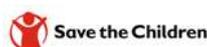


PROGRESSING NATIONAL SDGS IMPLEMENTATION:

An independent assessment of the Voluntary National Review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2022

THE SEVENTH EDITION IN AN ANNUAL SERIES COMMISSIONED BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS February 2023





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Highlights

In 2022, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda), which provides a fifteen-year agenda for people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, entered its seventh year. At the same time, the world faces unprecedented crises which not only threaten the delivery of the 2030 Agenda but also pose a deep existential threat to people around the world. These include the continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as overlapping socio-economic and climate crises, which have been severely exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. There is therefore an urgent need for governments everywhere to prioritize and accelerate actions to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in order to deliver transformative change and achieve a just recovery.

In this context, the 2030 Agenda, with the SDGs at its heart, provides a global roadmap towards building a better future, while achieving equality and sustainability for all. It is more important than ever that Heads of State and Government meet the commitments of the Decade of Action and Delivery to realize the 2030 Agenda and all SDGs while ensuring that no one is left behind.

For each of the past seven years, civil society organizations have reviewed the Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports presented by governments to the United Nations' High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The VNR reports submitted by governments as part of the follow-up and review processes of the 2030 Agenda are designed to provide an overview of the status of 2030 Agenda implementation at the national level. These reports are meant to be prepared through inclusive and participatory processes, serve as a source of information on good practices, lessons learned and challenges in implementation, and provide a basis for peer learning and accountability at the global level.

This report, the seventh edition of *Progressing National SDGs Implementation*, aims to provide useful insights and recommendations on the VNR reports presented at the HLPF in 2022, in order to inform discussions on SDG delivery and help guide improved implementation and reporting on the 2030 Agenda.

This report covers various aspects of 2030 Agenda implementation through an assessment of the VNRs according to key criteria, including consideration of governance arrangements, institutional mechanisms for stakeholder engagement, policy frameworks, means of implementation, and reporting. The report offers a review of the 44 VNR reports and/or main messages¹ submitted to the HLPF in 2022, as well as an analysis of 21 VNR-related civil society reports. It presents key findings, good practice case studies, emerging best practices and recommendations for action.

The key messages arising from the analysis of 2022 VNR reports are highlighted below and are numbered for ease of reference, rather than in order of priority.

1. 43 VNR reports submitted to the HLPF in 2022 were reviewed, as well as the main messages of Tuvalu, which did not provide a full VNR report to the HLPF.

1. **'Whole of society' approach:** The review of 2022 VNR reports included a similar level of references to the inclusion of non-state actors in formal SDG governance arrangements as 2021. However, within these institutional mechanisms, there was an increase in references to non-state actors' participation in technical working groups.
2. **SDG assessments:** In 2022 a higher number of countries mentioned having conducted a baseline or gap analysis than previous years. However, there was more limited reporting on national priorities, as well as regarding information on the integration of the SDGs into national planning.
3. **Transformative principles of the 2030 Agenda:** There has been some improvement in the reports' inclusion of information on key principles – mainly on leaving no one behind and human rights. However, reporting on universality, planetary boundaries and intergenerational responsibility is still uneven.
4. **Reporting on linkages between the 2030 Agenda and other relevant international agreements:** There were mixed results on interlinkages, with the Paris Agreement on climate change once again being the most frequently cited agreement in the VNRs, and the global aid/development effectiveness agenda being the least mentioned.
5. **'Leave no one behind' (LNOB) principle:** The VNR reports in 2022 included a high level of references to the LNOB principle. However, challenges remain in terms of data availability, the level of detail and quality of information provided on LNOB, and on the incorporation of the LNOB principle in national policies and plans.
6. **Civic space:** The VNR reports continue to be largely silent on shrinking civic space, including in relation to the ongoing attacks against human rights defenders, journalists and environmentalists in many countries.
7. **Partnerships and Implementation:** There was a decrease in examples provided in the VNRs of contributions to implementation by non-state actors. Overall, there was an increase in references to some aspects of the 2030 Agenda's Means of Implementation, but in most cases detailed information regarding SDG-costing and resource-identification was missing.
8. **Localisation:** While the ambition to localise SDG implementation has been widely discussed, the 2022 VNRs contained fewer examples of localisation, and less information on the formulation of Voluntary Local Reviews than in 2021.
9. **Follow up and review:** Information remains very limited on data availability and fewer countries reported on the use of unofficial data in their VNR reports.
10. **Common reporting guidelines for VNR processes:** While most countries presenting VNRs in 2022 did follow the majority of the Secretary-General's common reporting guidelines, there are still considerable gaps in the use of these guidelines, which undermines the valuable possibilities for greater comparability between VNR processes of different member states



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1. Introduction

At the July 2022 meeting of the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), United Nations Member States and others conducted their annual review of progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda) including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While Member States have committed to build an inclusive and effective path to achieve the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, the 2022 HLPF served as an important moment to take stock of the impacts of the efforts deployed at global and national levels to foster a socio-economic recovery from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as on broader progress towards sustainable development.

The Forum is mandated to carry out “regular, inclusive, state-led” and “thematic” reviews of 2030 Agenda implementation, with inputs from other intergovernmental bodies, regional processes and Major Groups and Other Stakeholders. Every year, a number of countries present Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). The follow-up and review process aims to promote accountability to citizens, support effective international cooperation and foster exchange of best practice and mutual learning.² To date (2016–2022), 187 countries have presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), 44 of which did so in 2022.³ Of these 44 VNRs, 11

-
2. See United Nations. (2016). Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level. Report of the Secretary-General. A/70/684. New York: UN.
 3. Tuvalu only presented main messages. The Kingdom of the Netherlands presented jointly with its territories of Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint-Maarten.

were by countries conducting their first review, 28 were by countries carrying out their second review, three were by countries carrying out their third review, and two were by countries carrying out their fourth review.⁴ As this report goes to press in early 2023, 41 countries are planning to present VNR reports at the HLPF in July 2023, among which only two will be presenting a VNR report for the first time.

Although not presented as a formal component of the HLPF, civil society organizations (CSOs) and coalitions from around the world also regularly produce independent reviews and analysis on their respective governments' implementation of the 2030 Agenda, complementing official processes. The present report contains analyses of 21 VNR-related civil society reports. When read in parallel with VNR reports, these "shadow" and "spotlight" reports provide additional, and sometimes contradictory, information in relation to country-level implementation.

Despite the key nature of these parallel reports in contributing to a 'Whole of Society' approach, they are rarely addressed by the VNRs. When VNRs do address them, they tend to do so in partial or incomplete ways. On the other hand, the civil society reports provide a channel to voice collective views about the configuration of civic freedoms and participation. These reports also provide an overview of many of the challenges faced by civil society, different perspectives on government policy and recommendations for improvement, as well as detailed examples of civil society actions towards 2030 Agenda implementation. Therefore, the perspectives and information presented by non-state stakeholders (e.g NGOs, private sector, academia, youth, children, etc.) can provide a broad complementary view on the extent to which (and how effectively) national SDG implementation is being carried out in a participatory way within the broader political system.

This publication is the seventh in a series prepared by a coalition of civil society organizations to document and analyze progress on the 2030 Agenda through an annual examination of VNR reports and a sample of civil society reports. **Complementary to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' [synthesis of VNR reports](#),⁵ this assessment provides an analytical assessment of progress on 2030 Agenda implementation and identifies good practices as well as where VNR reports could be improved. The analysis provides a basis for recommendations on how governments, civil society organizations and other stakeholders can improve the VNR process and strengthen accountability around the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.**

This seventh edition report assesses all 44 VNR reports submitted to the HLPF in 2022.⁶ Out of the 2022 presenters, only one country (**Tuvalu**) did not submit a full VNR report.

-
4. Countries with previous reports signaled by * (second time reporters), ** (third time reporters), or *** (Fourth Time reporters). Andorra* (FR), Argentina** (ES), Belarus* (RU-EN), Botswana* (EN), Cameroon* (FR), Côte d'Ivoire* (FR), Djibouti (FR), Dominica (EN), Equatorial Guinea (ES), El Salvador* (ES), Eritrea (EN), Eswatini* (EN), Ethiopia* (EN), Gabon (FR), Gambia* (Main Messages, EN), Ghana* (EN), Greece* (EN), Grenada (EN), Guinea-Bissau (FR), Italy* (EN), Jamaica* (EN), Jordan* (EN), Kazakhstan* (EN), Latvia* (EN), Lesotho* (EN), Liberia* (EN), Luxembourg* (FR), Malawi* (EN), Mali* (FR), Montenegro* (EN), the Netherlands* (EN), Pakistan* (EN), the Philippines** (EN), São Tomé and Príncipe (EN), Senegal* (FR), Somalia (EN), Sri Lanka* (EN), Sudan* (EN), Suriname, Switzerland** (FR-EN), Togo*** (FR), Tuvalu (Main Messages - EN), United Arab Emirates* (EN), Uruguay*** (ES)
 5. For 2022 specifically, Cf. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). (2021). [2022 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report](#).
 6. 43 VNR reports submitted to the HLPF in 2022 were reviewed, as well as the main messages of Tuvalu, which did not provide a full VNR report to the HLPF.

Box 1: Countries reporting to the HLPF in 2022

Countries reporting for the 1st time

Djibouti, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Suriname, Tuvalu

Countries reporting for the 2nd time (*)

Andorra (2018), Belarus (2017), Botswana (2017), Cameroon (2019), Côte d'Ivoire (2019), El Salvador (2017), Eswatini (2019), Ethiopia (2017), Gambia (2020), Ghana (2019), Greece (2018), Italy (2017), Jamaica (2018), Jordan (2017), Kazakhstan (2019), Latvia (2018), Lesotho (2019), Liberia (2020), Luxembourg (2017), Malawi (2020), Mali (2018), Montenegro (2016), the Netherlands (2017), Pakistan (2019), Senegal (2018), Sri Lanka (2018), Sudan (2018), and United Arab Emirates (2018)

Countries reporting for the 3rd time (*)

Argentina (2017, 2020), the Philippines (2016, 2019), and Switzerland (2016, 2018)

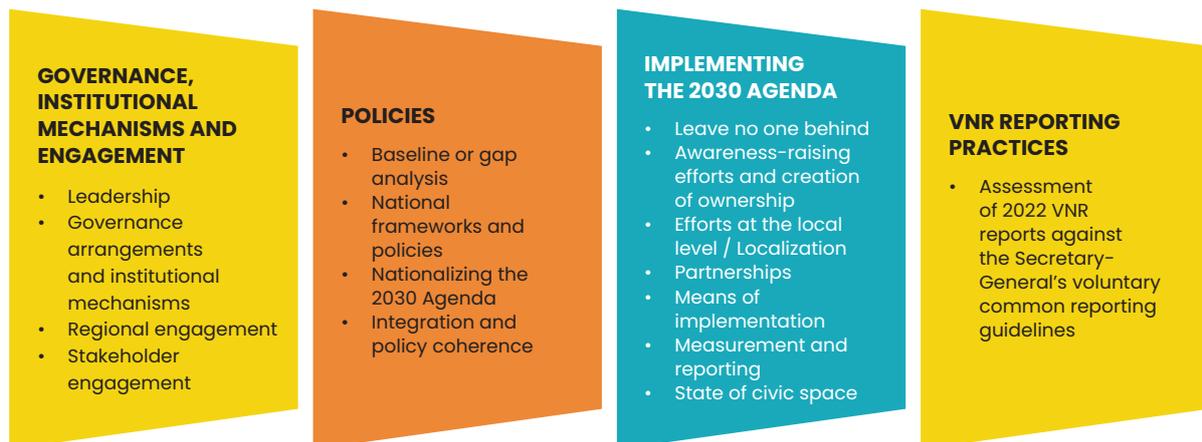
Countries reporting for the 4th time (*)

Togo (2016, 2017, 2018), and Uruguay (2017, 2018, 2021)

(*) Numbers in parentheses refer to first and second reporting years.

The report is structured around four sections: 1) Governance, institutional mechanisms and engagement 2) Policies, 3) Implementing the 203 Agenda, and 4) VNR reporting practices (Figure 1). Further information on the assessment framework, data sources and overall research approach is available in Annex 2.

Figure 1: What's in the *Progressing National SDGs Implementation Report*?



The analysis in the present review is based largely on the VNR reports, and where available, civil society reports.⁷ No additional research was conducted to verify the accuracy and confirm the validity of the information governments included in their reports.

7. [Civil society reports](#) are available for 21 of the countries reviewed in 2022 and can be found under "Civil Society Reports."



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2. Governance, Institutional Mechanisms and Engagement

This chapter has two main sections. The first one focuses on leadership, governance and institutional mechanisms, and examines how governments presenting VNR reports in 2022 established national processes at the governance and leadership levels to realize the 2030 Agenda, including by engaging non-state actors and peers. The second section focuses on stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda implementation, examining processes of engagement apart from governance and institutional mechanisms, including how multiple stakeholders have been engaged in defining national priorities and carrying out VNRs. This section also addresses the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement. Both of this chapter's sections are followed by a dedicated list of recommendations.

2.1. Key Findings

2.1.1. Leadership, governance and institutional mechanisms

- **Governance trends:** As has been the case from 2017–2021, most countries reporting in 2022 are making use of new or existing councils, committees, or specialized offices to oversee 2030 Agenda implementation (approximately 86% of countries). The most common type of leadership arrangement continues to be SDG implementation spearheaded by heads of state or government (36% of countries).

- **Inclusion of non-state actors:** The 2022 VNR reports continued the mid-range trend with regards to the formal inclusion of non-state actors in governance arrangements. While 64% of countries noted the inclusion of non-state actors in 2021 – compared to 70% in 2019 and 2020 – this percentage remained stable in 2022, at 66%. Civil society’s inclusion in Lead Council or Committee also remained relatively stable, going from 16 countries in 2021 to 17 countries in 2022. However, the picture regarding civil society inclusion in technical working groups and councils or committees showed improvement, with an increase (from 19% in 2021 to 32% in 2022) in references to civil society’s inclusion in technical and working groups.
- **Peer engagement:** The percentage of countries reporting on how they engage with peers at the regional level on the 2030 Agenda stood at 55%. The percentage remained relatively similar throughout the six-year series 2017–2022. For comparison, in 2021, 57% of reporting countries provided this information, 47% in 2020, 34% in 2019, 41% did so in 2018 and 56% in 2017. Furthermore, 2022 VNR reports continued the positive trend regarding regional/special country grouping activities around the 2030 Agenda, with 53% of countries (versus 29% in 2021, and 4% in 2020) mentioning such engagements. Greater regional coordination offers more opportunities to share best practices as well as technical support, and to learn lessons from peers and other stakeholders at the regional level.

2.1.2. Stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda implementation

- **Multi-stakeholder engagement:** In 2022, 31 VNRs (70% of countries) provided information on processes for stakeholder engagement beyond governance mechanisms (such as consultations, workshops, conferences, parliamentary committees, and/or local participation mechanisms) confirming and expanding slightly the upward trend that started in 2021 – with 67%, compared to 47% in 2020 and 60% in 2019. However, further details regarding the nature, scope, level of inclusiveness, and specific outcomes of these processes for stakeholder participation are scarce, thus making it difficult to provide a more precise assessment of the quality and extent of the engagement. As recommended in 2021, countries should develop indicators to measure the extent to which stakeholder engagement is being facilitated and supported, especially for vulnerable groups in relation to SDG implementation.
- **Civic space:** The VNR reports continue to mostly ignore the issue of closing civic space and ongoing attacks on human rights defenders, journalists and environmentalists. Although there was a slight positive development in this regard, since a higher number of countries mentioned the issue of civic space in the 2022 VNR reports, the total was still only 12 out of 44 countries (27%). On the other hand, there are many insights regarding the state of civic space contained in civil society reports. A number of these reports contradict the more generic assertions available in VNRs and highlight how the issue of closing civic space continues to be a challenge for many civil society groups. Recognizing and properly addressing the reality of shrinking civic space is urgent, and countries should work to protect this space while creating an enabling environment for non-state actors in a spirit of democratic openness and inclusiveness.

- Consultations on national priorities:** More than half of reporting countries in 2022 (55%, or 24 out of 44 countries) referred to consultations on national priorities with non-state actors – although this quantitative improvement must be tempered, given that the VNRs rarely provide further details on the nature and scope of the consultations, and how far the different stakeholders were able to make their contributions, convey their visions and influence the process. From a quantitative standpoint though, this represents an increase in relation to previous years, as the figures regarding countries pointing to consultations to identify national priorities were only 31% in 2021, and 49% in 2020.
- COVID-19 on stakeholder engagement:** Only 14 out of 44 countries (32%) included information on the effects of the pandemic in 2022, against 43% of the countries reporting in 2021. The difference probably reflects the improvement in sanitary conditions since late 2021- early 2022.

Figure 2: Comparative trends in reporting, 2022 versus previous years

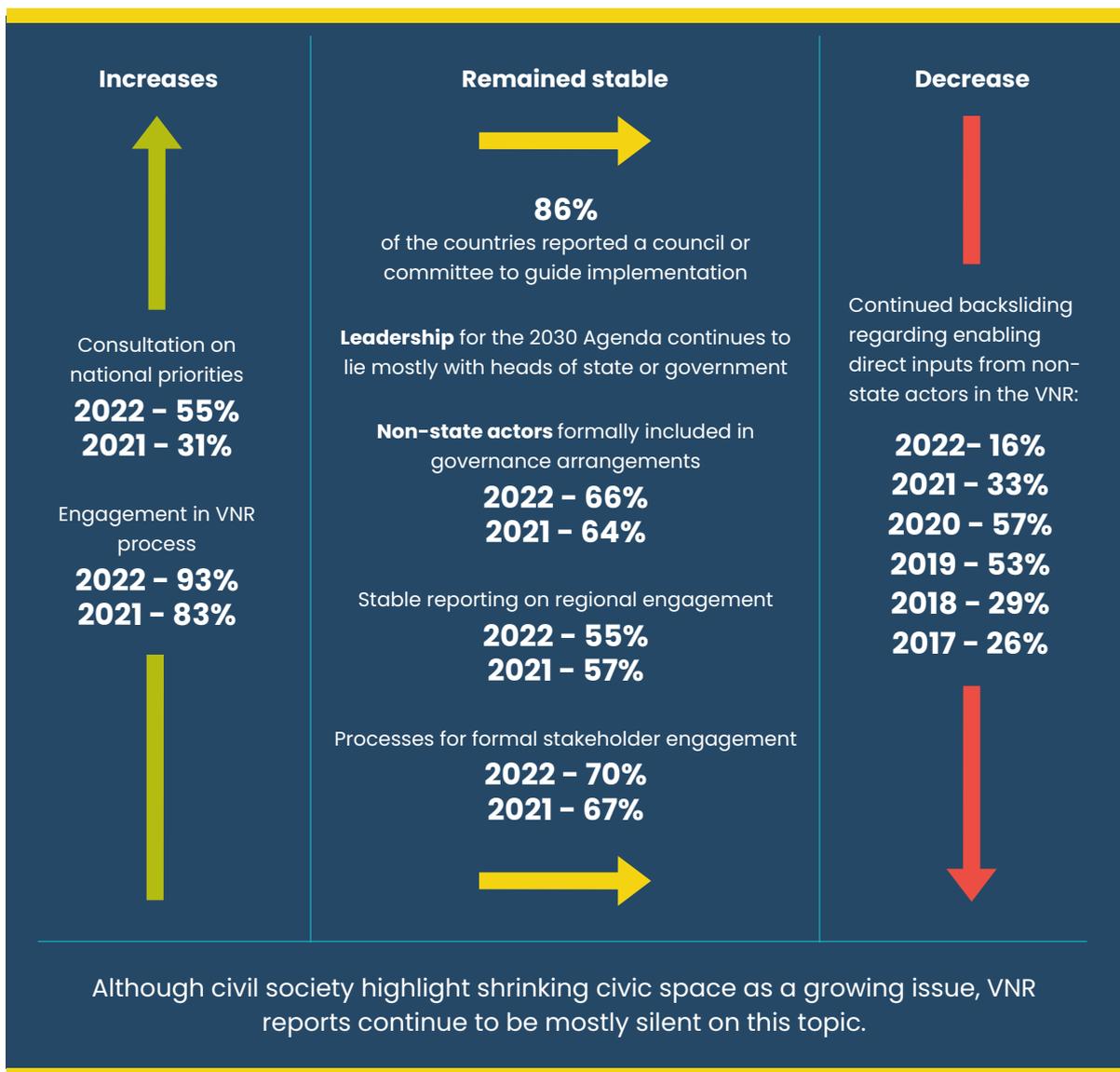




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2.2. Leadership, governance and institutional mechanisms

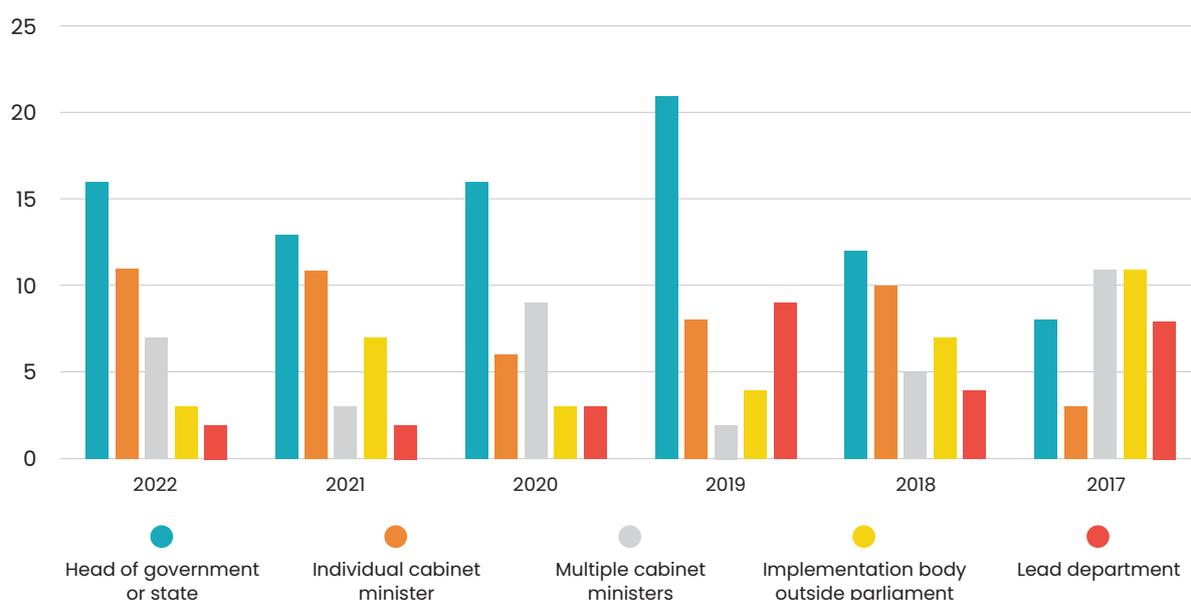
Governance arrangements and institutional mechanisms are basic building blocks for effective 2030 Agenda implementation. With the 2030 Agenda in its seventh year at the time of reporting (2022), VNR reports should at the very least demonstrate that basic foundational structures are in place. In this context, the choice by governments on where to assign leadership for 2030 Agenda implementation can indicate the level of political commitment as well as lines of accountability. While information on governance arrangements for 2030 Agenda implementation had been available in every full VNR report examined from 2017–2020, in 2022 there was one country – **Grenada** – that did not provide any information on either governance arrangements for delivering the SDGs or on leadership on SDG implementation. Furthermore, in the cases of **Eritrea, Ethiopia, Grenada, São Tomé and Príncipe** and **Somalia** – as well as the Dutch territories of **Curaçao and Sint-Maarten** – this aspect of their VNR reports were unclear.

2.2.1. Leadership

Most VNR reports include information on leadership, identifiable through an examination of governance arrangements. VNR reports over 2017–2022 show a range of approaches (Figure 3). In 2022, information on leadership was available most of the time: for 41 out of the 44 countries reporting (or 93%).

In 2022, the most common category of leadership for the 2030 Agenda was the head of state or government, with 36% of countries (16 countries).⁸ The second most common type of leadership was an individual cabinet minister (11 countries, or 26%), followed by multiple cabinet ministers (7 countries, or 16%), a specific implementation body outside parliament (3 countries, or 7%), and a lead department spearheading implementation (2 countries, or 4%). Based on this year's numbers, among the countries reporting leadership for 2030 Agenda implementation, most leadership arrangements continue to reside with the Head of State or Government.

Figure 3: Most common sources of leadership for 2030 Agenda implementation



2.2.2. Governance arrangements and institutional mechanisms

Effective governance arrangements and institutional mechanisms are key for providing policy orientation, ensuring coordination across government institutions and enabling a more participatory approach to engagement of non-state actors. Clear governance mechanisms can also provide a convening role for monitoring and evaluation processes, thus providing impetus for implementation and follow-up, ensuring policy coherence, including at national and subnational levels. In 2022, 38 countries (or 86%) are making use of new or existing councils, committees, or specialized offices to govern 2030 Agenda implementation.⁹ This finding is consistent with those of previous years (2017–2021), showing that the use of councils, committees or other forms of coordinating bodies continues to be a standard practice with

8. Six countries did not provide information on leadership, and three countries (El Salvador, Jamaica and Uruguay) have not been included in the chart as these countries' leadership arrangement corresponded into a different kind of category (Vice-president in the case of El Salvador, implementation bodies mixing ministries and agencies in the case of Jamaica and Uruguay). Data includes countries submitting a subsequent VNR report to the HLPF following their first presentation.

9. A council or commission was still considered "new" if it was established following 2015, even if the country had reported on the council or commission in a previous VNR report.

respect to institutional mechanisms. In 2022, 27 reporting countries (61%) referred to creating a **new** council, committee or specialized office. Eleven (11) countries (25%) are **making use of existing** councils or committees. Four countries (9%) referred to implementation through government institutions without referring to the existence of a council, committee or similar governing body. That said, many countries either provide very few details regarding the exact mandate and inner workings of these institutional arrangements or tend to conflate the VNR process with the actual implementation process, which often only provides either unclear or insufficient information to assess whether these governance arrangements were put in place for the oversight and coordination of the implementation process from a policymaking and continuous monitoring standpoints, or just in the context of the formulation of the VNR (**Cameroon, Dominica, Eritrea, Eswatini**).

In this theme, **Eritrea, Somalia, Grenada** and the Dutch territories of **Curaçao** and **Sint-Maarten** didn't provide clear information in their respective VNRs. In the case of **Botswana's** VNR, the information on leadership of the National Steering Committee wasn't clear, further insight into the national process contained in the civil society report clarifies that the NSC is co-chaired by the Secretary for Economic and Financial Policy from the Ministry of Finance and the Resident Coordinator from the United Nations Development System in the country. In **El Salvador**, the process is spearheaded by the Vice-President. A couple of countries explicitly include parliament in the provision of oversight and accountability within their governance systems, like **Ethiopia, Pakistan** (Parliament Task Forces). Countries like **Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Djibouti, Liberia, Lesotho, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Switzerland and Greece** detail that their SDG governance system is driven by their Head of Government or State. Some countries have put in place a set of institutional arrangements which are spearheaded by an individual cabinet ministry, these include: **Argentina** (Ministry of Social Affairs), **Cameroon** (Ministry of Planning) and **Suriname** (Ministry of Foreign Affairs); although in the case of **Argentina**, this leadership is conveyed through a National Council for Coordination of Social Policies, which includes other line ministries.

Civil society validity check: Institutional mechanisms for SDG implementation in Sri Lanka



Besides the inter-ministerial steering committee established under the leadership of the prime minister, institutional mechanisms in Sri Lanka also include a Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka (SDCSL) – established as a dedicated government agency tasked with increasing the ownership of the 2030 Agenda by all stakeholders, which according to the VNR, has '*strengthened the institutional framework and capacities for SDG governance, coordination and monitoring*' (Sri Lanka VNR, p.18). However, the civil society report asserts that the SDCSL hasn't been established as a multi-stakeholder Council – independent representatives have never been nominated – and it has been run only by a Secretariat. Civil society further asserts that the SDCSL hasn't brought vertical integration within the governance system, since its very centralized structure hasn't incorporated subnational and local authorities.

Source: Adapted from Sri Lanka's VNR and the spotlight report prepared by the SL SDG Platform + email exchanges with the SL SDG Platform.

As with previous years, the main responsibilities for governing bodies tend to include oversight, policy alignment, coordination (between government ministries/agencies and territorial levels), implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, throughout the years, countries have consistently reported the creation of technical and/or substantive working groups or other specialized bodies to support implementation.

The practice of establishing technical working groups continued to be noted in 2022 VNR reports. In this context, **Belarus, Montenegro** and the **Philippines** reported the establishment of specialized bodies for SDG implementation. Both Montenegro and the Philippines have set up committees that are intended to be multi stakeholder in nature. In Montenegro the National Sustainable Development Council is formally headed by the Prime Minister and in the Philippines, the Sub-committee on SDGs was set up under the leadership of the National Economic and Development Authority NEDA, which comprises Technical Working Groups mirrored at subnational/local levels and by non-state actors. However, the VNRs lacked specific information on how these committees will operate and how who will be included as members. Similarly, **São Tomé and Príncipe** reports that the government is working on an SDG-specific institutional arrangement based on an inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder composition.

Some countries haven't put in place specific governance systems or mechanisms for SDG implementation but rely on existing bodies for policy coordination. In the case of **Latvia**, according to the government, the SDGs have been aligned with the National Development Plan (NAP2027). This implies that the implementation and monitoring systems in place for the NAP also serve as the body for SDG implementation, specifically, the Cross-sectoral Coordination Center (CSCC), under the leadership of the Prime Minister. That said, the civil society report suggests that, although the formulation process for the NAP was participatory, the process of aligning the SDGs to the NAP hasn't been as participatory or transparent as hoped, which results in the fact that not all SDG indicators are integrated into the NAP, and some SDG targets have been interpreted very narrowly within the Latvian context.

In the case of **Djibouti**, a new National Commission for Sustainable Development (CNDD) chaired by the Prime Minister and assisted by a Technical Committee to oversee the implementation process was established, although more precise information on its mandate is available in the VNR, methodologies and membership aren't mentioned. In **Cote d'Ivoire** a Steering Committee is mentioned in the VNR, but its mandate is diffuse. On one hand, it is presented as the technical decision-body for SDG implementation, although on the other hand its main responsibility is stated as being the validation of the VNR, which seems to point to one of the main misconceptions regarding SDG implementation: that is the conflation of VNR-formulation with SDG implementation. In **Jamaica**, the 2030 Agenda Core Group (co-chaired by the Planning Institute of Jamaica, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Statistical Institute) is the institutional body responsible for coordination of implementation and monitoring efforts, with the assistance of a multistakeholder Technical Working Group (National Oversight Committee), which includes private sector, civil society, academia, trade unions and youth. In **Andorra**, an Open Working Group was created, but the VNR notes that the pandemic hindered its functioning. Nevertheless, the Andorra VNR states that the government formulated an Action Plan – Horizon 23 – to provide an immediate response to the pandemic and is purportedly fully aligned with the SDGs.

Key recommendations for good practice



Establish technical and/or substantive working groups or other specialized bodies for 2030 Agenda implementation, properly linked to the policymaking process. This enhances the implementation process by enabling a wide array of institutional and non-state actors – including vulnerable or marginalized groups such as women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, children and youth – to bring different perspectives and approach policy issues in a more integrated, integral, and holistic manner.



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2.2.3. Non-state actor engagement in governance arrangements

The involvement of non-state actors in governance arrangements is one indicator of the extent to which a government is adopting a whole-of-society approach for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Information on the involvement of non-state actors in formal governance arrangements was not available for 34% of countries (15 out of 44) that reported in 2022, which is slightly more than data from 2020 and 2019 showed (30% for both years).

A previous analysis showed that over 2016–2020, the formal inclusion of non-state actors in governance arrangements was becoming a regular practice, with 71% of countries reporting to the HLPF noting formal inclusion of non-state actors in high and/or working-level institutional mechanisms.¹⁰ However, in 2021, figures dropped, as 27 out of 42 countries (or 64%) provided

10. Cf. Kindornay, Shannon; Gendron, Renée. (2020). *Multi-stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda implementation: A review of Voluntary National Review Reports (2016–2019)*. New York: UN DESA.

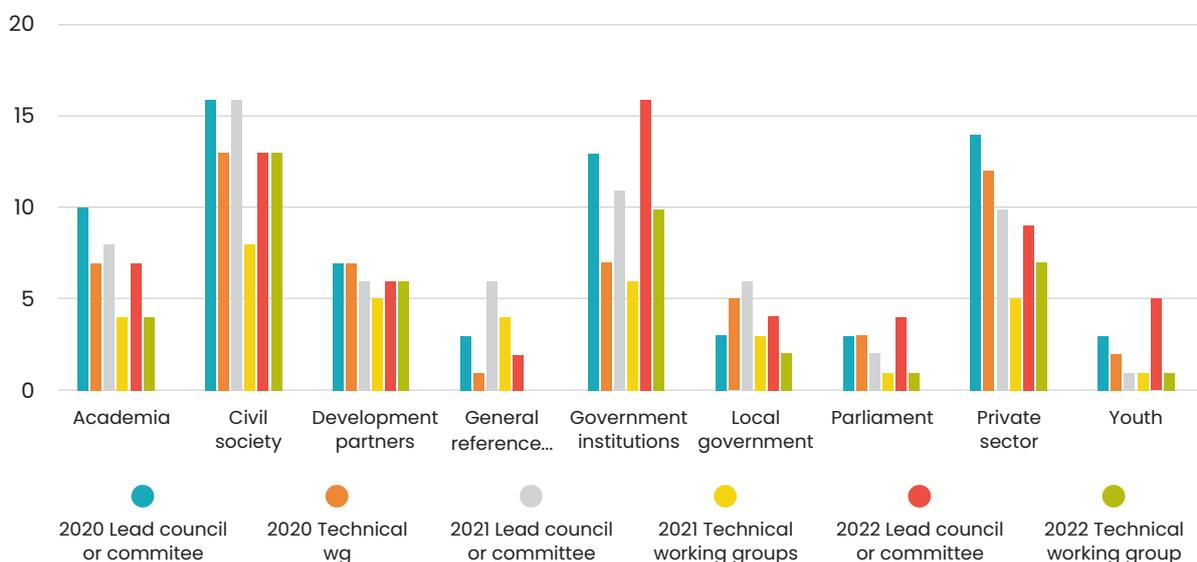
information on engagement with non-state actors, and 2022 VNRs continued this more limited tendency (with 29 out of 44 countries, or 66%). Moreover, VNR reports are consistently silent or unclear in providing further indications on the actual level of inclusiveness in governance arrangements, and the extent to which these multistakeholder spaces are enabled to exert some level of influence in decision-making processes. Information on mandates and methodologies tend to be very scarce, and mostly generic and imprecise when available. Within the countries that do provide information on non-state actor participation in governance arrangements, some only provide information regarding governance arrangements in the context of the VNR process, involuntarily showing the limitations of their implementation processes by viewing apparent participation in VNR formulation processes as equivalent to implementing the Agenda in an inclusive manner (**Dominica, Eritrea, Eswatini, Greece, Pakistan, Somalia**).

Key recommendations for good practice ✓

Formally include non-state actors in governance arrangements. This contributes to inclusiveness, and a whole-of-society approach in 2030 Agenda implementation and the promotion of partnership.

Figure 4 presents comparative figures regarding the inclusion of several different stakeholder groups in working-level and high-level governance mechanisms in 2021 and 2022. Working groups or technical committees tend to focus on progressing or solving technical issues. High-level governance mechanisms refer to lead councils or committees that aim to provide overall policy orientations for 2030 Agenda implementation and typically involve senior level officials.

Figure 4: Participation in governance and institutional mechanisms for 2030 Agenda implementation



As was the case in the 2021 VNRs, civil society was the most commonly mentioned stakeholder in 2022 VNRs; and there was a small increase from (eight countries in 2021 to 12 in 2022) in the number of countries that referenced civil society's inclusion in technical and working groups. Notably, there was relative consistency in the proportion of references to civil society's inclusion in Lead Council or Committee, going from 16 in 2021 to 15 in 2022. Mentions regarding the involvement of academia and parliament remained stable at low levels, while a slight decrease was observed in overall mentions of development partners (including UN agencies) and local government. Private sector registered stable mentions (16 mentions in 2022, similar to the 16 in 2021). It is also worth observing that references regarding the participation of youth increased from 2 references in 2021 to six references in 2022, and that most of the new references are included in the Lead Council or Committee category. This can be considered a positive development, as long as these Councils or Committee actually enable youth voices to properly influence decision-making and monitoring processes, which is unclear from the level of insight currently contained in VNRs. Other groups, like children and women, are very rarely mentioned by countries as being involved within institutional arrangements. In 2022, only The Gambia (women and children) and Côte d'Ivoire (women) provide information in their VNRs on the participation of women or children.

While over 2017–2020, the review of VNR reports had consistently shown progress in terms of formal inclusion of non-state actors, this trend seems to have changed in 2021 and 2022. As already highlighted, the modalities by which engagement occurs (e.g. the phase of the policy making process or to what extent government includes non-state actors inputs) is often unclear, or information is not sufficiently detailed in the VNR reports.

Although there was relative consistency with the previous year in the proportion of references to inclusion of civil society, development partners, local governments and the private sector in lead councils or committees, each of these actors were mentioned more often in terms of participation in technical working groups, except in the case of local governments, which remained stable. These numbers imply that many countries that presented VNRs in 2022 show a pattern of increasing participation at a technical level, as opposed to participation in spaces conceived for political orientation, decision-making and oversight.

Civil society validity check: Substantive policy dialogue in participation spaces



A recurring theme featured in many spotlight reports around the world is related to the perceived lack, or minimal, influence of civil society's voices when taking part in institutionalized spaces for policy dialogue or decision-making. From Latvia to Uruguay, Botswana, Italy, Kazakhstan, Malawi, and Switzerland, civil society groups felt that they often had limited input to the official VNR or were only included in terms of superficial contributions. In many cases, voices from vulnerable groups – including Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, children, young people, women – were missing from such dialogues. Another issue is the extent to which spaces for policy dialogue relating to the SDG implementation process (either directly or through national development plans) are linked to each country's policymaking process. Here are some examples:

Botswana: Although there is a multistakeholder dialogue structure for SDG implementation, civil society perceives that its representation within this space is minimal and not entirely reflective of the diversity of CSOs and community groups that exist in the country. Another reported issue is that participation tends to be organized in a somewhat generic way, which points to the fact that the link to the policymaking process is rather weak.

Italy: Although some inroads have been made in terms of participation spaces within planning frameworks, such as the introduction of a multistakeholder Sustainable Development Forum in the context of the updating process of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, as well as the formulation process of the National Action Plan on Policy Coherence; nevertheless Italian CSOs perceive that the process still isn't fully linked to the policymaking process, since key policy packages (like the National Recovery and Resilience Plan) haven't been addressed from a policy coherence standpoint.

Kazakhstan: Over the past few years, the state set out efforts to establish institutional spaces for dialogue with civil society in the form of various dialogue platforms, like the 5Ps SDG Working Group, public councils, etc. Although this is seen formally as a sign of positive progress by civil society, the progress is small from a qualitative standpoint given that the nature of the dialogue and its concrete outcomes in terms of policymaking appear to be minimal and superficial.

Latvia: Civil society groups are able to engage with the decision-making process at the policy and law-making levels, by engaging with sectoral ministries and parliamentary commissions. A new local government reform process will open further spaces for policy dialogue and participatory budgeting at the municipal level. Even though participation spaces are linked to the policy and law-making process, civil society perceives that its level of influence is minimal in comparison to other interest groups (like the private sector). Another issue is that there isn't an overarching and permanent structure for multi stakeholder dialogue related to the SDG implementation process.

Uruguay: Although some sectoral spaces for multi stakeholder policy dialogue have been in place for years, these have historically been run in parallel to the policymaking cycle with minimal influence on decision-making. Recently, the current administration has implicitly started to deactivate these spaces, as it appears to have progressively stopped convening these multistakeholder forums.

Source: Spotlight reports prepared by LAPAS (Latvia), GCAP-Italia, BOCONGO (Botswana), CONGOMA (Malawi), ARGO (Kazakhstan), ANONG (Uruguay).

As shown in previous editions of this report, the analysis of 2022 VNR reports also assesses references to governmental commitments to engage. These are noted when a VNR report does not specify a formalized mechanism for participation, but there is a well-established precedent for engagement or a promise to engage non-state actors is stated. For example, in **São Tomé and Príncipe**, there isn't yet a formal body for SDG implementation oversight, but

the VNR asserts that there are plans for the creation of an inter-ministerial and multi-sectoral structure, under the joint political leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communities and the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Blue Economy, the technical coordination of the National Directorate of Planning and composed of representatives of all development actors: Government (from central to local level), National Assembly, National Statistical Agency, Technical and Financial Partners (namely, UN agencies in the country), CSOs, Private Sector, Universities and Researchers. In **Greece**, CSOs gathered within the Hellenic Platform for Development proposed the establishment of a multistakeholder council for participatory implementation and monitoring. This is acknowledged in the VNR by the government, and a process of engagement and planning is now underway. **El Salvador's** VNR included the commitment to develop a legal framework that would favor the participation of different sectors of Salvadoran society as one of its next steps in the implementation process, although it didn't provide any further details on the process or which specific groups would be involved.

A case in best practice? Proposal for a Multi Stakeholder platform on SDG implementation in Greece



The Hellenic Platform for Development (HPD) was able to submit a proposal for a multi stakeholder platform for SDG implementation oversight. This proposal was detailed by HPD in the annexes to the 2022 VNR and acknowledged by the government within the VNR.

According to this proposal, the establishment of the Hellenic Multi-Stakeholder Platform on SDGs, to be chaired by the Prime Minister's Office, would both accelerate implementation and also attract much needed support from the public and other partners. To assist the work of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform, a management committee has been proposed, which would follow the model of the European Commission. The management committee should be chaired by the General Secretariat for the Coordination of the Government.

The role of the Hellenic SDG Stakeholder Platform would be to:

- Support and advise the Greek Government and all stakeholders involved on the implementation of the SDGs at National Level.
- Support and advise the Greek Government in relation to a structured on-going public consultation on the SDGs (not just in VNR years) as well as other Government-led events, projects and programmes in promoting sustainable development.
- Provide a forum for exchange of experience and best practice on the implementation of the SDGs across sectors and at local, regional, national and EU level.

Source: Adapted from Greece's VNR

CSO Validity check on the Good Practice from Greece described above:



In the first half of 2022, namely the period when the Greek VNR was drafted, the interaction between stakeholders and the Greek Government was quite enhanced as there was a need for collecting data and information to complete the VNR report. After the presentation of the VNR in New York in July, no further steps regarding the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform have been officially announced. As the national elections approach, it is unclear if the Government will invest in further dialogue with CSOs on the issue.

Source: Hellenic Platform for Development after consultation in the context of this report.

In **Kazakhstan**, civil society is included within the five Inter-agency Working Groups established for coordination and policy dialogue. Even though civil society in its independent report acknowledges this as a progress in fostering participatory policy dialogue, it also considers this progress minimal in substance, as the quality of participation within these spaces leaves much to be desired in terms of civil society being able to influence policy orientations and obtain concrete policy outcomes. In **Luxembourg**, the *Nohaltegkeetsrot* (Superior Council for Sustainable Development), whose 15 members come from a wide range of sectors (not specified in the VNR), is responsible for issuing opinions, which it has done regarding the long-term strategy “Luxembourg 2030”, at the request of the government or on its own initiative. It also functions as a think tank and a consultation platform on the implementation of SDGs by all stakeholders.

In certain African countries multi-stakeholder coordination structures (**Lesotho**), as well as technical working groups (**Liberia** and **Malawi**) have been established, which include civil society in their inner workings and deliberations. In the case of **Malawi**, these working groups are called ‘Pillar and Enabler Coordination Groups’ or PECGs. The PECGs have been conceived as multi-stakeholder and cross-cutting in nature, with a specific mandate on fostering interlinkages in policymaking. They are organized around specific pillars and transversal enablers identified in the government’s long-term strategy, Malawi 2063 (MW2063), and the first 10-year implementation plan, Medium-term Implementation Plan (MIP-1). According to the Malawian civil society platform CONGOMA, which has played a key role in identifying NGOs that have taken part both in the MW2063 and MIP-1 formulation process, this set-up has proved effective at fostering participatory policy dialogue and interlinked approaches. However, the scope and nature of participation and efficacy within the different PECGs is seen to be uneven, given that some of these working groups include high levels of participation, while others benefit only from a limited set of stakeholders. This unevenness is also seen at a financial and technical standpoint, as not all PECGs benefit from the same level of resources.

In **Djibouti**, the VNR mentions the existence of a ‘Global Institutional Mechanism’ put in place in 2014 to foster coordination and joint monitoring within the government, as well as fostering partnerships between the government and development partners, private sector, and civil society. The VNR doesn’t specify the scope and methodologies involved. In **Senegal**, the VNR states that on a yearly basis, the Government, in partnership with other actors (Civil society organizations, private sector, local authorities, partners in development), carries out a review of the progress recorded in the implementation of economic and social policies

included in the National Economic and Social Plan. This review, called the “joint annual review” or *Revue Annuelle Conjointe* (RAC), is a framework for sharing the results recorded in the implementation of the National Plan, and devotes a specific analysis to the state of progress of the implementation of the SDGs. In **Uruguay**, the focus for stakeholder engagement seems to be on SDG delivery, as the VNR asserts that a National Survey was conducted to map the different projects and initiatives non-state actors are deploying on the ground in the context of SDG implementation efforts.

At the same time, the VNRs from **Argentina, Grenada, Suriname, and Togo** didn’t articulate any specific insight regarding the way stakeholder engagement is integrated into the national implementation process.

A case study in good practice: Non-state actors’ official engagement in SDG implementation governance arrangements in Montenegro



The VNR from Montenegro mentions that the revamped National Sustainable Development Council (NCSD) will be able to establish more effective links between planning, policymaking, and monitoring – since it is acknowledged that the National Strategy on Sustainable Development hasn’t been providing orientation to policymaking as it was originally intended to.

Given this, a reform conducted by the government in 2021 returned the Office of Sustainable Development (OSD) to the Secretariat General of the Government –which acts as the NCSD secretariat, providing the Council with a functional link within the administration, while the NCSD was redesigned so that it deals with the current challenges that Montenegro faces on the path to implement the idea of an ‘ecological state’. Members of the NCSD are representatives of all relevant structures in society (all ministers in the government, the Secretary of the Parliament, Chief Negotiator for the EU, expert institutions, financial institutions, business associations, universities, trade unions, NGOs, independent experts, youth representatives and the media). The president of the NCSD is the prime minister, while the secretary is the head of the OSD.

The tasks of the National Council are directly linked to the 2030 Agenda. They support the Agenda and they are formulated in the following way:

1. Issuing recommendations and expert opinions to the government to ensure adoption and implementation of policies and development projects in line with the principles of sustainable development;
2. Harmonization of the sector-level strategy, planning and programme documents and regulations with principles, goals and measures of sustainable development policy and issuing recommendations and expert opinions to complement/amend them in such a way as to ensure integration of the principles of sustainable development;
3. Consideration and issuing of an opinion on national reports, among other tasks.

The reformed NCSD will have five working groups (expert working bodies) for:

- Monitoring implementation of sustainable development policy;
- Mitigation and adaptation to climate change;
- Integrated coastal zone management in Montenegro;
- Sustainable development at the local level;
- Financing for sustainable development.

Civil society validity check: On Montenegro's good practice described above



The political situation and changes on the positions of ministries as well as deeper changes within the administration in the last 2 years, have led to limited results regarding the establishment of the new NCSD. The communication between Government and CSOs is not particularly open, with the provision of information being mainly internal to the government. The National Sustainable Development Council has only very recently organized its first meeting (December 2022). Representatives from civil society organizations within the NSDC working groups haven't been elected – although the process is now underway. Nevertheless, although the process has been slow, many CSOs still responded to state that the working groups and the revamped NCSD are positive developments, as they could be a way to enable greater involvement in the decision-making process.

Source: Views from NGO Green Home, after consultation for the present report.

Overall, the 2022 VNR reports appear to point to a small reduction (compared to the 2017–2021 cycle) regarding the formal inclusion of representatives from civil society. This is a negative trend and leads to limitations in the 'whole-of-society' ownership over the 2030 Agenda, as well the risk of less inclusive approaches to implementation. Moreover, in comparison to the previous year, the role of non-state actors in high-level governance mechanisms, is still generally low and imprecise in its nature and scope. This situation suggests that spaces for non-state actors to input into overall strategic direction and coordination have not qualitatively improved in many countries. Moreover, this makes it more difficult to assess the potential impacts that stakeholders' inclusion in formal governance arrangements could have at the national level, including in regard to potential redesigning of policies and approaches based on diverse perspectives, including those from women, children, young people, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, etc.

2.2.4. Engaging peers on the 2030 Agenda

An important element of the 2030 Agenda is implementation at the regional level, including through engagement with regional organizations, peer learning and regional follow-up and review. Over half of VNR reports (24 out of 44, which represents 55%) provided information

on regional activities in 2022, suggesting a modest increase in terms of countries reporting on this dimension in comparison to three of the five previous years. In 2021, 57% of countries provided this information, 47% in 2020, 34% in 2019, 41% did so in 2018 and 56% in 2017. As with 2021, the 2022 VNR reports also bring interesting examples on regional efforts that specifically address implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A case study in good practice: Aruba's Centre of Excellence for the Sustainable Development of SIDS



The government of Aruba, UNDP, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands have established a Centre of Excellence for the Sustainable Development of SIDS in Aruba. The centre uses best practices to provide a platform for innovation and resilience in small island developing states (SIDS). South-South cooperation enables these countries to share knowledge of sustainable practices in areas like energy, public-private partnerships (PPPs), water management, the environment and tourism.

Source: Excerpt adapted from the Aruba (Kingdom of the Netherlands) VNR report.

With varying degrees of detail, 24 countries referred to their contributions at the regional or sub-regional level, which included advancing partnerships and agreements towards the 2030 Agenda and/or specific SDGs, hosting/participating in regional events, engaging in specific SDGs-related groups or frameworks, among others. For example, the Dutch territory of **Aruba** specifies in the Kingdom of the Netherlands joint VNR (along with Curaçao, Sint Maarten and the Netherlands) that the island is active in south-south/north-south/triangular cooperation based on experience and knowledge-sharing. Particularly, Aruba engaged with its Caribbean neighbours to learn from Jamaica's experience with SDG implementation, and in turn Aruba, shared its institutional framework and integration experiences with Trinidad & Tobago and Belize at various conferences. **Greece** highlights a variety of regional and subregional collaborations in its VNR, particularly its participation within the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development, where it has promoted the adoption of a Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development as a translation of the SDGs to the Mediterranean context, as well as the formulation of a Sustainability dashboard of indicators to facilitate its monitoring. While in **Luxembourg**, the country reports participating in different cross-border collaboration projects, for instance the «Grand Region Hydrogen» project in which they develop a renewable hydrogen supply chain to reduce CO2 emissions, as well as its membership in the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation since 2013, whose actions have so far focused on mobility, education, and sport.

In **Cameroon**, the VNR mentions the development of a national strategy and action plan to contribute to the implementation of the Great Green Wall, a pan-African process aiming to stabilize ecosystems and restore degraded landscapes and lands. In **Ghana**, the VNR asserts that members of the SDG implementation body, the Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC-SDGs) have actively participated in the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in order to share experiences and knowledge. For its part, **Sao Tomé and Príncipe** mention its participation in the Conference of Small Island Developing African States and Madagascar (SIDSAM) created in 2016. The VNR highlights that SIDSAM was created

as a 'platform for consultation, discussion of issues of common interest, promotion of ways and means to overcome barriers, and making effective existing recommendations and commitments'.¹¹ **Cote d'Ivoire's** VNR mentions a very specific area of regional cooperation, related to SDG 14. Within the West Central Gulf of Guinea Fisheries Committee (WCGFC) the country works with its sub regional peers to establish annual regional biological rest periods (seasonal closure of fisheries) for the protection of small pelagic fish stocks, particularly sardinella species, based on available scientific data. The report also mentions the Regional Project "Investment for West African Coastal Zone Resilience (WACA ResIP)".

Finally **Suriname** states that the General Bureau of Statistics has been working on strengthening the data collection process, both institutionally and in terms of human capacity, with respect to the SDG indicators framework, contributing to the selection of 125 unique CARICOM core SDG indicators, which are deemed relevant and realistic for the region. Suriname also participates in the regional readiness project targeting nine countries in the CARICOM sub-region, through which the awareness of the agricultural sector's potential contribution to climate solutions is raised, and promising practices and technologies to enhance resilience and quantifying its contribution to GHG reductions, are identified.

Key recommendations for good practice



Engage with peers to promote learning, establish collaborative initiatives to realize the 2030 Agenda and review progress on implementation.

In 2022, reporting on regional country grouping and participation in special country groups to advance the 2030 Agenda reversed the decline observed in previous years. In the 2021 VNR reports, 12 out of 42 countries (or 29%) mentioned engagement in special country grouping activities around the SDGs, whereas in 2022, 24 out of 44 countries (55%) highlighted coordination activities at the regional level. Such types of activities might suggest that efforts towards regional follow-up and review (e.g. the development of regional frameworks and indicators), SDG-focused collaborations (such as on SDG 4 and 13 in the case of **Andorra**), peer-to-peer engagement, and collective efforts to promote sustainable development at regional levels (such as through regional sustainable development fora and regional and subregional multilateral organizations) are being put in place, at least to an extent.

Greater regional coordination offers opportunities to learn lessons, share best practices, support and resources with from peers and other stakeholders across each region. For example, **São Tomé and Príncipe** noted being part of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS). **Aruba** highlighted that it hosts the Centre of Excellence for the Sustainable Development of SIDS, which provides a platform for resilience and innovation in small island developing countries. **Ghana** and **Lesotho** highlight their active participation in the African Union, particularly by aligning their SDG implementation activities with the African Union 2063 agenda. Regarding reporting initiatives, **Togo's** VNR mentions that "For accountability purposes, a national report on the implementation of the national development strategy, a report on the implementation of the SDGs are prepared annually and transmitted to West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and a report on the implementation of Agenda 2063 for the African Union in order to report on achievements at the national level".¹²

11. São Tomé and Príncipe, Voluntary National Review, p.22

12. Togo, Voluntary National Review 2022 p.24

2.2.5. Engaging with Regional Forums on Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda underlines “[...] the importance of building on existing follow-up and review mechanisms at the regional level [encouraging] all Member States to identify the most suitable regional forum in which to engage” (paragraph 81).¹³

The five United Nations regional commissions responded by updating the mandates of previously created Regional Forums on Sustainable Development (RFSDs) or establishing them:

- The **Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development** was created as an independent regional forum following the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). In May 2017, resolution 73/1 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) made the forum its subsidiary body.
- The 2013 meeting of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and the Economic Commission for Africa’s (ECA) Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development created the African Committee on Sustainable Development. In 2015, it was renamed as the **African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**.
- In 2014, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) established a “High-Level Arab Forum on Sustainable Development.” In 2016, ESCWA Member Countries aligned their functions with the 2030 Agenda and renamed it the **Arab Forum for Sustainable Development**
- In 2016, the Assembly of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) established the **Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development**.
- In 2017, the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) established the **Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**.

Each Regional Forum has its specificities, however, all of them share work mandates in the following areas:

- Monitoring the status of the SDGs at the regional level.
- Identifying common issues faced by countries in the region and promoting shared strategies to address them.
- Promoting knowledge exchange and best practices exchange
- Facilitating dialogue among States and between States and other stakeholders.
- Supporting countries in the region that have decided to present Voluntary National Review Reports to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).
- Creating inputs to feed the debate at the HLPF.

Furthermore, because of the current United Nations Development System (UNDS) reform at the regional level, the forums became the stage for the UN entities working in each region to report in a common single document. Following the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review commitments, RFSDs are programmed yearly, between February and May, in the lead-up to the HLPF, producing reports to inform the HLPF of their main conclusions (paragraph 83).¹⁴

13. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

14. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

Some also adopt other documents, such as political declarations. However, there is no established standard for RFSDs reporting. Consequently, building comparisons among their outputs and extracting lessons from each other becomes challenging.

Stakeholder Engagement at the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development

As previously mentioned, one of the critical RFSDs missions is to promote multistakeholder dialogue. As such, this part will view stakeholders' engagement, from governmental, non-governmental, and UN sector, in these forums. The review covers the period 2016–2022.

Regarding non-governmental stakeholders, situations widely vary. **Civil society** has established formal regional self-managed mechanisms to participate in the RFSDs at four of the five UN regions as follows:

- The Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Organizations Engagement Mechanism was established in 2014.
- The ECLAC Civil Society Participation Mechanism was established in 2017.
- The ECE–Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism was officially set up in 2018
- The Africa Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism was renamed in 2020 as the Africa Regional Mechanism of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders

There is no specific mechanism for civil society engagement in the Arab countries' sustainable development forum. The Arab NGO Network for Development became a de facto channel to this end. Among its claims, Civil Society Mechanisms in the five regions share the call for early inclusion of civil society in forums design, instead of just inviting them to join "packaged forum programs".

The **private sector** also participates in the forums. Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe forums included private sector forums as preparatory activities. However, links between regional forums and the private sector need to be strengthened. The same applies to **academia**, represented by universities, which only participate significantly in Africa and the Arab region. **Youth** and **local governments'** participation is increasing. In the first case, due to expanding recognition of their role in sustainable development, and in the second case, due to increased interest in local actions and the momentum created by Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) submissions. **Human rights and supreme audit institutions** are starting to gain space in the RFSDs, with Europe leading their inclusion. On the other hand, parliamentary engagement in RFSDs is very low.

Key Learning and Recommendations for the Regional Sustainable Development Forums

Based on the 2016–2022 period's review, RFSDs work combines a mix of successes and deficiencies.

- **RFSDs show mixed results in promoting regional analysis and collective work.** It is still challenging for the forums to transform regional information into actionable products and collective work.
- **RFSDs have opened new channels for multistakeholder dialogue.** Nevertheless, more and active participation of non-governmental actors in designing each forum program will help to make the debates more inclusive while promoting stakeholders' ownership of their results.

- **RFSDs contribution on HLPF debates is limited.** With only one session dedicated to regional forums, where countries who chair each regional commission present outcomes, the transfer of inputs from the regions to the global fora has been limited to a narrative of discussed topics and general conclusions, lacking the capacity for powering specific debates.

Improving RFSDs reporting could lead to an increased influence in the HLPF debates. To that end:

- RFSDs reports should highlight elements representing substantive contributions to global discussions from a regional perspective.
- A DCO representative could be included to present conclusions from the regional forums to the HLPF, as part of each year's session on regional contributions, to institutionally reinforce links between regional and global levels.

Support provided by RFSDs to countries submitting Voluntary National Review Reports is broadly recognized:

RFSD support to reporting countries could be leveraged by:

- Better aligning the support to second-generation reporting needs.
- Extending the support with Voluntary National Review (VNR) to local or sub-national (VLR) review processes.
- Including official sessions at the regional forums in which reporting countries present their review process designs and plans.

2.2.6. Recommendations

- **Establish clear leadership and governance structures to support 2030 Agenda implementation and lay out lines of accountability and engagement for all national stakeholder groups.**
- **Formalize non-state actor engagement in governance structures to implement and realize the 2030 Agenda. This includes lead councils or committees and technical working groups that are multi-stakeholder in nature (bringing together governmental actors, parliament, civil society, including vulnerable groups, private sector, academia, and local and subnational authorities), with sufficient resources, clear mandates and inclusive working methodologies to enable the different actors to contribute effectively.**
- **Establish a well staffed and resourced permanent secretariat within the administration (e.g., within the General Secretariat of the government or general secretariat of a given ministry), to support the work of the lead council, committee and/or working groups, and act as the main link with other governmental structures. This would also enable continuity of implementation and monitoring processes between different electoral cycles and administrations.**
- **Identify opportunities to achieve the 2030 Agenda through engaging more formally in regional level initiatives and with like-minded countries. Greater regional coordination offers opportunities to learn lessons, share best practices, support and share resources with from peers and other stakeholders across each region.**

- **Provide legal, institutional, financial, and other support to members of civil society including marginalized and vulnerable groups such as women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDs, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants etc., to enable their participation in policymaking and development processes to realize the 2030 Agenda.**

2.3. Stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda implementation

The concept of civic space encompasses different political rights and freedoms (freedom of association, of expression or speech, of peaceful protest, participation, access to information), that, through the regulatory approaches established and the actual extent of their exercise, determine the quality and scope of the public space for political expression, debate, and deliberation in each national context. The level of openness of the public space constitutes a key determinant of the degree to which civil society –and non-state actors in general– will be able voice their views in the public sphere, and more concretely, be able to exert influence within policy-making processes and political processes in general – programmes, policies, laws, procedures, budgets, political party platforms, etc.

VNR reports continue to mostly ignore the issue of closing civic space, the active curtailment of political rights and freedoms, and ongoing attacks on human rights defenders, journalists and environmentalists. Conversely, several civil society reports highlight issues related to the reduction of civic space, as well as limited quality of engagement. These issues include policies designed to actively curtail key civil and political rights that are integral to the concept of civic space – like freedom of expression or speech (and within this, freedom of the press), freedom of association, as well as freedom of peaceful assembly. In addition, in many countries, policies put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic are still being applied and used as an excuse by some governments to further encroach on civic space.

The multi-stakeholder and inclusive nature of the 2030 Agenda are well established through its emphasis on ‘whole-of-society’ approaches to implementation and to leaving no one behind including women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDs, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants. A prerequisite to effective engagement is an enabling environment¹⁵ for non-state actors to participate in implementation, follow up and review of the SDGs. Some countries reporting in 2022 noted efforts to create an enabling environment through policies that support multi-stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda implementation, at least to some extent. These include **Argentina, Aruba, Curaçao, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Liberia, Mali, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Sint-Maarten, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Switzerland, and Togo.**

15. “The political, financial, legal and policy context that affects how CSOs carry out their work. It can include: 1) Laws, policies and practices respecting freedom of association, the right to operate without state interference, the right to pursue self-defined objectives, and the right to seek and secure funding from national & international sources; 2) Institutionalized, inclusive and transparent multi-stakeholder dialogue; 3) Effective support from development providers to empower CSOs.” Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC), [FAQs for Participating in the Second Monitoring Round of the GPEDC: Indicator 2](#)

Key recommendations for good practice



Establish an enabling environment through the creation of appropriate legal, regulatory and policy frameworks that support all civil society actors, including women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDs, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, to contribute to sustainable development and set out how multi-stakeholder engagement and partnership will occur.

The extent of stakeholder engagement in the 2030 Agenda implementation process is determined in many ways by the type of political regime (and the degree to which a given regime can be considered a democracy), as well as by the broader set of interactions (formal and informal) between institutional and non-state actors that can be identified when considering a political system in its entirety and complexity (distribution of power between actors within national, sub-national and local processes; openness of the political system; capacity to participate of trade unions and private sector interest groups; capacity and autonomy to operate and participate of organized civil society and social movements).

According to the [CIVICUS Monitor](#), which examines the status of civic space around the world, civic space for 64% of the countries that reported to the HLPF in 2022 is characterized as “obstructed,” “repressed” or “closed.” This shows a slightly higher percentage compared to countries that presented VNRs in 2021 and 2020 (62%).

Box 2: Understanding the status of civic space in VNR reporting countries for 2022

CIVICUS’s Monitor of civic space has information for all 44 countries that reported to the HLPF in 2022.

Only nine (9) of the countries that reported to the HLPF in 2022 were considered “open,” meaning the state enables and safeguards civic space.

For seven (7) countries, civic space is considered “narrowed.” This means the rights to freedom of association, expression, and peaceful assembly have been violated in one way or another. Ten (10) reporting countries were classified as “obstructed.” For a country to be considered “obstructed”, a series of legal and practical constraints on the practice of fundamental rights have been noted. In these conditions, illegal surveillance and bureaucratic harassment occur. There is some space for non-state media, but journalists are subject to attack.

In 2022, thirteen (13) reporting countries were in the “repressed” category. The monitor ranks a country as “repressed” if civic space is severely restrained. Individuals who criticize a power holder may be subject to surveillance, harassment, intimidation, injury or death. The work of civil society organizations is often impeded and under threat of deregistration by authorities. Mass detentions may occur, and the media usually only

portrays the position of the state. Websites and social media activities are heavily monitored.

The last category in the CIVICUS scale is “closed.” In this category, there is a complete closure of the civic space. An atmosphere of fear and violence is prevalent. Powerful state and non-state actors routinely imprison people and cause injury and death to individuals who seek to peacefully assemble and express themselves. In such circumstances, criticizing authorities is severely punished. The internet is heavily censored and online criticisms of authorities are severely punished. In 2022, five (5) reporting countries were classified as “closed.”

Although only 20% of the countries reporting in 2022 have an “open” status when it comes to safeguarding civic space, according to the CIVICUS monitor, countries in general tend not to engage on questions regarding the quality and scope of their political systems in general in their VNR reports. That said, this year has seen an increase in countries that address this issue to some extent, mainly by highlighting specific constitutional or policy-based advancements in this field.

In 2022, 12 countries (**Ethiopia, Eswatini, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands –including Aruba–, Sao Tomé and Príncipe and Togo**) included some specifications on improvements to national civic space, or at least mentioned the issue.

The VNR from **the Netherlands** expresses in a generic manner that the country is a vocal advocate of freedom of expression, both online and offline, asserting that people should be able to express their opinions, take part in political and social debate, and access secure, uncensored information. Furthermore, in the Dutch territory of **Aruba**, the VNR highlights that the territory is a vibrant democracy, with active political participation, active civil society organizations, free media, and fundamental rights, which are laid down in the constitution. Regarding access to information, it also notes that the ongoing digital transformation of government services aims to foster transparency and accountability, and thus trust in government institutions. In the case of **Sao Tomé and Príncipe**, the VNR notes the Constitution has provisions on Freedom of the press (Article 30), freedom of expression and information (Article 29), which seems to be confirmed by reality on the ground, since the CIVICUS monitor categorizes the country as ‘open’.

In the case of **Ethiopia**, the VNR asserts that laws restricting civic space have been replaced through a process of reforms, which include a proclamation that now guarantees the freedom of association of citizens, abolishing previously unwarranted restrictions, and places the administration of civil society organizations under the management of an independent board. According to the VNR, as a result of this more amenable set of regulations, civil society organizations – especially those involved in the protection of human rights – are flourishing and are able to play a positive role in the community and the SDG implementation process. The Ethiopian VNR also states that restrictions on the media have also been lifted, to ensure freedom of expression. However, despite this increasingly positive context for civic space depicted in the VNR, according to the CIVICUS monitor Ethiopia is still within the ‘Repressed’ category and the ongoing war in the north of the country has implied the imposition of

internet blackouts, widespread arbitrary detentions, as well as intimidation of human rights defenders, journalists and other media actors in the Tigray and Amhara regions.

In **Jordan**, the VNR highlights the fact that the country ratified *'the Arab Charter on Human Rights issued by the League of Arab States without making any reservations to the articles included within the Charter, this is in addition to seven out of the eight core ILO conventions, which cover freedom of association, non-discrimination, equality, forced labor and child labour.'*¹⁶ That said, the civil society independent report from Jordan notes that freedom of speech and freedom of peaceful assembly aren't properly protected in the country, as well as the right to participate in public affairs. Additionally, regarding freedom of association, the independent report asserts that civil society's participation in the promotion of sustainable development would be improved by removing restrictions imposed on its activities, as well as through the elimination of the principle of pre-control over its work.

In **Kazakhstan**, the VNR mentions that the Government has adopted several action plans and programs in the field of human rights, with a set of reforms that aim for legislative frameworks, institutional development, and practice to align with international standards. However, the independent report from Kazakhstan specifically highlights the fact that Human Rights legislation and its enforcement aren't in line with international standards. It does so by providing the country's ratings within international democracy and human rights indexes : *'in rule of law index of the World Justice Project, Kazakhstan is ranked 62 out of 128 countries (for the year of 2020); according to the 2021 Global Rights Index of the International Trade Union Confederation, Kazakhstan is ranked at 5, i.e. one of the worst under the title "No Guarantee of Rights", where the best ranking is 1 and the worst 5+. According to the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, the country scored 50.28, i.e. ranked 155 out of 180 countries. According to The Economist Company's 2020 Democracy Development Index, the Economist magazine, it ranked 127 out of 167 countries, where the catastrophic situation with electoral processes and political pluralism and problems with civic freedoms were noted. And finally, Kazakhstan continues to belong to non-free countries. The independent report further states 'there are serious problems with exercising human rights, freedom of speech, peaceful assembly. The adopted law on peaceful assembly does not meet the international standards and continues to be based not on notifications but on the issuance of permissions by the authorities. The civic space for the development of civil society is significantly narrowing. Currently, there are absolutely discriminatory norms regarding the creation of non-profit organizations. They include fee-based registration, difficult liquidation process, funding and taxation issues, additional reporting on foreign funding, which is incorrect, unfair and creates barriers for civil society development [...] The country's environment on ensuring the rights to public oversight has narrowed in recent years. The amendments to the legislation being adopted are of decorative nature and have no impact on systemic problem solving. [...] The consultative and advisory body and a dialogue platform on the social dimension is functioning, and a dialogue is underway there. This is positive, but today its influence has seriously decreased, and decisions under this advisory body have almost no impact on the decision-making process.'*¹⁷

In **Equatorial Guinea**, some progress has been made in opening the country's civic space in the context of SDG implementation, although limited to environmental matters. The VNR

16. Jordan, Voluntary National Review p.124

17. People's Scorecard on the National Delivery of the 2030 Agenda – Kazakhstan, p.59

asserts that after the Third National Economic Conference, the General Directorate from the Ministry of Environment integrated the SDGs into strategies, policies, plans, and programs and organized meetings with CSOs to raise awareness and inform them about the need to accompany the Government in the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda implementation. This process fostered the legalization of several NGOs that work in the environmental sector, although the VNR doesn't specify whether the legalization process was open to every organization or there were political parameters involved. **Eswatini** in its VNR claims that *'there are zero verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates. Every citizen of the country has the right to freedom of speech. Laws exist to guarantee public access to information'*.¹⁸ Information contained in the CIVICUS monitor for Eswatini contradicts this claim, as many cases of curtailment of freedom of assembly and speech, democratic rights and state violence are reported.¹⁹

The VNR from **The Gambia** highlights a couple of interesting developments in its democratization process. Following decades of human rights abuses committed in the context of the country's former dictatorship, the democratically elected government is currently reinstating a fully functional National Human Rights Commission, whose roles and responsibilities conform to international standards, as well as formulating and adopting a new media law, which, according to the VNR *'received a boost from ongoing collaboration with [the NGO] Article 19 aimed at the adoption of international best practices in media regulation and the replacement of the draconian laws promulgated by the previous administration'*.²⁰ The CIVICUS monitor would tend to confirm these positive developments, although the country has still a long way to go for building a fully open civic space.²¹ The VNR also asserts that within the democratic transition, civil society has been able to expand its monitoring role, since *'the country has strengthened the coordination mechanism among civil society actors to ensure integrity of the electoral processes and the capacity of civil society to monitor elections and political reform processes'*.²²

Although the review of the different references to civic space available in this year's VNRs shows some positive developments, given that more countries than usual have addressed the issue (only 1 country mentioned civic space in 2021), the information is still partial and not always commensurate with the lived experience of civil society groups or the reality of civic space in many countries.

There appears to be a gap between *de jure* rights and the *de facto* implementation of these rights. In many cases it may be understood that constitutional provisions, laws and regulations aren't enough to guarantee a healthy civic space, since it could be argued that the way in which power is exercised, the independence of the judiciary, and the degree to which political cultures can shape processes also play a significant role. Furthermore, it could be suggested that democracy-enhancing reforms conveyed by the reports are still too recent to yield positive results. In either case, the gap between the way civic space is

18. Eswatini, Voluntary National Review, p.56

19. From the CIVICUS website: [Eswatini: Respect democratic rights and stop violence against peaceful protesters; Nearly 70 human rights groups condemn state violence in Eswatini](#)

20. The Gambia, Voluntary National Review, p.25

21. From the CIVICUS website: [The Gambia adopts Access to Information law](#)

22. The Gambia, Voluntary National Review, p.25

conceived and reported on and the realities on the ground has been observed for a number of years and is particularly concerning given the increasing trend of closing civic space around the world.

A case study in good practice? Togo's Cooperation Framework with CSOs



According to Togo's VNR, the Government has initiated reforms to strengthen cooperation with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). In this context, and in order to align the interventions of Civil Society Organizations with national priorities, the Government has adopted Decree No. 2022-002/PR of January 5, 2022 setting the conditions for cooperation between non-governmental organizations and the Government.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Togo's VNR report.

Civil society Validity Check on Togo's best practice above:



This decree may be seen as a way of controlling NGOs and forcing them to align themselves behind government development policy. That said, opinions are divided within Togolese civil society regarding its effects. For some, it hinders freedom of association and for others, it could be a positive element in terms of coordination, since it helps NGOs to increase coherence between their activities and official development policies and programs.

Source: Jeunes Verts Togo, consultation for civil society report.

2.3.1. The status of civic space according to civil society

Although the vast majority of VNR reports continue to ignore the process of shrinking civic space, several civil society reports highlight how this is an ongoing issue. With varying levels of detail, shadow, spotlight and/or parallel reports prepared by civil society organizations communicate how the closure of civic space is being enacted in their countries, including information on government actions that hinder freedom of expression, assembly, association, access to information, and participation. Such a body of knowledge raises awareness around the issue of shrinking civic space and how civil society voices are not being able to meaningfully contribute to public deliberation processes or are being actively silenced – especially groups such as children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants. The fact that so much information around this topic is being shared through civil society reports but is mostly ignored by VNR reports continues to be extremely concerning in the context of the implementation of a transformative and inclusive policy agenda like the SDGs. Box 4 shows some of the main topics identified by civil society organizations based in 2022 reporting countries with regards to civic space.

Box 3: Issues surrounding civic space as identified by civil society organizations

Criminalization of civic dissent / curtailment of freedoms

- **Sri Lanka:** Civil society reports that shrinking civic space in the country in the context of the socio-political upheaval is characterized by criminalization processes and curtailment of the right to peaceful assembly: *'The open shooting of protestors in Rambukkana, the 09th of May attack on 'Gota-Go-Gama', arbitrary arrests and detention of frontliners of the civic struggle, alleged torture of protestors at the start of the Galle Face unrest, are proof that the protection of the Article 14 fundamental right to protest and access to civic spaces are at the discretion of the political administration of Sri Lanka',*²³ as well as by the 'militarization' of the governance of the right of association, as CSOs are now under the oversight of the Ministry of Defense under the pretext of National Security.
- **Greece:** Civil society asserts that there have been cases of curtailment of freedom of the media and freedom of expression, given that journalists that have conducted investigations into corruption cases have been prosecuted.
- **Kazakhstan:** Civil society reports the curtailment of freedom of speech, especially freedom of the press, as well as to peaceful assembly and association. The adopted law on peaceful assembly does not meet the international standards, and the civic space for civil society to freely associate has narrowed significantly. Currently, there are discriminatory norms regarding the creation of non-profit organizations, which include fee-based registration, difficult liquidation process, funding and taxation issues, additional reporting on foreign funding – all of which creates barriers for civil society development.
- **Jordan:** Civil society asserts that since the government invoked the Defense Law during the pandemic, the country has seen increased restrictions to civic space, either by curtailing freedom of the press, of speech, or freedom of association or peaceful assembly. The Defense Law is still in place, and it has implied *'limiting gatherings and therefore protests and demonstrations – [setting] a precedent over the two past years. It has meant crackdowns of protests or even the intention to protest from activists. A further indication of a decline in good governance is the fact that Freedom House now classifies Jordan as "not free", as opposed to "partly free" in the years before, exposing restrictions in the work of civil society, problems with elections and the tightening of controls on individuals and certain societal groups. Additionally, Jordan's democracy rating according to the Economist's indicators has declined, as has its rating according to the CIVICUS civil society monitor [...]. There is also more than one law used to prosecute the public and journalists for freedom of expression, including: the Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Law, but most commonly the Cybercrime Law, especially Article 11 which allows for arrest and imprisonment for what is considered a criminal offence'*.²⁴

23. Voluntary People's Review on the SDGs 2022, p.29

24. Spotlight Report for the Voluntary National Report on the SDGs, Jordan, p.15

- **Pakistan:** Civil society reports that *'space for CSOs is shrinking and their interventions are being limited or hampered by the government through cumbersome procedural and regulatory interference'*. This hindrance on the freedom of association has taken the form of mandatory registration with State authorities *'[a CSO] could be suspended or dissolved if the government feels their activities were inadequate or 'suspicious'*. Based on a survey conducted by AwazCDS–Pakistan Development Alliance, only 45% of respondents agree that they enjoy freedom of assembly and association. 72% perceived that the laws and policies governing CSOs have tightened.
- **Sudan:** Civil society asserts that within the transitional period from August 2019 to October 2021, participation of citizens and their grassroots organizations grew immensely as spaces opened for civil society. However, it also points out that *'with the current situation following the October 25, 2021 coup, these spaces became fewer, and citizens' participation decreased. [...] The legal environment faced a setback, civic space was narrowed, and more control was imposed on activities by the Humanitarian Aid Commission and the Security and Intelligence Service'*.²⁵

Procedural democracy – lack of substantive participation:

- **Botswana:** The civil society report from Botswana argues that based on perception-based surveys (Afrobarometer 2018), although most Botswanans perceive their country as a formal democracy, more substantial aspects like the quality and scope of participation processes and freedom of speech are seen as declining. This has led to a growing disinterest from politics, dropping from 85% in 2003 to 67% in 2014, and an increasing disengagement from the public sphere of the citizenry at large – except at the community level. Available participation spaces at the national level, particularly those linked to SDG implementation, are perceived as too generic and the capacity for these spaces to provide a venue for more substantial policy dialogue are viewed with scepticism.
- **Senegal:** Senegal is also recognized as a formal democracy, and civil society recognizes the availability of participation spaces at different territorial levels, although it is also viewed that the quality of these spaces is hindered by the fact that the level of participation is perceived as minimal and unsubstantial, with civil society only being able to provide inputs when reports are presented by public authorities, and these must be validated.
- **Sri Lanka:** Civil society reports that participation spaces are very limited, for example there are some opportunities for a physical presence in consultations, but with no real possibility to contribute, or these exist only on paper. One example of a

25. Spotlight Report on the Progress to Achieve the SDGs in Sudan, p.8

space for limited engagement is the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka, which has never been implemented as a multi-stakeholder council.

- **Greece:** Civil society reports that policy dialogue between government mechanisms and CSOs still remains minimal and superficial. Either within SDG implementation processes at large or regarding the formulation of National Action Plans, consultations are limited and there is no permanent mechanism to connect government bodies and CSOs and promote dialogue; so communications are rather fragmented and on an ad hoc basis.
- **Italy:** Civil society acknowledges the fact that some key inroads have been made in terms of more substantial participation such as within the re-formulation process for the National Strategy on Sustainable Development under the previous administration. That said, the approach to participation is still fragmented and inconsistent, as key policy packages like the National Recovery and Resilience Plan have been conceived without proper participation. Participation in other processes at different territorial levels is also fragmented and there is a lack of collaborative planning.
- **Philippines:** Civil society reports that there has been a growing trend of superficial participation since the pandemic, as well as the government engaging only with CSOs selected under unspecified criteria.
- **Switzerland:** Civil society points to a lack of substantial participation in policy-formulation processes, as well as mounting political pressures when civil society is critical of entrenched vested interests from the private sector.
- **Uruguay:** Civil society asserts that participation spaces have been progressively and implicitly dismantled, as the government convenes civil society less and less regularly. That said, civil society also points out that these spaces were very weakly linked to actual policy-making processes to begin with, and therefore had limited impact.

2.3.2. Process for stakeholder engagement

In addition to an enabling policy environment, formal arrangements for stakeholder engagement (such as youth councils, annual fora, online portal for partners, annual consultations) are an element of governance that support broader participation by all stakeholders within 2030 Agenda implementation, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable stakeholders, such as women, children, persons with disabilities, older groups, etc. Such arrangements help to promote greater understanding of shared goals, objectives, priorities and potential synergies, build momentum and strengthen partnerships in implementation, particularly with a wider set of stakeholders than those involved through lead

councils or committees and working group structures. In particular, formal arrangements that support the engagement of marginalized or vulnerable stakeholders can seek to address the challenges and barriers – including physical, financial, linguistic, logistical, technological, age, gender or other barriers – that hinder the effective and meaningful participation of certain stakeholders in SDG implementation.

In 2022, 32 VNRs (73%) provided information on processes for stakeholder engagement beyond governance mechanisms, confirming the upward trend started in 2021, with 28 VNR reports (66%) doing so that year. This also shows an increase in comparison to 2020, where the number of VNR reports providing such information was 22 (47%). It must be noted though, that VNRs very rarely provide a detailed assessment on the nature, scope, and tangible outcomes of these consultation processes or their level of inclusiveness.

Key recommendations for good practice



Establish and report on formal mechanisms to ensure regular, inclusive multi-stakeholder engagement on 2030 Agenda implementation in line with good practice for ensuring effective and inclusive engagement, especially among marginalized and vulnerable groups such as women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, etc

Out of the countries that provided further details regarding their processes for stakeholder engagement, the following examples show different kinds of strategies:

In **Ethiopia**, the VNR states that stakeholder engagement is manifested at three levels: (1) design of policies, strategies, and plans, (2) implementation, and (3) monitoring and review. The main channels mentioned for stakeholder engagement within each of the different phases of the policy cycle are consultations and workshops, but no overarching process is in place, and no further details on the scope and level of inclusiveness of the consultations and workshops is provided. The government uses a regular 2030 Agenda dialogue forum involving multiple stakeholders, including youth delegates for sustainable development, to discuss the international sustainability agenda.

In **Greece** and **Latvia**, stakeholder engagement is channelled mainly at a sectoral level (line ministries and parliamentary commissions), but the scope of the participation (in terms of influence in decision-making) is qualified by civil society in both countries as minimal. In the case of Latvia, there was also a broad consultation process in the context of the formulation of the new National Development Plan (NAP), but there still isn't an overarching institutional system in place for SDG implementation.

In **Lesotho**, the planned National SDGs Forum will purportedly provide a mechanism for engaging key stakeholders on an ongoing basis, as well as providing a platform for direct inclusion of voices from groups at risk of social exclusion and/or discrimination in the national implementation of the SDGs. In **Liberia**, a broader channel for stakeholder engagement is seemingly being planned: the Citizen Feedback Mechanism (no further details provided).

Cases in Good practice: Child-focused consultations in 2022 VNR reports



In relation to the involvement of children in consultations, the following information is available from the 2022 VNR reports:

Gambia's 2022 VNR report discusses how the 2022 VNR process involved consultations with young people (children and youth) at regional levels. The report also outlines how Gambia conducted post-VNR consultations with children and youth at national, regional and community levels following the presentation of its first VNR report at the HLPF in 2020.

Montenegro's 2022 VNR report preparation process involved consultations with members of the network of Golden Advisers to the Ombudsman for the protection of the rights of the child – children and young people under 17 years old, including from vulnerable groups. Their opinions are outlined in a dedicated box in the report.

Andorra's 2022 VNR report highlights the process of consultation and participation of all relevant actors – including children and adolescents – in developing its future National Plan for Childhood and Adolescence.

Sources: Gambia's, Montenegro and Andorra's VNRs

A case study in good practice? The National Development Conference in Malawi



According to the VNR from Malawi, each year, the National Planning Commission organizes a National Development Conference which brings together different plans in a transparent and inclusive way.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Malawi's VNR report.

Civil society validity-check on the good practice from Malawi described above:



For the past three years, CONGOMA has been invited to be part of the Organising Committee for the National Development conference. The last two conferences were seen as useful moments for dialogue as key development reflections were made with various leading groups (including CONGOMA) making pledges on what they planned to do in the year ahead, in the presence of the State President. However, the pledges need to be translated into action. For the conference in January 2023, CONGOMA will lobby for a more structured conference, through which the stakeholders that made pledges should account for actions undertaken against the targets they set for each Pillar and Enabler Coordination Group, all in the presence of the State President. Additionally, the Pillar and Enabler Coordination Groups should deliver presentations on progress made so far.

Source: Excerpt adapted from the Confederation of NGOs from Malawi CONGOMA after consultation for this report.

As noted in a previous section, 2022 VNR reports were consistent with the 2021 reports in terms of non-state actor participation in formal governance arrangements, especially in lead councils or committees, with an increase in participation through technical working groups. On the other hand, more countries are reporting on processes of stakeholder engagement. This is positive, as the establishment of policies to support an enabling environment and the creation of formal processes and mechanisms that allow for more widespread and regular engagement with stakeholders outside formal SDG-related governance mechanisms are important. They contribute to ongoing awareness-raising efforts, national ownership and whole-of-society approaches to implementation. Such mechanisms have potential to make a positive contribution towards leaving no one behind by ensuring that populations that are being left behind, and individuals or the organizations that represent them, are included and supported to engage, as long as the nature and scope of participation within these spaces is conceived in an inclusive and substantive way and the mandates of these institutional spaces are linked to the policymaking cycle.

As has already been noted, information presented in VNR reports is rarely sufficient to allow an assessment regarding the quality of formal processes for multi-stakeholder engagement. Nevertheless, [civil society reports](#) for 2022 provide some indication of the challenges related to multi-stakeholder engagement. Civil society reports were prepared for the following countries that reported to the HLPF in 2022: **Argentina, Botswana, Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Greece, El Salvador, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Malawi, Mali, Montenegro, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Switzerland, and Uruguay.** Despite the importance of civil society groups in relation to their national experiences, civil society reports (e.g. spotlight, shadow, parallel reports) continue to lack any official status in the United Nations High-level Political Forum (HLPF) and its related processes.

The reports and written inputs by civil society organizations in regard to VNR reports point to challenges including the need for improved coordination and integration, greater transparency and enhanced institutional mechanisms for participatory monitoring and progress assessment, higher quality and more stable spaces for policy dialogue between civil society organizations and governments around implementation, as well as increased capacity for all stakeholders. More generally, in most countries there is a clear demand for the protection and expansion of civic space in order for civil society organizations to advocate and operate freely.

- **Botswana:** The civil society report from the national platform BOCONGO asserts that, although on paper the governance arrangement established in the country for SDG implementation appears sound and comprehensive (since it provides vertical and horizontal coordination and accountability with a multistakeholder National Steering Committee seconded by a national SDG secretariat within the ministry of Finance and ad-hoc Technical Working Groups) –civil society notes that participation within this institutional system tends to be too generic and doesn't maximize the benefits of having clear mandates, methodologies and resources.
- **Cameroon:** While engagement was noted on the VNRs by a number of civil society groups including Sightsavers, at the same time, the civil society report from the women's platform REFACOF states that only few spaces for participation were made available within the VNR process, and that these were solely for the validation of government reports. Moreover, participation tends not to be fully representative of the diversity of Cameroonian civil society and the wider citizenry, with very little participation from women, children, youth, and marginalized populations.

- **Gabon:** The Civil society report from the national CSO platform ROPAGA asserts that although the integration process of the SDGs within the National Development Plan has been relatively successful, there are weaknesses regarding the scope of participation in the context of the VNR and limited opportunities for civil society groups to engage with multi stakeholder partnerships. There were also challenges with data availability (databases only being updated every 10 years) – and related to this, issues around transparency.
- **Ghana:** The civil society report from the CSO Platform on the SDGs states that the mainstreaming process into the national development framework has been quite successful at the institutional and policy level, with a plethora of plans and policies having been formulated and spaces for participation at the central, subnational, and local levels. That said, there is still a significant gap between policymaking and actual implementation, as planning documents are seldom used as tools to effectively guide policymaking and government actions on the ground. CSOs also point out gaps in the participation of young people within sustainable development processes.
- **Greece:** The civil society report from the Hellenic Platform for Development asserts that some key modifications to the institutional system for SDG implementation coordination and oversight are needed to enable more effective participation. These improvements would include the appointment of a Permanent General Secretary in order to provide continuity in the coordination of the implementation process within administration structures between different political cycles, as well as the establishment of a multi stakeholder platform that would foster collective action around policymaking and participatory monitoring.
- **Italy:** The civil society report from GCAP-Italia acknowledges that there have been efforts made in order to improve participation. These improvements have been developed through the updating process of the National Sustainable Development Strategy and the National Action Plan on Policy Coherence. However, there are still further improvements to be made in order to make this participation truly substantive, so that collective deliberation has an influence on policy decisions). There is also a need to improve the articulation and coherence between the NSDS/SDG frameworks and policy packages that remain disconnected, particularly the EU-funded National Recovery and Resilience Plan.
- **Kazakhstan:** The civil society report from the CSO platform ARGO notes that the SDGs have provided a venue for the government to open participation channels, like the Coordination Council for Sustainable Development and its related working groups arranged following the 5Ps concept. The report also asserts that there is still room for growth regarding meaningful participation, as well as the development of accountability and transparency mechanisms within the SDG implementation process.
- **Mali:** The joint civil society report from *Conseil National de la Société Civile Malienne and Forum de la Société Civile du Mali* states that although there is some level of satisfaction with participatory processes, mainly stemming from VNR-related consultations, it would be key for the government to open more permanent channels for policy dialogue and cooperation. A specific demand from Malian civil society in this sense would be the establishment of a Joint Committee, to be constituted by government ministries and agencies, civil society, development partners and the private sector. This would provide

a backbone for collective action around policymaking and monitoring and would produce a joint roadmap for SDG implementation.

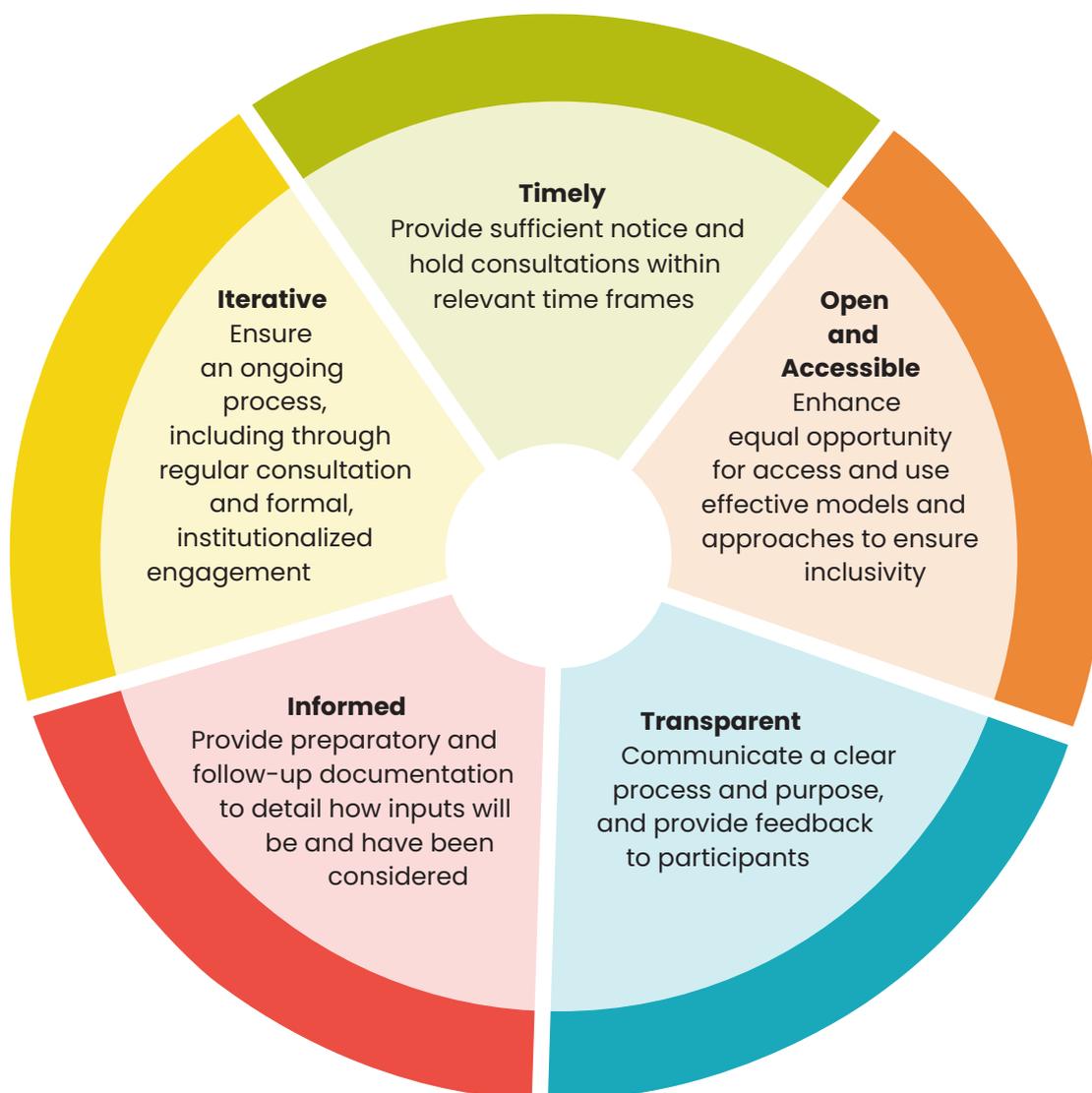
- **Philippines:** The civil society report from Social Watch–Philippines asserts that there are gaps in participation, with no permanent channels for policy dialogue and selectivity from the government when engaging with civil society. Other gaps in the implementation process include the prevalence of siloed approaches within government, weaknesses in the decentralization process and corruption.
- **Uruguay:** The civil society report from the national CSO platform ANONG notes a series of weaknesses in the implementation process in the country – relating to the fact that the SDG implementation has only been characterised by new policy announcements from the administration, but not the establishment of new open and inclusive institutions. The report also suggests that there have been no new channels for participation created, which is compounded by the fact that the few sectoral spaces for policy dialogue available appear to have been progressively dismantled.
- **Jordan:** The civil society report from Phoenix Center states that the country still faces challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The reasons for this are manifold and stem from internal structural factors preventing progress with regards to many of the SDGs, such as economic imbalances, lack of fairness within policies, as well as weak coordination and implementation. This is exacerbated by a lack of participatory decision-making processes and accountability mechanisms.
- **Latvia:** The civil society report from the national CSO platform LAPAS asserts that there isn't an overarching multistakeholder coordination platform for SDG implementation in the country; instead, the process and its monitoring (connected to the National Development Plan) are under the purview of a Cross-Sectoral Coordination Council and the Prime Minister. The report notes that there are channels for policy dialogue with sectoral ministries and parliamentary commissions, and increasingly, at the local level, but it also asserts that civil society's voices tend to have the least influence within decision-making processes.
- **Malawi:** The civil society report from the national CSO platform CONGOMA states that the SDG mainstreaming and integration process into the long-term development plan MW2063 and its 10-year implementation plan MIP-1 has been rather participatory and successful. Most of the technical work is carried out in a multistakeholder way within sector working groups (now Pillar and Enabling Coordination Groups). That said, the decentralized structure for implementation, although positive on paper, hasn't been meaningfully inclusive of the views of civil society and the wider citizenry on local priorities.
- **Montenegro:** The civil society report from the NGO Green Home notes that the revamped National Council on Sustainable Development is an interesting opportunity for joint implementation and monitoring of the National Strategy on Sustainable Development – in which the SDGs have been mainstreamed through a participatory process. However, the report also notes that there are still significant gaps still prevalent, especially around a balanced approach to the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic and social dimensions tend to take precedence over the environment), coordination and data availability, among others.

- **Pakistan:** The civil society report from the Pakistan Development Alliance asserts that civil society and the wider citizenry have very little influence on development processes in the country – with information flows and decision-making being mostly government-driven and government-centered. There are significant gaps remaining in access to justice and decentralization. Nevertheless, they note positive point in the process is the opportunity to leverage multistakeholder partnerships for delivery.
- **Senegal:** The civil society report from the national coalition in Senegal, *Groupe de Travail des Organisations de la Société Civile sur le suivi des ODD*, reports that Senegal has made considerable efforts in monitoring and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. In the second phase of the implementation of the National Development Plan (PAP 2019–2023), sectoral policies, projects and programmes have taken into account the priority aspects identified by all development actors across the 2030 Agenda. Despite the progress noted, constraints remain, including the debt burden, the weakness of domestic resources, a sometimes tense political situation, a national statistical system that is still not very effective in terms of decentralisation and disaggregation of data, and national pockets of poverty that tend to multiply and increase because of the crisis situations caused by the COVID 19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.
- **Sri Lanka:** The civil society report from the SL Stakeholder Platform on SDGs asserts that the country is in a full-blown crisis including all aspects of governance, economic, social and environmental dimensions. The lack of progress for SDGs is a result of lack of foresight, the deterioration of good governance, the rise of corruption, lack of accountability, low transparency, marginalization of subnational governments, and non-inclusion of stakeholders in the transformation process.
- **Sudan:** The civil society report from NIDAA states that an implementation body was established in 2018 to coordinate and monitor SDG implementation. However, since the October 2019 military coup, there isn't a governmental mechanism, nor a specialized implementation agency established to engage with the implementation body, which demonstrates a gap in Sudan's commitment to achieving the SDGs. The implementation body has limited personnel and powers and does not live up to the level of institutional commitment to achieving the SDGs. The report also notes a gap in terms of the lack of a national vision for sustainable development that would inform strategies and policies.
- **Switzerland:** The civil society report from the 2030 Agenda Platform states that although there is a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), it is a document that was drafted and approved with limited input from the multistakeholder 2030 Agenda Advisory Group (as was the case also of the VNR) – and is mostly a summary of existing policies and actions. Civil society hence calls for the updating process of the NSDS and its related action plan to be fully participatory and transformative.

As has been regularly noted in different editions of the present review, the quality of public deliberation spaces and long-term engagement of civil society and other non-state actors are key for the achievement of a 'whole-of-society' approach to 2030 Agenda implementation. Engagement should occur within a broader context that fosters an enabling environment for civil society (and other stakeholders) – with approaches centred around the five core elements that support meaningful engagement as presented in

previous editions of this report.²⁶ However, it should be noted that the quality of stakeholder engagement is frequently unclear, as the states presenting VNR reports do not usually present detailed insight in this regard.

Figure 5: Core elements of effective and meaningful stakeholder engagement



In practice, an effective and inclusive approach to multi-stakeholder engagement means making use of varied and inclusive approaches to consultation such as online and offline methods and publicizing consultation opportunities widely and with appropriate lead time, including at subnational events in different parts of the country. It also means taking steps

26. For a historical review of VNR reporting on stakeholder engagement with a focus on lessons learned, Cf. Kindornay, Shannon; Gendron, Renée. (2020). [Multi-stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda implementation: A review of Voluntary National Review Reports \(2016–2019\)](#). New York: UN DESA. Cf. Wayne-Nixon, Laurel, Wragg-Morris, Tanya, Mishra, Anjali, Markle, Dawson, and Kindornay, Shannon. (2019). [Effective multi-stakeholder engagement to realize the 2030 Agenda](#). In: Good Practice in 2030 Agenda Implementation Series. Vancouver and Ottawa: BCCIC and CCIC.

to include marginalized groups and their representatives and ensuring that information is available in a timely manner in local languages, where appropriate, and accessible to all including those with disabilities. As stated in the SDG Accountability Handbook written by The Transparency, Accountability and Participation Network (TAP Network) "There should be targeted outreach and strategies for specific groups – for instance, through dedicated consultations, events, meetings, workshops or activities that allow a specific group to participate and express their views freely, and active measures should be taken to accommodate the special needs of groups"²⁷ – such as providing childcare services for parents or ensuring that meetings occur after school for children and young people. As capacity for stakeholder engagement varies by country, there is also a role for development partners to support developing countries in this context. A comprehensive approach to stakeholder engagement and participation would also entail that inputs and contributions would have weight in decision-making processes around planning and establishment of national priorities, policy and law-making, as well as monitoring and evaluation. These kinds of fully inclusive approaches to participation should be based in co-creation or at the very least in comprehensive and structured consultation processes, with the government providing constructive, clear, and timely justification as to where and why it didn't include specific inputs from civil society.

Key recommendations for good practice



Support capacity development of civil society, including marginalized and vulnerable groups as well as the grassroots organizations representing such groups, to participate in opportunities for stakeholder engagement and promote accountability for 2030 Agenda implementation.

2.3.3. Engagement in defining national priorities

Part of a whole-of-society approach to 2030 Agenda implementation is developing a shared, national vision for implementation that reflects priorities from stakeholders across society. This approach supports broad-based, democratic ownership over the nationalization process. Most of the countries that report having engaged stakeholders in the definition of national priorities did so in the context of the formulation of their long or medium-term development plans – with 55% of reporting countries in 2022 (24 out of 44 countries) noting consultations on national priorities with non-state actors either within the implementation process at-large or in the context of the VNR process. From a quantitative standpoint, this represents an increase in relation to the two previous years, as the figures regarding countries pointing to consultations to identify national priorities were 31% in 2021, and 49% in 2020. That said, 2022 numbers also constitute a decrease compared to 2019 (89%), and 2017 (69%), but stability in relation to 2018 (57%). Although VNRs in 2022 show an improvement in relation to 2020 and 2021, this quantitative finding must be tempered, given that the VNRs rarely provide further details on the nature and scope of the consultations, and to what extent the different stakeholders were able to make their contributions, convey their visions and influence the process.

27. SDG Accountability Handbook, TAP Network, p.81 10 (2018)

Key recommendations for good practice



Ensure inclusivity and participation in the nationalization of the SDGs, including the creation of national targets and indicators, in line with the principles of the 2030 Agenda.

Overall, in the VNR reports that referred to non-state actors' participation in the definition of national priorities, there is a tendency to provide scarce information that would enable a full understanding of the nature and scope of consultation processes – specially regarding which stakeholders governments engage with and how. For example, in the case of **Belarus**, the VNR report mentions consultations with members of the Sustainable Development Council but no further information is made available regarding the nature and scope of the consultation, and the degree of detail regarding the members of the Council that were engaged is minimal. Likewise, in the **Philippines**, the VNR asserts that the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) was formulated through a process of public consultations that allowed the integration of inputs from a variety of stakeholders and communities, without providing more granular details on the process. In **Djibouti**, the prioritization process was carried out with support of UNDP, and is presented as having included government, parliament, development partners, private sector, and civil society.

There are also a number of examples where additional details were provided on the process of consultation. In the case of **Andorra**, the VNR states that a national survey on the SDGs was conducted for the population to vote on the national priorities of the SDGs. As a result, the majority of the participants considered as the priorities the following SDGs: SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), followed by SDG 13 (fight against climate change) and SDG 3 (health and well-being). In **Luxembourg**, the government launched a national consultation for the elaboration of the 3rd National plan for sustainable development, in which various stakeholders (civil society, federations, companies, etc.) were consulted on the priority fields of action established by the government to ensure sustainable development in the country, within the framework set by the 2030 Agenda. In **Greece**, even though there isn't an overarching development plan or SDG strategy available, there is a set of National Action Plans on different themes (Persons with Disabilities, Rights of the Child, Women, LGBTQ+), which included stakeholders' consultations, but Greek civil society asserts that these consultations were rushed and limited in substance. That said, the VNR did provide a venue for the government to enable a wide range of stakeholders to provide their visions regarding national priorities on sustainable development. In **Malawi**, the SDGs are mainstreamed into the MW2063 strategy and its 10-years implementation plan MIP-1. In this context, civil society reports that a wide multi-stakeholder consultation process did take place at the national, regional, and local level, with the creation of the PECGs (Pillar and Enabler Coordination Groups) as a venue for the continuation of multi stakeholder cooperation. In **Montenegro**, a range of regional consultations were organized for the formulation of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, which is confirmed by civil society in their independent report. Finally, the **El Salvador** VNR states that it used the VNR process in order to prioritize the SDGs, by organizing a series of SDG-focused workshops on SDGs 1, 5, 8, 10 and 16.

In the cases of **Argentina, Botswana, Grenada, Jamaica, Suriname, Switzerland, Togo, Pakistan, Somalia and São Tomé and Príncipe and Uruguay**, there is no explicit reference to the engagement of non-state actors in the identification of national priorities.

2.3.4. Engagement to carry out VNRs

Key recommendations for good practice

Solicit verbal and written inputs from all stakeholders in the preparation of VNR reports and provide stakeholders with an opportunity to review and comment on the first draft through public consultation.

The 2030 Agenda includes a commitment to participatory follow-up and review. The Secretary-General’s voluntary common reporting guidelines encourage governments to provide information on how they carried out VNRs in their reports. As shown in previous reviews of VNR reports, governments tend to include this information, however, the level of detail can vary significantly. Governments take a variety of approaches in this regard, including consultations, soliciting written inputs and commentary on draft reports and including non-state actors in drafting teams. To support Member States to carry out participatory VNRs, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) prepared a 2021 edition of the [Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews](#). A [2022 edition](#) is also available for the countries that presented a VNR report during the 2022 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

A case study in good practice: Non-state actors’ engagement in developing Pakistan’s VNR report + twinning peer-learning process

Pakistan’s VNR asserts that a broad consultation process was organized in the context of the formulation of this second VNR:

Several meetings with federal ministries and other stakeholders were held both virtually and in person. The Federal SDGs Unit and SDGs Section teams organized these meetings to discuss the challenges faced and opportunities available in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, between September 2019 to December 2021. Federal ministries were provided a template to map progress and challenges on relevant indicators in consultation with provincial governments, reporting progress from a baseline (2014-15) and since the first VNR in 2019.

Within the VNR-formulation process, Pakistan and Sri Lanka participated in a twinning exercise under the guidance of the Regional UN Economic Commission for Asia-Pacific UNESCAP – thus opening multiple avenues for long-term South-South cooperation on the SDGs.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Pakistan’s VNR report.



According to the Civil Society report, the VNR process was inclusive, and the government engaged CSOs, private sector and academics at a greater level than in the past. However, the recommendations of the CSOs are not included in the VNR report. The VNR report was also not shared with CSOs in a timely manner for their review and inputs.

Furthermore, while there was a twinning process for inclusive VNRs between Pakistan and Sri Lanka, facilitated by UNESCAP, neither the Government of Pakistan nor the Government of Sri Lanka engaged CSOs in this twinning process.

Pakistan Development Alliance and its member organizations remained engaged in country level processes – however the recommendations that were formulated were not considered for the VNR report. Therefore, a parallel process was prepared for the development of a CSO Spotlight report and VLR. These processes were respected by the government.

Source: View from AWAZ/Pakistan Development Alliance, after consultation for the present report.

Countries in 2022 reinstated a positive trend that had been emerging in recent years regarding non-state actor engagement in VNRs as standard practice, after a temporary drop in 2021.²⁸ In 2022, 41 out of 44 countries (93%) provided information on how multiple stakeholders were engaged in the VNR process, an improvement compared to the 81% that provided this information in 2021. Some countries mentioned making use of both offline and online consultation formats, as had been the case in previous years.

Aruba, within the joint Dutch VNR mentions that stakeholder consultations in the context of the VNR were brought online after a COVID-19 surge. In **Argentina**, a series of virtual consultations were held, and the VNR included boxes written by different stakeholders. In **Botswana**, a decentralized consultation process was deployed, while in **Lesotho** multi-stakeholder workshops were organized. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the VNR states that the drafting process included several meetings with the sectoral ministries, development partners, the private sector and civil society – including academia. This work allowed for a first draft of the VNR. In **Liberia**, the government asserts that the VNR was developed broadly based on evaluation reports prepared by all stakeholders involved in the SDG implementation process. In **Malawi**, the process was inclusive and involved the main multi-stakeholder governance structures – like the National Steering Committee and the thematic working groups, now called PECGs-, as well as specific constituency-based consultations, focusing on women, children, youth, the elderly, as well as persons with disabilities and albinism. In **Eritrea**, the focus of the VNR on SDGs 3 and 13 implied constituting two multi-stakeholder

28. In 2021, 34 out of 42 countries presenting full VNR reports (or 81%) provided information on how multiple stakeholders were engaged in the VNR process. In 2020, 44 out of 45 countries (98%) presenting full VNR reports (two countries, Barbados and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines were exempted from these figures as they only presented main messages) referred to whether consultations and/or non-state actor engagement in the VNR. In 2019, 45 out of 46 countries (98%) reported engaging non-state actors in the VNR, while this figure had been 43 out of 46 countries (93%) in 2018, and 34 out of 45 countries (76%) examined in 2017.

working groups, with a level of involvement from stakeholders qualified as ‘substantive’. In **El Salvador**, the VNR asserts that the VNR process was carried out through three consultation modalities: Sector workshops (multi stakeholder in nature); Interviews with institutions; Workshops with the government and the United Nations system. In **Jamaica**, the VNR mentions that the report-formulation process was guided by a stakeholder engagement plan, which included a process of consultation that engaged government partners, private sector, academia, and civil society – with the participation of over 600 participants that were engaged through meetings and conferences, a community engagement series targeting civil society representatives and service providers, as well as through two round tables on civil society and private sector participation in implementing the SDGs

The inclusion of non-state actors in drafting VNR reports – either as part of the official drafting team or through the inclusion of dedicated chapters or subsections prepared by non-state actors – was not frequently mentioned in 2022 VNR reports. Only in the case of **Andorra** does the VNR state that the drafting process for the report was inclusive, as the drafting group included actors from the public sector, parliament and mayors, civil society and citizens’ rights organisations, private sector, and the Andorran population as a whole through the national SDG survey. That said, the VNR from **Greece** included messages from a wide range of stakeholders (civil society platforms, persons with disabilities, private sector), as did the VNR from **Latvia** (with a focus on academia). In **Djibouti**, the National Steering Committee included a civil society representative from each of the country’s regions, although it’s unclear whether the NSC mandate included drafting the VNR, providing technical support or only validating the report.

Key recommendations for good practice



Include non-state actors in institutional mechanisms responsible for the VNR and drafting the VNR report, and advocate for civil society reports to be given recognition and status in the United Nations’ High-level Political Forum (HLPF) process.

2.3.5. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement

The COVID-19 pandemic had less of an impact on the 2022 VNR cycle – reflecting the fact that the pandemic situation had significantly improved since the beginning of the year. With regards specifically to stakeholder engagement, only 14 out of 44 countries (32%) included information on the effects of the pandemic in 2022, compared to 43% of the countries reporting in 2021. Among those who did report in 2022, most referred to impacts and changes on VNR reporting, with a lower number of countries reporting on overall engagement in terms of governance mechanisms. One specific example was **Andorra**, where the multistakeholder consultation structure, the Open Working Group, wasn’t able to function because of the pandemic. In terms of the VNR experience, countries mostly referred to the need to use virtual means to carry out participation and engagement, and to the disruption of planned consultations or other forms of engagement, including meetings being delayed, postponed, or cancelled. Only **Aruba, Ghana** and **Latvia** reported conducting most consultations online. In **Djibouti**, the VNR mentions that a delegation composed of members of the Steering

Committee and the government's technical secretariat was supposed to travel to another country that had presented a VNR at least two times, in order to learn good practices in the field of system coordination and data collection, but a video conference had to be held instead.

In 2022, among the key impacts, 8 out of the 14 countries (54%, versus 50% of 2021 reporting countries) that included information on the impacts of COVID-19 on stakeholder engagement mentioned moving into online platforms, virtual meetings, or other forms of online engagement. In countries like **Argentina, Grenada, Jamaica, and El Salvador** the VNR consultation processes were completely held online. Conversely, only 2 out of 14 countries referred to planned engagements being cancelled, postponed, reduced, or put on hold, which represents 14% of the countries reporting on the pandemic impacts and is also less than the 33% of countries mentioning those aspects in 2021.

The fact that fewer countries reported on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement in 2022 could be interpreted as showing a greater level of adaptation, as well as an overall improvement of the situation. But such lack of reporting might also point to an opposite direction, in which countries might be overlooking the importance of participation, or prioritizing engagement with groups that have access to online tools, which would ultimately exclude a considerable number of stakeholders, or using the pandemic as an excuse to prevent engagement and participation from happening. Any of these scenarios would hamper the path to a whole-of-society approach towards 2030 Agenda implementation.

2.3.6. Recommendations

- **Follow good practice in multi-stakeholder engagement by ensuring that approaches are timely, open and inclusive, transparent, informed and iterative.**
- **Support an enabling environment for multi-stakeholder engagement through appropriate legislation, regulation and the creation of policies that comprehensively and unambiguously set out how engagement will occur, as well as the scope of mandates – with clear links to the policymaking and monitoring processes.**
- **Create and report on formal mechanisms to ensure regular and inclusive stakeholder engagement.**
- **Engage diverse stakeholders in the selection of national priorities and partner with non-state actors to reach the furthest behind.**
- **Develop a range of opportunities for multi-stakeholder engagement in VNRs including through online and in-person public consultation, soliciting inputs to and feedback on draft reports, and inclusion of non-state actors as partners in carrying out the review and drafting the VNR report.**
- **Ensure that stakeholders continue to be engaged even in light of challenging situations (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic) by promoting resilience and finding alternative –and as much as possible, equally inclusive– ways through which to secure participation.**



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3. Policies for 2030 Agenda implementation

This chapter covers four aspects related to policies towards 2030 Agenda implementation. The first one refers to the 2022 reporting countries' conduct of baseline or gap analysis to inform implementation strategies. The second section focuses on the incorporation of the 2030 Agenda into national frameworks and policies, including the extent to which countries have integrated the Agenda's principles, such as human-rights based approach, universality, intergenerational responsibility, planetary boundaries, and leaving no one behind. The third section of this chapter addresses the topic of nationalizing the 2030 Agenda, looking into how countries have defined national priorities and established national targets and indicators. The fourth section focuses on integration and policy coherence, and examines how countries have reported on the SDGs and how they covered policy coherence for sustainable development. All the four sections are followed by lists of recommendations.

3.1. Key Findings

3.1.1. Baseline or gap analysis

- **Conducting assessments:** In 2022, more than half of the reporting countries (61%, or 27 out of 44 countries) reported completion of a baseline or gap assessment of either all or some SDGs – an improvement compared to 2021 (52%).

3.1.2. Incorporation of the 2030 Agenda into national frameworks and policies

- **SDGs integration:** In 2022, most of the countries (93%) reported integrating the SDGs into national policies, a similar level to the 93% of the countries that reported on this subject in 2021.
- **2030 Agenda principles:** Reporting countries continue to refer more to the SDGs than to the broader 2030 Agenda and its transformational principles. Among these principles, leaving no one behind continues to be well established and referred to in 2022 VNR reports, with 96% of the countries (42 out of 44) mentioning the principle (almost as many as in 2021), and there has been a steady trend in the number of countries pointing to human rights-based approaches, intergenerational responsibility, and planetary boundaries, as well as mentions to the principle of the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda.

3.1.3. Nationalizing the 2030 Agenda

- **National priorities:** Seven years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, 34 out of the 44 countries (77%) reported on National priorities being formulated, which constitutes a significant decrease from the 91% that reported in 2021. This represents an even bigger decrease in comparison to 2020 (with almost 96% of the countries). As in two previous years, priorities related to social outcomes and economy were most commonly cited, followed by the environment. Culture continues to be the least mentioned national priority.
- **National targets and indicators:** In 2022, 68% of countries (30 out of 44) provided some information on the selection of national targets and indicators, which represents a small increase in relation to the 62% of countries in 2021. Most countries reported selecting both national targets and indicators, with 25 of the 30 (77%) countries providing that information. This shows stability compared to 2021, when the figure was 77%.

3.1.4. Integration and policy coherence

- **SDGs reporting:** In 2022, 32 out of the 44 countries (73%) provided information on all 17 SDGs, which represents an increase in relation to the 21 out of the 42 countries (50%) that did so in 2021. A small increase with regards to the number of countries making applicable linkages to all three aspects of sustainable development between the goals was also found, with 21 out of the 44 reporting countries in 2022 (or 47%) reporting on this, compared to the 40% that made references to applicable linkages in 2021. The percentage of countries giving equal attention to economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development in their VNR reports was stable, with 51% (50% in 2021, versus 49% in 2020). Although numbers registered small increases or remained stable, the absolute numbers still highlight an overall worrisome trend in relation to SDG reporting, regarding the way the integrated nature of the agenda is embedded within implementation and reporting processes.
- **International agreements:** Reporting on linkages between the 2030 Agenda and relevant international agreements continues to show mixed results in 2022 over 2021, with the Paris

Agreement on climate change continuing to be the most frequently cited agreement (in similar numbers as 2021), and global aid/development effectiveness agendas the least mentioned one.

- **Policy coherence:** Countries referring to policy coherence for sustainable development in 2022 registered an increase in relation to both 2021 and 2020, with 61% of reporting countries mentioning the concept. In 2022, 23 countries (or 52%) examined the impacts of their foreign and/or domestic policies on the realization of the SDGs globally, modestly continuing the upward trend started in 2021 (45%), which is a positive sign.

Figure 6: Positive signs and worrisome trends regarding policies for 2030 Agenda implementation



3.2. Baseline or gap analysis

Baseline and gap analyses typically examine policy alignment and integration, as well as data availability and baselines for 2030 Agenda implementation. These assessments inform decision-making, policy processes, programming, as well as efforts to improve data availability. In the context of SDG implementation, gap analysis should also encompass process-related variables, such as the level of coordination between ministries and agencies, as well as the spatial dimension, by gauging the level of integration and coordination between levels of administration (national, regional, local).

Regarding policy and data availability parameters, in 2022, more than half of the reporting countries (61%, or 27 out of 44 countries) reported completion of an assessment of either all

or some SDGs – an improvement regarding 2021 (54%), and consistent with 2020 numbers.²⁹ Moreover, among the 27 countries that did report on carrying out a gap analysis or a baseline study, 24 assessed all the SDGs, which represents 55% of all reporting countries, an increase compared to 2021 (31%).

In the case of São Tomé and Príncipe, the VNR reports suggest an assessment is planned. In terms of gap analysis based on data availability, the Netherlands carried its analysis in 2016 through its National Statistics Office (Statistics Netherland), assessing the availability of data for UN indicators. The analysis showed that data is available for a third of the global indicators and the VNR asserts that the situation has improved since, going so far as to cover 50% of the global indicators. Lesotho’s VNR also mentions that the country has carried out a gap analysis based on data availability, having prioritized 152 indicators relevant to the national context (out of 244) – and finding available data for 81 of these indicators. Andorra, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Switzerland, and Luxembourg carried out a form of gap analysis, looking at comparative statistical progress, challenges and available policies, including regarding Covid-19, on their VNRs. In Latin-America, Argentina’s VNR mentions social, gender, infrastructure, and access to water gaps without providing information on how they were identified or defined; whereas in El Salvador, the VNR only notes that the baseline year for SDG progress-assessment is 2015.

Key recommendations for good practice



Assess policies, data availability and baselines to inform prioritization and nationalization of the 2030 Agenda and ensure an evidence-based approach to implementation. When submitting a subsequent VNR report, indicate if and how relevant assessments have been updated.

In terms of the content of assessments, out of the 27 countries that conducted assessments for either all or some of the SDGs, all provided information on what had been analyzed, although the degree to which the content and results of said assessments were detailed varied greatly. The most common type of assessment noted in VNR reports related to measuring progress based on policy and data assessments, with 18 out of 27 countries, or 67%, which represents an increase compared to 2021 and 2020 numbers.

29. In 2020, 64% of countries indicated they performed an assessment for all or some SDGs. In 2019, 79% of reporting countries provided this information. In 2018, 70% of countries noted that they had carried out an assessment or planned to, while in 2017, the figure was 84%, versus 62% in 2016.

Figure 7: Types of baseline or gap assessments listed in 2022 VNR reports



As noted in previous *Progressing National SDG Implementation* reports, some VNR reports for 2022 that included an assessment of policies also provided information regarding the extent to which the SDGs and their targets are aligned or integrated into national policies, with some countries providing details on the percentage of targets aligned. For example, **Sri Lanka** details in its VNR that 38% of the SDG targets are fully aligned with its updated Public Investment Plan (PIP). The analysis also included a mapping exercise that assessed how SDGs relate to the different themes of the PIP, as well as to the 10 key policies of the National Policy Framework – without going into further detail. Successive VNRs seem to have provided a venue for assessing the state of SDG implementation in the country. In **Jamaica**, the country’s analysis showed a high level of alignment between the national development plan (Vision 2030 Jamaica) and the SDGs. This was confirmed in 2016 when a Rapid Impact Assessment (RIA) conducted by UNDP to inform the development of Jamaica’s Road Map for implementing the SDGs identified a 91.3% alignment between Jamaica’s development agenda centred on Vision 2030 Jamaica and the SDGs. In **Ethiopia**, the completion of the second Growth and Transformation Plan 2015–2020 gave the government the opportunity to conduct an SDG-based needs assessment, as well as a baseline assessment to establish where the country stands regarding selected indicators. **Botswana**’s VNR also mentions having assessed the degree to which SDGs targets and indicators are mainstreamed into policy planning and frameworks at national and subnational levels. However, as in many cases with the 2022 VNR reports, although some of the data showed that assessments had been carried out, information on how aligned policies were or how much data is available was not detailed.

A case in good practice: Kazakhstan and Jamaica use of Rapid Impact Assessment tool in mapping SDG-integration within national development plans and national budget



According to its VNR, Jamaica's position on the SDGs demonstrated a high level of alignment between Vision 2030 Jamaica and the SDGs. This was confirmed in 2016 when a Rapid Impact Assessment (RIA) conducted by the UNDP to inform the development of Jamaica's Road Map for implementing the SDGs identified a 91.3 per cent alignment between Jamaica's development agenda centred on Vision 2030 Jamaica and the SDGs. The process to develop the Road Map was based on a partnership between the Planning Institute of Jamaica and UNDP, utilizing the Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) approach.

Kazakhstan's VNR mentions that the country assessed the level of integration of the sustainable development goals and targets into the documents of the national planning system (NPS) to identify gaps using the rapid integrated assessment tool (RIA) tool. In 2019, a Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) of budget programs of the Unified Budget Classification of the country was carried out. This included a Climate Budget Tagging (CBT), the development of a mechanism of child-focused budgeting, and a gender analysis in the areas of education, healthcare, and social protection.

Source: Adapted from Kazakhstan and Jamaica's VNRs

A small number of countries included some degree of information regarding gaps identified in 2022. Some are process-related, such as in the case of **Lesotho**, highlighting gaps in communication and information, which ought to be addressed in order to enhance vertical and horizontal integration within the public administration. Others highlight data gaps, like **Aruba**, with the territory noting in its dedicated section within the VNR of the Kingdom of the Netherlands that data gaps exist regarding gender, environment and peace and security. In the case of **Montenegro**, the 'Conclusion' section of its VNR includes a summary of progress and gaps identified regarding each SDG – both from a policy outcomes/gaps and data availability standpoints. Important data gaps are particularly highlighted regarding environmental protection (SDGs 14 and 15).

Malawi leveraged its VNR in order to establish a snapshot of where the country stands regarding SDG implementation and data availability, with significant progress on SDGs 2, 3, 4 and 6, lags regarding SDGs 1, 10 and 15, as well as significant data gaps regarding SDGs 11, 12 and 16. **Andorra** also used the VNR as a gap analysis of sorts, with policy gaps identified around reform of the public pension system, gender-based violence, integrated water management, energy efficiency and renewable energies, among others. The same goes for **Cote d'Ivoire**, where policy gaps were found on a number of SDGs including: SDG 1: the average annual income of heads of households has fallen by an average of 47.2% and the number of additional households falling below the poverty line is estimated at 32%; SDG 2: According to the analysis of extreme poverty and its determinants produced by the INS, 7.6% of the population is food insecure; and SDG 3: Postnatal consultation coverage remains insufficient although it has increased from 20.13% in 2016 to 42.39% in 2020. In **Cameroon**, gaps identified through the VNR process include education (qualitative and quantitative inadequacy of infrastructure and teachers), Gender-based violence exacerbated by the pandemic (nearly

62% of women and girls were exposed to domestic violence in 2020), as well as the increase in the price of basic necessities. In **Jamaica**, the VNR enabled the country to identify access to technology, education outcomes, wealth, gender, and rural-urban infrastructure as the main gaps for SDG implementation. **Senegal** and **Switzerland** VNRs also identified a broad range of gaps.

3.2.1. Recommendations

- **Conduct an assessment that identifies gaps in existing policies and programs, examines data availability, and sets out baselines from which to measure progress and assess where additional efforts are needed.**
- **National Audit Institutions and National Human Rights institutions can provide valuable ongoing assistance in the identification of process-related and right-based gaps.**
- **Articulate how the assessment was conducted and provide a summary of the gaps identified for each goal.**
- **Ensure that the gap analysis also encompasses process-related variables, such as the level of coordination between ministries and agencies, as well as the spatial dimension, by gauging the level of integration and coordination within and between levels of administration (national, regional, local).**
- **For countries presenting a subsequent VNR report to the HLPF, identify where progress has been made since initial policy and data assessments and provide information on changes between reporting years at national and subnational levels and for the furthest behind.**

3.3. Incorporation of the 2030 Agenda into national frameworks and policies

National frameworks and policies set the overall direction for 2030 Agenda implementation and provide guidance to government institutions and other stakeholders. Incorporation of the 2030 Agenda includes the SDGs as well as the Agenda's transformative principles, including commitments to a human rights-based approach, intergenerational responsibility and leaving no one behind. The review of VNR reports seeks to understand how governments have incorporated the SDGs as well as the guiding principles of the 2030 Agenda.

A case study in good practice? Pakistan's integration of the SDG framework into its medium-term national strategic roadmap



The SDGs are embedded in Pakistan's national policies and plans – with Pakistan Vision 2025 serving as a national aspirational roadmap to inclusive and sustainable development. It is designed to address the current and forthcoming socioeconomic and environmental challenges and set out realistic and ambitious pathways to ensure Pakistan's success in achieving the SDGs. Pakistan will take a step forward to alleviate extreme poverty by ensuring food security for all, living peacefully in better socioeconomic conditions and a clean environment for future generations. The 7 pillars of the vision resonate with one or more of SDGs and provide a balanced and solid platform for sustainable growth and development.

Source: From Pakistan's VNR report.s

Civil society validity check: On Pakistan's good practice described above



The Vision 2025 roadmap was first conceived and developed by the Planning Commission of Pakistan in November 2013 by the government in power at that time. Even though the original document was aiming for 2047 when Pakistan will be celebrating its 100th year of independence, the current document was revisited in 2016 after the adoption of the SDGs by the National Parliament of Pakistan. It has seven major pillars and SDGs are rightly aligned with all the seven pillars of Vision 2025.

CSOs were engaged in the processes, however the ownership of the document was limited when the government was changed after the general elections in July 2018. In April 2022, there was a further change in government and the second VNR in July 2022 was presented by the new government, who had been the initiators of Vision 2025. The document again appeared to the surface in policy meetings. In April 2022 immediately after taking office, the government organized a 'Turn Around' Conference to revive their commitments under Vision 2025. CSOs were invited to the conference along with the private sector as well as academics. Follow up strategies for SDGs implementation under Vision 2025 were discussed at greater length.

Source: Views from the AwazCDS/Pakistan Development Alliance, after consultation for the present report.

In 2022, the majority of the countries (93%) reported integrating the SDGs into national policies.³⁰ **Andorra** reported having developed a specific strategy for SDG implementation, the National Strategic Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in order to promote the formulation of new policies and measures in a more

30. For comparison purposes, 93% reported on SDG integration in policies in 2021, and 100% of countries reported integrating the SDGs into their policies in 2020. This figure was 79% of the countries reporting in 2019. Only half of countries reported similar approaches in both 2018 and 2017.

coordinated and inclusive manner. **Cote d'Ivoire** noted in its VNR that the country has mainstreamed the SDGs and African Union's Agenda 2063 in its National Development Plan 2021–2025, which is the operational translation of the vision "Côte d'Ivoire solidaire" and aims to accelerate the structural transformation of the economy to raise the country to the rank of upper middle-income by 2030. **Djibouti** asserts that the SDGs targets and indicators have been fully integrated into its National Development Plan (NDP) "Djibouti ICI" 2020–2024, as well as in the 2017 National Strategy and Action Programme for Biological Diversity (NBSAP). In **Luxembourg**, the SDGs serve as the framework for the 3rd National Plan for Sustainable Development (NPSD), which is also named "Luxembourg 2030", and encompasses the policies and measures of all ministries and administrations - united at the operational level in the Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development (CiDD) in order to steer and evaluate governmental actions according to the SDGs and their associated targets.

In **Sudan**, the VNR asserts that the SDGs were integrated in the PRSP [Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper], which pursues inclusive economic growth although the extent to which this document effectively informs policymaking is unclear given the current political situation in the country. In **Cameroon**, the VNR asserts that the National Development Strategy 2030 is aligned to the SDGs, aiming to promote sustainable, inclusive, and solidarity-based development. In **El Salvador**, the VNR lists a series of national strategies and policies on social development, early childhood, agricultural master plan, gender equality plan, environmental evaluation, among others, which intend to mainstream the SDG into public policies. **Grenada, Suriname, Togo** and **Jamaica** also state a very close link between their national development plans and the SDG through its main pillars and implementation roadmaps. In Latin America, **Argentina** and **Uruguay** don't have national development plans, which implies that the SDGs are incorporated through government policy programs and national budgeting.

Among the 41 countries that provided information around SDG integration, 30 countries, or 73% (compared to 95% in 2021), reported having incorporated the SDGs into national development plans and related policies and frameworks. Among these, 6 also highlighted the use of a specific national SDG implementation strategy. Conversely, **Andorra, The Netherlands** and **Switzerland** noted the creation of a national strategy to implement the SDGs without referring to national development plans. Overall, although these findings for 2022 show a decrease from 2021, they confirm a general mid-to-high range trend in integrating national development plans and related policies and framework.

Key recommendations for good practice



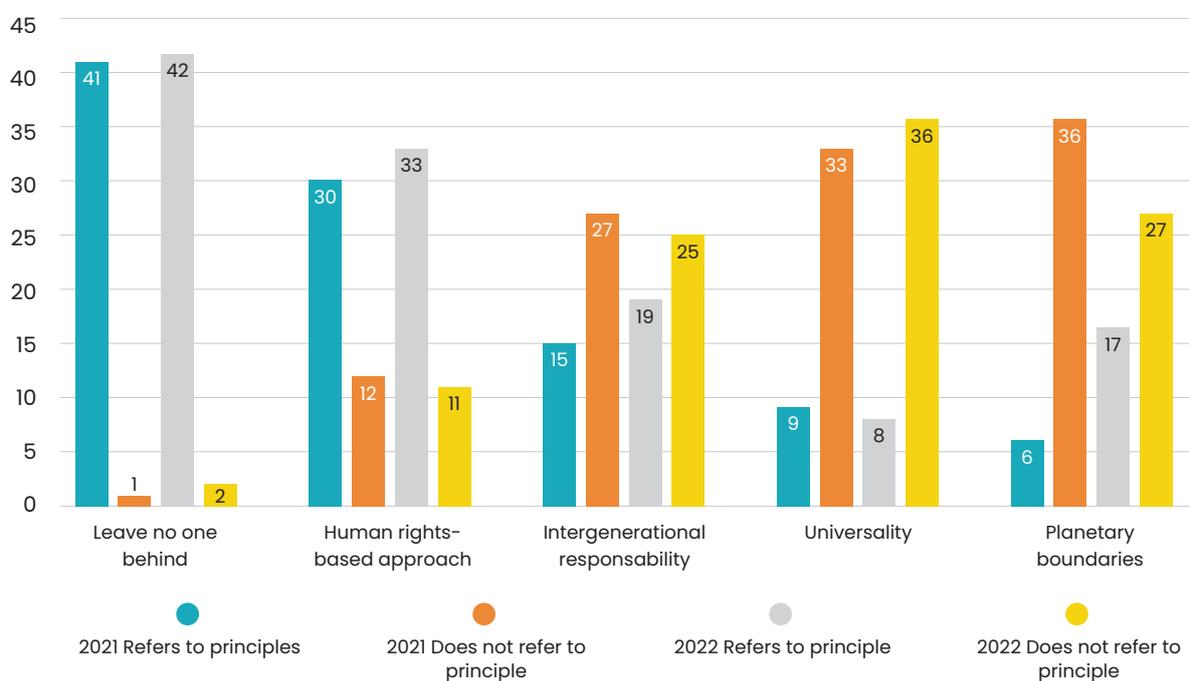
Integrate 2030 Agenda priorities into national policies and frameworks and develop a roadmap to accelerate implementation.

3.3.1. Integrating the 2030 Agenda principles

The principles of universality, human rights, integration, partnership, inclusivity, pursuing development within planetary boundaries, intergenerational responsibility and leaving no one behind are critical foundations of sustainable development. These principles embody the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and serve as enabling elements to crystalize the transformative ethos of the SDGs and its implementation process. The assessment of VNR reports looks at whether these reports mention the principles of the 2030 Agenda, including human rights-based approaches, leaving no one behind, universality, intergenerational responsibility and planetary boundaries.³¹

As shown in Figure 8, there is an impressive level of consistency between the numbers from 2021 and 2022. The principle of leaving no one behind continues to be well established and referred to in 2022 VNR reports, with 96% of the countries (42 out of 44) mentioning the principle (almost identical to 2021) – the exception being **El Salvador**, that did not explicitly refer to leaving no one behind in its VNR.³² The second most mentioned principle in 2022 was the human rights-based approach, with 75% of the countries (33 out of 44) referring to this principle or having some degree of a human rights focus, slightly up from the 71% mentioning this principle in 2021.³³

Figure 8: References to 2030 Agenda principles



31. Other principles are captured in the sections that follow through the examination of integration, stakeholder engagement and partnerships.
 32. For comparison purposes, the percentage of countries mentioning leaving no one behind in previous years was 98% in 2021, 92% in 2020, 98% in 2019, 89% in 2018, and 87% in 2017.
 33. The percentage of countries referring to a human rights-based approach was much lower in 2020 and 2019, with only 28% and 8% of the countries (4 out of 47) mentioning this principle respectively. In 2018, the percentage was 13% (6 out of 46 countries), and in 2017 it was 23% (10 out of 43 countries).

Some countries that did clearly state a human rights-based approach are **Aruba** and **Luxembourg**. Other countries didn't mention or defined their Human-Rights based approach, but implicitly showed a human rights focus by mentioning their adherence to human rights agreements and treaties, like **Eritrea, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan** (which also states that human rights-based approach will be one of the key pillars of its national strategy on Female Genital Mutilation), the **Netherlands, Uruguay** and **Kazakhstan**. Others reference it in the context of their national development plans (**Liberia**), specific national plans on Human Rights (**Jordan**) their constitution, persons with disabilities or educational programs (**Andorra**), in institutional arrangements (in **Côte d'Ivoire**, where the Technical Unit for SDG monitoring is composed among other by members of the National Council for Human Rights) or more generically (**Argentina, El Salvador, Latvia, Jamaica, Suriname** and **Sri Lanka**). **Switzerland** mentions human rights as one of the guiding principles of its Foreign Economic Policy Strategy.

In 2022, the third most mentioned principle of the 2030 Agenda was intergenerational responsibility, to which 43% of the countries (19 out of 44) made reference, showing an increase compared with the numbers from 2021, when 32% of countries reported on this principle.³⁴ In terms of the principle of planetary boundaries (the fourth most mentioned principle), 39% (17 out of 44) of countries either mentioned it explicitly or made references to some of the components of the concept, an increase compared with the 21% of the countries reporting on it in 2021. Only **São Tomé and Príncipe, the Netherlands, Cameroon, Malawi, Andorra, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Djibouti** and particularly **Eritrea** refer to this principle explicitly in one way or another – mainly regarding a sustainable use of natural resources. **Jordan** and the **UAE** referred to this principle by emphasizing the importance of involving young people in the path to sustainable development. **Argentina, El Salvador** and **Uruguay** make generic, vague references to the principle.

Key recommendations for good practice



Explicitly link the implementation of each SDG to relevant national and international human rights frameworks. Establish policies and institutions to ensure a human rights-based approach to sustainable development in 2030 Agenda implementation.

With regards to specific ways of addressing the nine planetary boundaries identified by the Stockholm Resilience Center³⁵ (or load on the planet as stated by the VNR reports from the **Netherlands** and its territory of Aruba) in 2022 VNRs, in the case of **Aruba**, the SDGs related to the planet are grouped (SDGs 6, 12, 13, 14 and 15), and in the case of the **Netherlands**, the concept of load on the planet is mentioned in the context of unsustainable production and consumption patterns that need to be tackled. In El Salvador's VNR, when referring to

34. For intergenerational responsibility, the percentage was 28% of the countries (13 out of 47) reporting in 2020, 38% of the countries (18 out of 47) reporting in 2019.
 35. These include stratospheric ozone depletion, loss of biosphere integrity (biodiversity loss and extinctions), chemical pollution and release of novel entities, climate change, ocean acidification, freshwater consumption and the global hydrological cycle, land system change, nitrogen and phosphorus flows to the biosphere and oceans and atmospheric aerosol loading. 2% of the countries (1 out of 47) reporting in 2020 had mentioned these somehow.

demographic, technological, and climate-related changes, impacts on SDGs achievement at the national level, planetary boundaries transgressions are explicitly mentioned – broadly identifying mitigation and adaptation measures such as pollution control, disasters risk management, social protection, nature-based solutions. In the case of **Eritrea**, although the concept is not referenced directly, the VNR mentions the need to foster responsibility for a shared planet. **Argentina, Cameroon, Grenada, Togo** and **Uruguay** make references to ocean acidification, climate change, drinking water management, and land use, without explicitly identifying them as planetary boundaries.³⁶

Finally, the principle of universality was the least referred to in 2022, with references included by 20% of the countries (8 out of 44), similar to the 18% that did so in 2021.

As with previous reporting years, VNR reports show that countries tend to focus on their assessments by addressing each SDG mostly in isolation, rather than considering the broader 2030 Agenda as an integrated model of development, underpinned by transformational principles. However, as shown in Table 1, the comparison between 2021 and 2022 shows consistency in the mention of each principle – although on intergenerational responsibility, universality and planetary boundaries, mentions are consistently low. That said, the way human rights-based approaches and leaving no-one behind are consistently mentioned at very high rates would imply that these principles have permeated and established themselves within polities, at least at a discursive level, which is a positive, although superficial, trend.

Table 1: Percentage of VNRs mentioning 2030 Agenda principles in 2021 and 2022

Principle	2021	2022
Leaving no one behind	98%	96%
Human rights-based approach	71%	75%
Intergenerational responsibility	32%	43%
Universality	21%	20%
Planetary boundaries	14%	39%

3.3.2. Recommendations

- **Fully integrate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into national and subnational plans and strategies based on an evaluation of existing policies, approaches and progress to identify gaps, adapt policies and target areas where further progress is needed especially for the furthest behind groups.**
- **Operationalize the principles of the 2030 Agenda in approaches to implementation recognizing the universal, human rights-based and interlinked nature of the agenda. VNR reports should demonstrate how approaches to sustainable development are transformative based on the principles of the 2030 Agenda and not just the SDGs.**

36. Planetary boundaries was equally mentioned by 32% of the 2020 reporters (15 out of 47), only 2% of the countries (1 out of 47) reporting in 2019, and by 6% of the countries (3 out of 46) reporting in 2018.

- **Base plans and strategies in human rights, including by linking activities to international and national human rights commitments and establishing appropriate institutions and mechanisms to support a human rights-based approach to sustainable development.**
- **Undertake actions with reference to and respect for planetary boundaries and responsibilities towards future generations, including avenues for intergenerational partnerships.**

3.4. Nationalizing the 2030 Agenda

While successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires that governments work towards realizing all SDGs, governments are expected to implement the 2030 Agenda in line with their national context and priorities. This means identifying national (and local) priorities, targets, and indicators through inclusive and participatory processes. These processes help countries situate implementation in light of baselines and existing progress, generate ownership and adapt the goals to country-specific contexts.

3.4.1. Priorities

Seven years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, 34 out of the 44 countries (77%) reported on National priorities being formulated, which constitutes a decrease from the 91% that reported on national priorities in 2021.³⁷ In 2022, **Argentina, Grenada, Jamaica, Sudan, Suriname, Malawi** and **Kazakhstan** did not articulate national priorities in their VNR – although in the case of Malawi these can be traced to their long-term strategy MW2063 and its 10-year implementation plan, MIP-1.

As was the case in previous reporting years, how countries articulate their priorities vary. Most countries identify and highlight national priorities either by establishing them as key pillars for their national development plans or in their strategy for SDG implementation. In **Andorra, Latvia, Djibouti, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Lesotho, Pakistan, Ethiopia**, the national development plans are clearly structured following identified national priorities. These include: People First, Growth, Governance, Security, Entrepreneurship, Knowledge Economy, and Connectivity in the case of **Pakistan**; job creation, inclusive growth, and further poverty reduction in the case of **Lesotho**; and quality economic growth and shared prosperity, economic productivity and competitiveness, technological capability and building digital economy, sustainable development financing, private sector-led growth, resilient green economy, institutional transformation, gender and social inclusion, access to justice and efficient public services, and regional peacebuilding and economic integration in the case of **Ethiopia**. Most of these pillars refer to broad priority areas that encompass several SDGs.

37. This also represents a decrease in relation to 2020, when 45 out of 47 countries (almost 96%), 89% of countries reporting in 2019, and 76% of countries reporting in both 2018 and 2017.

Other countries, like the **Netherlands**, use a system of interlinked entry-points to guide policymaking: Circular agriculture, biodiversity, and the food system; Wellbeing; A circular inclusive economy and use of raw materials; A fair climate and energy transition, climate adaptation and water; Inclusive society, equal opportunities, and open government; Global responsibility and policy coherence for development. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, national priorities within the National Development Plan are identified as 'accelerators', whilst in **Jordan**, the driving priority is building back on environmentally protective grounds, which implies environmental evaluations of investments. In **El Salvador**, within the first five-year period of SDG implementation (fourth quarter of 2015–2019), the decision was made to consider the achievement of 9 specific SDGs and follow up on 117 targets (88 of them related to the prioritized SDGs and another 29 related to the remaining SDGs). The Government of El Salvador, in 2020, decided to prioritize the SDGs. Considering the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided to maintain the SDG already prioritized to ensure continuity in the State's efforts to comply with its international and national obligations. That said, the government also added SDG 8, alluding to decent work and economic growth, to the set of outstanding objectives, in recognition of the relevance of the state duty to guarantee the right to employment as one of the welfare areas most affected by the economic-sanitary crises in times of COVID-19. **Switzerland's** VNR identifies sustainable consumption and sustainable production, climate energy and biodiversity, equal opportunities and social cohesion as national priorities; whereas Togo has identified 42 urgent priority targets to be addressed in the NDP – further detailing that the Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) tool developed by UNDP has made it possible to determine related specific policy accelerators. **Argentina's** VNR is unclear regarding the process for identifying national priorities, as well as regarding the nature of these national priorities, despite mentioning them throughout the report.

Recommendation for good practice



Include all dimensions of sustainable development in the selection of national priorities.

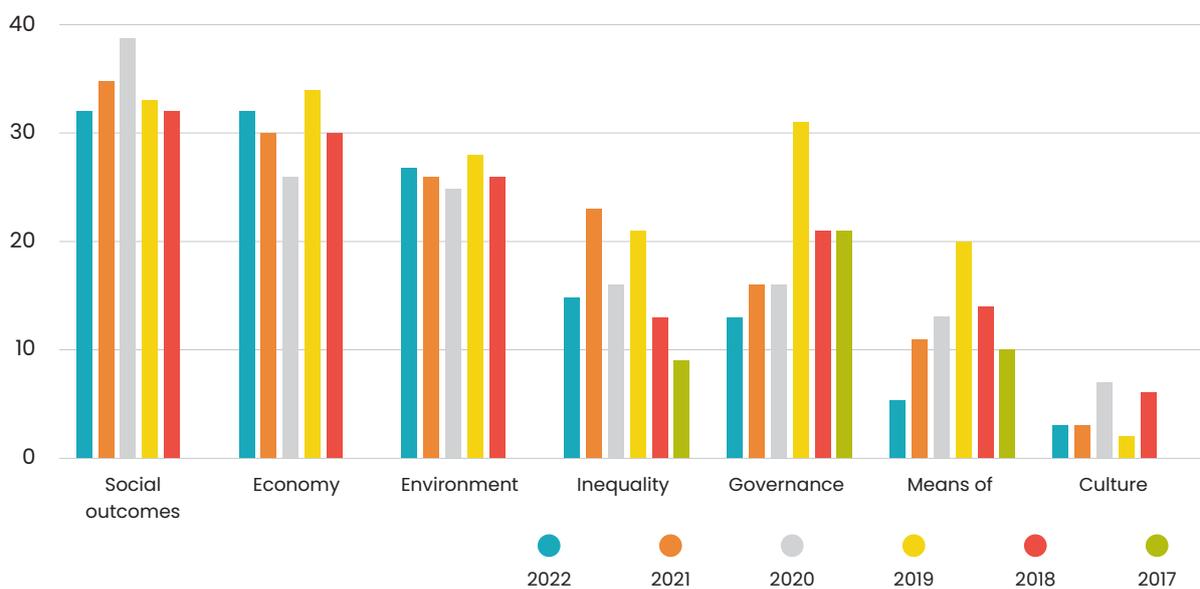
Out of the 36 countries selecting national priorities in 2022, 26 provided at least some level of detail on such priorities, with the exception of countries like **Togo, Kazakhstan, Gabon, Liberia, Equatorial Guinea** and **Argentina**, which mentioned national priorities in some way, but without specifying them. Among those countries, the majority either referred only to the SDGs under review at the HLPF, or did not consistently refer to specific SDGs, as had also happened with the countries reporting in 2021 and 2020. Those who did so in 2022 include **Andorra, Aruba, Belarus, Botswana, Cameroon, Curaçao, Djibouti, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Jordan, Latvia, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Mali, Montenegro, Pakistan, the Philippines, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sint-Maarten, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Togo**, and the **UAE**.

Overall, the comparison with previous years (Figure 9) showed a decrease in countries' references for most priority areas.³⁸ However, in 2022, the most commonly cited priorities continue to be those related to social outcomes (32 countries) and economy (32 countries),

38. Information for 2017 is incomplete or unavailable for four (4) of the priorities categories, and therefore comparison is only possible for that year with regards to inequality, governance, and means of implementation.

as it has been the case since 2018. A slightly lower number of countries prioritized the environment in 2022 in comparison to 2021, but the environment has continuously been the third priority for countries since 2018. The number of countries prioritizing inequality issues significantly decreased in 2022 in relation to 2021. In terms of countries reporting governance issues as a priority, numbers reduced from 2021 to 2022. Only six (6) countries pointed to issues related to the means of implementation (or SDG 17) in 2022, showing this continues to be treated as a low priority for most countries since 2017. Finally, only a very limited number of countries (3) pointed to culture as a priority overall, which is consistent with previous years.

Figure 9: Priorities for 2030 Agenda implementation



A case study in good practice: Highlighting interlinkages within national priorities based on the Global Sustainable Development Report framework in the Netherlands



The UN Global Sustainable Development Report (2019) recommends focusing on a number of systemic challenges, defined as entry points, which encompass several SDGs and largely correspond to the Netherlands’ current priorities. The progress on SDGs in the Netherlands VNR report is framed around 6 entry points.

To prepare for the VNR, six SDG dialogues were organised for the purpose of obtaining input from stakeholders, including representatives from all tiers of government, civil society organisations, the private sector, young people, educational institutions, and the research community. As part of this exercise, the Netherlands’ implementation of the SDGs was viewed through the lens of six systemic challenges (‘entry points’), in order to identify policy priorities and interlinkages.

This made it possible to consult a large number of stakeholders and consider different viewpoints, resulting in critical, open and constructive dialogues. The many useful insights gained – and seeing things from each other’s perspective – provide a sound

basis for the years ahead. The VNR contains summaries of these dialogues, including stakeholders' viewpoints.

The 6-entry points are:

Entry point 1: Circular agriculture, biodiversity and the food system; Entry point 2: Wellbeing; Entry point 3: A circular inclusive economy and use of raw materials; Entry point 4: A fair climate and energy transition, climate adaptation and water; Entry point 5: Inclusive society, equal opportunities and open government; Entry point 6: Global responsibility and policy coherence for development

Source: Excerpts adapted from the VNR report from the Netherlands.

In terms COVID-19, some of the 2022 VNR reports noted how the pandemic impacted national priorities. As some examples, among those who provided information in this regard, **Liberia** introduced modifications to its national targets to retain the emphasis on 'reaching the furthest first and leaving no Liberian behind' without providing further details on the nature of those modifications.

3.4.2. National targets and indicators

The selection of national (and local) targets and indicators links national priorities to monitoring and follow-up and review. In 2022, 68% of countries (30 out of 44) provided some information on the selection of national targets and indicators, which represents an increase in relation to the 62% of countries in 2021.³⁹ Most countries reported selecting both national targets and indicators – 23 of the 30 (77%) countries that provided information. This shows a similar level compared to 2021, when 77% of countries also reported having identified both targets and indicators.⁴⁰

Andorra, Gabon, Sudan and **São Tomé and Príncipe** are among the countries that did not provide information on the selection of national targets and indicators. Information available in the VNR reports for **Senegal, Luxembourg, Eritrea**, and **Sint-Maarten** were unclear on whether the countries had developed national targets and indicators. Territories like **Aruba, Curaçao**, as well as countries like **Ghana** and **Sri Lanka** report to have only formulated targets; others like **Belarus, Ethiopia, Greece, Liberia, Lesotho, Montenegro**, and the **Netherlands** report to have formulated only national indicators. **Latvia, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti**, and **Pakistan** report to have produced both targets and indicators. **Andorra** reported the formulation of a new Statistical Plan that will include the provision of national SDG-related indicators. **Jordan** reported that national gender and biodiversity targets and indicators have been developed. In **Argentina**, a process of national adaptation

39. In 2020, this percentage was 77%, and in 2019, this percentage was 60%.

40. In 2020, 34 out of 36 countries reported identifying both targets and indicators, in 2019 17 out of 29 countries did so. In 2018, only seven (7) countries provided such information.

of goals was completed between 2020 and 2021, which led to the inclusion of 8 national goals. In **Grenada and Suriname**, the process was related to a subregional effort, with the formulation of 125 core indicators within CARICOM, which are used as the baseline for the development of national indicators or the alignment of the national development indicators. **Uruguay** states that the government uses national supplementary indicators, such as: Volume of production per unit of work according to the size of the agricultural/pastoral/forestry enterprise as a proxy indicator to the agricultural production volume, which is not produced in Uruguay.

A case study in good practice: Identification of super-accelerators for SDG implementation in Côte d'Ivoire through the MAPS methodology



Côte d'Ivoire's VNR asserts that through a series of workshops organized in the context of the VNR, multi stakeholder thematic groups assessed current strategies and public policies to identify and prioritize accelerators using the MAPS (Mainstreaming Accelerating and Policy Support) methodology.

The findings identified four challenges, 18 bottlenecks, and 65 accelerators, including 11 SDG super accelerators. These super accelerator are as follows: (i) promotion of decent and stable employment for all; (ii) promotion of gender equality and women's political and economic empowerment; (iii) extension of access to social protection and basic social services for vulnerable populations; (iv) strengthening the performance and sustainability of the agro-industrial fabric by relying on local products; (v) development of agriculture and inclusive value chains; (vi) strengthening of infrastructure to support growth; (vii) implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures; (viii) sustainable and participatory exploitation of forests and fishery resources; (ix) promotion of community development and effectiveness of decentralization; (x) consolidation of social cohesion through reconciliation, national solidarity and peace; and (xi) strengthening of performance, transparency and interaction between state institutions and structures.

The MAPS methodology thus enabled an assessment of public policies by identifying the challenges and bottlenecks for the SDGs implementation and understanding where more efforts are needed.

Source: adapted from Côte d'Ivoire's VNR

3.4.3. Recommendations

- **Identify national sustainable development priorities that address all dimensions of sustainable development, recognizing the interlinkages between society, the economy, the environment and governance.**
- **Develop national targets and indicators through an inclusive and participatory process to complement global targets and indicators. This could be a first and key input**

from multi-stakeholder Sustainable Development Council or Committees, and their associated working groups.

- **In order to generate national ownership of the VNR process, present VNR reports for debate at the national level (e.g. in national parliaments and official multi-stakeholder sustainable development councils/commissions) before presenting at the international level (e.g. United Nations' High-level Political Forum).**

3.5. Integration and policy coherence

The 2030 Agenda covers economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, alongside issues related to governance, culture, inequality and partnership. It has implications for domestic and foreign policies as well as efforts at the local level. Importantly, the 2030 Agenda links to the international human rights framework and a range of international agreements related to issues such as climate action, gender equality, financing for development and aid effectiveness, among others. All stakeholders face the challenge of ensuring an integrated and coherent approach to 2030 Agenda implementation. Implementation must promote synergies to realize progress on all dimensions of sustainable development at local, national and global levels while addressing trade-offs.

3.5.1. Reporting on the SDGs

While the [High-level Political Forum \(HLPF\)](#) has an annual theme and sometimes establishes specific thematic goals, countries are encouraged to report on all 17 SDGs. This facilitates assessment of how well countries are progressing on the SDGs. In 2022, the HLPF theme was focused on 'Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', seeking to highlight how recovery-driven policies can contribute to generate the right conditions for reversing the impacts of the pandemic and promoting sustainable development pathways that would help to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda. The focused goals were Goals 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 14 (life below water), 15 (life on land) and 17 (partnership for the goals).

In 2022, 32 out of the 44 countries (72%) provided information on all 17 SDGs (Table 2), which represents a significant increase in relation to the 50% registered in 2021.⁴¹ Only 3 countries provided information on the SDGs selected for thematic review, and 12 countries presented a limited set of country selected SDGs, which represents the same number as in 2021. Landlocked countries tend to fall into this category as they do not usually review SDG 14 (Life below water) – a finding less consistent in 2022 than in previous reviews of VNR reports, given that some landlocked countries report on SDG 14 based on the assessment

41. 33 out of 47 countries (70%) reported all SDGs in 2020, and in 2019 and 2018 the percentage was 59% of the reporting countries.

of inland bodies of water and rivers. In 2022, the only landlocked countries that didn't report on SDG14 were **Lesotho** and **Andorra**, although the latter country stated the importance of international collaboration on ocean protection.

Eritrea, Liberia, Lesotho, Philippines and Somalia provided assessments based only on a limited set of SDGs. **Sri Lanka** and **Italy** did not provide a goal-by-goal analysis, but rather an analysis based on selected SDGs in relation to the country priorities. In the case of Sri Lanka this was based on the National Development Plan in and in the case of Italy it was focused on the 5Ps approach prevalent in the National Sustainable Development Strategy.

Table 2: Goal-by-goal reporting in the 2022 VNR reports

SDG coverage	Countries		
All SDGs examined (31 countries)	Andorra Argentina Belarus Cameroon Côte d'Ivoire Dominica Djibouti El Salvador Equatorial Guinea Ethiopia Eswatini	Gambia Ghana Greece Guinea-Bissau Jamaica Jordan Kazakhstan Latvia Malawi Mali Montenegro	Netherlands Pakistan São Tomé and Príncipe Senegal Sri Lanka Sudan Switzerland Togo UAE
Limited set of country-selected SDGs examined (8 countries)	Eritrea Grenada Lesotho Luxembourg	Liberia Philippines Somalia Suriname	
HLPF SDGs selected for in-depth review examined (3 countries)	Botswana Gabon Uruguay		
No specific goal-by-goal analysis but rather analysis based on country priorities (2 countries)	Sri Lanka Italy		
SDGs examination not articulated in the VNR (1 country)	Tuvalu		

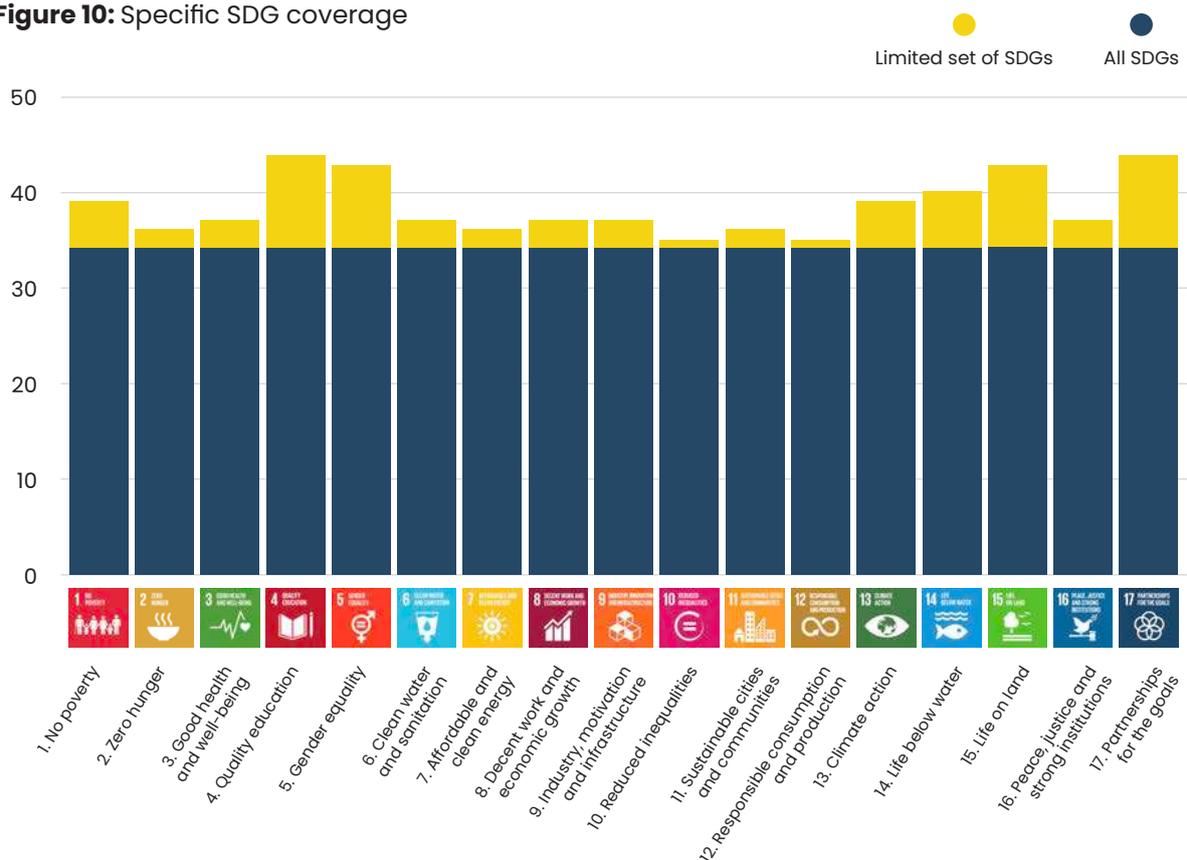
Recommendation for good practice



Provide a detailed assessment of all 17 SDGs, with appropriate linkages to all dimensions of sustainable development and reference to domestic and global efforts to realize the 2030 Agenda.

Figure 10 provides an overview of the goals most cited in VNR reports according to the approach taken to the goal-by-goal analysis. SDG 4 (Education), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals) were the most present in VNR reports that did not present an analysis covering all SDGs, which is consistent with the selected SDGs under review at the 2022 HLPF. **Argentina, Dominica, Grenada, Greece, Jordan, Malawi, Montenegro, Senegal, Sudan** and the **UAE** had a special section on the effects of the COVID pandemic, whereas **Gabon** and the **Philippines** integrated their goal-by-goal analysis assessments on recovery-driven policies for most SDGs.

Figure 10: Specific SDG coverage



The 2022 review shows a decrease in the proportion of VNR reports which included detailed overviews of the examination of SDGs, targets, and indicators. 23 out of the 44 reporting countries (or 52%) provided a detailed examination, a decrease from the 67% in 2021.⁴² Detailed examinations tend to include overall information on the status of a particular SDG, as well as policy changes, successes and challenges.

With respect to the integrated nature of the SDGs, the review of VNR reports also looks at the extent to which countries refer to linkages between the goals as well as coverage of all three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) overall in the VNR report. Apart from the detailed reporting on the SDGs, the review of 2022 VNR reports found a small increase with regards to the number of countries making applicable linkages to all three aspects of sustainable development between the goals, with 21 out of

42. In previous years, the percentages had been 50% in 2021, 79% in 2020, 89% in 2019, 65% in 2018, and 64% in 2017.

the 44 reporting countries in 2022 (or 47%), compared to the 40% that made references to applicable linkages in 2021. That said, this result still indicates that more than half of countries may not be working towards ensuring integration in their approaches to 2030 Agenda implementation.

Apart from the slight increase in the number of countries referring to linkages between the goals, 2022 VNR reports showed a steady trend in the number of countries giving equal attention to all three dimensions of sustainable development. Figure 11 provides an overview of the extent to which countries examined all three dimensions of sustainable development. 20 countries, or 45%, placed equal emphasis on the three dimensions of sustainable development in 2022.⁴³ Seven countries addressed all three dimensions of sustainable development but placed greater importance on the social dimension. **Eritrea**'s VNR had a more limited focus on the economic dimension, while **Argentina, Belarus**' and **Lesotho**'s VNRs showed less focus on the environmental dimension. Others showed a greater focus on the economic dimension, although touching on all three dimensions to some extent, like **Andorra, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Pakistan**.

Côte d'Ivoire, Uruguay and **Liberia**'s VNR had a greater emphasis on the social dimension, while **Botswana** and **Guinea-Bissau** showed a slightly greater focus on social and environmental dimensions, with **Djibouti** and **Luxembourg** doing so for the environmental dimension. **El Salvador, Suriname, Switzerland, Togo, Jordan, Sudan**, and the **UAE** seem to have placed an equal weight to each of the three dimensions. Overall, the review of VNR reports over 2017–2022 suggests stagnation in terms of the extent to which countries are reporting integrated approaches to implementing the SDGs.

Figure 11: Attention to social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in 2022 VNR reports

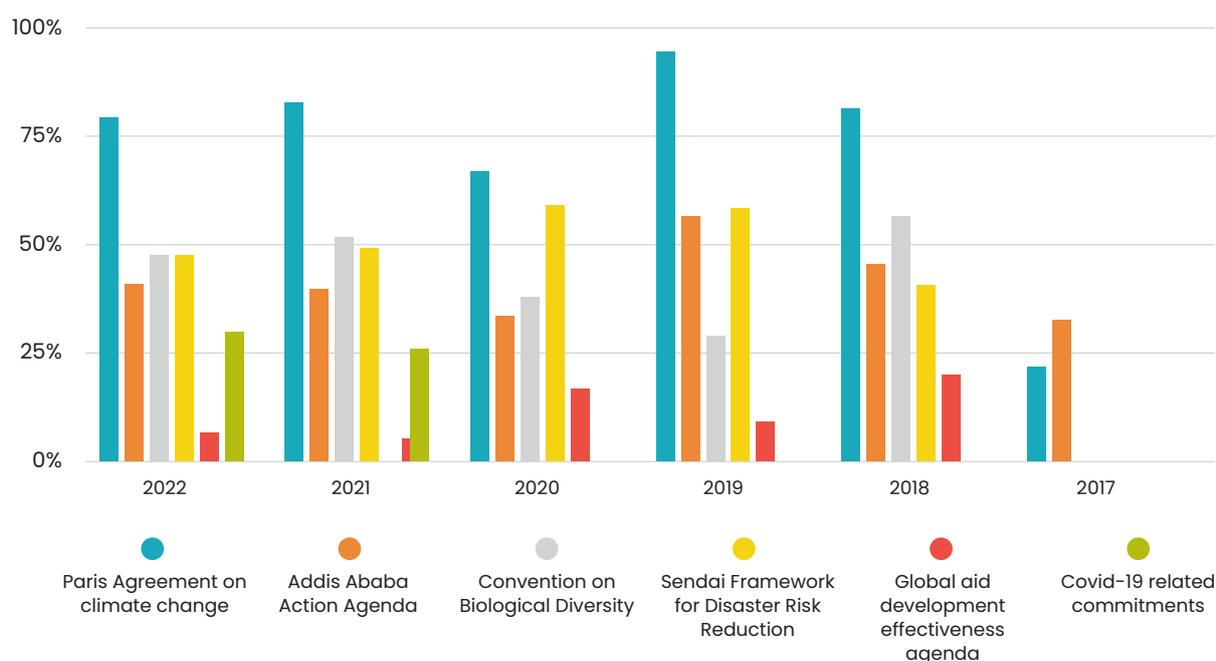


43. In previous years, these percentages were the following: 23 countries (or 49%) in 2020, 27 countries (or 57%) in 2019, 29 countries (or 63%) in 2018, and 33 countries (75%) in 2017.

3.5.2. Policy coherence for sustainable development

The review of VNR reports looks at the extent to which countries make linkages to international agreements related to the 2030 Agenda and policy coherence for sustainable development. There are many international agreements and frameworks that support implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The review examined references to climate change and the [Paris Agreement](#), the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#), the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#), the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) and the [global aid/development effectiveness agenda](#).⁴⁴ Given the significance of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review also included an examination of whether countries referred to international commitments related to responding to the pandemic, such as the [Access to COVID-19 Tools \(ACT\) Accelerator](#), the [Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations \(CEPI\)](#), [COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access \(COVAX\)](#), and the [Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization \(GAVI\)](#). Figure 12 shows linkages to international agreements related to the 2030 Agenda between 2017 and 2022, according to VNR reports.⁴⁵

Figure 12: Linkages to international agreements related to the



Overall, reporting on linkages between the 2030 Agenda and relevant international agreements showed stability or different degrees of decrease in 2022 compared to 2021.

The Paris Agreement on climate change continues to be the most commonly cited agreement in VNR reports. In 2022, 35 out of 44 countries (80%) made explicit reference to

44. The Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines for 2021 had encouraged countries to make specific reference to these agreements (and others) in the introductory section of the VNR reports. Same goes for the revised guidelines for 2022.

45. Information was not available for some of the components in 2017. Comparisons with that year's results were made whenever possible.

the Paris agreements, stable compared to the 35 out of the 42 reporting countries (83%) that mentioned the agreement in 2021. As with previous years, 2022 VNR reports tend to point to national climate policies, efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy and improved energy efficiency, efforts to reduce vulnerabilities to climate change and disasters, and mitigation and adaptation strategies.

When referencing the Paris Agreement, some countries also referred to education (**Curaçao** and **Lesotho**); adaptation efforts (**Djibouti, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Malawi, Pakistan, the Philippines, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Suriname, Switzerland**); or conservation initiatives (Andorra, Ethiopia). The significant increase in the number of countries that mentioned specific efforts around adaptation to climate change is certainly a positive development. In terms of other environment-related agreements, the review found that 48% of the countries reporting in 2022 referred to the Convention on Biological Diversity, stable from the previous year.⁴⁶ With respect to financing the 2030 Agenda and other means of implementation, VNR reports in 2022 remained stable in relation to 2020 in terms of references to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, with 41% of VNR reports referring to the Financing for Development agenda in 2022, a similar proportion to the 39% that did so in 2021.

In terms of COVID-19, a stable percentage of VNR reports referred to outward-facing responses to the pandemic, at 30%, compared to the 26% in 2021. The information included mentions of adapting their approaches to foreign assistance or commitments to global initiatives, including the ACT Accelerator, CEPI, COVAX, and GAVI. Countries referring to one or more of those commitments include **Greece, Latvia, the Netherlands** and **Switzerland** as contributors, and **Grenada, Somalia** and **Sudan** as beneficiaries. Given the significant impacts of the pandemic at the global level, countries should report their global actions alongside their domestic ones.

Key recommendation for good practice



Link the 2030 Agenda to relevant international agreements that support sustainable development to ensure coherency and synergies in implementation.

Beyond coherence with relevant international frameworks, implementation of the 2030 Agenda also depends on policy coherence for sustainable development. Domestic policies have an impact on the realization of sustainable development at home and abroad. In this context, policy coherence for sustainable development⁴⁷ is about ensuring that domestic policies maximize their positive contributions and minimize negative spillovers to sustainable development globally. The number of countries referring to policy coherence

46. With regards to references to the Convention on Biological Diversity, percentages from previous years were 52% in 2021, 38% of the reporting countries in 2020, 29% in 2019, and 57% in 2018.

47. This directly refers to Target 17.14 (Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development) and 17.14.1 (Number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence of sustainable development), although VNR reports may broach the topic of policy coherence in other parts of their VNR reports, and not only in the analysis of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

for sustainable development in 2022 registered an increase in relation to 2021, with 61% mentioning that concept.⁴⁸

Moreover, the majority of VNR reports continues to refer to policy coherence in the context of domestic policies. Some countries, like **Ghana**, made oblique references to policy coherence by pointing out efforts to ensure coherence in the way regional and international commitments are translated into actionable policies at the national level, including the SDGs, ECOWAS 2050, the African Union Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, the Sendai Framework, and the Paris Agreement. Others made references to policy coherence under different framings, such as the **Philippines**, that highlights policy coherence in the context of coordination between government agencies and non-state actors, through the newly created Stakeholder's Chambers. The **UAE** also makes a reference to the concept in the context of its domestic policies by mentioning that policy coherence should be achieved by using alignment mechanisms between national and subnational policies, as does **Suriname**, in the context of harmonizing sector strategies, policies and programs. Two of the primary focus areas of policy coherence under this framing are gender and youth policies.

In 2022, 23 countries (or 52%) examined the impacts of their foreign and/or domestic policies on the realization of the SDGs globally, modestly up from 45% in 2021, and significantly up from the 23% in 2020 and 26% in 2019. Among the 2022 reporting countries, **Andorra, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Luxembourg, Philippines, Montenegro, and Senegal** referred in some way to the assessment of its domestic policies on the realization of SDGs globally -mainly through the alignment of national policies with international frameworks-, compared to only 1 country in 2021. Conversely, no countries focused only on the impacts of their foreign policies on the SDGs globally, decreasing from 4 countries doing so in 2021.⁴⁹ In 2022, half of the countries assessing their policies regarding SDG outcomes (11 out of 23 countries) pointed to the impacts of both their domestic and foreign policies on the realization of the SDGs globally, which constitutes a small decrease in relation to 2021.⁵⁰

Latvia and the **Netherlands** note that Impact assessments of both domestic and foreign policies are systematically conducted. The impact assessment is carried out directly by parliament in the Latvian context, and by the government at the request of parliament in the Dutch context. In the specific case of the Netherlands, the analytical framework used is the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), and it is mentioned as having been established through the successful advocacy efforts of Dutch Civil Society Organizations. In the case of Ethiopia, its assessment on the contribution of domestic policies to the realisation of the SDGs globally is done by looking at the policies in place to enable the integration of refugees into the workforce. Its assessment of the contribution of foreign policies are linked to **Ethiopia's** involvement in peacekeeping missions in its immediate neighbourhood (Horn of Africa).

Regarding climate change, **Andorra** asserts that its domestic policies on mitigation are geared towards contributing to achieve the 1,5C global temperature rise target within reach.

48. Percentages related to policy coherence for sustainable development were 50% in 2021, 60% in 2020 and just over half of reporting countries (51%) in 2019.

49. This compares to 1 country in 2020, 8 countries in 2019, 15 countries in 2018, and 17 countries in 2017.

50. These numbers were 15 countries in 2021, 6 countries in 2020, 3 countries in 2019, 10 countries in 2018, and 11 countries in 2017.

Djibouti asserts that its environmental policies are also geared towards contributing to fighting global environmental processes like climate change, marine, land and air pollution, and the preservation of ecosystems. **Cote d'Ivoire** links the formulation of its domestic policies to its international commitments. Some countries reporting in 2022 provided a systematic analysis of their global contributions. **Luxembourg** mentions that although the country does not have much influence on global warming, its domestic policies aim to show the example at the global level, with emblematic measures such as free public transport (2020), a ban on glyphosate (2021) or a “sustainability check” of all new laws (2022).

Senegal's VNR asserts that the reflection on the impact of the country's domestic policies on global sustainable development efforts has begun. In **Switzerland**, the VNR states that the country's foreign policy is aligned with the SDGs, and on a more assessment-driven note, the report provides analysis on how national policies and programs support the advancement of the SDGs internationally.

Overall, VNR reporting for 2022 showed a small increase in the extent to which countries focused on policy coherence for sustainable development as a guiding framework for 2030 Agenda implementation, as well as regarding the analysis of both domestic and foreign policies on the realization of the SDGs globally.

A case in Good Practice? Greece's Special Parliamentary Coordinating Committee



The Greek VNR mentions that in order to ensure oversight of the SDG implementation process, a Special Parliamentary Coordinating Committee of the Hellenic Parliament is being put in place.

The Special Committee's mandate is to monitor the implementation of the SDGs, to review the associated government work and its progress, to provide guidance to fine-tune line actions and to ensure the mainstreaming of the SDGs in all legislative and policy frameworks, thus serving as a channel for mainstreaming policy coherence into policymaking processes.

The Coordinating Committee should include all the Presidencies of the thematically relevant Parliamentary Committees.

Source: Adapted from Greece's VNR

Civil Society Validity Check: On the Good Practice from Greece presented above



The process that is described in the VRN has not been widely communicated to CSOs. The specific details of implementing this approach and the results so far remain unknown to the majority of CSOs in Greece. Providing the relevant information to the interested stakeholders (including the CSOs) is the first step for not only achieving policy coherence in the policy making but also for allowing space for CSOs when it is needed. Regarding the cooperation and dialogue between the executive and the legislative branches, the effectiveness of their interaction cannot be assessed properly by CSOs as the information required is not accessible to wider external audiences.

Source: Hellenic Platform for Development after consultation in the context of this report

Key recommendation for good practice



Include information on global contributions to the SDGs alongside assessments of progress at national and subnational levels, recognizing the impacts of domestic and foreign policies.

3.5.3. Recommendations

- **Assess all 17 goals in VNR reports, respecting the indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.**
- **Ensure all dimensions of sustainable development are addressed in SDG implementation and VNR reporting. Linkages and synergies between the different dimensions of sustainable development should be clearly translated into policies, systemically supported through sound implementation structures and systematically included in reporting – all to help ensure clear integration.**
- **Link implementation of the 2030 Agenda to relevant international agreements that support 2030 Agenda implementation, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and global agreements on aid and international development effectiveness, including in VNR reporting – and ensure the provision of detailed information on how these international frameworks are translated into policies at the national level in a coherent way.**
- **Given the importance of the pandemics to the global context, future VNRs should include reference to international and global commitments and initiatives geared towards preventing and tackling new or evolving pandemics.**
- **Provide an assessment of domestic and global dimensions of sustainable development in the goal-by-goal analysis, demonstrating contributions to realizing the SDGs at home and abroad, and supporting policy coherence for sustainable development.**



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4. Implementing the 2030 Agenda

This chapter has six sections. The first one focuses on leaving no one behind and includes aspects such as understanding who is at risk of being left behind, efforts undertaken to address these groups, targeting domestic inequality, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on leaving no one behind. The second section addresses the topic of how 2022 reporting countries have raised awareness on the 2030 Agenda. The third section focuses on the topic of efforts at the local level (or localization) and includes an assessment around the mentioning of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) in the VNR reports. The fourth section broaches the theme of partnerships to realize the SDGs, and examines how countries have partnered with civil society, parliamentarians, the private sector, academia and experts, children and youth, other stakeholders (e.g. the media), and development partners. The fifth section of this chapter focuses on means of implementation, which include budgeting for 2030 Agenda implementation, international finance, trade, capacities for 2030 Agenda implementation (e.g. capacity development, technology, systemic issues), experiences in implementation (e.g. best practices, challenges, lessons learned, learning from others), and the impacts of COVID-19 on the means of implementation. Finally, the sixth section of this chapter focuses on measurement and reporting, including how countries have reported on data availability, efforts for data improvement, and national reporting practices on 2030 Agenda implementation. Each one of the six sections is followed by a dedicated list of recommendations.

4.1. Key findings

4.1.1. Leaving no one behind

- **Efforts to leave no one behind (LNOB):** In 2022, VNR reports from only 17 out of 44 countries (39%) indicated that efforts to LNOB were informed by existing data; an improvement compared to 2021 (24%).⁵¹ The same percentage, 17 out of 44 countries (39%) mentioned that additional data is required to leave no one behind, this is a similar level to 2021 (38%).
- **Reporting on LNOB:** In 2022, 96% of the reporting countries mentioned the principle of leaving no one behind (this remains high, the number in 2021 was 100%). Countries either provided information throughout their VNR report or included a dedicated chapter or smaller section on LNOB. 93% of VNR countries identified groups that are being left behind or at risk of being left behind, with persons with disabilities⁵² (82%), women and girls⁵³ (80% of the countries), children⁵⁴ (80%), the elderly (50%), and youth (50%) as the most often cited groups.
- **National policies and plans:** In 2022, 28 countries (or 64%) made explicit references to embedding leaving no one behind or efforts to address inequality and social exclusion within overarching development plans. This represents a significant decrease in the incorporation of the principle of leaving no one behind in the creation of national sustainable development policies – compared to the 84% in 2021.
- **Impact of COVID-19 on LNOB:** In 2022, 34 out of the 44 reporting countries (77%) provided information on the specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic from an LNOB perspective, a small decrease compared to the 36 out of the 42 reporting countries (or 86%) that did so in 2021.

4.1.2. Awareness-raising

- **Awareness-raising activities:** In 2022, information on awareness-raising activities was available for 81% of the countries, a similar percentage to most previous years covered by this analysis.

4.1.3. Efforts at the local level / Localization

- **Localizing the 2030 Agenda:** In 2022, 34 out of 44 (or 77%), provided information on their efforts to localize the SDGs, which shows a modest decrease compared to 83% of

51. Compared to 24% in 2021, 40% of countries in 2020 (19 out of 47 countries), 19% in 2019 (9 out of 47 countries), and 28% in 2018 (13 out of 46 countries).

52. Persons living with both physical and mental disabilities (e.g. mental illnesses, dementia, behavioural and developmental disorders) have been included in this category.

53. Some countries further specified this category by specifically mentioning pregnant women, divorced women, widows, and women with three or more children, for example.

54. Countries sometimes duly disaggregate children and youth as separate groups, sometimes they are presented as a cluster. We will be considering children and youth as distinct categories from this year onwards.

- countries in 2021. Additionally, 36% referred to integrating the 2030 Agenda into local plans and policies, this constitutes a small increase compared to 2021 (31%).
- **Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs):** In 2022, only 7 out of the 44 reporting countries (or 16%) mentioned VLRs, which compares to the 15 countries reporting about VLRs in 2021 (or 36%).

4.1.4. Partnerships to realize the SDGs

- **The role of non-state actors:** Among the 2022 reporting countries, 26 out of 44 countries (59%) mentioned contributions by non-state actors to 2030 Agenda implementation beyond consultation on priorities and participation in governance arrangements. This represents a considerable decrease compared to 2021, where 93% did so. Modest decreases were observed regarding the role of civil society, parliamentarians, the private sector, and academia, while the role of children and youth remained somewhat stable.
- **Civil society's contributions:** In 2022, 29 out of 44 countries (or 66%) provided such information, a significant decrease in relation to 2021, when 36 out of 42 countries (or 86%) did so. Data shows a continued prevalence of the role of civil society in implementing specific projects (19 countries) and participating in multi-stakeholder partnerships and/or initiatives to support 2030 Agenda implementation (10 countries). In the realm of awareness-raising though, the number of countries highlighting CSOs' actions of this nature increased, with 11 countries noting this element in 2022, as did the role of civil society in promoting accountability for 2030 Agenda implementation increased slightly, with 8 countries mentioning this aspect.

4.1.5. Means of implementation

- **Budgeting for 2030 Agenda implementation:** In 2022, 32 countries (73%) provided information on inclusion of the SDGs into national budgets, up from 62% in 2021
- **Means of implementation trends:** Although the manner in which the information is presented in VNRs varies greatly and is not always entirely clear as to the extent to which countries have costed and/or identified sources of finance, 23% of countries reporting in 2022 (10 out of 44 countries), seem to have both costed implementation efforts and identified stable source of finance (mostly through domestic resource mobilization, ODA, 'green finance' and public-private frameworks), a small increase in relation to 2021, when only 7 out of 42 countries (17%) did so. 14 countries out of 44 (32%) did not indicate that they have or plan to cost out implementation but have indeed identified sources of finance (compared to 35% in 2021).
- **COVID-19 on VNR reports and on means of implementation:** Among the 44 countries presenting VNR reports in 2022, 38 reported on the dimension of the impacts of COVID-19 on the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which represents almost 86% of countries (versus almost 91% of countries reporting in 2021).

4.1.6. Measurement and reporting

- **Data availability:** In 2022, only 19 out of 44 countries (43%) provided information on data availability, a small increase from 2021, when 36% did so, similar to 2020 (45%) and dropping from 2019 (76%) . For 2022, 9 out of 44 countries (20%) reported that data was available for less than 50% of SDG indicators but this is similar to the 17% of countries that did so in 2021.
- **National review processes:** In 2022, 28 out of the 44 (64%) countries provided some information on national level reporting, compared to 62% in 2021, showing stability in relation to previous years. Also, in a slight improvement from most previous years, VNR reports in 2022 were slightly clearer on who would prepare reports, this information was provided by 12 out of 46 countries (27%), slightly up compared to the 21% that did so in 2021, with Parliaments being the institution most often cited in VNRs as the overseeing body.

4.2. Leaving no one behind

The Secretary-General’s voluntary common reporting guidelines encourage Member States to include a chapter on leaving no one behind (LNOB) – in the understanding that building pathways to sustainable development implies, from an ethical perspective, the identification of sections of society that have been either historically marginalized or at risk of being marginalized within development processes. Ideally, it should also imply the direct involvement of these groups in the process of collective reflection regarding the different approaches that can address their needs and aspirations, since policies’ core principles and practicalities should not be established independently of the concrete life circumstances of a particular group within a given society.

In 2022, 98% of the reporting countries mentioned the principle of leaving no one behind (positive stability given that number in 2021 was also 100%). Most countries either provided information throughout their VNR reports (with variable levels of robustness), or a dedicated chapter or section on LNOB (extensions varied as well). Some representative examples in 2022 include the VNR reports from **Greece, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, São Tomé and Príncipe**, as well as the joint VNR from the Kingdom of the **Netherlands** (which includes dedicated LNOB sections for each territory, **Aruba, Curaçao**, and **Sint-Maarten**). **El Salvador** is the only country that did not mention the LNOB principle in its VNR.

Conversely, despite having referred to the LNOB principle, **Sri Lanka** only dedicated a section to it in the conclusion of its VNR, and the **Philippines** only referred to the principle in the context of the need for more granular data-generation to inform decision-making. In the cases of **Andorra, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Luxembourg** and the **UAE**, there was no dedicated chapter on LNOB, with only a paragraph on the subject. In the case of **Senegal**, a specific paragraph explains the strategy for leaving no-one behind that the country has formulated. **Switzerland** includes LNOB-specific assessments for various SDGs. Such examples show that although there has been a continuous upward trend in including the LNOB principle in VNR reports, findings suggest that in many countries the approach has been rather superficial and its application as a driving principle in policymaking very uneven- with some countries including the principle mainly as a checkbox activity. The quality of the information provided,

including data availability and the existence of dedicated or overarching programs, or the inclusion of the principle within national development plans and strategies, are essential for (truly) leaving no one behind.

Recommendations for good practice

Prepare a dedicated chapter on 'leaving no one behind' in VNR reports, detailing the overarching approach to LNOB developed by the country, highlighting processes, policies and results – and integrate information on specific efforts to leave no one behind in the goal-by-goal analysis.

A case study in good practice: Overview of the situation for vulnerable groups in Guinea-Bissau's VNR

Guinea-Bissau's VNR includes a table that provides an overview of all the vulnerable groups identified in the country, as well as the different types of exclusion each group could face in regard to discrimination, geography, vulnerability to external shocks, socio-economic status, and governance. This summary helps to better visualize and understand where the gaps are in terms of leaving no one behind policies and actions and where more efforts are needed to address these.

4.2.1. Understanding who is at risk of being left behind

The availability of disaggregated data is critical for informing efforts to LNOB. This issue is well recognized by the international community and across VNR reporting countries as shown by the attention given to increasingly disaggregated data in VNR reports submitted over 2016–2020. Reporting for 2022 indicated a decline in relation to 2020, but an increase compared to 2021. Overall numbers suggest that countries continue to face challenges in producing disaggregated data to monitor progress on leaving no one behind. In 2022, VNR reports from only 17 out of 44 countries (39%) indicated that efforts to LNOB were informed by existing data – an improvement compared to 2021 and similar to 2020.⁵⁵ The same percentage, 17 out of 44 countries (39%) mentioned that additional data is required to ensure the leave no one behind principle is addressed, similar to 2021 (38%).⁵⁶ On the other hand, a really concerning trend in 2022's VNRs is regarding gender disaggregated data, given that only 24% of reporting countries have gender-sensitive information available consistently.⁵⁷

Regardless of data limitations faced by countries, almost all countries or territories reporting in 2022 with full VNR reports⁵⁸ (41 out of 44 countries, or 93%) identified groups that are being left

55. 24% in 2021, 40% of countries in 2020 (19 out of 47 countries), 19% in 2019 (9 out of 47 countries), and 28% in 2018 (13 out of 46 countries).

56. Versus 13 out of 47 countries (28%) reporting in 2020.

57. This percentage compares to 60% in 2021, 57% in both 2020 and 2019 VNR reports.

58. This excludes Tuvalu which only presented main messages.

behind or at risk of being left behind. For some of these countries, the identification is implicit, which means that the VNR report does not explicitly mention the particular groups which are at risk of being left behind, but rather provides information that allows interpretation to infer that certain groups are vulnerable. Such an approach was taken by countries such as **Italy** and the **Netherlands** (including **Sint-Maarten**).

As shown in Figure 13, the 41 VNR reports identifying vulnerable groups in 2022 (93% of total reporters) compared to 41 countries (98%) in 2021, 45 countries in 2020 (96%), 46 countries in 2019 (98%), 42 countries in 2018 (91%), and 33 countries in 2017 (77%), suggesting that reporting on the main populations at risk of being left behind has maintained a positive trajectory in general. Only the **Philippines** doesn't identify clearly which groups are being left behind, besides referring generically to 'marginalized' populations, as does **El Salvador**. Identifying who is left behind (and why) enables countries to target efforts that work to ensure that all members of society benefit from progress on the 2030 Agenda – and involves these populations in the development process.

Figure 13. Identification of vulnerable groups

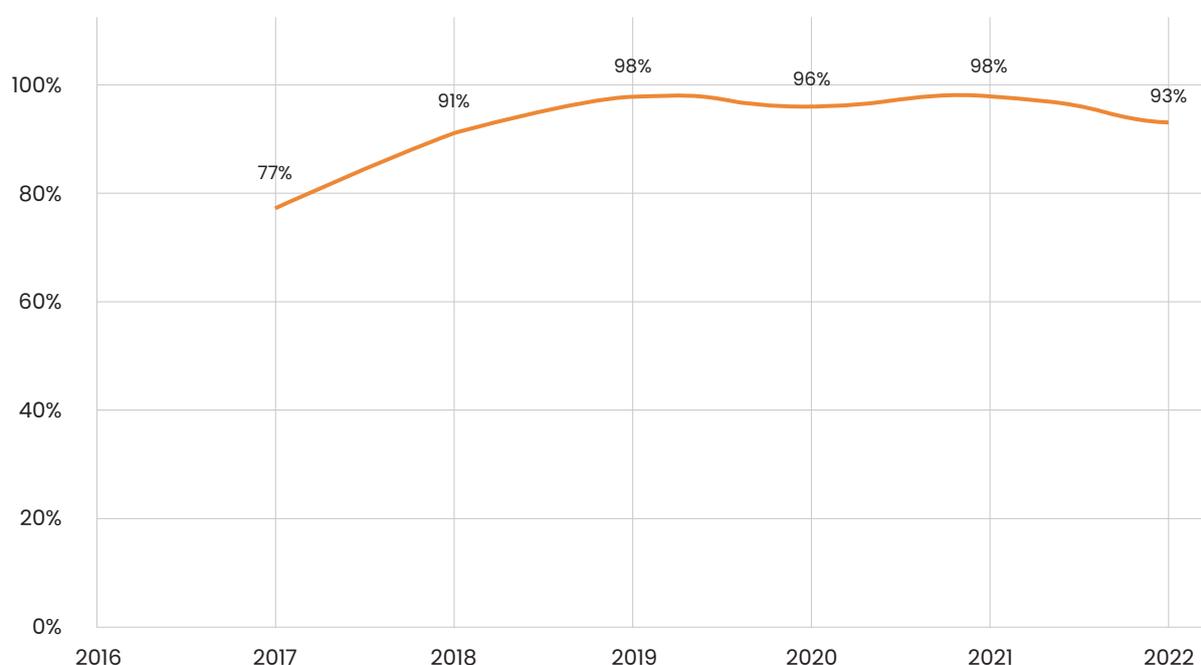


Figure 14 provides an overview of the main groups identified as vulnerable or being left behind in the 2022 VNR reports, with a comparison with data from previous years, when available. It shows that the groups identified as the most at risk of being left behind were persons with disabilities⁵⁹ (82%), women and girls⁶⁰ (80% of the countries), children⁶¹ (80%),

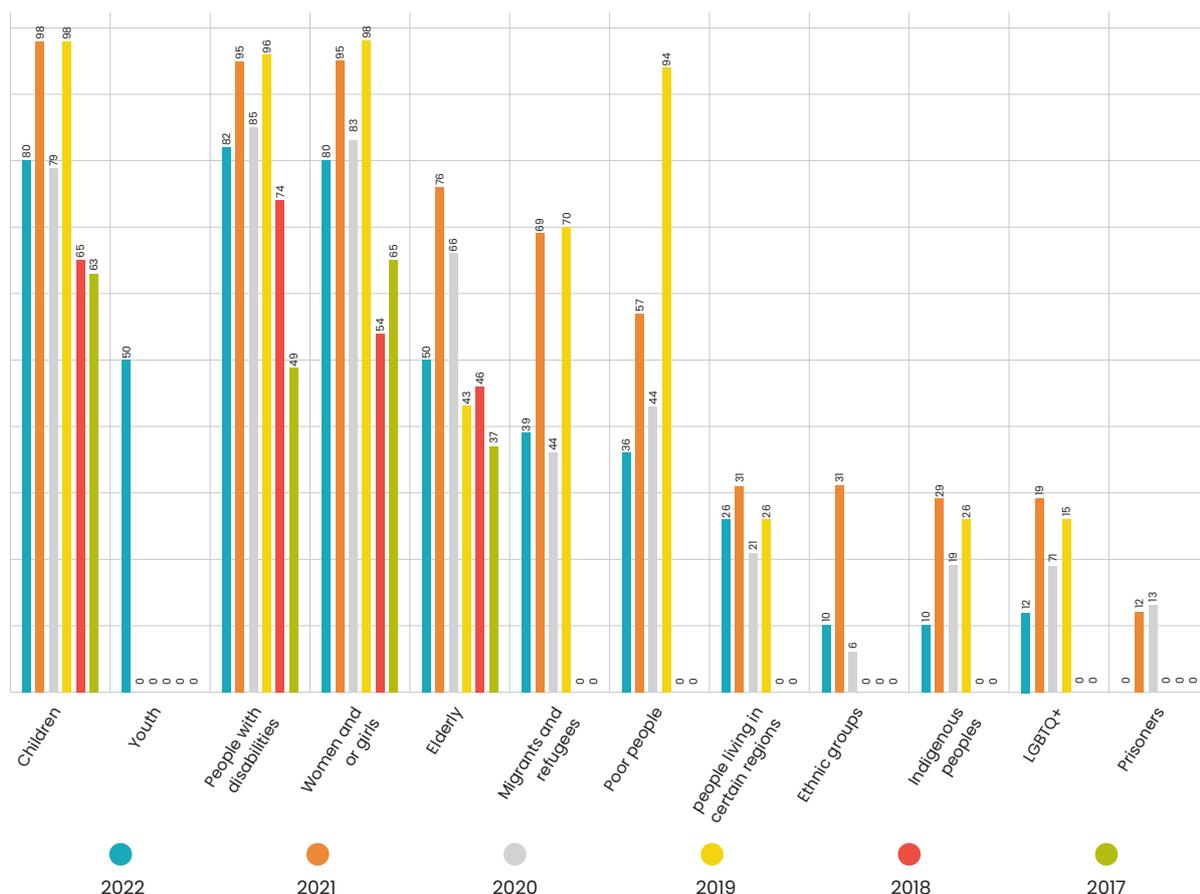
59. Persons living with both physical and mental disabilities (e.g. mental illnesses, dementia, behavioural and developmental disorders) have been included in this category.

60. Some countries further specified this category by specifically mentioning pregnant women, divorced women, widows, and women with three or more children, for example.

61. Countries sometimes duly disaggregate children and youth as separate groups, sometimes they are presented as a cluster. We will be considering children and youth as distinct categories from this year onwards.

the elderly (50%), youth (50%), migrants and refugees⁶² (39%), people living in poverty⁶³ (36%), people living in certain regions (26%), LGBTQ+ community (12%), ethnic groups (10%), and Indigenous peoples (10%). In comparison with previous years, 2022 VNR reports are consistent in identifying children, persons with disabilities, women/girls, the elderly and youth as the 5 major groups at risk of being left behind. The prevalence of these five groups has been present since the analysis of 2017 VNR reports.

Figure 14: Groups most commonly identified as vulnerable in VNR reports



In comparison with 2021, the 2022 VNR reports saw an overall decrease in the number of countries identifying most groups as being left behind or at risk of being left behind. Apart from the abovementioned 5 main groups, decreases in identification were also observed for the case of migrants/refugees, people living in poverty, people living in certain regions,⁶⁴ ethnic groups, and Indigenous peoples. Declines in identification also happened with the LGBTQ+ community, with 12% of the 2022 reporting countries mentioning this group (versus 19% in 2021), and prisoners, with no mentions in 2022 (down from 12% in 2021).

62. This category also includes references to internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless persons, and returnees.
 63. This category appears in many different ways in the VNR reports, such as the poor, poor people, the socio-economically disadvantaged, people living in extreme poverty, people with scarce resources, and the multidimensionally poor. Some VNR reports specified homeless people, who have also been included in the category of people living in poverty for the purposes of this analysis.
 64. E.g. rural regions, mountainous areas, areas of difficult access, island and coastal communities, and outer island inhabitants and peatland populations (from Latvia’s VNRreport).

Moreover, in addition to the groups identified in Figure 14, some countries presented more granular information about people at risk of being left behind, as shown in Box 5 below.

Box 4: Other groups identified as being / at risk of being left behind

- **Andorra, Belarus, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominica, Eswatini, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Jamaica, Latvia, Montenegro, the Philippines, Senegal, and Sri Lanka** mentioned the elderly – with specific programs like solidarity pensions designed to provide assistance in some of these countries.
- **Argentina, Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Dominica, Malawi, Sri Lanka, and Togo** made mention of youth around job inclusion, traineeships, and entrepreneurship support.
- **Andorra** and **Dominica** mentioned Unemployed and underemployed – with employment support programs and training opportunities.
- **Eswatini, Gabon** and **Liberia** referred to Widows and Orphans.
- **Kazakhstan** mentioned families with many children, which receive an allowance regardless of their level of financial income
- **Guinea-Bissau** and **Malawi** referred to albino populations
- **Argentina** mentioned afro-descendant populations
- **Andorra, Lesotho, Guinea-Bissau, the Netherlands, Montenegro and Switzerland** mentioned LGBTQI+ populations
- **Latvia** referred to peatland populations; **Ethiopia, Eritrea** mentioned to populations living in remote areas; **Lesotho, Eswatini, Guinea Equatorial, Argentina and Botswana** referred to people living in rural areas
- **Pakistan** referred to transgender people
- **The Philippines** referred to overseas Filipino workers
- **The Gambia** mentioned people living with HIV

4.2.2. Efforts to leave no one behind

Although not all countries included a dedicated section on leaving no one behind in their VNR reports, 42 the 44 countries presenting full VNR reports in 2022 provided information on efforts related to at least one vulnerable group – with **Luxembourg** providing only a broad mention in the context of human rights. This represents stability in relation to previous years – with only **El Salvador** not mentioning it at all.⁶⁵ Regarding the specific issue of gender equality, numbers are almost identical to previous years – with 41 out of 44 countries reporting efforts in that realm.⁶⁶

The review of 2022 VNR reports found a predominance of countries pointing to new and existing specialized programs for LNOB, and to a lesser extent, universal programs such as

65. For comparison purposes, the number of countries referring to efforts related to at least one LNOB group was: 41 out of 42 countries in 2021, 44 out of 47 countries in 2020, 46 out of 47 countries in 2019, 41 out of 46 countries in 2018, and 33 out of 43 countries in 2017.

66. In terms of realizing gender equality, numbers from previous years were: 44 out of 47 countries in 2020, 46 out of 47 countries in 2019, and 40 out of 46 countries in 2018.

social assistance.⁶⁷ In 2022, 9 countries pointed to universal programs, 21 referred to new or existing specialized programs for specific groups. The creation of new programs is a positive sign that countries are not only relying on existing mechanisms to LNOB but are also working to develop new initiatives. More generally, the combination of universal policies with targeted approaches and strong leadership can be an effective approach to reaching marginalized communities.⁶⁸

It is also worth noting that only 28 countries (or 64%) made some kind of reference to embedding leaving no one behind or efforts to address inequality and social exclusion within overarching development plans.⁶⁹ This represents a significant decrease in the incorporation of the principle of leaving no one behind in the creation of national sustainable development policies compared to 2021.

A case study in good practice: Togo's Covid-19 mitigation policy package



According to Togo's VNR, as part of the management of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government put in place a response and resilience plan to mitigate the socio-economic impact. This has enabled the implementation of support actions for vulnerable populations such as:

- i. the Novissi cash transfer program for the most affected vulnerable populations.
- ii. the "Yolim" initiative to facilitate the granting of digital input credit to agricultural households at zero interest
- iv. free water and electricity for social consumer groups as well as actions to support businesses (reduction of the tax rate in hotels and restaurants, suspension of late payment penalties, discounts on surcharges delay granted by the National Social Security Fund (CNSS)).

Source: Excerpt adapted from Togo's VNR report.

Civil Society Validity Check: Togo's best practice described above



These various initiatives were welcomed by CSOs, although civil society wasn't consulted within the formulation process. These measures were not totally effective, but they did provide substantive help for some very vulnerable households. This policy package was only temporary during the height of the pandemic, and the policies contained in it haven't been continued since then.

Source: Jeunes Verts Togo after consultation for this report

67. Between 2018-2020, universal programs such as social assistance, and existing specialized programs had predominated.

68. Samman, Emma. (2016). *10 Things to Know about 'Leave no one Behind.'* London: ODI.

69. This compares to 84% in 2021, 60% in 2020, 36% in 2019, and 22% in 2018.

In terms of efforts not to leave specific groups behind, most countries reporting in 2022 provided information on actions being carried out. The group mostly covered by actions described in the 2022 VNR reports was people living in poverty (94%). In this realm, **Eritrea** purports to have ongoing programs that tackle intersecting issues, in this case poverty, rural populations and women. A flagship program, the Minimum Integrated Household Agricultural Package (MIHAP), distributes agricultural inputs and extends different types of assistance to tens of thousands of poor or vulnerable rural households, many of them headed by single women. **Cameroon** highlights that it has continued to implement the Social Safety Net Project, through which more than 211,000 households have benefited from direct financial assistance from the State. This type of program based on cash transfers also exists in **Togo**, where the social safety net program provided cash transfers to 60,568 poor households – with an additional dimension regarding access to work, by creating 169,311 temporary jobs for vulnerable people in 2021. In Latvia, the intersection between poverty, old age and disability has been addressed through the increase in minimum old-age and disability pension since 2021. In **Argentina**, a Universal Child Allowance program (a cash-transfer program that also exists in **Uruguay**), as well as and the maintenance of social plans for rural workers, like the Program Promote Work that provides services in temporary and seasonal activities have been instated. **Andorra** also highlights its solidarity pension scheme for the elderly, as well as programs on family allowance for dependent children and annual financial assistance for rental housing. **Jordan's** VNR states that the government has put in place a cash assistance programme, along with targeted assistance, and a support programme (bread subsidy programme), to meet the target of reaching the poor and the population that are at risk of falling into poverty, as well as job creation programmes across all areas of Jordan by identifying job opportunities within the private sector and linking employers with job seekers.

The next most mentioned group in terms of specific policymaking efforts was children, with 41 countries (92%) describing approaches to avoid them from being left behind. In the Dutch territory of **Curaçao**, a Children's Right Platform was created in 2018 to foster collaboration between the government and NGOs working to promote children's rights. In this context, projects on sexual education, on breaking the cycle of violence, and intensive family counseling services have been completed or are still ongoing. **Greece** highlights in its VNR the launch in 2021 of a National Action Plan for the protection of children's rights that includes commitment to reduce child poverty, to guarantee that every child has access to free health services, education, childcare, housing, and adequate food, to apply guardianship to unaccompanied minor refugees, to simplify adoption procedures, etc. However, Greek civil society –although it acknowledges the formulation of a series of National Action Plans as a step forward to start addressing specific groups' needs–, places the NAP on children's rights on the list of NAPs that don't have a detailed budget nor clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and that were developed without a proper public deliberation process. In **Kazakhstan**, a Guaranteed Social Package (GSP) has been put forward, in order to provide support for children from low-income families who receive targeted social assistance.

Continuing the focus on children, **São Tomé and Príncipe** highlights its National Child Protection Policy (PNPC) as a policy tool aimed at translating international commitments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child into national legal and policy frameworks. In the **Philippines**, the Council for the Welfare for Children is reported to have ongoing

projects on violence against children and education. **Andorra** noted the approval of a law on the rights of children and adolescents, while **Cote d'Ivoire** highlighted the government's efforts to provide continuity of learning processes (with 71% achievement), as well as a law on compulsory schooling for children between 6 and 16 years of age. Djibouti mentioned its Code of Legal Protection of Minors of 2015 as a landmark reform for the protection of children's rights. In **Argentina**, the VNR highlights an overarching plan for Early Childhood, which aims to guarantee adequate and healthy nutrition in this period of life for the population; as well as to promote early stimulation and health promotion for the country's most vulnerable girls and boys from 0 to 4 years of age. The VNR further details that in order to support these policies, the strengthening or opening of Child Development Centers that assist girls and boys from 45 days to 4 years throughout the country is planned. In the fields of access to education, retention and completion, **Togo** stated that broad-ranging measures have been rolled out to improve the retention and attendance rate of children in school, like making public elementary school free since 2008. Secondary school tuition and examination fees were also made free in the context of Covid-19. Other countries like **Ghana** and **Montenegro** provided detailed diagnostics on the situation of children in the country, without detailing specific ongoing or planned policies or measures to tackle the issues raised – while **Ethiopia** and **Somalia** didn't identify specific institutions or policies for children.

Thirty-nine (39) countries (or 84%, compared to 88% in 2021) referred to policy efforts to leave no persons with disabilities behind. In **Aruba** and **Belarus**, ongoing or planned legislation and policies seek to increase work opportunities for persons with disabilities. **Greece** highlights its National Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, **Kazakhstan's** VNR also details a list of specific policies for persons with disabilities, like special centers providing legal and psychological support, as well as assistance to enter the workforce. An Atlas of Professions for Persons with Disabilities has been developed, and the national 'Enbek' program for the development of productive employment has special provisions that give priority to persons with disabilities in access to employment. In **Jamaica**, various initiatives to empower and address the needs of persons with disabilities -including women and girls- have been instated. These include the passage of the regulations for Disabilities Act 2014 in October 2021; public education and awareness-raising on the Act; completion of three Codes of Practice (Education and Training, Healthcare and Employment) to support the implementation of the Act (another on Public Transportation was initiated in 2021). Additionally, in 2020, there were 1 495 new registrants added to the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD) Registry, almost triple the number of new registrants in 2019, 564 persons. In **Togo**, the VNR highlights that for the period 2018–2021, the government has allocated nearly 20% of the budget (excluding debt) to the education sector, including 8% for preschool and primary education. One of the key developments has been building and rehabilitating between 2017 and 2020, 5,300 classrooms, 300 of which are equipped with communication technologies (ICT) accessible to people with disabilities. In addition, the government has set up a system of specialized visiting teachers for students with disabilities in the inclusive education system, with the support of NGOs in almost all regions of the country.

The next most highly mentioned group is migrants and refugees, with 24 countries (52% – compared to 71% in 2021) noting specific programs or actions not to leave those groups behind. In **Aruba**, undocumented migrants have been identified as a particularly vulnerable

group, and specific policies providing access to education to undocumented children –as well as youth– have been put in place. Similar programs are mentioned in **Greece**. In **Argentina**, Centers for the Integration of Migrants and Refugees have been put in place, as meeting spaces where foreigners can receive support and information on their rights and facilitate job placement and employability, thus intending to foster their inclusion and insertion into Argentine society. In Switzerland, the Integration Agenda **Switzerland** (IAS) is a joint federal-cantonal scheme to integrate refugees and provisionally admitted persons more quickly.

Regarding ethnic groups, these were mentioned by 9 countries (19% – compared to 29% in 2021) – and regarding indigenous people, only 6 countries (13%) provided information on efforts towards not leaving both of those groups behind. As some country-specific examples, when it comes to Indigenous peoples and ethnic groups, although generally the approach to LNOB is rather generic, the VNR from the **Philippines** does assert that Technical Working Groups have been set up in specific regions to address indigenous people’s concern regarding access to enabling technology for distance learning. Regarding ethnic groups, **Lesotho** identifies specific policies geared towards the Basotho diaspora for these ethnic groups to be able to contribute to the country’s development. While in **Montenegro**, the VNR identifies Roma and Egyptians as groups being left behind that should be the focus of specific policies, specially in the realms of access to education and decent work. In **Argentina** a specific policy approach to promote and protect African descent peoples’ rights –made up of the Afro-Argentine communities, the Afro-descendant community, and the African migrant community– has been formulated – the Afro National Plan. The plan establishes actions to be carried out to eradicate inequality, tackle structural and institutional racism, and contribute to their effective social inclusion. In the case of **Somalia**, the VNR mentions a special focus on internally displaced populations.

A category that seems to arise from the analysis of 2021-2022 VNR reports are people characterized by their labour or employment situation. Again, in the case of the **Philippines**, although the overall LNOB approach is rather diffuse, the VNR does mention informal, casual and gig workers as the target of specific training modules and internship programs. **Andorra, Belarus, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Latvia, Sri Lanka, Montenegro** mention the elderly as a specific group being left behind.

The 2022 data shows a continued emphasis on similar approaches compared to 2020-2021, although the percentage of countries referring to specific programs or actions targeting particular groups is more uneven.⁷⁰ As shown above, more limited references were found across 2022 VNR reports to efforts related to supporting Indigenous Peoples and ethnic groups. In terms of strategies and approaches, these are rather similar to the ones mentioned in VNR reports from previous years and include social protection schemes, specific programs (national and sectoral), solidarity pensions, legal instruments, cash transfers, employment or training programs, institutions dedicated to specific groups, and improved access to health or education.

70. For comparison purposes, percentages for 2020 were the following: the data analysis considers the amount of countries (from a total of 47 countries presenting VNR reports in 2020) referring to specific programs targeting specific groups, as follows: people living in poverty (92% of reporting countries), children (85% of countries), persons with disabilities (85% of countries), migrants and refugees (53% of countries), ethnic groups (32% of countries), Indigenous Peoples (19% of countries), and other groups (53% of countries).

Regarding highlighting tangible results from efforts to leave no one behind, in 2022, 23 countries (52% - compared to 71% in 2021) presented some level of information in this regard.⁷¹ Such progress has been sometimes backed up with data, with countries presenting evolution of percentages regarding, for example, levels of poverty and inequality (including evolutions in the Gini coefficient), access to health, the wage gap between men and women, women's representation within public institutions, girls participation in education and youth's participation in the labour force.

Countries that have presented comparative data to refer to results of LNOB efforts include:

Andorra (regarding wage equality between women and men through the evolution of the interprofessional minimum wage salary, which increased 2.7% in 2016 compared to 2003);

Belarus (regarding gender equality, children, children with special needs, persons with disabilities and the elderly);

Côte d'Ivoire (Social programs like Productive Social Nets Project have increased its number of beneficiary households from 127,000 in 2019 to 227,000 households in 2021, which have been granted an annual allowance of US\$250);

Djibouti (access of refugees to social services);

Jamaica (Decline in poverty prevalence; High enrolment levels from early childhood up to grade 11; Improvements in gender parity ranked, etc);

Ethiopia (improvements in the gender gap index);

Malawi (children's education);

Senegal (children covered by health insurance; proportion of births attended by skilled personnel; and secondary level completion rate have all increased);

Pakistan (National Socio-economic registry for improved identification of beneficiaries; cash transfer programs for half of the population; targeted subsidies for families);

Togo (national poverty rate reduction from 55.1% in 2015 to 45.5% in 2019; monetary poverty in rural areas reduction from 68.7% in 2015 to 58.8% in 2021, inequality has been reduced from 39.3 Gini in 2013 to 38.5 in 2021);

and the **UAE** (The Productive Families Programme, based on improving the economic level of productive families by diversifying their sources of income witnessed a 28% increase, and the number of participating families benefiting increased by 28%).

Box 6 provides further insights from civil society reports on efforts towards LNOB in different VNR countries.

71. This compares to 35 countries (or 75%) reporting in 2020. In 2019 and 2018, VNR reports did not provide enough information on leaving no one behind data to evaluate the outcomes of activities.

Box 5: Perspectives on efforts to Leave no-one Behind from civil society reports

Leaving No One Behind

- **Botswana:** CSOs submit that there is recognition of the poorest and vulnerable and those furthest behind in the national strategic frameworks and the national strategy of the 2030 Agenda. However, there is a huge gap in terms of tangible efforts towards addressing the situations of those people. Government planning and implementation processes remain vertical without paying particular attention to the situation of such marginalised groups. CSOs are not aware of any deliberate overarching approach to incorporate the Leave No One Behind principle into institutional guidance for policy-making processes. Furthermore, a business-as-usual approach is on-going as there are no special programmes or innovative strategies in place to address the situation of the poor and marginalised populations including, amongst others, persons with disabilities, people discriminated by geographic area, migrants and undocumented persons and indigenous peoples.
- **Ghana:** Youth Inclusion: The current arrangements for the implantation of the SDGs does not intentionally factor the participation of young people in the process. It is important for the Government to take strategic steps to ensure young people are proactively being engaged and that both at the institutional and personal level, young voices and actions are informing local and national actions as far as the SDGs are concerned.
- **Greece:** While the discussion is now open towards the establishment of protection of vulnerable groups, for example, through the consultation process and the subsequent adoption of the National Action plan for the LGBTIQI community, or the national action plan for Roma, still many groups – such as older people, women, migrants, persons with disabilities – are marginalized and at risk. A national plan for Ageing is yet to be seen, the older population, over 65 years old, is an ever-growing percentage of the population (22.28% in 2020) but this population should be perceived not as a “cost” basis but as a resource. Similarly, the neglected issue of integration of migrants in the Greek society was introduced lately at top level, but further actions are still awaited.
- **Italy:** Important measures such as citizenship income and essential social protections have been introduced, but discrimination continues to persist especially against women and specific social groups such as migrants.
- **Jordan:** The civil society report calls for expansion of the social protection system to include all workers and vulnerable groups by allowing the contribution of all workers, whether they are self-employed or working informally.
- **Kazakhstan:** There is a systemic problem that has been highlighted by civil society in Kazakhstan. This is the lack of a definition of ‘discrimination’ in Kazakhstan’s legislation and law enforcement practice that would meet international standards, absence of anti-discrimination legislation and anti-discrimination institutions and

procedures. A further example is that the norms of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified in 2015, are not observed across the country, including regarding access to inclusive education. Achieving equality, including gender equality, is impossible without a systematic approach to setting out clear legal guarantees against discrimination.

- **Latvia:** Income inequality and poverty are still high in Latvia compared to the European Union, and regional inequalities are also pronounced. In 2021, NGOs organised discussions on funding to reduce inequalities, concluding that there is no comprehensive national strategy in this area. Some vulnerable groups – such as single-parent families at high risk of poverty – do not seem to be of interest to decision-makers. NGOs participating in the SDG assessment identified the following target groups that are not sufficiently addressed: single-parent families, seniors, unemployed youth, vulnerable groups in regions, non-citizens and migrants, digitally excluded people, persons with disabilities, health professionals, low-income people, young families and homeless people.
- **Mali:** The lack of school infrastructure for students with disabilities is a major concern. Also, with regard to the education of the blind, the new educational system does not help people with disabilities because they must have a license level. People with disabilities do not have the means to continue their studies for a bachelor's or master's degree and therefore do not meet the employment criteria. At the same time, there is no policy that can put pressure to consider people with disabilities in terms of employment. Similarly, the system of technical schools is not adapted to the needs of the blind, apart from the IFM (Teacher Training Institute) for which ongoing efforts must be supported. This lack of legislation or incentives for the employment of people with disabilities deserves urgent attention. In order to support efforts to achieve this SDG which deserves the most attention from the point of view of civil society, the following measures are recommended: the provision of a policy for disability cards for the benefit of handicapped persons, adaptation of equipment for handicapped persons in health structures (delivery tables, consultation, etc.), systematic planning of access ramps which comply with standards in health structures, acceleration of the RAMU operationalization process, investment in neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) to eradicate them as a public health problem, and management of cases of NTD complications.
- **Montenegro:** A number of documents, with goals on social inclusion and protection of vulnerable groups, were adopted. In this segment as in others, implementation is a problem. Efforts are being made to improve social and health care (in general as well as vulnerable groups) and include children from vulnerable groups to the greatest extent possible in the education system.
- **Pakistan:** Violence against women, children, transgender and minority communities was highlighted as a significant challenge. Government despite their several initiatives has failed to safeguard citizen's rights, or to provide an inclusive and fair society. Murders of trans persons have occurred with shocking regularity, for example as many as 70 transgender persons were killed in KP in the last few

years. Furthermore, the Hindu marriage act was initially welcomed by all, but in recent years many under-age Hindu girls have been abducted, converted, and married off to adult Muslim men.

- **Philippines:** The health crisis and economic crisis resulting from the impact of COVID-19 pandemic laid bare systemic challenges that have plagued the country's economic, social, and environmental systems across generations. It has deepened poverty, discrimination, and inequality. Many people in the country have been negatively impacted, but there are vulnerable groups disproportionately affected, these include: persons with disabilities, the elderly, children, women, LGBTQ+, indigenous peoples, youth, farmers and fisherfolk, urban poor, Bangsamoro people. Regarding inclusive economic growth and employment, the Philippines is the only country in the world where the migrant sector is represented in tripartite bodies of the Labor Department such as the Decent Work Advisory Committee and the National Tripartite Industrial Peace Council. Currently the Philippine government extends its social protection programs to migrant workers (Philhealth, PagIbig, SSS), but migrant workers pay the full contribution to these programs (except sea-based workers). Despite the presence of laws and government structures in place, violations of migrants' rights continue and persist.
- **Sri Lanka:** Since youth and representative youth movements are core groups of the civil society space in Sri Lanka, it is essential to share a few reflections from the youth consultation organised with the participation of representatives from thirty-five youth organisations and voluntary social service organisations operating in Sri Lanka. Youth are discouraged by low opportunities provided to them to actively contribute to policy processes and the sustainable development transformation journey of Sri Lanka. It was also noted by the youth participants that the state sector lacked multi-stakeholder collaboration to implement coordinated and continuous development efforts in essential services such as education, healthcare, energy and gender equality. Another factor acting as a barrier to youth participation in transformation is the absence of a permanent ministerial portfolio for youth and the lack of a timely youth policy since the adoption of the last national youth action plan in 2014. Youth also call for the diversification of the Sri Lanka economy and adoption of economic systems that suit Sri Lanka's development needs. It was further noted that youth civic participation is strongest in metropolitan areas due to activism hubs operating in these localities. However, the same advocacy spaces and an enthusiasm for contributing to Sri Lanka's sustainable development transformation cannot be seen amongst the rural youth, who often contribute to human development through social service projects.
- **Sudan:** Despite the inclusion of marginalized groups in policies and plans, obstacles appeared in implementation since stakeholders have not been involved in defining national priorities. In the transitional period that was part of the past four years, marginalized groups (women, people with disabilities, and the most marginalized states) were very active in expressing their issues and demanding attention. However, no significant results were attained by groups like women or persons with disabilities. Furthermore, although a peace agreement was signed,

it has not yet led to the expected results. In general, there does not seem to be an approach to integrating the principle of “leave no one behind” in the institutional orientation of decision-makers.

- **Uruguay:** For many children, there is a system of vulnerability that is increasing, especially after the pandemic, characterized by the socio-economic recession and withdrawal from the territories of various public policy initiatives and social protection programs. Regarding women’s rights and sexual minority rights, policy advances have been achieved that aim to guarantee the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people, who also face, in the opinion of various actors consulted, the growing presence of a conservative political discourse that even goes so far as to question the consecration of these policy advances. The presence of anti-rights movements is even evident within parliament. This type of discourse begins to gain strength within public narratives on the part of some institutional actors and this has an impact legitimizing positions that are adopted at the level of political practice, in specific areas of society, in the health or education system, for example.

4.2.3. Targeting domestic inequality

Addressing inequality is a fundamental part of the 2030 Agenda to LNOB and as part of SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities). In 2022, 28 out of the 44 reporting countries (or 64% - compared to 81% in 2021) provided some information on their efforts to reduce domestic inequalities, which is tied to the principle of leaving no one behind – showing a significant decrease in relation to the previous year. Once again, countries point to national policies and guarantees to non-discrimination, including through legal instruments and universal and specialized programs, as well as youth-focused training programs, introduction of progressive taxation reforms, etc. Some countries, including **Malawi**, **Montenegro** and the **Philippines** highlighted efforts related to the establishment of social protection frameworks to address domestic inequalities.

A case study in good practice: Efforts to reduce inequality



In Latvia, the introduction of a progressive personal income tax rate was highlighted, as well as the increase of the differentiated non-taxable minimum and doubling of the guaranteed minimum income level in 2021.

In Greece, the VNR highlights the formulation of the first National Strategy for LGBTQ+ Equality (2021), which is based on the principle of equality, on the prohibition of sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination and on enhancement of social inclusion.

In Mali, the VNR highlights initiatives to better understand the inequalities among the poorest segments of the population and improve evidence-based policymaking, by enhancing disaggregated data-production by poverty group. The Demographic and

Health Survey makes it possible to better contextualize the situation of the poorest households and thus to provide the government and its partners with information to support development policies and programs in favor of the poorest.

Regarding gender equality and women's empowerment, **Togo** mentioned that the strengthening of women's protection against discrimination and gender-based violence and the reduction of socio-cultural constraints have considerably improved the contributory capacities of the female population.

Source: Excerpt adapted from the VNR reports for Latvia, Greece, Mali and Togo.

4.2.4. Impact of COVID-19 on leaving no one behind

In 2022, 34 out of the 44 reporting countries (77%) provided information on the specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic from an LNOB perspective, a decrease compared to the 86% reporting countries that did so in 2021.⁷² In 2022, supports focused equally on strategies to tackle health-related impacts (including in terms of mental health), and socio-economic ones (cash transfers; employment and business protections through salary subsidies, tax deferrals, reduction of VAT, low interest loan, loan refund deferrals; necessities provision through food vouchers, food packages, subsidized basic services like water and electricity).

Targeted groups mentioned in 2022 include children, orphans, people living in poverty, those with lower levels of education, the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrants, undocumented migrants, informal workers. Some countries have further specified people most at risk of being left behind in the specific context of COVID-19. Here some examples:

Andorra lightened access requirements for social and economic aid;

Cote d'Ivoire introduced a plan that included social safety nets (distribution of cash transfers to vulnerable households) and the creation of 4 funds to support economic activity (SMEs, Large Enterprises, Informal Sector, Solidarity);

Ghana rolled out the Ghana CARES program supporting vulnerable households with free electricity, water, and food during the early period of the pandemic;

Malawi unveiled a Socio-Economic Recovery Plan in December 2021, aimed at launching strategic socioeconomic interventions addressing impacts of the COVID pandemic from a multidimensional standpoint;

and **Jordan** highlighted its vaccination campaign, and the fact that it was among the first in the world to include refugees in its vaccination campaign.

4.2.5. Recommendations

- **Ensure policies and programs are informed by and concretely integrate efforts to leave no one behind, including by prioritizing those most in need to consistently reach marginalized communities.**

72. This also shows an increase in relation to 2020, when 32 out of 47 countries (or 68%) had provided such information.

- **Include a specific chapter on leaving no one behind in VNR reporting and demonstrate how the principle of leaving no one behind is being translated into action in an overarching way.**
- **Highlight existing and planned efforts to leave no one behind –including how policies and programs are being adapted–, with a specific focus on new approaches to reach the people who are furthest behind first, as well as on overarching and systemic policy approaches to ensure no group of the population are left behind.**
- **Provide information on the status of data collection or plans to improve data availability to inform efforts to leave no one behind. This includes information on gender disaggregated data. Ensuring no one is left behind means knowing who is being left behind, by how much, and in what areas. The Inclusive Data Charter (IDC) is a useful tool to this end, as it advances the availability and encourages the use of inclusive and disaggregated data while fostering transparency, accountability, and knowledge sharing to ensure no one is left behind.**
- **Promote gender equality through international good practice such as gender budgeting, gender-based analysis and mainstreaming into policies and plans, and appropriate legal, policy and institutional frameworks.**
- **Report on the outcomes of efforts to leave no one behind, including by drawing on civil society expertise and citizen-generated data. Clearly present links between specific policies and actions with results, presenting progress for specific marginalized groups.**
- **Target domestic inequality in 2030 Agenda implementation, including in support of SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, and outline the current status of domestic inequality and how it is being addressed in VNR reports.**
- **Include major crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the efforts being made to ensure no one is left behind, outlining which groups are being covered and detailing what approaches are being taken.**

4.3. Awareness-raising

Raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda and educating citizens on sustainable development is an ongoing process critical for establishing a national vision and culture around sustainable development, generating support, and promoting whole-of-society approaches to implementation. In 2022, information on awareness-raising activities was available for 81% of the countries, a similar percentage to several previous years covered by this analysis.⁷³

73. Mentions of awareness-raising activities compare to 79% in 2021, 98% in 2020, 87% in 2019, 83% in 2018, and over 90% in 2017.

A case study in good practice? Botswana's SDG Communications Strategy



According to Botswana's VNR, advocacy, sensitization and awareness creation are integral to generating momentum and commitment to attaining the SDGs. Public awareness is key to ensuring a participatory process in implementing the SDGs and creating ownership. Key activities undertaken include: (a) Presentation to the Parliamentary Special Select Committee on SDGs, on the domestication and implementation of SDGs in Botswana and the role of Parliament on SDGs implementation in line with Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) – Parliaments; (b) dialogues with traditional leaders on negative social norms and cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequality and (c) dialogues with young people particularly the boy child on positive masculinity.

Botswana's VNR further recognises the importance of advocacy, sensitization, and awareness as an integral part to generating momentum and commitment to the attainment of the SDG targets, and asserts that the country will intensify implementation of the SDGs Communication Strategy.

Source: Except adapted from Botswana's VNR report.

Civil society validity check: Good practice from Botswana's VNR described above



The Communications strategy, which was designed from 2018 to 2023, has not yielded positive results due to a number of reasons.

Firstly, the strategy was not resourced, which made it difficult for it to be disseminated to the citizenry effectively.

That said, the government & UNDP in partnership with MISA (Media Institute of Southern Africa) are embarking on training for media personnel to report on the SDGs and are also capacitating Government Public Relations officials so that they can disseminate the Communication Strategy to the public. CSOs also proposed that SDG champions and ambassadors from the NGO sector are established, who will be tasked to disseminate the same. If all these different processes were indeed intensified, the visibility of the SDGs would be improved.

On the civil society side, CSOs do not have a national structure on SDGs to coordinate their work in monitoring the implementation of the SDGs. It is only now in the context of the VNR and the civil society report that the national CSO platform's secretariat is trying to organize its structures to address this gap.

Source: Botswana Confederation of NGOs BOCONGO, after consultation for this report.

While a range of methods to raise awareness on the 2030 Agenda (Figure 15) continues to appear in 2021 VNR reports, two forms of awareness-raising strategies were most commonly cited. Technical workshops and programs with and for stakeholders on 2030 Agenda implementation were mentioned by 9 countries in 2022,⁷⁴ and events were highlighted by 4 countries.⁷⁵ While there has been a decrease in those numbers in relation to previous years, a higher number of countries (13 countries, namely **Aruba, Botswana, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Grenada, Lesotho, Mali, Philippines, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, UAE**) prepared or plan to develop a communications strategy in 2022 than in previous years.⁷⁶ Five countries referred to the VNR process as part of awareness-raising efforts,⁷⁷ 2 countries pointed to websites (**Jamaica, Switzerland**),⁷⁸ and 1 others mentioned forums and/or platforms for sustainable development (**Togo**). Only 3 countries referred to the use of media and social media (**Eswatini, Somalia, Sudan**),⁷⁹ and only 1 country (**Cameroon**), reporting in 2022 noted translation efforts.

Figure 15: Common methods of raising awareness of 2030 Agenda



In 2022, other awareness-raising methods referred to, for example, the launch of a report by the Emeritus Group of SDG advocates in **Ghana**, of which the president of the country is a member. The launch of the report will provide a venue for a host of awareness creation activities and training. Other methods include a national SDG survey (**Andorra**), capacity-

74. Workshops and programs were mentioned by 11 countries in 2021, 16 countries in 2020, 12 countries in 2019, and 10 countries in 2018.
 75. 9 countries noted events in 2021, 11 countries noted events in 2020, 9 did so in 2019, and 8 did so in 2018.
 76. The mention of communications strategies compares with 6 countries in 2021, 3 countries in 2020, 4 countries in 2019, and 6 countries in 2018.
 77. The VNR process was mentioned by 5 countries in 2020, 7 countries in 2019, and 9 in 2018.
 78. Websites were mentioned by 4 countries in 2021, 3 countries in 2020, and 5 countries in 2019.
 79. Media and social media were mentioned by 3 countries in 2021, 16 countries in 2020, and 8 countries in 2019.

building programs for civil servants and NGOs (**Aruba**), building a culture of sustainability through museums, libraries and festivals (**Latvia**) or through the VNR process and the consultations organized around it (**Malawi, Sudan**), design of a comic strip to facilitate SDG-learning for the youth (**Cameroon**), academic programs and seminars (**Jordan**), communal letters, SDG caravans and artistic contests (**Togo**) educational campaigns for children and SDG photography awards (**UAE**). Conversely, some countries referred to awareness-raising activities based on earlier processes that haven't been updated, like **Liberia**. Although data suggest that most countries are continuously focusing on carrying out and improving work to disseminate knowledge around the 2030 Agenda, the VNR reports presented in 2021 contain less information around this topic than previous years.

Key recommendations for good practice

Develop a communication and engagement strategy to continue to raise awareness of and ownership over the 2030 Agenda with a wide range of stakeholders over the course of SDG implementation.

4.3.1. Recommendations

- **Develop a communication strategy to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda on an ongoing basis.**
- **Continue to promote innovative ways to raise awareness of the SDGs among the general public, including in partnership with civil society and other non-state actors.**

4.3. Efforts at the local level / Localization

Regional and local governments are critical players in delivering locally tailored sustainable development solutions, integrating the spatial dimension in policymaking processes – as well as in monitoring schemes. For 2030 Agenda implementation, efforts at the local level (or localization) require coordination between different levels of government, incorporation of the 2030 Agenda into local plans and policies and often financial support and capacity development for local governments to effectively participate in implementation efforts.⁸⁰

80. For a report relating localization, the SDGs and the COVID-19 pandemic, Cf. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG); Global taskforce of local and regional governments. (2021). [Towards the localization of the SDGs: sustainable and resilient recovery driven by cities and territories](#). Local and regional governments' report to the 2021 HLPF. 5th report. Cf. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG); Global taskforce of local and regional governments. (2020). [Towards the localization of the SDGs: how to accelerate transformative actions in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak](#). Local and regional governments' report to the 2020 HLPF. 4th report. For results of a project on SDGs and local governments, Cf. Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (2020). [VVSG SDG pilot project with local governments 2017-2019: approach and lessons learned](#). Belgium, VVSG. For an overview of good practice in localizing the 2030 Agenda, Cf. Wayne-Nixon, Laurel; Wragg-Morris, Tanya; Mishra, Anjali; Markle, Dawson. (2019). [Localizing the 2030 Agenda](#). In: [Good Practice in 2030 Agenda Implementation Series](#). Vancouver and Ottawa: BCCIC and CCIC.

Rooting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in local priorities and activities at the community level makes the agenda meaningful and practical in the day-to-day lives of citizens.

A case study in good practice? Malawi's efforts to localize SDG implementation



According to Malawi's VNR, the SDG implementation process has implied a push for localizing policy planning efforts at the district, city and community levels, including through fostering multi stakeholder participation and sufficient financing of interventions at both national and subnational levels. Malawi has domesticated the SDGs in the long-term and medium-term development plans, through the Malawi MW2063 national development plan and Mid-term Implementation Plan MIP-1 respectively. This arrangement went down to the local councils where the SDGs are mainstreamed into the district and city development plans as well as community development plans. To ensure successful implementation of these national development plans and local plans that have mainstreamed SDGs, various modalities have been put in place.

Source: Malawi's VNR report

Civil society validity check: Nature of multi-stakeholder decentralized planning processes in Malawi



Malawi has established interesting decentralized structures in order to foster localization efforts from a planning, budgeting and implementation perspective, with multistakeholder Councils at the village, area and district levels that inform the planning process.

That said, civil society states that these participatory planning processes aren't devoid of inconsistencies, whether regarding limited communication flows, a lack of connection between identified priorities or absence of budget-allocation; all of which increases the disconnect between planning and implementation even further.

Communities consulted in the context of the CSO independent report, expressed concern over the tendency by the district councils not to give them feedback on how they plan to implement the consolidated plans, thereby detaching the citizens from the entire implementation process. The citizens observed that they submit their development plans as required, but what is financed is less than 10%. Expressing fatigue and frustration with the cumbersome process involved in the development of the plans in which little or nothing getting financed, the communities are demanding that councils declare to them what resources are available for a particular year, so they could plan in line with the available funds. The apparent top-down imposition of projects at local level has not led to the desired results when it comes to empowerment of the local structures. Duty bearers finance what is viable to them, not what communities feel should be financed as outlined in their local plans. This poor harmonization between what is desired at community level and what is financed disempowers communities from pursuing long term plans such as the SDGs. It is hoped that a more bottom-up approach would be capable of triggering ownership of such long-term development plans at local level.

Source: Spotlight report prepared by Confederation of NGOs of Malawi CONGOMA.

In 2022, 34 out of 44 (or 77% of reports) provided some type of information on their efforts to localize the SDGs, compared to 83% of countries in 2021, showing a small decrease.⁸¹ As had been the case in previous years, the VNR reports continue to show wide variance in terms of how countries work with their local governments with regards to efforts at the local level (or localization). Consistent reporting helps to assess the status of such efforts overall. In 2022, **Pakistan** and **Latvia** were the only countries to showcase a dedicated section on localization (in the case of Latvia, in conjunction with Academic institutions). Others, like the **Philippines**, devoted special boxes to highlight initiatives by local governments throughout their reports. Conversely, other countries either provided more limited space in their VNR reports to the local efforts/localization topic, or information was unclear or not sufficiently detailed, such as in the cases of **Aruba, Djibouti, El Salvador, Eritrea, Grenada, Jamaica, Somalia, Sudan, and Suriname**.

Figure 16 provides an overview of the main elements for developing implementation efforts at the local level (or localization) reported in VNR reports.

Figure 16: Efforts at the local level (or localization) noted in VNR reports



Beyond references to local government engagement in the VNR process or national governance arrangements, VNR reports provided some insights on the status of efforts at the local level (or localization). In 2022, 16 countries (36%) referred to integrating the 2030 Agenda into local plans and policies, showing a small increase in relation to 2021 (31%).⁸²

Coordination between national government institutions and local governments was explicitly noted by only 16 countries (or 36%) reporting in 2022, similar to the 38% that did so in 2021.⁸³ Reference to local initiatives was made available by only 10 countries (or 23%), also a decrease in relation to 2021 (55%).⁸⁴ 7 countries (or 16%) referred to local institutional

81. Information on efforts at the local level (or localization) was mentioned by the same 83% of countries in 2020, versus 75% of the countries reporting in 2019, 65% of countries in 2018, and 73% of countries in 2017.
 82. On the integration of the 2030 Agenda into local plans and policies, percentages were 43% of countries reporting in 2020, 38% of countries reporting in 2019, and 35% of countries reporting in 2018.
 83. In 2020, 47% of countries mentioned coordination efforts, in 2019, the number was 7 (or 15%).
 84. Information on local initiatives was presented by 23 countries in 2021 (55%), 10 countries in 2020 (or 21%), 13 countries in 2019 (or 28%), and 10 countries in 2018 (or 22%).

mechanisms (e.g. local councils or bodies supporting 2030 Agenda implementation), versus 8 countries (or 19%) in 2021. 8 countries (or 18%) noted having integrated local governments into monitoring and evaluation systems,⁸⁵ and 10 countries (or 23%) referred to capacity development or awareness-raising efforts aimed at local governments.⁸⁶

Several countries referred to a comprehensive process of decentralization of their development planning system, such as the case of both **Ghana** and **Malawi**. In **Ghana**, the architecture for SDG implementation is integrated within the decentralized planning set-up, which attributes planning capacities to the ministries, departments and agencies, and implementation capacities to the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies. The Regional Coordinating Council provides coordination, monitoring (the National Statistical Office is present at the district level) and technical evaluation capacities to the districts. In this context, Ghanaian civil society acknowledges the efforts that have been made in policymaking and the fact that policies address views and needs from the local level. But there is still a significant gap between the planning and institution-building processes, and the degree to which approved policies and plans inform local government actions.

In **Greece**, the VNR asserts that the 13 regions and 325 municipalities develop and implement a large number of actions directly related to the three dimensions of the concept of sustainable development. That said, civil society reports that these local actions are related to promoting gender equality through Municipal and Regional Equality Commissions. Even though up until 2021, 278 out of 332 municipalities and 8 out of 13 regions have approved the establishment of Equality Commissions, very few are fully operating. Greek civil society also asserts that local level action tends to be fragmented and mainly structured through EU funded programmes, with very few examples of municipalities having a broader, more integrated approach (like the city of Trikala). Civil society calls for the government to recognize the importance of the local level in the path towards sustainable development and provide more funds, and for municipalities to engage more fully and systematically with social stakeholders.

In **Cameroon**, awareness-raising of local elected officials on the SDGs has been carried out both at the level of the Regions and the Communes – equipping local authorities with tools for a better appropriation and consideration of the cross-cutting dimensions of the SDGs in Communal Development Plans. The training of these actors, carried out by officials from government structures, with the support of UNDP and some CSOs, have focused both on SDG-integration in planning and policies, but also on monitoring which led to 2 VLRs in Yaounde and Maroua. **Togo** and **Senegal** also assert to have followed a similar approach within their respective decentralized governance structures. **Switzerland** highlights the key importance of enhancing vertical integration (between the cantons and the federal level), as well as horizontal integration (between the cantons themselves).

As had been the case in 2021, almost no country reported on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to efforts at the local level (or localization). One exception refers to the case of **Greece**, whose VNR report mentions local actions (both from the autonomous communities and local governments) aimed at facing the pandemic and its effects.

85. Monitoring and evaluation regarding efforts at the local level (or localization) was referred to by 7 countries (18%) in 2021, by 3 countries in 2020 (or 6%), and 5 countries in 2019 (11%).

86. Capacity development related to efforts at the local level (or localization) was referred to by 4 countries (10%) in 2021, 4 countries in 2020 (or 9%), and 12 countries in 2019 (or 26%).

4.4.1. Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) have increasingly gained more space, especially since the 2021 HLPF, when the second volume of the [Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews](#) was launched. While directly relating to SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), [human settlements](#) at all levels relate to other SDGs. Moreover, as an instrument of efforts at the local level (or localization), VLRs pave the way for subnational accountability structures. That said, in 2022, only 7 out of the 44 reporting countries (or 16%) mentioned VLRs, which compares to the 15 countries reporting about VLRs in 2021 (or 36%).

Some VNRs mention plans on VLRs and/or Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs), or some type of VLR/VSR was used to inform certain VNRs. In the **Netherlands**, the VNR included comprehensive reports for its overseas territories (**Aruba, Curaçao and Sint-Maarten**), and it also mentions that the city of Amsterdam is preparing its VLR. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the central government organized a series of workshops in the country's 14 districts for local actors to learn about the tools and principles of VLRs. In **Latvia**, although there aren't any VLRs to speak of, the VNR provided a venue for different Latvian cities –as well as the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments– to share their vision of sustainable development challenges and some of their actions and priorities fostering SDG implementation. In **Jordan**, a process for formulating local development plans is projected. In **Pakistan**, provincial and area governments submitted their subnational reports to the central government in order to inform the VNR. In the **Philippines**, the VLR of Naga City is highlighted, which includes provisions for participatory budgeting and policymaking, enhancing data-driven monitoring processes, as well as the formulation of a Sustainable Urban Development Plan. **Sudan's** VNR highlights prevailing gaps in coordination and information flows between the central, subnational and local levels. In the **UAE**, the VNR notes that each local government and emirate has autonomy for choosing its own development pathway, under the guidance of the national long-term vision.

As mentioned in a report from United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG),⁸⁷ by going beyond monitoring and reporting, both Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) are drivers of local action to achieve the SDGs. By including VLRs and VSRs into reporting processes, countries have the opportunity to consolidate national collective efforts. However, despite being powerful tools towards implementation, those instruments are still not officially present at the HLPF. Such official acknowledgment would catalyse change for SDG implementation, monitoring and reporting.

4.4.2. Recommendations

- **Include efforts at the local level (or localization) as part of 2030 Agenda implementation strategies.**
- **Strengthen coordination with local governments and local institutional structures, capacities and resources.**

87. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). (2021) [Towards the localization of the SDGs: Sustainable and resilient recovery driven by cities and territories. Local and regional governments' report to the 2021 HLPF.](#)

- **Support and foster the translation of the SDGs into local plans, programs and monitoring efforts and ensure local priorities inform local level actions, as well as broader national plans.**
- **Advocate for the inclusion and acknowledgement of local and regional reporting tools (e.g. Voluntary Local Reviews and Voluntary Subnational Reviews) at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).**

4.5. Partnerships to realize the SDGs

Most countries agree – at least at a discursive level– that all stakeholders in society contribute to sustainable development. In order to realize the SDGs by 2030, accelerated substantive actions are needed from all stakeholders, even more so with the backsliding of progress on sustainable development as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary actions towards an inclusive and sustainable recovery. As such, VNR reports should showcase contributions from a wide range of stakeholders towards the 2030 Agenda.

Among the 2022 reporting countries, 26 out of 44 countries (59%) provided examples of contributions by non-state actors to 2030 Agenda implementation beyond consultation on priorities and participation in governance arrangements.⁸⁸ This represents a considerable decrease compared to 2021, where 93% of the countries had provided that information – as well as to all previous years.⁸⁹ In 2022, **Aruba, Belarus, Botswana, Curaçao, Djibouti, Dominica, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Gabon, Grenada, Jamaica, Lesotho, Liberia, Montenegro, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sint-Maarten, Somalia** and **Suriname** did not include information on whether non-state actors are engaged in implementation of the SDGs.

For those who did so, approaches to showcasing efforts varied – as well as the type and scope of the civil society initiatives mentioned. Some countries, such as **Ghana**, included a section in the goal-by-goal analysis, as well as in the annex, with information on initiatives from non-state actors. In a similar theme, the VNR from the **Philippines** highlights best practices from civil society and the private sector in the health, social and environment areas. In others, partnerships with civil society are mentioned as a welcome aspiration, such as the case of **Malawi**. Jordan’s VNR highlights examples of multistakeholder partnerships in a specific section and within some SDGs. In **Sudan**, the role of the private sector is emphasized. In **Pakistan**, the VNR acknowledges the work deployed by CSOs for persons with disabilities, which has opened opportunities for further collaboration in the field of data gathering. **Cameroon, Senegal, Switzerland**, and **Togo** VNRs mention non-state actors as key players in the implementation process, without providing further details on how they participate or any specific examples. Among these countries, only **Switzerland** provides some degree of detail by inviting readers to visit the SDGital2030 website for more information.

88. This section deals with the forms of engagement and participation within implementation efforts that have not yet been addressed in the earlier sections of this report, looking beyond engagement through specific consultations and governance arrangements.

89. Percentages on contributions by non-state actors towards 2030 Agenda implementation compare to 93% of countries in 2021, 89% of countries in 2020, 98% of countries reporting in 2019, and 85% of countries reporting in 2018.

The inclusion of activities by a wide range of stakeholders provides a national picture of implementation efforts, including and moving beyond government. This approach to VNR reporting respects the principles of inclusivity and participation embedded in the 2030 Agenda.

Key recommendations for good practice



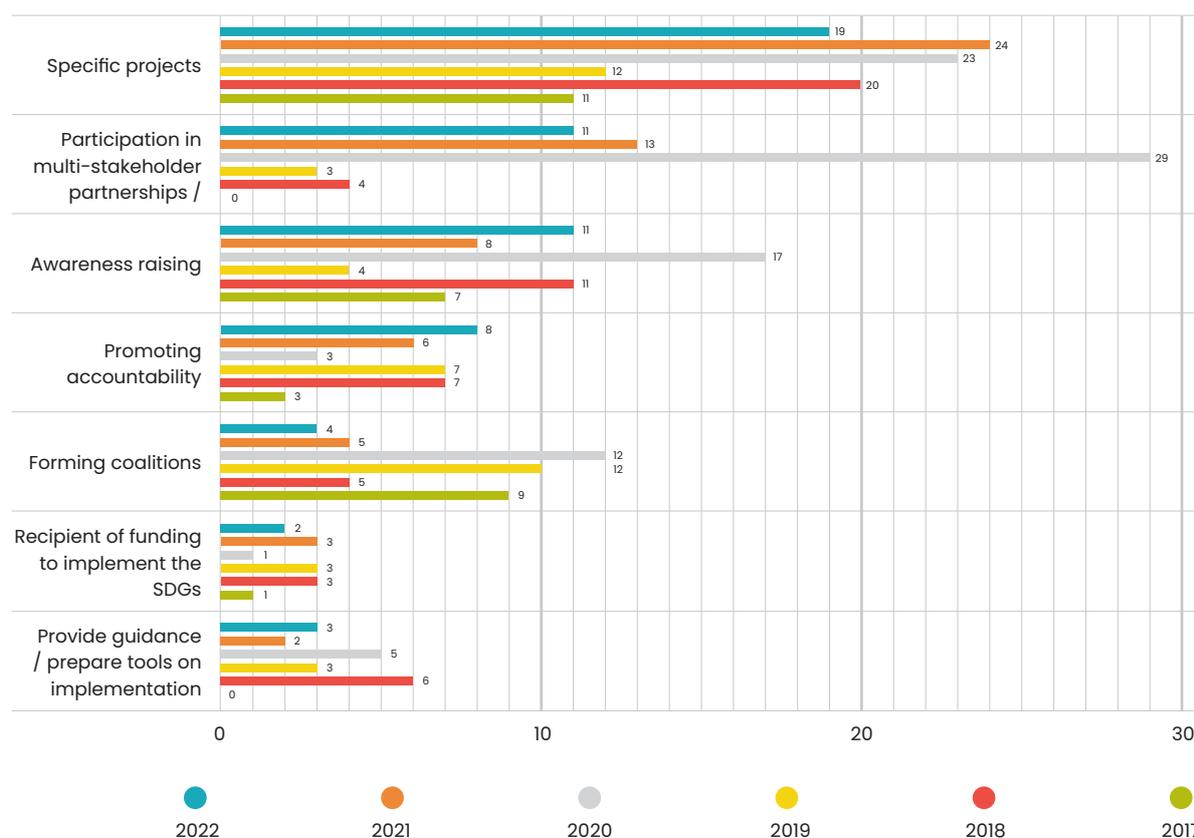
Submit a *national* report for the VNR that systematically outlines the contributions made by a wide range of stakeholders, not just the national government.

4.5.1. Civil society contributions to implementation

Civil society organizations support 2030 Agenda implementation by representing and advocating for citizens and those left behind, contributing to policy development, implementing projects and programs, promoting accountability through independent analysis and reporting, among other roles. Reporting on civil society contributions to the 2030 Agenda has increased over 2017–2021, suggesting a positive trend in terms of countries recognizing the contributions by civil society organizations in their VNR reports. In 2022, 29 out of 44 countries (or 66%) provided such information, a significant decrease in relation to 2021, when 36 out of 42 countries (or 86%) did so, as well as to the 79% of countries reporting in 2020, and in line with the 68% of countries reporting in 2019, and 65% of countries in 2018.

Figure 17 provides information around the most common activities emerging with respect to reporting on civil society contributions over 2017–2022. Information for 2022 shows a continued prevalence of the role of civil society in implementing specific projects (19 countries) and participating in multi-stakeholder partnerships and/or initiatives to support 2030 Agenda implementation (10 countries) – as in 2021, although numbers are slightly lower. In the realm of awareness-raising though, the number of countries highlighting CSOs’ actions of this nature increased, with 11 countries noting this element in 2022. Also, the role of civil society in promoting accountability for 2030 Agenda implementation has increased slightly, with 8 countries mentioning this aspect. Mentions to civil society organizations’ actions towards forming coalitions and towards providing guidance and/or preparing tools on 2030 Agenda implementation have both stayed stable at low levels, with 3 countries mentioning the first aspect and 3 countries referring to the second.

Figure 17: Main civil society contributions highlighted in VNR reports



Other aspects appearing in the analysis of both 2021 and 2022 VNR reports were references to civil society conducting research, promoting structured dialogue, and incorporating the SDGs into institutional objectives and activities. In 2022, 2 countries (**Greece, Luxembourg**) mentioned civil society’s engagement in producing research directly or in collaboration with academia, versus 4 countries in 2021. Actions carried out by civil society from 4 countries (**Greece, Latvia, The Netherlands and Switzerland**) pointed to the promotion of a structured dialogue, reflection and debate around the SDGs, similar to the 4 countries that reported on that topic in 2021. There was mention of SDGs having been mainstreamed in institutional objectives and programs of civil society organizations only in **Greece**, versus 3 countries in 2021. Countries should look to coordinate even further with civil society and showcase activities carried out by CSOs systematically and inclusively, in order to more fully acknowledge their role in 2030 Agenda implementation.

On the other hand, civil society reports and written inputs as part of VNR reports provide useful insights on the challenges civil society organizations face in contributing to the 2030 Agenda. Ranging from 2017 to 2022, civil society reports noted a range of challenges that prevent civil society’s advocacy and delivery on the 2030 Agenda. These include low levels of awareness of the Agenda by the public, civil society and government, limited engagement and coordination with government, weak institutional capacities to implement the 2030 Agenda by national, local governments and CSOs, lack of an enabling environment, limited finance, issues related to data availability and monitoring capacities, structural factors such as deeply rooted behaviours within political cultures and changes in government, as well as challenges to fully

implement the concept of leaving no behind. Figure 18 provides an overview of the challenges noted in civil society reports for 2022, which are consistent with the challenges highlighted in previous years. Such consistency is worrisome, as it points to a global trend towards closing civic space and a disabling environment for civil society through the active curtailment of a wide array of political and civil rights and freedoms – as well as it suggests that the issues hindering civil society’s action towards 2030 Agenda implementation are not being properly addressed in a concerning number of countries.

Figure 18: Challenges identified by civil society organizations to 2030 Agenda implementation

Capacity

- **Botswana:** Delivery by CSOs is a huge challenge since CSOs do not even have a structure or collective strategy for SDG implementation. They are too fragmented to organise themselves and are also challenged in terms of monitoring, evaluation, and documentation to account for their implementation efforts. Their major and most pressing challenge is that of funding for implementation of any aspect of the SDGs.
- **Ghana:** Most ministries that are responsible for policy formulation are indeed involved in the SDG implementation process but require financial support to implement most related initiatives. Budgets do not follow in the implementation phase, creating the impression that institutions are always planning but minimally implementing.
- **Italy:** Some kind of integration between budget and SDGs is available, but ex post, while there is low level of alignment between the National Strategy for Sustainable Development and a multiplicity of different plans, including the NRRP.
- **Latvia:** Surveyed NGOs see themselves as more active than other related parties (state, municipalities, private and academic sector) in the implementation of Goals 5, 10, 13, and least involved in the implementation of Goals 6, 9, 15.
- **Mali:** Weak financial and organizational capacities of CSOs impacts the speed of **implementation and its monitoring**
- **Philippines:** Budgets reflect Government priorities – and in practice, many progressive or good laws, programs, projects, and activities are either inadequately funded or not at all.
- **Sudan:** In 2020, the Finance Ministry adopted the SDGs as a primary reference to prepare the budget. However, it was not reflected in practice, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on previously established plans and budgets.

Quality of engagement

- **Botswana:** While there is recognition of CSOs as the ‘third sector’ in national development processes, practices on the ground demonstrate that they are not fully involved in decision making. CSOs are concerned that spaces are too generic and do not maximise the benefits of clear mandates, methodologies, and resources. CSOs are skeptical that the VNR process will provide opportunities for participation in the broader implementation process especially regarding policy dialogue. Sceptics argue that government agencies only involved CSOs in a superficial process whilst there is limited commitment to inclusion of civil society views by the government.

- **Gabon:** Given the lack of updated data, it's difficult for CSOs to engage in an informed manner with the government.
- **Ghana:** Policy dialogue available at different administrative levels, but significant gaps remain between policy pledges and their actual implementation.
- **Greece:** The Greek government should maintain and strengthen the dialogue with CSOs regarding the implementation of the SDGs. At this stage, policy dialogue between government mechanisms and CSOs on the 2030 Agenda remains minimal; consultations over the national action plans were limited and, in many cases, no more than a pretext. Similarly, CSOs participation in the VNR was weak. Overall, there is no permanent mechanism that connects government bodies and CSOs and promotes dialogue; rather communications are fragmented and on an ad hoc basis.
- **Latvia:** Analysis of the work of the government and the Parliamentary commissions shows that employers' organisations and organisations representing local authorities are the most widely consulted, so that the interests of a limited number of stakeholders are represented in decision-making. Organisations representing vulnerable groups or those unable to represent themselves report that consultations are often superficial and substantive views are not considered.
- **Italy:** The Forum for Sustainable Development and the National Council for Development Cooperation have opened participation, but they are still not working well in terms of actual policy-making dialogue. This needs to be strengthened with clear procedures and resources. Participation should also be whole-of-government and not only in certain ministries.
- **Jordan:** In Jordan, the country's institutional structures democratic institutions should be strengthened. It would be important to open more space to include Jordanian civil society and local stakeholders in policy- and decision-making, as they can help develop and implement policies that take all segments of society into account. This will lead to a more enabling environment to move forward in achieving the SDGs.
- **Kazakhstan:** Over the past few years, the government has put in place an institutional and practical dialogue with civil society by creating various dialogue platforms, like the 5Ps SDG Working Group, public councils, etc. In this sense, it can be assessed as progress in the implementation of SDG 16, 17. However, the progress is limited because the outcome of this dialogue and CSO interventions leaves much to be desired.
- **Mali:** According to the civil society reports, it would be important to carry out more advanced studies on the quality of civil society involvement, how to ensure transparency and accountability in the SDG implementation process for all key actors, and how to revitalize monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and reporting. The conclusions of these studies should include concrete proposals and examples on which the government can rely for possible replication and scaling up – along with ascertaining which mechanisms to put in place or revitalize to ensure transparency and accountability from the national level to the sub-national level (regions, prefectures, and municipalities).
- **Malawi:** The citizenry engages in local level planning, but rarely influences budget allocation and decision-making processes.
- **Montenegro:** Civil society groups were engaged through membership in the National Council for Sustainable Development and were able to provide comments on the proposed strategy and issues discussed at council meetings. However, only a small number of organisations were involved in this process and their communication with other organisations was at a low level.
- **Pakistan:** The core responsibility of CSOs is to support local priorities and to take community preferences and needs into account. There is a misconception of successive

governments that civil society is a western concept, which cannot be applied in Pakistan. Moreover, CSOs often face government opposition to their demands for decentralized service delivery, transparency and accountability, human rights protection and empowerment and social mobilization.

- **Philippines:** There is a growing trend for superficial and technocratized participation of CSOs in times of public health emergencies. Unfortunately many civil society groups and private sector stakeholders who were willing to help in the COVID-19 response were discriminated against. Furthermore, the government often 'handpicks' which civil society groups to consult.
- **Uruguay:** It is understood that many of the governance roundtables exist formally, but their proper functioning is debatable from a practical point of view, since it questions the degree of influence on public policies. It appears that changes proposed by civil society are rarely taken into consideration.
- **Sudan:** In the transitional period from August 2019 to October 2021, the participation of citizens and their grassroots organizations grew immensely. Spaces opened for civil society. However, with the current situation following the October 25, 2021 coup, these spaces have become fewer, and citizen participation has decreased.
- **Switzerland:** Civil society actors are still not fully involved within the SDG implementation process. The present federal government 2030 Agenda Advisory Group often provides only superficial engagement and the members had limited input into the draft of either the 2030 SDS or the Voluntary National Review (VNR).

Data availability and monitoring capacities

- **Botswana:** Policy-making and decision-making processes on the SDGs are not based on easily accessible, timely and accurate information and data. Regarding data-generation, processes are limited in their transparency so CSOs cannot access data to inform evidence-based planning.
- **Ghana:** Implementing stakeholders should be encouraged to publish more data on their monitoring processes as far as the SDGs are concerned. It will also be important to conduct national evaluation actions and studies, as well as developing robust SDG Monitoring and Evaluation System to take stock of where we are in terms of the goals and indicators.
- **Greece:** The data collection process on sustainable development should be enhanced by strengthening the ELSTAT and CSOs.
- **Gabon:** Data transparency and availability is minimal since databases are only updated every 10 years.
- **Italy:** Data is still very limited, thus hindering any civic monitoring attempt. All connections and spillovers should be considered and addressed in Policy Coherence terms. Indicators and metrics are considered a technical domain excluding NSAs/CSOs.
- **Malawi:** Monitoring, evaluation and reporting remain problematic as outcomes from these processes are not easily accessible to the public. There is therefore a need to make such information freely available, backed by the Access to Information Law. CSOs should also be involved in monitoring partnerships, specifically those involving ODA.
- **Mali:** SDG monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms are not operational or are generally ineffective.
- **Montenegro:** The process of collecting and understanding official data is on the low level.

Statistics of public institutions and ministries are not in correlation with the statistics office (MONSTAT). It often happens that some data are not usable because they are used in old formats and are very difficult to interpret from different sources.

- **Sri Lanka:** There is a monopoly of data and information by state data collection points, which has led to a reduced data democracy in Sri Lanka, which in turn is negatively impacting civil society activism and people led development. The data collected by civil society actors are not integrated into the macro data reporting structures of Sri Lanka which are essential for sustainable development policy processes in the country.
- **Sudan:** Disclosure policies are not clear or binding on the various parties. Although the constitution guarantees the right to obtain information as a fundamental right, its application is not commensurate with its status. There are no regular periodic monitoring and accountability reports on the SDGs. Except for voluntary non-annual reports, there is no existing monitoring process, and civil society has not been widely invited to review evidence on SDG implementation.
- **Uruguay:** Transparency and accountability is the area that obtained the lowest scores in the civil society report since there are very few institutionally mandated monitoring mechanisms.
- **Switzerland:** The country has its own sustainable development monitoring system, MONET 2030. It serves the federal administration as a basis for its voluntary national review. Although the system has mapped greater international responsibility and raw materials consumption abroad in recent years, it still displays considerable gaps. One of the fundamental problems here is that the SDGs and their targets have not been sufficiently translated into national policy.

Internal and external factors hindering 2030 Agenda implementation

- **Ghana:** Youth Inclusion: The current arrangements for the delivery of the SDGs does not intentionally include the participation of young people in the process. It is important for Government to take strategic steps to ensure young people are proactively engaged so that young voices and actions can inform local and national actions as far as the SDGs are concerned.

A case study in good practice? Latvia's National NGO fund



According to Latvia's VNR, a vibrant civil society is crucial for any democracy, and the national NGO Fund is a significant catalyst for civil society groups to become more active. Within the framework of projects financed by the NGO Fund, nongovernmental organisations can apply for grants to do advocacy work and organise activities that strengthen civil society. In addition, current specialised programmes include support for NGOs in the regions of Latvia, co-financing for NGOs participating in international projects, and promotion of participation of minority NGOs.

Source: Except adapted from Latvia's VNR report.

Civil society validity check on the best practice from Latvia described above:



The NGO fund is a good achievement. It is currently the only real facility through which Latvian CSOs can develop capacity-building and advocacy projects (there is also the European Economic Zone instrument, but that is funded through European donor's contributions). The NGO fund's governance structure is led by a council that includes elected NGO seats, and there is an open discussion on priorities within this council. Improvements can be made, but it is more about conceptual aspects.

Regarding the level of funding available, it could definitely be improved – the call for 2023 projects is capped at 1.8 million euros in total – and the demand is very high. For the fund to be fully considered a good practice, funding should be increased significantly.

Source: Views from the national NGO platform LAPAS after consultation for this report.

4.5.2. Parliamentarians

Parliamentarians are supposed to advocate for the priorities and concerns of the citizens they represent, hold governments to account for progress, and in many cases, vote on the national budget. Within the SDG implementation process, enhanced coordination and coherence between the policy and lawmaking processes should provide with deeper integration of sustainable development processes within the policy and institutional frameworks of a given country. In 2022, fewer countries provided information on the role of parliaments in their VNRs than in 2021, the percentage in 2022 were broadly in line with the ones for the period between 2017–2018, and increased in relation to 2019 (23%). Fifteen (15) countries (34%) reported on efforts by parliamentarians to support SDG implementation, beyond consultations and engagement in governance arrangements in 2022, a decrease compared to the 20 (48%) that did so in 2021.⁹⁰

The majority of countries noting parliamentarians' actions (10 out of 15 countries) mentioned the folding of SDG-related activities into regular parliamentary work, which includes the creation of specific SDG-focused committees and monitoring of SDG-based budgeting, for example. Among the institutional arrangements mentioned, in some countries like the **Philippines**, parliamentary committees were constituted both within the House of Representatives and the Senate – with the aim to better coordinate and inform the law-making process based on national plans, priorities and budgeting. In **Pakistan**, parliamentary task forces have been in place at the federal and provincial legislatures. In **Botswana**, a parliamentary Select Committee has been established, while in the **Netherlands**, an Inter-Parliamentary Kingdom Conference was established, to provide a space for joint review of SDG implementation between the Kingdom and its overseas territories (**Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten**). In Djibouti, although parliamentarians are mentioned as being involved within the National Commission for Sustainable Development, roles are still unclear, and the VNR notes that one of the next steps in the institutionalization process of the Commission is to adopt a regulatory text that clearly defines the role of each institutional and non-state actor. In **Switzerland**, the parliamentary group on the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs) at the Federal Assembly was established in November 2021. All parliamentary parties are represented in the group including FDP Free Democratic Party, the GLP Green Liberal Party, the Greens, the Die Mitte centrist party, the SP Social Democratic Party, and the SVP Swiss People's Party, and the VNR states that the group seeks integrated, partnership-based and cross-party solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

90. This compares to 53% of countries reporting in 2020, 23% of countries in 2019, 39% of countries in 2018, and 35% in 2017.

A case study in good practice: Pakistan's parliamentary task forces on the SDGs



The National Economic Council (NEC) is the highest forum chaired by the Prime Minister of Pakistan. All provincial Chief Ministers are core members of the council. Pakistan SDGs framework was approved by NEC in March 2018. Furthermore, a Sub-committee of the National Economic Council (NEC) on SDGs was established under the chairmanship of the Minister of Planning to discuss important issues of SDGs to further take it up to NEC. Senior representatives from the provinces are core members of the subcommittee. In addition, for legislative efforts on SDGs implementation, 20 sub-groups of parliamentary task forces on SDGs were formed at the National parliament – along with a legislative mapping tool that contributes to identify legislative gaps for each SDG.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Pakistan's VNR report.

Civil society validation check on Pakistan's good practice described above



The Parliamentary Task Forces at National and Sub-national level are functional and CSOs can work with them on a regular basis. They also have sub-committees on various goals to measure progress on SDG implementation. AwazCDS-Pakistan/ Pakistan Development Alliance and some other CSOs have also signed Memorandums of Understanding with Provincial and National Task Forces and Assemblies to ensure effective engagement and joint actions. The website of the SDGs Secretariat at National level also provides ample information on their work.

Source: Excerpt adapted from AwazCDS/PDA after consultation for this report.

The activities showcased by parliaments in the 2022 VNR reports are similar to what had been reported in previous years, and there was a variety of efforts being highlighted. However, reporting on parliamentarians was more limited in the 2022 VNR reports, and fewer countries detailed their efforts. Overall, a backslide can be noted, given the role of parliamentarians in ensuring accountability for 2030 Agenda implementation, identifying priorities and gaps, developing legal frameworks, and approving national budgets.

A case in Good practice? Regulatory Impact Assessment for new and existing legislation in Greece



The greek VNR highlights as a Good Practice the introduction of the Regulatory Impact Assessment approach – RIA – that seeks to address the consistency of the proposed regulatory measures with the three dimensions of sustainable development and the SDGs. In a similar vein, the Presidency of the Government is in the process of publishing in 2022 a new Manual and Template on Ex-post Evaluation of Legislation, which addresses, inter alia, the extent to which the existing legislation has contributed to the achievement of the SDGs.

Source: Adapted from the Greece's VNR



According to the Greek Constitution, any new law that is introduced must be accompanied by a report (Explanatory Report) that justifies its necessity and the impact that its application/ implementation is expected to have. Other than this report, a document that reflects on the relevant budgetary requirements, as well as tables that indicate the specific legal changes that will be performed are part of the material that is submitted in the parliamentary processes. In 2019 the existing framework was codified and renewed.

The renewed form of the Explanatory Report is called a Regulatory Impact Assessment and part of it requires an assessment of whether the SDGs are taken into account in new legislation. However, monitoring coherence and balanced approaches require a more systematic monitoring process that is not restricted in the SDGs table included in the RIA. More time is also needed to actually assess to what extent this new approach has contributed to the SDGs achievement, with a focus on policy coherence and balanced approaches.

Source: Hellenic Platform for Development after consultation for this report.

4.5.3. The private sector

The role of the private sector in adapting their productive activities, incorporating sustainability principles into their core businesses and practices, providing decent working conditions, as well as contributing finance and innovative solutions to development challenges has received a lot of attention in the context of 2030 Agenda discussions. In recent years, financialization of development processes, as well as high interest rates involved in governments' access to market financing for countries in the global South have led development trajectories to witness an increase in the prevalence of public-private partnerships (or PPPs). Within these types of partnerships, public balance sheets provide de-risking conditions in order to facilitate the mobilization of private investments – a phenomenon that implies the transformation of service-provision and infrastructure development into asset classes.⁹¹ These approaches tend to be underpinned by a set of assumptions, which include the increased efficiency and cost-effectiveness in providing basic services of the private sector (particularly through Public-Private Partnerships, or PPPs), the assumption about the scarcity of public resources, as well as the convergence between private sector -profit-driven- interests and the provision of public goods. This set of assumptions shifts the focus towards the privatization of public goods, instead of addressing structural asymmetries in the global financial architecture and wealth redistribution at the national level. Such approaches tend to remove public goods from the democratic process.⁹²

Given that private funding is still an important component of the financial architecture for sustainable development, especially regarding infrastructure as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation, the underlying de-risking in PPPs in developing countries should be provided on a project-basis through specific funds established by multilateral organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and regional

91. Gabor, Daniela, 2020. "The Wall Street Consensus," SocArXiv, Center for Open Science.

92. Musthaq, F. presentation at "The SDGs as an asset class: Getting serious about green finance for development" Development University College London, Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, webinar on June 9th 2022.

Multilateral Development Banks. This would enable longer-term funding at lower rates given that the IMF can issue Special Drawing Rights (SDRs),⁹³ and regional MDBs can raise funds in financial markets at preferential rates (also backed by Special Drawing Rights), as proposed by the Bridgetown Initiative.⁹⁴ The World Bank could issue SDR-denominated bonds⁹⁵ for green infrastructure projects, allowing developed countries to channel unused SDRs towards developing countries. This could free fiscal space for developing countries to use within their sustainable development trajectories. These types of approaches should also be embedded within public deliberation processes, and accompanied by debt renegotiations or debt service suspension that least developed and emerging countries require, in order to create more fiscal and policy space for the provision of public goods.

In 2022 VNRs, 73% of reporting countries (32 out of 44) highlighted private sector contributions beyond consultations and engagement in governance arrangements, a slight decrease in relation to 2021.⁹⁶

Table 3 outlines the main activities noted in 2022 with regards to private sector contributions and includes a comparison with the period between 2017–2021. The most prominent activities relate to involvement in specific projects (13 countries, a decrease compared to 2021), provision of finance for SDG-related activities (13 countries, which constitutes an increase in relation to 2021), and Multi-stakeholder partnerships (11 countries, with a slight decrease compared to 2021). The area of alignment by the private sector with corporate responsibility and business practices saw a significant decrease from 2021, from 14 countries down to only 8. In 2022, the creation or use of forums to raise awareness and coordinate around the 2030 Agenda increased, and the creation of prizes or competitions related to the SDGs decreased in relation to previous years.

Table 3: Main private sector contributions highlighted in VNR reports, 2017–2022

Activity	Year					
	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Specific projects	13	20	13	12	12	7
Alignment through corporate social responsibility and/or business practices	8	14	14	9	14 ⁹⁷	5 ⁹⁸
Creation or use of forums to raise awareness and coordinate	5	-	4	6	6	8
Events	1	2	2	5	-	6
Research	2	1	1	4	4	5
Provision of finance for SDG related activities	13	7	7	3	-	-
Multi-stakeholder partnerships	11	14	17	2	10	-
Creation of prizes or competitions	0	2	3	2	4	-

93. Special Drawing Rights, often referred to as SDRs, are an interest-bearing international reserve asset used by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which represent the right of one IMF member to borrow a quantified amount of central bank reserves from another, effectively at low overnight interest rates, currently at 2.4%. These reserves, collectively amount to US\$12.7 trillion.

94. Persaud, A, (2022) 'Breaking the deadlock on climate: the Bridgetown initiative', Groupes d'études Géopolitiques, Nov. 2022

95. See Stephen Paduano and Brad Setser's article in the Financial Times: <https://www.ft.com/content/60a9e577-0bd3-4898-ac18-6ea9ff3573dd>

96. Percentages had been 75% of countries reporting in 2020, versus 53% of countries in 2019, 61% of countries in 2018, and 53% of countries in 2017.

97. Ten (10) of which were in the form of company-specific commitments.

98. Company specific commitments.

In 2022, approaches include building an enabling environment to promote synergies around sustainable development between private and public financial flows, like in **Latvia**, where the government has put in place a Sustainable Finance Plan, geared towards creating an institutional framework for sustainable financial goals; creating a sustainable government bond framework; and ensuring availability of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) data for assessing sustainability. **Ghana** highlighted its Public Private Partnership Act from 2020, which is aimed at providing a regulatory framework to the governance of public-private partnerships. In the context of the SDGs, these public-private partnerships have focused particularly on expanding recycling capacities within waste management.

In the realm of embedding sustainability principles within financial markets, in **Uruguay** a project called “Development of the impact investment ecosystem: Reform of market conditions and definition of the strategy to finance the transition to sustainable development in Uruguay,” financed by the Joint SDG Fund as a public-private alliance states that it aims to contribute to the development of an ecosystem and create the market conditions necessary for the public sector, the private sector, and international cooperation to leverage their capacities to make sustainable development in Uruguay possible. Others aim to foster an enabling environment for the private sector in general, by providing incentives for Foreign Direct Investment and a dynamic and competitive local private sector by ensuring a more widespread access to credit, without really detailing how sustainability is factored into the equation, like in **Malawi**.

In terms of policy dialogue and enhanced coordination, in **Greece**, the private sector demands in the VNR that the government convenes a multi-stakeholder consultation conference – apparently similar to the platform also proposed by Greek civil society – in order to fully integrate and link the different national strategies and plans into a cohesive framework. This would also enable private actors to develop a set of guidelines for businesses to align their initiatives around sustainability with the national SDG framework. Regarding national SDG roadmaps that can guide the private sector in infusing sustainability principles into their productive activities, in **Senegal**, the private sector is integrated into the governance arrangements regarding the national development plan. **Jamaica’s** VNR states that Corporate Social Responsibility can support domestic resource mobilization for the SDGs through alignment between the Vision 2030 Jamaica –the National Development Plan– and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In **Sudan**, the VNR asserts that the government has conducted training workshops aimed at helping businesses integrate the principles and dimensions of the SDGs in their productive activities. Regarding concrete PPPs, in **Jordan**, private sector involvement is mentioned in the fields of social protection; agricultural industries (without specifying the sustainability aspect); the coordination and supervision over private hospitals; reducing water losses and increasing energy efficiency of water stations and the operation of desalination plants; as well as disposal and transport of dangerous and medical waste. A partnership council with the private sector was established in 2015 and a working team set up with partners to follow up on developments related to the sector.

A case study in good practice: The Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA) Strategy for Investment Attraction and Development



The Jamaican VNR highlights the Sustain-a-Livity initiative, which is a uniquely Jamaican concept conceived by the Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority that combines two words: Sustainable: -meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs-, and Livity - the Rastafari concept of righteous living. Its essence is the realization that an energy, or life force, conferred by Jah (God), exists within, and flows through, all peoples and all living things. Livity has a strong focus on living a natural lifestyle.

According to the VNR, based on this concept, Sustain-A-Livity is the embodiment of an elevated lifestyle whereby people can develop an awareness to expand their workstyle, quality of life and spiritual interests; where eco-industrial parks interact and cooperate with the local community to achieve a harmonious living philosophy emanating from the Jamaican motto "Out of many one people" to protect the environment and achieve economic prosperity. The Sustain-a-Livity Framework, developed by the Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA) embraces the United Nations Industrial Development Organization's Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development principles: Advancing Economic Competitiveness (Economic); Creating Shared Prosperity (Social); Safeguarding the Environment (Environmental); and the JSEZA has added Supporting the Rule of Law, Transparency and Accountability (Governance).

Source: Excerpt adapted from Jamaica's VNR report.

4.5.4. Academia and experts

Academics and experts contribute to 2030 Agenda implementation through research, project implementation, and education initiatives. Reporting on the contributions from academics or experts to SDG implementation decreased in 2022 with 22 out of the 44 countries (or 50%), compared to the 67% in 2021.⁹⁹

In 2022, the highest number of references was to research contributions - mentioned by 10 countries: **Andorra, Latvia, Jamaica, Gambia, Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Luxembourg, Netherlands (including Curaçao), UAE and Uruguay**.¹⁰⁰ 4 countries (**Curaçao, Eritrea, Jordan, Sri Lanka**) mentioned incorporating the SDGs into curricula.¹⁰¹ Engagement of academia/experts in multi-stakeholder initiatives for technical support and data-gathering was also mentioned by 4 countries (**Cameroon, Philippines, Togo, Eritrea**),¹⁰² participation in institutional arrangements for SDG implementation governance was mentioned by 2 countries (**Montenegro, Malawi**) and 2 countries mentioned academic networks (**Greece, Luxembourg**).¹⁰³ Four (4) other countries referred to capacity development efforts (**Jamaica,**

99. This compares to 55% of countries reporting in 2020, 28% of countries in 2019, 50% of countries in 2018, and 33% in 2017.

100. Research: versus 8 countries in 2021, 6 countries in 2020, and 7 countries in 2019.

101. Courses and incorporation into curricula: numbers compare to 9 countries in 2021, 3 countries in 2020, versus also 3 countries in 2019, and 4 countries in 2018.

102. Multi-stakeholder initiatives: numbers compare to 8 countries in 2021, 11 countries in 2020, and 2 countries in 2019.

103. Academic networks: versus 5 countries in 2021, 11 countries in 2020, and 3 countries in 2019.

Pakistan, Togo, UAE).¹⁰⁴ Three (3) countries referred to specific expert contributions (**Switzerland, Eritrea, Kazakhstan**).¹⁰⁵

One strong example is **Luxembourg**, where a Platform for Sustainable Development has been created as a collaborative structure initiated by the Higher Council for Sustainable Development and the University of Luxembourg with the support and participation of a number of institutional actors aiming at fostering actions in favor of sustainability: civil society, companies, schools, municipalities, public organizations, research institutes.

4.5.5. Children and Youth

The engagement of children and youth as partners in the process of multi-stakeholder implementation of the SDGs was mentioned by 15 out of 44 VNR reports (34%) in 2022, which constitutes a small decrease compared to 2021 (40%). This type of engagement had been noted by 21 countries (or 45%) in 2020, 9 countries (or 19%) in 2019, and 10 countries (or 22%) in 2018. Although it should be acknowledged that children and youth constitute distinct groups and should be conceived as such within policymaking and reporting processes.

The VNR reports in 2022 mostly mentioned the engagement of children and youth in initiatives focused on them, such as consultations, capacity development, multi-stakeholder discussions, awareness-raising campaigns and initiatives, specific reports, inclusion in forums and committees, volunteerism, and integration of children and youth's perspectives in policy documents and the VNR report. As an example, in **Grenada**, the role of youth as climate ambassadors is recognized in the VNR, to promote conservation, adaptation, and mitigation at the national level. One clear example is the Caribbean Youth Environment Network implemented the Young Professional Climate Finance Program Training in 2019- 2020.

The second most mentioned type of engagement was through specific projects and/ or initiatives designed and carried out by children and youth, which was mentioned by 11 countries (**Curaçao, Philippines, Suriname**, among others). In **Sint-Maarten**, children have been creatively involved in publicizing the SDGs. In **Suriname**, the VNR mentions that youth-led organizations have been working in remote Indigenous villages to support primary education. The third form of engagement was through the means of youth organizations, councils, parliaments, or networks. Countries that referred to the existence of such groupings were **Aruba** and **Greece**. In the case of **Ghana**, the VNR highlights specific youth-centered programs, like the YouStart programme, aimed at providing start-up capital and grants to young entrepreneurs. **Montenegro's** VNR highlighted the development of a youth consultation (with young people 15 and higher) to inform a U-report with the support of UNICEF. **Luxembourg's** VNR highlights participation from the country's youth at the United Nations, within the Youth Delegates program (UNYD), working to raise awareness around the SDGs among youth, notably through interactive workshops in different schools. The **UAE**

104. Capacity development: versus 5 countries in 2021, 5 countries in 2020, and 2 countries in 2019.

105. Expert contributions: versus 3 countries in 2021, 13 countries in 2020.

notes the formulation of its first Federal Youth Agenda, which highlights five objectives that focus on the development and productivity of youth. One of the main initiatives is ensuring the engagement of youth in shaping policies through Youth Councils, which are composed of young members (18–35 years old) that act as representatives for all policies in their respective entities. As of 2022, there are 104 local, ministerial, corporate, and global Youth Councils with nearly 1,300 youth members who act as ambassadors, relaying the youth’s concerns and collaborating to solve youth’s issues.

4.5.6. Other stakeholders

Beyond the stakeholders noted above, a wide range of groups contribute to 2030 Agenda implementation, including volunteers, trade unions, the media, *inter alia*. In 2022, only 13 out of 44 countries (or 30%) referred to stakeholders not previously mentioned in this report – a considerable decrease in relation to the 55% that did so in 2021.¹⁰⁶ While volunteers were mentioned by 8 countries in 2019, by 5 countries in 2020, 8 countries in 2021, they were mentioned by only 4 countries in 2022 (**Andorra, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, Switzerland**). Other stakeholders referred to in 2022 were Women (**Ghana, Dominica**), albino populations (**Malawi**), the elderly (**Malawi**). In addition, **Jamaica** highlighted the role of Jamaica’s Supreme Audit Institution in conducting research on the country’s readiness to implement the SDGs, and **Dominica**’s VNR made many references to work developed in partnership with UN Agencies such as UNDP, UN Women and UNFPA.

Moreover, **Cameroon** and **Mali** referred to public–private social initiatives in conjunction with development partners.

4.5.7. Development partners

The Secretary–General’s voluntary common reporting guidelines ask countries to outline their main priorities for development partner support. In 2022, key areas in which the government requires additional support to realize the SDGs were noted by 18 out of 44 reporting countries (or 41%), consistent with the 36% from 2021, and confirming a decrease compared to previous years.¹⁰⁷ Conversely, 21 out of 44 countries (or 48%) mentioned types of support required from development partners or, in other words, how support should be provided.¹⁰⁸ As with previous years, countries tended to provide general information on the support they require.

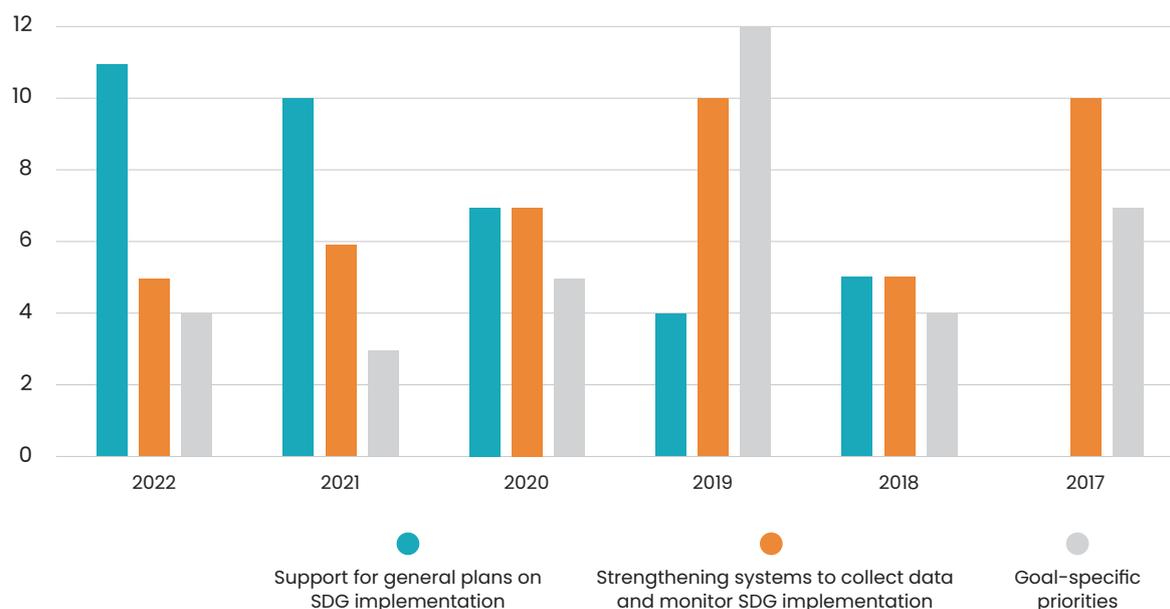
Figure 19 shows the number of countries referring to 3 priority areas for development partners support in the 2017–2022 period. As in 2021, most countries reporting in 2022 referred to the need for support in carrying out general plans on SDG implementation. Secondly, six (6) 2022 VNR reports noted the need to strengthen systems of data collection and monitoring of implementation, down from previous years.

106. This had been mentioned by 17 out of 47 countries (or 36%) in 2020.

107. This information had been included in VNR reports from 27 out of the 47 reporting countries (58%) in 2020, against 38 out of 47 countries (81%) in 2019.

108. Information on the role of development partners, or how they should provide support, was included by 19 out of 42 countries (or 45%) in 2021 and 26 out of 47 countries (55%) reporting in 2020.

Figure 19: Priority areas for development partners' support



In supporting country priorities, the provision of finance (official development assistance (ODA), finance from international financial institutions, and South-South cooperation) continued to be the most common role identified by countries (16), same as 2021, and up from the 2017–2020 period.¹⁰⁹ Technical assistance, including technology transfer, knowledge sharing, and capacity building were noted by 7 countries (versus 15 in 2021), while general coordination and partnerships were mentioned by 7 countries (versus 10 in 2021). The role of development partners in 2030 Agenda implementation was also connected with the COVID-19 pandemic in some cases. In the cases of **Senegal** and the **Philippines**, both highlighted that significant amounts of their COVID-19 response and recovery packages were financed through ODA.

Finally, the number of countries noting support to carry out their VNR in 2022 was rather consistent compared to the previous year. In 2021, 52% noted such support from the United Nations, whereas in 2022, 25 out of 44 did so (57%).¹¹⁰

4.5.8. Recommendations

- **Support civil society to engage in 2030 Agenda implementation by creating a more enabling environment, including through institutionalized dialogue and consultation, inclusion in formal governance arrangements, finance, and capacity development.**
- **Integrate the 2030 Agenda into parliamentary work, recognizing the critical role parliamentarians play as citizens' representatives and in ensuring national level accountability for progress.**

109. In 2020 this number had been 13 countries, versus also 13 countries in 2019, and 12 countries in 2018.

110. In 2020 there were 25 out of 47 countries (53%) mentioning such support, versus 22 out of 47 countries (47%) in 2019, 14 out of 46 countries (30%) in 2018, and 7 out of 43 countries (16%) in 2017.

- **Support and develop partnerships with a variety of non-state actors, including academia, the private sector, children and youth, volunteers, trade unions, and the media.**
- **Where relevant, clearly stipulate and provide details on priority areas for support from the international community, laying out the role development partners can best play to support the acceleration of 2030 Agenda implementation.**
- **Outline how multiple stakeholders can be involved to address crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.**

4.6. Means of implementation

Governments have committed to supporting a diverse range of means of implementation to realize sustainable development. Beyond aspects related to policy coherence and monitoring – captured elsewhere in this report – finance is a critical aspect including national and international dimensions. At the national level, activities include costing, SDG-based budgeting allocations and identifying sources of finance. Domestic public resources, private investment, trade, and different types of international public finance instruments contribute to varying degrees. In addition to supporting implementation in their own countries, development partners also have a role to play internationally by supporting developing countries, notably through effective official development assistance (ODA) and South-South cooperation, capacity development, technology transfer and by promoting fair trade, including preferential trade access where relevant. Cooperation to address global systemic challenges such as those related to climate change, peace and security, and the global financial architecture, including illicit capital flight and taxation are also included as part of the means of implementation.

In addition to reporting on these aspects of 2030 Agenda implementation, countries are also asked to report on best practices, challenges, lessons learned and on which fields they would like to learn from others. In 2022, the global COVID-19 pandemic continued to have implications for all aspects of 2030 Agenda implementation, particularly with regards to means of implementation, as most countries had their resources diverted to address the ongoing recovery process from the lingering localized and global effects of the pandemic, as well as the overlapping early effects of the war in Ukraine (inflationary context and its associated interest-rates hikes, disrupted supply chains, effects on commodity markets, etc). The present review specifically looked for information on the impacts of COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the means of implementation presented by VNR reporting countries.

4.6.1. Budgeting for 2030 Agenda implementation

Costing 2030 Agenda implementation, identifying sources of finance and incorporating the 2030 Agenda into budgets assist countries in preparing realistic implementation strategies, identifying financing shortfalls and setting clear expectations regarding their needs when working with development partners. Figure 20 provides an overview of whether VNR reports

refer to costing for domestic implementation of the 2030 Agenda and identified sources of finance for 2017–2022. Although the manner in which the information is presented in VNRs varies greatly and is not always entirely clear regarding the extent to which countries have costed and/or identified sources of finance, a low percentage of countries reporting in 2022 (10 out of 44 countries, or 23%), seem to have both costed implementation efforts and identified stable sources of finance (mostly through domestic resource mobilization, ODA, ‘green finance’ and public–private frameworks), which still constitutes a small increase in relation to 2021, when only 17% did so. 14 countries out of 44 (32%) did not indicate that they have or plan to cost out implementation but have indeed identified sources of finance (compared to 35% in 2021). Based on the information contained in the VNRs, these numbers would point towards countries making small but consistent strides in integrating the SDGs in their national budgeting processes, albeit with varying degrees of clarity regarding total costing, monitoring frameworks, as well as regarding the mapping of funding sources.

Among the countries that have both costed the implementation process and identified sources of finance, we can find **Andorra, Argentina, Aruba, Belarus, Cameroon, Djibouti, Ethiopia**, among others.

A case study in good practice: Integrating Official Development Assistance funds in the National Financing and Public Finance Frameworks in Malawi



According to Malawi’s VNR, the development partner’s community in Malawi continues to play a key role in financially supporting the implementation of the SDGs. Some of the notable key initiatives by the development partners is the Joint SDG Fund that seeks to strengthen Malawi’s financing architecture to accelerate implementation of the SDGs. The programme is using two streams of intervention, the top-down establishment of Malawi’s Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) and the bottom-up strengthening of local level Public Finance Management, service delivery and financial accountability systems.

The INFF is being used to mobilize and catalyse resources and investments, public and private, to fund its development plans and deliver the SDGs. More importantly, the INFF will provide the Government with a clear assessment on the set of options and of policy interventions to finance the unlocking of the country’s development potential. Second, the programme will seek to improve the financing structures supporting essential social services at local level by investing in evidence generation on the costs and funding gaps. Furthermore, the Malawi government, Development Partners (DPs), and the United Nations (UN) developed an SDG Acceleration Fund. The Fund is a financing coordination mechanism where joint priorities are set.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Malawi’s VNR report.

Civil society validity-check on the good practice from Malawi described above:



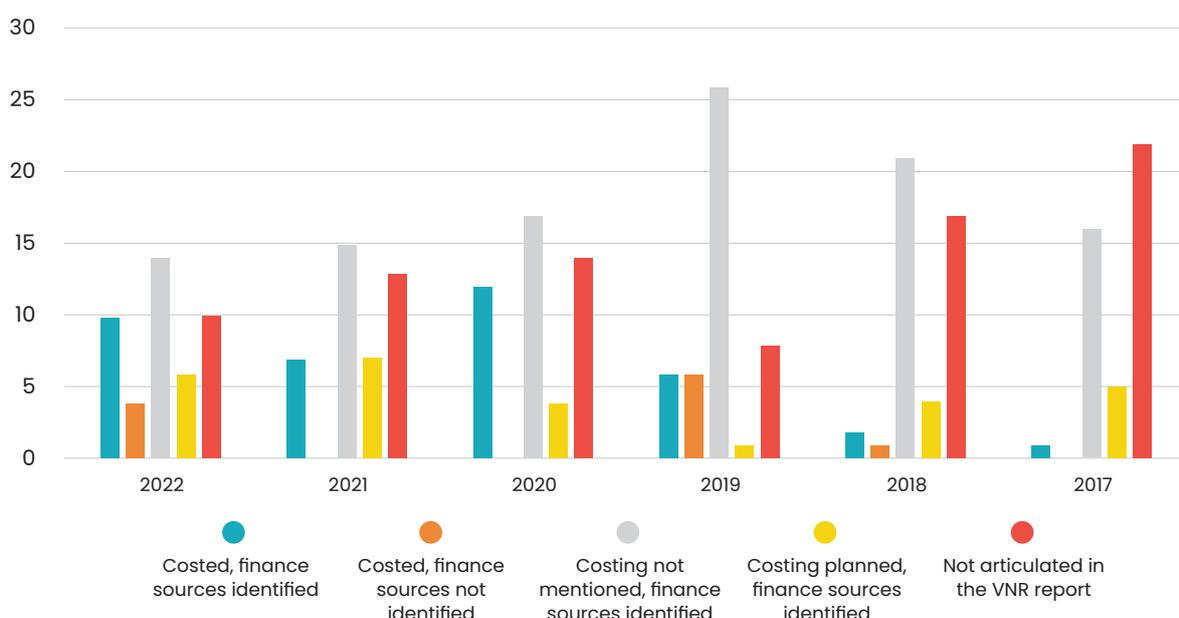
These frameworks seem to exist mostly on paper. Due to various aid conditionalities, it has not been easy for the Government to get the desired support for implementation of various programmes. In this regard, more donors resorted to financing sectors of their choice (i.e., health, agriculture) directly or through partners including NGOs. As such, other sectors are being left behind. This is being reflected in the Pillar and Enabler coordination mechanisms, for example the health and agriculture PECG is well attended, while the one on Mindset is lacking in participation yet key to achieving all the SDGs.

Initially, the support was predictable when the donors had a grouping that they called Common Approach to Budget Support (CABS). But now it is not functioning, each donor is pursuing their own interest. So, the efficiency and effectiveness of the new arrangement being referred to in the VNR is yet to be tested and should be given a bit of time.

Source: Excerpt adapted from the Confederation of NGOs from Malawi after consultation for this report.

Considering all the countries that have identified sources of finance (regardless of whether they have costed implementation or not), the figures for 2022 include 30 countries (or 68%), similar to 2021 (65%).¹¹¹ Like previous years, for the countries that identified sources of finance, these tend to include domestic resources, private investment, remittances, and where applicable, official development assistance (ODA) and South-South cooperation. Overall, the trend between 2017-2022 shows that countries tend to cost out 2030 Agenda implementation to a lesser extent, compared to the identification of sources of finance.

Figure 20: Resourcing the 2030 Agenda



111. Figures had been 70% of countries in 2020, the same 70% of countries in 2019, versus 57% in 2018, and 49% in 2017.

Key recommendation for good practice



Cost out SDG implementation and identify sources of finance. Assess budget allocations for SDG implementation at national and subnational levels and incorporate and clearly denote activities aimed at realizing the SDGs in budgets.

The inclusion of the 2030 Agenda into national (and subnational budgets) ensures that resources are effectively allocated for implementation. Budgetary allocations also give life to government commitments and priorities, clarifying the actions that are being undertaken to realize the SDGs.

In 2022, 34 countries (77%) provided some level of information on inclusion of the SDGs into national budgets or budgeting processes, up from the 62% in 2021.¹¹² For example, **Pakistan** highlighted the use of an SDG costing tool, which is used for estimating the costs of total interventions for each SDG to better identify priorities and an enhanced allocation of resources based on these. Meanwhile, the **Philippines** asserts that their medium-term and annual budgeting framework have been functioning better regarding traceability and allocations. In **Andorra**, the Horizon 2023 plan, which includes a total of 77 actions divided into 20 initiatives organized around three axes: social welfare and cohesion, economy and innovation, and alliances for change; has been entirely costed. The estimated budget for the 77 specific actions included in this action plan is 80 million euros for the entire legislature. In **Djibouti**, the budget for the implementation of the Djibouti ICI NDP 2020–2024 is estimated at US\$14 billion according to an integrated financing plan mobilising public and private resources. In **Jordan**, specific projects and actions seem to be linked retroactively to SDG targets and indicators. In **Sudan**, efforts to improve the integration of the SDGs in the general budget are said to be ongoing, in the context of the IMF's Extended Credit Facility program. In **Ghana**, annual allocations and expenditure are tracked through SDG budgeting reports. Of the 35 countries, 6 (**Argentina, Liberia, Jamaica, Malawi, Sri Lanka, Grenada**) are currently working to incorporate the SDGs into budgeting processes – with **Grenada** instating a pilot project on gender-responsive budgeting in 2022, and Jamaica implementing a results-based budgeting framework.¹¹³ This continues to be a positive sign in the sense that more countries are doing such incorporation, instead of only mentioning it as a future plan. In **Argentina**, the systematic linkage between the national budget and SDG-related policies and programs began in the second half of 2021, which is also reflected in the VNR, as the analysis of each SDG includes the identification of the budgetary resources that the government has assigned to it.

In 2022, 6 VNRs referred to plans of SDG incorporation into national budgets and integrated financing frameworks. This was the case of **Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Senegal, Botswana, Jordan, and Sudan**. Moreover, a similar number of countries referred to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on budgeting for the 2030 Agenda. In 2022, 6 countries (**Botswana, Ghana, Grenada, Philippines, Jamaica, Montenegro**) did so, versus 5 countries in 2021.

112. Figures were 51% of countries in 2020, 64% of countries in 2019, and 46% in 2018.

113. This compares to 4 countries in 2021, 2 countries in 2020, 14 countries in 2019, and 10 countries in 2018.

4.6.2. International finance

International public finance, including official development assistance (ODA), other official flows and South-South cooperation remain as important contributors to national sustainable development efforts for many countries. The examination of international public finance provides an indication of how development partners see their responsibilities with respect to supporting the realization of the SDGs globally and in developing countries. Reporting on international public finance decreased slightly in 2022, with 38 out of 44 countries (86%) doing so – compared to 95% in 2021 – with exceptions being **Argentina, Belarus, Jordan, Luxembourg,** and **Malawi**.¹¹⁴

High-income countries that reported in 2022 provided some information on international public finance, with the exception of **Luxembourg**. The Dutch territories of **Aruba, Curaçao,** and **Sint-Maarten**, despite being classified as high-income countries, highlighted that their status as SIDS should provide them with access to ODA. Of these, most countries referred to their role as providers, including specific mentions to ODA, South-South and triangular cooperation. More specific information is listed below.

- **Greece** highlighted that it has been a member of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) since 1999. Total Official Development Assistance (ODA) of Greece (bilateral and multilateral ODA) in 2020 amounted to 325.44 million USD reaching 0.18% of Gross National Income, focusing on areas where it has competence and experience.
- **Latvia's** VNR noted that the country's development cooperation framework is based on the global development agenda and relevant agreements – the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the Addis Ababa Programme of Action, and the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. At the same time, it made it clear that the share of official development assistance provided by Latvia continues to grow steadily in absolute terms (remaining at 0.12% of GNI), which has allowed the country to expand its geographical scope of support, including to countries in Africa, beginning in 2022.
- **Switzerland:** The VNR highlights that Switzerland has been promoting agroecology for several years as a decisive element in the transformation to sustainable food systems. It includes promoting agrobiodiversity to safeguard diverse and sustainable agriculture around the world. Similarly, as part of its international cooperation activities, Switzerland assists developing and newly industrialised countries as they build resilient infrastructures based on clean technologies. The country also engages in bilateral programmes with partner countries and makes considerable core contributions to multilateral organisations in order to enhance the relevant political frameworks for women and to improve their livelihoods.
- **The Netherlands** highlights its role as a major humanitarian donor, offering assistance and future prospects to communities affected by natural or man-made disasters, including conflicts. The funding provided is largely unearmarked to enable the UN or civil society organisations to respond quickly and effectively in emergencies. The Dutch government is also making a significant contribution towards SDG 3 by funding UN and NGO programmes for better sexual and reproductive health and rights, including HIV/AIDS, as well as capacity-building in the areas of climate change, water scarcity and food security.

114. This compares to 39 out of 47 countries (83%) in 2020, 36 out of 47 countries (77%) in 2019, 44 out of 46 countries (96%) in 2018, and 38 out of 43 countries (84%) in 2017.

- **UAE:** In 2018, assistance reached AED 28.62 billion (USD 7.79 billion). When only the Official Development Aid (ODA) is considered, UAE assistance to causes beyond its borders amounted to AED 13.94 billion (USD 3.79 billion). In terms of ODA as a proportion of Gross National Income (ODA/GNI), the UAE continues to exceed the 0.7% UN target, as it did in the last six years, providing 0.93% of ODA/GNI in 2018. Looking at the most vulnerable, UAE's VNR asserts that the country is also one of the most generous donors to LDCs, overachieving the UN target.

Among low and middle-income (both lower-middle and upper-middle) countries, **Jordan**, **Malawi** and **Belarus** did not report on international public finance. **Cote d'Ivoire's** VNR mentions international public finance under the constraints of the implementation of innovative financing mechanisms, and also notes that the fragility of most African states can also limit investor confidence, which implies that States therefore need to consolidate internal peace and security in order to increase the confidence of domestic and international investors. **Sudan** also links a potential increase in ODA flows to its political rebuilding process – with the lifting of the country's current suspension by development partners based on reaching national reconciliation, and the transitional government continuing its efforts towards establishing democratic rule. It is hoped that this will result in substantial increases in development assistance flows, and more financial resources available to implementation of the SDGs, according to Sudan's VNR. **Grenada** and **Jamaica** mention their classification as upper-middle-income countries as a key factor in the need to improve access to financing options and in identifying alternative and innovative sources of financing to bridge the development financing gap.

CREDIT: FORUS/BOTH NOMADS



Figure 21: Issues related to international public finance highlighted by low and middle-income countries

Declining aid flows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethiopia, Gabon Lesotho noted decline in donor flows. • Pakistan highlighted that although it has benefited greatly from international development assistance, specifically ODA, consistent, and reliable supply of international financial aid flows are much needed to capitalize on the country’s preparedness.
Increasing international public finance received	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sao Tomé and Príncipe noted that in 2020, ODA was expected to increase to meet the country’s response needs to the COVID-19 pandemic. • Togo highlighted that the strengthening of development cooperation has contributed to an increased mobilization of external resources, which amounted to US\$785.95 million in 2020, compared to US\$512.44 million in 2019, which represents an increase of 53.37% million. • Jamaica noted an increase in the funding to the environment and climate change from bilateral arrangements with Canada (72%), along with increases in funding from FAO and the GEF Small Grants Programme of 47% and 39% respectively.
Improving aid effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Philippines mentioned that as a member of the steering committee of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), the country works to improve the management, provision, and conduct of development cooperation in the form of technical assistance and ODA. In 2021, the Philippines contributed to the revisions of the GPEDC monitoring framework specifically on how the monitoring results can be institutionalized at the country level.
South-South cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cameroon referred to SSC as a source of development cooperation • Cote d’Ivoire mentioned that the country encourages South-South cooperation to limit external shocks. In this dynamic, the authorities are intensifying reforms to improve the business climate to encourage more public-private partnerships. • São Tomé and Príncipe stated that the country received between 2015 and 2019 about USD 57.6 million from financial and technical assistance (including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation). • Suriname highlighted the importance of south-south and triangular cooperation, in the form of technical assistance, small grants and credit lines have been provided by development partners for various sectors. The VNR further asserts that cooperation with neighboring and adjacent countries and the strategic partnerships with countries in the Caribbean, the Americas, Europe, and within South-South cooperation are promising.
Leveraging public and private finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aruba states that while most FDI goes to tourism, construction and real estate, data is not disaggregated at the micro level, making it unclear how foreign direct investment and local private investment contribute to innovative projects that promote sustainability. • El Salvador asserts that by 2030, it is expected that recovery plans include measures to accelerate the pace of reducing inequalities and the mobilization of international financing flows for development, such as foreign direct investment and remittances – given the state of public finances after the pandemic. • Ethiopia mentions that the decline in ODA is more than offset by increased inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) and remittances, each grew by 16% and 21%, respectively. • Senegal has put in place measures to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), by also targeting funds dedicated to the protection of the climate and the environment and green funds, by capturing the opportunities of Islamic finance and Public-Private Partnerships.

4.6.3. Trade

Participation in international trade is a key strategy for realizing sustainable development across countries. Moreover, the international community has committed to establishing a universal, environmentally-sustainable, rules-based, fair-trading system that enables developing countries to reap the benefits of trade – specially for SMSEs and small-holder farmers. Through a capabilities approach (rights-based, seeking the redistribution of public goods), rather than focusing narrowly on the material outcomes of international trade at a macroeconomic level, the focus of international trade should shift toward the expansion of human freedoms, capabilities and entitlements. It is thus suggested *‘that the point of intersection between sustainable development and international trade is to remove barriers to human freedom, and the purpose of redistribution through the international trading system is to promote and enhance freedoms for more just and inclusive societies’*.¹¹⁵

In 2022, 32 out of 44 countries (73%) reported on trade – a stable percentage compared to the 74% that mentioned trade in 2021. The percentage including a reference to trade represented a stabilization of the upward trend started in 2021 after a series of declines between 2018 and 2020.¹¹⁶ Countries tend to note the importance of trade in general terms with a focus on specific initiatives to strengthen trade, such as creating trade strategies and specific policies (9 countries),¹¹⁷ increasing trade overall through integration into regional and global trading systems (8 countries),¹¹⁸ and finalizing specific trade deals (12 countries).¹¹⁹ In general, VNRs tend to provide sparse details regarding the principles underpinning the development of trade relations.

As some more specific examples, **Eritrea**’s VNR report notes that the Eritrean diaspora contributes significantly by investing in business creation and entrepreneurship, promoting trade and the transfer of knowledge and skills. **Côte d’Ivoire**, mentions under SDG 9 that the government is seeking to amplify its effects in structural and social transformation by revitalising transport services, increasing the sustainable mobility of people and goods, and promoting internal and intra-regional trade. **Ghana**’s VNR also mentions harnessing diaspora funds to foster trade, especially in the context of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement, which is seen as a key process to boost the productive sector, without detailing which economic actor this FTA will benefit the most. **Latvia** highlights being a proponent of a comprehensive, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory, and fair multilateral trading system in accordance with the rules of the World Trade Organisation, as well as supporting the transition to duty-free and quota-free market access for all least developed countries. The **Netherlands** asserts that one of the ways the country contributes to SDG achievement in other countries is through aid, trade, and investment – with Responsible Business Conduct as a guiding principle.

115. Gammage, C., ‘The International Trading System and SDG 2: Reforming Agricultural Markets for Food Security’ in *Legal Perspectives on Sustainability* (2019), p.124.

116. In 2020, 27 out of 47 countries (58%) reported on trade, versus 28 out of 47 countries (60%) in 2019, 35 out of 46 countries (76%) in 2018, and 22 out of 43 countries (49%) in 2017.

117. Versus 15 countries in 2021, 10 countries in 2020, and 9 countries in 2019.

118. Versus also 12 countries in 2021, 12 countries in 2020, and 9 countries in 2019.

119. Versus 5 countries in 2021, and 2 countries in both 2020 and 2019.

4.6.4. Capacities for 2030 Agenda implementation

In the examination of capacities for 2030 Agenda implementation, the present review examines how Member States refer to capacity development, technology transfer, and systemic issues that impact capacities to implement the 2030 Agenda.

4.6.4.1. Capacity development

In 2022, 36 out of 44 countries (86%) referred to capacity development in some way in their VNR reports, which is similar to the level in 2021, when 36 out of 42 countries (86%) did so, confirming the positive trend compared to previous years.¹²⁰ Also as with previous years, discussions on capacity development tend to focus on capacities for implementation such as institutional and human resources and monitoring and evaluation. In 2022, a majority of countries reporting on capacity development (20 out of 36 countries) referred to actions being either carried out or planned towards capacity building geared at raising the level of knowledge within the administration or among the wider citizenry about the SDGs as a development framework, with varying levels of detail.

Secondly, capacities related to monitoring and data collection were noted by 10 countries (compared to 10 in 2021, 5 in 2020). High-income countries such as **Latvia**, the **Netherlands** and **Switzerland**, tended to showcase their efforts to support capacity development in other countries (on digitization and cybersecurity). Overall, the issues related to capacity development as reported in VNR reports in 2022 continue to be consistent with reporting in the period between 2017–2021.

Key recommendation for good practice



Articulate specific capacity constraints to 2030 Agenda implementation and with respect to realizing specific SDGs in VNR reports. Indicate the type of support needed to address capacity constraints.

4.6.4.2. Technology

With respect to technology, SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals) includes 3 targets on technology transfer to developing countries. A similar number of countries reported on technology in 2022 in comparison to previous years. In 2022, information was available for 86% (38 out of 44), similar to the 90% of countries that did so in 2021,¹²¹ with a majority among those making some type of reference to leveraging technology to implement or advance the SDGs domestically. Moreover, 10 countries discussed technology in terms of environmental management or improving the quality of their environments. Countries like **Belarus**, **Curaçao**, **Lesotho**, the **Netherlands**, **Sri Lanka**, **Togo** and **São Tomé and Príncipe** discussed ways of improving the education system with technology or enhancing learning through the

120. In 2020, 39 countries (83%) referred to capacity development, versus 32 countries in 2019 (68%), 2018 (70%) and 2017 (74%).

121. Versus 79% of countries reporting in 2020, 87% of countries in 2019, 80% in 2018, and roughly 75% in 2017.

mobilization of technology. In 2022, six (6) countries referred to digitization efforts -mainly of government services-, only 2 (two) mentioned technology transfers,¹²² including **Sri Lanka**, which highlighted the need for such transfers, and Ethiopia, which mentions the importance of technology transfers to accelerate the digitization of both the public sector and the broader economy.

A case study in good practice: National Digital Transformation Strategy in Botswana

According to Botswana's VNR, The National Digital Transformation Strategy embraces the use of technology to boost effectiveness in access to, and delivery of public services. It also aims to narrow the existing digital divide between rural and urban Botswana; and is listed as one of the policy initiatives that hold potential for transformational change in the Leave No One Behind section of the report.

Source: Adapted from Botswana's VNR

Civil society validity check: on Botswana Best practice described above

The National Digital Transformation Strategy is carried out with the primary aim of supporting the national innovation ecosystem to enhance Botswana's global competitiveness and efficient service delivery. This has been rolled out at CEDA, a public entity that has already digitized most of their services. At the moment, Transport, Water and electricity are some of the facilities that have been digitized. This will enable the ICT infrastructure to be spread across the country and improve service delivery, especially in the public sector domain. We are anticipating this as the NGO sector also needs to embrace digitization.

Source: Botswana's Confederation of NGOs (BOCONGO), after consultation for this report.

4.6.4.3. Systemic issues

Finally, systemic issues such as global macroeconomic stability, peace and conflict, migration, and illicit flows impact the capacity of countries to pursue sustainable development. In 2022, 39 out of 44 countries referred to systemic issues (89%), similar to 2021, when 88% did so, thus confirming the upwards trend from previous years.¹²³ 21 out of 44 countries, or 48%, referred to the COVID-19 pandemic as a systemic issue hindering countries' capacity to realize the 2030 Agenda in 2022, a decrease from the 57% that did so in 2021. Apart from this challenge that continues to hinder implementation at a global scale, some of the other systemic issues identified in 2022 are consistent with the ones mentioned in previous years' VNR reports. Sixteen (16) countries referred to climate change or environmental degradation,¹²⁴ and 7

122. Compared to 6 countries mentioning technology transfers in 2021, 3 countries in 2020, 6 countries in 2019, 3 in 2018, and 8 countries in 2017.

123. In 2020, 33 out of 47 countries (70%) referred to systemic issues, versus 22 out of 47 countries (47%) in 2019, and 32 out of 46 countries (70%) in 2018.

124. Versus 21 countries in 2021, 15 countries in 2020 and 6 countries in 2019.

countries mentioned macroeconomic instability as systemic issues. Eleven (11) countries (versus 8 countries in 2021) referred to peace and conflict –and the war in Ukraine in particular–, regional instability, terrorist organizations’ actions, and mentioned illegal activities on their territories, such as illicit flows and corruption, as systemic issues.

As a specific example, **Belarus** asserts in its VNR that ‘since the end of 2020, *Belarus has been implementing the 2030 Agenda in the face of unprecedented illegal unilateral economic sanctions (UCMs), which are actively applied by Western countries. Not only do these actions hinder the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by Belarus but they also run counter to the UN Charter and the core UN conventions in the field of human rights*’ – without noting that these stem from what is perceived by the international community as rigged elections and the widespread and violent repression against the pro–democracy movement that ensued. The active support Belarus has provided to Russia in its war of aggression towards Ukraine has added another significant layer.

In **Ghana**, the persistently broad informality in the economy is seen as a major systemic issue – with the size of the informal economy standing at 77% in 2021. This places a majority of Ghanaian workers outside of decent work arrangements and diminishes the tax base of the country. In **Latvia**, the VNR notes the declining effectiveness of multilateral international organisations, their inability to respond adequately to existing challenges, the questioning of the international rule of law, and the readiness of countries to ignore democratic values as one of the main systemic issues at the global level, as well as climate change and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. For **Jamaica**, geopolitical tensions have always presented a downside risk to achieving the 2030 Agenda – and currently, the post COVID-19 recovery is affected by the latest geopolitical tensions in Europe, the effects of which are challenging the effectiveness of global supply chains and food security and manifest in the form of high inflation – particularly food–related inflation, as the country relies on a high level of food imports. Climate change and the impact of hydro meteorological events that continue to threaten the sustainability of development gains are also mentioned.

4.6.4.4 The war in Ukraine

The war of aggression started by Russia through its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has had a series of repercussions for the global economy – on top of the incalculable human and economic impact it has had on the country and the Ukrainian people. The prices of key commodities within global markets, like wheat, corn, seed oil, fertilisers have spiked due to the increasing scarcity that the war has implied for these products. Moreover, the switch from oil to gas that many European economies have adopted – added to the inefficiencies in the structure of the European energy market – has translated in skyrocketing energy prices, as well as a more positive but much slower increase in the deployment of renewable energies and energy efficiency. All this, compounded by the lingering effect of the pandemic on supply chains, has contributed to building a protracted inflationary context globally, with its associated interest rate hikes, reducing the fiscal space for countries in the global South, as well as increasing their food security vulnerabilities that were already impacted by the global and localized effects of climate change. The war in Ukraine has hence increased the level of challenges globally, and has led to specific challenges for developing countries in their pathway to achieve the SDGs.

In **Cameroon, Lesotho, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Somalia, Andorra, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti** and **Switzerland**, the VNR acknowledges that the war in Ukraine is already constituting an additional burden for the global economy. Many of the VNRs also point to the local impact for low-income households on top of the lingering effects of the pandemic, since food expenditures represent a more significant part of the budget for these categories for the population. **Latvia's** VNR emphasizes the link between peace and sustainable development and asserts that the war creates immediate imperatives that need to be tackled – like helping refugees, combatting disinformation and safeguarding energy and food supplies globally.

Box 6: Internal and external factors hindering 2030 Agenda implementation according to Civil Society reports

- **Botswana:** Institutional processes for tackling corruption are in place and housed at the Directorate of Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC). CSOs are of the perception that they are doing their best to play their role effectively as often corruption cases of high-level individuals are exposed and prosecuted. However, the increasing number of corruption cases involving high level individuals remain worrisome.
- **Gabon:** Corruption and embezzlement are significant factors. There is a ministry that fights against corruption, and it's currently in the process of putting in place a battery of legal texts and proceeds – first by raising awareness on good practices.
- **Ghana:** Ghana has made some progress in the fight against corruption with the recent enactment of the Right to Information Act 2019 (Act 989) and the setting of the Office of the Special Prosecutor 2017 (Act 959). Another progress marker is the setting up of an accountability coordinating platform that brings together all the accountability players to share experience, improve coordination and prevent duplication of efforts. That said, it is worth noting that citizens are of the perception that the government is not allocating and releasing the needed funds for Anti-Corruption interventions. This gives basis to the perception that there is the lack of political will to fight corruption. The judiciary system is perceived to be slow, further compounding the low confidence of the public in the fight against corruption.
- **Greece:** While some steps were made over the last years, such as the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security that was made public, further actions are yet to be seen especially in the justice system, which is well-known for its severe weaknesses, such as delays and malfunctioning. Moreover, the National Action Plan to fight corruption is yet to be published. It should be noted that according to the Special Eurobarometer Report (No. 523, March–April 2022) 98% of the population in Greece think that corruption is widespread in the country, while 59% feel personally affected by corruption.
- **Italy:** The issues of climate and biodiversity, growing inequalities, prevailing economic models based on productivism with nationalistic revanchism, and the geopolitical influences of the new multipolarism, where relations are based on competition and conflict rather than cooperation and multilateralism, deeply constrain Italian politics. Also, a major element that profoundly constraints the

implementation of the NSDS and the various plans, is represented by the Stability and Growth Pact. Indeed, public spending on climate is inaccurately considered as debt. This is because the macroeconomic models used by the European Commission do not include the cost of the risks of climate change and the positive role that mitigation would play in reducing them.

- **Jordan:** A committee on Integrity and Anti-Corruption has implemented a series of national anti-corruption strategies, as nepotism and corruption are obstacles to good governance. The public demands the abolishment of corrupt practices and successive governments have adopted strategies against it. The work of the committee gained speed during the last five years and resulted in the enforcement of legislative amendments to the Public Procurement Law, the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission Law, and the Illicit Gain Law. However, the enforcement of the laws still lags and could be improved.
- **Kazakhstan:** It is possible that the loss of livestock that was observed in Kazakhstan last year due to drought was caused by the lack of coordinated work by the authorized bodies in the field of agriculture at all levels – starting from the Ministry down to regional and district executive officials. Disrupted communication among themselves, lack of planning and forecasting led to the fact that a mass death of livestock had happened. This was added by a corruption component and huge embezzlement. A lot of efforts are being taken but it does not always work effectively. As an example – the ‘Aksu’ state program was completed in 2020, but the problem of providing people with clean water has not been solved. Among the reasons is corruption, embezzlement, irresponsibility of state officials.
- **Latvia:** National budget planning is in line with NAP2027, but there is a growing tendency for decision-making to be highly politicised, without being linked to planning documents. For example, the EU’s Recovery and Resilience Mechanism process was led by political parties and there was little public involvement, with NGOs setting up their own discussion processes to address inequality and the impact of Covid-19 on it.
- **Mali:** Security problems are mentioned at the forefront of the challenges to eradicate poverty in Mali. Uncertainty about the continuity of the sanctions to which the country is exposed by ECOWAS and WAEMU remain major concerns. The presence of terrorist and jihadist groups in central and northern Mali seriously hinders efforts to achieve all the SDGs in Mali, hence the need to accelerate the process of eradicating these phenomena to give Mali a chance to meet the SDGs by 2030.
- **Montenegro:** The Government of Montenegro has recently announced a stronger stance towards fighting corruption, mainly through the new Law on the sources of assets, which would target high-level corruption and would look to seize criminally acquired assets. Montenegro has an Agency for prevention of corruption, and an Agency for the freedom of data and personal data protection, both of which are troubled by the limited powers to act. When we speak about policy documents, Strategy for the fight against corruption and organized crime was prepared in 2010 (for period 2010–2014) and according to information from CSOs that follow this topic, implementation of the Strategy was absent. Public consultation for preparation of a new Strategy is just starting.

- **Pakistan:** Local government system or decentralization of power system could play pivotal role increasing people's participation and engagement in development process, but decentralization of power has never been practiced in Pakistan – with some exceptions in recent history.
- **Philippines:** The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically delayed or slowed down the implementation of laws and programs. It has laid bare systemic weaknesses that have plagued our economic and social systems across generations and set off multiple crises: public health, mobility/transportation, and livelihoods.
- **Sri Lanka:** Taking on new loans to pay back previous loans became Sri Lanka's de facto policy at addressing the looming debt crisis. Sri Lanka has consistently run fiscal and current account deficits relying on excessive money printing and foreign loans to finance them. The 2019 tax policy proved to worsen the situation even more, causing a drop in government revenue convincing the international markets of Sri Lanka's insolvency risk that cut off access to further foreign market borrowings leaving dwindling reserves to pay for imports. The implementation of regressive taxation in 2019 disproportionately benefited higher income earners thereby increasing the gap between the rich and the poor over the past two years, and the soaring inflation resulting from the ongoing economic crisis in 2022 has increased the cost of living and eroded people's purchasing power further increasing inequality in Sri Lanka (SDG 10).
- **Sudan:** The reporting period was split between three regimes: al-Bashir's regime, the transitional period, and the coup government. Each period took a different character regarding commitment to the SDGs and partnership between development stakeholders. The transitional government was the most committed to partnering with all development parties, internally and externally, including civil society organizations.
- **Switzerland:** The 2030 Agenda lays the foundation for a common, sustainability-centered policy followed by all UN Member States. Now almost half of the set timeframe has already passed. Switzerland's experience clearly illustrates the great difficulty of integrating into a global target framework. Although the Federal Council adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy (2030 SDS) in the summer of 2021, it by no means translates the global SDGs into national goals. In fact, the Federal Council has watered down many of the SDGs. Even if we were to assume, optimistically, that Switzerland is implementing the 2030 SDS properly, it is not a way to implement the 2030 Agenda. The latter is considerably more ambitious.
- **Uruguay:** Some actors express the feeling that there is a slowdown in the progress of policies in the environmental sector, at times associated with a freeze or dismantlement of public programs, and in some cases (such as in protected areas) a setback is perceived. Changes are also marked at the level of the regulatory structure (changes, for example, that will not make it easier for new areas to enter the national system), deterioration in the distribution of resources to the territories (such as park rangers without fuel vouchers). In addition to this, the feeling of a possible "relaxation" of compliance with regulations; the land use

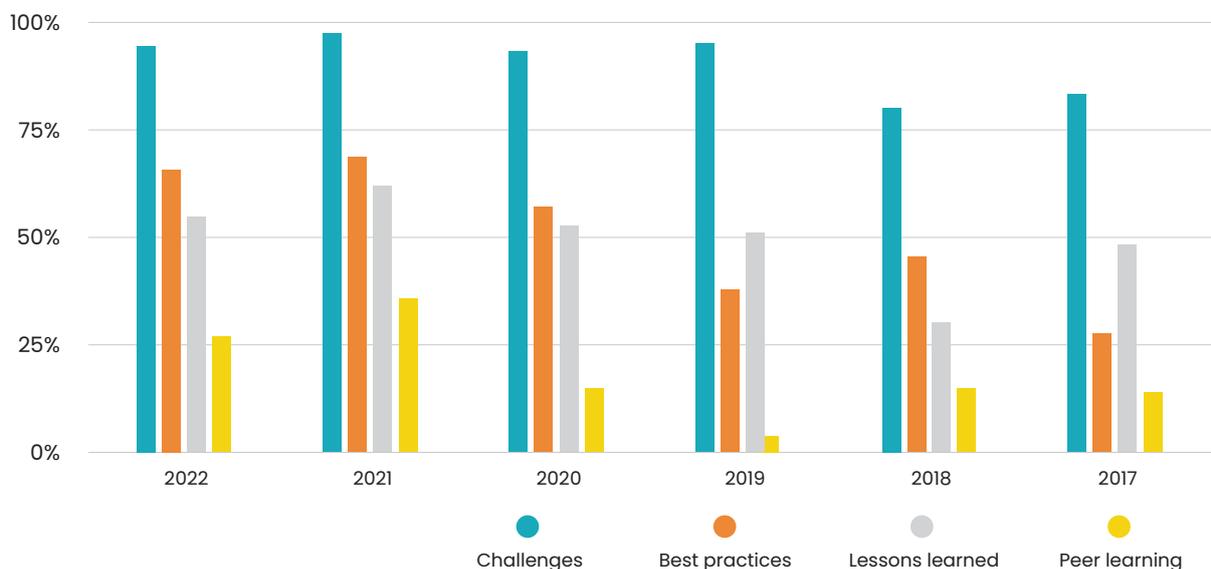
plans are mentioned as an example, where progress had been made some time ago and many professional personnel had been hired for the design of different types of planning that the regulations established, but for some time now a very significant drop in this activity has been perceived.

4.6.5. Experiences in implementation

The Secretary-General’s voluntary common reporting guidelines ask Member States to outline their best practices, lessons learned in accelerating implementation, challenges, and what they would like to learn from peers. Honest reflection on these elements is critical for the promotion of peer learning and the identification of areas for greater support by domestic and international stakeholders.

Figure 22 shows that there has been stability in reporting on challenges and on best practices, a decrease in reporting on lessons learned, as well as on reporting on peer learning in 2022 compared to previous years. Nearly all countries reported on challenges, with 42 out of 44 countries doing so (95%), stable compared to 2021. Almost two-thirds of countries reported on best practices (66%), and 55% reported on lessons learned. Twenty-one percent (27%) of countries reported on learning from peers, a significant decrease in relation to 2021. Given this development, room for improvement is even more significant than in previous years, regarding peer learning and lessons learned – as reflecting and reporting on these elements is critical to meeting the learning objectives of the HLPF-reporting cycle. Despite the encouragement for Member States to include this information throughout their VNR reports, there continues to be a need for the United Nations to explore with Member States why there is underreporting on that dimension, particularly given the focus of the HLPF follow-up and review process on knowledge and lesson sharing.

Figure 22: Countries highlighting areas requested in the voluntary common reporting guidelines



Key recommendations for good practice



Report on best practice, lessons learned to accelerate 2030 Agenda implementation, challenges and areas countries would like to learn from peers.

4.6.5.1. Best practices

The information shared for best practices tends to be detailed across VNR reports, particularly through case studies and text boxes, which provides a good basis for understanding and learning. A similar number of countries presented information on best practices in 2022 compared to previous years, with 29 out of 44 countries (66%), identical numbers as in 2021.¹²⁵ As in previous years, most countries reporting in 2022 highlighted specific programs or practices related to the realization of specific SDGs, such as **Cameroon, Ethiopia, Grenada, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Lesotho, Senegal, and UAE**. Other countries that inserted examples of good practices related to their goal-by-goal analysis, including **Greece, Kazakhstan, Latvia**, and the **Philippines** (CSOs and private sector-led initiatives). Only one country explicitly referred to national policies or national plans in relation to the SDGs, this was Lesotho. In turn, **Mali, the UAE and Uruguay** mentioned good practices in SDG-related indexes and on the creation of new databases and methods for data collection to report on implementation.

A few countries highlighted good practices being carried out by different stakeholders other than the national government, including civil society, local governments, the private sector academia, youth, and volunteers. The **Philippines** reported best practices in relation to SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), **Ethiopia** included good practices specifically related to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, and **Sudan** highlighted a multistakeholder campaign to eradicate Female Genital Mutilation. With regards to SDG 13 (Climate action), countries such as **Grenada** and **Montenegro** showcased initiatives on environmental programs focused on or carried out by youth organizations, while **Ethiopia** highlighted its Green Legacy Program, a tree-planting initiative.

125. Versus 27 out of 47 countries (57%) in 2020, 18 out of 47 countries (38%) in 2019, 21 out of 46 countries (46%) in 2018, and 28% of countries in 2017.

Case studies in Good practice: Andorra and Luxembourg's free public transport initiatives:



- **Andorra:**

According to Andorra's VNR, free public transport came into effect on July 1 for an initial period of 6 months as a pilot project, as a measure that symbolizes the green transformation of the country and responds to the social and ecological emergency. Through this action the government can contribute to the achievement of their social and ecological targets.

- **Luxembourg:**

"WORLD FIRST: FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT FOR ALL"

According to Luxembourg's VNR, since March 1, 2020, public transport (train, streetcar, bus) has been free throughout the country, including for cross-border workers and visitors. The government wants to encourage the use of public transport in an area still heavily reliant on cars. In January 2022, a pilot project extended free travel on a cross-border bus line 5 km across the border. Other projects could follow. This policy helps to contribute to the achievement of mobility, ecology, and social targets in the country.

4.6.5.2. Challenges

Identifying challenges in 2030 Agenda implementation is an important contribution of VNR reports. Frequently cited challenges across VNR reports signal areas where more support is needed from the United Nations and development partners. Moreover, the discussion of challenges can inform expectations regarding the speed and scale of 2030 Agenda implementation and provide a basis for addressing bottlenecks in individual countries.

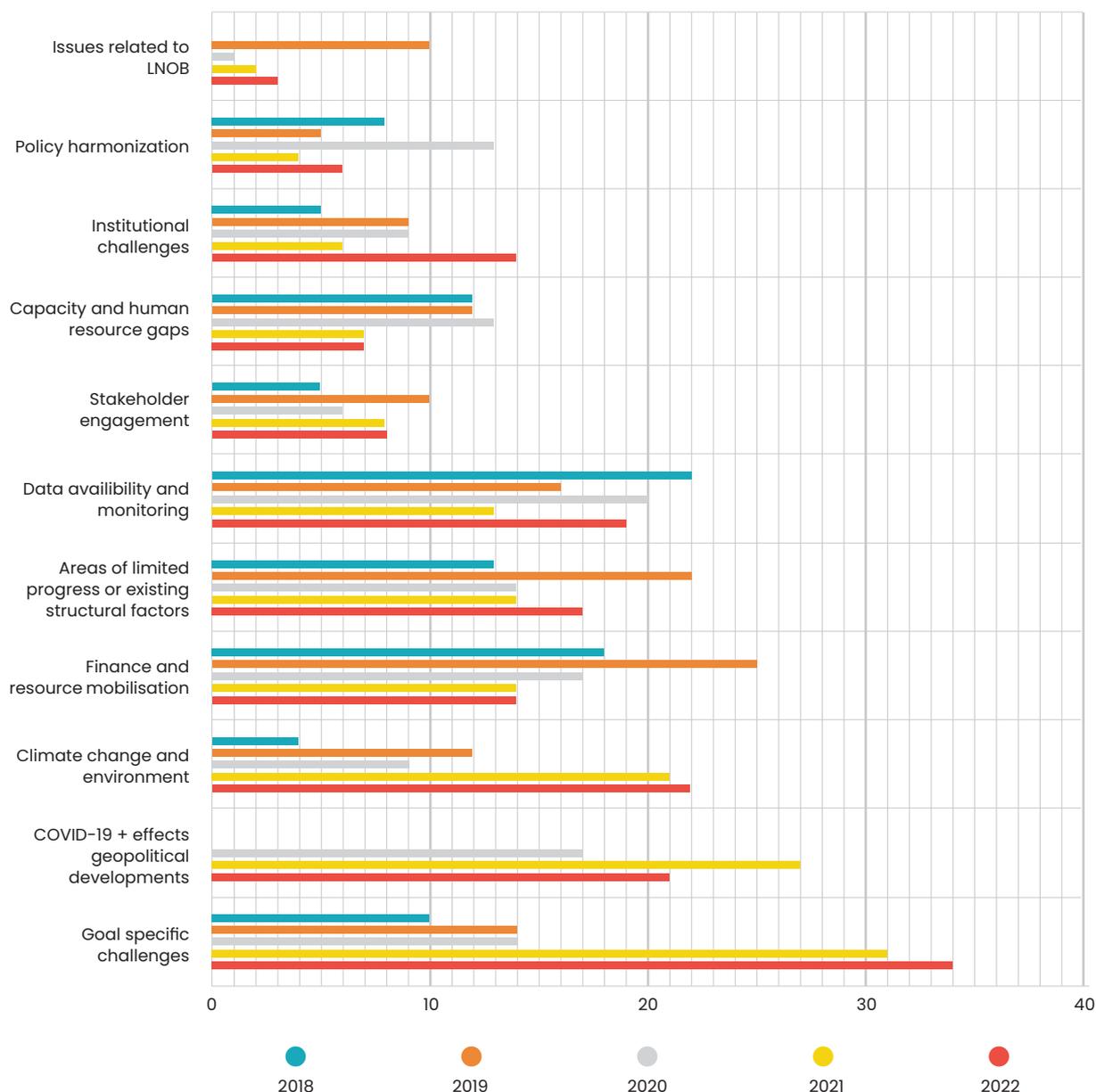
Key recommendations for good practice



Articulate clear and detailed challenges in 2030 Agenda implementation to inform how the country can best be supported by domestic and international communities.

In 2022, 42 out of 44 countries (95%) identified and reported on challenges to 2030 Agenda implementation, a similar number to 2021, when 98% did so. The exceptions were the UAE and Tuvalu. Countries reporting in 2022 presented implementation challenges in different ways, such as lists of key issues integrated in the VNR reports, with varied levels of detail. Figure 23 shows the main challenges emerging in 2030 Agenda implementation over 2018–2022.

Figure 23: Most common challenges in 2030 Agenda implementation, 2018–2022



Goal-specific challenges emerged as the top challenge in 2022, being mentioned by 34 countries, slightly up from the previous year. Secondly, 22 countries referred to climate change and environmental issues, consistent with the number of countries that did so in 2021. Thirdly, the COVID-19 pandemic with 21 countries – category to which this year *effects of major geopolitical events* was added, as two major global events that have created an overlapping set of challenges in global energy and commodity markets, as well as global supply chains, which have contributed to the current global inflationary context and the underlying tightening of monetary policies worldwide – with its implied interest rates hikes, restricting fiscal spaces, specially in the global south, even further. In fourth place came structural factors and data availability and monitoring, with 18 countries providing some degree of reflection and insight into their national deficiencies in these areas – such as structural challenges for socio-economic transformation, regarding unsustainable or weak productive structures, unbalanced geographical development, and/or unbalanced demographic structures. In the

case of data availability, countries mention a wide array of factors that range from inadequate human and budget-related capacities, institutional fragmentation to methodological and digitization challenges. In fifth place, ensuring institutions are fit for purpose was mentioned by 14 countries, a significant increase from 2021, when only 6 countries had mentioned this variable. In this area, knowledge on the interlinked nature of the SDGs, challenges to vertical and horizontal integration within the different levels and actors within public administrations are commonly cited. In the realm of stakeholder engagement, countries like **Argentina, Gabon** and **Lesotho** recognized the lack of participation within policymaking and of coordination in delivery processes, and **Somalia** also recognized a lack of participation, but in the context of the VNR process. Only 6 countries referred to challenges in terms of policy harmonization, and the issue of ensuring inclusivity and meeting the promise to leave no one behind was mentioned by only 3 countries in 2022 – in both cases, slightly up from 2021.

4.6.5.3. Lessons learned

Pointing to lessons learned in VNR reports is another aspect of reporting that supports peer learning. In 2022, 24 out of 44 countries (55%) highlighted lessons learned, a small decrease compared to 2021, when 62% did so.¹²⁶ Among the countries that provided such information in 2022 most reported lessons learned related to integrating the 2030 Agenda into integrated government systems, including policies, budgets and monitoring and evaluation. Other countries emphasized stakeholder engagement for successful 2030 Agenda implementation and others, lessons on improved interlinked approaches for policy formulation. Countries also highlighted issues related to addressing the needs of vulnerable populations in the context of leaving no one behind. A couple of countries (**Jordan** and **Malawi**) highlighted the roles of local governments, and **Lesotho** and **Greece** pointed to the importance of increasing capacities for prioritization under the 2030 Agenda.

4.6.5.4. Learning from others

Reporting on what countries are keen to learn from others saw a decrease in 2022, with 12 out of 44 (27%) countries providing this information, compared to the 38% of 2021.¹²⁷ As some examples, **Pakistan** focuses its peer-learning on environmental and innovation matters, like the management of coastal pollution, industrial waste and the development of innovative local cost-effective solutions. The **Philippines** mentions its participation in the Group of Friends of VNRs which is based on peer-learning around joint VNR reviews and HLPF preparation. At the regional level, the Philippines has also been active within the VNR twinning program developed by UNESCAP – as has also been the case for **Sri Lanka**. **Aruba** notes that the territory has been active in south-south/north-south and triangular cooperation on SDG-based projects. In **Senegal**, the VNR acknowledges that the country will benefit from the experiences of the work deployed within the United Nations Regional Working Group on Climate Change, Environment, Security and Development in West Africa – which has contributed knowledge and expertise from its members to promote an integrated and harmonized approach to climate change risks in coordination with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), by linking regional policy development to local and national action.

126. Figures had been 25 out of 47 countries (53%) in 2020, and 24 out of 47 countries (51%) in 2019.

127. Up from 7 out of 47 countries (15%) in 2020, 3 out of 47 countries (6%) in 2019, and 7 out of 46 countries (15%) in 2018.

A case study in good practice: Peer learning exercise between VNR reporters



The governments of Sri Lanka and Pakistan developed a twinning partnership, designed as a peer learning exercise in the context of their VNR process, under the auspices of the UN regional commission UNESCAP.

That said, neither Sri Lankan nor Pakistani civil societies were able to take part in the exercise.

Source: VNR reports from Pakistan and Sri Lanka, as well as consultations with AwazCDS/PDA and SL Platform on the SDGs for this report.

4.6.6. Impact of COVID-19 on the means of implementation

Among the 44 countries presenting VNR reports in 2022, 38 reported on the impacts of COVID-19 on the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which represents almost 86% of countries (versus almost 91% of countries reporting in 2021). The majority (29 countries) reported the design and application of national recovery plans, emergency contingency plans or funds, as well as national stimulus packages. Support to people, reported by 15 countries, was another category highlighted in the 2022 VNR reports, which included the population in general and the most vulnerable sectors of society. Another reported action was the provision of support to businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises, which was reported by 12 countries.

Still other actions were highlighted by some countries. For example, **Somalia** mentions the government's efforts to maintain the continuity of quality learning during the pandemic. **São Tomé and Príncipe** highlights that in the context of the pandemic, the country received unprecedented financial support for development partners to cater to the needs of its population. The **Philippines, Pakistan, Montenegro, Malawi, Cameroon, Jamaica, Greece, Ghana, Aruba, Curaçao, Côte d'Ivoire, Luxembourg, the UAE, Djibouti, Switzerland** (domestic and international), **Togo** and **Botswana** highlighted comprehensive sets of measures to provide continuous people and business centred-support during the pandemic – including cash-transfers, financial facilities and payment deferral for businesses. They also shared their development of recovery plans to revitalize the economic fabric – like increasing the speed of digitization, the strengthening of financial facilities, targeted measures for specific sectors and developing productive infrastructure.

4.6.7. Recommendations

- **Include best practices, lessons learned in accelerating implementation, challenges going forward and where opportunities exist to learn from peers in VNR reports, in order to convey the ways in which the country has established a more reflexive type of governance in the context of SDG implementation.**
- **Examine national and subnational budgets as an essential part of the implementation process and start integrating the SDGs into them to ensure that resources are allocated for implementation. In doing so, build on the good practice in costing out**

SDG implementation and identify sources of finance to implement the 2030 Agenda at country level.

- **Report on all means of implementation, including clearly specifying capacity constraints. Such information is critical for assessing gaps, identifying where greater domestic and international efforts are needed and informing development cooperation frameworks.**
- **Bolster efforts to support development partners' capacity development priorities, including strengthening statistical systems and the capacities of local stakeholders to implement the 2030 Agenda.**
- **Scale up efforts to address systemic issues that impact SDG implementation, in particular international peace and security, corruption, illicit and other illegal activities, effects of climate change, as well crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- **In view of COVID-19 and other crises, report on how it affected the means of implementation of the SDGs, highlighting actions taken to address the crisis, reduce its impact as well as structural reforms undertaken considering impacts and gaps identified in addressing them.**

4.7. Measurement and reporting

The Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines suggest countries include information on how they intend to review progress at the national level. The guidelines also recommend countries provide information as to how they will report to future HLPFs.

In 2022, 29 out of 44 countries (66%) provided information on follow-up and review processes at the national level. This shows a slight increase - compared to 61% in 2021- in terms of reporting on this dimension of 2030 Agenda implementation.¹²⁸

Key recommendation for good practice



Provide an account of national level reporting and accountability processes for 2030 Agenda implementation in VNR reports.

Furthermore, the Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines strongly encourage repeat reporters to present progress made since their last VNR report. In 2022, 28 out of the 44 reporting countries presented a VNR report for the second time, 3 countries presented for the third time, and two countries for the fourth time. Most repeat reporters (25 out of 33 countries) provided information on their progress since their last VNR report.

128. In 2020, 64% of countries discussed measures to report on the national level, versus 85% of countries in 2019, 67% of countries in 2018, and 72% of countries in 2017.

As an example, **Lesotho** consistently references progress since the last review in 2019, mentioning improved integration of the SDGs in the country's planning processes, which has improved data collection, monitoring and budgeting. The VNR also highlights increased efforts by the government in the realm of awareness-raising and participation, based on the diagnostic made in the context of the first VNR regarding gaps in these areas. **Andorra** consistently highlighted specific areas of progress for most SDGs. **Sudan** noted specific constitutional and legislative progress in the realm of gender equality and women's empowerment. **Pakistan** notes that several improvements to its implementation process have been undertaken since its first VNR, such as in the realm of institutional strengthening – through the creation of the sub-committee on the SDG within the National Economic Council; vertical integration through the development and alignment of federal, provincial and government frameworks and policies with the SDGs. In **Senegal**, the VNR provides comparative statistical data under several SDGs. For example, under SDG1, for the poverty rate, the biggest drop is recorded in urban Dakar, where the poverty rate fell from 14.2% in 2011 to 8.7% in 2018. It is followed by rural areas, where the rate was estimated at 58.7% in 2011, compared with 53.6% in 2018/2019, i.e., an improvement of more than 5%. **Togo's** VNR reports comparative data for the SDGs under review at HLPF 2022, whereas **Switzerland** includes a traffic light system. For its part, **Greece's** VNR provides an assessment of progress for each SDG, based on relevant indicators.

A case study in good practice: Reporting process since previous VNR report in the cases of Italy, Switzerland, Greece, and Togo



Italy and **Switzerland** VNRs show SDG-related progress through a traffic light system.

In the case of **Italy**, the statistical assessment is linked to the recently updated National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSSD) – framework that mainstreams the SDGs within the national planning structures and is organized in 5 Domains (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership) one for each pillar of the 2030 Agenda. Each Domain encompasses National Strategic Choices (NSCs), which are further specified by National Strategic Objectives (NSOs) and are complemented with one or more benchmark indicators. The set of measures associated with NSCs builds on the aforementioned 43 indicators selected in 2018 and constitutes an initial synthetic set of indicators capable of rendering the level of implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Italy and monitoring the progress of the SDGs as well as of the national strategic choices at different territorial levels, following the legislative mandate in Italy. For each indicator, red signifies 'deterioration', yellow stands for 'stability', and green conveys 'improvement'. The VNR provides a view based on selected indicators, but a complete assessment is available in a specific statistical report.

In **Switzerland's** VNR, the first part of each section provides a status report based on the most important aspects and developments for each SDG, and then outlines the progress that the country has made since the 2018 assessment and which challenges remain. The report also offers a summary of the key elements and focuses primarily on actions taken by the federal government. The links inserted in each section lead directly to the dedicated SDG page of the 2018–22 Baseline Assessment. These qualitative assessments have been combined with quantitative data to supply additional, complementary information on the status of progress towards

the individual SDGs. Progress towards each SDG is illustrated by a rating icon for the indicator linked to that goal, as well as by a key indicator represented by a pictogram. The goals and requirements of the 2030 Agenda are monitored in the Swiss context by means of the MONET 2030 system of indicators consisting of 103 indicators. The www.SDGital2030.ch provides a complete assessment of the 17 SDGs and the 169 targets. This constitutes a good example on how data and digitalization tools can support the achievement of the SDGs, enhancing the reporting of the country's progress in the SDGs – and allowing a better understanding on data gaps, data availability and data reliability.

Greece's SDG progress assessment is more qualitative and policy-driven, highlighting key challenges, as well as current and planned policy initiatives. That said, one or two key statistical indicators are shown, through graphs that include the 10-year evolution of said dataset (until 2020 in most cases), which is disaggregated by gender when relevant. A more detailed statistical assessment is available as an annex.

In the case of **Togo**, the VNR shows statistical progress for the SDGs under review at HLPF 2022. The assessment of the rest of the SDG framework is based on baseline data.

Source: Excerpts adapted from the VNR reports from Italy, Switzerland.

Key recommendation for good practice



Provide an account of progress made between VNR reports with reference to trends for SDG targets and changes to overarching national development plans, legislation, sectoral and cross-sectoral policies and programs formulated in the context of 2030 Agenda implementation, as well as any institutional, methodological, and/or partnership-based changes made to improve policymaking and concrete implementation efforts.

4.7.1. Data availability

Strong levels of data availability are key to ensure monitoring and evaluation of 2030 Agenda efforts. In 2022, only 19 out of 44 countries (43%) provided information on data availability – slightly up from 2021, when 36% did so.¹²⁹ Like previous years, there is no consistent method countries use to measure and report on data availability, making it difficult to provide an overall assessment of data availability for 2030 Agenda monitoring based on VNR reports. In addition, countries often do not provide information on the specific data they lack. Conversely, some countries provide an overall percentage of data availability, and others note data gaps for specific SDGs.

129. In 2020, 21 out of 47 countries (45%) provided clear information on data availability for SDG monitoring, versus 36 out of 47 countries (76%) in 2019, 18 out of 46 countries (39%) in 2018, and 14 out of 43 countries (33%) in 2017.

Table 4 provides a year-by-year comparison of data availability according to the reporting countries' calculations. The data presented do not attempt to reconcile the differences in how countries calculate data availability. Rather the table provides an indication of where countries situate themselves in terms of data availability, and further demonstrates the need for countries – regardless of their income level – to strengthen data availability for SDG monitoring. The information presented in the table is based on available data, proxy data, or partial data according to information in VNR reports. For 2022, 9 out of 44 countries (20%) reported that data was available for less than 50% of SDG indicators – similar to 2021, when 7 out of 42 countries (17%).¹³⁰

Table 4: Data availability for global SDG indicators

%	Countries and Years					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
11–20%	Guatemala	Paraguay	-	-	-	-
21–30%	Azerbaijan, the Maldives	Jamaica	Cambodia, Croatia, Eswatini, Fiji, Iceland, Iraq, Mauritius, New Zealand, Pakistan, Palau, Serbia, Tonga, Vanuatu	Honduras, Nigeria, Panama	-	Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau
31–40%	Japan, Panama, the Netherlands	Bahamas, Dominican Republic	Algeria, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Turkey	Gambia, Mozambique, Niger, Zambia	Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Iraq, Paraguay	Botswana, Somalia
41–50%	Belgium, Italy, Nigeria, Peru	Benin, Egypt, State of Palestine	Côte d'Ivoire, Kuwait, Oman, Saint Lucia, Tunisia	Kyrgyz Republic, Morocco, Syria, Uzbekistan	Denmark, Dominican Republic, Zimbabwe	Cote d'Ivoire, El Salvador, São Tomé and Príncipe, Eswatini
51–60%	Denmark	Ecuador, Niger, Spain, Uruguay, Viet Nam	Lesotho, Mongolia, Philippines, Tanzania, Timor-Leste	Costa Rica	Malaysia, Spain	Djibouti, Gambia, Lesotho
61–70%	Indonesia	Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Lithuania, Senegal	Indonesia, Israel, Rwanda, South Africa	Finland	Guatemala, Niger	Jordan
71–80%	Bangladesh	Hungary, Mexico	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, United Kingdom	Benin, Ecuador, Libya, Malawi, Moldova	Angola, Madagascar, Sweden, Tunisia	-
81–90%	Malaysia	-	-	Austria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya	-	The Netherlands

130. In 2020, 11 out of 47 countries, or 23%, and in 2019 over half of the reporting countries, or 25 out of 47 countries, had less than 50% of data available.

As noted in previous years, as well as in the section on leaving no one behind, information on disaggregated data is not necessarily reported in a consistent manner within VNR reports. Yet, this type of statistical data is key for establishing detailed baselines and informing evidence-based, specific approaches to policymaking and programming. While only 12 countries (26%) reporting in 2018 noted the need to improve disaggregated data, this figure jumped to 30 countries (64%) in 2019, then declined back to 13 countries (28%) in 2020, whereas in 2021, 16 countries (38%) pointed to the need of additional data to leaving no one behind. In 2022, 17 countries (39%) explicitly highlighted the need for improvements to the production of disaggregated data.

Seven years into reporting on 2030 Agenda implementation, information available in VNRs still tends to suggest that although some countries recognize that efforts to LNOB will require improvements to the availability of disaggregated data, less than half of reporting countries mentioned this recognition (with the proportion of countries remaining at around 30% for most of the period since 2018). As in previous years, few countries clearly articulate the forms of disaggregated data that are further required (e.g., gender, age, region, disability, income or socio-economic status, ethnicity or social group, migration status, housing). It would be very useful for countries themselves and for the international community to identify and specify the level and type of granularity in data that would support and inform policy efforts for Leaving no one behind.

A case study in good practice: Display of disaggregated data in an Official Statistics Portal in Latvia



With the launch of the new Official Statistics Portal (hereinafter – the Portal) in 2020, official statistics produced by national statistical institutions, metadata, a dissemination calendar, etc. are available in one place. The Portal provides detailed gender, age, ethnic and territorial distribution statistics. A special section on gender equality and thematic publications focusing on specific age groups, such as the annual publication “Children in Latvia” and “Seniors in Latvia”, are available in the Portal.

Source: Latvia’s VNR report.

Civil society validity check: On Latvia’s good practice described above



The launch of the new Official Statistics Portal has been a positive development, since it contains very valuable data.

That said, there are a couple of aspects that could enhance the usefulness of the data portal. Firstly, it could be designed in a more user-friendly way, as data literacy in the country needs to be improved. Secondly, regarding the link between data and policymaking, many policy documents don’t include appropriate indicators, which implies that policymaking and monitoring aren’t necessarily informed by data.

Based on a perception-based assessment conducted by the Latvian CSO platform LAPAS, the availability of data for each SDG appears uneven, with data for SDG 6 (water and sanitation) being the lowest (30%), and data on Industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9) perceived as the highest (80%).

Source: Latvian Platform on Development Cooperation LAPAS, from its Spotlight report and further consultations for this report

4.7.2. Improving data availability

In 2022, 40 out of 44 countries (91%) indicated ongoing or planned efforts to improve data availability, a small increase compared to 2021.¹³¹ As shown in Figure 24, the three most cited ways to address data availability in 2022 VNR reports were introducing the development of new overarching statistical plans (12 countries, versus 1 countries in 2021 and 9 countries in 2020), the introduction of institutional changes to strengthen statistical systems (11 countries, versus 13 countries in 2021 and 5 countries in 2019). 9 countries referred to developing or modernizing indicators, which constitutes an increase compared to 2021 (5) and 2020 (4). Building of new or expanding databases (8 countries, versus 5 countries in 2021 and 7 in 2020), and only the Dutch territory of Aruba focused on capacity-building (compared to 8 countries in 2021 and 11 countries in 2020).

Figure 24: Efforts to improve data validity



Regarding specific efforts for improving data availability, **Mali** highlighted having adopted a 3rd generation Statistics Master Plan, and undertaken its 5th General Census of Population and Housing (RGPH) in order to improve the production and use of statistical data necessary for the formulation, implementation and monitoring of public policies and the SDGs. In terms

131. This was noted by 24 out of 42 (84%) in 2021, 30 out of 47 (64%) reporting countries in 2020, 100% of the 47 countries reporting in 2019, and 31 out of 46 countries (67%) in 2018.

of establishing databases for improved dissemination, in **Curaçao**, a dashboard is being developed to monitor and communicate progress on achieving the SDGs with the community, making progress more quantifiable and easier to review periodically, also by peers. Periodical reviews will make it easier to adjust where necessary and hence making the process of achieving the SDGs more transparent to the community. In **Gabon**, the VNR highlights a set of institutional changes, database expansions and methodological revisions which have been ongoing since 2014. These changes revolve around the update of the National Statistical System (SSN) by revising the Statistics Law to transfer the General Directorate of Statistics into the National Institute of Statistics (INS), in a process financed through a World Bank loan of 50 million USD. The plan also encompasses ensuring the financing of the construction of a new modern and equipped headquarters at the new institute, several collection operations, revision of the Harmonized Consumer Price Index (IHPC), updating national accounts and the Harmonized Index of Industrial Production (IHPI).

A case study in good practice: The Philippines's efforts to produce disaggregated data at the local level



According to the Philippines' VNR, in keeping with the national efforts to realize true ownership of the SDGs and national development priorities at the local level, the Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) is being rolled out. The CBMS is a technology-based system of collecting, processing, and validating necessary disaggregated data. The CBMS differs from other systems where there is a larger participation by local governments while data collection is done door-to-door ensuring the highest levels of inclusivity. The system aims to provide robust and more accurate data for use in planning, implementation and monitoring purposes at all levels of governance. This ambitious undertaking is strategically planned to not only provide the government with more reliable information for decision-making but also to empower communities that take part in the process.

Source: Excerpt adapted from the Philippines's VNR report.

Even though the efforts noted in 2022 observe a higher degree of focus on building new or expanding databases, most VNRs note a combination of areas, with the establishment of new databases being part of ongoing planning endeavours, which also tend to encompass some form of institutional modifications, methodological revisions, the unveiling of new digital tools to enhance dissemination, etc.

In addition to these findings, a reduced number of 13 out of 44 countries (30%) included unofficial data (from sources other than governments) in their VNR reports, versus 40% in 2021. Different data sources (e.g., independent bodies, United Nations' agencies, World Bank, OECD, academic articles, civil society-driven documents or consultations) contribute to maintaining a multi-stakeholder reporting process, provide balance to government-focused data bases, and serve as a means of reinforcing transparency and accountability. In a spirit of comprehensiveness and inclusiveness, it would be key for countries to improve their use of non-official data in their assessments.

4.7.3. National reporting on 2030 Agenda implementation

Reporting at the national level ensures visibility of the 2030 Agenda and encourages a participatory and inclusive country-level follow-up and review process. Countries should inform their progress to attain the SDGs both at the national level (being accountable to citizens) and the international level, including at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). In 2022, 28 out of the 44 (64%) countries provided some information on national level reporting, compared to 62% in 2021, this demonstrates a similar level of information as previous years.¹³²

In 2022, only 6 countries indicated that their national reporting process or mechanism is under development, which might suggest that more countries currently have reporting mechanisms in place.¹³³ Fewer countries explicitly pointed to regular national reporting in 2022 in comparison with previous years,¹³⁴ 4 out of 44 countries (or 9%) and only 2 countries – **Malawi** and **Togo** – referred to the intention of reporting annually, versus 3 countries in 2021. VNR reports from 2022 were only slightly clearer on who would prepare reports, information that was provided by 10 out of 44 countries (24%), compared to 21% in 2021. Another aspect over which VNR reports are usually unclear is to whom reporting would occur, but 12 countries reporting in 2022 (27%, similar to 2021) did include some level of information in this sense, with parliaments being the institution most often cited in VNRs as the overseeing body, which is a positive find.¹³⁵

Three (3) countries (the same number as in 2021) noted regional-level follow-up and review processes. In 2022, monitoring and reporting actions at the local level were noted by **Pakistan** (provincial level) **Malawi**, and **Senegal** (in the context of the VNR assessment). No countries provided information on planned HLPF reporting for the future. In 2021, this intention was noted by 2 countries. In 2022, no reporting countries provided information on national auditing institutions, down from the previous year. Finally, VNR reports often lack information about citizen engagement in follow-up and review processes. While 5 countries had made some reference to stakeholders such as civil society and the general citizenry being engaged in national reporting in 2020, and 7 in 2021, this was noted by 6 countries in 2022, namely **Djibouti, Andorra, Malawi, the Netherlands, Togo** and **Mali**, although some only mentioned this in context of the VNR assessment, and not necessarily through established institutional mechanisms.

Key recommendations for good practice



Link accountability for progress on 2030 Agenda implementation to regular, planned parliamentary reviews.

132. This compared to 29 out of 47 countries (63%) reporting in 2020.

133. This data compares to 5 out of 42 countries (12%) in 2021, 2 out of 47 countries (4%) reporting in 2020, and 18 out of 47 countries (38%) reporting in 2019.

134. In 2021, 8 out of 42 countries (19%) pointed to regular national reporting, 16 out of 47 countries (34%) in 2020, versus 19 out of 47 countries (40%) in 2019.

135. Information on who would prepare reports was included by only 1 country in 2020

4.7.4. Recommendations

- **Report on data availability, including disaggregated data, and country efforts to improve data availability – given the importance of data for SDG monitoring and accountability, as well as leaving no one behind.**
- **Link reviews of progress for 2030 Agenda implementation to parliamentary oversight mechanisms in order to ensure accountability at the national level. Supreme auditing institutions can also be key players in national follow-up and review processes.**
- **Establish clear monitoring and reporting mandates (inclusive of non-state actors, local authorities and parliament) for national councils or committees, with presentation of progress to the legislative body at least on a yearly basis.**
- **Spell out plans to review progress at the national level and be accountable to citizens for progress on the 2030 Agenda beyond reporting to the HLPF. This should include consulting with non-state actors and articulating plans for future HLPF reporting. These elements are important for ensuring accountability for progress on the 2030 Agenda, identifying gaps in implementation, allowing for course correction and ensuring transparency in reporting processes.**
- **Include an assessment of progress on 2030 Agenda implementation in VNR reports to the HLPF, particularly with reference to the status of implementation in previously submitted VNR reports.**

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5. Reporting according to the voluntary common guidelines

This chapter has two sections. The first one focuses on the United Nations Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines, and the second one examines how the countries presenting VNR reports in 2022 have made use of and complied with the guidelines.

5.1. Key findings

5.1.1. Use of the voluntary common reporting guidelines

- **Overall guidelines compliance:** The review of 2022 VNR reports shows improvements in most of the components of the Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines compared to 2021, more in line with the positive trends started between 2019 and 2020, which could be attributed to the publication of the VNR handbooks by the UN.
- **Guidelines' components:** Although most countries presenting VNRs in 2022 fully meet the Secretary-General's reporting guidelines, there have been some backslides and negative trends. Only three (3) components out of 15 show a reduction compared to 6 out of 15 in

2021 – with very slight variations for two of these (Highlights and Institutional Mechanisms), and a more significant one regarding the Means of Implementation component.

- **Increases and declines in reporting:** Reporting increased or kept at a similar level for 12 components listed in the guidelines in 2022 compared to 2021, with the most significant gains seen in reporting on Ensuring Ownership and Structural Issues, although these quantitative improvements should be tempered by the fact that in both cases, almost half of reporting countries complied with the component’s specifications only to some extent. The Leave no one behind and Structural Issues components reached the highest level of compliance in the whole 2018–2022 series, although with almost half of countries complying only partially.

5.2. Voluntary common reporting guidelines

The United Nations Secretary-General proposed a set of voluntary common reporting guidelines to help countries frame their VNR reports to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). The guidelines have evolved over time with an updated [reporting guidelines for 2022](#). VNR reports submitted for the following year also have a [new handbook for reporting \(2022\)](#) that includes a more detailed set of recommendations on how to prepare subsequent VNR reports after first HLPF reporting, and suggestions on how to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidelines are voluntary however and countries ultimately decide on how to present their findings.

Box 7: What is in the Secretary-General’s voluntary common reporting guidelines (2022)?

- **Opening statement by the Head of State or Government, a Minister or other high-ranking Government official.**
- **Highlights presented in one to two pages highlighting the number of VNRs previously presented to the HLPF and the most significant changes, a synthesis overview of the review process, status of SDG progress, new and emerging challenges (including on COVID-19), and how the government is responding to the integrated and indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda and working to leave no one behind.**
- **An introduction that sets the context and objectives for the review, outlines the review cycle and how existing national reports were used. The policy architecture for implementation and policy tools to support integration of the three dimensions, as well as linkages to relevant international agreements could also be mentioned.**
- **Presentation of the methodology for the review, outlining the process for preparation of the national review.**

- **Policy and enabling environment**
 - Ensuring ownership of the SDGs with an outline of efforts towards all stakeholders to inform them on and involve them in the SDGs and the VNRs. This section can address how specific groups have been engaged.
 - Incorporation of the SDGs in national frameworks is understood in terms of the critical initiatives countries undertook to adapt the SDGs and targets to their national circumstances, and to advance their implementation. This section should include challenges in implementation, their cause, and refer to efforts taken by other stakeholders.
 - Integration of the three dimensions through a discussion of how the three dimensions of sustainable development are being integrated and how sustainable development policies are being designed and implemented to reflect such integration. Could include analysis related to the yearly HLPF theme.
 - Assessment of how the principle of leaving no one behind is mainstreamed in implementation. Includes how vulnerable groups have been identified and efforts to address their needs, with particular attention to women and girls.
 - Institutional mechanisms described in terms of how the country has adapted its institutional framework in order to implement the 2030 Agenda. Would be useful to include information on institutions and non-state actors, coordination, and review plans.
 - Relevant systemic issues or barriers that hinder progress, including potential external consequences of domestic policies. Transformative approaches to addressing these challenges can be highlighted.

- **A brief analysis of progress on all goals and targets, as well as policies and measures taken so far, including whether a baseline has been defined. Discussion can also include trends, successes, challenges, emerging issues, lessons learned and actions to address gaps and challenges. Countries completing a subsequent VNR are encouraged to describe progress since the previous review.**

- **Description of new and emerging challenges, including recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, plans and measures to build back better while advancing the SDGs and targeting those most at risk of marginalization. Description of other new and emerging challenges, further discussion on policies and measures to address structural frictions, and definition of future actions needed can also be included.**

- **Presentation of the means of implementation, including how means of implementation are mobilized, what difficulties this process faces, and what additional resources are needed based on review of challenges and trends. The section can include reference to financial systems and resource allocation to support implementation, the role of technology, concrete capacity development and data needs, and the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships.**

- **Conclusion and next steps include the plans the country is taking or planning to take to enhance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including efforts and**

any support needed for an inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Can also outline how implementation will be reviewed at national and subnational levels. Countries can also highlight lessons learned and how they will be applied for future VNR processes and reports. Next steps should be stated in a concrete way to allow for targeted follow-up.

- **Annexes should include an annex with data, using the global SDG indicators as a starting point and adding priority national/regional indicators as well as identifying gaps. Additional annexes can also showcase best practices or comments from stakeholders.**

5.3. Use of the guidelines

All the VNR reports presented in 2022 were reviewed against the guidelines to identify which of the suggested components have been addressed by reporting countries. Another assessment refers to the extent to which countries fully met the guidelines' requirements for each component.

Figure 25 shows that, reporting increased in 11 components listed in the guidelines in 2022 compared to 2021.¹³⁶ Two components experienced the highest level of reporting/inclusion in the whole 2018–2022 series, namely LNOB and systemic issues for SDG implementation, although with almost half of countries complying only partially.¹³⁷

136. The “new and emerging challenges” component is not comparable, as it has only been included in the guidelines in 2021.

137. As a disclaimer, conclusion and next steps have been merged into a single component from the 2020 Secretary-General's guidelines. Therefore, the comparison for this component only relates to the 2020–2022 series.

138. Tuvalu only produced main messages

Figure 25: Trends in reporting against the Secretary-General’s voluntary common reporting guidelines over 2021–2022¹³⁸

Apart from assessing the percentage of countries including the guidelines’ components into their VNR reports, more information was drawn on in terms of countries’ overall compliance with the guidelines. Figure 26 provides an overview of trends, outlining countries that:

- have fully met the guidelines for a component, indicated in green;
- partially met the guidelines by referring to the component but not most aspects requested in the guidelines, indicated in yellow; or
- did not include the component at all, indicated in red.

	Statement by HoS	Highlights	Introduction	Methodology for Review	Ensuring ownership	Incorporation into National Frameworks	Integration of three dimensions	Leaving no one behind	Institutional Mechanisms	Structural Issues	Goals and Targets	New and emerging Challenges	Means of Implementation	Conclusions	Annexes
Andorra															
Argentina															
Belarus															
Botswana															
Cameroon															
Cote d'Ivoire															
Dominica															
Djibouti															
El Salvador															
Equatorial Guinea															
Eritrea															
Ethiopia															
Eswatini															
Gabon															
Gambia															
Ghana															
Greece															
Grenada															
Guinea-Bissau															
Italy															
Jamaica															
Jordan															
Khazakhstan															
Latvia															
Lesotho															
Luxembourg															
Liberia															
Malawi															
Mali															
Montenegro															
Netherlands															
Pakistan															
Philippines															
Sao Tomé and Príncipe															
Sénégal															
Somalia															
Sri Lanka															
Sudan															
Suriname															
Switzerland															
Togo															
Tuvalu															
United Arab Emirates															
Uruguay															
Direction of change over previous year (2021–2022)	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	→	↓	↑	→	↑	↓	↑	↑
Percentage of countries including component in 2022	88%	82%	93%	95%	88%	98%	86%	93%	90%	90%	98%	90%	86%	91%	77%
Percentage of countries including component in 2021	79%	86%	86%	88%	74%	93%	74%	93%	93%	76%	98%	88%	98%	88%	71%
Percentage of countries including component in 2020	77%	87%	92%	96%	85%	96%	79%	87%	94%	87%	96%	-	96%	94%	72%
Percentage of countries including component in 2019	83%	81%	96%	83%	94%	89%	85%	81%	98%	53%	94%	-	91%	(**)	72%
Percentage of countries including component in 2018	83%	72%	96%	93%	80%	96%	72%	63%	96%	67%	91%	-	76%	(***)	61%

(*) Component added in the VNR Handbook 2021 (**) Conclusion 77%, Next steps 79% (***) Conclusion 74%, Next steps 80%

5.4. Recommendations

- **Follow, as much as possible, the guidelines as proposed by the Secretary-General to ensure that all elements of SDG implementation are captured and facilitate comparison of shared challenges, good practices and lessons learned.**
- **Continue to include the methodology for the VNR, with details that articulate how the drafting process occurred, timing, how stakeholders were engaged and lessons learned. This will provide greater clarity on what was done, and how other Member States can draw from the experience of different countries.**
- **Make use of the guidance provided by the Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews to better assess and report on integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in VNR reports, highlighting tangible policy examples, if available.**
- **Report more qualitative information regarding institutional spaces and mechanisms for policy dialogue, for example explaining their specific mandates and methodologies, how these spaces and mechanisms are linked to the policymaking and reporting cycles, as well as highlighting substantive policy outcomes generated through participatory processes.**
- **Report on the means of implementation as instructed in the guidelines, including domestic finance, resource allocation, budgeting, international public finance, trade, capacity development, technology and partnerships.**
- **Provide a detailed assessment of the forward-looking agenda, outlining where the country needs to go and the steps to get there, based on gaps and lessons learned to date. This should include next steps in terms of follow-up and review with concrete commitments to be fulfilled by states, strengthening the VNR process and clarifying what stakeholders can expect in the years following VNR reporting at HLPF.**
- **Report on data availability, including disaggregated data, with reference to global and national level indicators, in the statistical annex. This will provide a better picture of countries' overall capacity to monitor SDG implementation.**
- **Take all guidelines updates into consideration, including instructions focused on second or third time VNR presentations, and on building back together from COVID-19.**



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6. Conclusions

Based on the review of the 44 VNRs conducted in 2022,¹³⁹ the extent to which the SDGs act as a directing principle to fully incorporate sustainable development principles, approaches and objectives within decision-making processes in national contexts remains limited and fragmented. This fragmentation is viewed from the standpoint of political processes, and is manifested through institutional structures for SDG governance. When such institutional structures are in place, the VNRs indicate they are usually either state-centered, operate on narrow or unclear mandates, are detached from policymaking when constituted as multi stakeholder spaces, or exist only at a specific level of governance (usually the national level). Regarding the extent of political processes, this fragmentation translates into different actors within political systems enjoying different levels of capacity, access to participation and buy-in regarding SDG implementation pathways.

As in previous years, although VNRs on paper provide a vehicle for stocktaking by reporting on countries' progress (or backsliding) within their pathways to sustainability, their inconsistencies in approach, unevenness in granularity and accuracy in the information, as well as insights presented, introduce challenges for comparison. The United Nations has strived to provide overarching guidelines for the formulation of VNRs, but as a country-implemented initiative, there is a lot of variation. Some of these inconsistencies are influenced

139. Full VNRs from 43 countries + Tuvalu's main messages

by material limitations in implementation and monitoring processes (fiscal space and data availability), but others (like the level of transparency and comprehensiveness of the analysis) tend to reflect a lack of political will – usually stemming from a lack of political consensus within countries. Since SDG implementation doesn't take place in a vacuum, it's essential for political actors to build new governance mechanisms that attempt to address political and societal fragmentation, bridging different policy preferences and provide a platform for transforming collective intelligence into collective action. VNRs should be treated as an intermediate product of such spaces for continuous, structured policy dialogue and participatory monitoring.

Sustainable development is a dynamic concept with evolving interpretations and modes through which collective preferences are set. Governments should therefore consider how to continually improve implementation, monitoring and reporting processes and not just focus on procedural aspects, but also address substantive aspects related to SDG implementation. For example, it is not enough to only provide basic information on whether multi stakeholder consultations did or did not take place (or whether civil society is or is not included in formal governance arrangements). The international community needs information on best practices on ways to ensure participation takes place, how participation spaces are linked to the policymaking or reporting cycle, the level of inclusiveness, and the concrete outcomes of these participation spaces in terms of policies or inputs in decision-making.

Additionally, when addressing integration of the SDGs into policy frameworks, it would be beneficial for VNRs to include how and to what extent this integration informs policymaking outcomes and concrete implementation efforts. In this context, the inclusion of dedicated sections on integration within VNRs would be welcome to provide a way for countries to fully convey the extent to which the 2030 Agenda framework and principles have influenced the substance of their policymaking processes and policy outcomes. This would hopefully also strengthen assessments and debates within the HLPF, as well as the exchanges and peer reviews that take place within that space.

This kind of approach would also enable observers and peers to distinguish more clearly between countries that display a more discursive or symbolic approach to the SDGs (typically countries for which the 2030 Agenda is more of an administrative undercurrent process, acting as an influence for policies ex post) and those countries for whom the 2030 Agenda has more political salience and acts as a structuring element in their policymaking and public deliberation processes. Learning how countries in the latter group have substantively reconsidered policy frameworks and trajectories, political practices, and institutions from a sustainability standpoint will help raise the bar for SDG implementation. This approach would also enable the identification of the different forms that civil society involvement actually takes, as well as its extent. Such information should focus in particular on how stakeholders are included, given that *'the knowledge required to establish sustainability pathways is dispersed throughout society and it is only through interactive processes that we can more precisely define problems and solutions'*.¹⁴⁰

140. Meadowcroft, J. (2007) 'National Sustainable Development Strategies: Features, Challenges, and Reflexivity', in *European Environment Eur. Env.*, p.152–163

One positive aspect of the SDG reporting process is the fact that, in different forms and to varying degrees, VNRs have enabled administrations and governments throughout the world to establish more reflexive and open approaches to progress-assessment. They have incrementally enhanced governance through social interactions and opened spaces to a wider range of actors, with the resulting increased levels of understanding of challenges and possible policy solutions. The set of 2022 VNRs seem to be further proof of this positive trend, especially regarding VNR-related consultations, the identification of challenges and systemic issues and to a lesser extent on the inclusive definition of national priorities or planning and policy tools. Governments should be encouraged to build formal governance mechanisms that go beyond the VNR process, as well as technical working groups and convene regular broad-based and substantive consultations on their development priorities.

At the global level, the HLPF's role as convenor '*promoting coordination within a fragmented governance space*' at the international level,¹⁴¹ could be built upon to consider how global inequities within the multilateral system and global financial architecture could be addressed to enhance challenges in SDG implementation identified in the VNRs.

In 2022, the fifteen-year agenda for people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership entered its seventh year. While the world continues to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and overlapping socio-economic and geopolitical challenges added by the war in Ukraine, there is an urgent need for governments to accelerate actions and promote transformative change to achieve a just recovery. It is our hope that the implementation of the SDGs during the coming eight years – and the VNRs that report on this implementation – will be characterised by more meaningful engagement between a wide range of stakeholders and will lead to greater achievement of our collective efforts towards a sustainable future for our communities and our planet.



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141. Bernstein, S. (2017) 'The United Nations and the governance of the Sustainable Development Goals', in Kanie, N. and Biermann, F. (eds), *Governing Through Goals: Sustainable Development Goals as Governance Innovation*, Boston: MIT Press, pp 213–40, cited by Novitz, T. (2019)

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List of 2022 VNR reports (44 reporting countries)

Andorra

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: French

Argentina

Third VNR report
Language of analysis: Spanish

Belarus

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: Russian

Botswana

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Cameroon

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: French

Côte d'Ivoire

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: French

Djibouti

First VNR report
Language of analysis: French

Dominica

First VNR report
Language of analysis: English

El Salvador

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: Spanish

Equatorial Guinea

First VNR report
Language of analysis: Spanish

Eritrea

First VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Eswatini

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Ethiopia

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Gabon

First VNR report
Language of analysis: French

Gambia

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Ghana

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Greece

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Grenada

First VNR report
Language of analysis: Spanish

Guinea-Bissau

First VNR report
Language of analysis: French

Italy

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Jamaica

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Jordan

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Kazakhstan

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: Russian

Latvia

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Lesotho

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Liberia

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

Luxembourg

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: French

Malawi

Second VNR report
Language of analysis: English

<p>Mali Second VNR report Language of analysis: French</p>	<p>Senegal Second VNR report Language of analysis: French</p>	<p>Togo Fourth VNR report Language of analysis: French</p>
<p>Montenegro Second VNR report Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Somalia First VNR report Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Tuvalu First time reporting – only main messages Language of analysis: English</p>
<p>Netherlands Second VNR report Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Sri Lanka Second VNR report Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>United Arab Emirates Second VNR report Language of analysis: English</p>
<p>Pakistan Second VNR report Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Sudan Second VNR report Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Uruguay Fourth VNR report Language of analysis: Spanish</p>
<p>Philippines Third VNR report Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Suriname First VNR report Language of analysis: English</p>	
<p>São Tomé and Príncipe First VNR report Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Switzerland Third VNR report Language of analysis: French</p>	

List of 2022 civil society reports (21 reports)

<p>Argentina Report: Informe de Monitoreo Ciudadano ODS Language of analysis: Spanish</p>	<p>Italy Report: A critical Appraisal of the Italian Voluntary National Review 2022 on Sustainable Development Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Philippines Report: People's Scorecard on the Global Goals [Executive Summary] [Full Report] Language of analysis: English</p>
<p>Botswana Report: People's Scorecard Report on the National Delivery of 2030 Agenda Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Jordan Report: Spotlight Report for the Voluntary National Report on the SDGs Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Sri Lanka Report: Voluntary People's Review on the SDGs Language of analysis: English</p>
<p>Cameroon Report: Rapport Alternatif sur l'état de mise en œuvre des Objectifs de Développement Durable (ODD) Language of analysis: French</p>	<p>Kazakhstan Report: People's Scorecard on the National Delivery of the 2030 Agenda Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Sénégal Report: Rapport Alternatif sur la Mise en Œuvre des ODD Language of analysis: French</p>
<p>El Salvador Report: Estado de la Implementación de los ODS en El Salvador Language of analysis: Spanish</p>	<p>Latvia Report: NGO report on the Implementation of the SDGs in Latvia Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Sudan Report: Spotlight Report on the Progress in Achieving the SDGs in Sudan Language of analysis: English</p>
<p>Gabon Report: Rapport de la société civile sur le progrès de la mise en oeuvre des ODD Language of analysis: French</p>	<p>Mali Report: Etat de la Mise en Oeuvre des ODD au Mali: Rapport de la Société Civile Language of analysis: French</p>	<p>Switzerland Report: Business-as-usual at the expense of our planet? Half-time remarks on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Switzerland Language of analysis: English</p>
<p>Ghana Report: TAKING ACTION ON SDGs: CITIZENS PERSPECTIVES ON THE SDGs DELIVERY MECHANISM IN GHANA Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Montenegro Report: People's Scorecard on the National Delivery of the 2030 Agenda Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Togo Report: Rapport des OSC du Togo sur les ODD Language of analysis: French</p>
<p>Greece Report: People's Scorecard on the national delivery of the 2030 Agenda Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Pakistan Report: Spotlight Report: Achieving the SDGs in Pakistan Language of analysis: English</p>	<p>Uruguay Report: Informe Luz sobre los ODS Language of análisis: Spanish</p>

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