



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2023 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination
for Sustainable Development

Acknowledgements



This report is prepared with inputs from:

Bayda Abdulrahman I Alibrahim, Nayef Saeed M Al Nabet, Naiara Costa, Sandra Yinhang Dai, Seok-Ran Kim, Huanyu Liu, Ke Liu, Heather Page, Johanna Risan, Alexey Shamagin, Lineke Wang Schrijver, Javier Caicedo Trujillo, Tonya Vaturi, Zihao Xu, Sokunpanha You.

Editor: Tonya Vaturi

Design: Winta Abay Beyene

Foreword



I am pleased to introduce the eighth annual Synthesis Report of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

This report captures some of the most important experiences and trends in national implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), based on the reviews conducted in 2023. It provides a useful resource for Governments, stakeholders, the United Nations system and others who seek to accelerate sustainable development progress through the replication,

scaling-up and diffusion of best practices identified through the VNRs each year.

At the conclusion of the second four-year cycle of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), this report also marks the mid-point between 2015 and 2030, with seven years of VNR presentations from 189 member States, including many that have reported multiples times over the years. This year, 39 VNRs were submitted to the HLPF,¹ including 36 countries reporting for the second time, one for the third time and one for the first time. The European Union also prepared its first review this year.

The VNRs illustrate good practices in governance, institutional capacity building, stakeholder engagement, data collection and analysis, and means of implementation that engage both local and national actors, with continued emphasis on the principle of leaving no one behind. They continue to evolve, with improved comparability between second and subsequent reports demonstrating clear momentum for monitoring progress in a way that also serves to move the process forward, collectively representing the continued global commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. As the wealth of information contained in the online database of VNRs continues to grow, it is evident that the reports provide an inspiring array of policies, actions, and other measures to combat multiple global crises and ensure a strong foundation for progress over the next seven years.

Mr. Li Junhua
Under-Secretary-General for
Economic and Social Affairs

¹ VNR countries in 2023 all reported for the second time, except for those noted in parenthesis: Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Central African Republic, Chile (third time), Comoros, Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, France, Guyana, Iceland, Ireland, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Maldives, Mongolia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Saint Kitts and Nevis (first time), Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Zambia. The European Union also prepared the first voluntary regional review to be presented at the HLPF.





Table of Contents

1. Introduction	8
2. Integration of the 2030 Agenda in national and local contexts	9
3. Institutional capacity building and coordination	11
4. Ensuring ownership and engaging stakeholders	13
5. Data for monitoring progress towards the SDGs	18
6. Means of implementation	23
7. Transformative actions to accelerate recovery and address systemic challenges	26
8. Evolution of VNRs	29
9. Conclusion	30

Executive Summary

The 2030 Agenda states that **regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels** should be country-led and country-driven, drawing on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities, and with support from national parliaments as well as other institutions.²

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, United Nations Member States have accordingly been encouraged to undertake Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to monitor and evaluate national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and present these comprehensive reports to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) held each July under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). VNRs provide **detailed information and data on how countries are measuring progress towards the 17 SDGs** and their targets.

VNRs in 2023 described a range of **dynamic and evolving arrangements**, as Governments continue to redefine their strategies and approaches, adapt existing institutional and coordination frameworks, create new mechanisms to elevate the SDGs to the highest levels of Government, and engage stakeholders at all levels.

The reports focus on **national efforts to overcome setbacks** that have eroded progress towards the SDGs on poverty, food security, health, gender equality and other priority Goals. As the **COVID-19 pandemic** continues to impact multiple spheres of economic and social development, most countries describe how changes in development plans and policies have adapted to steer societies onto **a path of recovery that is resilient and sustainable for everyone**.

The reports from 38 countries plus the European Union include numerous examples of environmental devastation due to the worsening effects of **climate change and accelerated biodiversity loss**, including earthquakes, hurricanes, drought and disasters that in some countries will require many additional years of recovery. **Ongoing and sustained conflicts** continue to directly affect many countries, creating regional humanitarian crises, forcing the displacement and migration of millions of people, exacerbating extreme poverty and food insecurity, and rendering uncertain futures for a generation of children and youth.

The 2023 VNR synthesis report examines how the 38 reporting countries and the European Union are making efforts to get back on track to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and cope with interlinked global crises while **strengthening national institutions, working with stakeholders to implement inclusive and homegrown solutions at local levels** and developing policies for a recovery from the pandemic that is sustainable and resilient, and accelerates transformative actions for the benefit of all people.

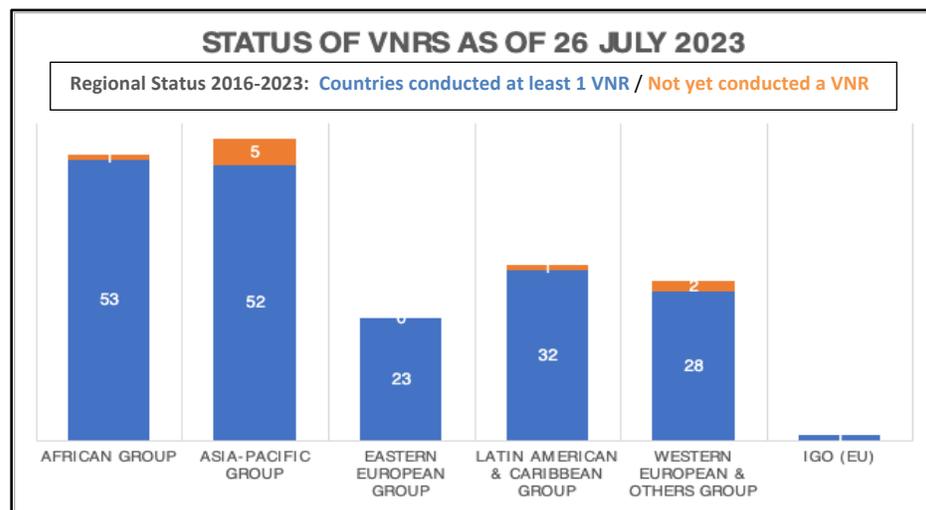
² A/RES/70/1: Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraphs 72-77.

1

Introduction

The present report provides a brief synthesis of the 39 VNRs presented at the 2023 HLPF, which was convened in person from 9 to 19 July under the auspices of ECOSOC at United Nations Headquarters in New York. All 38 countries and the European Union presented their VNR reports over the course of meeting, on 14 July and during the ministerial segment from 17 to 19 July.

This year, 36 countries presented their second VNR,³ while Saint Kitts and Nevis presented its first VNR and Chile presented for the third time. The first-ever regional review was conducted by the European Union. Fourteen VNRs were presented by countries from Asia and the Pacific, along with seven countries from Western Europe, seven from Africa, six from Eastern Europe, and four from Latin America and the Caribbean.



The aim of the VNR synthesis report is to identify good practices in specific areas and highlight important initiatives from all VNR reports. It is necessarily selective rather than exhaustive. The examples included are illustrative, and their selection does not imply that the 2023 VNRs do not also contain many other equally valid and useful instances of best country practices.

The reader is invited to explore the individual VNR country reports from 2023 in greater detail by accessing them through the online VNR database at <https://hlpf.un.org/countries>, which includes all 330 VNR reports received since reporting began in 2016. The database also includes a repository of tools, resources, and key documents such as the VNR Handbook and the Secretary-General's updated voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs at the HLPF.

³ Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Central African Republic, Comoros, Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, France, Guyana, Iceland, Ireland, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Maldives, Mongolia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam and Zambia.

2

Integration of the 2030 Agenda in national and local contexts

All VNR reports in 2023 included descriptions of Government actions to integrate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into their **national development plans and strategies** or equivalent policy frameworks. Countries reported on allocation of responsibility among various levels of government, creation of inter-ministerial structures, and mobilization of different governance structures and bodies around the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in a coherent and integrated manner.

Many countries have **designated lead ministries or created new ministries** as leaders of a whole-of-government approach to implementation. Elevation of SDG coordination to the level of the **Prime Minister's Office (PMO)** or its equivalent has proven to be effective in accelerating implementation of the SDGs in some countries, as the PMO often commands significant influence over the entire governmental apparatus. Such high-level authority can help drive a unified national vision for action and ensure that all sectors of Government are aligned in their efforts. In 2023, Brunei Darussalam, Croatia, Iceland, Romania and Timor-Leste reported on new mechanisms that align their work around systems led by the PMO.

The **alignment and coordination of policies and actions across different levels of governance**—local, national, regional and international—supports **vertical integration** of the SDGs and ensures that policies at one level complement and support those at other levels. For example, Belgium's VNR described vertical integration in the implementation of the SDGs through its inter-ministerial conference on sustainable development, with representatives from different levels of governance, as the most important body for dialogue and cooperation between federal and federated entities.

The practice of integration and inclusive approaches also fosters **vertical coordination** of policies, with increased engagement of local authorities and local communities. The Government of Portugal adopted a new inter-institutional mechanism—a Joint Commission of Government and Local Self-Government—that ensures institutional dialogue between central and regional or local authorities. Bosnia and Herzegovina also reported on efforts to improve vertical cooperation between different levels of government, as well as **horizontal exchange** of best practices, especially between local communities and various stakeholders.

Localization of the SDGs and the increasing practice of **sub-national reporting** shows that vertical integration operates in both directions, as more municipalities are responding to the call for voluntary local reviews (VLRs) that provide data and information to the VNR. The VNR exercise can support local action and advance the localization of the SDGs, while VLRs lend credibility to the overall review and enrich the reporting process. In some countries, VLRs are becoming an integral component of the VNR. United Republic of Tanzania's VNR included inputs from the VLR conducted by Mwanza City, and Portugal's VNR included a VLR from Mafra. Chile, Iceland and Zambia reported on the involvement of local government associations in their VNR process. Democratic Republic of the Congo has launched a local development programme for its 145 territories that aims to increase the public provision of basic social services, bolster the resilience of local populations and strengthen public institutions at the local level.

Countries are also reporting increased efforts to integrate the SDGs with other relevant frameworks, supporting **supranational and regional coordination** on related agendas and global agreements.

African countries reporting in 2023 highlighted domestication of the SDGs in alignment with their implementation of Africa’s Agenda 2063, which overlaps with the 2030 Agenda in numerous areas.⁴ Belgium’s VNR included a call by civil society contributors for policy coherence in monitoring implementation at the national and regional levels, as well as coherence between the European and international contexts, to address economic, environmental and social impacts across borders. Romania is participating in a unique approach at the European Union level to train 2,000 officially recognized sustainable development experts for public administration by 2026, with 150 experts having already completed the training programme in 2022. Bosnia and Herzegovina reported on regional cooperation through initiatives and meetings to address bottlenecks and challenges, including a meeting of the States of the European Union Adriatic-Ionian macro-region that focused on a midterm evaluation of progress towards the SDGs.

The European Union has the distinction of being the first regional entity to conduct a voluntary review. The President of the European Commission decided to integrate the SDGs into the Commission’s political guidelines for 2019 to 2024, under six priority areas, as shown in the figure below: a European Green Deal, an economy that works for people, a Europe fit for the digital age, promoting our European way of life, a stronger Europe in the world, and a new push for European democracy.

The European Union’s Strategy to Deliver on the SDGs



These six priorities are also aligned with the “five Ps” from the preamble of the 2030 Agenda (people, planet, prosperity, peace, partnership), and are consistent with the set of entry points recommended by the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report.

The **Regional Sustainable Development Forums** held each year in preparation for the HLPF provide important platforms for VNR countries to compare their national sustainable development strategies and engage with regional stakeholders and UN system entities, to share knowledge and forge partnerships that augment the

national efforts and improve the coherence of reporting on the SDGs through the VNR exercise. Some countries, including Croatia and Lithuania, noted that **regional cooperation can also be instrumental to promoting peace, stability and resilience**, which are central preconditions for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

⁴ Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

3

Institutional capacity building and coordination

Implementation of interlinked SDGs through integrated policymaking is a complex and multifaceted process that requires **effective, accountable and inclusive institutional arrangements**. Institutional frameworks in VNR countries are evolving, and institutional mechanisms supporting SDG implementation are being adapted to accommodate multiple crises and shifting priorities.

In line with the domestication of the SDGs and a trend to increasing whole-of-government approaches, most countries have undertaken **work across sectors and institutions** to accelerate SDG implementation. Many also have established **national multistakeholder councils** or other bodies that are inclusive and provide multidimensional support to the monitoring and reporting process. Parliaments, national evaluation and oversight mechanisms or **human rights institutions** are often engaged.

An increasing number of countries are committed to advancing their national institutional frameworks to effectively monitor progress, especially **by strengthening national statistical institutions**. Brunei Darussalam established a **new technical working group** for the SDGs. Barbados is strengthening its national statistical offices to collect, process and disseminate SDG-related data. Cambodia and Croatia reported on the challenge of **sustainable financing for strengthening their national statistical systems**.

The involvement of **parliaments** in the implementation of the SDGs is crucial for several reasons. Parliaments play a pivotal role in formulating, adopting, and overseeing the implementation of legislation. For SDGs to be effective, the goals and targets might require new laws, or amendments to existing laws, to **ensure that national legislation aligns with global targets** set by the SDGs. Implementing the SDGs requires significant financial resources, and parliaments have the power to allocate budgets. They can ensure that necessary funding is directed towards projects and initiatives that support progress towards SDG targets. Parliaments, by their very nature, represent the diverse views of the population. They can thus help SDG implementation to proceed in accountable and inclusive manner and ensure that the interests of various groups, including marginalized and vulnerable populations, are considered in SDG-related policies and actions. Parliaments also play a role in ensuring that the SDGs are integrated across different policy areas, breaking down silos and promoting a **whole-of-government approach**.

Mongolia, Romania, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan all reported on the establishment of parliamentary sub-committees, commissions or working groups to monitor the implementation of the SDGs. Other countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina and Democratic Republic of the Congo, highlighted the need for greater engagement of parliaments in national follow-up and implementation. Liechtenstein's VNR highlighted a newly established requirement that every bill introduced to parliament must include an SDG analysis. Following an initiative by Uzbekistan, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 77/159, entitled "Enhancing the role of parliaments in accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals" in December 2022, which is highlighted in their VNR.

External audits can help to shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of institutional mechanisms supporting national SDG implementation and provide useful recommendations to Governments on how they can be made more effective, accountable and inclusive. As external

auditors of Governments, **supreme audit institutions** (SAIs) are in a unique position to contribute to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and their role is increasing. The VNR reports of Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada and Croatia refer to audit reports produced by the SAI on SDG implementation, and the reports from Belgium and Croatia illustrate their impacts on institutional arrangements for SDG implementation.

4

Ensuring ownership and engaging stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement is recognized by many countries as essential to support SDG implementation in a more effective, accountable, and inclusive manner. Stakeholder engagement also facilitates policy coherence for the SDGs, as **diverse actors can contribute a wide array of perspectives to the process**, and their input highlights potential conflicts or synergies between different policy options. Many VNRs highlighted stakeholder involvement in SDG-related decision-making bodies, emphasized diverse sectors' contributions to national and sub-national implementation plans, and offered insights into stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda follow-up and review, including in the VNR process.

Stakeholder participation in SDG-related coordination and decision-making mechanisms

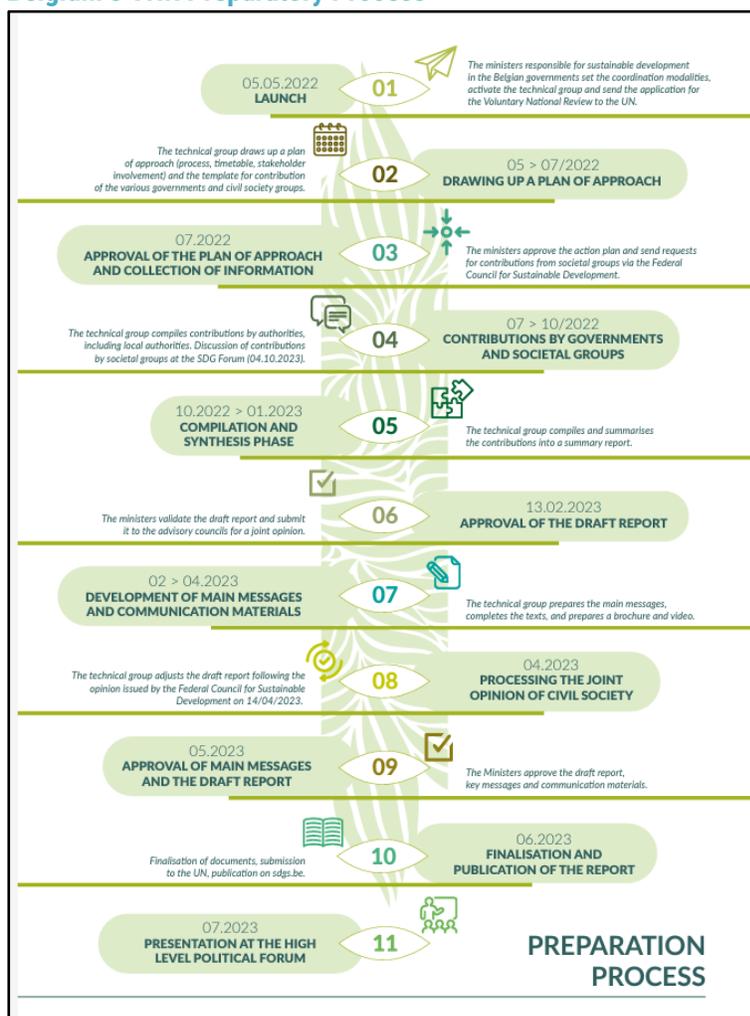
Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Comoros and Zambia reported their efforts to **institutionalize stakeholder engagement** in various ways. In Belgium, the Federal Council for Sustainable Development was tasked to serve as the focal point for engaging various social groups such as non-governmental organizations. In Comoros, Thematic Dialogue Groups (TDGs) constitute platforms for intersectoral consultation and coordination, bringing together all stakeholders, including various ministries, civil society, and the private sector, to ensure cross-cutting synergy. These TDGs serve as institutional mechanisms to ensure the interconnectedness of SDGs and their implementation. Zambia has established a National SDGs Coordination Framework, which provides the institutional setup and mechanism to guide and oversee implementation, monitoring and reporting related to the SDGs and incorporates the efforts of various stakeholders, including relevant Government departments, civil society organizations, the private sector, and development partners.

National sustainable development strategies have been developed in consultation with stakeholders from different sectors in Canada and Romania, and participatory mechanisms in Chile are used to track their national implementation strategy. In Lithuania, stakeholders are integrated into the National Development Cooperation Commission, contributing to the country's development cooperation policies. Local governments, businesses and civil society representatives participate in "Sustainable Iceland", a cooperation platform that formulates the national sustainable development strategy. Fiji expanded its VNR technical working group to include civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, and other development partners.

Stakeholder engagement in the implementation and follow up of the 2030 Agenda

The contribution of stakeholders to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was reflected in the reports of Barbados, Croatia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Slovakia, which showcased CSO and private sector-led SDG initiatives. The European Union featured its collaboration with stakeholder networks in poverty reduction initiatives, and Liechtenstein gathered contributions through an online survey. Ireland's Second National Implementation Plan includes a chapter reflecting the contributions of key stakeholder groups to the SDGs. Canada supports not-for-profit organizations through the SDG Funding Programme. In Poland, the Partnership for the Implementation of the SDGs initiative united over 150 entities with 170 commitments from different sectors.

Belgium's VNR Preparatory Process



Most countries reported on processes for establishing and consolidating stakeholder consultation mechanisms for the SDGs, including in the VNR reporting process. Many countries involved stakeholders in various types of **SDG coordination bodies and working groups**,⁵ and held consultations to collect stakeholders' inputs to their VNR.⁶ Belgium hosted the first multi-stakeholder forum on the SDGs, and published stakeholders' inputs online (www.sdgs.be). Canada's Together|Ensemble multi-stakeholder symposium tracks SDG progress. The European Union used the "Have Your Say" portal to seek stakeholders' feedback on SDG implementation. In Fiji, an online platform established in collaboration with the UN Development Programme compiled stories and promoted dialogue with non-State actors.

⁵ Barbados, Burkina Faso, Croatia, Liechtenstein, Maldives, Mongolia, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia and Timor-Leste.
⁶ Bahrain, Barbados, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guyana, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Maldives, Portugal, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Uzbekistan.

Chile conducted dialogues in 15 regions to compile stakeholders' contributions to the 2030 Agenda. An SDG Agency Mapping tool was used in Guyana to map government and stakeholders' responsibilities on specific SDG targets. Mongolia organized more than ten discussions to encourage inputs from all sectors and stakeholder levels. Saint Kitts and Nevis, Timor-Leste, and United Republic of Tanzania developed stakeholder engagement plans for their VNRs, and the VNR reports of Belgium, Iceland, Ireland, Poland and Zambia included chapters written by stakeholder groups.

Sectoral engagement and participation

Countries reported tailoring engagement strategies for different stakeholder sectors. Cambodia collaborated with networks of **civil society organizations**, and the European Union collaborated with the European Economic and Social Committee, which serves as the core platform representing civil society, in a broad consultation process focusing on the achievements and challenges of implementing the SDGs.

The **private sector** was represented in some VNRs. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, companies participated in the SDG Business Pioneers Award and signed a Sustainable Development Declaration, while France established the "SDG Action Manager" to help companies self-assess and benchmark their sustainability efforts. Chile developed the first Voluntary Business Report for Sustainable Development in collaboration with the United Nations Global Compact, and Democratic Republic of the Congo partnered with the United Nations Development Programme on a national report on the contribution of the private sector to SDG implementation.

Most VNRs identified **micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)** as essential providers of employment opportunities and social services central for the full implementation of 2030 Agenda at all levels,⁷ and noted that partnerships with public and **private sector stakeholders** are critical for unlocking the full potential of MSMEs.⁸ Many reported on their measures to support MSMEs, including optimization of the policy environment,⁹ elevation of financial inclusion,¹⁰ strengthening of MSME capacities to accelerate digitization,¹¹ expansion of market access,¹² and uptake of sustainable business practices.¹³ Canada, the European Union, France and Portugal all reported their delivery of international cooperation to support innovations among MSMEs. However, numerous VNRs also report that MSMEs were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴ Cambodia, Fiji, Timor-Leste and Zambia added that informality and lack of financial literacy have undermined the resilience of MSMEs, and many others also highlighted the problem of limited entrepreneurial skills.¹⁵

A few countries described collaboration with **academic institutions** in support of SDG

⁷ Bahrain, the European Union, Iceland, Kuwait, Maldives, Mongolia, Romania and Timor-Leste.

⁸ Bahrain, Belgium, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Uzbekistan.

⁹ Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Saint Kitts and Nevis.

¹⁰ Burkina Faso, Central Africa Republic, the European Union, Fiji, Guyana, Ireland, Maldives, Slovakia and Turkmenistan.

¹¹ Croatia, the European Union, Fiji, Guyana, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Turkmenistan.

¹² Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Guyana, Mongolia, Kuwait, Singapore, Slovakia, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

¹³ Belgium, Croatia, the European Union, France, Ireland, Portugal, Romania and Rwanda.

¹⁴ Barbados, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Ireland, Maldives, Mongolia, Romania, Slovakia, Timor-Leste, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

¹⁵ Bahrain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Croatia, Fiji, Guyana, Iceland, Lithuania, Saudi Arabia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Slovakia, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

implementation.¹⁶ Cambodia organized dedicated workshops with universities, research institutes and think tanks, while the University of Iceland supported the provision of data, analysis and advice on SDG targets for the country VNR report.

Collaboration with **local governments** was flagged by many countries.¹⁷ Some VNRs also included inputs from VLRs, as previously mentioned in Chapter I.

Countries sought **youth involvement**, with initiatives highlighted in many VNRs.¹⁸ Timor-Leste incorporated youth messages from postcards addressing development issues and expectations for SDG implementation. Guyana established a Youth Advisory Council, while Turkmenistan selected Young SDG Ambassadors. Bosnia and Herzegovina conducted a UNICEF U-Report survey on youth engagement, and Ireland organized a junior art competition in schools and featured winning drawings in its VNR.

The role of **volunteers** was mentioned by Cambodia, Central African Republic, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. Mongolia highlighted its volunteer network's contributions through training, advocacy, and campaigns.

The **United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) and Resident Coordinators** were more engaged in the preparation of VNRs this year and were instrumental in guiding the process in numerous countries.¹⁹ However, support from UNCTs and Resident Coordinators remains uneven across programme countries, and more effort could be deployed to engage UNCTs and Regional Collaborative Platforms in supporting the VNR process in reporting countries. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) facilitated a twinning program among Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for knowledge exchange on the voluntary reporting processes, including stakeholder engagement.

The VNR reports of Central African Republic, Comoros, Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia included inputs from **persons with disabilities**; the VNR from Maldives recognized contributions by **farmers, fishers and tourism stakeholders**; and **human rights institutions** were involved in the report by United Republic of Tanzania.

Many countries assessed **lessons learned and challenges to engage stakeholders in SDG implementation and follow-up**. Lithuania aimed to enhance coordination mechanisms, noting fragmented involvement at sub-national level. Chile emphasized the need for additional cooperation and exchange on stakeholder engagement practices. Croatia committed to strengthening coordination among all sustainable development stakeholders. Democratic Republic of the Congo urged increased action and commitment from all stakeholders for SDG support. Fiji, Portugal and Tajikistan all recognized the need to reinforce coordination mechanisms. Poland planned to boost youth participation in sustainable development over the next ten years through its Youth Fund Programme.

¹⁶ Bahamas, Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Croatia, France, Ireland, Maldives and others.

¹⁷ Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Comoros, the European Union, France, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Maldives, Poland and Saudi Arabia.

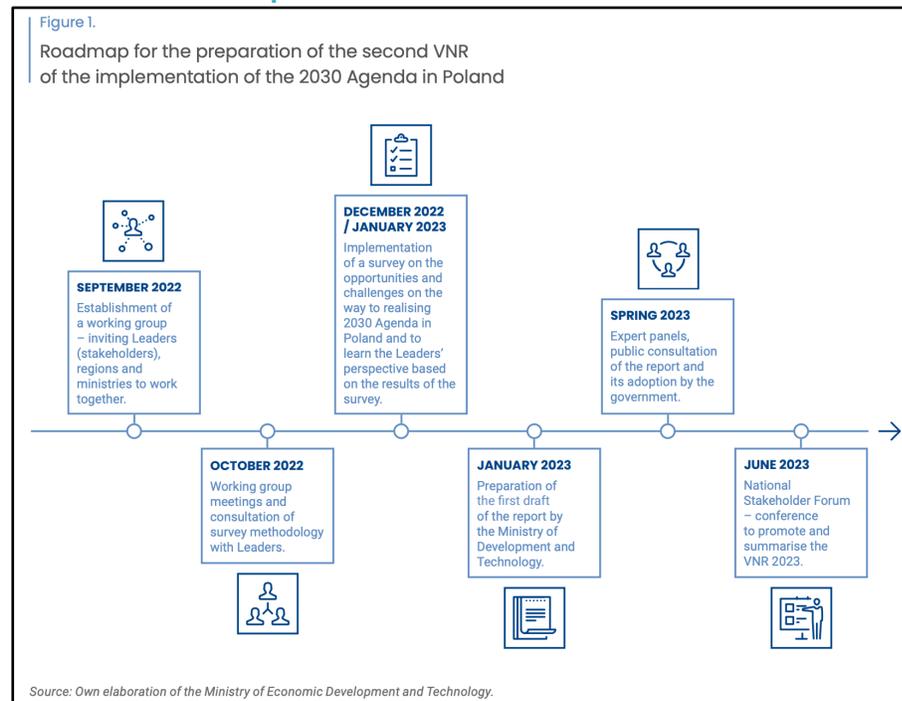
¹⁸ Bahrain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Comoros, Iceland and Lithuania.

¹⁹ Bahrain, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Kuwait, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

Awareness Raising

Countries continue to report on **initiatives to increase awareness of the 2030 Agenda among the public** and specific societal sectors. Bahrain and Comoros used VNR preparations to promote SDG awareness within the Government and among the public. Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mongolia and Romania organized events to engage the public in SDG discussions, while Democratic Republic of the Congo targeted the provincial level. United Nations entities collaborated with Timor-Leste in sensitization events targeting journalists, and in Uzbekistan United Nations partners supported a government-led information campaign. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, an e-learning program enhanced understanding of the 2030 Agenda, Poland focused on raising awareness of SDG data sharing. Ireland established the SDG Champions Programme to identify advocates that support SDG awareness, Saudi Arabia initiated a communication roadshow across media platforms to enhance VNR awareness, and Turkmenistan contributed to SDG awareness through its Young Ambassadors Programme.

Poland's VNR Roadmap



5

Data for monitoring progress towards the SDGs

Assessments of the status of SDG implementation are largely based on statistical data, using indicators to the extent possible. When analyzing the importance of data in VNRs by reviewing how often the word is mentioned in the reports, “data”²⁰ appears 4,035 times in the 39 VNRs—an average of 103 times in each report, or a rate of nearly seven times every 10 pages.

All VNR countries have underscored that **data availability**—including how relevant data, information and analysis is systematically gathered, shared, analyzed and used across sectors—**is one of the biggest challenges** in the follow-up and review exercise. Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures are usually the responsibility of the **national statistical system**, which also has the task of identifying gaps in official statistics on indicators. It is worth noting that in the absence of strong national statistical data capacity, countries tend to rely on qualitative information to assess and report on SDG progress.

The use of data in VNRs

In this year’s VNRs, most countries stressed that the availability and quality of data are fundamental to shaping policies that can drive meaningful development progress. As the President of the National Institute of Statistics of Timor-Leste’s Ministry of Finance explained:

“Statistical capacity and a quality evidence base is becoming increasingly important, and our systems should meet the changing data needs of the Government, civil society, and development organizations, especially given the recent COVID-19 pandemic and our efforts to accelerate our progress towards meeting the SDGs.”

National Statistical Offices played a leading role in coordinating with ministries and other government agencies to collect SDG data, as well as to evaluate data for inclusion in VNRs. All 39 of this year’s reports also highlighted the importance of **complementing official data with views from diverse stakeholders** gained from an inclusive VNR consultation process. In drafting its third VNR, Chile engaged more than 2,000 individuals from academia, civil society, the private sector, and regional governments. Dialogues in 15 regions were also held with children and adolescents and with organizations representing elderly people. The VNR report includes an annex listing more than 250 civil society organizations, 41 academic institutions, and 97 companies that were consulted.

Several countries reported **inputs and assessments of SDG progress from key segments of society** in their VNRs. For example, Brunei Darussalam included a statement by young people; Ireland incorporated a civil society assessment on key areas such as education, housing, and climate action; and Romania published a separate “Children’s Report for Romania’s Voluntary National Review on the Sustainable Development Goals” that summarizes the opinions of 55,000 children on seven SDGs (Goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11 and 13).

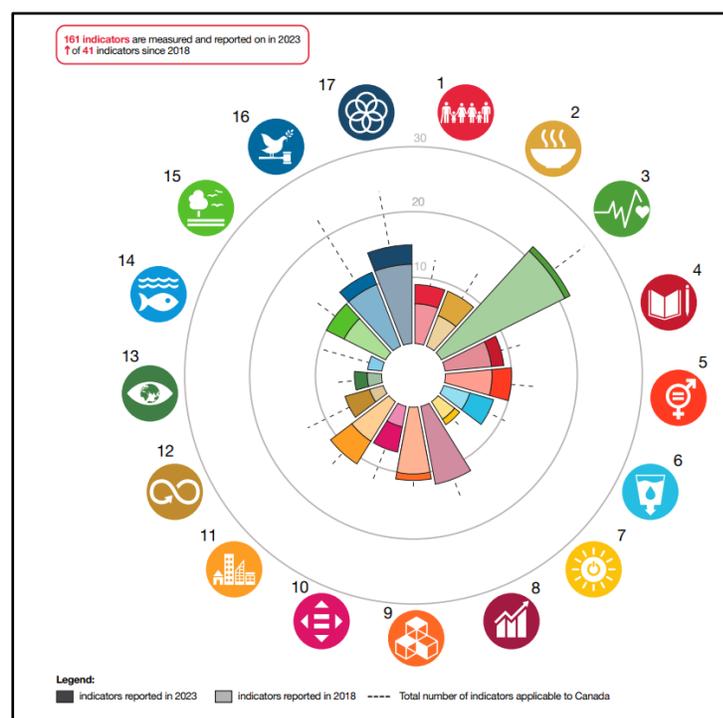
²⁰ “Données” and “datos,” in French and Spanish, respectively.

The presentation of data in VNRs

Statistical annexes: In 2023, 25 of 39 VNRs (64 per cent of those reporting) included statistical annexes in their VNRs,²¹ an increase from last year, when 23 of 44 did so (around 50 per cent). Five countries presented their statistical annexes in a document separate from the VNR report.

Data availability analysis: Twenty countries (51 per cent) provided analysis on data availability and gaps in their VNRs. For example, Canada's statistical annex illustrated progress on 161 SDG indicators this year, 41 more than in 2018. It also highlighted **areas of improvement** and those that require attention (see below).

Canada's statistical annex, showing data availability for 2018 and 2023



Progress charts and online SDG portals: 2023 is the critical midpoint of SDG implementation, a fact acknowledged by two thirds of the VNRs this year, with 24 reports noting **the importance of reviewing SDG progress at the midpoint and using the results as an impetus for acceleration in the second half.**²² Twenty-three VNRs (nearly 60 per cent) provided progress charts in their reports or in statistical annexes. Some, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, used a traffic light system (see below) to offer a snapshot of SDG progress at the indicator level. These visual illustrations complement detailed data on baseline, current, midpoint, and final target values in the statistical annex. Seventeen countries (44 per cent) also included links to their national SDG portals where readers can access even more granular SDG data and explore visualization and analyses of those data.

Progress chart and detailed SDG data in Bosnia and Herzegovina's VNR

INDICATOR	Baseline value (2015)	Current/latest available value	Midterm target value (2023)	Final target value (2030)
2 ZERO HUNGER 				
 Adjusted SDG indicator 2.1.2: Food insecurity in adult population, %	9.6	12.6 (2020)	5	0
 SDG indicator 2.2.1: Proportion of children moderately or seriously stunted	10.2 (2015)	9.1 (2020)	5	0
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 				
 SDG indicator 3.2.1: Under-five mortality rate per 1,000 live births	5.8 (2018)	5.7 (2020)	5.1	2.5
 SDG indicator 3.2.2: Neonatal mortality rate per 1,000 live births (under one year of age)	5 (2018)	4.6 (2020)	4.5	3.8
 Adjusted SDG indicator 3.4.1: Non-communicable disease mortality rate (per 1,000)	18.2 (2015)	18.7	16.4	12.1

Disaggregated data: Twenty-three countries (nearly 60 per cent) presented disaggregated data in their VNRs, enabling a more precise understanding of inequalities and empowering countries to ensure that no one is left behind in the effort to monitor and report on implementation of the SDGs. However, not all dimensions of disaggregation received equal attention (see below).

Disaggregated data by dimension in 2023 VNRs

Disaggregation Dimension	Number of Countries*
Gender	20
Age	14
Geographical Location	13
Income Level	3
Race/Ethnicity	0
Disability	9

*Aggregations are not mutually exclusive. Some countries provide indicators in more than one dimension and not all indicators are disaggregated.

²¹ Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Central African Republic, Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, the European Union, Fiji, France, Guyana, Lithuania, Mongolia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Tajikistan, United Republic of Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam.

²² Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Canada, Central African Republic, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, European Union, Fiji, France, Guyana, Iceland, Ireland, Kuwait, Lithuania, Maldives, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, and Viet Nam.

Data challenges and innovations

Data gaps: As in previous years, one of the primary challenges cited in many VNRs is the lack of data, especially those that are **timely and disaggregated**. These data gaps hinder comprehensive assessment of progress and the **identification of vulnerable populations**, which in turn impede effective policymaking. Several VNRs identified a lack of funding, inadequate institutional capacity, challenges in manual data collection, and missing metadata/methodologies as the main causes of limited data availability. Goals where data seem most limited are those on **gender equality, sustainable cities, and climate**.

Some countries discussed strategies and innovations to address SDG data gaps. Barbados, for instance, planned to improve data collection and coordination across government agencies through the creation of a Data Analytics Department where enhanced software and digital tools would be deployed. At the regional level, The National Sustainable Development Goal Tracker established by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) has improved data monitoring and reporting for countries in the region. The Integrated Planning and Reporting Toolkit (IPRT) software sponsored by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) was developed in response to the needs of African countries to simultaneously adopt and integrate both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 into their national development plans, and to **report on progress in a more efficient and harmonized way**.

SDG interlinkages/integrated analysis: This year's VNRs acknowledged that achieving the SDGs depends on understanding the intricate interlinkages between different Goals and the need to address multiple dimensions of sustainable development simultaneously. In its VNR, Portugal included an analysis of the strength of interlinkages between the 17 Goals (with 1 denoting strong interlinkage and 0 weak interlinkage) calculated from their association with policy planning instruments (see below).

An analysis of interlinkages between different SDGs in Portugal's VNR

	1 PEOPLE	2 ZERO HUNGER	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	4 QUALITY EDUCATION	5 GENDER EQUALITY	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION	7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	13 CLIMATE ACTION	14 LIFE BELOW WATER	15 LIFE ON LAND
SDG 1	1,00	0,84	0,74	0,68	0,81	0,38	0,36	0,30	0,63	0,49	0,45	0,59	0,37	0,35	0,48
SDG 2	0,83	1,00	0,77	0,58	0,73	0,52	0,52	0,24	0,60	0,36	0,36	0,62	0,45	0,25	0,48
SDG 3	0,83	0,88	1,00	0,66	0,81	0,67	0,52	0,33	0,63	0,43	0,52	0,64	0,51	0,45	0,57
SDG 4	0,90	0,79	0,78	1,00	0,92	0,43	0,40	0,43	0,68	0,68	0,50	0,62	0,43	0,45	0,57
SDG 5	0,90	0,82	0,80	0,77	1,00	0,43	0,44	0,37	0,64	0,55	0,43	0,62	0,45	0,45	0,61
SDG 6	0,14	0,19	0,22	0,12	0,14	1,00	0,56	0,28	0,15	0,19	0,25	0,23	0,37	0,40	0,61
SDG 7	0,16	0,23	0,20	0,13	0,17	0,67	1,00	0,39	0,23	0,26	0,32	0,23	0,47	0,45	0,61
SDG 8	0,28	0,23	0,28	0,30	0,31	0,71	0,84	1,00	0,44	0,58	0,52	0,38	0,53	0,80	0,70
SDG 9	0,88	0,86	0,78	0,71	0,81	0,57	0,67	1,00	0,58	0,68	0,68	0,76	0,65	0,55	0,74
SDG 10	0,45	0,33	0,35	0,47	0,45	0,48	0,56	0,57	1,00	0,38	0,64	0,31	0,55	0,50	0,65
SDG 11	0,34	0,28	0,35	0,29	0,30	0,52	0,56	0,43	0,37	0,53	1,00	0,34	0,63	0,50	0,61
SDG 12	0,88	0,95	0,86	0,70	0,84	0,95	0,80	0,61	0,81	0,51	0,68	1,00	0,78	0,95	0,91
SDG 13	0,31	0,39	0,38	0,27	0,34	0,86	0,92	0,48	0,40	0,51	0,70	0,44	1,00	0,70	0,91
SDG 14	0,12	0,09	0,14	0,12	0,14	0,38	0,36	0,30	0,14	0,19	0,23	0,22	0,29	1,00	0,48
SDG 15	0,19	0,19	0,20	0,17	0,22	0,67	0,56	0,30	0,21	0,28	0,32	0,24	0,43	0,55	1,00
SDG 16	0,91	0,79	0,77	0,77	0,91	0,43	0,40	0,41	0,67	0,58	0,50	0,62	0,43	0,45	0,61
SDG 17	0,88	0,79	0,77	0,74	0,81	0,48	0,56	0,41	0,70	0,51	0,52	0,63	0,45	0,55	0,57

Qualitative data: In several VNRs, qualitative research was used in conjunction with quantitative data to **contextualize the challenges and opportunities** in achieving the Goals from the perspectives of different stakeholders. Mongolia, for example, conducted a focus group with 40 representatives from at-risk population groups to understand their specific needs and interests. In Bahrain, in addition to data on the SDG indicators, government entities were also asked to submit the main challenges they face and their plans to accelerate progress on the SDGs relevant

to their mandate. Iceland added 39 “well-being indicators” addition to the Sustainable Development Goal indicators, to monitor quality of life by **assessing factors beyond economic measures** such as gross domestic product (GDP).

Non-traditional data: As previously mentioned, countries are increasingly **using alternative data sources**, which can complement traditional data sources, fill data gaps and provide valuable insights that may not be possible with traditional data alone. For example, Cambodia employs satellite imagery to monitor forest coverage and to report on Indicator 15.1.1 (forest area as a percentage of total land area). Saudi Arabia gathered data from social media to complement official SDG data in developing the content and analysis for its VNR.²³ Mongolia used data from Google Earth and other tools to estimate Indicator 11.1.1 (proportion of urban population living in slums).

²³ Saudi Arabia 2023 VNR, p. 27

6

Means of implementation

Countries highlighted the opportunities and difficulties in mobilizing finance, adopting new technologies and enhancing capacities to implement the 2030 Agenda. The alignment of budgets, strategies and vision to the SDGs remains essential to identify the most effective and efficient means of implementation.

Domestic public resources

The mobilization of domestic public resources was a central concern for all Member States. Given that public finance remains the primary source for developmental needs in developing countries, Member States prioritized the optimization of limited resources. Some countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina and Uzbekistan, conducted **Development Finance Assessments** to identify priority sectors with significant potential to catalyze SDG attainment and expand fiscal capacity. Several countries, including Comoros, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania and Turkmenistan embraced an **Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF)** to ensure the efficiency of public spending and investment. INFFs are recognized to be a planning and delivery tool that strengthens the link between planning and financing related processes to overcome obstacles to financing sustainable development at the national level.

Many countries concentrated their efforts on designing governance models and instruments to enhance the efficiency of **public spending** and its alignment with the SDGs. Following this objective, Poland adopted a State Purchasing Policy to promote the execution of sustainable procurements. The National Bank of Belgium shifted from negative screening, where the bank refrained from investing in companies that did not take environmental and social factors into account, to positive screening, considering bonds only from firms with high **Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) scores**.

To further strengthen SDG alignment, **local government** entities were increasingly involved in project planning and execution in both developed and developing nations. For instance, Canada expanded its Green Municipal Fund to support community-based climate change adaptation initiatives, while Guyana prioritized community-led programs in its development strategy.

There was a shared recognition of the need for an **efficient and effective tax system**. Rwanda's tax system, for instance, underwent major policy and administrative reforms to broaden the tax base, enhance tax compliance, and combat tax evasion. Zambia has digitized its tax system through a home-grown digital solution to enhance domestic revenue collection and is implementing its Government Service Bus and payment gateway, which makes many **government services always accessible online**.

Fiji emphasized the importance of rationalizing inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies by addressing market distortions through tax restructuring. Moreover, Uzbekistan put forward reforms to its state-owned enterprises, with a focus on SDG-aligned results and **combatting illegal financial flows**, which erode tax revenues. Some VNRs also mentioned the generation of revenue through market-based instruments, e.g., the European Union's Emissions Trading System and national carbon taxes.

Domestic and international private business and finance

All countries acknowledged the catalytic and transformative role of the private sector and underscored the need to **create conducive conditions for expanding private sector involvement** in financing for development. There was a consensus in favor of the creation of enabling regulatory environments as a factor of vital importance, as in the case of Rwanda, which launched the accelerated private finance initiative (APFI) to increase private investment for infrastructure development and achieving the SDGs.

Several VNRs emphasized the need for **access to finance** as crucial for accelerating progress towards the SDGs, and supported recent calls for a reform of the international financial architecture to enable changes to how sustainable development and climate action are financed. Others called for operationalization of the loss and damage fund. Guyana called for the global community to support the development of the **Multidimensional Vulnerability Index**, noting that graduation to upper-middle-income status has made concessional lending from traditional partners scarcer and substantially increased the cost of borrowing.

Some Member States established dedicated entities and funds to facilitate **public-private-partnerships**, thereby promoting risk-sharing in investments. Additionally, scaling up **blended finance facilities** was showcased as an important strategy to mobilize SDG-aligned private capital.

Voluntary and mandatory **sustainability reporting** and classification mechanisms such as Saudi Arabia's voluntary ESG reporting standards and the European Union's Taxonomy, are increasing on a global scale, contributing to more sustainable investment incentives.

Countries including Burkina Faso, Comoros, Tajikistan and Zambia reaffirmed that **remittances** from abroad constituted significant—and in some cases, the primary—source of income for households and investments.

International development cooperation

Many countries noted that developed countries have generally increased their **official development assistance** (ODA), however still falling short from the target levels, and added that merely increasing these resources was insufficient. Portugal, for instance, advocated for a broader approach that emphasizes **capacity building and technical assistance** alongside financial support. France has put forward a path to transition away from an exclusive government-to-government approach by engaging multiple stakeholders, including civil society, local authorities, the private sector and academia in development efforts in partner countries.

Some ODA-eligible countries pointed out that often these resources would be exhausted in addressing humanitarian emergencies, resulting in limited flexibility to allocate resources for sustainable development. Barbados and Saint Kitts and Nevis recalled that small island developing States face **exceptionally high exposure to natural catastrophes** and other phenomena, which demands an enhanced ODA and international cooperation, but they are often excluded due to income criteria in ODA allocation, thereby creating a reduced fiscal space that forces critical choices about where limited financial resources should be prioritized. Barbados proposed that developed countries consider **refinancing high-interest and short-term debt** with credit guarantees and extended maturities.

Trade, digitization, and other highlights

Trade was highlighted by Viet Nam, which significantly expanded its free trade agreements, including the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the Viet Nam-EU Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) and achieved the set target by increasing the **export growth rate** by an average of 12.1 per cent per year over the period of 2015 to 2022. A network of trade infrastructure has been developed across Rwanda, including the scaling-up of national airline capacity and destinations; the establishment of modern logistics platforms, cross-border markets and one-stop border points; and the development of regional, national and feeder roads. Initiatives are also being undertaken to **enhance innovation** start-ups and create an **ecosystem that supports a thriving tech and innovation industry**.

Several countries also placed special emphasis on **developing digital skills** and aligning skills with the requirements of Agenda 2030. Brunei Darussalam highlighted the importance of the Fintech sector as a driver of **financial inclusion**. United Nations agencies such as UNDP, UN-Women and UN-Habitat, along with other international organizations like the Organization for Economic Coordination and Development (OECD), play significant roles as collaborative partners in the domain of **digital capacity development**, with programmes that encompass a range of priorities including youth employment and inclusion of indigenous communities and people with disabilities.

Although the promotion of **women in the workforce emerged as one of the most prominent issues** for many countries, the implementation of **gender-responsive budget mechanisms** was only present in some reports. Rwanda and Portugal, for instance, have provided for the obligation to analyze budget impacts on gender equality, reinforcing accountability for **gender-sensitive resource allocation**. Canada's VNR highlighted the policy of ensuring equal pay for work of equal value in federally regulated workplaces and noted its high rank as an investor **supporting women's rights organizations**.

7

Transformative actions to accelerate recovery and address systemic challenges

In keeping with the 2023 theme of “*Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels*”, this year’s VNRs focused on how countries are **addressing the economic and social crises that have resulted from the pandemic, as well as from other interlinked global crises**. In May 2023, as the World Health Organization declared that the COVID-19 pandemic was no longer considered a global health emergency, many countries began to **shift the focus** of their VNR assessments toward how their national development plans are **supporting policies and measures for building back better** and ensuring that recovery measures advance the SDGs in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner.

Most VNRs this year describe how countries are **strengthening resilience**, and many provide examples of initiatives and actions that have served to **mitigate the effects of the pandemic** while addressing **interlinked crises**, supporting pathways to **peaceful and inclusive societies**, and upholding the central principle of **leaving no one behind**.

Increasing resilience

The resilience of the **national health care system** in Brunei Darussalam reportedly mitigated the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic through regular public communications and a strong sense of solidarity, resulting in a low death rate and a high recovery rate, while the commitment to universal health coverage contributes to a low maternal and child mortality rate, a high proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel and a high percentage of routine vaccination coverage rates.

Bahrain’s VNR provides an example of how a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach can be used to guide preparedness and early response, adopting innovative approaches to strengthen the **resilience of health systems**. The rate of vaccination against the COVID-19 virus in Comoros exceeded 50 per cent, due to robust community participation, placing this small island developing State in the list of African countries with the highest vaccination rate against the disease.

Maldives reported that the pandemic necessitated **digital acceleration for online education, telemedicine, e-payment systems** and other digital uses, and that ongoing digitization and **expansion of digital connectivity** across the country is being combined with a sustainable public ferry network, which has greatly improved mobility and access to opportunities.

Some countries reported on their efforts to combat the **impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss**, which disproportionately affects least developed countries and small island developing States. Barbados highlighted their **Bridgetown Initiative**, which “seeks to overcome the shortcomings of mobilizing finance for climate-vulnerable developing States, normalize natural disaster and pandemic clauses in all lending instruments, provide funding for loss and damages as a result of the climate crisis and widen access to concessional financing”. Canada reported their commitment of Can\$5.3 billion in **climate financing** in 2021 to help low- and middle-income countries transition to sustainable and climate-

resilient development. Comoros has established five new **terrestrial and marine national parks**, and agreements between parks and communities on co-management of marine resources has increased from 17 in 2015 to 72 in 2023.

Tajikistan has successfully proposed new global initiatives that enable the international community to take collective action towards the **sustainable use of water resources** and mitigating climate change, including resolutions recently adopted by the United Nations General Assembly declaring 2025 as the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation and 21 March as the World Day for Glaciers.

Peacebuilding

Countries in **conflict and post-conflict** situations recounted their efforts to address the impacts of conflict and other crises while sustaining their commitment to achieve the SDGs. The Democratic Republic of the Congo stated that despite efforts undertaken at the national, subregional and regional levels to end conflicts in the eastern part of the country, the humanitarian situation has deteriorated dramatically since 2019, with the proportion of the population in need of **humanitarian assistance** nearly doubling, and more than five million internally displaced persons.

Burkina Faso detailed the ongoing security crisis and **changes in political governance** at the national level, which has resulted in nearly two million internally displaced persons, more than half of whom are children. The national plan for economic and social development (2021–2025) is currently being operationalized through the plan of action for **stabilization and development**, which is built around four pillars: combating terrorism and restoring territorial integrity; responding to the humanitarian crisis; rebuilding the State and improving governance; and pursuing national reconciliation and social cohesion.

Similarly, the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan in Central African Republic is aligned with the SDGs in its dedication to supporting **peace, security and national reconciliation**; renewing the **social contract** between the State and the population; and promoting **economic recovery** and revival of the productive sectors. Supported by the national peace process, this effort has reportedly helped to stabilize and strengthen the capacities of national institutions, restore the authority of the State, re-establish security and bring about national reconciliation, improve the provision of basic social services to the population and revive the economy.

Croatia, Lithuania and Poland noted their **commitment to provide humanitarian, economic, social, political and military assistance** to Ukraine amidst the ongoing conflict and related crises. Poland added that ensuring food security, as well as good quality food and food safety, remain critically important. In Cambodia, a national goal to “end the negative impact of mines and explosive remnants of war” has been added as a country priority, in addition to the SDGs.

Leaving no one behind

Guyana's President Mohamed Irfaan Ali said in his 2020 inauguration address, “*From this day forward, we must, each of us, become our brother's and sister's keeper, ensuring that in our journey to progress and prosperity, no one is left behind.*” Guyana's VNR observed that this message is equally applicable to us as a **community of nations**.

The principle of leaving no one behind has been prioritized in many countries and translated into concrete actions for tackling the systemic problem of **inequalities and discrimination**, with efforts to ensure inclusive and effective participation in implementation efforts.

Countries **identified vulnerable groups and those furthest behind** in their VNRs, particularly women, migrants and refugees, persons with disabilities, children and youth, older persons, indigenous peoples, LGBTQI+, internally displaced persons and other groups in vulnerable situations. Canada additionally reported on efforts to accelerate progress for racialized and religious minorities; two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex plus (2SLGBTQI+) people; and official language minority communities.

Vulnerable groups have also been engaged through improved data collection and disaggregation. They are involved in finding solutions and participating in programmes that aim to **address their special needs, realize their rights and support their empowerment**. Saint Kitts and Nevis established a new Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Ageing and Disabilities to ensure that special attention is paid to the most vulnerable residents.

Many VNRs in 2023 noted **setbacks to progress on gender equality and women's empowerment**, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related challenges. **Gender discrimination is an underlying systemic issue** for some countries, with little progress towards the empowerment of women and girls. However, the 2023 VNRs do highlight some progress in the **enactment of policies and legislation**. In Uzbekistan for example, targeted free and soft loans and additional quotas have doubled the number of women in higher education, and a new law passed in April 2023 at the legislative level criminalizes the harassment and stalking of women.

The systemic problems of **discrimination and inequality** are also acknowledged by some countries, such as by Burkina Faso in relation to the challenges faced by **migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons**. These problems are interlinked with food insecurity, environmental degradation and human rights violations, which are also addressed to various degrees in many of this year's VNR reports. For example, Comoros has begun working to strengthen its contributory and non-contributory **social protection system** by adopting new laws to **promote youth employment**, strengthening existing laws on **violence against children and women**, launching a national institution for human rights and civil liberties, and establishing **universal health coverage**.

8

Evolution of VNRs

Second and subsequent VNRs primarily serve to **reinforce national commitment** to the principles of the 2030 Agenda that were established in the previous report, and some provide **updates on actions and measures** for implementation of the SDGs. In 2023, there were 36 second-time reports, plus one country—Chile—reporting for the third time.

Many of the second time reports this year referenced elements of the previous VNR, or described **changes to the national development policies and plans** that were previously reported. Croatia noted that improvement was particularly evident in the areas of economic and social fairness, labour productivity and macroeconomic stability. Since its previous VNR in 2020, Comoros has revised its Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy together with the adoption of their Emerging Comoros Plan. VNRs also acknowledged the **impact of global challenges**, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, on their SDG implementation and highlighted the **importance of multilateralism and international cooperation and partnerships**.

Second or third VNRs also can be seen to undertake a **more expansive effort** to include a **wider range of inputs** from different types of interested stakeholders or incorporate **sub-national studies and data** that may not have been included in the first review. For example, Chile's third VNR reinforces the assertion that sustainable development is not possible without a culture of peace, strong institutions and democracy, and reports on measures to create a more just and inclusive society by addressing issues such as citizen security, violence and discrimination, and by building partnerships at the global, regional and local level.

Some countries analyzed SDG **progress achieved since the previous VNR**, including efforts to **illustrate how baseline data was expanded** and whether there has been progress over time, as mentioned in the earlier example of Canada's statistical index. Iceland tracked an increase in progress since its first VNR in 2019, which reported data for 30 per cent of the SDG indicators, with the data coverage in 2023 up to 70 per cent. Kuwait's VNR in 2019 reported limited availability of data and statistics, which resulted in **sustained investments and capacity development** programmes over the past few years that have resulted in advancements at the institutional, managerial, technical, data-gathering, information-sharing and dissemination levels; their VNR in 2023 emphasizes that meaningful and illustrative data and statistics have added significant value to the analysis undertaken in the second review and includes a chapter that looks back at the status of implementation in 2019 for comparison. Mongolia reported that a total of 156 global and 35 national indicators had been defined for its 2023 review, which improved their implementation assessment tool and elaborated the results documented by data compared with the first review in 2019.

Overall, the VNRs for 2023 show the **evolving landscape of sustainable development efforts** across different countries. It is evident that countries are increasingly demonstrating their dedication to the 2030 Agenda as they continue to voluntarily report on progress and their unique paths towards the achievement of the SDGs. Such global commitment reflects on the **importance of collaborative action and international cooperation** in addressing the world's most pressing challenges.

9

Conclusion

VNRs continue to serve as an accountability mechanism, a means for promoting inclusive multi-stakeholder engagement, and a tool for accelerating progress towards the SDGs. They also uphold the principle of leaving no one behind in the pursuit of sustainable development, by providing a framework for inclusion of inputs from many types of vulnerable groups to ensure that their voices are heard.

The 2030 Agenda is a transformative global agreement, and since its adoption in 2015, the international community has been united in pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals. Efforts are clearly ongoing to gather data and strengthen national statistics institutions, to enable countries to measure progress against the targets and indicators, in a process of implementation that is also shaping a wide range of national policies, actions and other measures toward these aspirational Goals.

At the halfway mark to 2030, the period of VNR reporting from 2016 through 2023 has culminated in a database of more than 300 VNR reports, which provide a rich array of in-depth quantitative and qualitative data and information. Over time, we can observe that second and subsequent VNRs are beginning to reflect a more forward-looking and inclusive follow-up and review process, with practices that are increasingly grounded in evidence-based reporting based on disaggregated data.

The VNR exercise thus continues to guide and inspire member States, stakeholders, and the United Nations system in a collective effort to monitor and measure progress and better understand how to overcome the roadblocks of inequality and poverty, support ecological harmony, and achieve a better world for all. As we collectively shift into the second half of the implementation period in the run-up to 2030, hope remains for the transformative shifts envisioned by the signatories to this landmark global agenda.