

3 VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are a central element of the follow-up and review mechanisms of the 2030 Agenda by which member states report on their SDG implementation strategies at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

They are voluntary, include developed and developing countries alike and are expected to draw on contributions from civil society and other stakeholders (A/RES/70/1, Paragraph 79).

The main objective of VNRs is to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They also seek to strengthen government policies and institutions and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the SDGs. National consultations are often carried out to be fed into the VNR process. Countries are encouraged to put regular review follow-up processes into place at the national level after they are presented at the global level.

As of January 2019, 111 VNRs have been presented at the HLPF since 2016, with a further 51 due to be presented in 2019. European countries presenting at the HLPF in 2019 are Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, France, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Serbia and the United Kingdom.

The VNRs represent an opportunity for civil society to engage in the national development process because there is a strong expectation that countries should consult stakeholders in preparing their report. Moreover, in paragraph 89 of the 2030 Agenda, major groups and other relevant stakeholders were called upon to report on their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 agenda.

HOW CAN CIVIL SOCIETY TAKE PART?

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are making various efforts to build their capacity to make them strong and meaningful partners in the VNRs process. In the following paragraphs a few of the most relevant guidelines and examples are presented.

Major groups and other stakeholders prepared common guidelines to report to the HLPF on their implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Various inputs to the HLPF can be found [here](#).

Together 2030, a coalition of civil society organisations, launched a civil society quick guide on how to engage in VNRs in September 2018. Besides this, the organization is also engaged in independent assessment of the VNRs submitted to the HLPF in 2017 which can be read as a critical accompaniment to the 2017 UN synthesis of the VNRs.

Forus, a global network empowering civil society for effective social change, has produced a comprehensive Briefing Document providing a useful introduction and various links to VNR-related resource materials.

The German GIZ Partners for Review, a transnational multi-stakeholder network for government representatives and stakeholders from civil society and other sectors, facilitates dialogue and peer learning on challenges. It provides space to explore best practices and lessons learnt, mobilizes knowledge, and shares expertise on new and emerging issues related to national monitoring and reviewing. It partnered with Together 2030 in the making of the quick guide for Civil Society on how to engage in the VNR process.

Various organizations made efforts to provide templates and recommendations for CSOs engaged in the VNRs. The Platform Action for Sustainable Development produced a guiding Template for CSOs engaging in the VNRs. In 2016, this platform additionally produced the report Learning by doing on civil society engagement in the HLPF's national review process which includes different approaches of thirteen countries.

In its turn, the Women's Major Group provided recommendations for CSO engagement in the VNRs process, and UKSSD and Bond put together recommendations on progressing national SDGs implementation for CSOs.

The type of involvement of CSOs in the national VNR process as well as their own reporting style varies across the EU. Some national governments invite CSOs to contribute during the preparation of their VNR and may invite CSO representatives to be part of the delegation to the HLPF, others not. In other countries, CSOs write their own shadow report, providing an independent and critical assessment of the national progress.

CSOs reporting varies in format and methodology. In Latvia for example, LAPAS is involved in a CSOs spotlight that presents data, challenges, analysis and an opinion on each of the SDGs. In turn, the Spanish CSO coalition Futuro en común follows an issue-focused approach based on everyday problems and using the SDGs framework as an advocacy tool and common narrative for their sustainability agenda. On the other hand, a German CSOs network adopted an essayistic style structured along the SDGs with the inputs of expert organisations highlighting the challenges and gaps in implementing the SDGs.

RESOURCES

[Independent Assessment: Progressing national SDGs implementation](#)

[2017 synthesis report of VNRs](#)

[2016 synthesis report of VNRs](#)

[Women's' Major Group Recommendations for Engaging in VNR Process](#)

[Bond report on SDG implementation with some recommendations for CSO reporting](#)

[Guiding Questions for a Template for CSO engagement for Voluntary National Review at the HLPF](#)

[Civil Society Engagement in HLPF's national review process \(2016\)](#)

[Mapping of CSOs engaged in SDGs – see page 11 for CSO engagement in VNRs](#)

[CSO engagement in VNR – but mostly statistical, no information on the how](#)