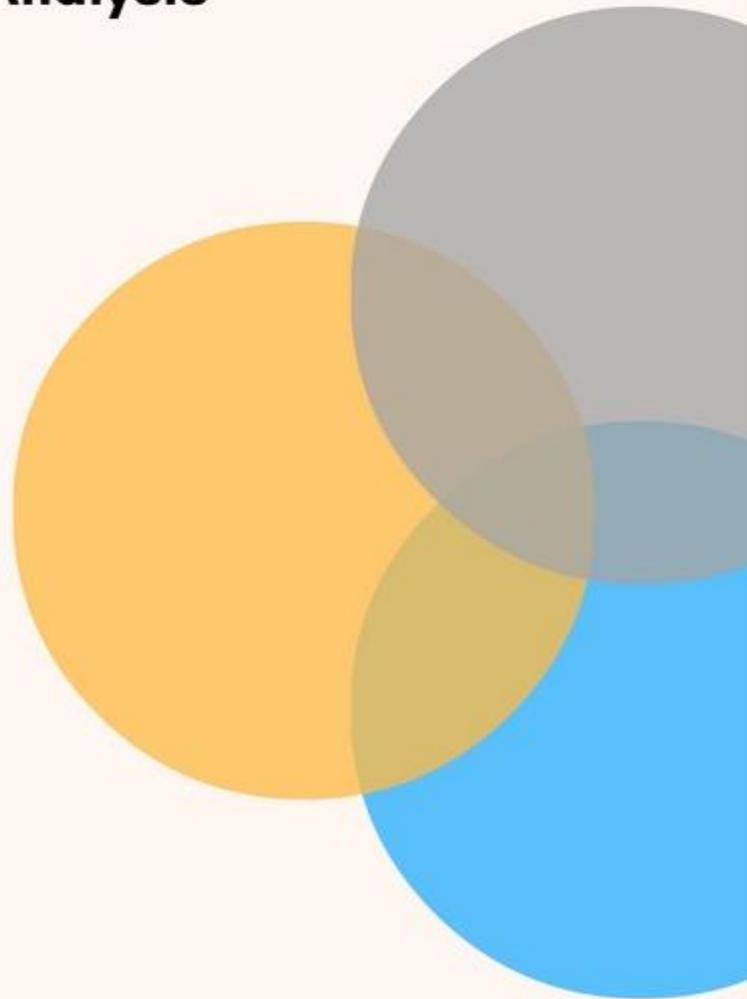




THE **2016 HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM** AND THE FIRST **VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REPORTS** ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (**SDGs**)  
**EuroNGOs Analysis**



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## ABOUT EuroNGOs

**EuroNGOs** is a vibrant European network dedicated to promoting universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) worldwide. It is **a membership network of 34 non-governmental organisations working on SRHR in 22 European countries**, collaborating closely with a wide range of partners across the world. The network engages in key debates shaping development cooperation and other global policies at the European and international level. EuroNGOs works by **convening and networking, generating and sharing information and knowledge, strengthening skills, and promoting collective advocacy actions**. Every year the network organises an international conference hosted by a member and based around a topical theme to convene and connect like-minded actors working on SRHR issues.



## INTRODUCTION

The **aim of this analysis** is to have a look at the **first High-level Political Forum (HLPF)** after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, with a **gender and SRHR lens**. The analysis begins with a discussion on the process of developing the **Voluntary National Reviews and civil society participation** herein. It then moves on to analyse the content and the inclusion of gender and SRHR, of the first Voluntary National Review reports, the HLPF discussions & outcomes and the **European regional inputs** to the HLPF. Finally, **recommendations** are drawn for future engagement and advocacy efforts by the SRHR community in these processes for 2017 and beyond. These recommendations are based on this analysis but also on outcomes of discussions that took place during the [EuroNGOs conference](#) in Paris in October 2016.

## BACKGROUND

In September 2015, Member states agreed on a new Sustainable Development agenda for the coming 15 years; the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. Never before have world leaders pledged common action across such a broad and universal policy agenda, which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries. This **universality** element of the SDGs is a key feature of the new agenda, as an effort to eliminate the division between 'developed' and 'developing' countries, and from the understanding that for a transformative shift to a sustainable future, developed countries also have an important role to play in achieving the Global Goals.

At the global level, the **High-Level Political Forum** is now the central UN body tasked with monitoring the implementation of the SDGs. The HLPF met for the first time after the adoption of the SDGs in New York in July 2016, where UN Member states, representatives of major groups and civil society organisations came together to discuss the first steps taken in implementing this ambitious agenda.

One of the key elements of the formal follow-up and review mechanism of the 2030 Agenda are the **Voluntary National Reviews**. Member states are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels. These national reviews serve as a basis for the reviews by the HLPF. As stipulated in paragraph 84 of 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.*

Twenty-two countries participated in the **first round of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)**, including Germany, France, Finland, Switzerland, Estonia, Georgia, Montenegro, and Norway from the European region. The reports differ greatly in terms of size, quality, and thematic depth. As the SDGs only entered into force beginning of 2016, the reports can of course say little about progress in their implementation. However, they can demonstrate political willingness of governments to take the Goals forward and to integrate them in different policy areas beyond development cooperation.

# SUMMARY ANALYSIS

## National Level

- At national level there was **great variation on government processes** followed/implemented in the development of the Voluntary National Review reports. Despite the strong emphasis in the reports itself on being inclusive, in general very few countries were able to have a **truly inclusive consultation with civil society** within the available timeframe.
- The **Voluntary National Reviews** make clear that **some key first steps** have been taken by member states under review. New **institutional arrangements** have been set up in most countries, with coordination mechanisms and multi-stakeholder platforms to support commitments and actions. A number of countries are doing an analysis of existing policies for alignment with the SDGs, and others have already started to integrate SDGs reporting into national reporting and budgeting processes.
- Despite these positive first steps, civil society have also pointed out **areas for improvement**. There is a strong focus on process and governance mechanisms, and not much on achievements or challenges against the specific SDGs or 'leaving no one behind', a **lack of discussion on challenges** and on **how to go beyond business as usual**. Further, the first reports are **'self-portrayals' of the governments**, and a lot of them show a lack of self-criticism and admissions of challenges. Finally, major gaps were found in terms of **awareness of the SDGs**. A major effort is needed to communicate the SDGs within public administration and state institutions, across political parties and within society at large.
- **Some countries specifically address gender and SDG 5** in their reports, and showcase the improvements made with regards to gender equality, but also acknowledge the challenges that still exist in this area. **Other countries give considerably less attention** and consideration to SDG 5 and its targets. In general countries did **not report on systematically integrating gender perspectives** in their national planning, decision-making, policies or budgets.
- Despite the fact that sexual and reproductive health, reproductive rights and family planning are part of the SDGs framework, there is **hardly any reporting on SRH or SRHR** in the Voluntary National Reviews. Only in a few cases reports mention SRHR topics, but often in the context of very specific issues or in a development cooperation context only.

## Global level

- The **Ministerial declaration**, the official result of the HLPF mainly reiterates the agreed language of the 2030 Agenda, is very **generalist and broad**, and does not set new impulses. There is little substance and civil society has expressed disappointment about the declaration not being reflective of the ambition of the SDGs and civil society asks not been taken on board. The document makes several references to gender equality and universal respect for human rights, but there are no specific references to SRH or SRHR.
- Although the **HLPF** managed to bring together high level presence from member states, opportunities for meaningful discussion and reflection on the progress to date were limited.

## Regional Level

- The **United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)** organized, in May 2016, a Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, which Conclusions were submitted to the

HLPF as the official inputs. UNECE did a Regional Survey on Planning, Implementation, Follow-up and Review of the SDGs, showing national efforts to implement Agenda 2030 mainly seek to build on existing policy frameworks and strategies, and that the inter-sectoral character of the SDGs is recognised and reflected in the use of inter-ministerial coordination structures. Gender is only mentioned once in the ECE report, in relation to significant challenges in collecting appropriate data in the area of gender.

## ANALYSIS OF THE PROCESS: DEVELOPMENT OF THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS AND HLPF 2016

### National level

At country level there was **great variation on government processes** in developing national reports. Despite the strong emphasis in the VNR reports itself on being inclusive, in general very few countries were able to have a **truly inclusive consultation with civil society** within the available timeframe. Civil society in a number of countries had not been consulted at all or were only able to comment on almost-finalised drafts of official national reports.

- Only two of the 21 countries reviewed had **invited civil society to engage in the national HLPF review** and very few countries incorporated civil society, especially women's organizations and other main actors, from the beginning of the process. **More than half of the countries did not, or were not able to involve civil society at an early stage** in planning the national SDG review report for HLPF. In France for example, civil society was not involved in the reporting and early implementation of the Agenda, and the consultation process has appeared inconsistent. Civil Society Organisations received a first draft of the French voluntary report in early June, but they were not consulted on the final report. On the contrary, there were also a few countries whom had regular dialogue with civil society. Germany provided civil society the opportunity for inputs and feedback to the draft VNR, and also invited civil society to present its own view at the HLPF (see below). However, the process was organised in an un-transparent way, there was a very little time for civil society to feed in, and the inputs were not necessarily also included in the final report.
- **Consultations on national priorities** were conducted in most reporting countries, but **not always in a meaningful way**. Some countries invited a small (non-representative) number of civil society members to a consultation meeting, as a result of using restrictive selection criteria. Other countries followed a business as usual model and invited groups that already closely work with government. Both of these approaches fail to embrace the inclusive spirit of Agenda 2030, and engage with a wider group of independent major groups, constituencies and stakeholders. However, a **few countries went a step further** to engage civil society. For instance, Finland's 'National Commission on Sustainable Development', a Prime Minister led partnership forum that already exists for 23 years, was re-mandated in 2016, with a broad membership including also civil society organisations.
- **The majority of the governmental reports could not be validated by civil society organizations**, particularly women's organizations, given that NGOs and women's organizations did not have access to the draft report or the drafting process.
- The analysis by the global civil society initiative Action for Sustainable Development concluded that a **strong civil society and a working relationship with government seems to directly correlate with a strong plan for SDG implementation**, especially regarding

adaptability of implementation to local contexts. National governments that have included CSOs in a consultation for drafting their HLPF report, and included them in the overall process in an inclusive and participatory fashion, have a much more detailed and tangible plan set forth to tackle the SDGs (e.g. in Finland and Uganda). When civil society is weakened, due to a tense political environment or lack of strong national coordination within CSOs, civil society is more likely to be left out of formal processes. The countries under review that have had less engagement with CSOs in the drafting or consultative process have submitted less well defined proposals that may not include how practical implementation will be achieved (e.g. in Venezuela, Togo, and Sierra Leone).

- **A key element in ensuring effective implementation** stems from genuine **coordination and self-organising by national civil society**. In countries where civil society coordination is not strong at the national level (e.g. Togo and Sierra Leone), there has been limited success in advocating for inclusion of CSOs in formal processes, in comparison with countries where civil society is well organized at that level (e.g. Uganda and Finland).
- Finally, the civil society initiative Together2030, from their surveys and case studies on civil society, note that when it comes to ensuring the participation of civil society, there is **no clear distinction between those countries who volunteered for national reviews and those that did not**. They therefore recommend that civil society in future years avoids the temptation to focus our support exclusively on CSOs in volunteer countries, as that would leave a large number of committed CSOs in the lurch.

## Global level - High-Level Political Forum

Feedback and analysis by civil society participants present at the 2016 HLPF has found that the **first week of the forum was not highly valuable**. The **most interesting discussions** took place during the 2<sup>nd</sup> week and around the **Voluntary National Reviews**, which should hence receive more attention and time in the coming years. Although civil society had several speaking slots, there was **limited opportunity for questions from and discussion with civil society** at the HLPF.

There was quite significant **high level presence** during the Ministerial Segment including Prime Ministers, Vice-Presidents, Ministers of development Cooperation. This was particularly the case from countries undergoing VNRs attended. A few countries, namely Germany, Norway and Finland, made time in their presentations for **civil society representatives** from their countries to state how they viewed the progress and planning in their country, an initiative that could be an example for other countries in the future and something civil society could push for.

The main outcome of the HLPF, the **Ministerial Declaration**, was pre-negotiated, which unfortunately meant excluding civil society not present for these negotiation sessions. It was hence difficult for broader civil society to properly engage in discussions and providing inputs.

## ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT: VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS AND HLPF 2016

### Voluntary National Reviews

There have been mixed feelings on the performance of the member states under review. On the **positive side**, some **key first steps** have been taken. New institutional arrangements have been set

up in most countries, with coordination mechanisms and multi-stakeholder platforms to support commitments and actions. A number of countries are doing an analysis of existing policies for alignment with the SDGs, and others have already started to integrate SDGs reporting into national reporting and budgeting processes.

Some **encouraging findings in terms of institutional arrangements** and coordination mechanisms (from UN DESA [overview and initial learning on institutional arrangements](#)) include:

- In several cases, heads of state or government remain engaged in **convening inter-ministerial** and other bodies in charge of steering and coordinating implementation. The involvement of ministries with **cross-cutting** influence, such as ministries of finance, and the mainstreaming of the SDGs into sectoral ministries are considered as very important in maintaining the momentum around the SDGs and cross-cutting implementation of the framework.
- The establishment of the necessary **coordination and integration** mechanisms can also help to avoid creating silos during the implementation phase and also ensuring impact on domestic, international and development cooperation agendas.
- In terms of accountability mechanisms, the **role of parliaments** is important. For example, parliamentary scrutiny is underscored by Norway, where the different ministries will report on their action for the SDGs in their budget proposal to parliament. Each year the ministries will report on the implementation to the budget negotiation, which will be summarised by the Finance Minister and reported to the parliament.
- Examples show that **cities or other institutions** are also embracing the SDGs and incorporating them into their regular work. These will also be a driving force in implementing the SDGs.

Despite these positive first steps, civil society have also pointed out **areas for improvement**. In the VNRs and the discussions on the reports at the HLPF reports that there is a **strong focus on process and governance mechanisms**, and not much on achievements or challenges against the specific SDGs or 'leaving no one behind'- the overarching theme of the 2016 HLPF. While there is no doubt that the establishment of these processes are very important, the main qualm is with the lack of discussion on challenges that were arising on **how to go beyond the business as usual** model.

The VNRs mainly aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. However, the first reports are 'self-portrayals' of the governments, and a lot of them show a **lack of self-criticism** and admissions of challenges. One could question how much the reports tally with reality in society. Therefore, inputs of, and the discussions and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders, both at national level and at global level during the HLPF, are crucial.

Major gaps were also found in terms of **awareness of the SDGs**. A big effort is needed to communicate the SDGs within public administration and state institutions, across political parties and within society at large. There is also a need for capacity building in areas ranging from statistics to policy-making, monitoring and review. Both the public sector and other stakeholders need attention, as do the capacities of parliaments and supreme audit institutions.

Finally, in general there is still a **danger of cherry-picking the SDGs** – with countries indicating in their reports that they have already achieved certain SDGs and targets, making the case that they would not prioritize action on these areas.

### *Gender in the Voluntary National Reviews*

**Some countries**, such as Finland, Norway, Egypt, Samoa, Morocco, Switzerland, and Germany, **specifically address gender and SDG 5** in their reports. They showcase the improvements made with regards to gender equality, but also acknowledge the challenges that still exist in this area. Other countries give considerably less attention and consideration to SDG 5 and its targets, e.g. Colombia, Mexico, Montenegro, Venezuela, and Estonia. **Some examples include:**

- **Finland** admits that in terms of gender equality, although the country ranks high, in regard to gender-based violence or the gender pay gap, there is still much to be done.
- **Germany** similarly acknowledges that achieving gender equality is still a national challenge. They refer to gender in an economic context (e.g. around the pay gap), but also draw attention to women in decision-making, and mention some specific SRHR related issues (see below). The German reports states that gender equality is seen as a cross-cutting task and also an important element in bilateral and multilateral dialogues on development policy.
- **Switzerland** developed a new Sustainable Development Strategy (2016–19), with gender equality as one of the 9 key priorities. Switzerland’s international cooperation in the period from 2017 to 2020 will be guided by seven objectives including human rights and gender equality. In addition, they also recognise gender equality also as cross-cutting theme.
- **France**, when discussing their domestic agenda, acknowledges that there is still a lot of work to be done, especially to reduce gender inequalities, mentioning in particular the pay gap.
- **Uganda** refers to the issuance of ‘certificate of compliance to gender and equity’ to ensure gender-responsive budgeting as part of reforms taken, which had been tabled for amendment last year but was rejected. Uganda also mentions new social programmes, for example on women’s entrepreneurship, but there is no other mentioning of steps towards SDG 5 or new integrated approaches for gender equality.
- In the VNR of **Norway**, there are a lot of references to gender and human rights, also specifically acknowledging gender related challenges in different sectors, and in particular highlighting domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, female genital mutilation and forced marriage. In terms of its development cooperation, the Norwegian report mentions that a new action plan on gender equality and women’s rights in Norway’s foreign and development policy (2016) will support the 2030 Agenda’s gender dimension and the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Under Goal 16, Norway’s national and global efforts to end abuse and combat violence against women and children is also mentioned. The report also says that Norway will ensure its efforts to meet the SDGs are in line with relevant human rights norms and standards, irrespective of sexual orientation.
- Other countries such as **Sierra Leone** make reference to the MDGs and shows the progress made regarding maternal mortality and girls’ education. Sierra Leone then mentions plans for SDGs that includes engaging marginalized groups and rural women in consultations on the SDGs.

In general, albeit the specific attention given to gender equality in some reports, in this year’s Voluntary National Review, countries did **not report on systematically integrating gender perspectives** in their national planning, decision-making, policies or budgets.

### *SRHR in the Voluntary National Reviews*

Despite the fact that **sexual and reproductive health, reproductive rights and family planning** are part of the SDGs framework, there is hardly any reporting on SRH or SRHR in the Voluntary National Reviews. **Only in a few cases reports mention SRHR topics**, but often in the context of very specific issues.

- **Germany**, when reporting on its development policy and support for other countries stated that maternal and child health, ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services and realising reproductive rights is seen as an important part of the unfinished business of the MDGs. The report states that within the framework of negotiations and international initiatives, the German Government is actively involved, for instance, in efforts to promote a rights-based approach to family planning and maternal health, comprehensive sexuality education and access to sexual and reproductive health services, and in the field of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a central concern of the German Government, which “should include age-appropriate explanations of human rights, sexuality, gender equity, partnerships and sexual and reproductive health on the basis of scientifically founded and value-free information”. Under goals 16, Germany highlights the need to Protect women, children and young people from (sexual) violence.
- **France**, when discussing its international agenda in the summary report, include gender equality, especially sexual and reproductive health and rights, as high on its list of development policy priorities. In the full report, it is explained that France produced its first international cooperation strategy on population and sexual and reproductive health and rights challenges for 2016-2020. The strategy concentrates on West Africa, and three priority targets (legislative frameworks for sexual and reproductive rights, access to modern contraception methods, and adolescents and young people). The country also affirms their commitment to fight against discrimination, violence and breaches of human rights perpetrated against LGBTI people, both in France as abroad.
- **Finland** mentions SRHR in the context of its development cooperation. It is stated that one of the key priority areas of development policy include the focus areas selected for the Government Programme such as promoting the rights and status of women and girls, including reproductive sexual health and rights.
- **Norway** brings up SRHR in the context of its development policy. In their new action plan on gender equality and women’s rights in Norway’s foreign and development policy, one of the themes chosen is violence and harmful practices against women and girls, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- **Estonia** mentions discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in relation to the existing Equal Opportunities Act.
- The government of **Mexico** highlights, as one of the 2 key challenges faced, the issue of leaving no one behind, specifically referring to ‘excluded groups’ such as women and LGBTI people. However, in the summary report from civil society in Mexico, attached an annex to the VNR, civil society is calling for stronger attention to human rights, specifically referring to SRHR.
- In the **Philippines**, one of the key issues raised on SDG indicators from a multi-stakeholders’ workshop, is the need to disaggregate some data by sexual orientation & gender identity.

Overall, the **attention given to SRHR issues is very limited**, often linked to sexual violence only, and **either in a development cooperation context or around specific domestic issues only**. This lack of

inclusion of information about, and commitment to SRHR as part of implementation of the SDGs, will make shadow and Spotlight Reports by civil society even more important, and makes the involvement of the SRHR community in the thematic reviews next year crucial.

## HLPF Debates and outcomes

It was widely acknowledged that the most important element of the 2016 HLPF was the **presentation of the Voluntary National Reviews**, but there was limited time for discussion, questions and interventions from civil society and other stakeholders.

When introducing their National Voluntary Reports, several countries reaffirmed the importance of **SDG 5 and gender equality**. A few examples include:

- **Finland** made a strong statement about putting human rights and gender equality at the core of implementation.
- **Germany** mentioned human rights based approach, and the need to close the gender-pay gap in Germany.
- **France** specifically mentioned SDG 5, stating that “without women we can neither resolve development issues incl. climate issues.” They also specifically mention the issue of silence on (sexual) violence against women, and stated that there is a need to make policies sensitive to this and introduce laws against domestic violence.
- **Egypt** informed the HLPF of the establishment of an inter-ministerial national committee to follow up on progress, which has identified gender equality as one of the areas for major focus over the next 15 years. In response to a comment from civil society around barriers preventing women and girls from realizing their potential as agents of social and economic progress, the Egyptian Minister also stated that every project in Egypt takes the gender perspective into account in ensuring that equal opportunities are provided to all.
- The Government of **Luxembourg** stated they have created an interdepartmental committee for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and stressed the crucial importance of gender equality.
- Other countries’ ministers or representatives mentioning gender equality or women’s empowerment specifically in their statements include **Nepal, United Arab Emirates, Albania, Croatia, Guatemala, Mali, Tunisia** and the **USA**.

Again **only few countries highlighted** their commitment to **SRHR** (Germany, Finland, Samoa), or in specific contexts, for example when speaking about Violence against Women (Finland, UK).

### *Ministerial declaration*

The **official result** of the eight-day High-level Political Forum is a Ministerial Declaration, which was mainly negotiated before the start of the HLPF between UN Member States representatives to the UN. The document consists of five pages which **largely reiterates the agreed language** of the 2030 Agenda.

In general, the Ministerial Declaration is **very generalist and broad**, and does not set new impulses. There is little substance and civil society has expressed disappointment about the declaration not being reflective of the ambition of the SDGs, and little of civil society asks’ having been taken on board by the negotiators.

In terms of **content relevant** to our SRHR community, the declaration includes the following:

- The document makes several **references to gender equality** and universal respect for human rights, stating that 'the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is crucial', but there are no specific references to SRH or SRHR.
- **Young people** are referenced to as 'key agents of change' but there is no further mentioning in terms of their crucial role and importance of meaningful youth participation in implementation, monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda. On this the EuroNGOs network alongside other civil society organisations had asked for their [response](#).
- There is however a strong paragraph on the importance of accessible, timely, reliable and high-quality disaggregated **data**, one the four priorities highlighted in the [EuroNGOs position paper](#).

Some member states managed to inject highly political issues into the deliberations, such as foreign occupation. Eventually, the declaration was **agreed by vote instead of consensus**, which is uncommon for such a document. Member States acknowledged afterwards that this was not meant to be setting a precedent, so it is unclear how the ministerial declaration will be agreed upon next year.

## Regional inputs to the HLPF

Follow-up and review of the SDGs at the regional level in **Europe** falls under the responsibility of the **United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)**, which is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations. UNECE includes 56 member States in Europe, North America and Asia.

In May, UNECE organized a **Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**, and the Conclusions of the forum were submitted to the 2016 HLPF as the official inputs from the UN ECE region. The conclusions include the key results of a **Regional Survey on Planning, Implementation, Follow-up and Review of the SDGs** that was carried out by UNECE end of 2015, to which 38 out of 56 member States provided answers. Some outcomes of the survey and forum include:

- National efforts to implement Agenda 2030 seek to build on existing policy frameworks, updating or adapting existing strategies. The overall approach seems to be to refrain from the creation of new structures and processes, but rather to embed the SDGs in existing policy frameworks and mechanisms.
- In most countries, the inter-sectoral character of the SDGs is recognised and reflected in the extensive use of inter-ministerial coordination structures.
- Significant emphasis was placed on the need for broad stakeholder involvement at different stages, including in the preparation and updating of strategies, adaptation of the SDGs to local circumstances, monitoring and reporting.

**Gender** is only mentioned once in the ECE report, in relation to significant challenges in collecting appropriate data in the area of gender. It is recognised that, as current data gaps are very large, additional resources would be required to support these efforts. Furthermore, there is **no gender perspective provided on the regional implementation** of the SDGs so far, let alone insights on **SRHR** specifically.

Civil society was present at the regional forum, but were invited very late and only after pressure by civil society groups. Further, inputs by civil society were very limited and little time was given to civil society to prepare joint statements.

UNECE member States agreed to continue the process of informal consultations on a **future regional review mechanism** for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level in the run-up to the sixty-seventh session of the Commission in April 2017. They have promised more space for civil society next year than what happened in 2016. EU Member states apparently oppose the role of UNECE as the regional follow-up and review body on the 2030 Agenda, mostly for financial reasons – and because they would rather see this institutionalized at EU level.

The **European Union** did not make a formal submission to the HLPF, but the European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, attended and spoke at the HLPF on behalf of the EU and its Member States. Despite calls from civil society, the First Vice-President of the European Commission did not attend the HLPF, even though his office is responsible for the overall coordination of the implementation of the SDGs for the European Union. This showcases again how at the regional level in Europe the agenda is mainly perceived as a **development agenda** rather than a universal agenda.

In their statement at the HLPF, the Commissioner said they will put forward an **overarching initiative mapping out** how the EU will contribute to implementing the SDGs through its internal and external action. They will also present a proposal for a **new European Consensus on Development**, outlining how the EU and its Member States can respond to global challenges and the 2030 Agenda through its development policy. **Gender equality** was mentioned as absolutely essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda, and the strategic frameworks for gender equality actions in internal and external policies were brought forward as concrete contributions to the implementation of the SDGs.

## CONCLUSION: LOOKING FORWARD TO 2017

This HLPF can be seen as a trial phase, as governments only recently took final decisions on the precise modalities of the Follow-up and Review process from 2017 onwards. The meeting of the HLPF on sustainable development in 2017, held under the auspices of ECOSOC, will be held from July 10-19, 2017, including the three-day ministerial meeting of the forum from July 17-19, 2017. The theme will be 'Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world'. Seven SDGs will be reviewed in depth, including Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), as well as Goal 17 on the means of implementation. 2017 will hence be a crucial year for our gender and SRHR community with regards to the follow-up and review of the SDGs.

Here are some **key recommendations** for the SRHR community's future advocacy, based on this analysis and outcomes of the discussions held at the [EuroNGOs conference](#) in October 2016.

## In collaboration with other civil society actors

It will be important to work in partnership with others in civil society. The wider the coalition, the harder it will be to ignore civil society and citizen's voices.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** In collaboration with other civil society actors, the SRHR community should push the **UN and UN Member States** to create **better and more inclusive opportunities for civil society engagement**. This should be done by:

**At the global level for the HLPF:** ask for procedural changes in the HLPF. Challenges from this year around the format of the sessions could be brought to the President of the ECOSOC for his report on the session and preparations for next year's meeting. The Ministerial Declaration's concluding paragraph makes review of the accountability mechanisms possible in two years, which is another entry point for advocacy.

- The UN could be asked to provide **guidelines or standards** to countries preparing a voluntary national Review with minimum standards in terms of civil society engagement in the process.
- The HLPF should **begin with the Ministerial Segment** where member states conduct their reviews and adopt the ministerial declaration, followed by the expert level thematic roundtables and dialogues. This would allow the discussions taking place at the expert level to be informed by inputs from the national reviews.
- The Q&A sessions during the HLPF allow for **questions from the floor**, which is a key accountability opportunity at the HLPF. Furthermore, they should give more attention and time to discuss the Voluntary National Reviews, including civil society perspectives.
- Our community should push for as many countries as possible to bring **civil society on their delegation** to co-present the report at the HLPF, as was done by Germany and Finland this year.
- **Negotiations on the future Ministerial Declarations** should take place during the HLPF instead of before, giving opportunity for CSOs outside NYC to participate and contribute.

**At the regional level:** Considering Europe and the UN ECE is currently lagging behind in terms of actions and first steps taken around the SDGs in comparison with other regions, civil society will need to **raise pressure on EU and UN ECE institutions** and stakeholders in charge to take up their responsibility, both at the domestic and international level.

**At the national level,** we should continue pushing for **meaningful spaces and opportunities** for civil society participation in national reviews and implementation, but also monitoring the follow-up of civil societies' inputs to the process.

- Civil society could also use **positive examples of civil society inclusion, including lessons learnt and recommendations**, for others to follow their footsteps and make improvements for 2017.
- There could also be opportunities around pairing up between countries who have already done a Voluntary National Review, and countries who are under review in 2017, to learn from each other and **support each other**, not just at government level but also civil society

platforms or organisations. This has also proven useful in the context of the Universal Periodic Review.

- The SDGs need to be brought in the **political sphere** to be taken forward by governments, also acknowledging the role that **parliamentarians** can play. Governments have to see them as a useful political tool to **frame their longer term vision**. Civil society should help make the SDGs useful for them in that regard, showcasing what success could look like, bring attention to the plans proposed by governments and analyse their feasibility.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

Apart from civil society participation, it is important to advocate around the **reporting format used by countries**, to ensure comprehensive Voluntary National Reports by countries. This could be done through the revisions of the **Secretary-General's voluntary reporting guidelines**, for which BOND developed an analysis and [overview of recommendations](#) for improvement. Further, national governments should be encouraged to clearly use the theme of HLPF in their report.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

As the analysis shows, there is still a danger of cherry-picking the SDGs in the implementation phase. We should push countries to focus on the entire agenda, implementation at both internal and external level, and take an **integrated approach**, including when mainstreaming gender in their interventions. Further, despite the importance of addressing environmental and economic challenges, we need to ensure the **social pillar of the SDGs** is going to be addressed adequately in the future.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4:**

While Agenda 2030 is celebrated in political and development circles there is still very little traction among the general public. The HLPF served as a reminder that **public awareness** of the 2030 Agenda and what it means for the lives of people around the world, and engaging the public, is needed to transform the SDGs into policies and practical action. In order to achieve the SDGs, it is crucial to reach out to other constituencies and 'take the SDGs out of the UN' to the broader society. National and local dialogues will be important in order to reconnect with communities. Within this, civil society should not only play the role of watchdogs of government implementation, but also has to ensure that the public are aware of this new universal agenda. The **involvement of media** will be crucial in showcasing and translating the information and gain broader support and engagement with the agenda. The media can further help scrutinise reports and highlight underperforming of governments.

## Advocacy by the SRHR community

Considering the 'self-portrayal' nature of the Voluntary National Reports, and the lack of a gender or SRHR lens in most of the reports, **advocacy & monitoring by civil society and shadow reports** will continue to be very important.

### RECOMMENDATION 5:

Civil society advocacy efforts should **not only focus on countries who are under review**. For the countries who already reported, it will also be important to keep the pressure up. The German Government for example announced that it will only be submitting the next voluntary national review to the HLPF in 2021, which from a civil society perspective is insufficient.

### RECOMMENDATION 6:

Our SRHR community should **avoid the risk of speaking to our sector** or government departments **alone**, but look for ways to match our agenda and language with government priorities, to make it relevant and create hooks for other departments or stakeholders who might be interested but not expert on this area. Apart from collaborating with other civil society actors and government, there are **other stakeholders** that will be key in achieving the SDGs and whom our community could engage with, for example parliamentarians. The latter are an important, and often overlooked, stakeholder in promoting implementation, follow up and review.

### RECOMMENDATION 7:

The current **political context** with increased 'ethno-nationalists' and conservative groups clearly shows that issues that might have been taken for granted such as certain sexual rights, are now under threat. A stronger **focus** is needed on the groups and **individuals we haven't 'conquered or converted'** yet, reaching out to find common ground. The SDGs can be a good and useful starting point to do that.

### RECOMMENDATION 8:

**Broadening our agenda and linkages to other topics:** The SDG agenda needs to be implemented in its entirety. SRHR underpins the entire agenda, and there should hence not be a focus on just goal 3 and 5. The SRHR community should monitor those goals closely to ensure they are achieved, but we should make sure our efforts support the universality of the agenda. The SRHR community should for example also look at working on other goals, such as goal 17, as the fundament for achieving all the other goals, and civil society's role of watchdog – e.g. the shrinking political space for CSOs, in particular CSOs advocating on sexual rights and LGBTI.

#### RECOMMENDATION 9:

**Preparation of spotlight and shadow reports:** Spotlight and shadow reports can provide a great mechanism to pressure governments to remain accountable to the public, and are also an opportunity to challenge information in the formal government report. It is important for our community to respond directly to the government reports to the HLPF. Reports can draw from official data as well as citizen-generated data. Smart, thematic reports, developing engaging data analysis and information, but also the ranking and comparing between countries, will be crucial in monitoring processes and in showcasing what countries should be working towards.

#### RECOMMENDATION 10:

Although the topic of this year's HLPF was 'leaving no one behind', the SRHR community could have done more in terms of working out in advance who were being left behind for the specific targets our community is monitoring closely. Being more strategic in terms of **data, evidence and information** provided next year, in particular with the 2017 HLPF focusing on a few specific SDGs including 3 and 5, may lead to more concrete debates.

#### RECOMMENDATION 11:

Although our community has the HLPF as main accountability body for the SDGs at the global level, we should remember this is part of **many different follow-up and review mechanisms** - e.g. the World Health Assembly which will review SDG 3 every two years. We must not forget that there are other consensus and declarations than the SDGs in which there is more progressive language. Our community should actively **look for opportunities to link** these different accountability processes and ensure they feed into each other.

#### RECOMMENDATION 12:

Particular attention should be given to the **involvement of young people**, and the inclusion of **youth priorities**. Young people should be given the opportunity to voice their priorities and needs, as policies do not always sufficiently reflect what is happening in their communities. They can challenge the status quo by voicing realities of their fellow peers from the grassroots level. Further, to increase youth participation, the capacity of young people should be built for the localisation of the SDGs, and youth-adult partnerships established.

As a community, we have to continue **sharing information, but also successes and failures**, to learn from each other on best approaches to turn this ambitious agenda into reality.

Finally, we need to remain positive and believe that Agenda 2030 can be achieved. **No battle was won thinking we weren't going to win.**

EuroNGOs welcomes any **additional comments or questions** on the analysis – please contact Joke Lannoye ([joke.lannoye@eurongos.org](mailto:joke.lannoye@eurongos.org))

## SOURCES

- [Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform](#)
- [Voluntary National Reviews](#) of 22 member states
- UN DESA [a zero draft of a policy brief](#) with an overview of institutional arrangements for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level
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- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, [Conclusions of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development \(RFSD\)](#)
- Analyses by civil society or research institutes:
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  - German Development Institute - [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the EU and its Member States: Analysis and Action So Far](#)
  - Concord's analysis of the first VNRs - [First Agenda 2030 national reviews ready](#)
  - Women's Major Group – [ISSUE #4: Voluntary Country Reviews – ensuring meaningful participation and ensuring gender equality targets and goals are at the forefront.](#)
  - Together2030: [Experiences from national voices: Civil society engagement on national reviews of the 2030 Agenda](#)
  - Global Policy Watch - [The HLPF 2016: First global meeting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs](#)
  - Action for Sustainable Development: [Learning by doing: Civil Society Engagement in the High-level political forum's National Review Process \(2016\)](#)
  - BOND UK: [Progressing national SDGs implementation: Experiences and recommendations from 2016](#)