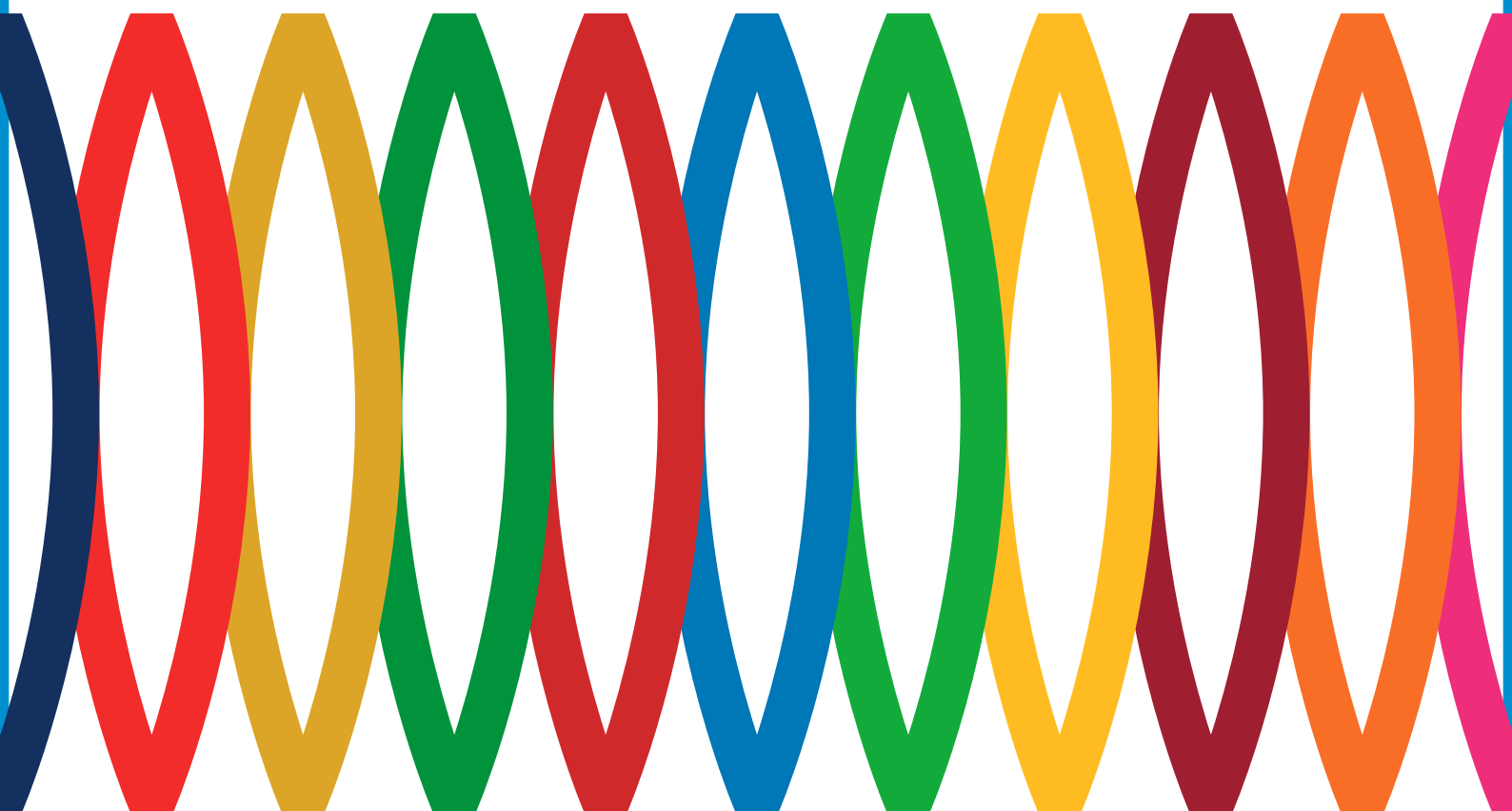# Regions Voice in UN reporting

An overview of Voluntary Subnational Reviews and other contributions to the 2030 Agenda

Regions4

Sustainable Development

The United Nations Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for accelerated economic, social, and environmental transformation in the ten years left to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Subnational governments have played a crucial role in localizing the SDGs and successfully implementing them on the ground.

Regions4, as the global voice of subnational governments in sustainable development, presents this document on the occasion of the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to discuss the importance of Voluntary Subnational Reviews and other relevant contributions to the 2030 Agenda.

What are
Voluntary Subnational Reviews?

Subnational governments are at the forefront of the design and implementation of policies related to the SDGs and had elaborated different types of documents reporting their own progress on the 2030 Agenda since 2015.

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) are a new modality of reporting that aim to report and monitor progress at the local and territorial level, following the example of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).[1] Reporting progress helps to understand if we are on the track to achieving the SDGs, and monitoring progress can improve policy efficiency, inclusiveness, and decision making in the territories.

The VSRs are an opportunity to use the SDGs as a common framework to discuss shared challenges and solutions from a subnational perspective.

---

1   The VNRs are part of the mechanisms to follow-up and review the 2030 Agenda. Member States are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven. These national reviews are expected to serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) every year in July. As stipulated in the 2030 Agenda, regular reviews by the HLPF are to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and involve multiple stakeholders.

10 Benefits that VSRs can bring to subnational governments

1. **Monitor progress** and contribution to the 2030 Agenda.

2. Develop a sense of **ownership and awareness raising** of the SDG process.

3. **Raise the level of ambition** and sustain the transformative action towards the SDGs.

4. Ensure a **data-driven and evidence-based process**, providing measurement and potential comparability, and revealing inequalities within countries and between regions that national averages hide.

5. Promote **participation, transparency, and accountability**, engaging and strengthening the relationships with different stakeholders.

6. Promote **horizontal and vertical policy coherence** and institutional coordination.

7. Offer a common language to share experiences, both of successes and difficulties, fostering **cooperation and peer learning.**

8. Create **new partnerships** to address shortcomings of means of implementation.

9. Promote **self-reflection** to rethink the planning process and reshape policies from the ground-up.

10. **Value the process as much as the product**. VSRs should not be seen as another internal reporting obligation, an additional burden, or an index to rank governments.

Monitor progress, guide policy strategies and decision-making, and promote accountability and transparent governance are the top three most reported benefits by Regions4 members according to a survey conducted in 2020-2021.

Structure and content of VSRs

As VSRs have increasingly been prepared worldwide, there is a variety of methodologies and approaches for elaborating them. There is no blueprint on how to produce a VSR. They are heterogeneous and reflect the diversity of the territorial and institutional contexts in which they operate:

1. Objectives
- → Implementation roadmaps with **new policy framework**
- → Review of the implementation efforts based on **existing planning framework**
- → Review of progress with a **connected online database**

2. Scope
- → Assessment of **all SDGs**
- → Assessment of a **selection of SDGs** of particular relevance for the territory
- → Assessment of the **SDGs under review** at the HLPF in the year of publication

3. Stakeholder engagement
- → Creation of an alliance or advisory council with a **wide range** of stakeholders
- → Strengthening of an **existing citizen consultation** or participatory processes

4. Indicators
- → Adaptation of global, regional, or national indicators to the specific context
- → Promote correlations between the official indicators and relevant local datasets

5. Preparation time
- → From a few weeks to up to a year

6. Authorship
- → Subnational officials, researchers, consultants, or supported by external organizations

7. Frequency
- → Varies from annually to every 4 years

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) elaborated the **Global Guiding Elements for Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) of SDG implementation** providing a starting point, suggesting a structure and a check list of issues that could be addressed.

![Regions4 Sustainable Development]

Examples of subnational reporting

Aland Islands	Development and sustainability agenda for Åland - IV Status Report 4 (2020)
Association Nationale des Communes du Bénin (ANCB)	Report on the Localisation of SDGs in Benin (2020)
Basque Country	Agenda Euskadi Basque Country 2030 - IV Status Report (2020)
Busia County	Busia County Voluntary Reporting on SDGs (2019)
Canarias	Canarian Strategy for Sustainable Development (2018)
Catalonia	National Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Catalonia (2019)
CONGOPE	Voluntary review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by the Provincial Governments from Ecuador (2020)
Council of Governors of Kenya	Localization of Sustainable Development Goals by County Governments in Kenya (2020)
Flanders	Vizier 2030 (2018)
Hawai'i	Aloha+ Challenge 2020 Benchmark Report: Hawai'i's Voluntary Local Review of Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (2020)
Kwale County	Kwale County Voluntary Reporting on SDGs (2019)
Lombardy	2020 Lombardy Report (2020)
Marsabit County	Marsabit County SDGs Voluntary County Reporting (2019)

Navarra	[2030 Agenda fof Sustainable Development of Navarre](#) (2019)
Normandie	[Sustainable Development Scorecard](#) (2020)
North Rhine-Westphalia	[Sustainability Strategy for North Rhine-Westphalia](#) (2016)
Oaxaca	[State Voluntary Review](#) (2019)
Occitanie	[Sustainable Development Scorecard](#) (2020)
Pará	[Voluntary Local Review on the Sustainable Development Goals in the State of Pará](#) (2020)
Pays de la Loire	[Sustainable Development Scorecard](#) (2020)
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	[Sustainable Development Scorecard](#) (2021)
Santa Fe	[Santa Fe's contribution to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development](#) (2019)
Sao Paulo	[1st Progress Report on the Sustainable Development Goals in São Paulo State](#) (2019)
Scotland	[Scotland and the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (2020)
Taita Taveta County	[County Sustainable Development Goals Implementation Voluntary Report 2019](#) (2019)
Valencia	[The Region of Valencia and the local implementation of the SDGs](#) (2016)
Wales	[Wales and the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (2019)
Wallonia	[Where does Wallonia stand in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals?](#) (2020)
Yucatan	[Voluntary Subnational Review of Yucatán](#) (2020)

For further information please visit www.regions4.org/our-work/sdgs

Supporting subnational leadership in the 2030 Agenda:
The Community of Practice Regions4SDGs

The **Community of Practice Regions4SDGs** is a Regions4 collective and participatory project to support SDGs localization in subnational governments. Based on peer-review, it acts as a platform for region-to-region exchange of experiences, mutual support, capacity building, and alignment of statements both at technical and political levels. It aims to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and strengthen territorial approaches, scaling-up regional pathways from isolated good practices to collective modalities of implementation, ultimately influencing more ambitious results in the national and international frameworks.

Its series Regions Voice in UN reporting analyses the contributions of subnational governments to the 2030 Agenda through the Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs). The 2020-2021 series explores experiences on aligning the SDGs with legislation, annual budgets, indicators, and disaggregated data by discussing practical tools and sharing knowledge and lessons for policy efficiency and coherence. The lessons learnt from our community serve to support further contributions of subnational governments to the High-level Political Forum and the work of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments.

Interested in being part of the Community of Practice Regions4SDGs? Join us!
www.regions4.org/become-a-member
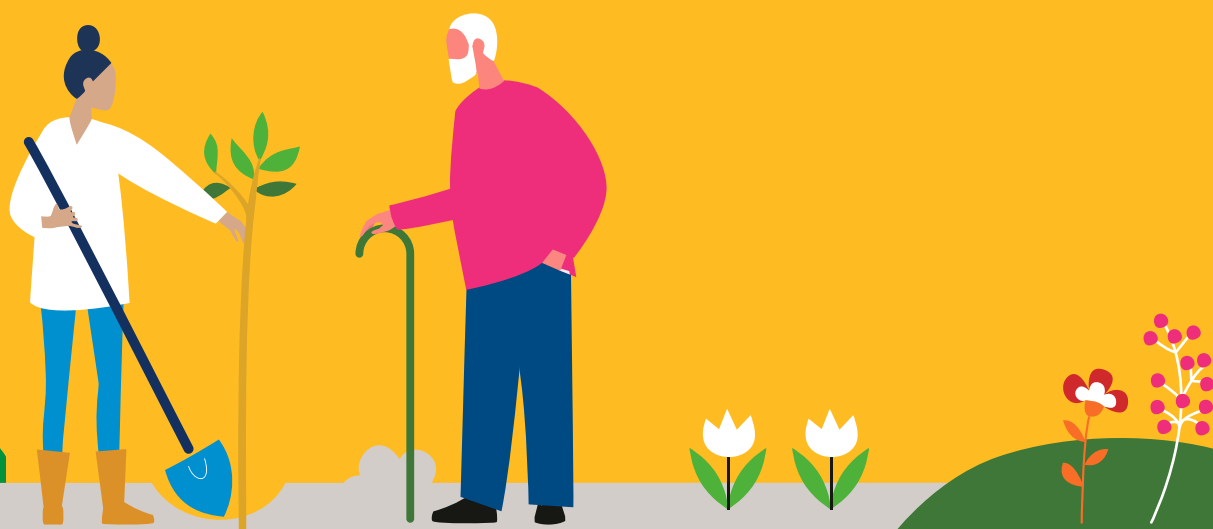
Walk the talk:
Regions4SDGs members in action

The following experiences were shared at the Community of Practice Regions4SDGs in the series Regions Voice in UN reporting:

Legislating for Sustainable Development

The Welsh Government has an innovative response to the Sustainable Development Agenda through the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015. The Act translates the SDGs into law and established the world's first Future Generations Commissioner. Wales is the first government to ensure law enforcement to SDGs implementation, making sustainable development the central organizing principle of each of the 44 public bodies. The Welsh Government has implemented a beyond-silo approach to the formulation, implementation, monitoring, and continued development of sustainable public policymaking.

Enacting laws with the purpose of implementing the SDGs can be a **powerful element to ensure enforcement and continuity of the strategy over the years**. Additionally, laws provide a consistent framework subject to strict aspects of **accountability and reporting**. Wales represents an outstanding example of governance design that make public bodies think more about the long term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined up approach.

The UK presented its first Voluntary National Review taking stock of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals to the United Nations in 2019, and Wales produced a **Supplementary Report** to provide consolidated and complementary additional content on the different approach taken by Wales to sustainable development.
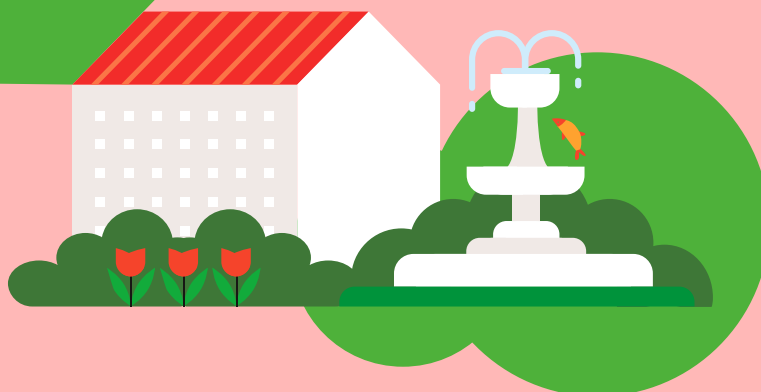
Integrating the SDGs into plans and budgets

The São Paulo State Government has made progressive efforts in the localization of the SDGs. São Paulo aligned its mid-term planning with the 2030 Agenda. The Multiyear Plan is a four-year policy guidance that includes targets, resources, and timeframe for each area of action. It is a bill proposed by the executive government and approved by the legislative body that shapes the annual budgets and priority actions in the following years.

The assessment of the São Paulo 2016-2019 Multiyear Plan resulted in the **First Progress Report on SDGs in São Paulo State** and propositions for the next cycle to **mainstream the SDGs since its conception**. It incorporates the three dimensions of sustainable development in its guidelines, strategic objectives, programs, and goals. Also, the Multiyear Plan counted with the civil society participation through public hearings on five themes (people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships) that are connected to the 2030 Agenda. In 2021, São Paulo is launching its II Voluntary Subnational Review, an action-oriented document that details how the government structures and employs its resources in order to achieve the SDG.

The experience of São Paulo reflects the importance of **elaborating an institutional arrangement to integrate the different sectoral policies and thematic bodies, mobilizing the entire administrative system for concerted action on the SDGs**. The provision of adequate financial resources as well as the legal and institutional frameworks are indispensable for regional governments to achieve their full potential in the monitoring the 2030 Agenda.

Measuring progress on the 2030 Agenda

The Government of Catalonia adopted the National Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It is the result of a process that started with the report **2030 Agenda: Transform Catalonia, Improve the World** and had contributions from an inter-ministerial commission across the entire Government, gathering 920 commitments for implementation both within and beyond Catalonia. It sets deadlines for the accomplishment of those commitments, specifies ministries in charge and links the UN targets with existing planning and regulations, the Government Plan, ministerial plans and, in the near future, the Urban Agenda for Catalonia.

The monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs in Catalonia is conducted by the Statistical Institute of Catalonia and the Advisory Council for Sustainable Development of Catalonia in accordance with the methodological criteria developed by the UN and the European Union and adapted to the context of Catalonia. The integrated system of **SDG indicators for Catalonia** is a live dataset that is continuously updated and publicly available, fostering **principles of transparency and access to information**. It is an effort conducted by all Ministries that enhances **cooperation across divisions and build the internal capacities of the government agents**.

There are no agreed upon global indicators for the subnational level. Subnational governments are aligning, adapting, and identifying their own suitable indicators according to their context. Catalonia is a good example of the importance of subnational governments in **collecting and analyzing disaggregated data and indicators**, which are a fundamental aspect of monitoring and reviewing the SDGs progress **to identify inequalities within countries, support evidence-based decision making at all levels, and enable tailored-cut action to ensure no one is left behind**.

Main lessons for other subnational governments

The experiences shared in the Community of Practice Regions4SDGs can provide helpful insights for the SDGs work of other subnational governments:

1. Translate the SDGs at the appropriate level by mobilising people to own territorialized and specific goals.

2. Focus on sustainable development as an organising principle and avoid the 'add on'.

3. Move the discussion on, from definitions to practical action, from 'compliance' to 'enabling'.

4. Build in mechanisms to maintain a longer-term orientation.

5. Mainstream the SDGs into strategies, plans, and budget.

6. Build on existing platforms and processes, where these exist, avoiding duplication.

7. Establish an independent voice and advocate for sustainable development.

8. Bring partners together at the territorial level, including mobilising action from academia, civil society, and business.

9. Strengthen statistical capacity and monitoring systems to ensure access to data that are of high quality, accessible, timely, reliable, and disaggregated.

10. Track SDG performance and identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors to make evidence-based choices.

11. Promote policy coherence and integration by fostering collaboration across government divisions.

12. Strategize to tackle major challenges of SDG progress on human and financial resources, capacity, and technology.

About Regions4

Regions4 is the global network representing regional governments (states, regions, and provinces) before UN processes and global discussions in the fields of sustainable development, climate action, and biodiversity. Through advocacy, cooperation, capacity building and knowledge exchange, Regions4 empowers governments to accelerate action and raise ambition towards resilient and sustainable territories and societies.

As Organising Partner of the Local Authorities Major Group (LAMG) and member of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, Regions4 represents the voice of subnational governments in the global sustainable development fora, especially in the annual reviews of the 2030 Agenda at the United Nations High-level Political Forum (HLPF).

Acknowledgments

Jalisco
GOBIERNO DEL ESTADO

Regions4
Sustainable Development

For more information, visit:
www.regions4.org

Follow us!
@Regions4SD
@Regions4
Regions4

#Regions4SDGs #RegionsVoice