

Main Messages – Israel Voluntary National Review 2019

Harnessing Innovation to Leave No One Behind

Israel is a vibrant, multicultural society, with 9 million inhabitants who speak 35 different languages. Ongoing development is at the heart of Israeli society. Since the establishment of the State, Israel has absorbed waves of immigrants, over 3.2 million, often refugees or penniless. Israel's land-area is 22,072 square kilometers with an average population density of 400 people per square kilometer. Over 90% of the country's population lives in urban areas.

Sustainable development in Israel is not a luxury or a catch phrase – it is vital in order to improve the well-being of present and future generations. This is one of the reasons that Israel attributes great importance to the SDGs and to the processes they engender.

Fueled by a dynamic entrepreneurial spirit, robust technological infrastructure and a highly skilled human workforce, Israel produces solutions in all three pillars of sustainability. Innovation is one of Israel's most valuable resources and its breakthrough solutions in fields such as communication, internet, medical systems, agriculture, biotechnology, security, water desalination, wastewater treatment and recycling, water management, digital printing and more, have long facilitated sustainable development in Israel and globally. Israel's vision is to continue to nurture its culture of innovation and expand it to all people in need on our planet and to give practical expression to the noble value of leaving no one behind.

To that end, Israel is investing, both domestically and abroad, in innovation to leave no one behind. For instance, the Israel Innovation Authority partnered with several other government entities and created tailor-made R&D support tracks. Examples include the [GCI Grand Challenges Program](#) focused on humanitarian health, agritech and water challenges in developing nations, the [Assistive Technology for the Disabled Program](#) to improve the quality of life for the disabled and ease their integration into society, and the [Diverse Startups Program](#) for ultra-Orthodox and minority entrepreneurs.

As a society with a broad cultural, ethnic and religious mix, the government has to continually search for creative and culturally sensitive ways to provide equal opportunities for all. As the statistical annex to Israel's report shows, there is substantial work yet to be done to close gaps in areas such as employment, income disparity, literacy, and mathematical and ICT technology skills. There is also a need to address the gender gap, for example by increasing personal security and lowering poverty levels for women.

As a recent OECD report shows, Israel's economic growth is strong. The standard of living is on the rise and income inequality is down, but a high percentage of working poor still remains. As a result, major investments are being made to increase workforce skills and education, to encourage entrepreneurship and to create small and medium businesses among low-income groups.

The preparation of Israel's first VNR required intensive scoping and mapping, not least in order to discover the extent and the variety of our cooperation with developing countries on projects that are aligned with the SDGs. These projects, carried out both by our official aid agency and by many other bodies, include disaster relief, setting up field hospitals, introduction of water technologies, and increasing the availability of food and off-grid solar energy solutions to developing countries. Israel is currently working to update its development policy, which will also take into account work on the SDGs.

The Israeli non-governmental sector took part in and actively contributed to the roundtable discussions on the SDGs and the VNR over the past eighteen months. Israel has yet to examine how each sector can implement and use the SDGs to guide their work, as well as how to pursue the ongoing stakeholder engagement process with the government.

Like many other countries, Israel embarked on this process while the institutional arrangements were being developed. Agenda 2030 was presented at the government's Heads of Strategy Forum – a cross-governmental committee led by the Prime Minister's National Economic Council, the body responsible for formulating Israel's strategic economic and social goals. A government decision is currently being prepared to continue the integration of the SDGs into the government's strategic planning and to realize the vision of leaving no one behind through Israeli innovation.