

# PROGRESSING NATIONAL SDGS IMPLEMENTATION:

## 2022 Policy Brief

### Leave No One Behind

#### Key Findings

- **The VNR reports in 2022 included a high level of references to the ‘Leave No One Behind’ (LNOB) principle:** In 2022, 96% of the reporting countries mentioned the principle of leaving no one behind (the number in 2021 was 100%). Countries either provided information throughout their VNR report or included a dedicated chapter or smaller section on LNOB.
- **However, challenges remain in terms of data availability, as well as the level of detail and quality of information provided on LNOB:** In 2022, VNR reports from only 17 out of 44 countries (39%) indicated that efforts to LNOB were informed by existing data.
- **Limited incorporation into national policies and plans:** In 2022, 28 countries (or 64%) made explicit references to embedding leaving no one behind or efforts to address inequality and social exclusion within overarching development plans. This represents a significant decrease in the incorporation of the principle of leaving no one behind in the creation of national sustainable development policies – compared to the 84% in 2021.
- **Impact of COVID-19 on LNOB:** In 2022, 34 out of the 44 reporting countries (77%) provided information on the specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic from an LNOB perspective, a small decrease compared to the 36 out of the 42 reporting countries (or 86%) that did so in 2021.

## 1. Introduction: The Leave No One Behind pledge

The pledge to Leave No One Behind is the central transformative principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda). It represents the strongest collective commitment by countries to date to not only transform the lives of those who are the furthest behind - including women, children, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, migrants and refugees, indigenous peoples and people living in poverty, among others - but also to fight discrimination and the root causes of inequality and injustice within and among countries.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, we have seen that putting the “leave no one behind” principle into practice can be difficult to achieve. It requires a solid and unwavering commitment to prioritising the people who are the most marginalised and demands ambitious action and an appetite for risk. It means working in the most fragile contexts and supporting the most complex and diverse needs, whilst also seeking to rebalance power, opportunities and outcomes between groups and individuals across all areas of sustainable development..

The world is currently facing unprecedented levels of uncertainty caused by the global polycrisis, with multiple concurrent economic, political and ecological shocks converging that will challenge the achievement of the 2030 Agenda by its deadline. New and protracted conflicts are compounding the impacts of climate change and other local and international political, health and environmental shocks, to increase humanitarian needs and deepen existing inequalities.

Crises disproportionately affect people who are already marginalised or vulnerable, particularly women and girls. As a result, governments must respond to crises in ways that reach the furthest behind first. This requires implementing concerted and targeted policies and programmes for specific vulnerable groups, rather than just broad-based responses that target the general population.

As data from the World Bank has revealed, the COVID-19 pandemic marked the end of an era of global progress in poverty reduction. During the three decades that preceded its arrival, more than one billion people escaped extreme poverty, while the incomes of the poorest nations gained ground. However, during the pandemic, the income losses of the poorest 40% of the world’s population were twice as high as those of the richest 20%. Global median income declined by 4% in 2020 — the first decline since measurements of median income began in 1990. The COVID-19 pandemic did not affect all groups equally, with children, refugees, migrants, Indigenous Peoples, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, LGBTQ+ people, older people and people with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, among the worst affected.

2



Since the pandemic began, people who are marginalised and economically disadvantaged, particularly those who work in urban health and sanitation sectors (many of whom lack adequate Personal Protective Equipment), have faced a greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and have been more likely to die from it. These outcomes have been driven, at least in part by a lack of access to quality, high-functioning public health systems.

People who are marginalised have also been unfairly impacted by measures to contain the virus. For example, people employed in the informal sector – disproportionately, minorities, women, people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ people – have had little or no access to social protection benefits when their incomes have been frozen due to mandatory lockdowns. In 2020, between 119 and 124 million people were estimated to have been pushed into extreme poverty as a result of the pandemic.

The impact of the pandemic also threatens to reverse 20 years of education gains, as many education systems have failed to meet even the most basic learning needs of children who were forced out of the classroom due to school closures. Before the pandemic began, 258 million children and young people were already out of school, a figure that has increased significantly since 2020. While the lives of all children have been impacted, girls and children with disabilities face the greatest risk of never returning to school. The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to an increase in the number of children engaged in child labour, rising to 160 million globally, the first increase in two decades.

COVID-19 has further put at risk the limited progress made to advance gender equality in previous years. The pandemic’s impacts have been exacerbated for women and girls in all spheres, from health to the economy, to food security and social protection. For some women and girls, such as those with disabilities, intersecting inequalities have further increased their risk of experiencing violence during the pandemic, especially during mandatory lockdowns.

## 2. What do the 2022 Voluntary National Review (VNRs) say on LNOB

The 7th Edition of the Progressing National SDG Implementation report reveals that in 2022, countries are increasingly recognizing the importance of the pledge to Leave No One Behind. Many 2022 VNR countries identify specific groups that are at risk of being left behind, highlight specific policies and programmes to reach them, and/or report on progress in using disaggregated data to track progress on the SDGs. Nonetheless, key challenges remain in translating this principle into results on the ground.



Key findings from the report are set out below:

- **The VNR reports in 2022 included a high level of references to the ‘Leave No One Behind’ (LNOB) principle:** In 2022, 96% of the reporting countries mentioned the principle of leaving no one behind (the number in 2021 was 100%). Countries either provided information throughout their VNR report or included a dedicated chapter or smaller section on LNOB. 93% of VNR countries identified groups that are being left behind or at risk of being left behind, with persons with disabilities<sup>1</sup> (82%), women and girls<sup>2</sup> (80%), children<sup>3</sup> (80%), the elderly (50%), and youth (50%) as the most often cited groups.
- **However, challenges remain in terms of data availability, as well as the level of detail and quality of information provided on LNOB:** In 2022, VNR reports from only 17 out of 44 countries (39%) indicated that efforts to LNOB were informed by existing data – an improvement compared to 2021 (24%).<sup>4</sup> The same percentage, 17 out of 44 countries (39%) mentioned that additional data is required to leave no one behind – stable from 2021 (38%).
- **Limited incorporation into national policies and plans:** In 2022, 28 countries (or 64%) made explicit references to embedding leaving no one behind or efforts to address inequality and social exclusion within overarching development plans. This represents a significant decrease in the incorporation of the principle of leaving no one behind in the creation of national sustainable development policies – compared to the 84% in 2021.
- **Impact of COVID-19 on LNOB:** In 2022, 34 out of the 44 reporting countries (77%) provided information on the specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic from an LNOB perspective, a small decrease compared to the 36 out of the 42 reporting countries (or 86%) that did so in 2021.

### 3. Case studies of countries that have made progress in addressing inequalities and implementing the pledge to LNOB

#### Ethiopia: Mainstreaming the principle to Leave No One Behind into national development planning

The 2022 VNR report from Ethiopia states that the Government of Ethiopia has sought to mainstream the ‘leave no one behind’ principle in its national development frameworks through adopting and

<sup>1</sup> Persons living with both physical and mental disabilities (e.g. mental illnesses, dementia, behavioural and developmental disorders) have been included in this category.

<sup>2</sup> Some countries further specified this category by specifically mentioning pregnant women, divorced women, widows, and women with three or more children, for example.

<sup>3</sup> Countries sometimes duly disaggregate children and youth as separate groups, sometimes they are presented as a cluster. We will be considering children and youth as distinct categories from this year onwards.

<sup>4</sup> Compared to 40% of countries in 2020 (19 out of 47 countries), 19% in 2019 (9 out of 47 countries), and 28% in 2018 (13 out of 46 countries).

implementing inclusive and pro-poor policies, strategies and plans in the last two or so decades. The Government, together with development partners, has designed and implemented flagship and multisectoral programs to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups of population and location.

A key element of this is the Productivity Safety Net Programme (PSNP) which provides direct cash/food transfers to poor households in food insecure areas. The programme consists of a public works component, identified by the community that builds its communal assets such as schools and roads, and direct support for households that are food insecure but unable to work such as those with persons with disabilities and the elderly. Impact assessment studies indicate that the PSNP raises household income, reduces poverty and food insecurity, and helps beneficiaries to become more resilient to droughts, through subsidies for basic agricultural supplies.

### **El Salvador: Involving children’s voices in the VNR process**

In July 2022, El Salvador presented its VNR at the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development after a consultation process with national and local governmental and civil society organizations. In parallel to this consultation process, the Joining Forces alliance, which brings together six international children's organizations decided to prepare a complementary or “shadow” report that would gather the voices and opinions of Salvadoran children and adolescents, with the aim of ensuring their right to participate in reviewing SDG progress in their country.

The complementary report was based on consultation process based on focus groups carried out in the country's 14 departments, using a survey, and the use of the photo-voice technique. Both the methodology approach and the selection of questions were validated with a group of children and adolescents linked to the Joining Forces actions, thus acting as an advisory group. A total of 160 children and adolescents participated in the focus groups (66.8% female and 33.1% male) and a total of 215 surveys were collected (66.98% female, 32.56% male and 0.46% non-binary).

The Joining Forces’ organizations shared the approach of the child-consulted report with the main government stakeholders in El Salvador: the Office of the First Lady, who leads the children's agenda in the country, and the National Council for Sustainable Development, which reports to the Vice-Presidency and was in charge of elaborating the VNR. The National Council for Sustainable Development is also responsible for building the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, to which the voices and opinions gathered in the complementary report will be an essential contribution.



## **Kazakhstan: Including citizen’s voices and gender analysis in assessing progress and challenges in SDG implementation.**

The Government of Kazakhstan stated that it conducted its 2022 VNR with the active engagement of a range of stakeholders, including central and local government agencies, non-governmental organizations of Kazakhstan, the business community, international organizations and academic experts. The process of preparing the VNR was accompanied by information in the media, both at national and regional levels through awareness-raising seminars. The seminars were covered by local TV channels and print media. In order to identify priority areas for the implementation of the SDGs in the 17 regions of the country, voting was conducted among representatives of the LEAs, citizens and other stakeholders during workshops. Based on the results of seminars in the regions, the Kazakhstani people selected the top five SDGs for implementation in Kazakhstan. The Government of Kazakhstan stated that engagement of citizens in the VNR process offers both the potential to be a catalyst for the localisation of the SDGs in Kazakhstan, as well as providing the opportunity for stakeholders to identify focus areas for implementation.

As part of Kazakhstan’s VNR, experts from the Economic Research Institute JSC conducted gender analysis in the areas of education (additional education and technical and vocational education), health care (life expectancy and some common diseases) and social protection (the employment of people with disabilities) in different regions of the country, the results of which are included in the final report. While the Government recognises that there are still significant gaps in data availability in relation to gender equality, this detailed analysis incorporating a gender lens is an important step in monitoring progress on leaving no one behind in the implementation of the SDGs in Kazakhstan.

## **4. Recommendations**

In order to achieve meaningful progress on the Leave No One Behind principle, governments, working with other stakeholders should aim to:

- 1. Ensure policies and programmes take into account the principle to ‘leave no one behind’ and integrate efforts to include all parts of society in SDG monitoring and implementation, including prioritizing the most vulnerable or marginalized people, groups and communities.**
- 2. Include a specific chapter on ‘leaving no one behind’ in future VNR reports and demonstrate how the LNOB principle is being translated into action at national level, including in overarching national development plans.**





**3. Ensure that the VNRs highlight:**

- a) Existing efforts on LNOB, including how existing policies and programmes are delivered;
- b) Planned efforts on LNOB, including a specific focus on new approaches to reach the people who are the furthest behind first;
- c) Overarching and systemic policy approaches including any micro and microeconomic policies.

**4. Provide information on the status of data collection and/or plans to improve data availability to inform efforts to leave no one behind, including information on gender - disaggregated data. <sup>5</sup>**

**5. Promote gender equality through international good practice such as gender budgeting, and gender-based analysis and mainstreaming into policies, plans, and appropriate legal, policy and institutional frameworks.**

**6. Report on the outcomes of efforts to ‘leave no one behind’. These reports should include clear links between specific policies and actions with results, presenting progress for specific marginalized groups.**

**7. Include civil society expertise and citizen-generated data in the analysis of progress on the SDGs.**

**8. Target reductions in domestic inequality in 2030 Agenda implementation, including in support of SDG 10 on reduced inequalities in terms of income, access to education, health and social care. Assess the current status of domestic inequality and highlight specific measurement of inequalities in VNR reports.**

**9. Ensure clear analysis of major crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and outline the efforts being made to ensure that no one is left behind, as a result of such crises, including a summary of which groups are being supported and detailing what approaches are being taken.**

---

<sup>5</sup> For examples on tools and methodologies to report meaningfully on the pledge to Leave No One Behind, see 2023 Virtual Knowledge Exchange [booklet](#)



*This policy brief was prepared by Lilei Chow (Save the Children International) and Arelys Bellorini (World Vision International) and draws on information compiled by Nicolas Sautejeau and Oli Henman (Action for Sustainable Development) for the 2023 Progressing National SDGs Implementation report (7th edition), an independent assessment of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2022.*

The report was produced with financial or in-kind support from the following organizations:

Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD), Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), BOND, Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional (CEPEI), Cooperation Canada, CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), Forus International, Global Focus, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Save the Children (UK), Sightsavers, Together 2030 and World Vision International.

