

Main Messages

Latvia

Latvia's second Voluntary National Review (VNR) evaluates progress, challenges and presents new initiatives to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as reflected in the national framework - Latvia's Sustainable Development Strategy to 2030, new policies and other government commitments. The VNR shares stakeholder insights, best practise, and highlights emerging factors potentially transformative for all of the SDGs.

Over the past three years, Latvia has completed one mid-term planning period, started implementing the National Development Plan for 2021-2027 (NDP2027) and the European Green Deal, addressed the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and its consequences, while increasing cooperation at the global level.

All countries are intricately connected in the web of sustainability, and as 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development points out, **there can be no sustainable development without peace**. Latvia expresses deep concern about the impact of Russia's military aggression, supported by Belarus, against Ukraine and other conflicts on the rules based international order and multilateralism, affected populations and polarization of societies, as well as the ripple effect in food and energy markets and on the most vulnerable across the world. The war on Ukraine is a clear violation of the UN Charter and international law, and accountability for the crimes perpetrated must be ensured.

Latvia is proud of its stable gains in Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17) that contribute to societal resilience, including the threefold increase in financing for bilateral development cooperation between 2021 and 2022, with the overall aim to direct 65% to promote good governance, the rule of law and democratic participation.

Progress is best evaluated at the target level, as improvements *within* each SDG can vary widely. However, generally, data show that results in Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11) and Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) have increased despite the COVID-19 pandemic, supported by improvements in Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9). Gains in Clean and Affordable Energy (SDG 7) have been high, but affordability is a growing concern requiring new solutions for just transition. Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3) shows improvement in all but healthy life years and out of pocket expenditures, and healthcare is becoming more efficient and accessible regionally.

Challenges include a stagnating level of inequality between people and regions in Latvia (SDG 10), and an increase in the poverty risk (SDG 1) for older persons, despite a recent reform of the minimal income level that reduces the depth of poverty.

Regarding SDGs to be reviewed in-depth at the 2022 HLPF: Quality Education (SDG 4) is continuously improving. Although most Gender Equality (SDG 5) indicators are high, increasing wage disparities are disconcerting. Life on Land (SDG 15) is stagnating, but there are inland waters improvements in Life below Water (SDG 14).

Regarding climate, it is important to consistently advance on SDG 13, SDG 7 and SDG 12 to meet 2030 climate commitments and to develop solutions for climate neutrality by 2050 while ensuring that low-income households are not disproportionately affected. This was reiterated in stakeholder input to the VNR. **The transition to an innovative and eco-efficient economy must reduce inequalities, leaving no one behind.**

Latvia is committed to achieving sustainable development even when confronted with crises. Internationally, Latvia has donated vaccines, participated in the COVAX mechanism and provided humanitarian aid. Nationally, Latvia's Parliament added a COVID Addendum to the NDP2027, directing the government to accelerate action in health, education, digitalisation, et.al., reenforcing the principle that we remain true to our sustainability goals, while prioritizing our actions for the vulnerable.

Our VNR shares three **accelerators of change** that recently have emerged in Latvia: sustainable finance, space for inquiry and well-informed dialogue online and offline, and the mission approach to managing urgent and complicated challenges.

Next steps are agreed in the National Development Plan 2021- 2027 that was co-created in an inclusive multi-stakeholder process. Macro indicators are focused on reducing inequality and regional disparities, improving productivity, increasing trust. New sectoral policies cover all SDGs. In the medium term, Latvia will advance sustainability through participative, democratic decision making and in a fiscally responsible manner. Through our actions and behaviour change, we shall defend the rights of future generations. We shall also soon embark on a nation-wide discussion on Latvia 2050 to provide the government a long-term vision for action beyond 2030.