

Local Governments:

The role of SDG Voluntary Local Reviews

Pre-meeting to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region on “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and action and delivery on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region”

Thursday, 11 March 2021, from 3 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. CET

The meeting will be held online via WebEx in English only

Meeting link: <https://unece.webex.com/unece/j.php?MTID=m4370a1736ea5f1ac697047b37983cbac>

Introduction

Cities play an important role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Local governments are close to the citizens and are responsible for the development and provision of essential infrastructure and services for them. Most recently, local governments have been at the forefront of addressing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many cities across the UNECE region have documented their progress towards the SDGs by developing **Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)**.

VLRs provide an assessment of the progress towards achieving the SDGs at the local level. They increase the ownership of SDGs at this level and improve the engagement of local governments in the preparation of the **Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)** and other national processes for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. To support the cities in their efforts and to enhance the dialogue between the VLRs and VNRs, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) has developed a set of Global Guiding Elements for VLRs that draws from the Secretary-General’s common voluntary guidelines for the VNRs¹.

The VLRs are therefore an important tool to support economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. To do this even more effectively, the VLRs need to transform from being merely a tool for reviewing the progress of achieving the SDGs to being a forward-looking and action-oriented instrument promoting sustainable and resilient urban development, mobilizing stakeholder support towards the collaborative implementation of city actions, and aligning the use of local finances with the SDGs and towards recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cities and international organizations, including the United Nations agencies, have developed tools to promote urban resilience and to overcome the negative consequences of the pandemic. For instance, the five UN Regional Commissions, UN-Habitat and the UN Capital Development Fund are providing support to 16 cities globally in the development of their immediate response and recovery plans to the COVID-19 pandemic, through the project on “[Building Urban Economic Resilience during and after COVID-19](#)”. However, this and other projects and initiatives are not always well coordinated with the development of VLRs.

The theme of the 2021 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and action and delivery on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region”. This pre-meeting to the Regional Forum will discuss how the VLRs could more

¹ https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/GlobalGuidingElementsforVLRs_FINAL.pdf

effectively support sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and promote sustainable urban development.

For more information on the meeting, please contact:

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Housing and Land Management, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
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DRAFT AGENDA

15:00-15:15 Welcome and introduction

- Ms. Paola Deda, Director, Forests, Land and Housing Division, UNECE
- Ms. Riina Jussila, Sustainable Development Officer, National Strategies and Capacity Building Branch, Division for Sustainable Development, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
- Ms. Cristina Bueti, Focal Point on Environment and Smart Sustainable Cities, International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

15:15-16:00 Panel discussion of cities on “How the VLRs could help cities to accelerate recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and promote urban resilience?”

Moderator – Mr. Kristian Mjøen, Advisor, Trondheim commune, Norway; and Coordinator of the UNECE Charter Centre of Excellence on Smart Sustainable Cities

Discussion questions:

1. How could the VLRs help cities to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and promote urban resilience?
2. How could the VLRs be used to identify opportunities for shared value creation?
3. How could the VLRs help to develop impactful partnerships and nurture innovation?
4. What would make the VLRs more actionable and forward-looking?

Panellists (up to 5 minutes):

- Ms. Anne Romsaas, Sustainability Officer, The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), Norway
- Ms. Soraya Axelsson, Head of H22, City Government of Helsingborg, Sweden
- Mr. Marco Espinheira, Head of Future, City Government of Cascais, Portugal
- Ms. Aida Darmenova, Head of Data Management Unit, Almaty City Department of Digitalization, Kazakhstan

Questions and answers

Discussion

16:00-16:45 Panel discussion of international organizations on “Tools and instruments supporting urban recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and promoting the achievement of SDGs”

Moderator – Ms. Gulnara Roll, Secretary to the UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management

Discussion questions:

1. How does your initiative support cities in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and in building resilience to natural disasters and climate change?
2. Is your initiative connected to the development of the VLRs?
3. How could your initiative support cities in the data collection to support the achievement of SDGs?
4. What needs to be done to promote synergies between the existing projects and the preparation of the VLRs; and to support integration of methodologies and tools?

Panellists (5 minutes):

- Ms. Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch, Global Solutions Division, UN-Habitat
- Mr. Esteban Leon, Head, City Resilience Global Programme, UN-Habitat
- Ms Belinda Gottardi, Mayor of Castel Maggiore, Italy; Member of Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
- Mr. Andrew Mackay Bower, “Making Cities Resilient 2030” Campaign, UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
- Ms. Paola Proietti, European Commission Joint Research Centre
- Mr. Kim Gabrielli, Director, Norwegian Office of the UN Global Compact Network
- Mr. Pietro Elisei, President Elect, International Society of City and Regional Planners.

Questions and comments, discussion

16:45-17:00 Conclusions by UNECE, ITU and DESA