

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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# Sustainable development goals: voluntary national reviews ahead of the 2018 United Nations High-Level Political Forum

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## ABSTRACT

The voluntary national reviews are the cornerstone of the United Nations High-Level Political Forum for assessing the progress, achievements and challenges faced by developed and developing countries in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals as specified on the 2030 agenda. The EU Member States (EU MS) actively participate in this yearly exercise carried out at the UN High Level Political Forum. They contribute with proactive commitment to ensuring progress towards implementing the global agenda, promoting accountability, supporting effective international cooperation, and fostering exchanges of best practices and mutual learning. By the end of the 2018 exercise, 24 EU countries will have volunteered for participation (UK, Austria, Bulgaria and Croatia have not participated yet). Over the last three years, EU MS have taken lead in the ongoing process for overcoming major challenges in implementing SDGs, such as: bringing SDGs into the national context and ensuring consistency with other international obligations; setting an appropriate institutional framework, including the involvement of national parliaments; engagement of stakeholders and awareness raising; developing indicators and monitoring mechanisms; and supporting developing countries in implementing the 2030 agenda through external policy and development assistance. While there is much to be done for the global implementation of SDGs, EU Member States are earnestly showing their commitment, including supporting third countries.

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# 1 Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a political declaration setting out 17 goals, which are the follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Rio+ 20 process on Sustainable Development.

During the negotiations, the EU insisted on strong language regarding human rights, good governance, gender equality, as well as for the integration of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

The SDGs are reflected in many EU policy initiatives, such as the European Consensus on Development, and in the position of the European Parliament.

One hundred ninety three UN Member States agreed on the 2 August 2015, after more than two years of negotiations, on a new sustainable development agenda. The resulting political declaration, '[Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)' (Agenda 2030) set the common vision, shared principles and key elements of the new agenda, a detailed list of 17 goals and 167 targets, the means of implementation (MOI) and review process. The core elements, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), result from [the convergence of two processes](#): the follow up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which reached their target date in 2015, and [the Rio+ 20 process](#) on Sustainable Development.

The SDGs aim for an economic and societal transformation. In contrast to the former MDGs, which required commitments from richer countries primarily in view of their external policies, the SDGs are universal in nature. SDGs are commonly divided in three categories:

1. domestic development outcomes, where governments assume responsibility for improving the situation of their own citizens;
2. assisting other countries, through financial assistance or capacity building;
3. participating in achieving global objectives, such as climate change and biodiversity.

The EU's contribution to the negotiation process was significant. The [public negotiation documents](#) show that the EU insisted on strong language on human rights and good governance, as well as gender equality.

The [Addis Ababa Action Agenda, \(AAAA\)](#), laying out the steps the international community committed to take to fund the world's new sustainable development agenda, was also integrated into the 2030 Agenda thanks to the EU. The Action Agenda establishes indeed a strong foundation to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Finally, the EU called for the strong and participatory follow up and review mechanism that is currently being implemented. This explains the strong commitment of the EU in the implementation of the SDGs, not only at internal level but also in cooperation with partner countries.

Another reason explaining the EU's commitment is that the 2030 Agenda reflects many of the EU's existing priorities for sustainable development, as highlighted by the 2016 [Communication on next steps for a sustainable European future](#), which maps the contribution of the various EU policies and legislation to the SDGs. The convergence between the EU and the global agenda is even clearer in the renewed [European Consensus on Development](#), aligning the Union's development cooperation policy with

the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its main focus points (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership).

The European Parliament has been an active participant in the process. In its [February 2017 resolution on the revision of the European consensus on development](#), the Parliament reiterated its position supporting SDGs, placing a particular emphasis on the fight against poverty. It also voiced its wish for the EU to maintain official development aid (ODA) as the backbone of its development policy, calling on Member States to fulfil their commitment to achieving the 0.7 % of GNI ODA target by 2030. In its [July 2017 resolution on EU action for sustainability](#), the European Parliament urged the Commission to produce an EU SDGs implementation strategy and adapt the EU budget to the priorities of the SDGs. The Parliament also stressed the need to ensure effective EU external-policy support for the implementation of the SDGs in developing countries.

The next steps for the EU's contribution to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 will focus on two work streams. The first track includes mainstreaming the SDGs into EU policies and initiatives, and promoting sustainable development globally in cooperation with external partners. The implementation will be pushed forward by the European Institutions in an inclusive process that will take into consideration inputs from relevant stakeholders. To this end, the Commission has launched a [Multi-stakeholder Platform](#) to facilitate the follow-up and exchange of best practices on SDGs implementation. Furthermore, a new EU [list of indicators](#) to monitor progress in an EU context towards the SDGs was published in May 2017.

A second track will launch a reflection work on the EU long-term objectives and the focus of sectoral policies after 2020. In this view, the Commission will adopt at the end of the year a [Reflection Paper](#) "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030, on the follow-up to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change" to address possible ways on how to further integrate the Sustainable Development Goals in EU policy making.

Paragraph 54 of the [United Nations Resolution A/RES/70/1](#) of 25 September 2015 sets out the following 17 'Global Goals', together with 169 targets:

**Goal 1.** End poverty in all its forms everywhere

**Goal 2.** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

**Goal 3.** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

**Goal 4.** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

**Goal 5.** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

**Goal 6.** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

**Goal 7.** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

**Goal 8.** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

**Goal 9.** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation

**Goal 10.** Reduce inequality within and among countries

**Goal 11.** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

**Goal 12.** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

**Goal 13.** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts <sup>(13)</sup>

**Goal 14.** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

**Goal 15.** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

**Goal 16.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

**Goal 17.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

## 2 Assessing progress towards SDG implementation: the UN High-Level Political Forum

The United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the global structure responsible for assessing progress.

The United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the global structure responsible for assessing progress, achievements and challenges faced by developed and developing countries, ensuring that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains relevant and ambitious, and most importantly that the Sustainable Development Goals are achieved by 2030.

In the 2030 Agenda, Member States have emphasized that the HLPF should draw high-level political attention to gaps or areas where implementation is lagging behind, and provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up to accelerate progress.



<p>Two cycles of reporting have been carried out so far, in 2016 and in 2017.</p> <p>The HLPF 2018 will be convened from 9 to 18 July 2018.</p> <p>The next strategic review of the HLPF will be in 2019 and the European Commission is expected to present a report.</p>	<p>Presentation and discussion of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) is a key component of the HLPF's function. VNRs, are state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and involve multiple stakeholders.</p> <p>These aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In short, VNRs are the cornerstone of the review process.</p> <p>Two cycles of reporting have been carried so far, in 2016 and in 2017. Out of 22 countries that volunteered for the pioneer exercise in 2016, four were EU countries, such as France, Germany, Estonia and Finland.</p> <p>In 2017, the number of countries submitting their Voluntary National Review to the HLPF nearly doubled, with 43 countries undertaking VNRs in 2017, compared to 22 countries that volunteered in 2016. Out of those, ten were EU Member States: Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden presented their VNR in 2017.</p> <p>On the occasion of the incoming <a href="#">HLPF 2018</a> that will be convened from 9 to 18 July 2018, under the title <i>Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies</i>, and will assess progress, 47 countries will submit their voluntary national reviews: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Guinea, Jamaica, Kiribati, Laos, Lebanon, Mali, Mexico, Namibia, Niger, Paraguay, Qatar, the Republic of Congo, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Palestine, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Vietnam, as well as 10 EU Member States: Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.</p> <p>As a result, following the 2018 exercise, 24 out of 28 Member States will have presented at least one VNR (all but UK, Austria, Bulgaria and Croatia).</p> <p>The HLPF 2018 will also include sessions dedicated to the following goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal 6 - Clean water and sanitation</li> <li>• Goal 7 - Affordable clean energy</li> <li>• Goal 11 - Sustainable cities and communities</li> <li>• Goal 12 - Responsible consumption and production</li> <li>• Goal 15 - Life and land.</li> <li>• Goal 17- Partnerships for the goals.</li> </ul> <p>Next year, the 2019 HLPF will undertake a strategic review and provide high-level political guidance on the Agenda and its implementation. The European Commission is expected to present a regional report. The</p>
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<p>Common reporting guidelines have been developed by the UN to support member states in conducting VNRs.</p>	<p>European Parliament, together with national parliaments, has a central role in scrutinising the implementation of the SDGs, advocating strong monitoring procedures and accountability mechanisms, and contributing to effective communication.</p> <p>The UN has developed <a href="#">common reporting guidelines</a> in order to support countries in conducting VNRs, with the primary objective to make VNRs comparable between themselves. The guidelines - produced in 2015 and updated in December 2017 - provide a common framework for reporting while allowing for flexibility, so countries can adapt them to their own circumstances. The UN also released synthesis <a href="#">reports of the 2016 and 2017 VNRs</a>, and the UN Development Group (UNDG) <a href="#">released Guidelines to Support Country Reporting on the SDGs</a>. Finally, in January 2018, the UN Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) went a step further and issued a <a href="#">handbook</a> for preparing VNRs: providing basic, practical information on the steps that countries may take when preparing a VNR. These documents compose a comprehensive toolbox that seeks to support countries in their follow-up and reporting efforts.</p>
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### 3 Voluntary National Reviews: evolution and challenges

	<p>Experience developed over time and guidelines agreed at international level had a clear impact on the process and format of the VNRs presented by Member States. As a result, the 2016 reviews are less detailed and targeted compared to the 2017 exercise. The 2017 reporting countries had the opportunity to build on previous experience and to use as a reference the growing number of publications prepared by the UN to assess progress on SDG implementation.</p> <p>To reflect this evolution in our analysis, we will compare VNRs presented by the EU Member States by year of presentation, thus starting by France, Germany, Estonia and Finland, who participated in the 2016 exercise, and following with Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden, who presented their VNRs in 2017. The analysis will also take stock of Member States' preparatory material presented in view of the 2018 HLPF, despite the currently limited available information.</p> <p>The analysis, we will focus on the main challenges of VNRs <a href="#">as identified by the UN</a>, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridging the SDGs into the national context and ensuring coherence with the international policy framework;</li> <li>• Institutional framework;</li> <li>• Stakeholders engagement;</li> <li>• Indicators, data collection and monitoring;</li> <li>• Financing and means of implementation.</li> </ul>
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<h3>3.1 Bridging the SDGs into the national context and ensuring coherence with the international policy framework.</h3>	
<p>The main challenges to implementation include the integration of SDGs into the national framework and policy coherence, along with institutions, stakeholder engagement, monitoring and financing.</p>	<p>The SDG implementation has to take into consideration different national policies and priorities. All reporting countries conducted a mapping exercise for cross - checking SDGs and existing national sectorial strategies. Steps have been taken to align development plans and strategies with the SDGs. While existing plans and strategies are the main vehicle for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, some countries have also developed separate dedicated strategies and action plan, for establishing priorities and coordination mechanism. Finding the right balance between feasibility and ambition in setting national targets is a challenge for most reporting countries.</p> <p>In carrying out this mapping exercise, countries noted that national plans and strategies were to be aligned - for policy coherence - not only with the 2030 Agenda, but also with international obligation; stemming from international commitments e.g. on climate and the environment. Aside from instruments such as the Paris Agreement, the UNFCCC and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are also frequently referred to.</p>
<h3>3.2 Institutional framework</h3>	
	<p>Member States outlined efforts to map ministries and government agencies involved the implementation of SDG targets. All countries reported progress in establishing and/or strengthening existing institutional frameworks, inter-ministerial coordinating offices, committees, or commissions. However the different approach of each EU MS is such that it may result in a challenge for international cooperation on the matter. Tellingly, while some VNR report that the national parliament has a critical role in SDG implementation through its oversight and legislative functions, other VNRs do not even mention the parliament, as if it was not part of the process.</p>
<h3>3.3 Stakeholders engagement</h3>	
	<p>The VNRs reflect that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the meaningful engagement of all national stakeholders. Many countries have incorporated designated stakeholder coordination elements in their overall institutional mechanisms for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.</p> <p>However, the form of stakeholder engagement varies: ranging from stakeholder consultations in decision-making processes, to the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships to advance on certain goals and targets, to involving stakeholders in monitoring and reporting.</p>

	<p>During the preparations of the VNR reports, many governments invited stakeholder representatives to provide input, or shared draft reports for stakeholders' comments. Some countries invited stakeholder representatives to join their official national delegations to the HLPF, including sharing the stage of their VNR presentation with stakeholder representatives. Challenges highlighted by countries include: securing the resources required to maintain well-structured, collaborative engagement with stakeholders; to ensure fair representation; and the need to manage stakeholders' high expectations.</p>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Indicators, data collection and monitoring</b>
	<p>Defining meaningful and consensual indicators, to be used in monitoring and review, is considered crucial by most countries. A global indicator framework was agreed upon at the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2017, and subsequently adopted by the General Assembly in July 2017. The <a href="#">Global SDG Indicator Database</a> was launched in July 2017, and presents country-level data as well as global and regional aggregations compiled through the UN system and other international organisations. However data collection remain one of the top of the challenges highlighted by the reporting countries.</p>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Financing and means of implementation</b>
	<p>While expectations are that the financing needs for SDG implementation will be considerable, concrete cost estimates are still lacking. Several countries however did refer to the importance of preparing needs assessments and cost analysis for SDG implementation. The EU MS perspective is that there is a clear commitment to focus support, including Official Development Assistance (ODA), on the most vulnerable countries. Implementation requires action, both at national and EU level; and both in internal and external policies. As regards to development cooperation, the existing financing instruments and programmes were negotiated before the SDGs agenda was finalised.</p>
<b>4</b>	<b>EU Member States Voluntary National Reviews: the 2016 exercise</b>
<p><a href="#">Estonia, Finland, France and Germany</a> were the first EU countries presenting VNRs to the 2016 HLPF.</p>	<p><a href="#">Estonia, Finland, France</a> and <a href="#">Germany</a> are the four EU Member States that participated in the first VNR exercise carried out in 2016. Although these countries had experience in sustainable development policy, their reviews are not as targeted, detailed and comparable as the 2017 ones. The 2016 VNRs tend to include more political declarations and less technical details that those presented in 2017.</p> <p>Namely, the French and German 2016 VNRs used two different approaches: Germany illustrates its comprehensive National Sustainable Development Strategy, whereas France refers to several national and</p>

<p>Integrating SDGs into the national policy framework: the most common approaches are the development of national strategies or action plans to reflect the 2030 Agenda, or the review of existing legislation at the basis of the national approach to sustainable development.</p> <p>All countries expressed in broad terms their commitment to the principle of policy coherence.</p>	<p>international initiatives that are components of the overall national approach to sustainable development, including: the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, several actions in the field of environmental policy, and legislation for reducing unemployment.</p> <p><a href="#">Stakeholders criticized</a> France for its VNR as the country announced the development of a National Action Plan for integrating the SDGs into the national policy framework, without however identifying the specific gaps to be addressed in order to fulfil its objectives, opposite to Germany that conducted a more structured analysis and, in line with the announcement made in 2016, published a year later a new <a href="#">German Sustainable Development Strategy</a> for better integrating SDGs into the national policy, based on the principles of intergenerational equity, quality of life, social cohesion and international responsibility.</p> <p>In spite of already having a number of ongoing initiatives in the field, Finland mirrored Germany's approach and updated its own strategic framework, termed <a href="#">Finland 2050</a>, as well as adopting an <a href="#">action plan</a> for the systematic implementation of the SDGs.</p> <p>The Estonian VNR is particularly well structured when it comes to presenting the methodology and the process used, that started with a mapping exercise defining policy gaps and areas to be improved for the SDG implementation. In preparation of the 2016 Estonian VNR, the Estonian Commission for Sustainable Development has initiated a review of Estonia's sustainable development strategy <a href="#">Sustainable Estonia 21</a>, in the context of Agenda 2030. Additionally, the Government Office, in co-operation with the Inter- ministerial Sustainable Development Working Group, has initiated a compliance analysis related to the global sustainable-development goals. Estonia also announced its commitment renewing its sustainable development indicators - through Statistics Estonia - so that they reflect Estonia's challenges in fulfilling the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals.</p> <p>All EU MS participating in the 2016 exercise expressed in broad terms their commitment to the principle of policy coherence. Germany's National Sustainable Development Strategy is intended to further enhance policy coherence for sustainable development within the Federal Government and in all policy areas. France reported that it had already made policy coherence a priority of its development and international solidarity policy. Finland's coordination mechanism for the national implementation of Agenda 2030 was geared towards policy coherence for sustainable development, drawing from the contributions of the government, the parliament and external stakeholders. Policy coherence has also been highlighted as a top priority for Estonia's humanitarian and development policy, following the country's VNR.</p>
<p><b>Best practice, policy coherence. Source: <a href="#">UN 2018 Handbook</a>.</b></p>	<p>In Finland, all Ministries are required to chart key policy measures taken in implementing all the SDGs. In other words, with the objective to ensure a</p>

	holistic and integrated approach to the SDGs, all ministries are requested to assess their role with regard all of them.
<p>External policy dimension: all countries expressed their commitment to upscale development cooperation.</p> <p>Institutional framework: with the exception of France, the countries reported task the Prime Minister with SDGs implementation, through an ad hoc group ensuring coordination with other Ministries.</p>	<p>With reference to external support, all countries expressed their commitment to upscale development cooperation. France has made plans to increase its ODA to up to 0.7 % of its GNI. This implies an increase in funding to the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) Group's for sustainable development by €4 billion by 2020, €2 billion of which will be allocated to tackling climate change. At the same time, an extra €400 million will be allocated to the most fragile countries in the form of bilateral grants.</p> <p>Similarly, Germany stressed its commitment to the 0.7 ODA/GNI target, with the intention of increasing development spending within the timeframe of the Agenda 2030. Finland established a new development policy for integrating the 2030 Agenda, while Estonia - shifting from being a recipient to a donor country – reported it will focus its support in the neighbours including Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Afghanistan.</p> <p>In terms of institutional setting, the Federal Chancellery is in the lead for the national sustainable development strategy in Germany, through its Committee for Sustainable Development comprising representatives from all federal ministries.</p> <p>France adopted a very different approach, entrusting the Commissioner-General for Sustainable Development (CGDD) with the implementation of the SDGs. This has been labelled as an <a href="#">ambiguous choice</a> by some stakeholders, as the CGDD reports to the Ministry of the Environment, while simultaneously being the Inter-ministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development under the responsibility of the Prime Minister.</p> <p>Estonia's and Finland's approach is similar to that of Germany's, as the political impetus is given by the Prime Minister through an ad hoc group that ensures coordination with other Ministries.</p>
<b>Best practice, institutional asset. Source: <a href="#">UN 2018 Handbook</a>.</b>	In Germany, the Federal Chancellery is the lead agency for the national sustainable development strategy, with all government departments responsible for their own contributions to implement the 2030 Agenda in their respective policy fields. The institutional structure consists of the State Secretaries Committee for Sustainable Development, which steers the implementation of the sustainable development strategy, and which invites the contributions of external experts from the private sector, the scientific and research community, civil society, and from the federal states.
<b>Best practice, involving local authorities. Source: <a href="#">Estonia VNR 2016</a>.</b>	In Estonia, the planning officials of local authorities (including those of cities) have received seminars and training on spatial planning, supporting the development of sustainable, inclusive and safe cities. Meetings have been held to discuss safety in planning, the role of planning in the development of an environment for entrepreneurship, assessments on the social impact of planning, and about planning with a shrinking population.

<p>Parliament engagement: national parliaments have a critical role in SDG implementation, through their oversight and legislative functions.</p>	<p>Parliaments have a critical role in SDG implementation, through their oversight and legislative functions. In Germany, the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development (the Council) works to support the German government's National Sustainable Development Strategy and raises policy-related sustainability concerns in parliament. The Council also formally reviews whether the sustainability impact assessment of draft legislation of the government has been conducted in a plausible manner, and it regularly holds public hearings and publishes policy papers to trigger debate on various aspects of sustainable development. In Finland, the Parliamentary Development Policy Committee is tasked with following up on the SDG implementation from the development policy perspective, and to monitor the implementation of the programme in compliance with the government's development policy guidelines. Following the 2016 French VNR the national parliament involvement is limited to receiving an yearly report from the Government concerning "wealth indicators", such as indicators of inequality, quality of life and sustainable development, as well as an assessment of the impact of key reforms implemented based on those indicators. In the Estonian VNRs we could not clearly identify the role of the national parliament in implementing SDGs.</p>
<p><b>Best practice, parliament engagement. Source: <a href="#">Finland SDG country report 2016</a>.</b></p>	<p>In Finland, the Parliamentary Development Policy Committee is tasked with following up on the SDG implementation from the development policy perspective, and with monitoring the implementation of the programme in compliance with the government's development policy guidelines.</p>
<p>Stakeholder consultation and awareness-raising: all countries reported, to a varying extent, the involvement of a wide range of non-governmental stakeholders in the process of preparing the VNR and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.</p>	<p>All countries reported the involvement of a wide range of government and non-governmental stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, in the process of preparing the VNR and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Though the degree to which the stakeholders are able to participate meaningfully in national formulation and implementation of sustainable development policy varies, several forms of engagement of multi-stakeholders are evident in the reports.</p> <p>In some countries, stakeholder consultation was already institutionalised for a long time. This is the case of Estonia, Finland and Germany, where consultative bodies composed by private sector actors, interest groups and civil society organisations have been established for more than two decades.</p> <p>France engaged a number of technical agencies in preparation of its VNR. A multidisciplinary committee of international experts was also set up to advise the government on the development of the next national action plan.</p> <p>All countries concerned reported being actively engaged in awareness raising. In France, a participatory <a href="#">on line platform</a> was established to disseminate good practices and recommendations, as well as to monitor</p>



	progress. Germany took a similar initiative. Estonia and Finland went a step further by including sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda in school and university programmes, as well as in teaching materials.
<b>Best practice, stakeholder engagement. Source: <a href="#">Germany 2016 VNR</a>.</b>	The <a href="#">German Council for Sustainable Development</a> has led several comprehensive multi-stakeholders engagement processes on major components of national policy such as energy policy and corporate social responsibility. Tasked with carrying out an assessment on SDGs in 2015, the Council responded by engaging experts in and outside the Government to produce an independent national response.
Monitoring: efforts are underway to define indicators, improve data availability, and ensure transparent monitoring and governance systems.	National and international efforts are underway to define indicators, to assess and improve the availability of data and statistics, and to put in place transparent monitoring systems. Governance structures are being created or adapted to ensure transparency and accountability in the development and monitoring of indicators. In Finland, a wide-reaching review process has been established, whereby the parliament assesses progress based on a set of indicators defined by a group of experts. In Estonia, the Government Office Strategy Unit is in charge of coordinating the implementation and monitoring of sustainable development issues. In France and Germany, the national statistical services are involved in producing indicators and ensuring follow-up and review.
<b>Best practice, monitoring. Source: <a href="#">UN Guidelines 2017</a>.</b>	Finland developed a colour-coded scorecard for a quick and effective understanding of progress and gaps as a monitoring tool.
	<p>AGENDA 2030 GOALS AND STARTING LEVEL OF FINLAND</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No poverty</li> <li>2. Zero hunger</li> <li>3. Good health and well-being</li> <li>4. Quality education</li> <li>5. Gender equality</li> <li>6. Clean water and sanitation</li> <li>7. Affordable and clean energy</li> <li>8. Decent work and economic growth</li> <li>9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure</li> <li>10. Reduced inequalities</li> <li>11. Sustainable cities and communities</li> <li>12. Responsible consumption and production</li> <li>13. Climate action</li> <li>14. Life below water</li> <li>15. Life on land</li> <li>16. Peace, justice and strong institutions</li> <li>17. Partnerships for the goals</li> </ol> <p>Starting level – Finland: EXCELLENT MODERATE POOR</p> <p>Source: Finland's SDG Country Report of 2016.</p>
Financing: VNR reports recognize the importance of mobilizing resources from numerous public and private sources.	VNR reports recognize the importance of mobilizing national resources from numerous, public and private, national and international sources, as well as the importance of establishing policy environments favourable to the mobilization of such resources. France indicated that assisting countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability is at the core of its international cooperation programme, while Germany noted its constructive involvement in the debate on state insolvency mechanism promoted by the UN.



## 5 EU Member States Voluntary National Reviews: the 2017 exercise

Integrating SDGs in the national policy framework: the majority of the EU countries have in some way incorporated the SDGs into national development plans, mostly through new initiatives.

Policy coherence: many countries have organised their VNRs along the 2030 Agenda's "5Ps" ", People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships, while others have addressed only selected goals.

The majority of the EU countries submitting their VNRs in 2017 have in some way incorporated the SDGs into national development plans and related policies and frameworks. Most countries have taken new initiatives for implementing the 2015 goals. Only one country – [Cyprus](#) – suggests that, after a crosscheck with existing policies, the SDGs are already effectively captured in the national legislative framework.

Some Member States have developed a separate SDG implementation strategy or vision, as is the case with [Belgium](#) and the [Czech Republic](#). Belgium adapted the implementation of the goals into its federal structure, while the Czech Republic has developed a national strategy of 97 country-specific goals.

[Italy](#) and [Luxembourg](#) have reported to be in the process of updating their existing sustainable development strategies to reflect the 2030 Agenda and its goals.

A similar approach has been adopted by [Portugal](#) - having integrated the SDGs in its National Reform Programme - and [Slovenia](#) who opted to include the SDGs in its new development strategy for 2030, rather than designing a separate one.

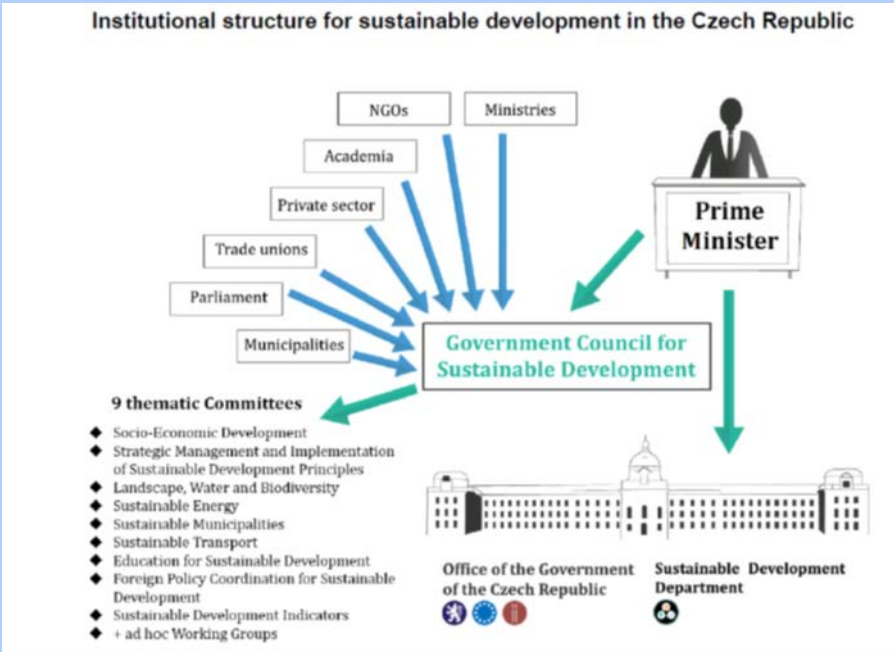
Following a cross-check with existing national legislation, [Sweden](#) established an ad hoc delegation in March 2016 to design an overarching national action plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

[The Netherlands](#) made a special effort in its VNR, as it included separate specific actions undertaken by Aruba, Curaçao and St Maarten. The Netherlands and St Maarten have integrated selected 'high-priority' SDGs into their National Development Plan, while Curaçao has adopted a separate 'common vision' as a result of consultations with stakeholders.

Only a limited number of countries provide information on their actual contributions to each of the 17 goals. Many countries have organised their VNRs along the 2030 Agenda's "5Ps" ", People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships, while others have addressed selected goals. The first three goals - poverty, hunger and healthcare - have been analysed by the majority of States, while the least-analysed goals are social inequalities, sustainable consumption and production, and sustainable cities.

Italy and Portugal have utilized the 2030 Agenda's "5Ps" for their "nationalization" of the SDGs in the structure of the review. The Danish National Action Plan is equally centred on the 5 Ps. For each of these, except partnerships, which are crosscutting, the government has formulated a number of targets (37 in total), which in most cases integrate and encompass several SDGs.

<p><b>Best practice, policy coherence. Source:</b>  <a href="#">An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the UN HLPF in 2017.</a></p>	<p>A goal-by-goal analysis has been carried out by Belgium, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden and The Netherlands that refer to contributions to the SDGs through domestic and foreign policy. This approach details how each country implements SDGs both at home and abroad. The rationale is that reporting on goal-by-goal basis prompts greater policy coherence by bringing into focus the impact of different components of domestic and foreign policies on sustainable development.</p>
<p><b>Best practice, policy coherence. Source:</b>  <a href="#">An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the UN HLPF in 2017.</a></p>	<p>Nearly all countries pledge their commitment to policy coherence in broad terms, although lacking in concrete details. Sweden stands out as it referred in its 2017 VNR to a separate detailed report ("Towards Achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals: Report on the Implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development"), which explicitly links the SDGs with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Sweden notes that the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 are coherent parts of the new global framework for sustainable development. This is in line with the European Parliament position that emerged during the negotiations.</p>
<p>External policy dimension: most VNRs reiterate countries' commitments to development cooperation, and highlight national priorities.</p> <p>While only a few countries reported compliance to the 0.7% ODA/GNI target, this is an area of ongoing efforts.</p> <p>Countries reporting in 2017 gave a detailed overview of the institutional framework for SDGs implementation. The majority of countries has adopted inter-ministerial working groups or other</p>	<p>With particular reference to the external dimension of national policies, most VNRs reiterate countries' commitments to development cooperation and highlight their existing priorities in this regard. The Czech Republic reported - in its 2017 VNR - that SDGs will be reflected in the new Development Cooperation Strategy 2018 – 2030. Italy noted that the Three-year Strategic and Planning Document of the Italian Development Cooperation was in line with the 2030 agenda. Likewise, Luxembourg has incorporated SDGs in its development cooperation strategy. In 2016, the Swedish Government established a new policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian aid, based on the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. <a href="#">Denmark</a> also placed particular emphasis on the external dimension of the 2030 Agenda by drafting a new national strategy - The World 2030 - for integrating the SDGs in its approach to development cooperation. The country applies a human rights-based approach and considers SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships) to be the foundations for its entire development engagement. The Netherlands reported four priorities: water, security and the rule of law, food security, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.</p> <p>Only five countries (Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden) reported compliance to the commitment to give 0.7% of gross national income in development aid. However, this is an area of ongoing efforts: all countries (except for Cyprus) have made plans to gradually increase their level of Official Development Assistance in the coming years.</p> <p>All EU MS reporting in 2017 outlined their institutional arrangements with respect to the SDGs. Some countries opted for centralising coordination at the level of the Head of Government and /or involving relevant ministries; as is the case for Belgium, Czech Republic, Italy, and Slovenia. Others</p>

<p>coordination mechanism for involving different ministries.</p>	<p>identified a Ministry to take on the responsibility for overall coordination. This is the case in Cyprus, the Netherlands and Portugal, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinate the process. In Luxembourg, the responsibility lies with the Ministry for Sustainable Development and Infrastructures.</p> <p>Denmark and Sweden are a special case, as their Ministries of Foreign Affairs share responsibility with the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Public Administration respectively. Albeit with some variations, the majority of countries have created inter-ministerial working groups or other coordination mechanism. As a result, several ministries are involved in SDGs implementation in accordance to their relevant area of work. All recognised that the implementation of the SDGs requires joint efforts from different Ministries.</p>
<p><b>Best practice, institutional setting. Source: <a href="#">Czech Republic 2017 VNR</a>.</b></p>	<p>In the Czech Republic, the sustainable development agenda is coordinated at the national level by the Government Council on Sustainable Development (GCSD), which is chaired by the Prime Minister. The work of the GCSD is supported by its Secretariat in the Sustainable Development Department of the Government. Work on the strategic framework for the SDGs started in 2015 and has been carried out in cooperation with hundreds of experts and stakeholders gathered in the GCSD and its nine thematic Committees.</p>  <p><b>Institutional structure for sustainable development in the Czech Republic</b></p> <p>The diagram illustrates the institutional structure for sustainable development in the Czech Republic. At the top, various stakeholders (NGOs, Ministries, Academia, Private sector, Trade unions, Parliament, Municipalities) are shown with arrows pointing towards the central body, the Government Council for Sustainable Development. This council is chaired by the Prime Minister. Below the council, the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic and the Sustainable Development Department are shown. A list of 9 thematic committees is provided below the council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Socio-Economic Development</li> <li>◆ Strategic Management and Implementation of Sustainable Development Principles</li> <li>◆ Landscape, Water and Biodiversity</li> <li>◆ Sustainable Energy</li> <li>◆ Sustainable Municipalities</li> <li>◆ Sustainable Transport</li> <li>◆ Education for Sustainable Development</li> <li>◆ Foreign Policy Coordination for Sustainable Development</li> <li>◆ Sustainable Development Indicators</li> <li>◆ + ad hoc Working Groups</li> </ul>
<p>Parliamentary engagement: many national parliaments have established committees on the 2030 Agenda and SDGs and many countries have the executive part of government organise regular</p>	<p>Many countries have emphasised the importance of meaningfully engaging national parliaments. Many of these parliaments have established committees on the 2030 Agenda and SDGs and various countries have the executive part of government organise regular dialogues and briefings for the parliamentarians. Some also included</p>

<p>dialogues and briefings for the parliamentarians. MPs have also been engaged in the presentation of countries' VNRs at the 2017 HLPF.</p>	<p>members of parliament (MPs) in their delegations when they came to present the country's VNR at the 2017 HLPF.</p> <p>In Belgium, Parliaments at the federal and sub-national levels have mostly a scrutiny function. Since 2017, the federal parliament has been engaged in the 2030 Agenda implementation, as each parliamentary committee is progressively integrating the relevant SDGs into its area of work. In Sweden's national parliament, the Riksdag, it is primarily the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Finance that handle the 2030 Agenda issues.</p> <p>In Italy, The Chamber of Deputies' Foreign Affairs Committee has set up Standing Sub-Committee on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, with the authority to establish facts and to trigger and orient public policies for realizing the SDGs, with particular reference to both a monitoring of results and transparency in the use of financial resources to achieve the SDGs.</p> <p>In Cyprus, The House of Representatives' Committee for the Environment has initiated parliamentary discussions on the 2030 Agenda, by requesting an informative session with the SDGs Coordinator (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) on Cyprus' progress in the implementation of the SDGs.</p> <p>In Denmark, the Parliament has decided to organise itself into a network to hold public debates and to identify priorities for its work, including the task of raising public awareness on the SDGs. The government will present an annual progress report as well as a quadrennial status report on the SDGs Action Plan to Parliament. A similar monitoring role is taken by the Parliament in the Netherlands.</p> <p>The Portuguese Parliament acted as a discussion forum during the planning and implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as the recommendations drawn from civil society consultations were presented during a seminar taking place at the Portuguese Parliament on 19 April 2017.</p>
<p><b>Best practices, parliament scrutiny. Source: <a href="#">Belgium 2017 VNR</a>.</b></p>	<p>In Belgium, the Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD) presents to the Parliament an annual report on public services' initiatives that contribute to sustainable development.</p>
<p>Stakeholder consultation including roundtables, seminars, workshops and bilateral discussions – is the most common form of stakeholder engagement in the preparation of the VNR reports and SDGs implementation.</p>	<p>Every country reported that stakeholder consultation – including roundtables, seminars, workshops and bilateral discussions – is the most common form of stakeholder engagement adopted during the preparation of their VNR reports. Civil society, non-government organisation and the private sector are the most commonly cited, followed by academia, youth organisations, labour associations and local authorities.</p> <p>However, VNR reports provide varying degrees of details in terms of the actual consultation processes. Some governments (Belgium, Czech Republic, Portugal and the Netherlands) invited stakeholder representatives to provide input, in the form of comments or “shadow”</p>

<p>Awareness-raising in 2017 VNR reports has improved compared to 2016, as many countries have highlighted activities to raise awareness of the SDGs among the population, generally with the support of CSOs and NGOs.</p>	<p>reports. Other countries invited stakeholder representatives to join their official national delegations to the HLPF, assigning them with speaking roles during their presentations (Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden). Denmark, Slovenia and Sweden went a step further to include an annex in their VNRs based on stakeholder-generated content.</p> <p>While the commitment by countries to engage stakeholders in the national review process is welcome, non-state actor engagement in governance arrangements and institutional mechanisms to support the actual SDGs implementation is equally important. Many countries reported that engagement with non-state stakeholders is occurring, but did not provide details. Six countries (Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden) provided information on the actions taken to institutionalize multi-stakeholder approaches to the implementation of the SDGs. Belgium, Luxembourg and Sweden have established a discussion and advisory body whose members have expertise from different parts of civil society. Danish civil society organisations are developing recommendations for the Danish government and members of Parliament on a regular basis. All parts of the Netherlands have a good record of stakeholder consultation and bottom-up approaches, including Curaçao, which has published its first national review using inputs from civil society, its Central Bureau of Statistics, the private sector and the National Platform for Youth Development. In Portugal, public consultations on SDGs were led by a group of non-governmental organizations of civil society, with the support of Camões – Institute for Cooperation and Language and the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe – namely for the purpose of preparing periodic sectorial “shadow reports.”</p> <p>However, a group of NGOs and research institutes noted in their report<sup>1</sup> that countries tend to highlight civil society contributions to the 2030 Agenda in terms of specific projects, formation of and participation in coalitions, and awareness-raising activities. This is a very narrow perception of the roles that civil society organisations play in broader society.</p> <p>Reporting on awareness-raising in 2017 VNR reports has improved in comparison to 2016<sup>2</sup>. Many countries have highlighted activities to raise awareness of the SDGs for the public, generally with the support of CSOs and NGOs. Initiatives range from organising conferences, workshops and festivals, to the use of social media. For instance, the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS), which gathers over 150 organizations in</p>
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<sup>1</sup> [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 2017.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Cutter, Amy. 2016. [Progressing national SDGs implementation: Experiences and recommendations from 2016.](#) London: Bond.



	<p>the economic and social field, launched the first Sustainable Development Festival in May 2017, a large-scale awareness raising campaign to foster cultural-political reflections on the issue across the country, which has now turned into a yearly event and a point of reference for all SDGs-linked initiatives. Aruba and Belgium have created online portals on the SDGs to engage the public and promote awareness. Countries also highlighted the importance of involving the youth and noted that education was a powerful tool to foster awareness of the SDGs. To this end, Denmark started to integrate the SDGs into school curricula and educational programmes. Portugal also reported on the initiatives of a Children's Parliament and Youth Parliament respectively, both of which aim to promote civic participation and understanding of democratic institutions, and enable children and youth to acquire knowledge on human and civil rights</p>
<p><b>Best practice, participation. Source <a href="#">UN 2018 Handbook</a>.</b></p>	<p>There is a continued need to raise awareness among the general public. A <a href="#">recent survey</a> in Denmark shows that 12 per cent of the Danish population has heard of the SDGs, which despite an increase from 10 per cent in 2015, leaves room for improvement. The government will do its part to increase awareness of the SDGs by communicating the SDGs whenever relevant and encouraging other stakeholders to do the same and actively engage with people.</p>
<p><b>Best practice, stakeholder consultation in Italy. Source <a href="#">UN 2017 Voluntary National Review synthesis report</a>.</b></p>	<p><b>2016 2017 Activities</b></p> <p><b>CIVIL SOCIETY</b></p> <p>March May: "Positioning" Italy and SDGs</p> <p>June July: Preliminary platform - consultations basis</p> <p>August September: draft01, draft02</p> <p>October November: draft03 NSDS proposal</p> <p>January MARCH: public involvement - second stage (Second meeting + consultation)</p> <p>More 200 NGOs involved; <b>public consultation (april 2017)</b></p>
<p><b>Monitoring: every VNR report includes provisions for monitoring and reporting on progress, which is usually carried out with the support of national statistical institutes.</b></p>	<p>Substantial efforts have been reported at the national level in assessing data availability, sources, methodologies, coverage and dissemination, as well as in identifying data gaps to be addressed. Every VNR report includes provisions for monitoring and reporting on progress, which is usually carried out with the support of national statistical institutes.</p> <p>Countries use the global indicator framework as a benchmark for reporting progress on the SDGs, a framework of <a href="#">232 indicators</a> that was agreed upon at the 48th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission held in March 2017. However there is inconsistent data available for the global indicators, as only some countries provided information in this regard, such as Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Italy.</p>



	<p>Countries also reported on their establishment of national targets and indicators. For example, Cyprus included a draft set of national indicators in its VNR. The Czech Republic's planned biannual analytical Report on the Quality of Life and its Sustainability will build on 192 indicators of the Czech Republic 2030 Agenda corresponding to 97 specific goals. However, one criticism<sup>3</sup> from civil society is that, for the majority of countries, information on data gathering is unclear or not articulated.</p> <p>Data accountability is also an issue. Just a few countries – namely Belgium and Denmark - made an effort to institutionalise a clear monitoring and reporting procedure. In Denmark, the government will present an annual progress report as well as quadrennial reports on the Action Plan to Parliament for discussion. Also, <a href="#">Denmark committed to produce a yearly statistical report</a> to be sent to the UN as an input to the global progress report. The first progress report is scheduled for late 2018.</p>
<p><b>Best practice, monitoring.</b> <b>Source:</b> <a href="#">An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the UN HLPF in 2017.</a></p>	<p>Belgium's National Sustainable Development Strategy commits all authorities involved to jointly establish a report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda twice per government term, including in dialogue with non-state actors and parliamentarians. The aim of this report will be to highlight the progress made in achieving the SDGs, to identify gaps, and to consecutively develop recommendations for adaptation and/or prioritisation in dialogue with the stakeholders. The Inter- Federal Statistical Institute is responsible for the systematic monitoring of progress, and has set up a specific working group to that end. SDG indicators will be progressively incorporated into a comprehensive inter-federal SDG follow-up and review mechanism. Belgium's approach links reviews of progress for 2030 Agenda implementation to parliamentary power in order to ensure accountability at the national level.</p>
<p>Financing: most countries have not quantified the implementation cost in their VNRs but have identified public and private, domestic and international sources of finance to support implementation.</p>	<p>Although no country indicated having prepared a cost analysis for SDG implementation, most countries identified public and private sources of finance to support implementation. In Italy, the yearly Economic and Finance Document (DEF) will reflect the national SDGs targets and will outline actions and tools to achieve them. The government of Denmark is preparing to launch an SDG Fund in 2018, with a contribution of EUR 382 million, which will be matched by an equal contribution from investors.</p> <p>Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, the Netherlands and Portugal reported on their commitment and actions to support capacity building for enhanced revenue mobilisation in third countries, particularly in tax matters.</p> <p>The development of strategic partnerships, particularly in terms of South-South and triangular cooperation is seen as an important way to support</p>

<sup>3</sup> [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 2017.](#)

	<p>the means of implementation going forward for both the Netherlands and Portugal.</p> <p>A limited number of countries referred to the need to finalise international trade agreements for developing countries. Denmark reported that it aims, through active involvement in the EU, to utilise trade policies to create better conditions for the least developed countries and to support the least developed countries by enabling them to take advantage of existing EU market access. The Netherlands highlighted the integration of foreign trade and development cooperation policy and stated that the introduction of the aid and trade agenda had resulted in a strong focus on responsible business conduct in global value chains.</p>
<p><b>Best practice, financing.</b> Source: <a href="#">UN 2018 Handbook</a>.</p>	<p>A specific Belgian commitment, in the spirit of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda's encouragements, has been to dedicate at least 50% of its ODA to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and fragile states by mid-2019.</p>
<p><b>Best practice, financing.</b> Source: <a href="#">UN 2018 Handbook</a>.</p>	<p>The Netherlands supports multi-stakeholder initiatives in producing and manufacturing countries, in which international and local stakeholders support decent work, the formation of labour unions, the prevention of child labour and better waste management. Examples include the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, the Pakistan Buyers' Forum in the textile industry, and the Sustainable Trade Initiative's Malawi Tea 2020 project.</p>

## 6 Towards the 2018 High Level Political Forum : preparatory work

<p>Ten EU countries will submit their voluntary national reviews in 2018: Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.</p> <p>A <a href="#">workshop for the 2018 Voluntary National Reviews</a> at the HLPF was held to share lessons learned, which have since been incorporated in the UN 2018 Guidelines to support country reporting on the SDGs.</p>	<p>Globally, 47 countries will submit their voluntary national reviews in 2018, of which 10 are EU countries: Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. Considering that these countries haven't submitted the full VNRs at the time of writing, our analysis for 2018 will take preparatory works into consideration - including workshops organised by the United Nations for supporting countries reporting on SDGs, lessons learned as revised UN guidelines are integrated in 2018, and the preliminary 'key messages' that the EU Member States share with the UN in view of the 2018 exercise.</p> <p>A <a href="#">workshop for the 2018 Voluntary National Reviews</a> at the HLPF was held on 4-5 December 2017 in Geneva to share experiences and lessons learned.</p> <p>The discussion following the panel presentations highlighted that there are different mind-sets on how the VNR report is perceived. On one hand, the report is treated as governmental, although the views of stakeholders are taken into account. On the other hand, the VNR can be viewed as a national report, reflecting the views of both the government and the civil society.</p>
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	<p>With reference to format and content, it was highlighted that the lesson learnt focused on quality and analysis, bringing concrete examples, and representing the true situation of the country, as opposite to falling into a 'beauty trap'. The importance of starting preparation early on and following guidelines was also highlighted.</p> <p>On the issue of taking into consideration national priorities, some countries preferred an approach whereby existing policies were built upon, while others preferred to start by selecting main goals and using those as a guide for the review.</p> <p>In terms of institutional setting, countries noted the need to establish 'focal points' and to make sure that the relevant administration have the capacities to carry out the task. On sub-national and local government involvement, it was noted that consultation from the bottom-up was important to create ownership.</p> <p>Several participants noted the crucial role that parliaments played, in SDG awareness-raising, monitoring and budget approval, while other participants underlined the need to increase parliament involvement. Slovakia noted that peer-to-peer contact was a successful way to engage parliamentarians, and referred to its cooperation with Finland on this issue, with the support of the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU.) While Spain mentioned how their parliament was taking action on the SDGs and how the Spanish local governments were helping to foster the vertical integration of SDGs, the IPU noted that only about 25 % of VNR countries' MPs were part of the process of the VNR report.</p> <p>While most countries agreed on the need to involve stakeholders there were a wide range of approaches for gathering and reflecting stakeholders' perspectives.</p> <p>The importance of leaving no one behind both in the process of VNR as well as in implementation of SDGs, emerged clearly. Leaving no one behind is one of the core principles of the 2030 Agenda with particular reference to ensuring inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as refugees and persons with disabilities, as well as women, children and youth. Country representatives highlighted their interpretations of the principle and actions aimed at ensuring that no one is left behind, as well as their plans of including the principle in their VNR reports: such as using it as a theme for the review or including a section on the issue in their report.</p>
<p><b>Best practice, national parliaments. Source:</b> <a href="#">Report of the 2017 workshop on VNRs.</a></p>	<p>For Slovakia, that peer-to-peer contact was a successful way to engage parliamentarians. Namely, Slovakia referred to the cooperation they had with Finland on this issue, with the support of the IPU.</p>
	<p>These considerations were integrated in the <a href="#">2018 guidelines</a> to support country reporting on the sustainable development goals( box below).</p>

## Suggested structure of a national SDG report

The following structure is suggested for a national SDG report:

- ✓ **Introduction:** This can set the context, state the purpose, describe the structure and provide a summary overview.
- ✓ **Tracking progress:** This can identify where the country is on track, slow or falling behind in achieving national targets; compare national progress with that of countries at a similar stage of development and circumstances; and assess national progress in light of the global targets.
- ✓ **Assessing means of implementation:** This section can assess means of implementation—such as domestic resource mobilization, external resource flows of different kinds, access to external markets, access to technology and life-saving medicines, etc.—as well as the overall domestic and global economic environment. In particular, the section can examine how integrated the means of implementation are, relate them to the extent of progress, and discuss impacts from the domestic and external economic environment.
- ✓ **Analysing thematic issues:** In light of the integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs, this section can cover thematic issues with cross-cutting implications—such as inequality and discrimination, gender equality, the situation of children and youth, peace, climate change, food security, the data revolution, people’s participation, poverty, etc.—and relate global/regional issues to the national context.
- ✓ **Evaluating policies and strategies:** This section can scrutinize policy gaps and deficits in national strategies, especially in terms of their integration of different elements of the 2030 Agenda and emphasis on targeting those furthest behind. It may draw on lessons from other countries facing similar development stages and circumstances.
- ✓ **Concluding with recommendations:** This final section can synthesize findings and offer possible policy options and strategies to accelerate progress.
- ✓ **Statistical annexes:** These can include basic data, their sources and definitions (metadata),<sup>25</sup> as well as discussions of methodologies. A section assessing data availability and discussing plans to work on data gaps can also be optionally included.

The guidelines also include an overview of the building blocks of the national review process such as :

- inclusive national policy dialogue: policy makers should involve civil society, academics and other relevant stakeholders in drafting VNRs as well as in implementing SDGs;
- mutual accountability: a multi-stakeholder approach that is transparent, open and participatory in a national review process can contribute to mutual accountability;
- cooperation among government bodies: given the integrated nature of the SDGs the approach shall be holistic and multi-sectorial;
- coordination with statistical offices: the importance of high-quality, , accessible, reliable, and disaggregated data has been underscored in almost every step of the process;



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• capacity development: the UN calls upon Member States to ensure that relevant officials are equipped for this complex task. The guidelines point in particular at the capacity to engage with key stakeholders with a special focus on the vulnerable groups, as well as the capacity to collect, compile and disseminate data;</li> <li>• facilitating comparability across countries: the UN calls all countries contributing in this exercise to make reference to agreed global indicators and agreed guidelines, as comparability is fundamental for the success of the process.</li> </ul>
<p>Building blocks of the VNR report following the <a href="#">UN 2018 guidelines</a></p>	
<h2>6.1 EU Member States submission ahead of 2018 High Level Political Forum</h2>	
<p>Integrating SDGs in the national policy framework: a more uniform approach to the VNR has emerged as almost all countries have started the process by conducting a 'mapping exercise,' whereby they cross SDGs with existing national strategies, to identify national priorities.</p>	<p>The analysis of the 'main messages' presented by Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain in preparation of the 2018 exercise highlights a comparatively more uniform approach to the VNR. Almost all countries have started the process by conducting a 'mapping exercise' whereby they cross SDGs with existing national strategies and thus identifying national priorities. In its main messages for the HLPF of 2018, <a href="#">Latvia</a> reported on a mapping exercise, crossing 169 SDGs indicators with the national Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia (Latvia 2030), the National Development Plan 2020 (NDP2020), and sectorial policies. Similarly, in <a href="#">Greece</a>, an in-depth</p>

<p>External policy dimension: few countries have already submitted their input or made declarations in view of the 2018 HLPF</p>	<p>stocktaking and mapping exercise was carried out in 2017, resulting in the endorsement of eight National Priorities for adapting the 17 SDGs to the national priorities, as indicated in the National Growth Strategy. <a href="#">Hungary</a> considers the preparation of its first VNR as a stocktaking exercise to assess national policies and strategies in relation to the SDGs.</p> <p>Some countries noted that their national policy is already fully in line with the 2030 agenda: the <a href="#">Lithuanian paper</a> suggests that most of the SDGs and their targets are already reflected in the national strategic planning documents. The same applies to <a href="#">Poland that made reference to its new Strategy for Responsible Development</a> (SRD), as well as <a href="#">Spain and Ireland</a> who have adopted an action plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As its next step, Spain announced the adoption of a National Strategy of Sustainable Development during the current legislature, while Ireland launched , <a href="#">Project Ireland 2040</a> in February 2018 - the government's overarching policy commitment to the 2030 Agenda.</p> <p>Other countries reported themselves to be currently in the process of integrating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs in the national policy: <a href="#">Malta</a> is drafting its Vision 2050 to offer guidelines towards long-term sustainable development in Malta, by offering a framework for the mainstreaming of sustainable development across all levels of Government. In Greece, the next step will be the elaboration of a National Implementation Plan for the SDGs in 2019, as is consistent with the National Growth Strategy. <a href="#">Slovakia</a> will introduce its six priorities for the Agenda 2030 implementation (education, sustainable and knowledge-based economy, sustainability of settlements, regions and the countryside in the context of climate change, social inclusion, rule of law, democracy and security and health) into a national development strategy, as well as into sectorial policies and investment plans. <a href="#">Romania</a> reported itself to be in the process of reviewing the National Sustainable Development Strategy of Romania (NSDS) in order to localize the SDGs.</p> <p>Concerning the external dimension of SDGs implementation, some countries have already submitted their input or made declarations in view of the 2018 HLPF. Lithuania has identified development cooperation as one of its priorities, with a focus on partnerships with governments, international organisations, international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector.</p> <p>Malta reported that its VNR will include information on its new Official Development Assistance (ODA) Implementation Plan, and on the newly set up Malta Development Bank. Similarly, Ireland will address in its VNR how the country is supporting each of the SDGs globally, including through official development assistance. The government will publish a new White Paper on International Development in the second half of 2018, which will further strengthen the alignment of Ireland's aid programme with the SDGs.</p> <p>Both Poland and Greece prepared a technical document regarding development cooperation. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs channels</p>
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<p>Institutional framework: the majority of reporting countries are bringing ministries and agencies to work across the institutional boundaries, gradually moving towards a “whole-of-government” approach.</p> <p>Stakeholder consultation: while some countries conceive the VNR as a government report, where the views of stakeholders are taken into account through a consultation process, others view the VNR as a national</p>	<p>ODA funds mostly through the <a href="#">Small Grants Fund</a> system, which proved to be very effective in reducing rural poverty in Africa. Greece stated that it is currently financing programmes for adaptation to climate change in Least Developed Countries and in regions that, due to their geographical location, are under severe danger from climate change (mainly Africa and Small Island States). In order to ensure the best possible utilisation of funds, the Hellenic development assistance plan is implemented in coordination with regional organisations of the areas under consideration, such as the African Union.</p> <p>During the preparatory process to the HLPF 2018, all countries have addressed the question on institutional arrangements for the VNRs as well as SDGs implementation.</p> <p>The majority of the reporting countries are bringing ministries and agencies to work across the institutional boundaries, gradually moving towards a “whole-of-government” approach. For instance, many countries have established inter-institutional commissions, often with the President/Prime Ministers or one Ministry as key coordinator. In Romania, for example, the institutional architecture for sustainable development is composed by both government and parliamentary bodies: the coordination is with an Inter-ministerial Committee, led by the Vice prime-Minister and the Minister of Environment, and comprising representatives of all Ministries; the Parliament is involved through a dedicated Sub-Committee for Sustainable Development.</p> <p>Likewise, Spain opted for an inter-ministerial coordination, chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, who reports directly to the Prime Minister, while its 2030 Agenda Action Plan couples each SDG with a specific Ministry. In Hungary, the coordination mechanism is very similar to that of Spain, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade being responsible for overall coordination. Greece has successfully endorsed a “whole-of-government” approach through an active Inter-Ministerial Coordination Network, steered by the General Secretariat of the government.</p> <p>On sub-national and local government involvement, some countries presented ways of involving these actors. This can be regarded as the best practice, since the SDG implementation of local authorities is in some instances more efficient than at national level. In Lithuania, a group of experts has been established for drawing up the voluntary national review, and engaging representatives of various ministries, non-government organisations and municipalities. Slovakia provided for the creation of a Government Council involving key line ministers, as well as representatives of city and regional associations to ensure greater coordination. In Spain, the Autonomous Communities and Local Entities have been called to collaborate on the joint design of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda.</p>
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<p>process that engages both government and other actors (typically private sector and civil society).</p>	<p>Concerning stakeholder engagement, two clear trends can be identified. While some countries perceive the VNR as a government report, where the views of stakeholders are taken into account through a consultation process, others view the VNR as a national process that engages both government and other actors (typically private sector and civil society). The latter approach is preferable, as it better aligns with the principle of 'leave no one behind' that the 2030 Agenda entails. To this end, Malta's VNR also contains input from Malta's National Platform of Maltese Non-Government Development Organisations, in terms of work being undertaken by the platform to further raise awareness and establish a channel of communication among local Development NGOs and the public sector on development-related issues. In Poland, a special team was appointed with the aim of preparing Poland for the VNR 2018, which consisted of representatives of ministries, social organizations, socio-economic partners, NGOs, public statistics, civil society, academia and youth. In Slovakia, representatives of NGOs, academia and private sector are part of the Government Council of SDGs. Greece has implemented a "whole-of-society" approach with a strong stakeholder engagement in the gap analysis and stocktaking process, thereby enhancing transparency, partnership and accountability. Hungary created a multi-stakeholder platform in 2017, which incorporates the Hungarian Central Statistical Office and other consultative stakeholders, including from civil society academia and the business sector. In Ireland, the National Implementation Plan and VNR process have also provided a focus for stakeholder engagement.</p>
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