

VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW

A BRIDGE BETWEEN
GLOBAL GOALS AND
LOCAL REALITY

EXPERIENCES AND
OPPORTUNITIES OF THE
VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW
PROCESS IN THE BALTIC SEA
REIGON AND THE EASTERN
PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

MAY 2022



Supported by
SI. Swedish
Institute

VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW

- a bridge between Global Goals
and Local Reality

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ISBN

978-91-88331-36-6

Published May 2022

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the interviewees for contributing with their experiences from working with the Voluntary Local Review process and the localization of Sustainable Development Goals. Without your generous sharing of details about your work, the making of this report would not be possible.

Thank you:

Agita Kaupuža - Advisor on EU Issues, Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, Latvia
Anna Bertoft - Special Advisor on Sustainability, the City of Turku, Finland
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Foreword

During the covid-19 pandemic it was called for actions to build back better once our societies returned to a post-covid reality. The time has arrived where we must put those words into practice and ask ourselves: what does building back better mean and what steps can be taken to ensure a more sustainable future?

For us, this means taking the urgency of creating resilient, sustainable and inclusive cities and societies seriously. A more sustainable future is only possible if our cities and municipalities lead the way and are recognized for the important work they are doing to create improved living conditions for their citizens.

The sub-national level, and its rural and urban areas, are the very space where sustainability is put into practice and the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are turned into action. It is widely known, but nevertheless important to remind oneself, that the fast-growing cities of our planet are home to more than half of the world's population and responsible for 70 percent of the energy consumption and the GDP generated, globally. To realize the implementation of the SDGs cities, municipalities and regions worldwide therefore need visionary and brave leadership

To build capacity among sub-national authorities on how to ensure this visionary and brave approach to build back better, this report focuses on the process of reviewing sustainability work on sub-national levels to identify challenges and achievements and support more integrated and holistic approaches to SDG implementation.

This process is called Voluntary Local Review (VLR), and is a city-led process that was first initiated by New York in 2018 to ensure that sub-national perspectives had an opportunity to be heard in the United Nations and influence the global policy dialogue on sustainable development. The VLR process provides tools to track and compare progress: it helps identifying challenges, opportunities and needs going forward, and offers a practical way for taking part in the macroregional and European movement towards sustainable development. VLRs are instruments of political coherence, with the potential to stimulate participatory planning, while also fostering partnerships and investment towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Since 2018, more than 80 Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) have joined the VLR movement. While the process holds no official status in the UN, the process of undertaking reviews is providing multiple benefits to the entities engaging in them and to SDG implementation at large. There is a growing interest among cities worldwide to conduct VLRs, but there is still a general lack of knowledge about the process, its methods and potential benefits.

However, many cities and municipalities have made great advancements in the process of implementing the SDGs. In this report, good examples from the Baltic Sea and Eastern Partnership regions are highlighted to inspire and support other cities that are about to conduct their first VLR.

This report sets out to take stock of, and share, existing experiences of conducting VLRs in the Baltic Sea Region and in the Eastern Partnership countries. We believe that the VLR is a powerful catalyst to build back better as well as ensure sustainable and resilient cities and communities.



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**"THE VLR IS NOT SOLELY A FRAMEWORK,
BUT ALSO A COMMON GROUND WHERE
CITIES CAN SHARE BEST PRACTICES, AND
DISCUSS LESSONS LEARNED."**



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