



Summary

Second Global Workshop for 2025 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) Berlin, Germany, 8-9 April 2025



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Opening

The second global workshop for the 2025 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) took place from 8 to 9 April 2025 in Berlin, Germany, in-person with virtual participation. The workshop was organized by United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and hosted by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) and Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Federal Government of Germany.

The workshop brought together government officials responsible for the coordination and preparation of the VNRs with the objective of sharing good practices for developing evidence-based VNRs and SDG reporting. Over 30 representatives of the 2025 VNR countries participated. The workshop focused on peer-to-peer learning and exchange of knowledge and lessons learned in SDG implementation and VNR preparation. It allowed participants to take stock of the status of preparations for the VNR reports and address any remaining challenges and concerns, while also addressing the upcoming steps and timeline for finalizing the VNR reports and providing information and advice for the presentations of the VNR at the HLPF. It featured sessions on stakeholder engagement, data and statistics, means of implementation, and peer-learning and preparations for the VNR presentations at the HLPF.

The workshop was opened with a video message from H.E. Bob Rae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York and President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). On behalf of the host, Mr. Ulrich Nicklas, Head of Division I, BMUV, Germany and Mr. Simon Triebel, Deputy Head of Division G10, BMZ, Germany delivered opening remarks. Mr. Joop Theunissen, Deputy Chief of the Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development (OISC), DESA also delivered opening remarks.

Session 1: Towards a new generation of Voluntary National Reviews

Session 1 was moderated by Mr. Joop Theunissen, OISC, DESA. It opened with a presentation providing a snapshot of the VNRs at 10 years, highlighting progress made from 2016 to 2025. It was noted that by July 2025, a total of 406 VNR reports will have been submitted by 190 countries, averaging two reports per country. The presentation also showcased the distribution of reporting by regional groups and concluded with an overview of the 2025 VNR presenters, grouped by region and by frequency of reporting at the HLPF. The data revealed that 62 per cent of countries will be presenting their VNR for the third time, 27 per cent for the second time, and 11 per cent for the fourth time.

The opening presentation was followed by three presentations on preparing new generation of VNRs. The first speaker emphasized the importance of integrating SDG reporting in the current era of VNRs, stressing that Voluntary National Reviews are not endpoints but tools to accelerate SDG progress

through an integrated, science-based approach. She highlighted the need to address interlinkages across environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainable development, referencing the Global Sustainable Development Reports (GSDR) prepared by an independent group of 15 scientists. She also cited the theme of the upcoming HLPF — "Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind"—and the "World in 2050" initiative led by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).

She recalled that the 2019 and 2023 Global Sustainable Development Reports (GSDRs) identified six key transformation areas, showing that synergies often outweigh trade-offs, and that one action can advance multiple SDG targets. Tools such as the SDG Synergies tool, developed by the Stockholm Environment Institute, were noted as helpful in navigating these interlinkages. She also highlighted one country's example, where off-track indicators were mapped in detail. The country had subsequently prepared a national indicator report and had created transformation teams within government structures. However, she acknowledged that integrated SDG reporting can be time-consuming and requires strong political commitment and sufficient institutional capacity.

The second presenter shared their country's experience in strengthening the VNR process through peer learning and insights gained from previous workshop exchanges. A national indicator framework comprising of 215 indicators was developed, aligned with the National Development Programme. The country reported progress in 10 out of the 17 SDGs, while 7 showed limited or partial advancement. Key lessons learned included the value of stakeholder engagement, with particular emphasis on gender equality, education, and green technology innovation. Major challenges included data and knowledge gaps, most notably the limited availability of disaggregated data, a gap newly identified since the first workshop. To foster innovation and learning, the country also launched a competition to showcase good practices. Looking ahead, the presenter emphasized the need for greater synchronization, enhanced cross-regional cooperation, and stronger monitoring through the national system.

The third presenter shared their preparations for the upcoming fourth VNR, highlighting a "Whole-of-Nation Plus" approach that engages government, civil society, youth, and other non-governmental actors. The country will focus on "Driving Transformation for the 2030 Agenda through SDG localization, collaborative partnerships, and innovative statistical data systems." Their reporting process follows an "ABCD" framework—Accessing national context, Building capacities, Consulting stakeholders, and Distilling data for integration. They also emphasized the ongoing use of the Community-Based Monitoring System and SDG Watch, managed by the National Statistics Office, as key tools for data tracking and localization.

During the interactive Q&A session, participants engaged with the presenters to learn more about their experiences in using and implementing the tools highlighted in their country presentations. Notably, several interventions from other countries echoed similar challenges, underscoring the need for partnerships to address data and monitoring gaps, and to implement local-level transformation—whether at the city or village level—through an integrated, country-owned approach.

It was also emphasized that this process is a work in progress, and that valuable lessons are being learned along the journey through the adoption of best practices.

Session 2: Expectations of the VNRs at the HLPF

This session provided participants with guidance and best practices for finalizing their reviews and preparations for the HLPF. The discussions highlighted how countries were building on previous VNRs to craft their 2025 reports and develop forward-looking recommendations. The session also covered structuring the VNR report and preparing key messages. Participants shared experiences, lessons learned, and best practices.

Ms. Maame Agyeben, OISC, DESA presented expectations and considerations for the VNRs at the HLPF, including a checklist for VNR presentations. Countries were reminded of deadlines, such as the submission of Main Messages by 24 April, and the need for internal clearances before submitting the final VNR report to DESA. Submissions must be sent via a Note Verbale from their Permanent Mission to the UN in New York.

VNRs will be presented on 18, 21, 22, and 23 July, with reports due one month before the HLPF in New York. A questionnaire will be provided for details about the VNR presentation. The presentation concluded with examples of Main Messages from previous years.

A civil society representative urged member states to "Make it matter at home, make it true" by addressing challenges and critical perspectives to support peer learning. She emphasized the need to "Involve your critics and trust them" by including crucial voices from CSOs and community representatives in the VNR process, inviting them to speak at events, and organizing side events. She advised member states to "not throw away the SDG community we have now" by sharing gaps and challenges in VNRs for the HLPF to discuss and review.

A country representative shared an overview of their country's VNR preparation which will reinforce their commitment to the 2030 Agenda, guided by the national development strategy (2024–2028). The country will report on all SDGs, highlighting the post-COVID rebound, especially in tourism and fisheries; economic resilience; and data for evidence-based policy development. The report will also emphasize governance, transparency, accountability, economic diversification, and the Blue Economy for long-term resilience. The VNR is being prepared according to global guidelines, with a focus on tracking progress and informed by comprehensive consultations. The draft report is currently under review by various partners. Stakeholder consultations, supported by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, had generated honest and refreshing conversations.

A second country representative indicated that the VNR process is an opportunity to renew and reflect on national partnerships. The 2025 report will build on previous VNRs and will be deeply rooted in the three pillars of sustainable development. The 2025 VNR is state led, aligned with national goals, and coordinated with inputs from a broad range of stakeholders. Efforts are being made to involve more youth and CSOs, using real-time polls to capture priorities, challenges, and new data sources through a model for inclusive national engagement and insight generation.

A third country representative shared an overview of the VNR process, highlighting four themes: inclusive post-pandemic recovery, sustainable territorial development, responsibility and transparency, and alignment with the Pact for the Future. The VNR will be data-driven and will focus on priority SDGs. The preparatory process includes an inclusive methodology with broad, multistakeholder consultations and will feature promising private sector initiatives and best practices on several SDGs. Consultations, interviews, and questionnaires have been shared with nongovernmental organizations.

Session 3: Good practices in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Moderated by Ms. Naiara Costa, Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG), DESA, session 3 highlighted diverse good practices and lessons learned from the implementation and localization of the 2030 Agenda across national and local contexts. A local government representative shared the experience of a city's integrated approach to localizing the SDGs, including the development of a local sustainability strategy, climate neutrality targets for 2035, participatory initiatives and the use of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) to enhance international cooperation and advocacy. He shared the city's efforts including dynamic sustainability data dashboards, community campaigns, and integration of sustainability indicators into municipal budgeting.

A youth representative provided an overview of youth involvement in the country's VNR process, underscoring youth participation as essential in achieving the 2030 Agenda. It was noted that the VNR offered a structured space for young people's voices, signaling the country's commitment to civil society inclusion. The process highlighted progress since the 2021 VNR, including the establishment of youth coordination structures in climate and education. It was also noted that the consultation process was extensive, involving youth councils, environmental groups, and national and international partners. She also highlighted some challenges, such as short VNR timelines and lack of diversity in youth participation. The representative noted that youth engagement should be structurally inclusive, intersectional, and continuous. Furthermore, she stated that youth are not just beneficiaries but co-creators of sustainable futures.

Ms. Lisa Ainbinder, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG), DESA delivered a presentation on the role of institutions for SDG delivery. The presentation emphasized the importance of institutional collaboration in advancing the 2030 Agenda, guided by the principles of SDG 16—effectiveness, transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness. The VNR process provides an opportunity to review and strengthen how institutions work together. Changes to institutional arrangements over time reflect evolving needs and priorities, and countries can elaborate in their VNR on why such changes were made. The VNR serves as a platform to identify gaps and catalyze improvements across the institutional system. Examples of institutional reform to better align with SDG principles—such as transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness—were also shared.

A country representative presented the country's "whole-of-government and whole-of-society" approach. He detailed the country's institutional structure supporting SDG implementation at national and subnational levels, including the state governments, and local bodies. India's SDG Index was highlighted as a key tool for tracking progress, alongside extensive efforts in SDG localization, particularly in rural areas through Panchayati Raj institutions.

A country representative described the structure and efforts of the country's National Committee for Sustainable Development, established in 2016 and chaired by the Prime Minister or Deputy Prime Minister. The mechanism includes nearly 40 members from government, academia, and the private sector, with evolving composition. Under the National Committee for Sustainable Development there is a working group led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for VNR drafting through a dedicated working group, supported by SDG focal points and the National Statistical Office. The country's SDG planning is integrated into its long-term national strategy and economic and social development plan supported by a comprehensive roadmap and multi-level development plans. Efforts to localize the SDGs include the adoption of area-based indicators and alignment of regional and provincial plans with the 5Ps contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The session underscored the importance of localized strategies, strong institutions, multistakeholder participation, and the value of data-driven approaches in accelerating the SDG implementation process.

Session 4: Stakeholder engagement in the VNRs and enhancing ownership of the 2030 Agenda

In session 4, Ms. Naiara Costa, DSDG, DESA shared a presentation which focused on how countries can reflect stakeholder engagement in their VNR, including but not limited to how institutions have been adapted to the 2030 Agenda implementation, engagement of all stakeholders, including subnational governments, civil society, the private sector, the modalities used to engage stakeholder such as platforms, consultations, commenting on the report and how the views of stakeholders can be reflected in the report and presentation on the VNR.

The session included small group discussions among participants, who shared their good practices on the engagement of stakeholders to be featured in their VNR report this year. Following the group discussions the session featured two country presentations. One country explained the roadmap of consultations with stakeholders for VNR presentations. Voluntary Local Reviews had been critical in preparing for the national VNR in this country. VLRs preparations also fed into national consultations for the VNR. A small island country had prepared three questionnaires as inputs to the VNR, for government entities, civil society, and the general public. They had fed into the preparations for a Multi-Stakeholder Forum held in November 2024 with 12 thematic workshops covering all 17 SDGs. Essential input was also delivered by SDG Youth Champions, and by organizing vulnerable groups, engaging young artists and organizing meetups for young people. This had been a critical input into the VNR preparatory process.

After the country presentations, a checklist on stakeholder engagement was shared and discussed in plenary. Participants then heard experiences from two more countries on key strategies and lessons learned on stakeholder participation. Strategies included ensuring to carefully identify all stakeholders in society; ensuring representation; engaging in transparent communication channels; encouraging collaboration; and in fostering partnerships with government; and building ownership of the consultation process:

Two representatives of the host country elaborated on the extensive consultation process for the 2025 VNR. This included participation from two research institutions which had offered their long-term and evidence-based perspectives to the key authors of the VNR.

In the final part of the session, various advocacy and outreach tools were shared to assist countries to reach more stakeholder groups and gain interest in the process. There was also a discussion on stakeholder engagement post-VNR. It was recommended to develop a plan for wide dissemination after the VNR presentation, to debrief national stakeholders after the presentation and to develop a roadmap for follow-up action and recommendations.

Session 5: Data innovations and data journey for the VNRs

In this session participants discussed their VNR data journey and how countries are enhancing their data analysis. The session provided examples of various methods for analyzing and presenting data, including systems analysis, and both qualitative and quantitative approaches, utilizing innovative and alternative data sources.

Mr. Daniel Eshetie, UN Statistics Division (UNSD), DESA emphasized the importance of assessing data availability and gaps, addressing quality issues, and compiling and incorporating data for the HLPF presentation. Countries were encouraged to use statistical annexes in their VNRs and to include plans for tracking indicators post-VNR presentations.

A group discussion focused on lessons from previous VNRs and data. Participants highlighted the importance of regular meetings with NSOs and stakeholders to identify gaps, data sources, and methodologies. They emphasized partnerships to enhance the data journey and the need for capacity building to identify data sources and set up an accessible data ecosystem. They also noted the need for intermediary data collection methods between major surveys. Additionally, VNRs were seen as opportunities to highlight data gaps and advocate for resources.

Participants were invited to consider setting up a VNR data roadmap to enhance the data ecosystem and coordination. They discussed using a data ecosystem approach to show processes and linkages in data collection and use, improving coordination challenges, and making VNRs more analytical by deepening data analysis. Documenting the data journey in the VNR or online, linking to online resources for deeper dives, addressing capacity needs, and including recommendations for incorporating data insights and visualizations into the VNR were also flagged.

On data storytelling, countries were encouraged to consider that VNRs and SDG data stores have a broad audience. They should identify and understand their target audience's statistical literacy, develop and articulate key messages from the data, and identify visualization objectives, constraints, style guidelines, and preferred tools. Examples of SDG infographics, statistical annexes, progress charts, data elements, innovative data systems, SDG tracking tools, and dashboards were shared, along with good practices on Sustainable Data Goals and innovative approaches.

Member states were also encouraged to strengthen data-sharing frameworks with the private sector, support NSOs with tools, training, and resources to integrate non-traditional data, and create resilient data systems for continued SDG monitoring beyond the VNR presentation.

A country representative presented SDG implementation and data coordination mechanisms in their country. The presentation covered the governance structure, challenges in data collection, and regulations for SDG follow-up. Efforts to strengthen data disaggregation, including innovative approaches for LNOB, were highlighted. The representative also mentioned that their VNR will include a statistical annex detailing data origin.

A second representative detailed efforts to track national progress beyond GDP and integrate SDGs into the national strategic plan. For their VNR, the country is assessing data sources, frequency, disaggregation, and data repository. Recommendations from these assessments are being summarized and implemented.

A third representative shared updates on the national context and data availability, including efforts to update indicators and address new challenges. The VNR report preparation involved direct collaboration with the NSO for the national indicator set. The country is also working on enhancing its dataset management system and improving data collection, including geospatial data.

A fourth presentation from a representative focused on efforts to address data availability and gaps by setting up a Goal tracker and training experts. Information about the data ecosystem and SDG data providers was shared. The country is also adjusting funding for data collection and management due to policy changes in donor countries.

The last country presenter highlighted innovations that resulted in several technical reports. The country increased its reporting from 66 indicators in 2019 to 140 in 2024. Innovations included using earth observation for SDG 15 monitoring, assessing disparities by type and place of residence, and co-creating citizen data apps for local data. The country also reached out to academia, think-tanks, professional bodies, and science and technology institutions to gather evaluation evidence on SDG performance.

Session 6: Financing and means of implementation

Session 6 was facilitated by Mr. Yanis Burgsdorff, Financing for Sustainable Development Office (FSDO), DESA and provided support and recommendations to participants in preparing and drafting the Means of Implementation chapter of their VNR reports. It focused on the use of the Integrated

National Financing Framework (INFF) as a model to guide reporting on financing for the SDGs. INFFs and their four building blocks—assessment, financing strategy, monitoring and review, and governance— formed a structured approach to identify gaps, align financial flows, and strengthen coordination around SDG financing.

Participants broke into table groups for a guided exercise, using the INFF framework to reflect on a country case study of the fictitious country of "Brenland." Brenland was a lower middle-income country with high levels of debt. With a population of 7.5 million, it had seen modest economic growth driven by agriculture, eco-tourism and diaspora remittances. It was prone to natural disasters and external shocks, and economic growth had slowed after an earthquake. It also had various key financial policy frameworks in various levels of implementation. Participants were asked to offer insights from their own national context and to identify key elements to include in the Means of Implementation chapter of the VNR.

The case study brought participants with examples four table assignments of guiding questions, each addressing one core building block of the INFF.

The first building block dealt with assessment and diagnosis. Discussions focused if policy makers had a clear understanding of the financing gaps outlined in the study, and if based on the information available, risk and constraints to financing Brenlands national development strategy were well understood.

In a second building block, on a national financing strategy, participants assessed with policy frameworks in Brenland were currently in place, and what gaps could be identified. They were also asked to identify if existing strategies align with priorities set in the national stratebgy, and what additional policy or coordination efforts were needed to mobilize and align financing needs effectively.

In the third building block, on monitoring and review, questions were asked what systems were already in place to t rack and review financing flows, what the main gaps or limitations were in Brenlands' ability to monitor effectiveness and financing policies, and how coordination between institutions could be improved to strengthen tracking of financial flows.

In the fourth and final block, participants focused on governance and coordination. They assessed what institutions were currently overseeing financial policy and coordination and if roles and responsibilities were clear. They also assessed what the main barriers were towards improving effective coordination across government and with external partners, and how political buy-in or institutional leadership for INFF implementation could be enhanced.

After the exercise, representatives of each group shared insights and good practices in a closing plenary discussion.

Session 7: The VNRs as a platform for partnerships and cross-country learning

This session, moderated by Ms. Maame Agyeben, OISC, DESA, emphasized peer-to-peer learning and showcased how VNRs can facilitate partnerships and cross-country collaboration. It included examples of peer-review initiatives by various countries and offered a platform for discussing challenges and opportunities in VNR preparation.

A country representative summarized the peer-learning session among five countries, which included both virtual and in-person meetings. This initiative, launched at the First Global VNR Workshop, aimed to help draft a new generation of VNRs and foster collective learning for report preparation. The group held monthly virtual meetings on various topics and met in Berlin before the 2nd Global Workshop. They plan to present their peer-learning process at the 2025 HLPF and work on comparative VNR analysis.

Another country's representative shared their peer-learning experience with another VNR country, which began in May 2024 and was officially launched at a side event during the 2024 HLPF. Through this process, countries connected their CSO platforms to contribute to the VNR process. They held virtual meetings and agreed to review and provide feedback on each other's VNRs. This peer review was seen as beneficial for strengthening the VNR process, advancing the 2030 Agenda, and fostering collaboration.

A third country representative highlighted VNRs as a platform for partnerships, engaging government, CSOs, the private sector, academia, parliamentarians, and others in the VNR process. Early partner mobilization helped identify key issues, relevant SDG data, and outreach strategies. He emphasized how partnerships are essential for strengthening SDG analysis, monitoring, and evaluation.

During the discussion, participants highlighted private sector engagement, with some countries reporting their involvement in national SDG governance. One country collaborates closely with the UN Global Compact network, while another is developing regulations to integrate ESG and SDGs for joint reporting.

Mr. Oliver Paddison, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) representative, shared ESCAP's experience in facilitating the VNR Twinning Programme, which uses a multi-stakeholder approach to connect national counterparts through Resident Coordinators Offices. This aims to strengthen VNR preparation, promote capacity building, conduct joint workshops, and support troubleshooting, including study tours and joint side events at the HLPF. He also provided examples of contributions from other regional commissions to VNR countries, facilitating peer learning and sub-regional mobilization. During group discussions, participants shared challenges and experiences in engaging parliamentarians and how peer learning exchanges enable further review and enhancement of reports.

Session 8: VNR Presentations at the HLPF

The session provided an overview of the practical arrangements and interactive components of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) presentations at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). Ms. Emer Herity, DGACM shared a presentation that outlined key procedural elements, including that presentations will be chaired by the ECOSOC President or Vice-President, with a strict format allowing 10 minutes for the presentation and 15 minutes for questions and answers. It was also noted that this year all countries are second-, third- and fourth-time presenters, hence the VNRs will all be presented in panel format. The Head of Delegation is expected to lead the presentation. Countries were encouraged to ensure high-level representation during the VNR presentations.

In her presentation Ms. Maame Agyeben, OISC, DESA shared some considerations for VNR presentations at the HLPF and encouraged countries to use concise, data-driven messages supported by case studies and future visions. Audiovisual materials are permitted but must be accompanied by transcripts, and presentations must be delivered in one of the six official UN languages. The presentations will be broadcast live on UN Web TV. Key deadlines were shared: countries must submit their main messages by 24 April 2025 and their full VNR reports by 17 June 2025. Applications for side events and exhibits are due by 9 May. DESA will also share a questionnaire and templates to help countries prepare, including a scenario format for the session flow. In response to questions, it was clarified that countries may choose to include Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) in their VNR presentations, provided they are well integrated and fit within the overall time constraints. Applications for side events are available online via the VNR website.

The session also highlighted the respective roles of the Group of Friends of VNRs and the MGoS VNR Task Group in facilitating more inclusive and engaging presentations. The Group of Friends serves as an informal support network to help VNR presenting countries navigate the Q&A segments and ensure smooth delivery. They assist with coordinating potential questions from the floor and will be hosting a preparatory event in the lead-up to the HLPF. A representative of the MGoS VNR Task Group, which represents a wide range of stakeholders including civil society, academia, the private sector, and local governments, emphasized the importance of pre-HLPF engagement with marginalized groups. The MGoS VNR Task Group presentative outlined the process of how the MGoS prepare the statements and questions for countries conducting their VNR. The representative also encouraged VNR countries to make targeted efforts to reach groups that are marginalized; to consider supporting stakeholders to attend the HLPF; to reflect on the MGoS statement during their VNR Q&A response time; to organize dialogues with key stakeholders after the HLPF and to continue to monitor delivery on key commitments made.

Countries also shared early reflections on their VNR preparations. One country emphasized the importance of broad stakeholder participation, including international partners and academia, and noted that its national interventions will be aligned with those of civil society. Key challenges identified included limited financial resources, poor data quality, gaps in public services, inequality, and restricted legal access for marginalized populations. Future actions will be aligned with national development indicators, with a focus on strengthening cooperation and narrowing sustainable

development gaps. Another country highlighted alignment with the SAMOA Pathway and its national medium-term development strategy. Key themes included youth empowerment, gender equality, education, enhanced social protection, and improving agricultural and climate resilience.

Overall, the session reinforced the need for focused, inclusive, and strategically structured VNR presentations. UN DESA committed to continued support to ensure countries are well prepared for their participation in the 2025 HLPF.

Session 9: Closing and Next Steps

In the closing session of the workshop, Ms. Ilka Hirt, Deputy Director General for International Policy at BMUV and Mr. Martin Wimmer, Deputy Director General for Development Policy Issues at BMZ delivered closing remarks and overall reflections. Several countries offered thanks to the host and organizers of the workshop. Countries also shared their reflections and insights from the workshop and how they had benefited. Mr. Joop Theunissen, OISC, DESA thanked the speakers, facilitators and the participants for their active participation. He also extended appreciation and thanks to the hosts of the workshop, the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Federal Government of Germany.



More information on the 2025 VNRs is available here:

https://hlpf.un.org/2025/vnrs