

## Q&A for Voluntary National Reviews at the 2018 HLPF

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**The Q&A should be read in conjunction with the DESA/DSD [Handbook](#) for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews.**

**Q: What are voluntary national reviews (VNRs)?**

A: Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) are part of the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Regular reviews in the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) are to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other stakeholders. VNRs allow the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

**Q: What should countries do to present their VNRs at the High-Level Political Forum?**

A: Once a country has decided to carry out a review, the decision is communicated to the President of ECOSOC by means of a letter from the Permanent Representative of the country concerned. There are a number of other steps that countries should consider when organising and preparing the review. Many of these, and a sample letter, are contained in the [Handbook](#).

**Q: Who is involved in the preparation and presentation of the VNR?**

A: VNRs are state-led, prepared by government in a consultative, inclusive and participatory process involving all major groups and other stakeholders. This includes all sectors and levels of government, civil society, private sector, members of Parliament and other institutions

At the national level, Member States are encouraged to involve stakeholders in the national voluntary reviews in accordance with paragraphs 78 and 79 of resolution 70/1. The specific modalities for engagement are likely to vary from country to country and are to be decided by the national governments.

At the global level, the HLPF supports effective and broad participation of major groups and other stakeholders in the follow-up and review processes at the HLPF in line with resolution 67/290. Representatives from civil society, academia, private sector, and parliament have been included in the delegations of some countries to the previous HLPFs. Major groups and other stakeholders also commented and asked questions during the VNR presentations.

**Q: Are there any guidelines for the preparation of VNRs?**

A: The voluntary common reporting guidelines seek to support and guide member states in conducting VNRs. They were initially prepared by the Secretary-General in December 2015.<sup>1</sup> They were updated in December 2017 to reflect lessons learned during the preceding two years. They provide a framework for certain common elements within reports while allowing for flexibility so countries can adapt to their own circumstances. The updated guidelines can be found [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> See annex to Secretary-General's Report on critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level, A/70/684.

The guidelines are voluntary. Each country will decide on the scope of their review and the format in which they want to present their findings. The guidelines aim to introduce comparability among countries to make the discussion of good practices and the tracking of global trends more effective. Countries reporting in 2016 and 2017 mostly found it useful to structure their reports accordingly.

**Q: What should be the scope of VNRs at the HLPF?**

A: As implementation of the 2030 Agenda advances, the scope of VNRs is expected to be as broad as possible, and should take into account country specific circumstances. Given that countries in 2018 will already be in year three of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, they are expected to report on the actions and measures taken to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and where available, to provide information on progress made, taking into account the principle of leaving no-one behind.

It is also expected that countries will share good practices, gaps and lessons learned related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as possible areas where they would need support, or have identified the potential for partnerships.

**Q: What sources of information are available to help countries prepare for the VNRs?**

A: DESA/DSD has prepared a comprehensive and practical [Handbook](#) for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, which provides information on all the steps that a country may take when preparing a voluntary national review.

DESA/DSD has compiled synthesis reports of the [2016](#) and [2017](#) VNRs, which provide a snapshot of the status and trends of national implementation.

While the synthesis reports provide a resource of good practices and lessons learned, countries are encouraged to consult the VNR reports prepared by their peers as a benchmark for their own preparation. These are available at DESA's [VNR Database](#).

There are also a number of other resources available on the web which will assist countries in preparing for their VNRs, including the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the United National Development Programme (UNDP).

**Q: How will DESA and other UN entities support countries in their preparation for the VNRs?**

A: DESA/DSD organises workshops for all participating VNR countries which are designed to improve country reviews and to strengthen preparations of voluntary national presentations, as well as to identify areas where they need support. The preparatory workshops are based on countries' previous experiences in participating in the VNR process. The workshops are intended for working-level officials for developed and developing countries which are closely engaged in the national preparatory process.

Countries may approach DESA/DSD for capacity building support. Depending on request for support by countries for the preparation and follow-up of their reviews, DESA/DSD and other UN entities will work with countries to identify their needs and provide capacity building support in these areas. Several developing countries that conducted reviews for the 2016 and 2017 HLPFs reported on assistance received from UN Country Teams.

**Q: The HLPF will consider a specific theme and discuss a group of SDGs each year. Are the VNRs expected to address this theme and the group of SDGs in their reports and presentations?**

A: Countries are encouraged to provide brief information on progress and the status of all SDGs. However, some goals could be addressed in more depth, for instance, to illustrate innovative policies to achieve goals, or examples that could be especially interesting for peer learning and in an international context as well as those that are prioritized by a country.

**Q: Are the VNRs expected to include statistics and indicators and corresponding analysis supporting the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda?**

A: It is up to individual countries to determine how they wish to include statistics and indicators in their VNRs. Countries may want to illustrate the main elements of the reviews with figures showing trends, as appropriate. Countries may include an annex with data, using the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and adding priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels where appropriate.

**Q: How do countries participate in presenting their VNRs at the 2018 HLPF?**

A: Voluntary national reviews at the HLPF, aiming at facilitating the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, are expected to be based on follow-up and review processes at the national and local levels.

The expectation is that each country participating in the VNRs in 2018 may present a focused report in writing and make a brief oral presentation during the 2018 HLPF. It is expected that reports are to be submitted to the Secretariat prior to the 2018 HLPF in order to leave enough time to HLPF participants to study and read the VNR reports. Main messages from the VNR preparations should be submitted to the Secretariat by 18 May 2018, while the reports themselves are due by 15 June. Both documents will be posted on the website of the HLPF. The word count of the Main Messages may not exceed 700 words. They are translated into English by the Secretariat if they are submitted in any other UN language.

**Q: At what level should countries be represented in their VNR presentations at the HLPF?**

A: It is suggested by the Secretary-General that the report include an opening statement by the Head of State or Government, a Minister or other high-ranking Government official, highlighting the key messages from the review and touching on critical issues in implementation that the country wishes to highlight. It is recommended that officials with the rank of Minister or equivalent lead the presentation during the three-day ministerial segment at the HLPF.

**Q: How much time will countries have to present their VNRs at the 2018 HLPF?**

A: Consultations are underway in the Bureau of ECOSOC to identify the most effective way to present national reviews at the 2018 HLPF. The President of ECOSOC, as the convener of the HLPF, decides on the programme of HLPF including the Ministerial segment. The presentation at the HLPF is intended to focus on the key messages from the review process.

**Q: What is the format for the presentation of the VNRs at the 2018 HLPF?**

A: As was the case for the 2016 and 2017 VNRs, it is expected that countries will utilize either the panel or individual format. In the panel format, the countries in a VNR session (between two and four) each make their presentations. Once all countries in the session have presented, questions are posed to the presenting countries. In the individual format, a country presents, followed by questions from countries in the audience, as well as from major groups and other stakeholders. This is then followed by the next VNR country in that VNR session. In 2017, presentations were made mostly by government representatives, but in some cases also by members of civil society, youth

representatives and the private sector as part of the official delegation. Use can be made of slide presentations (PowerPoint) and short films. However, it is up to the countries to decide on their format of presentation.

**Q: What can countries expect after participating in voluntary national reviews at the 2018 HLPF?**

A: The implementation process should not be broken after the VNR presentation/s at the HLPF. After the presentation, lessons learned and outcomes of the VNR process can be fed into national-level follow-up and review processes.

Participating countries are encouraged to continue engaging in the peer-learning exercises within relevant VNR networks, fostering an environment of mutual support and shared progress, and to apply lessons learned to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at their national and local levels.

It is anticipated that a synthesis report will be prepared by the Secretariat after the 2018 HLPF, highlighting good practices and lessons learned from the VNR countries. The factual summary of the discussions at the HLPF, prepared by the President of ECOSOC in consultation with the Bureau, may also reflect key points from the presentation of the VNRs. The Ministerial declaration also gives guidance to VNR countries.