

# Introduction to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development



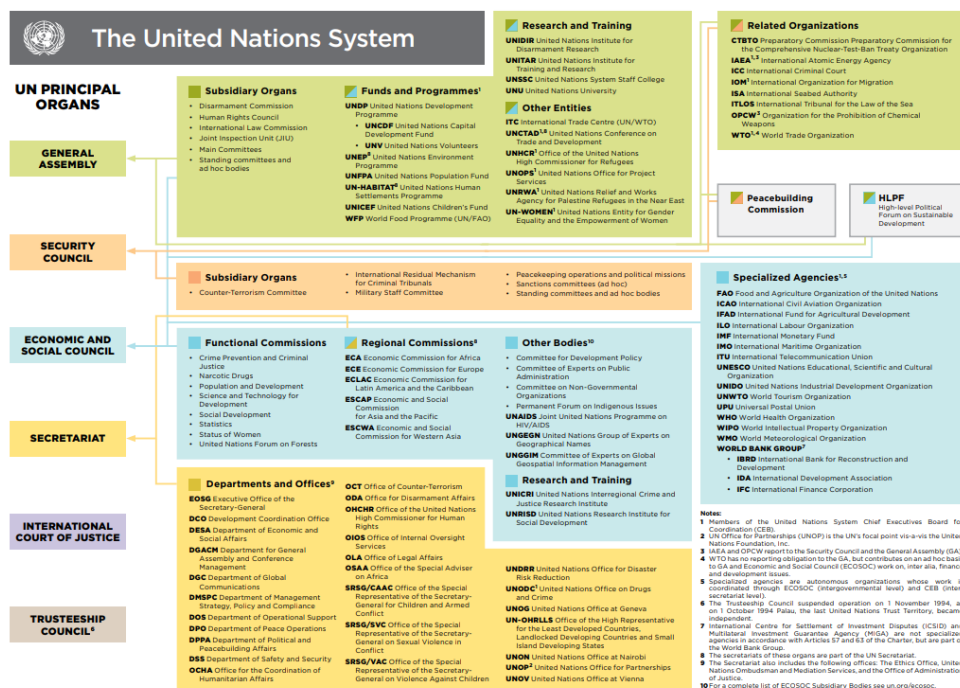
# Introduction to the HLPF

## What is the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development?

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the main United Nations platform on sustainable development. It has a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level. The HLPF provides for the full and effective participation of all Member States of the United Nations, Specialized Agencies of the United Nations, as well as civil society through the Major Groups and other Stakeholders' Coordination Mechanism. The Office for Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs serves as the Secretariat of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) acts as the Secretariat for the SDGs.

The HLPF facilitates the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned and provides political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up. It promotes system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies. It ensures that the 2030 Agenda remains relevant and ambitious and focuses on the assessment of progress, achievements and challenges faced by developed and developing countries as well as new and emerging issues. Effective linkages are made with the follow-up and review arrangements of all relevant United Nations conferences and processes, including Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States and Landlocked Developing Countries.

The HLPF meets annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council for eight days in July, which includes a three-day ministerial segment. It also meets every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly for two days in September. The following infographic demonstrates where the HLPF is positioned in the UN System:



The objectives of the HLPF were initially outlined in General Assembly resolution 66/288 and subsequently in the 'Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development' as part of resolution 67/290:

- a. provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development;
- b. enhance integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels;
- c. provide a dynamic platform for regular dialogue and for stocktaking and agenda-setting to advance sustainable development;
- d. have a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges;
- e. follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments contained in Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and The Future We Want and, as appropriate, relevant outcomes of other United Nations summits and conferences, including the outcome of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries as well as their respective means of implementation;
- f. encourage high-level system-wide participation of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and invite to participate, as appropriate, other relevant multilateral financial and trade institutions and treaty bodies, within their respective mandates and in accordance with United Nations rules and provisions;
- g. improve cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system on sustainable development programmes and policies;
- h. promote transparency and implementation by further enhancing the consultative role and participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders at the international level in order to better make use of their expertise, while retaining the intergovernmental nature of discussions;
- i. promote the sharing of best practices and experiences relating to the implementation of sustainable development and, on a voluntary basis, facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned;
- j. strengthen the science-policy interface through review of documentation, bringing together dispersed information and assessments, including in the form of a global sustainable development report, building on existing assessments;
- k. enhance evidence-based decision-making at all levels and contribute to strengthening ongoing capacity-building for data collection and analysis in developing countries; and
- l. promote system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies.

A central feature of the HLPF are the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) that it receives from Member States on their implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Member States are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven. The VNRs are regularly undertaken by both developed and developing countries. They provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders. Other central features to the HLPF include the fact that it hosts annual thematic reviews of the SDGs including cross-cutting issues. The HLPF also adopts an intergovernmental ministerial or political declaration which has been negotiated by each of the Member States.

## What is the history of the HLPF?

### United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 67/757

The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1992 to ensure effective follow-up of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit. This was the first UN body on sustainable development, and it played an important role in keeping sustainable development high on the international agenda. From its inception, the Commission on Sustainable Development was highly participatory in structure and outlook, by engaging in its formal proceedings a wide range of official stakeholders and partners through innovative formulae. The 2013 Report of the Secretary-General on 'Lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development' identified that a high-level political forum was required to be able to review implementation of sustainable development and to respond with sufficient flexibility to new and emerging issues. UNGA Resolution 67/203 recommended that the Commission on Sustainable Development hold its last session in 2013. The high-level political forum would soon replace the Commission on Sustainable Development.

### UNGA Resolution 66/288

The establishment of the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was mandated in 2012 by the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio 20), titled 'The future we want'. The outcome document was endorsed by and annexed in UNGA Resolution 66/288. Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives met at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Rio 20) with the full participation of civil society, in order to renew commitment to sustainable development and to ensure the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations. The decision was made to establish a universal, intergovernmental, high-level political forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development to follow up on the implementation of sustainable development. An intergovernmental negotiation process under the General Assembly was launched to define the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

### UNGA Resolution 67/290

Resolution 67/290 was adopted in 2013 and it outlined the 'Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development'. The Resolution guides the HLPF:

- to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development,
- to follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments,
- to enhance the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels; and
- to have a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges

The Resolution outlines that format of the meetings of the forum will differ under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and under the auspices of the General Assembly (UNGA) as outlined below. One factor remains the same between both meetings in that they both call for the full and effective participation of all Member States of the United Nations.

## HLPF

- Under the auspices of ECOSOC
- Involving ministerial & other high-level participants
- Convened every year
- 8-day meeting
- Chaired by the President of ECOSOC
- Shall result in a negotiated ministerial declaration

## SDG Summit

- Under the auspices of UNGA
- Convened at Heads of State level
- Convened every 4 years
- 2-day meeting
- Chaired by the President of the Assembly
- Shall result in a concise negotiated political declaration

The initial guidance for voluntary national reviews was outlined in Resolution 67/290. It was decided that the HLPF shall conduct regular reviews, starting in 2016, on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives, including those related to the means of implementation, within the context of the post-2015 development agenda. Furthermore, the meetings of the forum should devote adequate time to the discussion of the sustainable development challenges facing developing countries, including the most vulnerable countries, in particular the least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries, African countries, as well as the challenges facing middle-income countries.

Resolution 67/290 also highlights the necessity to further enhance the consultative role and participation of the major groups and other relevant stakeholders at the international level in order to make better use of their expertise. Further information on the mandate of the major groups and other relevant stakeholders will be discussed in a separate section of this document.

## UNGA Resolution 70/1

In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the outcome document titled ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ following the UN summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda. This outcome document, also known as the ‘2030 Agenda’, is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. The UN General Assembly recognises in the 2030 Agenda that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. As part of the 2030 Agenda, the UN General Assembly announced the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 169 targets to come into effect on 1 January 2016.



## **Sustainable Development Goals**

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts\*

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

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\* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

The SDGs and targets sought to build upon the Millennium Development Goals and to stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet. Agenda 2030 also identified the 5 P's of sustainable development:

- People** We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.
- Planet** We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.
- Prosperity** We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.
- Peace** We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.
- Partnership** We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

The UN General Assembly committed to engaging in systemic follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, citing that a robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review framework will make a vital contribution to implementation and will help countries to maximize and track progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda to ensure that no one is left behind. The 2030 Agenda outlined principles to guide the follow-up and review processes at all levels. It also identified that the SDGs and targets would be followed-up and reviewed using a set of global indicators and that a global indicator framework would be developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.

### **UNGA Resolution 70/299**

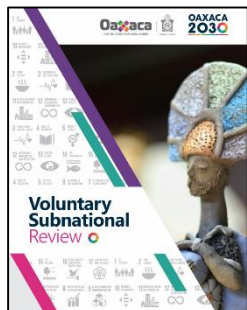
Resolution 70/299, 'Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level' was adopted in 2016. The UN General Assembly decided that for the purposes of the thematic reviews of progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the HLPF, the sequence of themes for each four-year cycle of the forum shall reflect the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Sustainable Development Goals and the three dimensions of sustainable development including cross-cutting issues as well as new and emerging issues, and will serve as the framework for reviewing all 17 Goals.

For the first cycle of the HLPF, this Resolution decided the theme for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 as well as which SDGs would be reviewed in depth each year. It also determined that SDG 17 - *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development* - would be reviewed annually.

## How does the HLPF facilitate follow-up and review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

### Local level

Governments may consult with local-level stakeholders when conducting their voluntary national review process, however some cities and regions have started creating their own Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) to follow-up and review implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals at a sub-national level. These VLRs allow local governments to showcase achievements, to highlight challenges, to share experiences and to foster the localization of the SDGs. VLRs are modeled on the format of the VNRs, addressing each of the 17 SDGs.



The Institute for Global Environmental Strategies has an online platform which collates VLRs from across the world. New York City, as one example, was one of the cities that submitted a VLR in 2018. Oaxaca City has submitted a VLR for 2020.

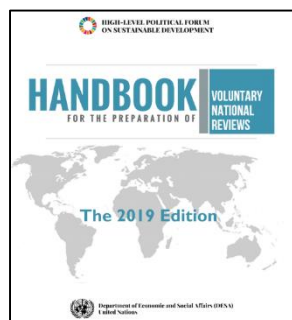
### National Level

As previously discussed, Member States are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national level and sub-national levels, known as the voluntary national reviews (VNRs). VNRs allow the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

VNRs are country-led and country-driven. They should be prepared by government in a consultative, inclusive and participatory process involving all major groups and other relevant stakeholders. This includes all sectors and levels of government, members of parliament, civil society, private sector, and other institutions. At the national level, Member States decide on which institution will lead the VNR. The specific modalities for engagement are likely to vary from country to country and are to be decided by the national governments. Once a country has decided to carry out a review, the decision is communicated to the President of ECOSOC by means of a letter from the Permanent Representative or another official of the country concerned.



DESA has prepared a comprehensive and practical Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, which provides information on all the steps that a country may take when preparing a voluntary national review. DESA has compiled synthesis reports of the 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 VNRs, which provide a snapshot of the status and trends of national implementation. While the synthesis reports provide a resource of good practices and lessons learned, countries are encouraged to consult the VNR reports prepared by their peers as a benchmark for their own preparation. These are available at DESA's VNR Database.



The voluntary common reporting guidelines seek to support and guide countries in conducting VNRs. They were initially prepared by the Secretary-General in December 2015 and have been updated in December 2017 to reflect lessons learned during the preceding two years. They provide a framework for certain common elements within reports while allowing for flexibility, so countries can adapt to their own circumstances.

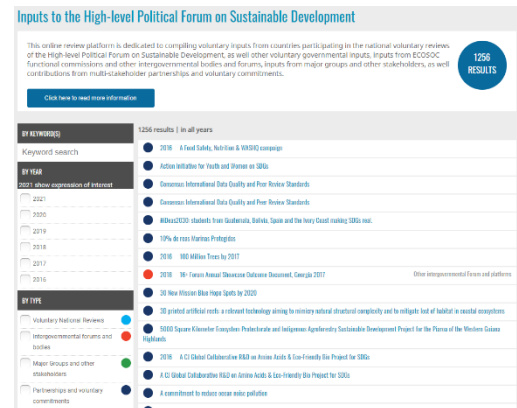


Countries are strongly encouraged to report on all 17 SDGs or on the ones that are their priorities. It is not the expectation that the VNRs should focus on the SDGs being reviewed by the HLPF that year. VNR countries are also encouraged to provide analysis based on statistics and VNR indicators. It is up to individual countries to determine how they wish to include statistics and indicators in their VNRs. Countries may want to illustrate the main elements of the reviews with figures showing trends, as appropriate. Countries may include an annex with data, using the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and adding priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels where appropriate.

During the ministerial segment of the HLPF in July, Member States will utilize either a panel or individual format to present their VNR reports. In the panel format, between two and four countries per session each make a presentation. Once all countries in the session have presented, questions are posed to the presenting countries. In the individual format, a single country presents, followed by questions from countries in the audience, as well as from the Major Groups and other Stakeholders.

The implementation of the SDGs should build on the VNR presentation at the HLPF. After the presentation, lessons learned and outcomes of the VNR process can be fed into national-level follow-up and review processes. Participating countries are encouraged to continue engaging in the peer-learning exercises within relevant VNR networks, fostering an environment of mutual support, and to apply lessons learned to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at their national and local levels. It is anticipated that a synthesis report will be prepared by the Secretariat after the 2019 HLPF, highlighting good practices and lessons learned from the VNR countries as was done in previous years.

The Voluntary National Review database, noted above, is as an online platform which is dedicated to compiling reports from countries participating in the HLPF. In addition to the VNR database, there is an online platform dedicated to all inputs to the HLPF including VNRs, as well other voluntary governmental inputs, inputs from ECOSOC functional commissions, intergovernmental bodies and forums, and inputs from Major Groups and other Stakeholders. These inputs are searchable by year, by type and by suggested keywords.



Each year, global 2-3 VNR workshops are held so that delegations can exchange their experiences on the VNR process. The workshops act as peer-learning events which include plenary sessions and discussions in working groups. Furthermore, a 'Groups of Friends on the VNRs' was established by the President of ECOSOC to review reports on the VNRs, prepare the HLPF's interactions on the VNRs and support peer learning. The group is chaired by the Deputy-Permanent Representative of Mexico.

The 2020 HLPF will be held from Tuesday, 7 July to Thursday, 16 July, including the three-day ministerial meeting from Tuesday, 14 July to Thursday, 16 July. 50 countries are due to present their Voluntary National Review in 2020. 23 countries will be presenting for the first time with the remainder to present for the second or third time.

## Regional Level

The Regional Commissions of the United Nations were established by resolutions of the Economic and Social Council to promote regional development. There are five regional commissions, namely the:

- [Economic Commission for Africa \(ECA\)](#)
- [Economic Commission for Europe \(ECE\)](#)
- [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean \(ECLAC\)](#)
- [Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific \(ESCAP\)](#)
- [Economic Commission for Western Asia \(ESCWA\)](#)

As part of Agenda 2030, the UN General Assembly welcomed the cooperation of regional and subregional commissions and organisations in contributing to the global follow-up and review process, including the HLPF. In response to this mandate, each of the Regional Commissions convenes a Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) to follow up and review implementation in their region. These forums have generally been organized in collaboration with partners of the Regional Commissions, including the Office Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

These Regional Forums link national, regional and global discourses on the SDGs and serve as a platform to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They create space to share policy solutions, best practices and challenges in SDG implementation. They also help to identify major regional and subregional trends. High-level panels are convened for in-depth discussions on the theme of the HLPF; implementation of the VNRs; implementation of Agenda 2030; and implementation of regional calls to action. Pre-event workshops, which focus on preparation and capacity development for major groups and other stakeholders as well as regional preparatory workshops for VNR countries, are also held in parallel. The Regional Forums are convened in the spring before the annual HLPF over the course of two to three days.

Key messages and challenges are then communicated to the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC and to the SDG Summit. These official inputs include information on attendance, official sessions, events and policy recommendations. In addition to these inputs, the regional discourse is then reflected in the official programme of the HLPF in July. In 2019, an official session was convened titled *'What are the regions telling us about the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs?'* and a VNR Lab titled *'From presentation to implementation: Regional support to the follow-up on the VNR process'*.

## What are the official inputs of the HLPF?

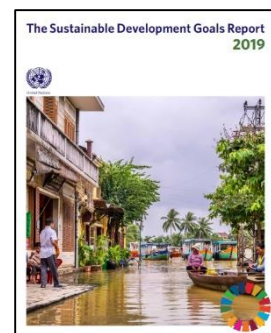
### Global Sustainable Development Report

The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) originated in the Rio +20 outcome when Member States were laying the groundwork for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The negotiators knew that the Agenda would be complex, and unprecedented in ambition, and that the traditional siloed approach to development would not be adequate. They recognised the power of science to understand and navigate relationships among social, environmental and economic development objectives, and so they called for a report to strengthen the science-policy interface. In 2016, Member States decided that the report should be produced once every four years, to inform the quadrennial SDG review deliberations at the General Assembly, and that it should be written by an Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General. They mandated that the Group would consist of 15 experts representing a variety of backgrounds, scientific disciplines and institutions, ensuring geographical and gender balance.



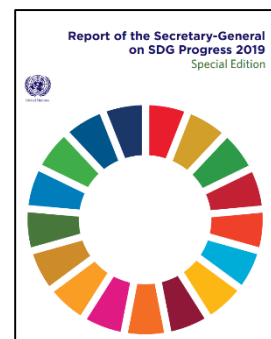
### Sustainable Development Goals Report

The Sustainable Development Goals Report is compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division, a division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The information presented in this report is based on the latest available data on selected indicators in the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals. The global indicator framework was developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and adopted by the General Assembly in 2017. The report uses the latest available data to track global progress of the 17 goals with infographics and presents an in-depth analysis of selected indicators for each goal. It highlights challenges and identifies many areas that need urgent collective attention to realize the 2030 Agenda's far reaching vision. Regional and/or sub-regional analyses are presented to the extent possible.



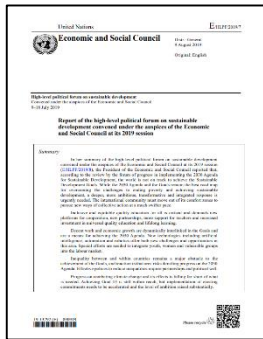
### Report of the Secretary General on SDG Progress

The special edition uses the latest available data to track global progress on the SDGs and to take stock of how far we have come in realizing our commitments. The report addresses the global response to the 2030 Agenda, its dynamism and shortcomings. It points to the gaps and challenges, and efforts that are needed for accelerating its implementation. It highlights cross-cutting actions to advance progress on all the Goals, including those falling behind. The United Nations System Task Team on the HLPF, a team comprised of Secretariat departments and UN system entities, is responsible for preparation of the report. The report of the Secretary-General is released each year to help UN Member States prepare for the HLPF convened under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council.



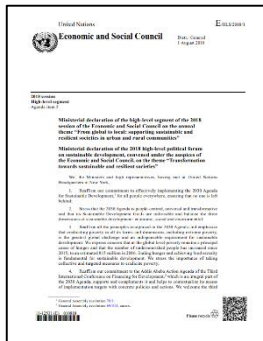
# What are the official outcomes of the HLPF?

## Report of the HLPF convened under the auspices of ECOSOC



The President of the Economic and Social Council summarises the key issues of concern and possible solutions in the summary of this report. The remainder of the report provides logistical information on each official session of the HLPF, such as the details of chair-persons, key-note speakers, resource persons and lead discussants, as well as which Member State representatives participate in the interactive dialogue. The report covers the opening and closing sessions, the thematic reviews, the SDG reviews, the voluntary national reviews and the general debate. The report also gives statistical information on details such as the number of side events and the number of participants. It also provides a table of contents for notes and documentation associated with the HLPF.

## Ministerial Declaration



The HLPF concludes with the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration. It is an outcome document which reflects the collective views of each of the Member States engaged in its negotiation. The Ministerial Document provides a snapshot of where the Member States believe they currently stand with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals and where they think we should be heading. Prior to the HLPF, the President of ECOSOC appoints two co-facilitators, the permanent representatives of two countries to consult with member states with a view to producing the Ministerial Document. A zero draft is circulated among Member States in the weeks leading up to the HLPF and a series of negotiations on the text ensue. Representatives of

Major Groups and other Stakeholder are invited to the informal negotiations to suggest additions and amendments.

## Political Declaration



In 2019 the HLPF was convened under the auspices of the General Assembly in September (SDG Summit) in addition to under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council in July (July HLPF). By way of design, a Ministerial Declaration was not adopted at the conclusion of the July HLPF. Instead, a more concise Political Declaration was adopted at the SDG Summit. The President of ECOSOC appointed the permanent representatives of Bahamas and Sweden to consult with the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives of the Member States with a view to producing a Political Declaration. This was adopted in September at the SDG Summit.

