

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

Norway is a unitary country, a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy with two tiers of subnational government. The country is subdivided into 11 counties at regional level, and 356 municipalities. Oslo is both a region and a municipality (not included in the aforementioned numbers).¹



Unless otherwise indicated, all the information in this profile is taken from the previously published Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).²

1. NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

The SDGs are incorporated into all policy documents, including budgets, strategies and action plans, but ensuring policy coherence and a cross-sectoral approach is still a challenge. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are included in the **White Paper "Long-term Perspectives on the Norwegian Economy 2021"**,³ the **National Transport Plan 2022–2033** and several other long-term sectoral plans. A 2nd White Paper and a first national **Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda** were to be submitted to Parliament during Summer 2021.

1.1 NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Until 2020, the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** coordinated international and national entities and policies for SDG implementation, through a project for the post-2015 development agenda and an inter-ministerial contact group. In January 2020, the **Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation** was appointed coordinating body for national implementation of the SDGs. This has increased cross-sectoral cooperation and a more holistic approach to sustainable development. The Ministry of Foreign Office coordinates global efforts. All line ministries are now represented in the **State Secretaries' committee for the SDGs goals**. An advisory Forum on Policy Coherence involves all other stakeholders.

1.2 VNR ELABORATION PROCESS

Each ministry provided input on its respective goal(s) to the 2016 VNR. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was responsible for compiling and presenting the overall report. The **Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation**, in collaboration with the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, was responsible for the preparation of the 2021 VNR. The Office of the Prime Minister, all ministries and several government agencies also contributed to the review. In particular, in February 2021, a **working group** led by the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation was established. It held extensive discussions with ForUM (made up of CSOs), UN Global Compact Norway (business sector) and SDG Norway (academia) in order to channel their knowledge into the report.

The main focus of this VNR is the **local and regional commitment to achieve the SDGs**. To gain insights on the work for sustainability of Norwegian municipalities and regions, a partnership agreement with the **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)** was reached at an early stage of the VNR process. KS sent a survey to LRGs, answered by 33% of the municipalities (118 out of 356) and 73% of the regional authorities (8 out of 11). Stakeholders wrote several chapters or sub-chapters, providing new perspectives and relevant examples.

1.3 MONITORING

In 2016, Norway planned to be part of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), and to adapt the indicators that are most relevant to the national context. Norway also planned to define other indicators of its own to ensure

1. As of January 2020, the number of counties decreased from 18 to 11 (including Oslo). Municipalities are undergoing continuous consolidation, and their number has also decreased from 422 in 2017 to 356 in 2020.

2. See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10692NORWAY%20HLPF%20REPORT%20-%20full%20version.pdf> (2016); https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/28233Voluntary_National_Review_2021_Norway.pdf (2021)

3. It is available here: <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/91bdfca9231d45408e8107a703fee790/en-gb/pdfs/stm202020210014000engpdfs.pdf>

comprehensive follow-up. The country already had systems in place for reporting on national targets and environmental indicators. The 2021 VNR presents the National Action Plan as a set of national targets and indicators that needs to be developed further. Statistics Norway will, together with different government agencies, organizations and regional and local authorities, develop indicators for different monitoring and reviewing purposes. Norway has been the first country to apply the **U4SSC Key Performance Indicators** for smart and sustainable cities to an entire cluster of municipalities. A **taxonomy** has been developed by Statistics Norway in partnership with KS, to classify SDG-related indicators. The 2021 VNR includes a report on the global indicators in its annex. The statistical overview is created by **Statistics Norway** in collaboration with several government agencies. In addition, many of the localized targets related to green transition are far more ambitious than the national goals.⁴

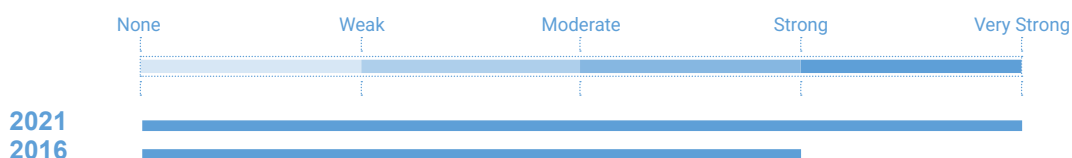
2. LRGs INVOLVEMENT IN SDG LOCALIZATION

The 2016 VNR states that the government makes use of existing mechanisms for cooperation with local and regional authorities. Consultative meetings are organized, and take the form of plenary meetings and bilateral meetings between the **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)** and ministries. They also provide a forum for discussing the framework for distribution of revenues in relation to the tasks carried out by the local authorities, their financial situation, etc. However, there is no reference to specific mechanisms for SDG localization in the 2016 VNR. Five years later, the 2021 VNR states that the SDGs “concern all aspects of the local government sector’s work and contribution through regular service delivery, welfare production, local planning and development work is substantial. Implementation has gained momentum in municipalities and regional authorities” (see VNR, 2021, p. 7). LRGs are recognized as being at the forefront of the SDG localization process. Many of them use the SDGs as a guiding framework for planning, management and local development of their communities. Half of the municipalities have incorporated the SDGs in master plans. Some of them have even operationalized and integrated the SDGs in strategic plans and management processes.⁵ The municipal sectors’ political priorities are Adolescence and life quality; Climate and environmentally friendly development; Adaptable business community; Attractive places and cities; Diversity and inclusion and Citizens’ participation.⁶ Nonetheless, there are large variations in terms of commitment to, and implementation of the SDGs across municipalities. Larger municipalities have generally worked longer with the SDGs, and these municipalities seem generally to be more committed and to have come further in the implementation of the goals. They have also leveraged measures to cooperate with both internal and external stakeholders.

As mentioned above, **KS** directly contributed to the 2021 VNR.

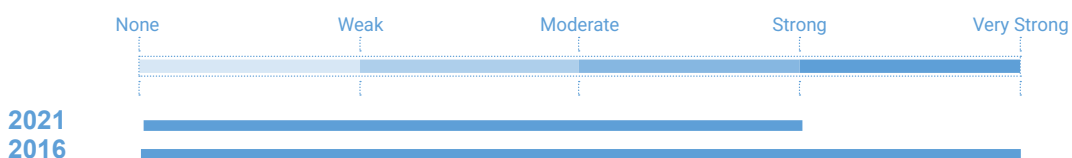
2.1 LRGs PARTICIPATION

► In the VNR process



Comments: The Norwegian association of LRGs participated in the 2021 VNR through bilateral meetings, participating in the reporting unit, and with its own contribution (GTF Survey 2021).

► In national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation



Comments: The Norwegian association of LRGs is regularly consulted (no decision making). National coordination mechanisms were only established in 2020 (GTF Survey 2021).

This assessment is based on the information collected in the VNRs and in the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments’ annual survey on the localization of the SDGs.

2.2 VNR REFERENCES

In the 2016 VNR, there was a specific subsection on LRGs’ involvement in the national strategies and consultation processes

4. See: https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/norway_2021.pdf

5. See: https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/norway_2021.pdf

6. However, according to the CSO assessment included in the 2021 VNR, “there is no holistic approach and a lack of understanding of the connection between the different SDGs. The government has recently delegated a number of tasks to the municipalities without sufficient funding or guidance. This has, inter alia, contributed to the degradation of nature, outdoor areas and green structures in and around the cities.”

for SDG implementation (see VNR, 2016, p.7). KS was mentioned. In the 2021 VNR, several sections mention the LRGs, for instance section 5.3 (“The SDGs in Norwegian municipalities”. Chapter 7 is entirely dedicated to them. It is entitled “SDGs in Norwegian municipalities and Regions”, and it also presents key findings of the Voluntary Subnational Review conducted by KS this year.

2.3 SPECIFIC PROJECTS AND CASES

▶ Through the **Network of Excellence on SDG City Transition (Network of Excellence)**, several municipalities, regional authorities and organizations, together with KS, join forces in localizing the SDGs. To strengthen these efforts, KS is also working together with the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO), the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and other labour organizations to develop a national sustainability pledge to strengthen the progress on fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.

▶ “I Drive Green” is a yearly attitude and awareness campaign carried out by the municipality of **Kristiansand** in 2010, on behalf of the Area and Transport Plan cooperation in the Kristiansand region. The purpose is to contribute to reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improve public health and limit local pollution. The campaign consists of an individual competition with registration of green travels, and a business competition in which large and small private and public companies compete to be the best on green travelling.

▶ The municipality of **Stavanger** was a pilot for Decidim. It is an open-source platform for participatory democracy and co-creation that allows citizens to digitally track and influence the content of a decision-making process. To stimulate youth participation, Stavanger has tested it on students in middle school. Through the network “Smart Cities Norway” eleven municipalities are now working together to develop ‘Decidim as a service’.

▶ As political commitment is vital for succeeding with the SDGs, the municipalities **Aremark** and **Bodø** as well as **Viken** regional authority have established a systematic approach for involving the political level in the operationalization of the SDGs by incorporating them in templates for the treatment and processing of background documents for political decisions. As such, the SDGs become an integral part of political governance.

▶ **Bergen** officially became a Human Rights City in 2018. The municipality provides financial support to the Church City Mission, which together with the Red Cross, offers health care to undocumented refugees.

▶ In 2020, following the amalgamation between Hurum, Røyken and Asker, the new **Asker** municipality came to life. Asker decided to use the SDGs as an overall integral framework for its development. Asker’s innovative amalgamation process has inspired others, including the new municipalities **Nordre Follo**, **Narvik** and **Ålesund** as well as **Viken** regional authority, who also have built their new authority with the SDGs as a foundation.

▶ The municipality of **Trondheim** uses SDG budgeting to integrate the SDGs into local finance structures: it has designed a data science approach to existing municipal finance systems that connects the 169 UN targets and local accounting standards.⁷

▶ Frontrunner cities integrated the SDGs in purchasing and procurement. **Oslo** has implemented social requirements in its contractual terms to prevent and combat work-related crime, social dumping and the exploitation of vulnerable labour in its supply chain. **Stavanger** has focused on responsible supply chains for several years and **Lillestrøm** recently launched a strategy for green procurement.⁸

▶ The **Sustainability County Møre og Romsdal** is a regional authority initiative to collectively boost the work on sustainability in the region. With this initiative, the county wants to position themselves as a clear contributor in developing a sustainable society for the future. The goal is to direct the regions’ efforts towards achieving the SDGs in a methodical and coordinated manner. To achieve this, on the regional authority’s initiative, all the municipalities in the region have collected data and measured performance and progress according to U4SSC’s KPIs.

2.4 VOLUNTARY SUBNATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL REVIEWS (VSRs / VLRs)

Viken published a VLR in 2020, while the municipalities of **Asker**, **Bergen** and **Romsdal** carried out theirs in 2021. The **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)** conducted a VSR in 2021, and it was used to complement the 2021 VNR.¹⁰ It focuses its recommendations on multilevel governance, policy coherence and multi-stakeholder partnerships; the importance of consultations with local and regional authorities at each step of the national decision-making process; the necessity of political commitment towards SDG implementation; and the need to enhance institutional knowledge and competence on sustainable development.

7. Using this SDG budgeting logic has a strong impact on planning and programming at the local level as it provides a new lens to analyse the way the city plans and uses financial resources. Together with the U4SSC KPIs, the budgeting makes for a more direct link between resources and impact and is a good starting point for funnelling resources from where they are to where they should be.

8. All examples mentioned above are extracted from the Norwegian VSR. See: https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/norway_2021.pdf

9. See: https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/viken_2020.pdf;

https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/asker_2021.pdf;

https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/bergen_2021.pdf;

https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/romsdal_2021.pdf

10. See: https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/norway_2021.pdf

2.5 MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

In 2016, the national government decided that the follow-up of the SDGs, in order to be accountable, effective and transparent, should be incorporated into the **budget process**. Therefore, a plan for national follow-up of the SDGs was developed, linked to the budget process. Among the targets that are likely to remain the focus of political attention and policy development are those relating to sustainable consumption and production, health and education, equality, employment, and migration. The 2016 VNR showed that the government had taken important steps to integrate SDG reporting into the annual budget documents. It was decided that domestic reporting on the SDGs should take place via the budget process, with one ministry having responsibility for each SDG and the Ministry of Finance having responsibility for summing up the main points in the national budget.

The 2021 VNR highlights the fact that in 2020 the government allocated approximately NOK. 4,5 billion to a green transition package to reduce the negative effects of COVID-19. The funding was allocated to research, innovation and the transition to a climate-neutral society in the private sector and municipalities. NOK 11 billion, (approximately EUR 1,1 billion) has been added to the budget for 2021 to promote climate and environmental efforts. Approximately NOK 50 mill were granted to a planning programme. One of the projects focuses on developing a framework for localizing the SDGs in regional and local planning (see VNR, 2021, p. 112).

3. RELEVANT INFORMATION

General comments: The indigenous peoples' assembly, the Sami Parliament (Sámediggi), is involved through dialogue with the line ministries and formal consultation mechanisms, and representatives of indigenous peoples provided input to the 2016 VNR.

3.1 WOMEN PARTICIPATION

The 2021 VNR acknowledges that Norway still has a problem with violence against women, but states that several local and national initiatives are being implemented to mitigate this. The report also mentions "equal representation in politics" as one of the main achievements regarding gender equality, and states that "giving priority to women's political participation and economic empowerment is crucial".

3.2 COVID 19

More than half of the municipalities report that they have less capacity to implement the SDGs due to COVID-19. Small municipalities seem to suffer the most. Nevertheless, the pandemic has not had any apparent impact on the work with the SDGs (in highlighting the importance of the SDGs, triggering more active work towards the goals, or improving LRGs' holistic perception of the goals). Some authorities even made remarks about the pandemic making it clearer that there is an important potential for working holistically and cross-sectorial with the SDGs.

4. SDG INDICATORS¹¹

| | | |
|---|-------|------------------|
| 5.5.1. (b) Proportion of seats held by women (%) in local governments | | 40.8 (2019) |
| 6.1.1. Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services (%) | Urban | - |
| | Rural | - |
| 6.2.1. (a) Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (%) | Urban | - |
| | Rural | - |
| 11.1.1. Proportion of population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (%) | | 40.8 (2019) |
| 11.6.1. Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed (%) | | 0.001 (2018) |
| 11.6.2. Air pollution – annual means of particulate matter in cities (population weighted) | | 100 (2015, Oslo) |
| 11.b.2. Proportion of local governments that have adopted local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national strategies (%) | | 98.01 (2019) |

11. The data used for this table come from the UN SDG Indicators Database. See: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/UNSDG/IndDatabasePage>.
More information on the country's progress towards the SDGs here: <https://country-profiles.unstatshub.org/nor>