



## **EU Voluntary Review – Recommendations of the SDG Watch Europe Civil Society Task Force**

**Introduction:** What is the EU VR? Serving as a Europe-wide Voluntary National Review, the EU VR is an opportunity for Europe to monitor our global progress on the Sustainable Development Goals by producing a detailed review report, foreseen for March 2023 and lead by the EU Commission Secretariat-General and DG INTPA, ahead of the 2023 HLPF and the SDG Summit.

[SDG Watch Europe](#), Europe's largest cross-sectoral coalition for SDG implementation, hereby presents its key demands for the EU VR.

Civil society is an important part of sustainability policies in Europe. This needs to be reflected in the EU's VR report and presentation. The EU cannot fall behind well-established practices at HLPF which involve civil society and a critical reflection of each government's or region's sustainability policies.

We as Civil Society demand that the EU VR is an honest and inclusive stocktaking of where Europe and its relationship and impact on the rest of the world stands with respect to SDG Implementation, with a forthright assessment of how much remains to be done for Europe to meet its sustainability commitments under the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, and the European Green Deal.

### **Recommendations on the process:**

- The participation of civil society in the EU VR must be guaranteed throughout the process of design and production of the report, civil society should not be simply an afterthought for brief consultation on completion of the final document. A proper follow up process is also crucial.
- Effective civil society participation can only be guaranteed if there is a timely and transparent process, including a clear timeline. All relevant civil society actors must be included in the drafting of the report. This must include selection of topics and goals.
- All Commissioners within the European Commission should play a significant role in the EU VR, it must be a joint process to ensure a holistic and coherent approach to the Review.
- A strong VR report must not only include an analysis of what is going well, but also a critical reflection on where there are still obstacles or lack of progress. Only with strong CSO participation can there be honest reporting.
- A Multi-Stakeholder Platform must be (re)established as soon as possible. It can give support and structure in the drafting of the VR. It can bring CSOs, research actors, and other key stakeholders together.
- Regarding external relations, it is crucial to get inputs from actors outside of the EU - especially from lower income countries and countries in the Global South.
- Once the report is drafted, civil society should receive it with plenty of time and have the opportunity to comment. Civil society recommendations and analysis should be included in the report.
- In many EU countries, additionally to the official report by the government, civil society publishes shadow reports or other publications regarding the VNRs. As in those countries, the EU should include these independent CSO voices in their official report and publish civil society statements or shadow reports on the website along with their own report. A civil society shadow report should also be featured on the UN website.
- As for the presentation of the VR at the HLPF itself, it has become the norm to include civil society in the presentation giving them a space to present their own analysis. The EU should do so as well.
- Besides the official presentation at the HLPF plenary, the EU should also organise a side event at the HLPF to go into more depth on their report. Civil society should be included in this side event as well.



- A follow-up process after the VR is crucial, it must include a costed Action Plan, clear policy prescriptions, a renewed Multi-Stakeholder Platform, a strong role for the EP, as well as a political timeline for EU sustainability policies until 2030. The EU VR must only be the first step, we need a stronger process in the EU on the SDG implementation.

### **Recommendations on the method:**

Building on best practices demonstrated by member states Voluntary National Reviews, as well as civil society shadow reporting, the EU VR should integrate the following recommendations and best practices regarding the methodology and use of indicators:

- Many EU SDG indicators do not have a target attached - without targets we do not know how to measure progress. We need clear and time bound distance to target indicators where they are lacking or inadequate, and where progress towards SDG implementation is obscured or too slow.
- The report should pay special attention to the negative externalities of Europe's policies. The EU should advance its analysis of spillover effects, introduced by Eurostat in the 2022 Eurostat monitoring report on the SDGs.
- GDP is not a strong SDG indicator as such as GDP growth usually comes with more environmental pressures or at least not a significant reduction of environmental pressures, so SDG monitoring should investigate and make use of other indicators to measure economic health.
- Best practices from national level, including those seen by Finland (CSO participation), Switzerland (Digital innovation), Greece (Whole of Society Approach) and others both within and outside the EU, to name only a few, should be mainstreamed for the EU Voluntary Review. Lessons learned from VLRs at the local level should also be considered by the European Commission.
- To have internationally comparable VRs and VNRs, the EU report must include all the UN SDG indicators as well.

### **Recommendations on the content**

- The EU VR needs to be more than just a report on the status quo of EU sustainability policies or a presentation of what the EU is doing well. Rather, it needs to analyse the structural and systematic obstacles the EU is facing to realise the SDGs and transform the EU politically, socially and economically.
- Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) must be a key concept that the EU VR is committed to.
- The VR must include a reflection on the structures in which the SDGs are implemented, e.g., the scope in which the Green Deal is able to realise all the 167 targets equally and properly or if there are gaps to be tackled.
- The report must include a reflection of the unsustainable practices in the EU, the impact of EU policies on other regions and the implications of our social and economic model and how to overcome them.
- Given the half-point of the SDGs, the report must include a reflection of what has been achieved in terms of SDG implementation since their adoption in 2015, including an analysis on the reasons for gaps, trade-offs and other obstacles.
- The report must just as well include an outlook on what needs to be done to achieve the goals by 2030, and how it can be achieved given the multiple crises and challenges of the current times.
- The report must be rooted in the current political climate, without an honest analysis of the political challenges Europe and the globe is currently facing, otherwise it will not be able to serve as an adequate roadmap to achieving the SDGs by 2030.