



Concept Note

Advancing implementation of the SDGs: Workshop on Voluntary Local Reviews

3-4 October, Helsinki

Background

Local and sub-national governments are critical to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Actions taken by local and regional governments impact all SDGs, with consequences, for example, for the eradication of poverty and hunger; the advancement of gender equality and reduction of inequalities; access to health services, quality education and clean water and sanitation; and climate action. Local governments have also been at the forefront of addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as leading efforts to build back better.¹

As they localize the 2030 Agenda, local and regional governments are increasingly engaging in subnational reviews of SDG implementation, also called Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). While there is no centralized tracking of the number of the reviews that have been conducted, over 70 reviews have been submitted to the [database](#) maintained by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. These include the review of the City of Helsinki, which was among the first set of cities to carry out a VLR.

VLRs can be a powerful accelerator of SDG implementation – improving data collection; identifying key emerging issues and priorities, as well as actions necessary to address them; bringing divergent stakeholders to the table, including people in vulnerable situations closer to decision-making. As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages member States to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven" (paragraph 79). In its 2021 Ministerial Declaration, the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) also committed to involving and empowering local authorities to ensure local ownership of SDGs, in particular by citizens, community and local organizations and to best translate national development priorities into local realities. In that regard, the HLPF noted voluntary local reviews as a useful tool to show progress and foster exchange in local implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. The VLRs are also a means to foster the link between SDGs and COVID-19 recovery efforts. As implementation of the SDGs continues in the Decade of Action, an increasing number of countries are linking Voluntary National Reviews to Voluntary Local Reviews, strengthening multi-level governance to accelerate implementation of the SDGs.

Purpose and objectives

The objectives of the proposed workshop include:

¹ United Nations. Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an urban world. July 2020



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Helsinki

- Sharing experiences and lessons learned from local and regional governments in localizing the SDGs and on how local, regional and central governments are working together to make the 2030 Agenda a reality at the local level;
- Familiarizing interested local and regional governments with a follow-up and review framework that is consistent with the 2030 Agenda; and
- Promoting robust follow-up and review processes by local and regional governments that complement and feed into follow-up and review processes carried out by national governments, including the VNRs.

Organization and participation

The workshop will be organized jointly by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DSDG/UNDESA), the Government of Finland and the City of Helsinki. Participants will include representatives of local and regional governments working on SDG implementation and sub-national review processes. Participants will represent a mix of cities and regional governments that have already completed their initial reviews, and those that are interested in conducting a review. Representatives from entities working on sub-national reviews, such as research institutes and entities of the United Nations system will also be invited to the workshop.