

Belgium's Main Messages

Belgium's Voluntary National Review – a collaborative process

The decision to present a second VNR is part of a long-standing commitment to multilateralism and sustainable development of the federal state of Belgium. Since 2007, sustainable development has been enshrined in the Belgian Constitution, ensuring that all policy levels pursue the objectives of sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental aspects in their respective competences.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs requires a whole of society approach and besides governments, other important stakeholders including civil society and the private sector have mobilized around the Global Agenda 2030.

The process of the Second Review was established taking into account this *whole of society* approach. This joint report is the result of a collaborative effort of various policy levels and stakeholders and summarizes how these various policy levels in the federal state of Belgium contribute to the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Since the last VNR in 2017, the Court of Auditors has also conducted an analysis of the implementation, monitoring and reporting by public authorities in Belgium (Preparedness Review) in 2020.

In order to make the process as inclusive as possible, the Federal Council for Sustainable Development (CFDD-FRDO) was tasked to serve as the focal point for engaging various social groups: worker and employer organizations, science and research, youth and "Leave No-One Behind". These were involved in two phases. In the first phase a summarized overview of the SDG implementation of these groups was compiled after which a significant space was devoted to it in the VNR itself. In a second stage, a joint opinion by several advisory councils was requested on the preliminary draft version of the VNR.

The full contributions from all actors who have participated (governments & stakeholders) can be found at sdgs.be.

Strengths, challenges and policies

Governments in Belgium start from a privileged position given, among other things, the strong institutional framework regarding sustainable development. With a strong economy, high-quality education and relatively low income inequality, governments have the opportunity to pursue sustainability initiatives, both internally and externally. Through international actions, governments in Belgium are contributing to achieving the SDGs abroad. Global sustainable development has long been a shared commitment: promotion and protection of human rights, effective and inclusive multilateralism, international solidarity, eradicating poverty, combating climate change and reducing inequalities. This commitment was reflected, for example, in the Belgian response to the COVID pandemic, as well as the sixth Belgian mandate in the UN Security Council in 2019-2020 and the focus on climate security and children in armed conflict. Queen Mathilde's role as an SDG Ambassador also illustrates this commitment.

This second VNR illustrates that governments in Belgium have adopted many policy initiatives that contribute positively to the SDGs, yet many challenges also lie ahead of us.

National statistics show that time is running out. In 2022, Belgium was on track to meet the targets for only 20 of the 51 indicators examined. An annex to this VNR shows the evolution since 2000 for a comprehensive list of indicators in more detail, at the national and regional levels.

Key challenges for implementing the 2030 Agenda include, of course, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the theme of this year's HLPF, as well as increasing geopolitical uncertainty, the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, social inequalities, the link between digitalization and sustainable development, and the central role of education. These challenges can also present opportunities that must be seized.

In their contributions, civil society groups ask for, among other things, greater coherence in the way that different policy levels monitor the implementation of the SDGs and their targets. This means not only regard for internal Belgian policy coherence, but also coherence with the European and international context, given the economic, ecological and social impact across borders.

This VNR shows that the various governments in Belgium and actors involved remain committed to the SDGs by continuing and strengthening existing efforts to live up to the Decade of Action of Sustainable Development as called for by the Secretary-General of the UN.