Equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation:
AN EVOLVING PRACTICE IN REPORTING
VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS
Equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation: AN EVOLVING PRACTICE IN REPORTING VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

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Introduction

Since the launch of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, countries have committed to presenting their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the High-level Political Forum to demonstrate their progress in implementing the SDGs.

To date, 177 countries have presented at least one VNR at the High-level Political Forum. The core principles of the 2030 Agenda — human rights, gender equality and a commitment to leave no one behind — underpin efforts to prevent conflict, overcome divisions and address root causes of inequity, discrimination and unfair power relations. In 2020 and 2021 (the focus of this review), 47 and 44 countries, respectively, presented their VNRs at the High-level Political Forum.

As part of the research effort that the EvalGender+ and EvalSDGs networks initiated, an annual review of a sample of these VNRs was performed in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021. These reviews examined whether equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluative evidence has been integrated into the VNRs and the extent to which countries integrate gender equality and equity into national policies and systems.

This report highlights the main results of the review of the 2020 and 2021 VNRs conducted by the EvalGender+ network and UN Women. The report also suggests recommendations for enhanced integration of equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluative evidence in implementing the SDGs and preparing VNRs.

177 countries presented at least one VNR to date

47 countries presented their VNR in 2020

44 countries presented their VNR in 2021

34 VNRs covered in this review

19 VNRs from 2021 covered in this review

15 VNRs from 2020 covered in this review

This review covered a sample of 34 VNRs: 15 from 2020 and 19 from 2021, as illustrated in Graph 1. The selection of the sampled VNRs took into account a number of considerations, including the submission round of the VNR, i.e. first, second, third and whether the VNR was part of the 2018 and 2019 reviews to allow for a comparison and to identify any trends in implementing the SDGs.

The distribution of the sampled VNRs covered Europe, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and the Arab States and included the following countries:

- **Europe**: [2020: Armenia, Finland, Georgia, Slovenia and Ukraine], [2021: Czech Republic, Denmark and Germany].
- **Asia**: [2020: Bangladesh, India, Kyrgyz Republic and Nepal], [2021: Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Malaysia].
- **Latin America and the Caribbean**: [2020: Costa Rica and Ecuador], [2021: Uruguay, Colombia and the Dominican Republic].
- **Africa**: [2020: Kenya and Zambia], [2021: Sierra Leone, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Cabo Verde].
- **The Arab States**: [2020: Syrian Arab Republic], [2021: Iraq, Qatar and Egypt].

Graph 1: Sample regional distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arab States</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/
The criteria for this review build on a previously developed framework by the EvalGender+ network and UN Women to guide the annual review of VNRs. For the purpose of the 2020 and 2021 review, this framework has been updated to provide more concise evidence on the use of equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation in the VNRs and the integration of gender equality and equity into national policies and systems. The framework examined eight domains, including the ones described below.

**Keyword:**

The domain examined the extent to which specific words are used in VNRs, such as evaluation, assessment, monitoring, review, follow-up, impact, gender, gender-sensitive, gender-transformative, sex-disaggregated data, logical framework, evaluation matrix, sexuality, inclusion, disability, refugees, violence, abuse, gender equity, gender-inequality, gender-analysis, marginalized, rural, women, female, men, boys, youth and elderly.

**Governance:**

This domain reviewed whether VNRs clearly explained how the assessment of SDG implementation had been managed; whether a high-level body in the country had been assigned to supervise implementation of the SDGs; the nature of this responsibility; and what monitoring and evaluation frameworks and practices were adopted by these bodies to manage SDG implementation. This section also studied whether national women’s machineries had participated in consultations on preparing the VNRs.

**Methods:**

This domain reviewed evidence of methodological frameworks used to assess the SDG implementation process. It examined the extent to which the VNRs integrated elements of gender-responsive assessments, such as gender-specific objectives, using sex-disaggregated data for all SDGs, some or just SDG 5. This section also assessed the extent to which VNRs provide evidence on whether countries are integrating gender equality issues into national monitoring and evaluation policies and systems and whether the use of evaluation is referenced in these systems.

**Evaluation:**

This domain examined the extent to which countries consider the role of evaluation and use evaluation and gender-responsive evaluative evidence in managing the SDGs and preparing VNRs, and their use and incorporation of such evidence. This section also looked at whether VNRs highlight the best performing SDGs and whether progress on SDG 5 (Gender Equality) is included. In addition, this section studied whether Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation, i.e. national evaluation associations, were part of preparing the VNR and other bodies such as statistics institutes, universities and research institutions were included in the process.
National gender frameworks:

This domain looked at whether VNRs refer to international frameworks or policies related to gender, such as CEDAW. It also examined evidence of countries developing and activating national gender equality strategies and priorities. In addition, it examined the extent to which countries integrate gender equality issues and the needs of vulnerable groups into national plans, and demonstrate examples of the positive impact such policies have in support of gender equity.

Leave no one behind:

This domain examined the extent to which VNRs demonstrate evidence of the leave no one behind principle, including considering the perspective of marginalized voices and the efforts made to ensure that all national policies, plans and programmes reach the most marginalized and leave no one behind.

Looking ahead:

This domain assessed whether VNRs demonstrate future plans for the regular review of SDG implementation progress at the national level. This domain also examined recommendations on how evaluative evidence for gender equality and equity considerations could be strengthened in future reviews.

Overall summary:

The review criteria concluded with an overall summary domain which highlighted the main findings and observations, with comments on the VNR structure.

Review criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Governance</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National gender frameworks</td>
<td>Leave no one behind</td>
<td>Looking ahead</td>
<td>Overall summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, most countries covered progress of all 17 SDGs in their VNRs. However, a few only fully reported those SDGs that were the theme-focus of the High-level Political Forum for 2020 and 2021, while providing a general overview of the remaining SDGs. The High-level Political Forum theme for 2020 was "accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development;" while for 2021, the theme was "sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development." In general, the review of VNRs in 2020 and 2021 showed that solid, national governance bodies, policies and standards exist for supervising and monitoring implementation of the SDGs. Conversely, evaluation policies, practices and country-led evaluations were not strongly represented. Countries showed positive progress in integrating more evaluation use compared to the 2018 and 2019 reviews; nevertheless, the use of the word "evaluation" in most VNRs still reflects research studies and assessments rather than the recognized definition of evaluation as "judging the merit, worth, and significance of an intervention." Some of the 2020–2021 findings were unchanged from the 2018 and 2019 reviews, with others showing some improvement, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: VNR trends and changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT HAS CHANGED?</th>
<th>WHAT IS STILL THE SAME?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased focus on gender-related policies at the national level.</td>
<td>High-level governing bodies are in place to oversee the SDGs and VNRs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved consultations with women-related machineries in the VNR preparation process.</td>
<td>Monitoring is used more than evaluation in managing SDG implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthened national monitoring systems to monitor implementation of the SDGs.</td>
<td>Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation do not play a role in preparing VNRs or supporting SDG implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved gender-responsive evaluative evidence – though generated through national statistics and not evaluations.</td>
<td>Availability of sex-disaggregated data for all SDG indicators is a challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased use of the word “evaluation” and reference to evaluative evidence.</td>
<td>Sex-disaggregated data is mostly reported for SDG 5 and, to some extent, SDG 4 and SDG 10.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021
In contrast to the 2018 and 2019 reviews, the 2020 and 2021 review indicated improvement in using the word “evaluation”.

The review suggested ongoing efforts among most countries to build expertise in evaluation and establish national-level policies for using evaluation in assessing progress on the SDGs. The words “evaluation/assessment” were used around 1,579 times in the VNRs, and the terms “monitoring/follow-up/review” were used around 4,040 times. The top three countries that used the words “evaluation/assessment” were Denmark, Finland and Indonesia. The use of other terms related to evaluation was not as strong. For example, the term “logical framework” only appeared five times in Ecuador’s VNRs and once or twice in three other VNRs from Georgia, Zimbabwe and Cabo Verde.

The words “women/girls/females” were heavily used in the VNRs (around 5,912 times). Japan, Indonesia and Denmark were the top three countries that used these words in their VNRs.

The term “gender” was also evident in all VNRs, appearing 1,857 times, with Denmark, Indonesia and Japan using the term the most frequently. However, the terms “gender-sensitive/gender-responsive/gender-transformative/gender stereotypes” were almost absent in most VNRs, or were minimally used in a few VNRs, except for the Bhutan VNR, which had 118 occurrences of these terms. “Gender inequality” was also not heavily used: it appeared 65 times, 19 of which were in the Armenian VNR. The terms “youth/young people” (1,669 times) and “disabilities/disabled” (1,182 times) were frequently used in all VNRs, indicating an emphasis on the importance of their role in sustainable development. In contrast, the terms “old people/elderly” were used less frequently, with 331 occurrences. The terms “sex-disaggregation” and “women’s empowerment” were also used less regularly: they appeared 587 and 540 times, respectively. Interestingly, the term “gender analysis” was almost absent in the VNRs: it was only found nine times among the VNRs reviewed, and appeared in only three VNRs: Kenya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Bhutan. An illustration of the findings on the use of keywords is presented in Graph 2.
Graph 2: Use of keywords in the VNRs

- Woman/Women/Girls/female/s: 5912
- Follow-up/Monitoring/Review: 4040
- Gender: 1857
- Sexuality/sexualism: 1848
- Youth/Young people: 1669
- Evaluation/Assessment: 1579
- Rural: 1425
- Men/boys/male/s: 1374
- Violence/Abuse: 1328
- Gender Equality/Gender Equity: 628
- Sex-disaggregation: 587
- Women empowerment: 540
- Older people/elderly: 331
- Gender-sensitive/gender-responsive: 177
- Refugees: 165
- Marginalized: 101
- Gender Inequality: 65
- Logical Framework: 10
- Gender Analysis: 9
FINDINGS

Governance

All countries reported they had a clear process and framework in place to plan and monitor progress on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the national level. All countries mapped the SDGs within their national policies; allocated money in their general budget on an annual basis for implementing the SDGs; and assigned a governmental governance body to oversee implementation of the SDGs and follow up on progress.

For example, countries assigned this responsibility to the Prime Minister’s Office/Government Office (Finland, Georgia, Slovenia, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Syrian Arab Republic, Morocco, Armenia, Germany, Bhutan, Japan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Egypt), the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (Costa Rica), the Ministry of Foreign Relations and Human Mobility (Ecuador), the State Department for Planning (Kenya), the Ministry of National Development Planning (Zambia, Indonesia), the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (Iraq, Qatar), the Ministry of Environment (Czech Republic), the Ministry of Finance (Denmark, Cabo Verde), the Budget and Planning Office (Uruguay), or the Ministry of Economy/Economic Development and Trade (Ukraine, Kyrgyz Republic, The Dominican Republic, Azerbaijan).

All countries assigned their national statistics agency as the official reference for providing SDG statistics. All countries reported including all relevant stakeholders in developing SDG monitoring systems. All VNRs also reported including relevant stakeholders in the consultation process for preparing the VNRs, e.g. representatives from women-related machineries, youth interventions, people with disabilities, parliamentarians, private sector institutions, public sector institutions, indigenous people and the elderly. However, the inclusion of women-related bodies was not clearly described in most of the VNRs (62 per cent). An illustration of the findings on governance is presented in Graph 3.

Graph 3: Governance systems in the VNRs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is it clear to you how the assessment of SDGs implementation process has been managed?</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have the SDGs been [taken up by bodies, such as supreme audit institutions] or included in national performance monitoring and evaluation (M&amp;E) systems?</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have these bodies been in consultation with National Women’s machineries?</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings in this domain did not differ much across the different regions. Overall, VNRs from all regions clearly described how the VNRs were prepared and how the SDGs are assessed in these countries. Highlights of the main findings across the different regions are outlined below.

Europe

The VNRs showed that a high-level governmental working group observed the overall process of implementing the SDGs and preparing VNRs in each country. The Ukrainian government, for example, established an inter-agency working group for the SDGs to coordinate their achievement. In Armenia, the Prime Minister’s Office launched a national council for the SDGs to ensure a collaborative decision-making process and broad public participation in the national development programmes and issues related to the 17 SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

Germany developed the German Sustainable Development Strategy and integrated the 2030 Agenda into departmental policies and legislative and regulatory procedures. All federal ministries in Germany started publishing ministerial reports once every legislative term in which they explain how their policies are helping to implement the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, countries in this region used a participatory approach in preparing VNRs involving different stakeholders, in response to the leave no one behind principle.

The reports also showed that countries integrated the 2030 Agenda and SDGs into their national policies, and created an enabling environment to include relevant stakeholders such as the government, parliament, civil society organizations, UN agencies and assigned the national department of statistics as the official provider of numbers and statistics. In addition, a peer dialogue approach was used by two countries to prepare the VNRs: Finland consulted with Switzerland and Mozambique, and Denmark consulted with Norway and Kenya. Both countries mentioned that this process enhanced preparation of the VNRs because it allowed for sharing of knowledge and expertise between countries.

Most VNRs did not clearly indicate whether consultations with national women’s machineries were conducted as part of VNR preparation. However, they all mentioned that all relevant stakeholders had participated in the process. A few VNRs did mention specific institutions, e.g. Georgia referred to UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, and Ukraine mentioned UN Women. In addition, Denmark listed participating organizations such as Women and Development, the Women’s Council Denmark and the Danish Family Planning Association.
The VNRs provided a clear description of how preparation of the VNRs was managed, and how the SDGs were assessed. The VNRs showed that high-level governmental working groups observed the overall process, referred to as the “Sustainable Development Goals Implementation and Review Committee” in most countries. A participatory approach in preparing the VNRs was also adopted, including all voices in acknowledgement of the leave no one behind principle. The reports also showed that countries integrated the 2030 Agenda and SDGs into their national policies, and created an enabling environment to include relevant stakeholders such as the government, parliament, civil society organizations, UN agencies, and assigned the national department of statistics as the official provider of numbers and statistics. For example, the Kyrgyz Republic conducted a gap analysis to identify priority settings in developing its National Development Strategy. The strategy referred to the SDGs as transformative plans, and reflected them in the national development framework - Strategy 2018–2040.

**Indonesia** used a peer dialogue approach to prepare its VNR, consulting with Norway, which they reported as a rewarding mechanism that strengthened the process of preparing the VNR. In a few VNRs, it was unclear whether consultations with national women’s machineries were conducted as part of VNR preparation. However, all VNRs stated that all relevant stakeholders had participated in the process and most VNRs showed evidence of their involvement. **Nepal**, for example, mentioned the National Human Rights Commission and the National Women Commission as two of the eight constitutional bodies involved in the SDGs and VNRs. **Bhutan** mentioned consultation with the Association of Women Entrepreneurs, the Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women, and the Bhutan Network for Empowering Women. **Lao People’s Democratic Republic** included the Lao Women Union in the process, and **Malaysia** included the National Council of Women Organizations. The Azerbaijan VNR mentioned consultations with the State Committee for Family, and the Women and Children’s Affairs Ministry.
In general, most reports provided a clear description of how the VNRs were prepared, while all VNRs showed how the SDGs were assessed in these countries. However, not all VNRs clearly illustrated whether there was a methodological framework to evaluate progress towards the SDGs or whether monitoring and evaluation responsibilities were managed by a specific national body. The VNRs noted that a high-level governmental working group observed the overall progress of the SDGs. Costa Rica, for example, established the SDG Technical Secretariat and assigned it responsibility for coordinating the information-gathering process with national institutions, other actors and members of the SDG Advisory Committee. Uruguay integrated the SDGs within the federal budget, and the Budget and Planning Office coordinate SDG efforts. Overall, most VNRs from this region clearly described a participatory approach adopted for preparing the VNRs, including all voices and the leave no one behind principle.

The reports also showed that countries integrated the 2030 Agenda and SDGs into their national policies and created an enabling environment to include relevant stakeholders such as the government, parliament, civil society organizations and UN agencies, and assigned the national department of statistics as the official provider of numbers and statistics.

In most VNRs, it was unclear whether consultations with national women’s machineries had been conducted as part of VNR preparation. However, all VNRs stated that all relevant stakeholders had participated in the process. The Uruguay and the Dominican Republic VNRs clearly listed women’s machineries as part of the process, e.g. Uruguay adopted the instruments that UN Women and the International Labour Organization (ILO) deployed with the support of the European Union to promote gender equality in private sector companies through the Women’s Empowerment Principles. In the Dominican Republic, the Ministry for Women was part of the High Interinstitutional Commission for Sustainable Development and participated in the VNR decision-making processes.
Overall, the VNRs from Africa clearly described how the VNRs were prepared and how the SDGs were assessed in these countries. All countries assigned a high-level governmental body to supervise the overall process, such as the Ministry of National Development, the Ministry of Finance or the State Department for Planning. VNRs from this region demonstrated a participatory approach in preparing the VNRs, including all voices and the leave no one behind principle. For example, the preparation process included all line ministries, academia, youth organizations, the private sector, UN agencies, parliament, civil society institutions and representatives of vulnerable groups, such as elderly persons, youth and persons with disabilities. The reports showed that countries in this region had integrated the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into their national policies and created an enabling environment and working groups for all relevant stakeholders to prepare the VNRs.

As in other regions, African countries assigned national statistics departments as the official provider of numbers and statistics. In half of the VNRs from Africa, it was unclear whether consultations with national women’s machineries had been conducted as part of VNR preparation, but all VNRs stated that all relevant stakeholders had participated in the process. The remaining VNRs clearly listed women’s machineries that were part of the process, e.g. the Society for Women and Aids in Africa in Sierra Leone, the Women Development Fund and Women’s Microfinance Bank in Zimbabwe, and the Association of Women Entrepreneurs in Cabo Verde.

The VNRs showed that all reports clearly described how the VNRs were prepared and how these countries assessed the SDGs. The VNRs clearly illustrated national methodological frameworks for evaluating progress towards the SDGs; what monitoring and evaluation processes were taken to follow up on their progress; and what high-level governmental working group observed overall SDG progress. The reports also indicated that countries in this region integrated the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in their national policies; used the leave no one behind principle to include all voices; and created an enabling environment and working groups for all relevant stakeholders such as the government, parliament, civil society organizations, UN agencies and the national department of statistics to prepare the VNRs. The Syrian Arab Republic, for example, established the “Sustainable Development Gate” in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the National Center for Statistics to oversee and coordinate implementation of the SDGs. Qatar used the results and networking from the virtual workshop on “Voluntary National Reviews in the Arab Region” organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia to prepare its VNR. Egypt established the “National Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals,” managed by the Prime Minister’s Office and composed of representatives from line ministries and state entities. In all VNRs, except for Egypt, it was unclear whether consultations with national women’s machineries had been conducted as part of VNR preparation, but all VNRs stated that all relevant stakeholders had participated in the process. Egypt’s VNR included the National Council for Women and the Association for Women’s Total Advancement and Development.
Most VNRs demonstrated evidence of a methodological framework used to assess the SDG implementation process. In addition, countries reported creating policies that facilitate an enabling environment to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and had invested in integrating gender equality issues into national monitoring and evaluation policies and systems.

Finland, for example, mentioned, “the Finnish Parliament’s Committee for the Future has functioned as the parliamentary committee responsible for 2030 Agenda matters.” Similarly, the Kyrgyz Republic noted that, “the transformative nature of the SDGs has been reflected in the national development framework of the Kyrgyz Republic through gap analysis and priority setting undertaken in the National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2018–2040.” Most VNRs also reported integrating elements of gender-responsive assessments, such as gender-specific objectives, and developing plans to address equity and inequality. For example, the Sierra Leone VNR stated, “the enforcement of the Hands-Off Our Girls Initiative championed by the First Lady has catalyzed reduction of inequities and inequalities in communities affecting the advancement of women.” The Nepal VNR mentioned, “women’s groups has been advocating on the issues of women and girls such as gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights issues and gender responsive SDGs implementation in the national and international platform.”

Azerbaijan’s VNR noted that, “a guidebook on SDG 5, namely “practical recommendations for implementation of Gender Equality Policy in Municipalities” was published by the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs under the framework of mutual cooperation between the State Committee and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).”

Although most VNRs (74 per cent) demonstrated that they address gender equality issues in national monitoring and evaluation policies and systems, this area was unclear in 26 per cent of the VNRs. Among the VNRs that clearly explained this was the Costa Rica VNR, which noted, “the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy and the National Women’s Institute in Costa Rica prepared the 2020 Gender Equality Characterization Study to describe Costa Rica’s female inhabitants in terms of the main gender gaps and how public investment is addressing the needs of that population.” The Georgian VNR stated that, “the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia established the specialized unit - Department of Human Rights Protection and Quality Monitoring - within its structure in 2018 which continues to oversee investigations into and administrative proceedings on domestic violence, crimes committed on the grounds of discrimination, hate crimes, trafficking and crimes committed by and or towards minors.”
The Bangladesh VNR mentioned, “the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework has been finalized by the government to set targets of indicators of SDGs i.e., from where we are now (benchmark) and where we want to go by 2030. An innovative SDGs tracker (sdg.gov.bd), a web-based data repository system, has been launched to assist the monitoring of the implementation of SDGs in our country.” The Kyrgyz Republic VNR mentioned, “in order to efficiently plan for the production of SDG’s statistics and to regularly assess gaps in statistical capacity, the National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic is working on the implementation of the Advanced Data Planning Tool for SDGs indicators and the Minimum Set of Gender Indicators of the United Nations Statistics Division.” The Indonesia VNR stated, “availability of a system to monitor and track gender responsive budget allocations has an important role in achieving gender equality.”

The availability of sex-disaggregated data for all 17 SDGs was a challenge highlighted by most countries. Although most of the VNRs (71 per cent) reported sex-disaggregated data for a number of SDGs, such as SDG 4 and SDG 10, countries mainly reported sex-disaggregated data as part of SDG 5. Countries stated they were working on developing the capacity of national statistics institutes to generate more data disaggregated by sex and other variables such as race/ethnicity, age, region and others to better inform policy and decision-making. For example, the Morocco VNR presented the status of gender-sensitive data in the country and offered several indicators related to gender, such as education, employment, salaries and unemployment. An illustration of the findings on methods is presented in Graph 4.

### Graph 4: Use of methods in the VNRs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES (%)</th>
<th>NO (%)</th>
<th>UNCLEAR (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there an evidence of the methodological framework used for assessing the SDGs implementation process?</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the report integrate elements of gender responsive assessments?</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is ‘sex disaggregated data’ mentioned in the report represent all SDG or some of them or just SDG 5?</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there reference to evaluation use?</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have gender equality issues been integrated into national (monitoring and) evaluation policies and systems?</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings in this domain did not differ much across the different regions. Overall, the VNRs from the different regions mentioned establishing national methodological frameworks and using monitoring and evaluation processes to assess SDG progress, whereas sex-disaggregated data was challenging. Highlights of the main findings across the different regions are outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Europe</strong></td>
<td>The VNRs showed that sex-disaggregated data were not used for all VNRs throughout all 17 SDGs. They were mainly part of SDG 5, which was covered in all VNRs from this region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Africa</strong></td>
<td>The VNRs showed that sex-disaggregated data were not used for all 17 SDGs in most VNRs. Sex-disaggregated data were mainly used for SDG 4 and SDG 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asia</strong></td>
<td>The VNRs showed that use of sex-disaggregated data in this region was challenging. Disaggregated data was mainly used for SDG 5. Sex-disaggregated data were not used for all VNRs throughout all 17 SDGs. Only half of the VNRs used sex-disaggregated for all 17 SDGs, and only half reported them for SDG 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Arab States</strong></td>
<td>Sex-disaggregated data were not used for all 17 SDGs in all VNRs, except for SDG 4 and SDG 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latin America and the Caribbean</strong></td>
<td>The VNRs indicated that sex-disaggregated data were not used for all 17 SDGs in most VNRs. Sex-disaggregated data were mainly used for SDG 5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS

Evaluation

All VNRs mentioned the word “evaluation” and indicated using evaluation to measure SDG progress. Nevertheless, not all showed evidence of the actual use of evaluation, specifically country-led evaluation, in managing implementation of the VNRs.

Most use of the word “evaluation” referred to research studies conducted by universities, research institutes or national statistics institutions. However, a number of VNRs did demonstrate evidence of using evaluation practices to supervise SDG implementation. For example, Finland’s VNR noted, “the Finnish VNR relies on existing data and recently published evaluations, research studies, and reports …. In 2018, the Finnish Government commissioned an independent and comprehensive evaluation of national sustainable development policies. The evaluation examined the state of sustainable development in light of national sustainability indicators, key sustainable development policy objectives, and national implementation of the 2030 Agenda.”

The Ukrainian VNR stated, “during the VNR preparation, analysis of the SDGs incorporation extent provided a basis for rapid efficiency evaluation of key programs and strategies according to an updated OECD/DAC methodology.” Sierra Leone VNR included "for Goal 4 on education, we did basic evaluation of the impact of the government Free Quality School Education Program on the welfare of pupils and parents …. For Goal 16 on justice, we did a simple evaluation of the impact of the legal aid assistance that government accords the less privileged, including free legal representation and advice."

The Nepal VNR explained that a Monitoring and Evaluation Bill had already been endorsed by the House of Representatives and was currently under consideration in the National Assembly to facilitate more monitoring and evaluation practices at the national level.

The review examined whether the VNRs described the top-performing SDGs during 2020 and 2021. Overall, this area does not have a standardized measurement that all countries use to identify top-performing SDGs in a systematically manner. Therefore, the VNR review mainly checks whether the VNR mentions specific SDGs as having been successful in achieving indicators and targets. In most VNRs (62 per cent), this was unclear. However, in 38 per cent of VNRs, the narrative in the report suggested that the most successful SDGs were SDG 1 (End Poverty) and SDG 4 (Quality Education), which were reported in seven VNRs as among the most successful SDGs. SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 13 (Climate Action) were reported in three VNRs as among the most successful SDGs. SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) were reported in only two VNRs, and all remaining SDGs were only reported in one VNR as being among the most successful.

Engaging Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation in monitoring the progress of the SDGs or preparing VNRs was significantly absent in almost all VNRs: only two VNRs mentioned consultation with such organizations in 2020 (Nepal and Kenya).
The Nepal VNR noted that the government had established an Evaluation Network (Eval-Net) to oversee preparation of the VNR, which included representatives from different stakeholders, including the Voluntary Organization for Professional Evaluation in Nepal. Nonetheless, the nature of the organization's involvement was not explained, and no further information was provided. The Kenyan VNR explained that the government had begun to engage the Evaluation Society of Kenya as an important partner in promoting evaluation practices in managing the SDGs and preparing VNRs. The VNR mentions, “the Evaluation Society of Kenya (ESK) is increasingly becoming an important partner in the multi-stakeholder efforts of promoting the evaluation of the SDGs … towards strengthening the National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System … MED chairs while ESK coordinates.” Other forms of professional monitoring and evaluation communities that engaged in managing implementation of the SDGs and preparation of VNRs have mainly been national institutes of statistics and censuses, research institutes and universities. No other types of formal monitoring and evaluation communities were evident in the VNRs. An illustration of the use of evaluation findings is presented in Graph 5.

Graph 5: Use of evaluation in the VNRs

- **Is the role of evaluation in respective M&E frameworks significantly considered in preparing the SDG review?**
  - Yes: 91%
  - No: 6%
  - Unclear: 6%

- **Is there evidence of any professional M&E communities engagement in VNR processes at national level?**
  - Yes: 85%
  - No: 6%
  - Unclear: 9%

- **Has progress on SDG5 be covered in the report?**
  - Yes: 85%
  - No: 15%

- **Has the report incorporated gender responsive evaluative evidence?**
  - Yes: 68%
  - No: 32%

- **What are the top three SDGs for success in their attainment of achieving the SDGs?**
  - Yes: 38%
  - No: 62%

- **Have evaluation communities (VOPEs) been engaged in VNR processes at national level?**
  - Yes: 6%
  - No: 91%
  - Unclear: 6%
Findings in this domain showed a variation among the different regions concerning Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation's engagement in preparing VNRs. Overall, VNRs from the different regions referred to evaluation practices, which more likely meant reviews and research studies conducted by national statistics institutions rather than engaging Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation in managing VNRs. Highlights of the main findings across the different regions are detailed below.

**Europe**

The role of Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation was absent in all VNRs from Europe; however, other forms of monitoring and evaluation communities were mentioned, mainly research organizations, academic institutions and national statistics institutes. All countries described their efforts to build capacity to establish more effective databases to support monitoring of SDG progress. In general, the reports showed excellent visualization of monitoring results to present progress on the SDGs. For example, Armenia launched a national reporting platform and monitoring framework for SDG indicators. The platform provides a tool to disseminate and communicate national statistics and information related to global SDG indicators.

**Asia**

The role of Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation was absent in all VNRs from this region, except for Nepal. The Nepal VNR mentioned the participation of the Voluntary Organization for Professional Evaluation in the evaluation network (Eval-Net), which the government established to track SDG progress and prepare the VNR. Nepal also described development of a national monitoring and evaluation bill to manage SDG implementation. The monitoring and evaluation bill was endorsed by the House of Representatives and is currently under consideration in the National Assembly of Nepal. Other countries mentioned other forms of monitoring and evaluation communities involved in tracking the SDGs, mainly research organizations, academic institutions, national monetary authorities and national statistics institutes. Bangladesh, for instance, developed a national SDG monitoring and evaluation framework to set targets for SDG indicators based on where the country is now (benchmark) and where it wants to be by 2030. The Kyrgyz Republic assigned the National Statistical System as the main body responsible for coordinating efforts to collect data; produce statistics in accordance with the fundamental principles of official statistics; and create an evidence base mechanism for the SDGs.
The VNRs indicated that the role of Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation were absent in all VNRs. However, other forms of monitoring and evaluation communities were mentioned, mainly research organizations, academic institutions and national statistics institutes. All countries, except for one, described their national-level plan for monitoring the SDGs and their efforts to build capacity in establishing more effective databases to support monitoring of SDG progress. Colombia’s VNR report illustrated clear and detailed methodology, processes and findings on SDG implementation progress analysis. In addition, Colombia presented strong monitoring and evaluation data and techniques which were outstandingly visualized in the VNR.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The role of Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation was evident in only one country, Kenya: it was the only VNR in the 2020–2021 review that demonstrated clear collaboration with the Evaluation Society of Kenya in preparing its VNRs. The report also mentioned that the Evaluation Society of Kenya is becoming an increasingly important partner in multi-stakeholder efforts to promote evaluation of the SDGs. Other countries from this region described different forms of monitoring and evaluation communities that participated in implementing the SDGs, mainly statistics, research and academic bodies. Namibia and Zambia, for example, explained how their governments continue to work on building capacity at the national statistics bureau to provide more data to allow for better management of the SDGs.

Africa

The role of Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation was evident in only one country, Kenya: it was the only VNR in the 2020–2021 review that demonstrated clear collaboration with the Evaluation Society of Kenya in preparing its VNRs. The report also mentioned that the Evaluation Society of Kenya is becoming an increasingly important partner in multi-stakeholder efforts to promote evaluation of the SDGs. Other countries from this region described different forms of monitoring and evaluation communities that participated in implementing the SDGs, mainly statistics, research and academic bodies. Namibia and Zambia, for example, explained how their governments continue to work on building capacity at the national statistics bureau to provide more data to allow for better management of the SDGs.

The Arab States

The role of Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation was not evident in any of the VNRs in this region. However, other forms of monitoring and evaluation communities were mentioned in some VNRs, mainly research organizations, academic institutions and national statistics institutes. All countries described their national-level plan for monitoring the SDGs, and their efforts to build capacity in establishing more effective databases to support monitoring SDG progress. Egypt also strongly illustrated the country’s focus on monitoring and evaluation, which the VNR presented as essential to good governance. The Egyptian government created two electronic monitoring and evaluation systems: the first is the Integrated Electronic System for Planning and Monitoring, which oversees all national public projects in public entities and monitors their implementation in alignment with SDG objectives; the second system is devised to monitor the performance of each government entity based on entity-specific performance indicators, then align them to the country’s overall progress.
### FINDINGS

#### National gender frameworks

Most VNRs (97 per cent) showed some incorporation of gender-responsive evaluative evidence, such as conducting national surveys to measure girls’ enrolment in education; women’s participation in the labour market; or women’s ownership of property.

However, these pieces of evidence came mainly from studies conducted by national statistics institutes, research organizations or universities rather than from country-led evaluations, especially evaluations that used an equity-focused and gender-responsive approach. Most countries’ VNRs (85 per cent) also referred to gender-equality mechanisms such as CEDAW in developing national policies and practices related to the SDGs. Nevertheless, in 62 per cent of the VNRs reviewed, it was unclear whether women’s machineries were involved in the consultation process to prepare the VNRs. These findings also continue to align with the results of previous VNR reviews.

All countries identified gender equity and equality issues as national priorities; integrated these within their national plans; and had established institutional and legal structures to implement equity-focused practices within their communities. For example, the Costa Rica VNR noted, “the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy and the National Women’s Institute prepared the 2020 Gender Equality Characterization Study, with the aim of describing Costa Rica’s female inhabitants in terms of the main gender gaps and how public investment is addressing the needs of that population to identify financial resource needs and institutional capacities.”

The Kenya VNR stated, “establishment of Gender Statistics Inter-Agency Technical Committee and partnership with research institutions and Universities on gender research.” The Armenian VNR mentioned, “in 2019, gender-responsive budgeting elements and indicators have been added to the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework ... for 2020, while in 2020, gender-sensitive indicators have been added to the budget programs of RA state departments.” The Czech Republic VNR noted, “the Action Plan for Preventing Domestic and Gender-based Violence, the primary goal of which is education of society, prevention, the compilation of data, and the availability of programs addressing violence, originated in 2019.”

The Indonesia VNR stated, “based on the 2020 assessment, the existence of legal frameworks that encourage and or promote gender equality and law enforcement and or monitoring of the implementation results in the area of overarching legal framework has reached 100%.” The Namibia VNR stated, “the Government of the Republic of Namibia developed and implemented the National Gender Policy, 2010-2020 .... The main goal of the policy is to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of both female and male persons in Namibia.” Iraq VNR mentioned, “the Iraqi government has taken meaningful steps to promote women’s participation. In late 2020, the second National Action Plan was completed to implement and follow up on resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, adopted by the UN Security Council.”

All countries also amended or introduced gender-based legislation relating to domestic or gender-based violence, women’s working conditions and women’s representation in parliament. Zambia, for example, has an adequate legal framework that guarantees equality between men and women.

The women’s movement in the country went on to facilitate the establishment of the Male Members of Parliament Parliamentary Network on gender equality which has become an official body of parliament, ensuring that the male voice is enhanced in parliament on issues of gender equity and equality. Egypt joined the Equal Pay International Coalition, led by the ILO, UN Women, and the OECD, to promote gender equality and guarantee equal pay for equal work. The National Council for Women in the country also launched the “Protect her from Circumcision” campaign to educate women and families in rural and urban areas on the dangers of this crime and the harm thereof to the well-being of girls. An illustration of the findings on national gender frameworks is presented in Graph 6.

Graph 6: National gender frameworks in the VNRs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the report refer to national gender equality strategies and/or priorities?</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there discussion of the evidence of integrating gender equality issues into national plans?</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there examples of the positive impact of policies that are being implemented to address the needs of vulnerable groups with an emphasis on the status of women and girls?</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are Gender Equality Mechanisms (CEDAW, etc) mentioned in the Report?</td>
<td>85% 9% 6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

YES  NO  UNCLEAR
Findings in this domain showed variation across the different regions. Overall, VNRs from the different regions mentioned developing gender equity policies and strategies and integrating them into national plans. The leave no one behind principle was also integrated as a cross-cutting theme across all national plans to ensure all voices are included in implementation of the SDGs. In addition, national policies and legislative procedures were established to ensure gender equality moves forward. Highlights of the main findings across the different regions are detailed below.

Europe

The VNRs showed that equity-focused and gender-responsive evidence were included in all VNRs. However, such evidence was mainly descriptive, e.g. national surveys, statistics, and national policies and legislative procedures. The Czech Republic developed gender equality goals, outlined in a Gender Equality Strategy 2021–2030 to increase the number of women in executive positions and eliminate inequality in compensation. The Czech Republic also developed an Action Plan for Preventing Domestic and Gender-based Violence in 2019 to address gender-based violence issues in society. In addition, Slovenia introduced the Protection Against Discrimination Act in 2016, and an act Ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. Armenia added gender-responsive and gender-sensitive budgeting elements and indicators to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs’ Medium-Term Expenditure Framework and budget statement.

Asia

Equity-focused and gender-responsive evidence was included in all VNRs, and mostly came from national surveys, statistics, and national policies and legislative procedures. Bhutan, for example, identified the SDGs as a priority for the country, and within its holistic approach to development, based its SDG work on the principles of Gross National Happiness (GNH), which Bhutan is keen to monitor. Japan developed its Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality: “Toward Reiwa society where all women and girls can thrive and achieve their full potential,” which the Cabinet approved at the end of 2020. The Indian parliament has held frequent meetings and conferences, such as the Women Parliamentarians’ Forum, to discuss perspectives on implementation of the SDGs and the role of women parliamentarians in this process. The Kyrgyz Republic implemented constitutional provisions to ensure that the law in the country guarantees equal rights and opportunities to men and women. Therefore, any emerging acts of gender inequality are recognized as a result of discrimination and against the constitution. Azerbaijan developed a National Action Plan on Gender Equality to improve legislation on gender equality and women’s rights; raise awareness of gender equality and women’s rights among the population; strengthen measures to combat gender-based violence; and achieve gender equality in the economic sphere.
Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean: The VNRs indicated that equity-focused and gender-responsive evidence were not strongly present. The VNR data mostly came from national statistics, national policies and legislative procedures. The Ecuador VNR, for example, briefly refers to a National Equity Agenda and an agenda for equity of women and the LGTBI population, but does not provide many details on implementation of these agendas. In Costa Rica, since 2007, the National Women’s Institute has promoted equality and equity between women and men. Costa Rica also described other policies such as the national policy to prevent and address violence against women of all ages; the national policy for effective equality among women and men; and the national policy for the equality of women and men in job training and use of science, technology, telecommunications and innovation.

Africa

The VNRs showed that equity-focused and gender-responsive policies and procedures were strongly evident in all African countries’ VNRs. For example, CEDAW was mentioned as a gender equality mechanism to guide eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. In addition, national policies and legislative procedures were established, e.g. Kenya developed a STEM mentorship programme aiming to increase women’s enrolment in engineering and applied science courses, and the take-up of science-based professions in the country. Zambia implemented various interventions to address the needs of vulnerable, minority and neglected populations, including policy and legislative interventions such as protection against discrimination based on gender, political affiliation, ethnicity and religion; Social Cash Transfers for persons with severe disabilities; the Public Welfare Assistance Scheme that targets orphans and vulnerable children; households affected by HIV and AIDS; older persons; persons living with disabilities; farmers; the chronically ill; and female-headed vulnerable households.

The Arab States

The VNRs indicated that equity-focused and gender-responsive policies and procedures were strongly evident in all VNRs in this region. CEDAW and other national gender equality mechanisms were mentioned in the VNRs. In addition, national policies and legislative procedures on gender equality were established and mentioned in the VNRs. Iraq, for example, launched the National Action Plan to implement and follow up on Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, adopted by the UN Security Council in the 2000s. The plan covers 2021–2024 and focuses on increasing the number of women in humanitarian relief and reconstruction programmes, and finding capable and influential women to manage peace negotiations and peacebuilding. This plan makes Iraq the first Arab country to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to promote women’s active participation and empowerment in achieving and sustaining peace. Morocco’s VNR presented the country’s experience in enhancing national statistics systems, where the government is developing systems to generate more disaggregated data that better aligns with the leave no one behind principle.
FINDINGS

Leave no one behind

The “leave no one behind” principle was strongly evident in all VNRs. All countries built their SDG national plan based on this principle aiming to include all voices in the plan’s implementation and follow-up of the SDGs.

Slovenia, for example, described consultation with representatives from the Youth Council of Slovenia to gain insight into what younger generations think of individual SDGs. India’s VNR mentioned that the leave no one behind principle, which is the most compelling vision of the 2030 Agenda, resonates deeply with the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi; therefore, it is enshrined in the country’s constitution. Nepal explained that it had invested in constitutional, social protection and security provisions; increased public expenditure on social security; and targeted programmes for vulnerable and marginalized populations to transform sustainable development in the country.

Bhutan also mentioned, “towards reducing vulnerabilities with improved gender analysis and data, the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) as a government agency responsible for women and children in the country requires disaggregated data. As such, a comprehensive children and gender indicator handbook has been developed. Statistical Officers and Gender Focal Persons across agencies have been trained on gender indicators.” The Azerbaijan VNR stated, “one of the main distinctive features of the Third Voluntary National Review presented on behalf of the Government of Azerbaijan is that it coincides with the signing and implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Azerbaijan (2021-2025) between the United Nations and the Government of Azerbaijan. The framework guided by the principles of “Leaving No One Behind” and “Human Rights Based Approach.” An illustration of the findings related to the leave no one behind principle is presented in Graph 7.

Graph 7: Leave no one behind in the VNRs

Are there good practice examples of achieving the SDGs and SDG targets which other countries would find useful?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>79%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have perspectives from marginalized voices (LNOB) been included in the VNR?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, most VNRs (91 per cent) provided evidence that countries have future plans to review progress on the SDGs on a regular basis.

The India VNR, for example, included a “way forward” for various sections, such as women's empowerment, people with disabilities and the involvement of elderly voices. Similarly, the Nepal VNR mentioned, “the government has prepared the 15th Plan with a long-term vision incorporating the goals and targets of the SDG roadmap taking 2030 as a milestone.” The Syrian Arab Republic VNR noted, “the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and in collaboration with the Central Office of Statistics established the Syria Sustainable Gate to help generate future reports that will facilitate monitoring the progress of the SDGs towards accomplishing the national development plans.”

Most VNRs (74 per cent) included recommendations on how evaluative evidence for gender equality and equity considerations could be strengthened in these annual reviews. For example, the Denmark VNR mentioned, “the government must develop a national action plan to reduce the extent of partner violence, cover all initiatives in Denmark and report on all government obligations … integrate protection against gender-based violence into all Danish-supported humanitarian efforts and ensure lasting solutions for women and girls who have been displaced or forced to flee.” The Qatar VNR noted, “our sustainability framework includes our goals, policy commitments, priority material topics and strategic objectives organized according to five pillars: human, social, economic, environmental and governance. These framework pillars align with the three dimensions of sustainability and the Economic, Social, Environmental and Human Pillars of the Qatar National Vision 2030.” An illustration of the findings related to the looking ahead section is presented in Graph 8.

Graph 8: Looking ahead in the VNRs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>Unclear (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there a plan/Are there plans for a regular/annual review of the SDGs implementation progress at the national level?</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there recommendations on how evaluative evidence for gender equality and equity considerations can be strengthened in these regular reviews annually?</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do these recommendations consider links between monitoring and evaluative evidence and gender responsive evaluations?</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**YES** | **NO** | **UNCLEAR**
Main challenges

Similar to the VNR reviews for 2018 and 2019, the 2020 and 2021 VNRs suggested two primary challenges in monitoring the progress of the SDGs. First is the infrequent use of country-led evaluation to inform planning and managing implementation of the SDGs. Second is the unavailability of sex-disaggregated data to provide nuanced information on SDG progress. Furthermore, all countries reported the COVID-19 crisis as a challenge that had affected progress on SDG indicators over the past two years.

Country-led evaluations

Although the VNRs frequently used the word “evaluation”, most of this use did not reflect gender-responsive country-led evaluations that could contribute to more robust management of the SDGs and preparation of VNRs. In most cases, the VNRs’ use of evaluation referred to other assessments, which do not fall under the formal definition of evaluation. Countries mentioned they were developing monitoring and evaluation systems and practices and building capacity in evaluation expertise, which indicates positive progress from previous years that might facilitate more use of evaluation in the coming years.

Access to sex-disaggregated data

While all countries reported sex-disaggregated data primarily for SDG 5, a few countries also provided sex-disaggregated statistics for other SDGs, mostly SDG 4 and SDG 10. Although countries did mention that they were actively developing national statistical systems and capacities to integrate more sex-disaggregated data across all 17 SDGs, the availability of disaggregated and gender-sensitive data for all 17 SDGs was identified as a challenge facing their implementation.

To develop a solid and well-established monitoring and evaluation system for the SDGs, all policymakers and stakeholders involved need access to detailed data across multiple dimensions to make sure they leave no one behind. Therefore, taking practical methods to establish an equity-focused and gender-responsive approach to evaluation would better facilitate transformative change within their societies.

Adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

All countries included a response plan which proposed recovery interventions to address the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in areas such as education, employment and for small businesses. In addition, countries reported allocating general budget amounts to recovery interventions for the COVID-19 crisis. Malaysia, for example, described that as part of its recovery plan for sustainable development, the government introduced assistance for households through economic stimulus packages and cash transfers to counter the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Qatar’s humanitarian initiative raised millions of dollars to provide COVID-19 vaccines for the most vulnerable groups in cooperation with Qatar Red Crescent and the World Health Organization to improve access to tools to combat the Coronavirus in countries most in need.
Conclusions

Based on the findings of the 2020 and 2021 VNR reviews, this analysis highlights the following conclusions:

- Strong national, high-level governance bodies exist in counties to monitor SDG implementation and preparation of the VNRs.

- There is a positive change from 2018/2019 to 2020/2021 in using evaluation, and evaluative evidence exists in the VNRs in some cases; however, it is still not used as a standard practice to inform progress on the SDGs.

- Country-led evaluations were rarely used in the VNRs.

- Increased attention has been given to providing gender-responsive evaluative evidence, i.e. statistics through national research studies.

- Increased attention has been given to establishing national plans, policies, frameworks and regulations addressing gender equality.

- Access to disaggregated data by sex and other variables such as age and disability to monitor the SDGs continues to be challenging. Gender, education and health targets are often the only data disaggregated by sex.

- The engagement of women machineries in preparing VNRs was generally unclear; however, there seems to be a general improvement in this area from previous years.

- The engagement of Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation is still a major challenge – these organizations were almost absent in preparing the VNRs and supervising implementation of the SDGs.
Recommendations

Based on this review of the 2020 and 2021 VNRs, the following recommendations are proposed for a more robust demonstration of the use of equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluative evidence in implementing the SDGs and preparing VNRs.

1. Emphasize the importance of involving Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation in preparing VNR reports to provide the necessary resources and expertise to promote equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation evidence in the VNRs, and to support national evaluation capacity.

2. Continue to promote and provide access to resources and expertise to build evaluation capacity, especially in country-led evaluations, and share experiences among countries to enable the use of more evaluative evidence in the VNRs.

3. Include a list in the VNR of all stakeholders involved in the consultation process with a clear description of their role, with particular attention to women’s machineries and human rights organizations as part of integrating equity-focused and gender-responsive commitments to implementation and follow-up of the SDGs.

4. Improve the integration of an equity-focused and gender-responsive lens in monitoring and evaluation frameworks and systems to provide better evidence for learning and decision-making while ensuring that no one is left behind.

5. Continue to promote and provide resources and expertise from the evaluation community on using gender-responsive evaluative evidence, with particular attention to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

6. Provide guidance and/or support to countries to upgrade their national statistics to provide sex-disaggregated data and other levels of data classification as needed to manage implementation of the SDGs.