

Advancing North Macedonia's VNR process

2020 VNR Stakeholder Workshop
29-31 Jan 2020, Mavrovo, North Macedonia

Background

The Republic of North Macedonia is a land-locked country in Southeast Europe. In 1991, it declared independence from the former state of Yugoslavia. The majority of its approximately 2 million inhabitants are of Slavic descent and adhere to the Eastern Orthodox tradition of Christianity. Albanians constitute, by far, the largest ethnic minority (25%), followed by Turks, Serbs, Vlachs and Roma. Since 2005, North Macedonia is an EU candidate country.

In July 2020, North Macedonia will present the results of its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York. In mid-2019, the North Macedonian government began its VNR preparation, supported by the UN country team, GIZ and other international donors. To support this process, Partners for Review (P4R) and the GIZ SDG 16 focal person were asked to co-organize a stakeholder workshop together with the North Macedonian government and the local GIZ office.

Partners for Review (P4R) is a transnational network, initiated by the German Government and implemented by GIZ. P4R facilitates multi-stakeholder dialogue and peer learning on challenges, good practices and lessons learnt concerning national reviews of progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It brings together representatives of governments, civil society, academia and the private sector, as well as other national and international stakeholders who are involved in national, regional and global follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

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The workshop set out to i) review the institutional mechanisms in place to ensure effective inter-agency coordination as well as meaningful participation of other stakeholders, ii) finalize the list of national SDG indicators for the Statistical Annex of the VNR, and iii) discuss the first draft of the key messages of the VNR report.

The workshop included more than 40 participants from government, civil society, the private sector, academia, youth, and the UN. In addition, three



representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia participated and shared the experiences from their first VNR conducted in previous years.

The results of various activities contributed to the workshop, including a Rapid Integrated Assessment supported by UNDP, work on the alignment of national SDG indicators with EU and global SDG indicators, and a survey among civil society organizations inviting their input for the VNR report.

Key results

The workshop provided the opportunity for the North Macedonian government to deepen the relationship with key stakeholders from civil society, the private sector and academia and to learn about the contributions that these are already making to achieve the SDGs. Stakeholders offered to provide the non-official SDG data they collect and good implementation examples for possible inclusion in the VNR report. The interactions during the workshop paved the way for further collaboration and a more institutionalized dialogue during follow-up after the VNR.

Based on a proposal by the State Statistical Office (SSO), participants discussed the final selection of national SDG indicators to be included in the Statistical Annex of the VNR. Prior to the workshop, the SSO had reviewed the data availability for the 100 EU and 232 global SDG indicators and their national relevance.

Participants reviewed the first draft of the key messages of the VNR report and agreed on the way forward. Among the points of discussion were how to strike a balance between being concise and yet not superficial and how to write in a way that is equally addressing the national and international readership.

Different stakeholders emphasized that while the VNR was an important milestone in the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda, its litmus test would be the decisive and sustained follow-up action that all of them would or would not take after the VNR. In addition, participants repeatedly stressed the need to create synergies between the 2030 Agenda and the EU Accession process in a way that is meaningful for the citizens of North Macedonia.

During the two days, the discussions were enriched by contributions from the Albanian, Bosnian, and Serbian representatives, who shared their

experiences with national coordination, stakeholder engagement and follow-up. Their participation was not only beneficial for North Macedonia, but also made a regional peer exchange concerning the 2030 Agenda possible. Presentations by P4R/GIZ on the purpose of the VNR, its key elements and experiences from other countries further enriched the discussions and helped provide all stakeholders, including those who were so far less involved in the process, with a better understanding of the requirements and opportunities of a VNR.

Lessons learned

The depth and quality of the interactions between government and stakeholder representatives during the two-day deliberations demonstrated the benefit of a whole-of-society approach for achieving the SDGs. Each stakeholder brings not only a different perspective to the table, but also a wide range of skills, experiences and networks. By engaging multiple stakeholders, the VNR can drive forward the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.



Both the global perspective provided by P4R/GIZ as well as the national experiences shared by P4R network members can inspire and reinforce national efforts. They can help broaden the understanding and vision of participants about the VNR as engine for change and the concrete possibilities to work towards the transformation of society as envisioned by the 2030 Agenda.