

Moscow Urban Forum Online Conference
City for All. Wellbeing, Health, Sustainability

MUF UN-Habitat Joint Programme
Strengthening the Localization of the SDGs in Cities: Voluntary Local Reviews.

High-Level Round Table
Voluntary Local Review
Next Steps for a Sustainable Urban Future
December 10, 12.30 – 13.30, Moscow time

[Link to registration](#)

Voluntary Local Reviews during COVID-19 times

COVID-19 highlighted the critical role cities and local governments play as front-line responders in crisis response, recovery and rebuilding. They are central in ensuring adequate delivery of public services, economic development, infrastructure investments as well as in raising awareness of their communities.

As such, cities and local and regional governments are also key actors in advancing the implementation of the SDGs, especially in ensuring that recovery strategies – national and local – are translated into sustainable development actions.

In this sense, responding effectively to the COVID-19 outbreak and working towards the realization of the SDGs is not an either-or choice. They are two sides of the same coin. On one hand, the SDGs offer a unique framework to guide the sustainable recovery process; on the other hand, if cities are able to address critical concerns at the heart of the pandemic, they will be able to advance towards the achievement of several SDG targets in close coordination with national governments.

To enhance the scope of the recovery as well as cities capacities to implement the SDGs, accessible, relevant and ready-to-use data is needed. This to facilitate monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the long-term and short-term impact of recovery plans at all levels, and to provide evidence for the formulation of sustainable strategies and policies. Voluntary Local Reviews are a unique tool to allow city managers and communities to do both.

Some local governments have already started integrating the COVID-19 dimensions in their VLRs and development strategies.

Voluntary Local Reviews have been emerging in the past few years as a powerful tool available to cities to evaluate their SDG related progresses. But their potential goes far beyond that. Indeed, VLRs can:

- Enhance political ownership and engagement on the SDGs and sustainable territorial development;
- Facilitate civic engagement and citizens inclusion in decision-making;
- Support mainstreaming of the SDGs into local plans and strategies;
- Guide public investments;
- Facilitate connection and peer-learning with other cities and regions;
- Facilitate multi-level coordination.

Leading global megacities are moving towards management based on the SDGs which contributes to improving residents' quality of life and maintaining citizens' wellbeing in the long-term perspectives. The increasing interest towards VLRs has been accompanied by a growing VLR movement at global level. The Voluntary Local Review Declaration proposed by New York city was signed during the 2019 United Nations General Assembly. At the moment, 38 cities have signed on to the Declaration and many of them have achieved significant results in terms of the SDGs progresses in various areas of urban life. Global megacities such as New York, Barcelona, Helsinki, Rio de Janeiro are on the lead of the VLR process, proving good practices and inspiring other cities to follow their examples and to make next steps for a sustainable urban future.

The VLR global movement supported by international institutions such as UNESCAP, UNDESA and UN-Habitat and through the production of knowledge material and guidance such as the [Volume 1 of the Guidelines for VLRs published by UCLG and UN-Habitat](#) during the 2020 HLPF.

Structure and agenda

The event intends to be an opportunity to present and discuss some of the most innovative and interesting experiences on developing VLRs worldwide. Specific attention is dedicated to the COVID-19 dimension of VLRs and how the latter can be a tool to support a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery.

Moderated by UN-Habitat, the session will last 60 minutes.

Speakers will center their presentation around the following guiding questions:

- Which have been the added value as well as the main challenges in developing a VLR?
- How does the preparation of the VLR help mainstreaming the SDGs into local planning and management?
- How can the VLR be an instrument to support the COVID-19 recovery process?

Moderator:

Ms. Shipra Narang Suri, Director of Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat

Speakers:

Ms. Celeste Connors, Director of Hawaii Green Growth, USA

Ms. Sanna-Mari Jäntti, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Helsinki, Finland

Mr. Miquel Rodriguez Planas, Commissioner for 2030 Agenda, Barcelona, Spain

Mr. Daniel Gleidson Mancebo de Araújo, Head of the Planning Office of the Casa Civil, Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Mr. Luis Herrera-Favela, Lead Specialist, City Prosperity Initiative, UN-Habitat

Ms. Zinaida Neyarokhina, Mayor of Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation (tbc)

Resources

VLR Series: UCLG & UN-Habitat alliance for VLRs

Since 2014, UN-Habitat and UCLG have built a unique alliance to support to local and regional governments worldwide to localize the SDGs.

In 2020, UCLG and UN-Habitat have decided to further join forces and launch a global process on VLRs: the VLR Series. The VLR Series aims at providing LRGs with cutting-edge knowledge and practical guidance on VLRs, while offering learning opportunities for exchange and mutual learning.

The Volume 1 of the UCLG-UN-Habitat Guidelines for VLRs was launched at HLPF 2020 and presents an analysis of the variety of VLRs, with the aim to provide LRGs with an overview of the existing approaches towards the VLR tool though a comprehensive approach considering the key elements laying the foundation of the VLR process.

The Volume 2 will be centered on the multilevel dimension of SDG reporting, exploring ways in which local and national institutions are collaborating and providing insights how to improve the connection between VLRs and VNRs. The Vol.2 is the conceptual framework laying the foundations of the Madrid EGM on VLRs.

More spin-off documents are also currently being developed on specific dimensions of the VLR exercise (COVID-19; gender; megacities).

Click [here](#) to read the Vol.1 of the Guidelines for VLRs here.

Other Resources:

- [UNDESA: Global Guiding Elements for Voluntary Local Reviews](#)
- [UNESCAP: Asia-Pacific Regional Guideline on Voluntary Local Reviews](#)
- [IGES: Shimokawa Method for Voluntary Local Reviews](#)
- [UCLG & Partners: SDGs Learning Module 3: Reporting to national & local reviews](#)
- [Brookings: Cities Taking the Lead on the Sustainable Development Goals - a Voluntary Local Review Handbook for Cities](#)
- [European Commission Joint Research Centre: European Handbook for VLRs](#)
- [Cabot Institute for the Environment/ Bristol: VLR Handbook](#)