to increase awareness by informing the citizens.

Regionalising the SDGs:

Even though the Greek Regions may need more resources and competences, they intend to play a leading role in the implementation of policies and projects towards the achievement of the SDGs. According to the Association of Greek Regions (ENPE), the Regions have implemented thus far 30,000 projects promoting regional development and local economies, creating new jobs, supporting social solidarity structures, improving the environment and upgrading education, health, tourism and culture.

Among other things, every Region has developed and is implementing a Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation - RIS3. This is an integrated agenda for financial transformation adapted to the particularities of each area. RIS3 focuses on the productive reconstruction of a region, having as major pillars research, technological development and innovation, with a view to decreasing regional inequalities and working towards sustainable employment with respect to people, society and culture. Furthermore, through their established open, participatory and democratic processes, such as the Consultation Committees, and the everyday interaction with local societies, Regions have proved capable of linking global goals with local communities and regional needs.

In this framework, the Greek Regions go beyond SDG 11 and work for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in relation to the national priorities and taking into account local needs and particularities. The president of ENPE and Governor of the Thessaly Region has declared in 2017 that the “United Nations SDGs are the sustainable development goals of every Greek Region”. Indeed, under the coordination of ENPE, a network for the SDGs from focal points of each Region has been established; this network monitors policies, programmes and infrastructure towards the achievement of all 17 SDGs. ENPE’s position calls for the strengthening of Regions through increased resources, personnel and competences, as the more powerful the Greek Regions become, the more effective they will be in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In fact, ENPE believes that the application of the SDGs provides a unique chance for a qualitative reform of the Greek public administration, towards decentralisation, as well as towards policy planning and implementation, which require vertical and horizontal collaboration schemes, synergies and assessment.

Answer to question number 3:

In Greece there is a strong feeling of social consciousness, especially in local government level, as social issues and human rights as a core value and main prerogative in every mayor’s work frame. The mayor and his/her team are in an everyday direct interaction with citizens, so as every issue / obstacle is being directly communicated to the head of the municipality. This is a Greek particularity that ends in the greatest diffusion of the information possible. Every municipality is open to the citizens also in a virtual way, as the municipal sites are getting more and more interactive (help desks).

At the same time, the Central Union of Greek Municipalities (K.E.D.E) is and has always been (for a number of decades) the main and effective way to forward all municipalities requests to the Central Government. KEDE’s administrative board consisted of 31 mayors representing Greece from North to South and the islands, edits decisions that have a strong effect in the relevant governmental decisions. KEDE holds special discussions within its thematic committees meetings. Social and human rights issues are subjects to the Social Committee, the proper and democratic functioning of the Institutions is subject to the Institutional Committee, the implementation of every environmental guidelines is discussed within the Environmental Committee, the Insularity Policy Committee ect..

The decisions launched from these Thematic Committees are being ratified by KEDE’s administrative Board and are being uploaded on a very well organized and user friendly site, that attracts thousands of visits every day.

In parallel, KEDE is a partner in several EU projects on human rights protection, on equality, on health issues, environmental issues ect. The actions taken within the framework of these projects as well as every development in the relevant meetings of the consortiums, are being uploaded in KEDE’s page. As the main role of KEDE in every project is to organize conferensses anf diffuse the information in the direction of raising awareness on every project, it is easy to understand that the issues in stake are widely diffused all over Greece calling for the municipalities to further interfere in sustainable development projects implementing, in this way, the principles of the EU, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda principles.

As an example we can refer to the actions taken by KEDE and the Greek Municipalities within the HORIZON 2020 PRODESA Project (energy effieciency in municipal buildings), the LIFE GrIn Project (Green Infrastructure, green areas in cities), LIFE AdaptIn Project (on implementing the principles of Sustainable Development and the adapting to the Climat Change), MigHealth Care Project (on refugees health issues), Rights Equality and Citizens EnVISION Project (on integration of European Citizens in other European Countries and their interference in the local decision making process).

As it has already been said, every action within these projects and every other program implemented by KEDE, is uploaded to the site, open to the public, providing all the necessary information for a municipality to adopt a best practice or ask for any question via our electronic help desk. KEDE also has an e-journal where very interesting articles are being uploaded every day on these issues.

Sustainable Urban Mobility – linking SDGs 7, 11, 13:

The transport sector in Europe is responsible for the 25% of GHG emissions, and road transport, in particular, corresponds to a 70% of total emissions from transport, hence the European Commission systematically promotes the concept of Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning and encourages EU member states to ensure the right legislative and support conditions for their local authorities. In this regard, the Hellenic Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport established in 2017 a Division for Sustainable Urban Mobility with main responsibilities the monitoring of the development of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) in Greece and the preparation of a Strategic Plan to promote Sustainable Urban Mobility throughout the country. In order to establish a common framework for the development of SUMPs by Greek local authorities, a technical inter-ministerial Working Group has been set up by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport with experts from the Ministries of Environment and Energy and of Interior to elaborate general guidelines for SUMPs, ensuring the participation of all local stakeholders from transport agencies to citizens’ groups (e.g. cyclists, people with disabilities etc), that will be shortly officially adopted by law. Additionally, the Greek Government is providing financial support to 162 municipalities with a population higher than 25,000 inhabitants for the elaboration of their SUMPs, through the Green Fund (operating under the Hellenic Ministry of Environment and Energy), with a total budget of EUR 9 million. These SUMPs address transport issues such as urban road safety, urban logistics, mobility management and intelligent transport systems, with emphasis on sustainable mobility means e.g. public transport, walking and cycling, but could also have a wider scope, entailing wider urban renewal, restoration and landscape planning projects (e.g. to increase public open green spaces and address urban “thermal/heat island” effects), thus considerably improving the quality of life for all citizens in large Greek cities. In terms of awareness raising, participation of Greek municipalities implementing sustainable urban mobility interventions in the European Mobility Week has increased remarkably over the past years, growing from 8 municipalities in 2013 to 86 in 2016, with many of them also ranking in the list of the 10 finalist European cities to receive a Sustainable Urban Mobility Award. Moreover, dedicated training courses are being organised for the representatives of interested cities, on a repetitive basis, by the involved Ministries and the Institute of Training of the Greek Center of Public Administration and Local Government.

Enhancing public awareness and participation:

In its eﬀort to cultivate a culture of dialogue and partnership, the Office of Coordination, Institutional, International and European Aﬀairs of the General Secretariat of the Government (OCIIEA) encourages and facilitates, individually or in close cooperation with line ministries, the transparent and inclusive consultation with multiple stakeholders actively engaged in the SDGs implementation process (civil society and social partners, the private sector, academia and research community, regional and local authorities). Through the organisation of bilateral and multilateral meetings with representative stakeholders and its participation in workshops and roundtable conferences organised by ministries and stakeholders, the OCIIEA aims to raise public awareness on the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda, promote the shared responsibility of all stakeholders, and facilitate the sharing of experiences and lessons learned on the implementation of SDGs (fostering a whole-of-society approach).

From the very beginning an ongoing dialogue is taking place with some of the major national stakeholders, such as the Economic and Social Committee of Greece (ESC), the Business Council for Sustainable Development of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEVBCSD), the Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR Hellas), the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE), the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (GSEVEE), the Association of Greek Regions (ENPE), the Central Union of Municipalities of Greece (KEDE) and individual Municipalities like those of Athens and Thessaloniki, the Research institutions of Greece, as well as Universities, various Non-Governmental Organisations, Youth representatives, networks, such as the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Independent Authorities, such as the Greek Ombudsman, and, of course, the Hellenic Parliament.

In the initial round of dialogue, an extended discussion about the stakeholders’ involvement in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda took place, and this consultation with the stakeholders led to the formulation of the national priorities and the identification of the challenges and opportunities arising for each one of them by implementing the SDGs. Thus, the stakeholders contributed to the formulation and the drafting of the VNR for the HLPF 2018, and they will do the same for the upcoming national implementation plan.

The aim of the OCIEEA is to broaden, extend and systematise the consultation and participatory process, by further engaging the stakeholders in the implementation, follow-up and review of the whole project, supporting the role of the Economic and Social Committee (ESC), and creating an online platform, which can provide a broad forum for all the interested parties to participate, discuss, disseminate information and promote their good practices.

A worth noting imitative that the OCIIEA took in cooperation with the Institute of Training of the National School of Public Administraton and Local Government (EKDDA), is the introducton of a 3-day recurring seminar for the SDGs, where the senior public employees are trained at the international, European and national dimension of the SDGs. Thus, the employees from the ministries, local and regional administrations, universities, research centers and independent authorities who are enrolled for this seminar become fully aware of the core vision, priorities, objectives and multiple dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, and they add credits to their CV and personal career. Most importantly, they build a network of senior public employees with shared responsibility and commitment to implementing PCSD and SDGs across sectors and governance levels. Additionally, this network could contribute significantly to the submission of policy proposals and recommendations on SDG related issues and to the elaboration and drafting of key policy documents, such as national implementation plans for the SDGs and strategies.

Since March 2017, the OCIIEA participated in a number of high-level multi-stakeholder events that have been organised by either the ministries, the private or civil society sector, in order to inform, raise awareness on the SDGs and provide a space for multi-stakeholder interaction, such as an event on “Standards for Sustainable and Smart Cites”, co-organised by the Hellenic Organisation for Standardisation (ELOT) and the Central Union of Municipalities of Greece (KEDE) on 13.10.2017.

Of course, many other initiatives from individual stakeholders are taking place all over the country that aim to raise awareness and citizen participation for the SDGs and sustainable development in general. A good recent example is a weekly radio programme on the municipal radio station of Athens, dedicated entirely to the SDGs.

Answer to question number 4:

The Central Union of Local Authorities of Greece as member of the European Section of United Cities and Local Governments(UCLG) participates in the different sessions dedicated to the Human Rights. UCLG has followed the work of the UN Human Rights Council since 2013 as global organization representing local governments, providing specific inputs on the role of local governments in the promotion and protection of human rights, through the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights. Thanks to this work, the Human Rights Council adopted in 2015 a Report on the role of Local Government in the promotion and protection of human rights. The role of cities as fundamental spaces for democratic innovation as well as the role of local governments as the main stakeholders for rebuilding citizens’ trust in institutions should be protected and promoted. This trust needs to be rebuilt giving citizens back control over decision- making.

It is essential that local governments apply transparency policies and mechanisms that allow real accountability, so that citizens can know what decisions are taken, based on what interests, and with what resources are carried out.

In the context of the globalization of non democratic actors whose actions affect citizens’ daily lives, the coordination of cities on a global scale is key to defend the interests and rights of local communities. The local leaders should work hard to eradicate extreme poverty, combat inequality and injustice and solve climate change. They should also commit themselves to guarantee, protect and promote human rights providing fiscal and administrative decentralization, facilitating local administrations’ implementation of human rights.