

# Voluntary Local Reviews

*UN-Habitat global support to advance VLRs and the localization of the SDGs*

## Voluntary Local Reviews at a Glance

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) have become the tool of choice for local and regional governments to monitor and report on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The VLR global community has been growing at an encouraging pace, passing from 37 VLRs in May 2020 to 106 in October 2021 – a 186 percent increase in less than a year and a half.



**VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS  
ARE ACCELERATORS OF THE  
SDG LOCALIZATION**

A total of 87 local and regional governments from 27 countries have joined the VLR movement by producing at least one VLR. 72 percent of VLRs have been developed at city level, 16 percent at regional level, and 13 percent at state level.



**106** VLRs HAVE BEEN  
PUBLISHED SINCE 2016



**87** LOCAL AND REGIONAL  
GOVERNMENTS FROM  
**27** COUNTRIES HAVE PRODUCED  
AT LEAST ONE VLR

Europe and the Americas are the most active regions, having published 76 percent of VLRs between the two – 80 VLRs released in total. Nevertheless, other regions are catching up: Asia-Pacific has published 18 percent of existing VLRs, while many cities in Africa and Arab States have already committed to developing a VLR in 2021-2022.

Concerning the level of income, 56 percent of existing VLRs come from High-Income countries (59 VLRs from 16 countries), 37 percent from Upper-Income Countries (39 VLRs from 7 countries), while 8 percent is developed within Lower Income countries (8 VLRs from 4 countries).

### AFRICA



**7%** (OF EXISTING VLRs)  
7 VLRs  
3 COUNTRIES

### ASIA PACIFIC & OCEANIA



**18%** (OF EXISTING VLRs)  
19 VLRs  
6 COUNTRIES

### EUROPE



**38%** (OF EXISTING VLRs)  
40 VLRs  
10 COUNTRIES

### AMERICAS



**38%** (OF EXISTING VLRs)  
40 VLRs  
8 COUNTRIES

### HIGH INCOME (HI)



**56%** (OF EXISTING VLRs)  
59 VLRs  
16 COUNTRIES

### UPPER MIDDLE INCOME



**37%** (OF EXISTING VLRs)  
39 VLRs  
7 COUNTRIES

### LOWER MIDDLE INCOME



**8%** (OF EXISTING VLRs)  
8 VLRs  
4 COUNTRIES

## UN-Habitat support to Voluntary Local Reviews

UN-Habitat looks at VLRs beyond their monitoring and reporting function and considers them a powerful accelerator of the localization of the SDGs.

VLRs can increase the relevance of local governments as key actors to deliver sustainable development on the global stage. They have contributed to revamping multi-level dialogue and made national governments more aware of localization, mainly through the connection with Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). VLRs can foster de-silong and cooperation across public administration departments and, through participatory processes, bring local communities, minorities and vulnerable groups closer to decision-making. As such, VLRs enhance transparency and inclusion while strengthening the social contract. In addition, VLRs have contributed to enhancing engagement and innovation on data production and management at the local level.

As the UN Agency focal point to work with local and regional governments, UN-Habitat has supported Voluntary Local Reviews through different workstreams and by intervening at different levels - local, national, and global.



**Strategic partnerships.** UN-Habitat has established strategic partnerships with the main UN and international partners working on VLRs and SDG localization, such as the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the UN Regional Economic Commissions. Plus, it has been working with Member States across the globe – such as with Finland, Spain, and Malaysia, in addition to the collaboration with national associations of local and regional government and with its extended network of city partners.



**Technical Cooperation.** Since 2019, UN-Habitat has supported local governments across Latin America, Europe and Asia to develop their VLRs – including Moscow, Florence, Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro, Bhopal and Amman Greater Municipality. This experience was a crucial learning process to create and consolidate a fully-fledged methodology on VLRs that is now being applied to more than 20 new city cooperation schemes worldwide.



**Knowledge Development.** Along with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), UN-Habitat has been working to provide local and regional governments with cutting-edge knowledge and learning opportunities on VLRs and SDG localization. As part of this effort, UN-Habitat published Volume 1 and Volume 2 of the global Guidelines on VLRs, respectively in 2020 and 2021. Together with the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and UCLG-Africa, it has developed the Regional Guidelines for Africa. Forthcoming publication will focus on VLRs and (i) megacities, (ii) gender, and (iii) the experience of the Swedish cities.



**Global Advocacy and Capacity Building.** UN-Habitat advocates and builds capacities on sustainable local development and VLRs by organizing international events and peer learning opportunities. A few highlights of these global efforts include: the Expert Group Meeting *Towards a New Generation of VLRs*, organized with UCLG and Madrid City Council<sup>1</sup>; the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the *VLR-VSR Days* organized during HLPF 2021<sup>2</sup>; and the engagement in the occasion of the Italian Presidency of the G20 where UN-Habitat, along with OECD, led

the work on SDG Localization of the Development Working Group. In addition, UN-Habitat published an online platform on VLRs collecting all existing VLRs and relevant guidelines and resources<sup>3</sup>.

Voluntary Local Reviews are the cornerstone of UN-Habitat's comprehensive approach to SDG localization, anchored on three intertwined pillars on: the Global Urban Monitoring Framework<sup>4</sup>; Voluntary Local Reviews; and SDG Cities Flagship Programme<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/10/report\\_egm\\_vlr\\_vnr.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/10/report_egm_vlr_vnr.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://uclg-unhlocalreporting.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews>

<sup>4</sup> <https://data.unhabitat.org/pages/urban-monitoring-framework>

<sup>5</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/programme/sustainable-development-goals-cities>