



**TAKING STOCK OF EUROPE:  
VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS  
AND OTHER ACTIVITIES IN THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030  
AGENDA AND SDGS**

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**Background Paper**

**2<sup>nd</sup> ESDN Peer  
Learning Platform**

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## Introduction

This Background Paper provides input for the 2<sup>nd</sup> **ESDN Peer Learning Platform**, entitled “**Voluntary National Reviews at the UN High Level Political Forum: Experience Exchange and Learning**”, which will take place in **Helsinki on 20-21 April 2017**. This ESDN event is organized in cooperation with the Finnish National Commission for Sustainable Development.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> **ESDN Peer Learning Platform** will bring together policymakers, who have already completed their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) for the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2016, in order to facilitate a sharing of experiences and learning with policymakers from those countries currently preparing their respective VNRs for the HLPF 2017. The **Peer Learning Visit** on 21 April will focus on learning from the SD governance practices in Finland, as it is the host country. It will cover the topics of “Institutionalizing Sustainable Development in Finland: Horizontal integration and policy mainstreaming for the 2030 Agenda implementation”, and the second topic, “Involving stakeholders and experts in the Finnish Sustainable Development Model: Practical examples and experiences”. **The main objective of both Peer Learning events** is to have a very informal exchange and interaction between policymakers who are responsible for preparing their country’s VNR or develop strategies/policies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SD and the 17 SDGs. This Background Paper will mainly provide background information for the Peer Learning Platform.

The **Platform** will include an opening and orientation session, followed by four main ‘Spaces for Exchange’:

- **Space for Exchange 1:** Experiences from the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2016;
- **Space for Exchange 2:** Preparation of the VNRs for the HLPF 2017;
- **Space for Exchange 3:** Main challenges in the VNR 2017 preparation – exchange and learning (part 1);
- **Space for Exchange 4:** Main challenges in the VNR 2017 preparation – exchange and learning (part 2).

This Background Paper provides participants with information about the following topics: 1) basic information about the 2030 Agenda for SD and the SDGs will be given; 2) what the UN High Level Political Forum is, as well as provide a short analysis of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) presented at the UN HLPF 2016, including participatory arrangements and means of implementation; 3) what to expect from the HLPF 2017; and 4) the current 2030 Agenda/SDGs implementation activities in place in 19 European countries.

A general documentation of the main themes and outcomes of the Platform will be published in a report shortly after the events.

## The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** was formally adopted during the United Nation's Sustainable Development Summit which took place in New York from 25-27 September 2015. On this occasion, all 193 Member States of the United Nations agreed on adopting the 15-year plan, titled "[Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development](#)". The adopted 2030 Agenda contains **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** please see Graph 1 below, accompanied by 169 targets, which shape national development plans. Initiated by the Rio+20 Conference, the SDGs are scheduled to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Compared to their predecessors, the SDGs are more all-encompassing and make the important pledge that "no one will be left behind". The 2030 Agenda applies to developing, emerging and developed countries alike and recognizes the importance of partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society in its successful implementation.

Graph 1. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Source [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)

## High Level Political Forum and Voluntary National Reviews

The **High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)** was adopted as a **platform to enable experience sharing, peer learning and discussion between countries** in order to reach the 17 SDGs. The HLPF has been operating since June 2012, but the 2016 meeting was the first since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The Forum was held under the auspice of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) during 11-20 July 2016. The HLPF 2016 played the crucial role of establishing a **central platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda** and was the first progress report and benchmarking mechanism for countries in achieving the SDGs. Among others, the HLPF included discussions on:

- how to ensure that no one is left behind;
- means of implementation;
- mainstreaming the SDGs;
- creating ownership at the national level, as well as regional experiences;
- the role of multi-stakeholder engagement for implementation; and
- presentation of 22 VNRs on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Many stakeholders from different countries were not only able to **share their experiences, challenges, and concerns** over the development of the 2030 Agenda for SD, but also in the areas they think will have the greatest impact or importance in attaining the SDGs, ranging from acquiring enough finance for sustainable development and relieving income inequality, to more cooperation between stakeholders. These plenary meetings showed that **there is a plethora of challenges that all countries, stakeholders, and citizens face in trying to reach the SDGs.**

In 2016, to support countries in the preparation of the first Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) outlined a proposal with a set of common **reporting guidelines**. The guidelines were released in the Annex to the UN Secretary-General's January 2016 report on follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, titled "Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level". The aim was to help countries presenting their VNRs in 2016 to frame the content of the reviews. The guidelines also apply to countries holding the presentation at the UN HLPF 2017. According to the guidelines, **VNRs should be structured as follows:**

- 1) An **opening statement** highlighting key messages;
- 2) A **synthesis** of the process and findings of the review, highlighting the country's good practices, lesson learned, and challenges;
- 3) An **introduction** outlining context and objectives of the review;
- 4) **Methodology and process for preparation** of the review;
- 5) **Policy and enabling environment** including: SDG ownership creation; SDGs incorporation in the national framework; integration of environmental, social and economic dimensions; goals and targets; analysis of progress and initiatives related to the HLPF's high-level political forum's thematic focus; difficulties encountered; institutional mechanism;
- 6) **Means of implementation** including how means of implementation are mobilized, what difficulties this process faces, and what additional resources are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda;
- 7) **Next steps**
- 8) **Statistical annex** that may include an annex with data, using the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators to be proposed by the Statistical Commission as a starting point and adding priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels; and
- 9) **Conclusions** presenting a summary of the analysis, findings and policy implications.

## Voluntary National Reviews 2016

During the HLPF 2016, 22 countries presented VNRs analysing the implications of the 2030 Agenda and the relation between the SDGs and their national priorities; in putting in place consultation and coordination processes around the SDGs; in integrating the SDGs in their national strategies, plans and budget processes; and in setting up monitoring and evaluation systems. **All reviews focused on national processes that are ongoing to ‘nationalize’ the SDGs and integrate them with national priorities and in national strategies and plans.** The reviews highlighted a broad range of priority issues. Many countries described how they are setting up monitoring and evaluation systems at the national level, including revising or creating sets of national indicators.

At the UN HLPF 2016, 7 European countries prepared Voluntary National Reviews: Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Montenegro, Norway, and Switzerland. Table 1 below, shows the basic information about the VNRs of these seven countries, including the link to the report, the length of the document, and the ministry, or ministries, responsible for drafting the VNR.

**Table 1. Basic information on the Voluntary National Reports of 7 European countries**

	Estonia	Finland	France	Germany	Montenegro	Norway	Switzerland
<b>Title and link to the report</b>	<a href="#">Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Estonia</a>	<a href="#">National report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development FINLAND</a>	<a href="#">Report on the Implementation on by France of the Sustainable Development Goals</a>	<a href="#">Report of the German Federal Government to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2016</a>	<a href="#">Voluntary national reviews at the HLPF 2016 Montenegro</a>	<a href="#">Initial steps towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda</a>	<a href="#">Switzerland's initial steps towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</a>
<b>Length of the report</b>	60 pages	64 pages	53 pages	59 pages	163 pages	29 pages	28 pages
<b>Ministry/ ministries responsible for drafting the Review Report</b>	Strategy Unit of the Government Office coordinated the VNR (VNR ratified by SD Working Group and Estonia's Commission for SD)	Secretariat General of Finnish National Commission on SD - Prime Minister's Office - Ministry for Foreign Affairs	Inter-ministerial Representative for SD General Commissioner for SD (tasked by the Prime Minister)	- not clearly specified	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Inter-ministerial working group

Source [ESDN Quarterly Report 42](#)

### VNRs 2016 rationale and actors' involvement

The following paragraphs briefly outlines a number of important characteristics related to the VNRs. Such categories and contents could support other countries in the preparation of their VNRs, as well as towards the participation in future High-Level Political Forums. Additionally, this insight into the VNRs could facilitate peer learning and the establishment and improvement of practices in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. For a detailed analysis of the VNRs at the HLPF 2016, please refer to the [ESDN Quarterly Report 42](#).

First and foremost, the seven VNRs will be analysed to discern the **reasoning behind such an exercise, the expected use that countries had imagined, and the added value that it could bring.** In the majority of countries, the VNR was mostly aimed at describing first steps and future plans towards the 2030 Agenda implementation that countries had started considering, were about to undertake, or were already employed.

Countries reported about the added value and about numerous beneficial effects that the exercises brought to them. In several cases, the VNRs were seen as important exercises, because they **promoted and supported a process of mutual learning and experience sharing**. Additionally, VNRs were used as key tools to **understand and identify main issues and challenges** with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Secondly, the analysis tried to understand the **type of participatory arrangements that were undertaken in the preparation of the Voluntary National Reviews**. To do so, three different 'lenses' have been used: first, it has been considered the involvement of the administrative machinery at the national level, and the **involvement of sectoral ministries**. Then, it has been looked into the **inclusion of stakeholders**. And finally, the last lens focused on the **participation at the sub-national level**. A main result of the analysis is that participatory arrangements in the preparation of VNRs are not always clearly specified in the different documents that were looked into: in many cases, it was not possible to differentiate between these three levels of analysis. It appears, however, that **pre-existing mechanisms for consultation**, most probably developed in the context of SD policymaking, **were often used**. With respect to the involvement of ministries, it was reported that only in a few countries there was clear cooperation between them, or there was cooperation that took place using an 'inter-ministerial working group'. With respect to the participation of stakeholders, broad consultations took place in almost all countries, especially with the inclusion of civil society organisations. Only in Germany, consultation of the sub-national level was clearly specified in the report, and saw, in particular, the inclusion of parliaments, federal states, and local authorities among others. Table 2 gives a structured overview of these findings about VNR rationale and involvement for each of the seven countries.

Table 2. VNRs 2016 rationale and actors' involvement

	<b>Estonia</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>Montenegro</b>	<b>Norway</b>	<b>Switzerland</b>
<b>Reasoning, expected use and added value of the VNR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Describes the <b>main measures and plans</b> for implementation</li> <li>- Functions as <b>preliminary gap analysis</b> of governments' policies relating to SDGs</li> <li>- Tracks implementation of SDGs and targets</li> <li>- Highlights <b>challenges</b></li> <li>- <b>Shares positive examples</b></li> </ul>	Serves as <b>interim report</b> on Agenda 2030 implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>First review of the implementation</b> of each of the SDGs in France</li> <li>- Identifies <b>main issues and challenges</b>, government courses of action, and good practices and model measures already in place</li> <li>- <b>Experience sharing</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Describes <b>current and future plans</b> for 2030 Agenda implementation</li> <li>- Promotes and supports a process of <b>mutual learning</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relates to drafting of the NSSD (adopted in July 2016) and corresponding action plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Outlines <b>initial steps</b> to incorporate SDGs</li> <li>- Contributes to <b>greater political and public awareness</b> about the SDGs</li> <li>- Results in being a <b>catalyst</b> for 2030 Agenda implementation</li> <li>- Gives <b>greater coherence and ownership</b> of follow-up process within Government</li> </ul>	Presents <b>first steps towards 2030 Agenda implementation</b>
Participatory arrangements in the preparation of VNRs: <b>Ministries involved</b>	<b>Cooperation</b> with several ministries and Estonian SD Commission	<i>- not clearly specified</i>	<i>- not clearly specified</i>	<i>- not clearly specified</i>	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism conducted the public consultations	<b>Each coordinating ministry provided input on its respective goal(s)</b>	<b>Inter-ministerial working group</b>
Participatory arrangements in the preparation of VNRs: <b>Stakeholders involved</b>	<i>- not clearly specified</i>	In the context of Finland's Gap analysis, a <b>participatory stakeholder process and expert assessments</b> was used to outline key themes requiring urgent attention	- <b>Consultations with civil society</b> (i.e. National Council for Ecological Transition, the National Council for Development and International Solidarity and the National Advisory Commission on Human Rights)	Broad discussion with stakeholders (i.e. NGOs, churches, local authorities, Academia, business community and trade unions) through the <b>'dialogue forum'</b> on the 2030 Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public consultations</li> <li>- National Council for SD and Climate Change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business sector, CSOs and Sami Parliament participated in <b>informal consultations</b> with politicians and officials preparing the review</li> <li>- CSOs held meetings, submitting input to VNR preparation</li> </ul>	VNR was discussed within <b>pre-existing participatory consultation mechanisms</b>
Participatory arrangements in the preparation of VNRs: <b>Sub-national levels involved</b>	<i>- not clearly specified</i>	<i>- not clearly specified</i>	<i>- not clearly specified</i>	Consultations with other governmental actors e.g. <b>parliaments, federal states, local authorities</b>	<b>Existing coordination mechanisms</b> of National SD Council enabled participation of interested parties at the national/local level (in NSSD preparation)	<i>- not clearly specified</i>	VNR was discussed within the <b>pre-existing participatory consultation mechanisms</b>

Source [ESDN Quarterly Report 42](#)

## Means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs

In this section, it will be briefly analysed which initiatives have started, are about to start, or are planned to start with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SD and the related SDGs within the European countries which volunteered at the HLPF 2016. To do so, a set several categories has been set to help in understanding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SD and the related SDGs within these countries. However, this section will not provide specific information for each of these countries in the individual categories, but will outline the activities in general. Specific activities for each country are summarised in Table 3 and analysed in more detail in the [ESDN Quarterly Report 42](#).

**Leading ministry/institution in the 2030 Agenda implementation:** With respect to which institution is in charge, leads, or coordinates the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it was possible to see that there is no common way to approach this matter. However, four out of seven countries have assigned the leading/coordinating role to a high political level, close to governments.

**Involvement of other ministries in the 2030 Agenda implementation:** In this regard, the picture is different in each country, but it is possible to report at least one very indicative similarity: several countries have established a type of coordination mechanism at the inter-ministerial level. Another way a ministry can become involved sees each ministry coordinating with other ministries regarding the SDGs, and submitting an account in its budget proposal for its respective goal(s). Ministries were also involved in the process of drafting the NSDS until 2030 together with expert institutions, and institutions in the public sector, local self-governments, the parliament, academia, civil society organizations and the business community.

**Involvement of the subnational level in the 2030 Agenda implementation:** Regarding the involvement of the subnational level, the overview is not clear. In fact, only three countries specifically mentioned the subnational level in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Means of subnational level involvement include the active participation of regions and municipalities, regular dialogue with federal states on matters relating to SD and on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

**Involvement of stakeholders in the 2030 Agenda implementation:** All countries involve and intend to keep involving stakeholders. However, it seems that different grades of involvement are expected, ranging from a consultation typology to a more institutionalised and structured kind of involvement. Stakeholder consultation activities include: organisation of consultative workshops on the implementation of the SDGs; the set-up of a committee of international experts to inform government thinking; and the involvement of citizen and various interest groups, especially through the updating of the NSDS. A more structured way to involve stakeholders includes: stakeholders' involvement through implementation partnerships between the sub-national level and representatives of business, civil society, politics and academia; NGOs inclusion with the aim to involve interest groups and the general public on decisions that would affect them; broad-based participation of stakeholder groups in preparing the implementation plan and then implementing the 2030 Agenda through the creation of partnerships, institutional arrangements, open internet surveys, mobilisation of private sector resources, long-term and integrated approach to SD in early education/schools/universities, involvement of a broad spectrum of citizens. Awareness raising initiatives and outreach activities were also specifically mentioned.

**Link of 2030 Agenda/SDGs to existing SD policy strategy documents:** generally, almost all countries linked the implementation of 2030 Agenda and SDGs to existing SD policy-strategy documents in a clear, direct way. Most countries have revised or are about to revise their NSDS to incorporate the 2030 Agenda.

**Approach to the implementation of the SDGs and their targets:** In terms of the approaches used towards the SDGs and target implementation, the analysis tried to understand if countries considered the 17 SDGs and targets as a whole, or only considered a few, or if there was a prioritisation of certain goals. In general, it can be said that the majority of countries took all the SDGs, and went a step further by showing in their reports how each SDG was individually addressed and disaggregated into specific issues within the national context and how to address them. Some countries performed gap analyses to understand how the country could relate to all the SDGs and targets. However, the adaptation of the SDGs and targets to national contexts also showed that not all targets and international indicators are to be incorporated in the NSDS due to the national context, and, partly, because countries have their own objectives and targets, some of which are even more ambitious than the 2030 Agenda SDG targets.

**Challenges to implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs:** With regards to challenges, the majority of countries identified SDG-specific challenges. The most common challenges relate to the use of natural resources, resource efficiency, economic development, inequality, and unemployment. Four out of seven countries reported about general implementation challenges, the most common being: (1) increasing awareness and ownership of the Agenda and the SDGs at the national level; (2) development of indicators for SDGs, measuring and reporting on progress; (3) considering the 2030 Agenda as a new paradigm, and therefore adapting it to national policies and strategies; and (4) inter-linkages between SDG areas. Finland appears to be the one country that put the largest attention regarding the challenges of implementation. These challenges are reported in their entirety, as they offer interesting points for reflection and discussion:

- 1) Long chronological perspective of 2030 Agenda in relation to other political cycles;
- 2) Ensuring policy coherence;
- 3) Strengthening ownership and commitment and the Government's facilitating role;
- 4) Ensuring the synergy of implementation in execution at various levels;
- 5) Achieving transformation and in-depth changes;
- 6) Transforming abstract objectives into tangible, practical activities;
- 7) Strengthening the discourse on SD (content and operating models);
- 8) Mobilisation of resources of various administrative branches and stakeholder groups;
- 9) Developing operating models for the use of indicators and the monitoring of implementation;
- 10) Integrating the various dimensions of SD, requiring the creation of a new mind-set;
- 11) Understanding the relationships between various goals;
- 12) Defining a suitable set of means of implementation;
- 13) Ensuring the correct timing of measures; and
- 14) Bringing SDGs closer to citizens and making them tangible enough.

Table 3. Means of Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs

	Estonia	Finland	France	Germany	Montenegro	Norway	Switzerland
Leading ministry/institution in the 2030 Agenda implementation	Strategy Unit of the Government Office	Prime Minister's Office coordinates 2030 Agenda implementation	Ministry of the Environment, Energy and the Sea is in charge of SD	State Secretaries Committee for SD steers implementation of NSDS incorporating 2030 Agenda/SDGs	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Individual ministries are responsible for follow-up on the SDGs	Political responsibility lies with the Federal Council
Involvement of other ministries involved?	A coordination system includes:  - Intra-Ministerial SD Working Group  - Commission for SD	- Coordination secretariat (in the Prime Minister's Office)  - SD coordination network  - National Parliament and policy makers  - National Commission on SD and Development Policy Committee	- not clearly specified	- Representatives from all federal ministries are included in the State Secretaries Committee for SD  - Ministries are responsible for their own contributions to the NSDS and the 2030 Agenda, but must cooperate with other ministries	The process of drafting the NSDS until 2030 (which is focused on the SDGs) involved the work of an expert team and a participatory process, including ministries, experts, public sector institutions, local governments, parliament, academia, CSOs and business	- Each ministry coordinates with other ministries regarding SDGs, and submits an account in its budget proposal for its respective goal(s);  - Ministry of Finance sums up the main points in the national budget and presents it annually to Parliament	The Interdepartmental SD Committee (ISDC) coordinates NSDS implementation
Involvement of the subnational level	- not clearly specified	The regions and municipalities will play a key role in 2030 Agenda implementation	- not clearly specified	Federal government engages in regular dialogue with the 16 federal states on SD issues, and in particular on 2030 Agenda implementation	<u>Please see above</u>	- not clearly specified	Sub-national level is involved through implementation partnerships between Confederation, cantons, communes and stakeholders
Involvement of stakeholders	- NGOs are in Estonia's Commission for SD  - Code of Good Engagement  - Awareness raising initiatives (i.e. ESDW)	Broad-based participation of stakeholder groups to prepare implementation plan and in 2030 Agenda implementation is a key objective	- Consultative workshops on SDGs implementation  - Committee of international experts was set up to inform government thinking	Citizen and interest groups are involved especially through NSDS updating i.e. via the Internet and through hearings	<u>Please see above</u>	Relevant stakeholders will keep engaging in a constructive dialogue with the Government on implementation and follow-up of the Agenda	Stakeholders are included through implementation partnerships between the Confederation, sub-national level, business, civil society, politics and academia

Source [ESDN Quarterly Report 42](#)

## Key messages at the HLPF 2016

Following the HLPF 2016, the **President of the ECOSOC released a Summary Report**, in which, despite mentioning the successes of the meeting, **several important key messages for implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national level were outlined:**

- **Creating ownership at the national level**

Creating ownership at the national level is a key concept of the Summary Report. VNRs at the 2016 HLPF revealed that some countries already started to mainstream the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into national development plans. However, creating ownership of the SDGs and their interlinkages should carefully consider the national and local contexts as well as values and cultures, avoiding the use of external blueprints, since local contexts differ across regions, countries and the local level. This is of particular relevance, because SDGs will need to be taken to the grass-root level and focus on vulnerable people. To ensure that no one is left behind, the design of national strategies should be inclusive and allow for participation of all groups in society.

- **Incorporation of SDGs into national policies**

Incorporation of the SDGs and their interlinkages into policies, programs and institutions at different government levels requires strong commitment and leadership. Consequently, dialogue will have to occur among line ministries, among scientists and experts, among civil society, and, most importantly, with the people on the ground. Different governance tools - including legal instruments, market instruments or network solutions (partnership) - should be used in the implementation. Many countries are integrating the SDGs into national visions, adopting national sustainable development strategies, plans, and roadmaps. Other countries adopted mapping exercises in order to find the linkages between SDG targets and national objectives. Measures that have been undertaken further include the creation of national sustainable development councils, dedicated ministries for SDG coordination and other coordination mechanisms. In addition to horizontal and vertical policy integration for the development of national strategies, the summary also recommends to take into account the regional, sub-regional and local levels.

- **Multi-stakeholder and civil society engagement**

Beyond the important role of governments and institutions, the participation of citizens and stakeholders is crucial for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Multi-stakeholder partnership is considered a pillar of institutional arrangements for the implementation of the SDGs, while civil society is considered to play a pivotal role in pushing and delivering the Agenda. This means that all people can participate as partners, rights-holders and full citizens, and not only as mere beneficiaries of services. To enhance citizen and stakeholder participation, many countries have created mechanisms for social dialogue among stakeholders to follow the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and review the progress of its implementation, such as multi-stakeholder platforms and multi-stakeholder committees. These allow a regular dialogue with civil society, and the chance to exchange information and knowledge.

## Voluntary National Reviews 2017

The HLPF 2017 will take place from July 10-19, 2017 at the UN Headquarters in New York and the focus will be on “**Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world**”. The upcoming HLPF will focus on **SDG 1** (end poverty in all its forms everywhere), **SDG 2** (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture), **SDG 3** (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), **SDG 5** (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), **SDG 9** (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation), **SDG 14** (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development), and **SDG 17** (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development).

According to the UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, **11 European countries volunteered to present their VNRs at the HLPF 2017**: Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, and Monaco. Table 4 below shows which countries presented the Voluntary National Review in 2016, which countries are going to present it in 2017, and countries that already volunteered for 2018.

**Table 4. European countries presenting their VNR in 2016, 2017, 2018 as of 31.03.2017**

EU Member State	VNR 2016	VNR 2017	VNR 2018
Austria	-	-	-
Belgium	-	YES	-
Bulgaria	-	-	-
Croatia	-	-	-
Cyprus	-	YES	-
Czech Republic	-	YES	-
Denmark	-	YES	-
Estonia	YES	-	-
Finland	YES	-	-
France	YES	-	-
Germany	YES	-	-
Greece	-	-	-
Hungary	-	-	-
Ireland	-	-	YES
Italy	-	YES	-
Latvia	-	-	-
Lithuania	-	-	-
Luxembourg	-	YES	-
Malta	-	-	-
Netherlands	-	YES	-
Poland	-	-	-
Portugal	-	YES	-
Romania	-	-	-
Slovakia	-	-	-
Slovenia	-	YES	-

<b>Spain</b>	-	-	-
<b>Sweden</b>	-	YES	-
<b>United Kingdom</b>	-	-	-
<b>Other European Countries</b>			
<b>Monaco</b>	-	YES	-
<b>Montenegro</b>	YES	-	-
<b>Norway</b>	YES	-	-
<b>Switzerland</b>	YES	-	PLANNED

*Source ESDN Office, internal document*

The 2016 VNR guidelines still apply to the countries volunteering in 2017. In addition, to help countries frame the preparation for their VNRs, the UN Secretariat has issued a document titled, '[Q&A for Voluntary National Reviews at the 2017 HLPF](#)'. The document answers questions about scope, guidelines, what country participation in the 2017 VNRs entails, SDGs to be considered, statistics and indicators, organizational issues for presenting countries (i.e. time and format for the presentation), DESA and UN support in the review's preparation, major groups, stakeholders and partnerships involvement in national reporting, and what to expect after participating in the VNR. The document also highlights that **VNRs at the HLPF should not be a stand-alone exercise, but rather be part of a cycle of review and national implementation.**

## European countries' 2030 Agenda/SDGs implementation activities

A table has been created by the ESDN Office (please see the following section) that provides an overview of **what 19 European countries have been doing and/or are planning to do regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs**. The information presented here goes beyond the VNR 2016 and 2017 countries and offers details on general 2030/SDGs implementation efforts. Many countries have integrated the 2030 Agenda into their NSDS, or are in the process of adapting them to reflect the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

The following table (Table 5) includes information about 19 countries that have updated their ESDN Country Profile information regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, which is a new category of the country profiles section on the ESDN homepage. All the available information has been provided to the ESDN Office by the ESDN National Focal Points. For a more extensive description of national implementation activities, visit the [ESDN website](#).

From a brief analysis of the 19 European countries' implementation activities, and according to the information provided by NFP, it is possible to highlight the following developments:

- (1) **Leading ministry/institution:** With respect to leading ministry and institutions for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, different approaches emerged. However, confirming what has been said for the VNRs 2016, the leading role is generally assigned to a high political level.
- (2) **Integration of SDGs into national frameworks:** The 19 countries are putting efforts in this direction mainly by:
  - **Revising and updating their NSDS:** most of the countries are revising or updating existing NSDS, or are in process of identifying the appropriate governmental structure for implementation;
  - **Stakeholder involvement in Commission on SD, Council on SD, and multi-stakeholder committee:** The use of at least one of these bodies is a common approach in the 2030 Agenda implementation process. Several countries adopted a specific Commission on SD, Council on SD, or multi-stakeholder committee dedicated to 2030 Agenda implementation. The need for active stakeholder engagement is generally recognized among all countries.
  - **Conducting mapping exercises and gap analysis:** Several countries explicitly mentioned the use of this practice for identifying national readiness for the 2030 Agenda implementation. Gap analyses and mapping exercises are used to assess the national situation in relation to each SDG and identify the key implementation challenges, or to map SDG indicators against the NSDS performance indicators.
- (3) **Policy coherence:** SDG 17 (means of implementation) includes Target 17.14 “enhance policy coherence for sustainable development”. According to the OECD, this entails fostering synergies across economic, social and environmental policy areas; identifying trade-offs and reconcile domestic and international objectives; and addressing the spill-overs of domestic policies on other countries and on future generations. The building blocks of policy coherence include political commitment, coordination, analysis and monitoring. In this regard, some countries are adopting an inter-ministerial cooperation approach that aims to coordinate ministries' work for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As monitoring is a building block of policy coherence, some countries are taking this into account by reviewing their NSDS and monitoring progress on a regular basis regarding the SDGs.

**(4) Inclusion of subnational level:** One of the key messages at the HLPF 2016 recommended taking into account the subnational level. What emerged is that only a minority of countries are currently focusing on this aspect and that it is more likely to happen in federal countries.

Table 5. European countries 2030 Agenda and SDGs implementation activities

EU countries	Implementation activities for the 2030 Agenda and 17 SDGs
<p><b>1. Austria</b></p>	<p>In March 2017, the Austrian Federal Chancellery and the Austrian Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs published the report “<b>Contributions of Federal Government Ministries in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Austria – 2016 Account</b>” (which is currently only available in German). This report includes an overview of the implementation of all 17 SDGs in Austria, also reflecting on various cross-cutting themes like human rights, gender issues, education, culture, etc.</p>
<p><b>2. Belgium</b></p>	<p><b>Federal level:</b> SDGs implementation will occur through existing mechanisms of the <b>federal strategy for sustainable development</b> and a dedicated implementation plan to broaden the commitments. The existing <b>Interdepartmental Commission on SD (ICSD)</b> will be the <b>platform to implement the SDGs</b>.</p> <p>The SDGs also touch on subnational competences, as such the already existing Inter-ministerial Conference on Sustainable Development (IMCSD) is reinvigorated to enhance cooperation within the Belgian framework. Whereas the interaction with the European and multilateral level is concerned, existing coordination platforms for political and strategic orientation will continue serve as mechanisms to determine the common Belgian position by taking on board the positions of the federal and federated entities.</p> <p>In terms of external action, the Belgian development cooperation will focus especially on the needs of LDCs and fragile states/environments. Furthermore, Belgium will work through SDG references in multi-annual cooperation arrangements with multilateral partner organizations, and through multilateral efforts to make the whole UN development system more « fit for purpose ». Finally, Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) has recently been identified as a political priority, giving rise to a legal framework and corresponding institutional architecture.</p> <p><b>Flanders:</b> Flanders endorses all 17 SDG’s of the United Nations in its Vision 2050 strategy. The 7 transition priorities (implementation of the long term strategy) will contribute to accomplishing the SDG’s on the subnational level. This will mainly be monitored by existing structures. However, a new governance model, based upon the principles of the transition management approach, was conducted. Hereby responsible ministers were designated for each transition priority. Besides the responsible ministers, transition managers within the Flemish public administration were appointed.</p> <p><b>Wallonia:</b> The 2nd Sustainable Development Strategy, adopted on 7 July 2016, aims to help implement the SDGs along with other global or sectoral policies and plans. It intends to bring coherence in the actions undertaken by the Walloon Government to achieve the SDGs. A mapping exercise of the Walloon policy is being conducted for the moment in order to have a state of play as regards implementation of the SDGs and to allow an assessment of the progress made in the future, on the basis of a set of relevant indicators taking into account the list elaborated by UNSTAT.</p> <p><b>Brussels-Capital Region:</b> The government of the Brussels-Capital Region will launch a public consultation on the draft of Regional Sustainable Development Plan in the following months.</p>

<b>3. Croatia</b>	The new <b>Environment Action Plan</b> of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2016 – 2024 is under development and is in line with environmental aspect of SDGs. A project for drafting of Strategy for adaptation to climate change which includes detailed modelling of climate changes in Croatia has started in May 2016.
<b>4. Czech Republic</b>	<p>The process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda on the national level is <b>led by the Office of the Government</b> of the Czech Republic and <b>supported by the Government Council on Sustainable Development</b>. In order to reflect upon the principles, goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, the Government decided to review the Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development of the Czech Republic (2010). The final document titled “<b>Czech Republic 2030</b>” will come into effect in early 2017. The strategic framework outlined in the “Czech Republic 2030” is designed to serve as an umbrella mechanism for sectoral national strategies implementing sustainable development goals on the national level.</p> <p>A public consultation on initial proposals started in May 2015. The drafting phase has been thereafter carried out in close cooperation with representatives of the Parliament, ministries, local and regional authorities, local branches of UN agencies and wide range of other stakeholders including civil society, private sector, academia and labour unions gathered in the Government Council on Sustainable Development and its 9 Committees. The Council is chaired by the Prime Minister and serves as the main forum ensuring consultation and building new partnerships among different actors in the SD. One of the main tasks of the Council will be also to follow up and review the national implementation of the new strategic framework and the 2030 Agenda, and encourage the society's commitment to SD.</p> <p>The work of the Council is supported by its Secretariat based in the Department for Sustainable development at the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. The institutional location of the Secretariat allows horizontal integration, cross-sectoral coordination and mainstreaming of all three pillars of the SD into national policy-making.</p>
<b>5. Estonia</b>	Estonia plans to use the already functioning <b>national coordination system for sustainable development</b> issues (Estonian Sustainable Development Commission, Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Sustainable Development) also for coordinating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
<b>6. Finland</b>	<p>Finland has a long tradition in promoting sustainable development both in domestic policies and in international development cooperation. However, because of the nature of the universal and transformative 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals and targets, a careful review of the country's development cooperation policies and practices is needed, and just as importantly, a review of domestic policies and measures in various sectors, as well.</p> <p>The <b>Finnish Government</b> has the <b>primary responsibility for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda</b>, but, in the spirit of the global agenda, the civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders have an integral role in this endeavour. According to the Government Programme a</p>

**National Implementation Plan for Agenda 2030** will be drawn up by the end of 2016. To guide the preparation of the National Implementation Plan for Agenda 2030, **an external gap analysis** will be conducted to look into Finland's readiness to implement the global 2030 Agenda. The National Implementation Plan will outline, among other things, how Finland will integrate the principles, goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda into various policy sectors and into international cooperation, and how the progress in the implementation will be monitored and reviewed.

State officials are responsible for drawing up the implementation plan and facilitating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Finland. However, there are two major **multi-stakeholder committees** in Finland that **support and promote sustainable development policies**. The **Development Policy Committee** is a parliamentary body whose mission is to follow the implementation of the global sustainable development agenda in Finland from the development policy perspective and to monitor the implementation of the Government Programme and the Government's development policy guidelines.

The **National Commission on Sustainable Development** is a Prime Minister-led partnership forum with the aim of integrating sustainable development into Finnish policies, measures and everyday practices. The membership of both committees includes a broad spectrum of non-governmental stakeholders, private sector actors, interest groups and civil society organisations. In addition, the **Sustainable Development Expert Panel**, comprising eminent professors from different disciplines, challenges and enhances the work of the National Commission on Sustainable Development and adds a critical voice in the sustainability debate, when needed.

**The Finland we want by 2050 — Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development** was finalised in 2013 and it will feature as one of the key multi-stakeholder implementation tools for the 2030 Agenda in Finland. It provides the **framework for a strategic approach** to sustainable development and it sets out a vision, principles and objectives for the transition to a sustainable society. Society's Commitment also contains an implementation mechanism.

**Monitoring, accountability and review:** Finland is committed to providing a systematic, open, transparent, inclusive and participatory follow-up to and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals and targets at all levels. Monitoring the progress and reviewing the achievements on a regular basis is essential for ensuring accountability to the Finnish society and the global community.

## 7. France

France has promoted sustainable development since the adoption of its first **sustainable development strategy** in 2003 and the appointment of an **Inter-ministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development**. Since 2008, the Inter-ministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development is also Commissioner General for Sustainable Development with a team of 500 people. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals builds on and strengthens this institutional mechanism. The Inter-ministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development coordinates the work of every ministries in order to **ensure a better horizontal coordination** of public policies towards achieving the SDGs in very close relation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is in charge of international solidarity. Being as well the vice-Chair of the National Council for Ecological Transition (CNTE), the Inter-ministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development ensures that the SDGs implementation is discussed between administrations and

civil society's organisations.

#### 8. Germany

The **renewed German National SD Strategy** was adopted by the Federal Cabinet in January 2017. This renewed NSDS is **Germany's main framework for an ambitious national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs**. The strategy includes chapters on the current challenges of SD, the governance architecture for SD in Germany, the German contribution to reach the SDGs (including activities for all 17 SDGs), and an outlook for the future. This very comprehensive strategy is currently only available in German, but will be translated into English very soon.

#### 9. Greece

Greece is currently in the process of **identifying the appropriate government structure** which will undertake the responsibility of coordinating efforts for integrating SDGs at national level and, consequently, for following up on the progress of their implementation.

#### 10. Italy

In Italy, the **National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)** represents the **main framework** for the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The adoption of Law 221/2015 (Provisions to promote measures on Green economy and to limit the extensive use of natural resources) committed the Italian **Ministry of Environment** to take proper actions and measures in different fields related to green economy and sustainable development. Article 3 of the same Law provides for the revision, every three years, of the NSDS. This recent law can contribute to depict a new pathway for the mainstreaming of sustainable development into national policies and programs. In particular, the renewed strategy for sustainable development aims at providing general guidelines to inform policies, programs and actions towards sustainable development and at meeting the challenges of the new global internationally agreed goals.

To ensure a sound basis to the Strategy, and, at the same time, to track SDGs' implementation status, a **mapping exercise** has been developed, to assess where Italy stands in relation to each goal and target of the 2030 Agenda and to identify the key implementation challenges to be faced and the gaps to be bridged.

#### 11. Latvia

Latvia has a well-coordinated planning system. Any changes to the existing NDP as well as new targets, actions and measures for the next NDP will be introduced through mid-term reviews of the currently effective policy frameworks and plans. It is during the mid-term reviews that the 2030 Agenda for SD indicators and targets can be discussed, new actions considered and respective costs assessed. For the NDP2020 the mid-term review will take place in 2017.

The **Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre** has developed an assessment of the 169 targets against the national policy planning documents. First, the SDGs are divided in the three main groups (apply to domestic policy, development cooperation, global issues). Second, the responsible institution and, if applicable, institutions with shared responsibility are identified. The goals solely applicable to development cooperation (bilateral or multilateral) are mapped. Third, the SDG indicators for each of the targets are mapped against the Latvia2030 and NDP2020 performance indicators. Fourth, the responsible institution gives opinion regarding the need to include the non-existent or partially covered SDG indicators in NDP2020 or the next NDP.

Last, possible discussion issues are noted.

#### 12. Luxembourg

In May 2016, the Government Council agreed on a **renewed composition of the grand-ducal regulation** regarding composition, organisation and functioning of the Commission with the objective having appropriate organizational structures to ensure the implementation of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

#### 13. Malta

**Policy integration in government** is central to the sustainable development paradigm and presents a key governance challenge in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is particularly the case in view of the rising complexity of social problems and global issues with important national and local impacts such as climate change. Effective policy integration is all the more important given the range of expertise from different institutions and sectors required to tackle the SDGs, as well as demands for more innovative, responsive and equitable service delivery, which transcend the competencies of individual ministries. While policy integration is central to the sustainable development paradigm, bringing about the delivery of integrated policies is a daunting challenge, especially in developing countries where, for example, administrative silos are prevalent.

#### 14. Montenegro

The Government of Montenegro is in the process of **revision of existing National Strategy of Sustainable Development (NSSD)**. The process of development of the new NSSD was initiated after Rio+20 Conference. Drafting process is coordinated and technically supervised by the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, i.e. it is supervised by the National Council for Sustainable Development, climate Changes and Integrated Coastal Zone Management. The Platform for NSSD 2015-2020 has been developed, but it was identified that additional researches/analysis were needed and it influenced redefining of dynamics and methodology of further revision of the NSSD for the period after 2015. The draft of the new NSSD has been prepared, but it is also important to include results of ongoing global process of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals which will shape national policies on sustainable development. It is expected that NSSD will be adopted by the Government by the end of June 2016.

#### 15. Poland

Realization of the **Strategy for Responsible Development**, which was approved by the Polish Government in February 2017, will **support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Poland**. The Ministry of Economic Development, coordinating development policies of the country, undertook the leading role in the process of implementing of the 2030 Agenda in Poland.

The Strategy for Responsible Development lays down a new development model: strategic vision, the rules, objectives and priorities for Poland's economic, social and spatial development in the 2020 and 2030 perspective. The main objective of the Strategy is the growth of income of the Polish population, accompanied by an increase in social, economic, environmental and territorial cohesion. It is directed on inclusive social-economic development. Considering its role and the assigned tasks, the Strategy is an instrument of flexible management of the main development processes in Poland. The Strategy sets the goals and necessary tasks, implementation instruments and key projects that guarantee its implementation. It also provides for a system of coordination and implementation, specifying the roles of respective public bodies and the methods of cooperation with businesses, academics and citizens.

The objectives of development policy will be implemented, in line with the partnership principle, by representatives of social and economic partners, associations and non-governmental organisations, academic circles and private entities, including entrepreneurs. The participation of those entities in all stages of processes related to programming and implementing development measures will ensure their efficiency and effectiveness by building wide social support and trust among public entities and their partners for the purpose of achieving the development goals.

<b>16. Slovakia</b>	The Slovak Government has adopted <b>Baselines for the national implementation for the 2030 Agenda</b> for SD and SDGs in March 2016. According to the document the Slovak Government agreed with divided responsibility for the implementation for the 2030 Agenda between the Government Office (national implementation) and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (activities of Slovakia and Slovak entities abroad). The first overall assessment of achievement of objectives should be done by the end of 2019.
<b>17. Slovenia</b>	Slovenia with its <b>National Development Strategy 2030</b> (NDS 2030) sets a new strategic framework for national development, which is based on the principles of sustainable development. The document will build on the vision of Slovenia in 2050 and is linked to the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda. Preparation of the strategy is coordinated by the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy. The response of the Republic of Slovenia to the 2030 Agenda and the preparation of the national development strategy until 2030 are parallel, closely intertwined processes that are distinctly horizontal and require a comprehensive approach of the government and the active involvement of stakeholders. The adoption of the document by the government is expected in 2017.
<b>18. Sweden</b>	The Swedish government recently appointed a <b>multi-stakeholder National Committee</b> to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda throughout Swedish society. The Committee will put forward a proposal for an action plan. Civil society organizations, municipalities, academia, private sector and trade unions are at the core of this endeavor.
<b>19. Switzerland</b>	Switzerland started its first implementation activities immediately after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015. The Swiss Federal Council decided in December 2015 to keep this high level of engagement and contribute in a meaningful way to implementing the 2030 Agenda – both in domestic and foreign policy. In January 2016 the Federal Council adopted the <b>Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) 2016–19</b> that underlines the need for sustainable development to be a coherent feature of all policy areas. Consequently and wherever possible, Switzerland’s international engagement, in particular its future international cooperation as well as sectoral foreign policies, will also be oriented towards the SDGs. Within a “transition phase” from 2016 to 2017, a comprehensive programme of work is being put into practice. By early 2018, a report summarising these and other efforts as well as formulating respective recommendations for Swiss implementation of the 2030 Agenda will be presented to the Federal Council.

Source [ESDN country profiles](#)

