



**HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

HANDBOOK

FOR THE PREPARATION OF

**VOLUNTARY
NATIONAL
REVIEWS**



THE 2018 EDITION



**Division for Sustainable Development (DSD)
Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
United Nations**



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ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

handbook

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**VOLUNTARY
NATIONAL
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Purpose and aim of this Handbook

This is a handbook for country preparation and presentation of voluntary national reviews (VNRs). It should be read in conjunction with the updated Secretary-General's proposal for voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF). The updated Secretary-General's voluntary common guidelines are attached in the handbook as annex 2.

This handbook supplements the Secretary-General's guidelines in that it provides basic, practical information on the steps that countries may take when preparing voluntary national reviews. It is designed to provide elementary building blocks for a country in the preparation of its reviews. It is not an exhaustive document. A range of other sources of information may further assist countries, some of which are indicated in the text.

This document will be updated to reflect new information and dates.

To view the handbook online or check the latest information about Voluntary National Reviews, please visit

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

Prepared by: DESA/DSD, January 2018

Foreword



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by all Member States of the United Nations in September 2015, provide a visionary roadmap for all countries and stakeholders to strive for a world of sustainable prosperity, social inclusion and equality while at the same time preserving our planet and leaving no one behind. By no means is this an easy mission. We need to undertake this journey together if we are to succeed, learning from each other. Effective follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda through peer learning is essential for renewed action and progress in achieving the ambitious and interlinked SDGs. At the heart of this process are voluntary national reviews (VNRs), which have become a critical component of the review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Sixty-five countries have already undertaken VNRs at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) and 48 more are expected to present theirs in July 2018. This handbook, which is produced by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs serving as the Secretariat of the HLPF, elaborates on the Secretary-General's guidelines on VNRs and reflects over two years of shared experience in undertaking and supporting VNRs at the HLPF.

Prepared through a collaborative effort, the handbook provides practical information on the steps that countries may take when preparing a VNR. It explains in a practical way all stages in VNR preparation - from communicating the intention to present, to organizing and preparing the review, including its key building blocks and related preparatory

workshops, to presenting at the HLPF. As often emphasized, VNRs are not an end but a means to accelerate implementation. In that spirit, the handbook further proposes what to do after the VNR presentation. It also contains two useful annexes: a checklist for VNR preparations as well as the revised Secretary-General's proposal for voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs with which this handbook should be read and used in conjunction.

Though it can hardly be expected to do full justice to all the richness of the follow-up and review at the national level, I hope this handbook will be a useful reference for countries undertaking the VNRs. It is meant to be a tool to assist the countries in their journey to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. It will be further refined and updated as more experience and knowledge is acquired along with the deepening of the VNR process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized Chinese characters '刘振民'.

LIU Zhenmin

Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations

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Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews

A. Getting started: how to initiate a review

Introduction

Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) are part of the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As stated in paragraph 84 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, regular reviews in the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) are to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.¹ VNRs make possible the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The process of carrying out the voluntary national review should not be seen as separate from implementation of the SDGs. The voluntary national review is a process by which countries take stock of and assess the shortcomings in implementation of the goals and targets. It allows a country to plan more appropriate policies, structures and processes, and revise its national development goals, to effectively achieve them.

The VNRs are intended to track progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including the SDGs and targets, in all countries, in a manner that respects their universal and integrated nature and all dimensions of sustainable development. Among the principles guiding the reviews, the Agenda provides that they will be substantive and knowledge based, as well as open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people, with

¹ Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, [GA resolution 70/1](#). See also [GA resolution 67/290](#), para 8, for more on the reviews and the mandate of the HLPF.

a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind.²

The HLPF meets annually in July for eight days under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).³ Countries present their VNRs during the three-day ministerial segment of the HLPF. For the 2018 HLPF, the ministerial segment will be held from 16 to 18 July, in Conference Room 4, UNHQ, New York.

These meetings of the HLPF are convened by the President of ECOSOC, who is an ambassador and permanent representative of a Member State, elected for a one-year term of office. The President convenes the HLPF when it meets under the auspices of ECOSOC and as such approves the programme of the HLPF, including the VNR presentations. The current President of ECOSOC is Her Excellency Marie Chatardová, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations in New York. She will chair the 2018 VNRs, with the help of four Vice-Chairs of the Council.

The HLPF also carries out thematic reviews of progress on the SDGs, including on cross-cutting issues.⁴ To facilitate an in-depth review of progress, the HLPF annually discusses a set of SDGs and their interlinkages, subject to the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals.⁵ The 2018 HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC will carry out an in-depth review of SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15, as well as 17, which is reviewed annually.

Sixty-four countries have already conducted voluntary national reviews at the HLPF (22 countries in 2016, and 43 countries in 2017, with Togo presenting at both forums). Their VNRs, and the Main Messages, are available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>. Forty-seven countries will present their VNRs in 2018.

² [GA resolution 70/1](#), para. 74.

³ Every four years the HLPF also meets under the auspices of the UN General Assembly at the level of heads of state and government. In 2019 the HLPF will meet twice, in July under the auspices of ECOSOC, when the VNRs will be presented, and in September under the auspices of the GA, in accordance with [GA resolution 70/299](#).

⁴ [GA resolution 70/1](#), para. 85.

⁵ [GA resolution 70/299](#), para. 4.

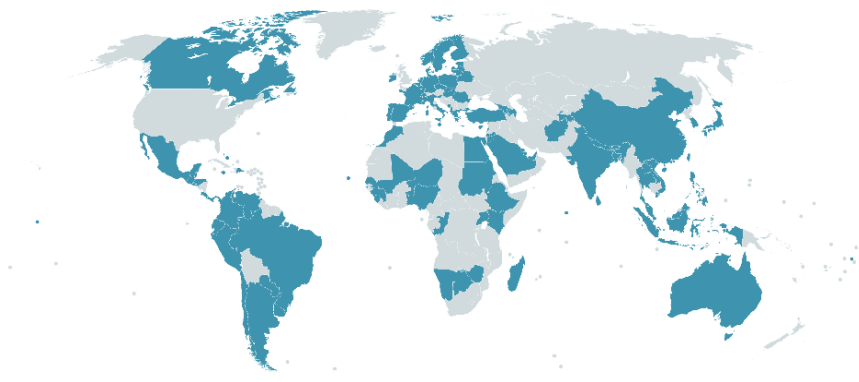


Figure 1: Map showing the distribution of VNR countries 2016-2018

Guidance for the reviews

The main guidance for the VNRs are the updated UN Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines, contained in annex 2. The guidelines provide a framework for certain common elements within reviews, while allowing for flexibility so countries can adapt to their own circumstances. The guidelines serve to promote consistency between reviews and comparability over time. However, in line with the voluntary nature of the VNRs, it is up to countries to decide how to carry out their reviews, in accordance with their national contexts and circumstances.

Other important resources are the synthesis reports of the 2016 and 2017 reviews.¹ The reports provide a snapshot of general characteristics of the VNRs for that year and contain additional examples of good practices and lessons learned for countries conducting VNRs.

How to communicate the intention to conduct a VNR

Given that the President of ECOSOC convenes the HLPF, the practice is for countries to notify the office of the President of the intention to conduct a VNR. There is therefore no registration form or template. Once a country has decided to carry out a review, the decision is communicated to the President by means of a letter from the Permanent Representative of the country concerned. For a sample, see the attached letter (Figure 2).

The President notifies countries of matters related to the VNRs by means of a letter to their Permanent Missions in New York. The list of VNR countries is established on a first come, first served basis, until the maximum number is reached. In September 2017, the President informed countries that the list of VNRs for 2018 had been closed, with the total set at 47. Those that did not make it onto the list for 2018 were encouraged to come forward for the 2019 HLPF. Countries have already begun stepping forward to register their interest for 2019. A list of volunteering countries for all years is available on the HLPF website. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

H.E. [Name of Ambassador],
President of the Economic and Social Council,
United Nations

Excellency,

I refer to the [year] high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF), to be convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July [year].

With reference to General Assembly resolution 70/1, I have the honour to request that [Name of country] be inscribed on the list of countries participating in the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) to take place at the [year] HLPF.

[Name of country] attaches great importance to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and looks forward to sharing experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned.

I look forward to early acknowledgement of receipt of this letter.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed)

Figure 2: Sample text of letter communicating decision to conduct a VNR

B. Organisation and Preparation of the Review

The review typically consists of several broad phases, with some occurring at the same time. These include the following phases: initial preparation and organisation; stakeholder engagement; VNR preparation; and HLPF presentation. The latter aspects are discussed later in the document.

The experience of most VNR countries is that the preparation time is very short. It is advisable to begin the process as early as possible, drawing up a work plan that covers the main deliverables and deadlines for the national preparatory process.

Consider the following when drawing up the work plan/road map for the review:

- **Coordination structure.** An entity within the government needs to be responsible for the overall coordination of the VNR. This could be an existing body/institution or an *ad hoc* arrangement, e.g. lead department/ agency, or an integrated, inter-ministerial group, coordinating office or committee. A small advisory group could be considered to lead the process of writing of the VNR. Contact and collaboration with other relevant government ministries, agencies and relevant stakeholders in order to provide information and data, including the establishment of focal points if necessary, should be considered. In the interest of country ownership, it is highly desirable that the drafting process is led by government in all respects.
- **Resources.** Determine estimated costs of carrying out and writing the review, as well as identify possible sources of funding, as required. Extra costs may arise for organisation of stakeholder meetings, travel of officials, production of the review (editing, layout, translation), and preparation of audio-visual material, including videos, for the VNR presentation at the HLPF. Human and technical resources will need to be dedicated to the VNR preparation.
- **Scope of the VNR.** Define the scope of the review of the 2030 Agenda, including determining whether all the SDGs are to be

included in the VNR. The SG guidelines encourage countries to report on the progress in relation to all 17 SDGs. Where priority targets have been identified, countries could cover those in greater depth. Consider where the country is in the national planning cycle and whether the national strategy or plan has been updated or aligned with the SDGs.

- **Draft outline and information gathering.** Draft a preliminary outline and decide on length, including the maximum length, and structure of the review, in line with the overall time-frame for preparation of the VNR. The experience from countries that have already prepared a review is that it is helpful to set a page limit at the beginning of the process. To gather inputs, prepare a list of bodies and agencies that will be providing data and information for the VNR. The national statistical office (NSO) and the relevant line ministries are of special importance, but there may also be other contributors, e.g. academia and think tanks.
- **Develop a stakeholder engagement plan.** Identify key stakeholders, methods of engagement and consider online and other options. All sectors and levels of government, civil society, private sector, members of parliament and national human rights institutions, should be considered (see table 4).
- **Data.** Access to high quality, up-to-date, and disaggregated data is vital for the VNR. Contacts with the national statistical office and other providers of data should be part of the planning process. Data will be needed to describe trends in relation to the goals covered in the review. If a statistical annex is included in the review, more extensive statistics on progress can be included there.⁶
- **Draw on existing reports.** Use existing national platforms and processes that could contribute to the VNR writing and analysis process. Examples include:
 - national frameworks such as national development plans and national sustainable development strategies;
 - reports submitted to international bodies, including those under international human rights treaties, and

⁶ The global indicator framework was adopted by the General Assembly on 6 July 2017. See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>

- other reports such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) relating to the Paris Agreement;
 - the SDG reports prepared at the national level together with the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) if available.
- Allocate time.** Establish a process and a timeline for technical editing as well as for a high-level review of the VNR and its Main Messages. This should allow for the integration of comments from within government and other stakeholders. Consider putting in place mechanisms to deal with potentially contentious issues.

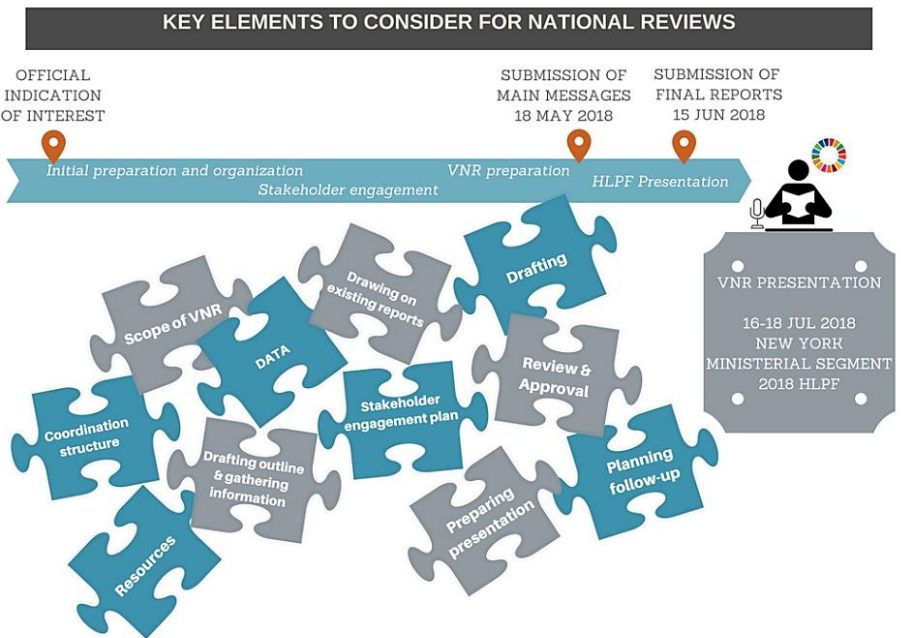


Figure 3: Elements for organisation and preparation of review

Tips:

- ✓ The *Guidelines to Support Country Reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals* (2017) prepared by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) contain tools and suggestions for preparing reviews at the national level, which can be used in the preparation of the VNR.⁷ There exists a number of other web-based resources designed to assist and support countries in VNR preparations, such as the document *Support to the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, UNDP, January 2016.⁸
- ✓ Countries are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other countries. The country examples provided below have been taken from the 2016 and 2017 VNRs, but countries can also use VNRs prepared by peers as a benchmark for their own preparations.
- ✓ Capacity building support is also available for countries. DESA/DSD organises workshops for all participating VNR countries, which are designed to facilitate peer learning about the VNR preparations. They are discussed further below. Further capacity development building support is available from the UN system, including upon request from DESA/DSD.

C. Multi-stakeholder participation

One of the founding principles of the 2030 Agenda is the requirement for processes to be participatory and inclusive. In practice, this means ensuring that all stakeholders, including all levels and sectors of government, civil society and the private sector, members of parliament, and national human rights institutions, are involved in the review and implementation processes. The participation of stakeholders promotes sustainable decisions, by giving groups affected by those decisions the opportunity to communicate their needs and interests. Participation and consultation also builds ownership of the 2030 Agenda, and therefore contributes to a whole-of-society approach to the implementation of the

⁷ Available at: <https://undg.org/document/guidelines-to-support-country-reporting-on-the-sustainable-developmentgoals/>;

⁸ Available at: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/sustainable-development-goals/strategy-undp-support-to-the-implementation-of-the-2030-agenda/>

SDGs. Stakeholder groups have highlighted that they should be actively engaged throughout the process of design, implementation, monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda.

A stakeholder engagement plan can be used, among other things, to frame the strategic purpose for consultation; the stakeholders to be consulted; means; techniques and methods for consultation (face-to-face workshops, online platforms, focus groups, written comments); and how the consultation process will be documented. Efforts could include reaching out to legislative bodies, the public, civil society and the private sector. Awareness raising efforts encompass a range of activities such as simplifying and translating the SDGs into local languages and including the SDGs in school and university teaching programmes.

Country examples

In **Sierra Leone**, consultations were held both in the capital and in each of the country's districts. They involved middle to high-level officials from the government, parliament, local governments, the private sector, trade unions, civil society/non-governmental organisations and universities. Trade unions, the private sector, civil society organisations and other non-governmental organisations, were engaged to ensure onward dissemination of information on the goals and targets to other actors, including the local communities. Interactive radio and TV discussions were held to raise awareness among the larger public. As a first step to localize the SDGs, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development in Sierra Leone has published a simplified version of the SDGs (2013-2018), illustrating the linkage between the 17 SDGs and the eight pillars of the country's existing national development plan.

From: The VNR of Sierra Leone, 2016

Brazil noted its SDGs Music Project for mobilization and engagement of the artistic and cultural sector with an emphasis on outlying and vulnerable areas. In **Belgium** a sustainable development fair is organized annually to raise awareness among citizens on sustainable development, while a film festival about the SDGs has also been created.

From: The VNRs of Brazil and Belgium, 2017

There is a continued need to raise awareness among the general public. A recent survey in **Denmark** shows that 12 per cent of the Danish population has heard of the SDGs, which despite an increase from 10 per cent in 2015,

leaves room for improvement. The government will do its part to increase awareness of the SDGs by communicating the SDGs whenever relevant and encouraging other stakeholders to do the same and actively engage with people.

From: The VNR of Denmark, 2017

D. Key building blocks for preparing the review

The following headings are generally presented according to the sections of the Secretary-General's guidelines, referred to above.⁹ A number of the steps described below may take place simultaneously and continuously. The guidelines make clear that each country will decide on the scope of their review and the format in which they wish to present their findings. However, countries may voluntarily use the components which are presented in the guidelines to help them frame the preparations for their VNRs.

The review is expected to show what steps the country has taken to implement the 2030 Agenda, including the goals and targets, and provide an assessment of the results on the ground. Implementation needs to be more visible over time and the country should indicate exactly what concrete, tangible steps it has taken to ensure that the 2030 Agenda is met.

In the first parts of the review (**Opening statement, Highlights, Introduction, Methodology for the process of preparation of the review**), countries are invited to give an overview of their own context and overall national objectives. Countries may provide a snapshot of the voluntary national review, including the preparation process and involvement of multi-stakeholders, and areas where they would need support, including in terms of finance, capacity building, technology, and partnerships. The introduction could also provide links to other international agreements such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the

⁹ The examples given in this section are illustrative of what countries which have already presented their VNRs have done. More good practice examples are available in the VNRs themselves. The guidelines are attached hereto as annex 2.

Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Countries could provide information on the process for preparation of the national review, for example, how different levels and sectors of Government and other multi-stakeholders contributed to the review.

Ownership of the SDGs

Tied in directly with the section on multi-stakeholder participation described above, is national ownership of the SDGs. Awareness raising and dissemination of information about the SDGs throughout all branches and levels of government and among stakeholders is a crucial and ongoing dimension of creating an enabling environment, and participatory and inclusive processes, a central requirement in the 2030 Agenda, can help to create a sense of ownership. Keeping the goals and targets under constant national review and ensuring the sustained involvement of all stakeholders, including through monitoring and review mechanisms, is important to maintain ownership of the SDGs.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- What mechanisms and platforms are available for stakeholders from civil society and the private sector to contribute to the VNR and implementation of the SDGs? Who can participate? Are there umbrella bodies that can be consulted or is there a need to create targeted consultation processes in situations where no multi-stakeholder bodies or fora exist?
- What is the desired mix of in-person or online engagement options?
- How is outreach targeted so that marginalised and vulnerable groups are reached?
- How are all sectors and levels of government (local and subnational) being engaged in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? To what extent have the SDGs been integrated into the policies and programmes of line ministries?
- How is parliament involved in the preparation of the VNR and the implementation of the SDGs?
- What is being done to keep the SDGs under inclusive and participatory review at the national level? Have the SDGs been taken up by bodies, such as supreme audit institutions, or included in performance monitoring and evaluation systems?

Country examples

Integrating sustainable development principles into all levels of government is a key concern for the Swiss Confederation in creating and increasing ownership. Vertical cooperation between the Confederation, cantons and communes is therefore important in a decentralized country such as **Switzerland**... Sustainable development should not be regarded as an additional government task, but as a means to increasing ownership and policy coherence and should be integrated as far as possible into sectoral policies and normal planning and control processes.

From: The VNR of Switzerland, 2016

In **Kenya**, the Ministry of Devolution and Planning is mandated to coordinate the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. The SDGs Coordinating Department has been established within the Ministry, supported by an Inter-Agency Technical Committee (IATC), comprising of officers from key government ministries, civil society organisations and the private sector. For ownership and ease of follow-up, entry points for the private sector, CSOs, sub-national governments, youth and persons with disabilities are typically their umbrella bodies, such as Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), SDGs Kenya Forum, the Council of Governors (CoG), National Youth Council and the Association of Persons Living with Disabilities.

From: The VNR of Kenya, 2017

The **Brazilian** Federal Court of Accounts (TCU), the country's supreme audit institution (SAI), carried out a pilot audit to evaluate how the Federal Government was preparing to implement the 2030 Agenda. In this pilot audit, a diagnosis was carried out of the coordination and alignment of Brazilian public policies related to target 2.4, which addresses sustainable food production systems. To that effect, not only policies directly linked to the achievement of this target were analysed, but also other governmental actions with potential to impact its accomplishment, such as tax exemption policies on pesticides.

From: the VNR of Brazil, 2017

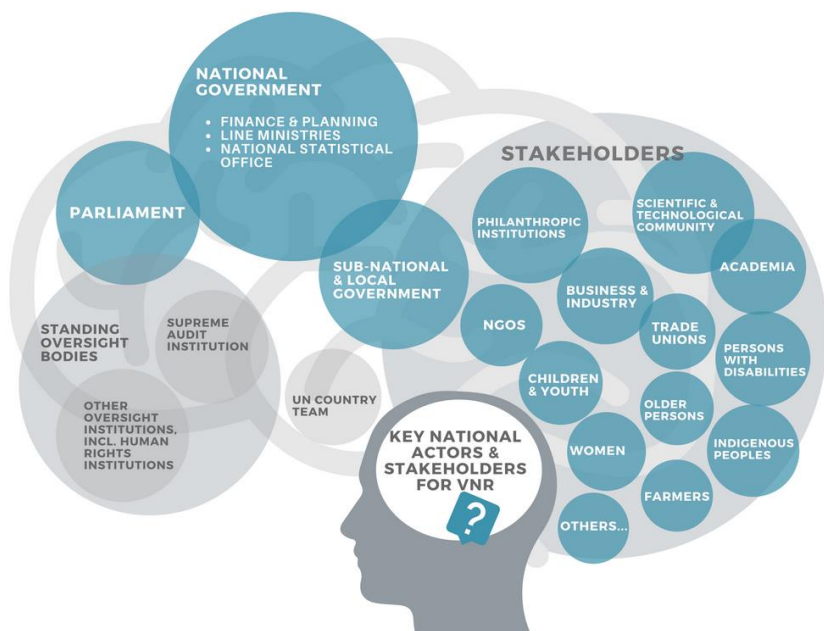


Figure 4: Indicative map of key national actors and stakeholders (DESA/DSD)

Incorporation of the SDGs into national frameworks

The effective implementation of the SDGs depends on their incorporation into all relevant national frameworks. The VNR needs to analyse how well such frameworks are aligned with the SDGs and determine whether there are critical gaps. Countries should be specific about the main challenges and difficulties they face in implementing the SDGs, and are encouraged to provide an analysis of the causes of these challenges and difficulties. There are various laws and policies that should be examined to assess a country's alignment with the SDGs including:

- national vision documents;
- a national development plan or sustainable development strategy;
- sectoral policies, strategies, plans and programmes;
- legislation; and
- local government and sub-national development plans; as well as laws, policies, strategies, and programmes.

Simple grid-based tools are a way to begin to explore the alignment between existing national frameworks and the SDGs. Below is a simplified representation from the Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) tool of UNDP.

Policy Area/Sector	SDG-1: Poverty								SDG-2: Food security							
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.a	1.b	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.a	2.b	2.c	
Health Strategy	X								X							
Water Sector Development Policy	X				X					X	X					
National Biodiversity Strategy				X							X	X	X			
Land Policy Act	X			X						X	X					
National Smallholder Policy	X			X			X		X	X						
Justice System Reform Programme				X			X									
Prevention of Violence Against Women Policy					X											
Early Childhood Development Programme		X							X							
	4	1	0	4	2	0	2	0	3	3	3	1	1	0	0	

Single target addressed in multiple policies

One plan covering multiple targets

Figure 5: Mapping of existing policies to the SDGs (DESA/DSD, adapted from the RIA of UNDP)

Where gaps and convergences are identified, the VNR could propose steps to better incorporate the SDGs into national frameworks. The review could provide an overview of adjustments to existing policies and

strategies, or the adoption of new policies and instruments for achieving the SDGs.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- Has the country conducted a gap analysis of the SDGs and its national frameworks?
- To what extent can the implementation of the SDGs be advanced through existing plans and strategies? Do they need to be updated or revised to implement the SDGs?
- How have the SDGs been aligned with national policy frameworks?
- What has been done to integrate the SDGs into legislation, policies, plans and programmes?
- What are the main challenges and difficulties that the country faces in implementing the SDGs?
- What actions have been undertaken by sub-national and local government to implement the SDGs?
- What partnerships, including with the private sector, have been put in place for implementation of the SDGs? Consider examples that could be showcased as good practices.

Country examples

Egypt reported that its ‘Sustainable Development Strategy: Egypt Vision 2030’ is aligned with the SDGs in content and implementation period. The strategy was reflected in the government programme for 2016-2018 and the annual plan for 2016-2017, both of which were approved by parliament. This enables parliament to monitor the implementation of the strategy’s objectives, targets, programmes and projects within a specific timeframe and against a clear set of key performance indicators.

From: The VNR of Egypt, 2016

Correlation of Japan's Priority areas with the SDGs



From: *The VNR of Japan, 2017*

Ethiopia has identified ten national development priority areas in its five year Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II), which have been aligned with the SDGs. The GTP II was approved by Parliament and the Council of Ministers. A long-term development plan, with a 15-year horizon, is under development, and it will fully integrate the SDGs.

From: *The VNR of Ethiopia, 2017*

Tip:

- ✓ The Rapid Integrated Assessment Policy Tool developed by UNDP may help countries gauge their readiness for SDG implementation. This assessment tool provides an initial overview of a country's alignment with the 2030 Agenda through a gap analysis of SDG targets. It can be used as a starting point for more focussed analysis. The RIA Tool is available here <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/sustainable-development-goals/rapid-integrated-assessment---mainstreaming-sdgs-into-national-a.html>

Integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development

An integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda means that reviews should discuss the interlinkages that exist between SDGs, both in the form of synergies and also in trade-offs and conflicts. A clear understanding of inter-linkages will, in turn, allow countries to manage them, notably through optimum cooperation and coordination between sectors and institutions.

Under this section, the VNR could provide a brief overview of analysis of interlinkages and institutional arrangements undertaken and designed for integrated policy-making, and examples of policies that integrate the three dimensions.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- What are the most important national interlinkages, or nexus of interlinkages, between the goals and targets covered in the VNR?
- What are the main barriers to the better integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and the 17 SDGs?
- How does the government map responsibilities of ministries against each of the SDGs, or even SDG targets?
- What actions are being taken to ensure that all levels of government work together (horizontally across sectors, and vertically from national to local) to integrate the three dimensions and the SDGs?
- Are there examples of the positive impact of more integrated national policies?

A simple example can be used to illustrate how certain policies/strategies have multiple benefits. Unconditional cash transfers to young girls in Africa can reduce poverty, keep girls in school, reduce unwanted teen pregnancies and decrease HIV transmission by as much as two thirds. Thus, an intervention motivated by a 'social protection' objective ends up

advancing other goals such as the reduction of poverty, education, health and gender equality goals.¹⁰

A basic template can be used to explore interlinkages between SDG targets, such as this one below, adapted for illustrative purposes from the RIA tool.

SDG Goals & Targets	Main SD dimensions	Potential line ministries, agencies	SDGs Potential interlinkages
Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere			
1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day	Economic Social Environmental	Ministry of Economy Ministry of Health Ministry of Education Ministry of Women’s Affairs Ministry of Water and Energy Ministry of Social Development Social Security Agency Ministry of Housing	SDG 2 Food, 2.1 SDG 3 Health, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.8 SDG 4 Education, 4.1, 4.3,4,4, 4.6 SDG 5 Gender equality, 5.1, 5.4 SDG 6 Water and Sanitation, 6.1, 6.2 SDG 7 Energy, 7.1 SDG 10 Inequality, 10.1, 10.2, 10.3 SDG 11 Sustainable cities, 11.1 SDG 13 Climate change 13.1

Figure 6: Identification of potential interlinkages (DESA/DSD adapted from the RIA of UNDP)

¹⁰ This has been adapted slightly from the example used in *UNDP Support to the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* available at: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/SDGs/SDG%20Implementation%20and%20UNDP_Policy_and_Programme_Brief.pdf

Such an initial mapping of potential interlinkages can be used to identify targets where more than one government agency has responsibility, which suggests areas for integrated policy-making and implementation. The initial mapping can also be used for more in-depth analysis of interlinkages between targets of special interest, e.g. national priorities, by means of focus groups or more specialised modelling tools. This could include examining synergies and possible strategies for tackling trade-offs.

Country examples

In **Finland**, all Ministries are required to chart key policy measures taken in implementing the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda on the basis that the SDGs are integrated, meaning that the implementation of the individual goals and targets cannot be directly assigned to sectoral Ministries. To ensure the realization of the mutual links between the goals, all sectoral ministries assess their role with regard to all 169 targets.

From: The VNR of Finland, 2016

In **Norway**, responsibility for each of the 17 SDGs has been attributed to a particular ministry, which coordinates with others involved in the various targets of the goal it coordinates. The Ministry of Finance receives from each of the coordinating Ministries reports on the follow-up of each goal and budget proposals, which the Ministry then consolidates and presents to parliament.

From: The VNR of Norway, 2016

Tip:

- ✓ UNESCAP has developed a framework and tools for integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development. This and other tools are available here:

<https://sustdev.unescap.org/thematicarea/category?id=9#topic>

Leaving no one behind

Countries could set out actions they have taken to mainstream the principle of leaving no one behind in the implementation of the SDGs. This could include actions to prioritise outcomes for vulnerable groups, as well as looking beyond population averages to identify who they are, where they are located and their specific needs. Particular attention should be placed on efforts to empower women and girls. Starting points

for addressing the area of ‘leaving no one behind’ could include actions to end extreme poverty, policies aimed at reducing inequalities and policies aimed at discriminatory barriers, including those arising from geography. The impact of multiple and overlapping inequalities – being a woman and living in a rural area, for example, could also be considered.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- How are vulnerable groups and those furthest behind being identified?
- Who is being left behind and what are the underlying reasons for their vulnerability?
- What disaggregated sources of data are available and what are the data gaps?
- What actions are being taken to determine the needs of the vulnerable and furthest behind?
- What is being done to support the empowerment of vulnerable groups?

Country examples

Finland has social insurance, social security benefits and social welfare and health care services available to all. The core idea behind the system is to ensure that everyone residing or working in Finland is insured against social risks such as old age, incapacity for work, unemployment, sickness and loss due to the death of a breadwinner. Everyone is entitled to basic security, including those who have not paid insurance contributions based on earned income. The system is financed from central government transfers, municipal tax revenues and, in some cases, client payments. Basic education, vocational education, universities and other higher education institutions are free.

From: the VNR of Finland, 2016

Costa Rica identified a series of multidimensional challenges specific to the population of elderly persons, which need to be addressed to foster well-being and reduce poverty and inequalities. These challenges include establishing a training package for older adults so that they can generate skills that allow them to enter the labour market or undertake entrepreneurial skills activities. In this regard, improved communication is needed so that the elderly can benefit from existing training opportunities offered by the National Institute of Learning.

From: the VNR of Costa Rica, 2017

Institutional mechanisms

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda will require countries to examine and often strengthen their institutional tools, ensuring that existing and/or new mechanisms are robust and inclusive. In many countries institutions have been put in place and/or strengthened. Institutional mechanisms are often multi-faceted and integrated, characterised by inter-ministerial coordination and multi-sectoral involvement, seeking to harmonise different workstreams and involving all agencies in cross-cutting efforts to achieve the SDGs. Responsibility for coherent implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda is often shared and allocated among various levels of Government (national, subnational and local).

The institutional mechanism should remain relevant across political cycles, and should overlap with rather than follow the electoral cycle of the country in question. This ensures that the institution's work extends beyond the term of the present government to which both current and future decision makers and political parties are committed.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- How does the institutional framework incorporate different actors and stakeholders and their interests? How do the overall institutional arrangements relating to the SDGs involve key line ministries, sub-national and local levels of government, parliament, human rights institutions, civil society organisations, and the private sector.
- What is the involvement of the highest level of government in the institutional arrangement?
- How does the institutional arrangement work to mobilise all stakeholders around the SDGs and promote change?
- Are there examples of how the institutional arrangements have had an impact, for instance through more integrated policy-making?

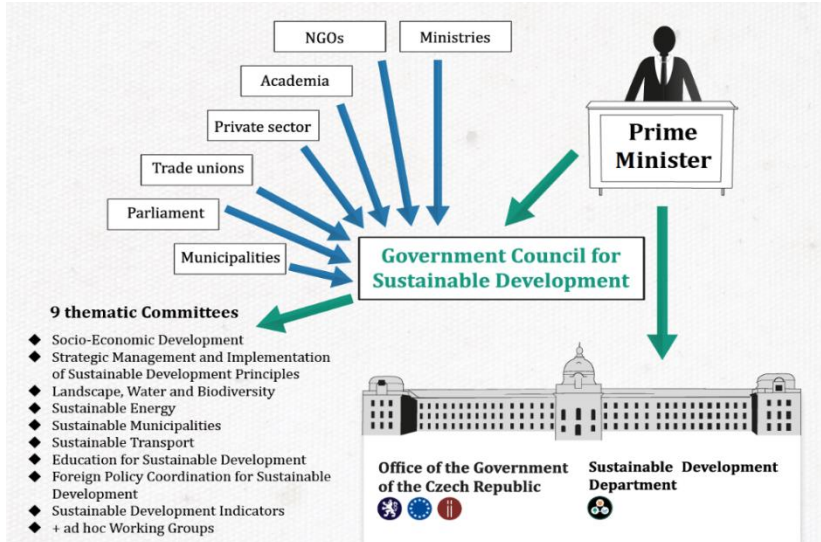
- How does the country review progress in implementing the SDGs, including possible plans for the conduct of national reviews that take into account the presentation of the VNR at the HLPF?

Country examples

In **Germany**, the Federal Chancellery is the lead agency for the national sustainable development strategy, with all government departments having primary responsibility for their own contributions to implement the 2030 Agenda in their respective policy fields. The institutional structure consists of the State Secretaries for Sustainable Development, which steer the implementation of the sustainable development strategy, and which invite external experts from the private sector, the scientific and research community, civil society, and from the federal states and local authorities to attend its meetings; the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development, which raises policy-related sustainable development concerns in parliament; and the German Council for Sustainable Development, which is an advisory panel consisting of 15 persons who represent the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development.

From: The VNR of Germany, 2016

Institutional structure for sustainable development in the **Czech Republic**



From: The VNR of the Czech Republic, 2017

Structural issues

Countries could reflect on the cross-cutting/transversal impact on the implementation of the SDGs of, for example, gender equality, inequality, trade, peaceful societies, production and consumption patterns, and structural transformation of the economy. The analysis could consider relevant institutional barriers to change at the national, regional, or international level. Countries could also provide examples of policies they have implemented that have resulted in transformative changes.

Goals and targets

Countries are encouraged to provide information on the progress and status of all the SDGs, but may also provide a more in-depth analysis of a few selected SDGs and targets and their related gaps and challenges. These may be chosen by the country in light of its priorities, but could also be provided because countries have best practice examples in implementation to share at the global level. The review of goals could include a qualitative and/ or a quantitative dimension. If countries are doing their second and subsequent voluntary national reviews it would be desirable to include the progress made since the previous review.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- Has a baseline for the SDGs been established and used?
- Has the country prioritised certain SDGs? What criteria /process was used to derive priorities?
- How are the various levels of government, parliament, and stakeholders working together to achieve the goals and targets?
- What progress has the country made on the goals and targets? What are the trends? Are there emerging issues of concern? Consider how the VNR can analyse progress/challenges, rather than describing existing/planned policies.
- Where gaps and challenges have been identified, what measures have been put in place, or are planned, to address them?
- What efforts have been made to ensure that all policies, plans and programmes reach the most marginalised and leave no one behind?
- Are there good practice examples of achieving the goals and targets which other countries would find useful?

Country examples for review of the achievement of the goals and targets are not given here due to the length and variety of reporting practices of VNR countries. VNRs have covered the goals and targets in a range of different ways, including providing:

- a snapshot of the status of the goals and targets;
- achievements and good practices;
- the impact of country interventions at home and abroad;
- gaps and challenges;
- interlinkages with other goals;
- an analysis of emerging issues; and
- plans for future enhanced implementation.

Means of implementation

The review process needs to consider how means of implementation are mobilised, what difficulties are being encountered, and what additional resources are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda. Costing and budgeting for the SDGs, as well as strengthening institutional and human capacities for implementation should also be considered when preparing the review.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- What are current resource flows? Summarise steps taken to mobilise domestic resources, official development assistance and additional sources of funding, such as foreign direct investment and remittances.
- What steps have been taken to identify critical gaps and estimate additional resources that are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda? Relevant aspects include financing, capacity development needs, including for data and statistics knowledge sharing, technology and partnerships.
- How can financial systems and resource allocations be aligned to support the realisation of the 2030 Agenda?
- How is the country engaging in international cooperation? Examples could include South-South, North-South and other forms of cooperation.

- How is the Addis Ababa Agenda being used to mobilise means of implementation?
- What partnerships is the country involved in? Are there opportunities to expand partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? What role does/can the private sector play?
- What capacity development services does the country need for more effective implementation of the SDGs? This is an opportunity to identify specific needs for the country.

Country examples

Under the means of implementation heading, the **Bangladesh** review contains a section on finance that summarizes the situation with respect to domestic resource mobilization (tax revenue), receipts from official development assistance (ODA), foreign direct investment (FDI), and remittances.

From: the VNR of Bangladesh, 2017

A specific **Belgian** commitment, in the spirit of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda’s encouragements to that end, has been to dedicate at least 50% of its ODA to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and fragile states by mid-2019.

From: the VNR of Belgium, 2017

In **Indonesia** reinforcement of domestic resources mobilization is conducted through increasing public–private partnerships in financing strategic projects, developing banking services, increasing tax revenues, exploring alternative contributions from philanthropies, diaspora funds and religious social funds.

From: the VNR of the Republic of Indonesia, 2017

The **Netherlands** supports multi-stakeholder initiatives in producing and manufacturing countries, in which international and local stakeholders support decent work, the formation of labour unions, the prevention of child labour and better waste management. Examples include the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety and the Pakistan Buyers’ Forum in the textile industry, and the Sustainable Trade Initiative’s Malawi Tea 2020 project.

From: the VNR of the Netherlands, 2017

Next steps

This section of the guidelines is an opportunity for the country to state what steps are being taken or are planned to further enhance implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- How are the outcomes of the VNR being taken up at the national level? Is the review being disseminated?
- What steps are planned to integrate the SDGs into government activities, e.g. the budgeting process and policies and programmes of line ministries?
- Are there plans for regular review of progress at the national level on the implementation of the Agenda?

Annexes

Countries may include an annex with data, using the global SDG indicators to be proposed by the Statistical Commission, as well as priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels where appropriate. Countries may also consider including additional annexes covering, for instance, best practices and/or policies and strategies that have advanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda, or comments and inputs from stakeholders.

Some questions that could be considered in relation to a statistical annex include the following:

- What criteria were used for selecting the indicators in the annex?
- How does the annex supplement and support the content of the review? Consider what is more effective – a very comprehensive presentation or a selection of the most relevant indicators?
- What is the most user-friendly format for presenting the data?
- Is it feasible to present time-series data?

Conclusion

The conclusion of the VNR could address some of the following issues/questions:

- A summary of the analysis, findings and policy bodies, the public, civil society and the private sector.
- New and emerging issues.
- What lessons can be learned from the review process?
- What support does the country need to prepare future reviews?
- What adjustments should be made to the voluntary national guidelines to ensure that they are useful?

E. Preparatory workshops and submission of VNRs¹¹

The preparatory process for the VNRs in the past has included workshops based on countries' previous experiences in participating in the VNR process. The workshops are organized by DESA/DSD and are designed to facilitate peer learning and interaction, providing a space for exchange of views, lessons learned and experiences in preparing VNRs. The workshops are intended for working-level officials who are closely engaged in the national preparatory process. Subject to availability of funding, it is anticipated that support may be provided for one participant per developing country. Additional participants from presenting countries may attend on their own funding.

The preparatory process for the 2018 VNRs includes the following:

First global workshop:

Based on peer learning and exchange between countries conducting VNRs in 2018 and countries that carried out VNRs in 2016 and 2017, and designed to cover key components of the preparatory process.¹²

¹¹ Dates in this section are for the 2018 HLPF.

¹² The report of the workshop, which took place in from 4-5 December 2017, is available here:

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17298Geneva_VNR_workshop_report_final_1201.pdf.

Second global workshop:

Will facilitate a sharing of experiences among the 2018 VNR countries, including on lessons learned and challenges encountered. It will also feature more in-depth exchange of knowledge and guidance on the preparation and presentation process, and will facilitate discussion on how to write sections of the report and make VNR presentations at the HLPF.

Third global workshop:

Scheduled to take place on the Sunday prior to the presentation of the VNRs at the HLPF, the meeting will cover final preparatory matters and engage countries in a discussion of anticipated follow-up to the VNRs.

UN Regional Commissions

The Regional Commissions support countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as in the preparation for the HLPF and VNRs. For the 2018 HLPF, four regional VNR workshops are scheduled to take place immediately before the regional fora for sustainable development. Workshop dates are as follows: Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), 28 February 2018 in Geneva; Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), 27 March 2018 in Bangkok; and Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), 17 April in Santiago. The date and venue of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) meeting is still to be determined. The regional workshops discuss the specificities of each region and provide for an additional exchange of experiences and lessons learned among the VNR countries.

Review – deadlines for submission to DESA

Two documents are to be submitted to the Secretariat, and there is a deadline for each of them.

VNR countries need to submit Main Messages for their VNRs by 18 May 2018. The Main Messages allow preparation by stakeholders, including other countries, for the HLPF. The Main Messages need not be a conclusive summary of the VNR, but can be emerging conclusions from the review. The Main Messages provide an indication of some of the principal findings of the review.

The word count of the Main Messages may not exceed 700 words. Main Messages are translated into English by the Secretariat if they are submitted in any other UN language. The Main Messages are posted online.¹³

The final reviews should be submitted in electronic format to DESA by 15 June 2018 (a month before the HLPF). The final reviews are posted online. It is important to leave time for national approval of the review, and to translate it into English if desired. The VNRs are not translated by the Secretariat, but are posted on the HLPF website in the language/s in which they are submitted.

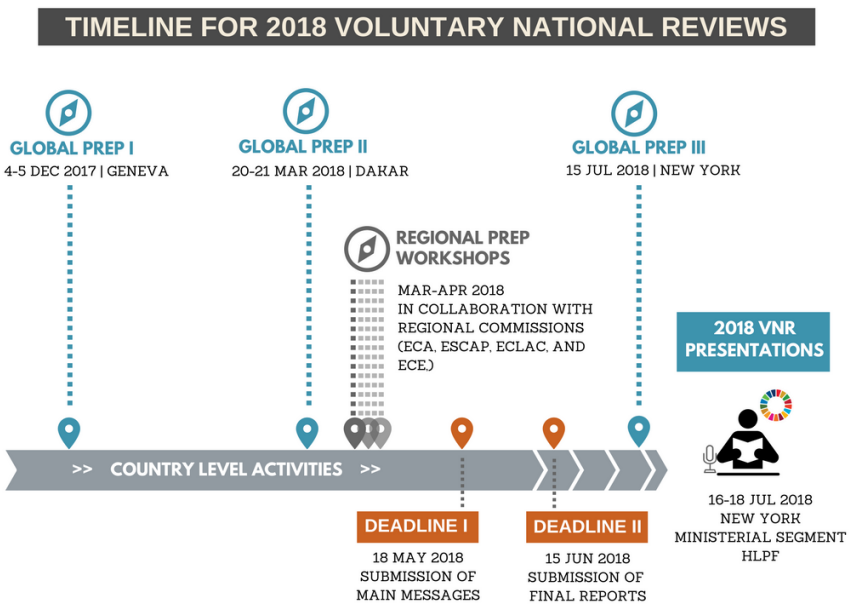


Figure 7: Timeline for 2018 Voluntary National Reviews (DESA/DSD)

¹³ Main Messages from the 2017 VNRs are available here:
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17035Compilation_of_Main_Messages_from_2017_VNRs.pdf

F. Presentation of the VNR at the HLPF

Preparations related to the presentation at the HLPF are an important part of the process.

Questionnaire

To gather relevant information, DESA/DSD sends a questionnaire to countries a few months before the HLPF. This seeks to establish:

- whether the country prefers the panel or individual-style presentation format for its presentation (see below);
- preliminary information on the composition of the delegation and who will present the VNR;
- information on audio-visual materials, including videos, that will be used; and
- any other special requests, including dates on which the lead presenter (minister) is/is not available, so that the draft schedule for the VNR presentations can be prepared.

The deadline for providing this information will be indicated in the questionnaire (April/ May).

Format of presentation:

In the *panel format*, the countries in a VNR session (between two and four) each make their presentations. Once all countries in the session have presented, questions are posed to the presenting countries. In the *individual format*, a country presents, followed by questions from countries in the audience, as well as from major groups and other stakeholders. This is then followed by the next VNR country in that VNR session. Unless agreed to otherwise by the presenting countries, the order of presentations within a particular session is by protocol level of presenter. For the same level, order of presentations is by presenting country name in English alphabetical order.

VNR schedule

The draft schedule for the VNR presentations (16-18 July) is prepared based on the principle of universality, so that sessions seek to reflect regional diversity and different levels of development. Consideration will be given to accommodating the time constraints of presenting ministers if this is communicated timeously to DESA/DSD. Countries may also

propose their own grouping, bearing in mind the above-mentioned regional diversity. The draft schedule is shared with the VNR countries' representatives in New York, with discussions taking place to arrive at a final schedule.

Presentation at the HLPF

The amount of time available for each presentation will depend, in part, on the number of countries that are due to present their VNRs each year. The time allocated for a country's VNR presentation includes that for sharing any videos, as well as time provided to stakeholders. Each VNR session also allocates time for questions from other countries, as well as from stakeholders.

The presentation at the HLPF could highlight the key messages from the review and touch on critical issues in implementation. It is recommended that a minister or person of higher rank lead the presentation of the VNR at the HLPF. In previous years presenters have included prime ministers, deputy prime ministers, and ministers from a range of portfolios.

In advance of the presentation, the country should prepare to:

- submit any audio-visual material by the deadlines communicated by DESA/DSD;
- finalise details of the composition of the delegation;
- finalise the person/persons to be seated on the podium, taking into account available seating; and
- consider whether national stakeholders will be allocated time to speak as part of the VNR presentation.

G. After the presentation

After the presentation of the VNR at the HLPF, the process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and review begin again. Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- What steps are being taken to ensure that there is wide dissemination of the VNRs?
- Are there initiatives to simplify the review for wider public consumption?

- What steps are being taken to address the challenges identified in the VNR?
- What steps are being taken to continue to monitor and review the implementation of the sustainable development goals?
- Does the country present an annual report to Parliament on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?
- What plans does the country have to share the VNR and the findings at the regional level?
- What efforts are being made to institutionalise the collection of the material for the VNRs?

Annex 1: VNR preparation checklist

Item	Actions
1. Initial preparation and organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send letter to President of ECOSOC to communicate decision to conduct a VNR. <input type="checkbox"/> Assign responsibility for coordinating and preparing the VNR. <input type="checkbox"/> Estimate and identify resources required. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider scope of review. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop work plan/road map with deliverables aligned to HLPF deadlines (e.g. submission of Main Messages and VNR Report). <input type="checkbox"/> Map key national actors (e.g. Parliament, line ministries, national statistical office, local government officials, stakeholders). <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare draft outline of VNR and develop key messages. <input type="checkbox"/> Assign information- and data-gathering tasks, including drawing on existing national documents and previous VNR reports.
2. Stakeholder Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Contact relevant government departments (line ministries) and agencies, setting out basic details, e.g. about the VNR, the information/data requested, and establishment of a focal point. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop stakeholder engagement plan which identifies key stakeholders, and method of engagement (consider offline and online options). <input type="checkbox"/> Establish awareness-raising and public outreach component, making use of government communication services, social media, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Make sure targeted efforts are made to reach groups that are marginalised and at risk of being left behind.

<p>3. VNR Preparation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Review and incorporate material received, including data, other reports and previous VNRs. <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up with government colleagues/information providers to secure missing material or provide additional analysis. <input type="checkbox"/> Decide on participants for the preparatory global and regional workshops. <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare zero draft, including identifying remaining gaps, together with stakeholders. <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare draft of Main Messages (not more than 700 words) for approval and submission to UN DESA by 18 May. <input type="checkbox"/> Carry out internal review of VNR, including quality control, allowing time for resolution of possibly contentious issues. <input type="checkbox"/> Establish comment period and circulate draft to relevant government officials. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide opportunity for stakeholders to comment and integrate comments from all national actors and stakeholders to the greatest extent possible. <input type="checkbox"/> Edit the VNR and arrange for translation into English, if needed/desirable, and design and layout. <input type="checkbox"/> Submit for endorsement and approval if required (for example to the Minister, Prime Minister, Cabinet). <input type="checkbox"/> Transmit electronic copy of the VNR to DESA/DSD by 15 June 2018.
<p>4. HLPF Presentation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Fill out questionnaire and return to DESA/DSD by April/ May (deadline will be indicated) for information on HLPF presentation. <input type="checkbox"/> Inform DESA/DSD of preferred presentation format (panel / individual), presenter, and composition of delegation. <input type="checkbox"/> Produce videos or other visual materials for the VNR presentations. <input type="checkbox"/> Select key messages for VNR presentation, with time limit scheduled for that year in mind.

Annex 2: Secretary-General's Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for Voluntary National Reviews at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

I. Introduction

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) are the cornerstone of the follow-up and review framework of the 2030 Agenda. They culminate in a country report to and presentation at the HLPF. They are most productive when they involve an inclusive and thorough review process, when they produce tangible lessons and solutions, and when they are followed by action and collaboration that drives SDG implementation.

The common reporting guidelines seek to support member states in conducting VNRs. They were initially prepared by the Secretary-General in December 2015.¹ They have been updated in December 2017 to reflect lessons learned during the two years that have followed.² They provide a framework for certain common elements within reports while allowing for flexibility so countries can adapt to their own circumstances.³

II. Guiding principles

In paragraph 74 of the 2030 Agenda, Member States identified a number of principles to guide the follow-up and review process at all levels. In preparing the voluntary national reviews, it is important that these principles be taken into account:

¹ See annex to Secretary-General's Report on critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level, A/70/684.

² See para 8 of resolution 70/299 of 29 July 2016.

³ It is important to note that the UN Development Group in 2017 released guidelines for the preparation of national SDG reports, with a view to providing coherent support by UN Country Teams to reviews at the national level. The UNDG guidelines provide case studies and tools for use in preparing a national SDG report, and can serve to complement the present Secretary-General's voluntary guidelines. See <https://undg.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/03/Guidelines-to-Support-Country-Reporting-on-SDGs-1.pdf>

- a) The follow up and review processes will be voluntary and country-led, will take into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and will respect policy space and priorities. As national ownership is key to achieving sustainable development, the outcome from national-level processes will be the foundation for reviews at the regional and global levels, given that the global review will be primarily based on national official data sources.
- b) They will track progress in implementing the universal Goals and targets, including the means of implementation, in all countries in a manner which respects their universal, integrated and interrelated nature and the three dimensions of sustainable development.
- c) They will maintain a longer-term orientation, identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors and support countries in making informed policy choices. They will help to mobilize the necessary means of implementation and partnerships, support the identification of solutions and best practices and promote the coordination and effectiveness of the international development system.
- d) They will be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders.
- e) They will be people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind.
- f) They will build on existing platforms and processes, where these exist, avoid duplication and respond to national circumstances, capacities, needs and priorities. They will evolve over time, taking into account emerging issues and the development of new methodologies, and will minimize the reporting burden on national administrations.
- g) They will be rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.
- h) They will require enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries, including the strengthening of national data systems and evaluation programmes, particularly in African countries, least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and middle-income countries.

- i) They will benefit from the active support of the United Nations system and other multilateral institutions.

III. Structure and content of a report for the HLPF

Countries are encouraged to structure the report along the following lines, which will promote consistency and comparability. Doing so will also help inform the process of review and generate reflections on implementation.

1. Opening statement. An opening statement by the Head of State or Government, a Minister or other high-ranking Government official could highlight the current status of SDG progress and how the Government is responding to the transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda for Development including through its national development plans, strategies, or other relevant documents.

2. Highlights. A one-to-two-page synthesis highlighting:

- the review process
- the status of SDG progress
- how the Government has respond to the integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs and to the principle of leaving no-one behind
- two or three examples of each of the following: good practices, lessons learned and challenges encountered on which it wishes to hear about other countries.
- two or three areas where it would need support in terms of finance, capacity-building, technology, partnerships, etc.

3. Introduction. The context and objectives of the review could be presented here. The introduction may briefly describe key features of the country context as it pertains to the 2030 Agenda, national review cycle, and whether and how existing national reports have been used. It could outline how the policy architecture reflects the three dimensions of sustainable development and what policy tools have enabled this integration, as well as links to other international agreements such as Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, etc.

4. Methodology and process for preparation of the review. This section may discuss the methodology that was adopted for the review, including its scope, depth and limitations and how the principles on follow-up and review from the 2030 Agenda, including paragraph 74, were used. Information on the process for preparation of the national review may be presented, including, for example, how different levels and sectors of Government contributed to the review and whether and how the whole-of-Government approach was used; whether parliaments were engaged; whether national evaluation/oversight institutions contributed; what mechanisms have been used to engage stakeholders from civil society, academia and the business sector and, where applicable, whether the UN Country Teams were engaged. The section could describe how the national report to the HLPF was discussed at the national level and who was engaged in the discussions.

5. Policy and enabling environment.

(a) Creating ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals. The review could outline efforts made towards all stakeholders, such as national and local governments, legislative bodies, the public, civil society and the private sector, to inform them of and involve them in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda, including goals and targets. The review could address how different groups, particularly women and young people, have been engaged and how direct citizen engagement has been facilitated.

(b) Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals in national frameworks. The review could outline critical initiatives that the country has undertaken to adapt the Sustainable Development Goals and targets to its national circumstances, and to advance their implementation including examining policy coherence and interlinkages. It may describe national efforts made to integrate the Goals into the country's legislation, policies, plans and programmes, including the sustainable development strategy, if there is one. The countries are encouraged to be specific in identifying the main challenges and difficulties experienced in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals as a whole. Countries are encouraged – even in cases of incomplete data – to provide, as far as possible, an analysis of the causes of their SDG implementation challenges and possible ways forward, including the role of different actors. Countries could consider referring to major efforts undertaken

by local authorities and non-State actors to implement the Goals, the role of science-policy interfaces, and partnerships.

(c) Integration of the three dimensions. The review might discuss how the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) are being integrated and how sustainable development policies are being designed and implemented to reflect such integration. This can also include an analysis of progress and initiatives related to the high-level political forum's theme for that year.

(d) Leaving no one behind: The review could also assess how the principle of leaving no one behind has been mainstreamed in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, the review could detail how vulnerable groups have been identified, including through improved data collection and disaggregation, as well as what policies and programmes are being implemented to address their needs and support their empowerment. Particular attention should be placed on how national efforts seek to empower women and girls.

(e) Institutional mechanisms. The review could provide information on how the country has adapted its institutional framework in light of the 2030 Agenda. This could include information on how the views of different ministries, agencies, levels of government and non-governmental stakeholders are considered, as well as on the institution(s)/mechanism(s) in charge of coordination and integration for the 2030 Agenda. The review could consider highlighting efforts to mobilize institutions around the Sustainable Development Goals, improve their functioning, and promote change to achieve policy coherence across sectors. Information may also be provided on how responsibility is allocated among various levels of Government (national, subnational and local) for coherent implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda. It would be useful to highlight how the country is reviewing progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, including possible plans for the conduct of national reviews that take into account the presentation of the voluntary national review at the HLPF, where applicable. This includes preparation of national SDG reports, supported by the UN Country Team, where applicable.

(f) Structural issues. Countries are encouraged to report on relevant structural issues or barriers they have faced, including the possible external consequences of domestic policies. Countries can highlight the transformative

policies, tools, institutional changes they have used to address these issues or barriers.

6. Progress on Goals and targets:

Countries are encouraged to provide brief information on progress and the status of all Sustainable Development Goals. It would be desirable to describe critical difficulties encountered in reaching them and how they could be addressed, referring, when appropriate, to data provided in a statistical annex. The review could indicate whether a baseline for the Goals has been defined and, if not, what are the remaining obstacles to doing so. Countries are encouraged to review all 17 SDGs; however, some could be addressed in more depth, for instance, to illustrate innovative policies to achieve goals, or examples that could be especially interesting for peer learning and in an international context.

The consideration of Goals could focus on trends, successes, challenges, emerging issues, and lessons learned, and describe what actions have been taken to address existing gaps and challenges. It could support the identification of gaps, solutions, best practices and areas requiring advice and support. The review may examine the agreed global indicators for SDGs and related targets, but countries may also choose to refer to complementary national and regional indicators. If countries are doing their second and subsequent voluntary national reviews it would be desirable to include the progress made since the previous review.

7. Means of implementation. Based on the above challenges and trends highlighted, the review may discuss how means of implementation are mobilized, what difficulties this process faces, and what additional resources are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda, including in terms of financing, capacity development and data needs, technology, and partnerships. The review could indicate how financial systems and resource allocations are being aligned to support the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Coverage of domestic resource mobilization could include the contribution of the private sector. Countries are also encouraged to cover technology, identify concrete capacity development and data needs, and the contribution of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

8. Next steps. Based on the outcomes of the review, the country could outline what steps are planned to enhance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It could also indicate how it is planned to keep the Goals under review

at the national and sub-national levels, including dissemination of reviews and their findings.

9. Conclusion. The section may present a summary of the analysis, findings and policy implications. It may discuss new or emerging issues identified by the review. Lastly, the country may indicate what lessons it has learned from the review process and how it will apply them in the future implementation and what support it would need in the future for preparing such reviews.

10. Annexes. Countries may include an annex with data, using the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and adding priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels where appropriate. They may highlight whether statistics were collected from the national statistical system and pinpoint major gaps in official statistics on indicators. Countries may want to include additional annexes where they would showcase best practices and/or policies and strategies that has advanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They could also include comments from stakeholders on the report in an annex.

IV. Making presentations at the HLPF

Under the current modalities, the time provided for countries to present at the HLPF is limited. Countries may therefore wish to consider a number of options when conducting their presentations at the HLPF:

- Using videos, infographics and data visualization to communicate complex messages such as linkages and priorities in a very short period of time;
- Providing space for stakeholders such as civil society and the private sector to share their views on SDG progress.
- Working informally with other presenting countries in advance to compare review processes and findings.

Countries may also wish to consider how best to use the time around the formal meetings of the HLPF to further engage on the lessons emerging from the review process.

