

**Briefing in preparation for the 2021 high-level political forum:  
Integrating a gender perspective in the voluntary national reviews**

*Monday, 14 December 2020, 8:30 – 10:00 am*

**Full recording of the event is available [here](#) (passcode: %0f7#Eh6).**

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### **SUMMARY**

*The briefing was attended by Permanent Representatives, Deputy Permanent Representatives and other delegates from the Permanent Missions in New York, as well as some officials from capitals, out of the 44 countries presenting voluntary national reviews (VNRs) in 2021. Speakers highlighted the importance of integrating a gender perspective in the forthcoming VNRs, across all the Sustainable Development Goals, including analyzing the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls. This includes assessing the implications of any planned action on women, including in relation to planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Several speakers underscored the significance of the production, accessibility and use of disaggregated data and gender statistics in informing evidence-based policymaking.*

***Mexico and Japan** highlighted key national initiatives for gender equality, including in relation to social protection, technology, education, labour participation and the gender pay gap, as well as the importance of inclusive consultations with civil society and women and girls and of peer-learning among countries. **UN-DESA** highlighted its support and guidance documents for VNR countries. **UN Women** presented available evidence in relation to COVID-19 impacts, including from rapid gender assessment surveys, as well as its technical and financial support to countries to strengthen gender-responsive national statistical systems. The **Women's Major Group** emphasized the significance of the knowledge and role of civil society organizations, including those outside of capital, in the VNR process to determine how to strengthen implementation. During the discussion, the **Dominican Republic, Sierra Leone, and Madagascar** outlined national activities following previous VNRs to address challenges and gaps in achieving gender equality, including reviewing national policies and plans with a view to integrate a gender perspective and facilitating institutional arrangements to prioritize gender mainstreaming.*

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In his welcoming remarks, **H.E. Mr. Jukka Salovaara, Permanent Representative of Finland to the UN**, stressed that integrating gender equality in the VNR process is more important this year than ever, as evidence shows that COVID-19 impacts are disproportionately affecting women and girls, especially those in vulnerable situations. Integrating a gender perspective in the analysis of progress of all the Sustainable Development Goals, not only in Goal 5, will allow governments to identify where challenges remain and where those challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic. This will further allow for more accurate targeting of actions, policies and available resources. Sex-disaggregated data to base policy interventions on are essential. Finland has strived to find the interlinkages among the Goals and targets.

**Ms. Asa Regnér, Assistant Secretary-General/Deputy Executive Director of UN Women**, emphasized that it is crucial that the VNRs:

- Reflect how a gender perspective is mainstreamed in the planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national sustainable development strategies, including assessing the implications of policies and programmes on women.
- Go beyond Goal 5 targets and indicators. Most of the previous reviews have analyzed progress on gender equality only in Goal 5, and some in the Goals on health, education and decent work. However, gender mainstreaming entails also analyzing how women and girls are impacted by policies related to food, water, energy, infrastructure, urban planning, sustainable consumption and production, climate and environment, security and inclusive institutions.
- Highlight how gender equality policies have been strengthened in recent years to address persistent and emerging challenges, as well as the use of gender statistics.
- Include how Governments have been institutionalizing processes to ensure gender-responsive planning and budgeting across line ministries, and how they involve national gender equality mechanisms.
- Build on the national reviews for the 25-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

**H.E. Mr. Juan Sandoval, Deputy Permanent Representative of Mexico to the UN, and Chair of the Group of Friends of VNR and Follow up and Review of the 2030 Agenda**, highlighted Mexico's efforts to integrate a gender perspective in national strategies: such as the initiative "Closing gaps: making social protection count for women in Mexico" (which has benchmarks aligned to SDG indicators); a digital tool to support women and girls who face situations of violence by accessing online applications; and the 2020 hackathon for women which awarded women-led projects related to climate change, health, security, economy and social causes. Efforts need to be made to engage women and girls in the VNR preparations and consultations. As governments prepare 2021 VNRs, they must be mindful of the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on women and girls, as well as include the voices of beneficiaries of social programmes and those at risk of being left behind. The peer-learning aspect is the most important part of the VNRs, and the Group of Friends supports countries to facilitate peer-learning.

**H.E. Mr. Tetsuya Kimura, Ambassador, Economic, Social and United Nations Management Affairs, Permanent Mission of Japan to the UN**, highlighted Japan's focus on actions to promote women's labour participation in its first VNR in 2017, which was prompted by data on the gender gaps related to labour participation and wages. For example, an initiative to improve accountability for the employment and advancement of women in the workplace requires companies to develop and report on action plans for women's empowerment. Since 2017, women's labour participation has increased and the gender pay gap has decreased. The previous VNR also included coverage of gender equality issues in the sections on overarching guiding principles, education, cooperation with civil society, international cooperation and microfinancing. Institutional arrangements for SDG implementation fostered inter-ministerial collaboration, including the national gender equality mechanism, and roundtable meetings facilitated consultations with various non-governmental stakeholders.

**Ms. Irena Zubcevic, Chief of Intergovernmental Policy and Review Branch, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)**, encouraged governments to build on previous VNRs. The 2020 VNR synthesis report highlighted the gender-related impacts of COVID-19 mentioned in the VNRs, including gender-based violence, women in the informal economy, and disrupted education, as well as efforts to integrate a

gender perspective in national policies and plans through gender-responsive budgeting and social protection, and gender statistics. These issues and other good practices and lessons learned are also highlighted in the VNR Handbook issued every year as well as in the SG's voluntary common reporting guidelines. SDG 5 is not among the goals to be reviewed at the 2021 HLPF but gender equality will be a cross-cutting issue throughout the thematic reviews, especially given the theme on COVID-19 recovery.

**Ms. Ginette Azcona, Research and Data Policy Specialist, UN Women**, highlighted the data and resources available at <https://data.unwomen.org>, including in relation to COVID-19 impacts. The pandemic is disproportionately affecting women and girls, as demonstrated by evidence related to health (e.g. maternal mortality) and economic (e.g. women in high-risk sectors) impacts and intensified unpaid care work and gender-based violence. Increased extreme poverty and food insecurity also are exacerbating existing inequalities. Without gender-responsive policies and fiscal packages, the crisis risks derailing hard-won gains on gender equality. Recent publications that provide recommendations on urgent actions needed include *[From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19](#)*, as well as *[Progress of the Sustainable Development Goals: Gender Snapshot 2020](#)*, which brings together the latest available evidence on gender equality across all 17 Goals.

**Ms. Jessamyn Encarnacion, Statistics Specialist, UN Women**, highlighted the global programme Women Count, which aims to build gender-responsive national statistical systems. Forums for data users and producers were established to strengthen overall coordination, which led to vast improvements in implementation and monitoring. In Kenya, gender data sheets were produced for every county and led to new legislation, policy reform and greater financing being introduced. In Uganda, with the identification and production of national priority gender equality indicators, reporting on gender-specific SDG indicators in the VNRs increased by 150% from 2016 to 2020. The pandemic exposed major gender data gaps and the lack of baseline data impedes evidence-based policymaking. Since April, 47 countries have completed rapid gender assessment surveys on COVID-19 impacts launched by UN Women with national and international partners, and 23 more are in progress. Data collected from these assessments have been used to inform recovery efforts. Strengthened gender-specific indicators, data disaggregation and contextual variables need to be integrated in national monitoring frameworks; also necessary are gender-responsive statistical policies, including budgeting for gender statistics, and capacity building for national statistical systems.

**Ms. Mabel Bianco, on behalf of the Women's Major Group and the other Major Groups**, underscored the importance of follow-up at the national level after the VNR presentations at HLPF, as well as in-depth analysis of obstacles to gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It was also recommended to facilitate presentations at the regional forums on sustainable development, with the participation of civil society. More inclusive and meaningful participation of civil society organizations, including those outside of capital, and of women and girls (e.g. indigenous, Afro descendent, migrant, poor, rural) in the VNR process and in national follow-up is essential. VNRs are not an examination of a country but a process to determine how implementation can be improved, and the knowledge and role of civil society is critical in this regard.

**H.E. Ms. Joan Cedano, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the UN**, outlined that the Dominican Republic's first VNR in 2018 examined the alignment of national development strategies with the SDGs and revealed that legal frameworks were necessary to reduce gender inequality and discrimination and violence against women. In early 2020, the Government undertook an integrated

rapid assessment to review policies with a gender lens, studying 10 national plans across sectors to find gaps. Sex-disaggregated data is a challenge, and the Government is working with partners and other countries to develop cooperation plans to strengthen capacity. It found that some indicators did lack a gender lens; for example, the national plan does not specifically mention women and girls in vulnerable situations (but national indicators do include women-headed households living in poverty). Currently, it is in the process of determining the best way to address gaps (e.g. standalone national gender plan that mainstreams a gender perspective in policies, SDG indicator dashboard where data can be disaggregated).

**H.E. Ms. Victoria Sulimani, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the UN**, highlighted that Sierra Leone used a whole-of-society approach to produce comprehensive reports for its previous VNRs and integrated a gender perspective in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Women are agents of change and integrating a gender perspective into every Goal will further implementation. Gender statistics in particular will be a priority in the next VNR.

A representative from **Madagascar** highlighted enabling institutional arrangements and legal frameworks to prioritize gender mainstreaming. The Government appointed gender focal points to integrate a gender perspective into all development projects and programmes in their respective ministries, built an alliance of men, including traditional leaders, and boys to promote gender equality, and established a network of women parliamentarians and a criminal council for women.