

**Report on the Pre-meeting “Local Governments: The role of SDG Voluntary Local Reviews” 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”**

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*The report will be delivered at the Regional Forum Plenary Session “Experiences from the region with Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)” on Thursday, 18 March 2021 (10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.)*

Madam Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues and partners,

I am the mayor of Helsingborg, a mid-sized city in Sweden, I have been an active member in the Mayors Forum of the UNECE. Helsingborg is committed and contributing to the UNECE Trees in Cities Campaign. We are currently finalising our first ever Voluntary Local Review, this we are doing in conjunction with the Swedish Voluntary National Review which you just heard Mia talk about. We are planning an international City Expo in the summer of 2022 where we aim to gather local, national, international governments, businesses, researchers and civil society to further push action for sustainability in the cities of the future.

Today, it is my honour to deliver the report on the conclusions of the Pre-meeting “Local Governments: The role of SDG Voluntary Local Reviews”. The event took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March and it was attended by over 80 participants. It featured a stimulating discussion on the role of Voluntary Local Reviews in accelerating the work with achieving the SDGs and supporting recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting was attended by representatives of national and local governments, local government associations, city networks, international organizations, the private sector, and academia.

While participants spoke of their own experiences, there were several important common themes.

I would like to share the **key conclusions** and **recommendations** that emerged from the discussion.

The following **conclusions** were noted:

**Number 1. Voluntary Local Reviews are an important tool to support economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic**

Cities are on the frontline of the global health crisis. They are faced with the deepest economic recession since World War II, while also coping with the accelerating climate crisis. Despite

this, Voluntary Local Reviews gained significant momentum in 2020, and to date, over 60 cities globally have published a review. This highlights the importance that cities are placing on the VLR process during this challenging time, and using them as a tool to help them recover.

**Number 2. Engagement in evidence-based processes, with multiple stakeholders, creates a path to improved urban resilience and preparedness for future shocks**

VLRs need to be pro-active and holistic, and grounded in local contexts. They need to address multiple needs, while also being based on robust and reliable data. Where possible, the implementation should be accelerated using digital tools and open source data; and it should involve all relevant stakeholders. This will enhance the cities' ability to adapt and recover from shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Number 3. VLRs need to focus on sustainable and inclusive value creation for local communities**

Understanding the needs of local communities is a first, critical step for cities that are looking to develop their VLRs. Further focusing the VLRs on the needs of local communities, and engaging them in the preparation of the review, improves the capacity of cities to deliver valuable outcomes and benefits for all residents. As does enabling cross-sectoral collaboration within city governments, promoting the engagement of local businesses, and documenting and sharing experiences.

With regard to the **recommendations**, the following key messages stood out:

**Number 1. Improve VLRs as a forward-looking instrument by linking the reviews to concrete, workable projects and also to national plans, including Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)**

It is important to improve the policy coherence between VLRs and VNRs. This includes establishing linkages with the national level and cooperation with key national players, for instance, Ministries of Finance. Connecting VLRs to concrete projects helps to mobilize financing. Ultimately, financing is a key aspect, and cities need to explore innovative financing mechanisms to be able to expand their budgets, and to scale-up and replicate successful projects and programmes.

**Number 2. Promote the use of indicators and metrics to measure the progress towards achieving the SDGs and encourage inter-sectoral cooperation**

Cities often do not have metrics to measure the progress towards achieving the SDGs. Using internationally agreed metrics to anchor VLRs provides an opportunity for inclusive, cooperative processes that engage and impact all of society. Furthermore, using metrics, and collecting and analysing data, helps connect projects with financing, both national and international.

**And finally, number 3. Elevate the political importance of the VLRs**

At present, VLRs are not part of an official framework for the SDGs progress review taking place at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. New pathways are

needed for local authorities to have agency and engage in international decision-making processes. And the participation of city mayors at the UN level needs to be enhanced.

Last but not least, let me conclude with an own reflection. As a mayor on local level, I believe it is important with keeping track, monitoring and working in this processes of review. However. Our ambition and focus must be on delivery and action. Lets focus on DOING sustainability.

I thank you for your attention, and wish you every success in today's work and deliberations.