



# What are the VNRs (not) telling us?

UN Committee for Development Policy | Sub-group on VNRs

VNR Labs | Virtual Meeting  
5 JULY 2022



**United  
Nations**

Committee for  
Development  
Policy





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## Launch of CDP Analysis of 2021 VNRs

“What are the VNRs (not) telling us?”

UN Committee for Development Policy (CDP)

Moderated by Mr. Roland Mollerus

### ***PRESENTATIONS***

- Overview of CDP report (Sakiko Fukuda-Parr)
- Leaving No One Behind (Sakiko Fukuda-Parr)
- COVID-19 and pandemic preparedness (Sakiko Fukuda-Parr)
- Inequality (Rolph van der Hoeven)
- Gender inequality (Natalya Volchkova)
- Environment (Trudi Hartzenberg)

### ***COMMENTS***

- Carlos Berrozpe-Garcia - European Union
- Barbara Adams - Global Policy Forum



# OVERVIEW OF CDP REPORT

CDP Subgroup on VNRs - S. Fukuda-Parr (chair) T. Hartzenberg, R. van der Hoeven, N. Volchkova, with T. Alfstad, A. Becker, I. Jahanfar Tholin and J. Felix Acre

**Sakiko Fukuda-Parr**  
***CDP Vice Chair***  
***Professor of International Affairs,***  
***The New School***

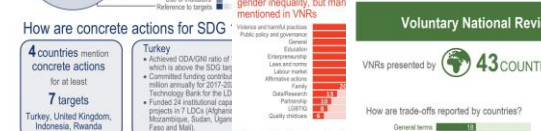
## Context

*"We can't lose more ground. It's time to rescue the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] and give sustainable development a fighting chance. For people. For planet. For our common future."*

- António Guterres in statement to Group of Friends Event  
on 2030 Agenda, May 2022

"With the climate crisis, unequal distribution of vaccines, increase in income inequality, food and energy crises and continued denial of basic human rights, it is clear that the whole agenda is at risk if an urgent change in course is not made."

- CDP Background Paper No. 54



## Annual reviews on UN website

CDP background papers  
2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022  
<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/voluntary-national-reviews.html>



## Key Messages

Annual CDP reviews of VNRs - 2017-2022: What do they (not) reveal?

- Content analysis of all reports presented at HLPF.
- How do they report on transformative ambition of Agenda 2030: leave no one behind, partnerships, inequality, gender equality, environment, pandemic preparedness
- Goals and targets: favourites and orphans.

### Recommendations:

- Promote more substantive, reflective analysis for learning lessons.
- Process: space to consider diverse perspectives and grapple with trade offs.
- MS should link findings from earlier reviews to show how these have accelerated implementation.
- Civil society: space for shadow reports

## Findings

- Reports are largely descriptive and lack substantive assessments
- Increasing attention given to income inequality but underreporting remains in regards to targets in SDG 10.
- Most do not reflect strategies for structural transformation of productive capacities of economies
- Increased attention given to climate action, but attention to individual targets are modest.
- A lower share than previous years have a dedicated section on gender equality and the reporting is superficial in most VNRs.
- Leave no one behind: improvement over the years but still used rhetorically or with target driven rather than transformative strategies.



# United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP)

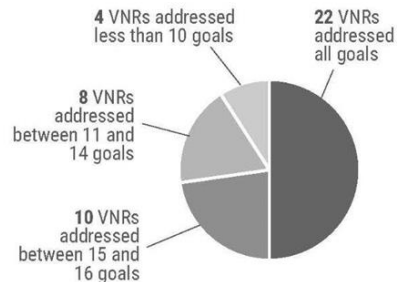
## 2021 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) Reports – Under-reported goals and targets

### VNRs of



**41** COUNTRIES

### Did all VNRs address all SDGs?

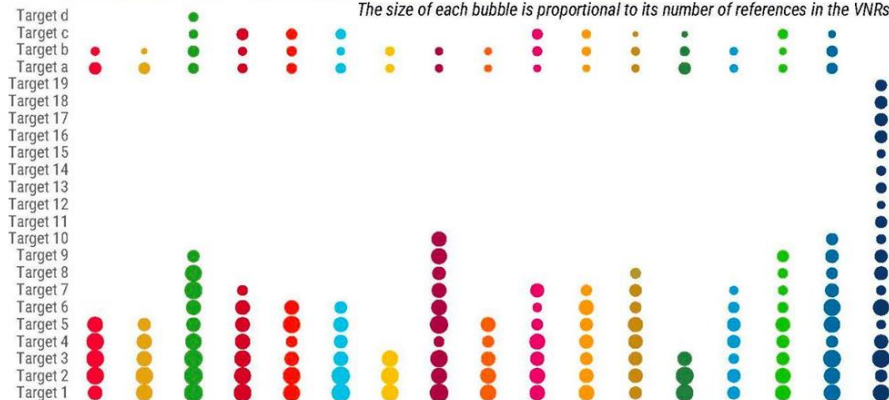


Targets least reported on relate technology transfer, capacity building and inclusive and equitable globalization and trade.

### Number of VNRs addressing each SDG



Goals closely related to the environmental dimension of sustainable development (11, 14, 15) and industry, innovation and infrastructure (10) are least reported on



### Targets referred to by number in the VNRs (directly or indirectly)



Goals least reported on are also those in which the coverage of targets (referenced by number) was the lowest

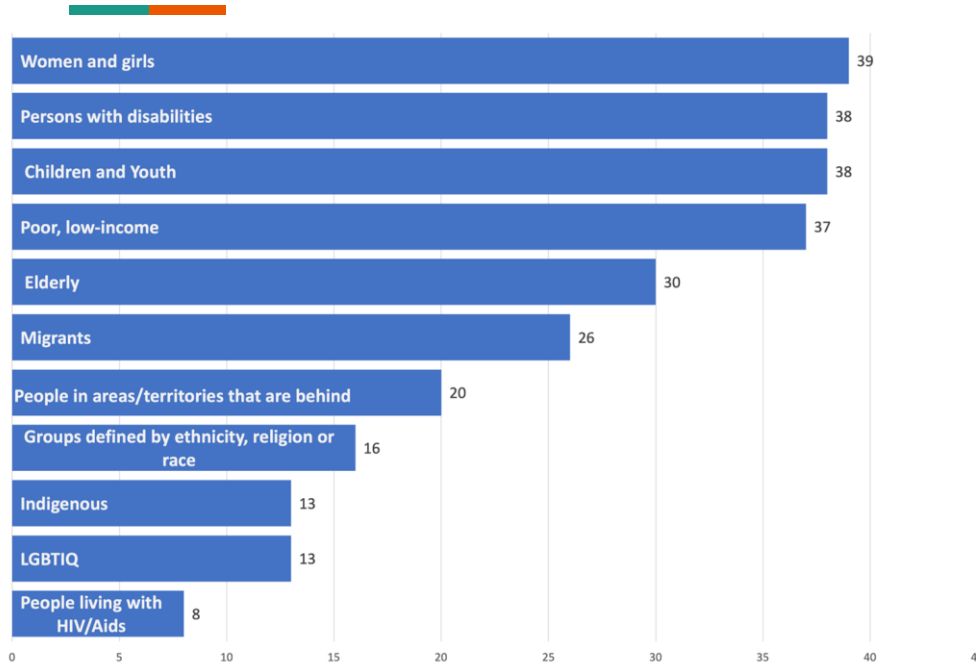
### Least Reported:

- Environment
- Industry, Innovation and infrastructure (SDG9)
- Means of implementation targets

# LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr

## Who - gender, age, poverty - less attention to race, indigenous, LGBTQ.....

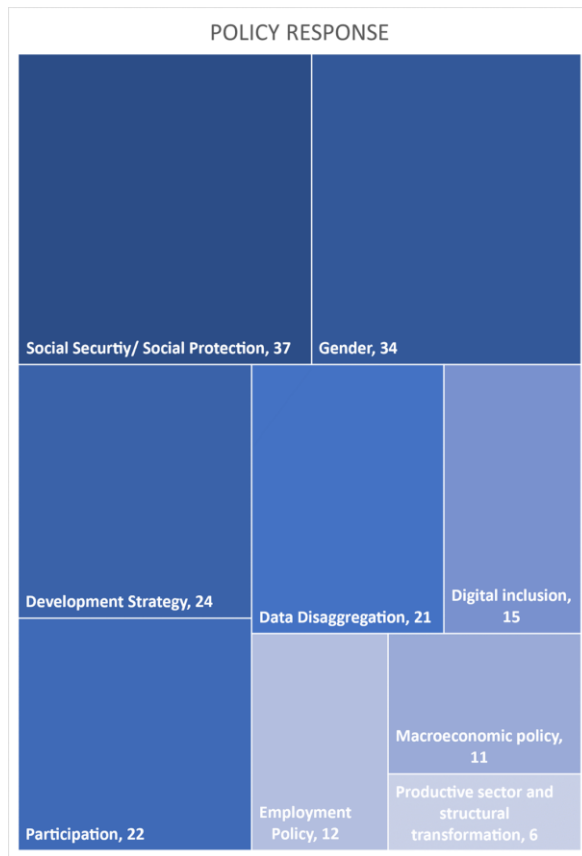


Those incapable of work  
Unemployed  
Rural Population  
Institutionalized Persons  
Victims of natural disasters  
People with Mental Illness  
Workers affected by lay-offs  
People without residence permit  
Workers in Informal Sector  
Foreign Workers  
Widows/Widowers  
IDPs  
Kuchis  
Sex Workers  
Covid-19 Positive  
Persons in Prisons  
Victims of modern slavery  
Homeless populations  
Orphans  
Health Workers  
Ex-convicts

# What?

## Good Practices

- Cabo Verde: Identified systemic racism, colonial legacy and harmful masculinity norms as risk factors to being left behind
- Antigua and Barbuda: Dedicated a section "Systemic Issues and Transformative Actions"
- Japan: Introduced the "SDG Award" given to actors and groups in society for their outstanding work on LNOB.



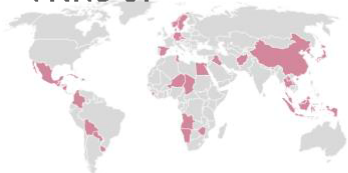
## What's missing?

- Systemic causes of exclusion
- Reaching the furthest behind first
- Pushing no one behind
- Digital inclusion as a way of leaving no one behind
- Acknowledging and acting on the link between production structure and exclusion



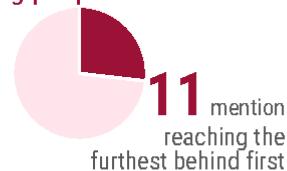
# United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) 2021 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) Reports - Leaving No One Behind

VNRs of

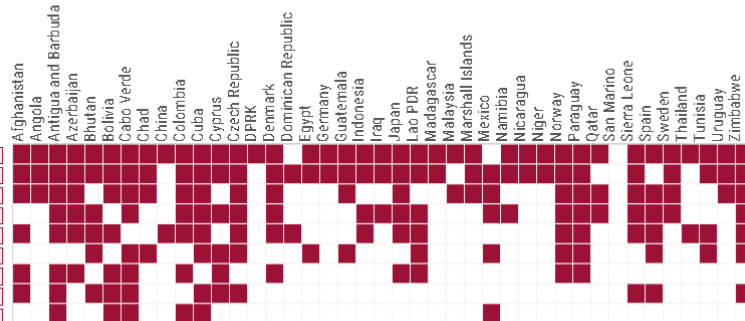
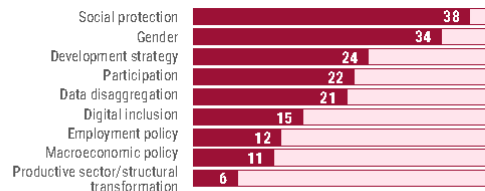


**41 COUNTRIES**

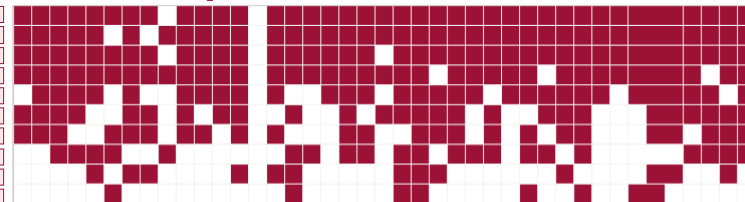
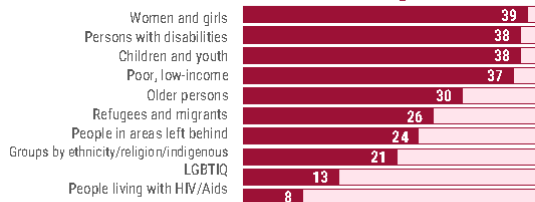
LNOB is now a consolidated topic in VNRs; however, “reaching the furthest behind first” and not pushing people further behind remains underexplored



## Policy actions to leave no one behind



## Who do countries refer to as being left behind or at risk of being left behind?



# COVID-19 AND PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr



# United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) 2021 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) Reports – Pandemic preparedness

## VNRs of

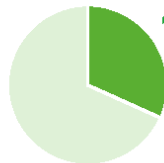


**41 COUNTRIES**

COVID-19's consequences on achieving the SDGs discussed in most VNRs, but propositions of urgent transformative actions are still missing



**40** discuss  
COVID-19 consequences on SDGs

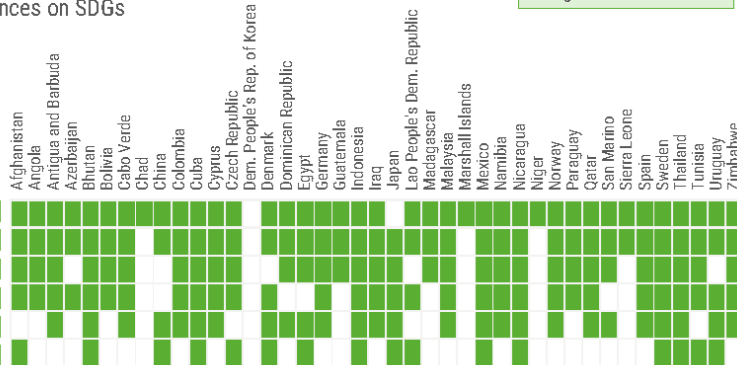
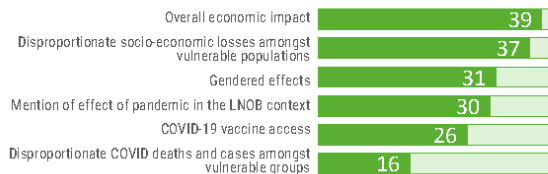


**13** mention  
target 3.d

### Target 3.d

Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks

## Issues raised or neglected in the VNRs



### Bhutan

"True to the spirit of GNH and the SDGs, Bhutan's response to the pandemic has been to ensure the wellbeing of the entire population as its top most priority, while also ensuring that the most vulnerable sections of society are protected—as they could otherwise have easily fallen through the cracks. Key to this unique and inspiring approach is His Majesty The King's personal efforts and compassionate leadership."

### Germany

"Germany plays an active role in the international CEPI initiative (Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations) and is providing it, as part of the aforementioned ACT Accelerator allocation, with a total of EUR 350 million for 2020 and 2021."

## Pandemic of inequality

- Covid-19 deaths and illness - Social determinants of health and disproportionate incidence among marginalized groups.
- Socio-economic consequences of lockdown - income, access to services, unpaid care work.....
- Global recession - LDCs hard hit, lack of resources for fiscal stimulus/social protection
- Most VNRs focussed on economic effects, and public health responses, increased attention to inequality and socio-economic issues compared to last year.
- Only 26 VNRs mentioned access to Covid-19 Vaccine

## Good Practices

- **Paraguay** included a section of their VNR to discuss how the LNOB principle has been understood pre and post the arrival of the pandemic. The report highlighted that children and adolescents have become increasingly vulnerable as a result of education and training moving online and how lack of connection to the internet has been a hindrance for learning
- **Guatemala's** VNR highlighted the detrimental effects of the informal economy the pandemic has had: the informal economy was described as "the most affected as a result of the restrictions on economic activities due to measures to ensure the social distancing."

### *Highlights of VNR analysis*

#### **Zimbabwe**

"The impact of COVID-19 and its complexities are multidimensional and demonstrate a need for integrated and systematic policy responses. For example, the risks borne by women during the COVID-19 pandemic are multiple and extend beyond the nontrivial risks of infection, psychological and physical stress to the physical, social and economic costs of stigma experienced by health workers in their communities. The pandemic has also exposed even more the vulnerabilities of those who are at risk of being left behind, ranging from women and children, to youth, persons with disabilities, older persons."



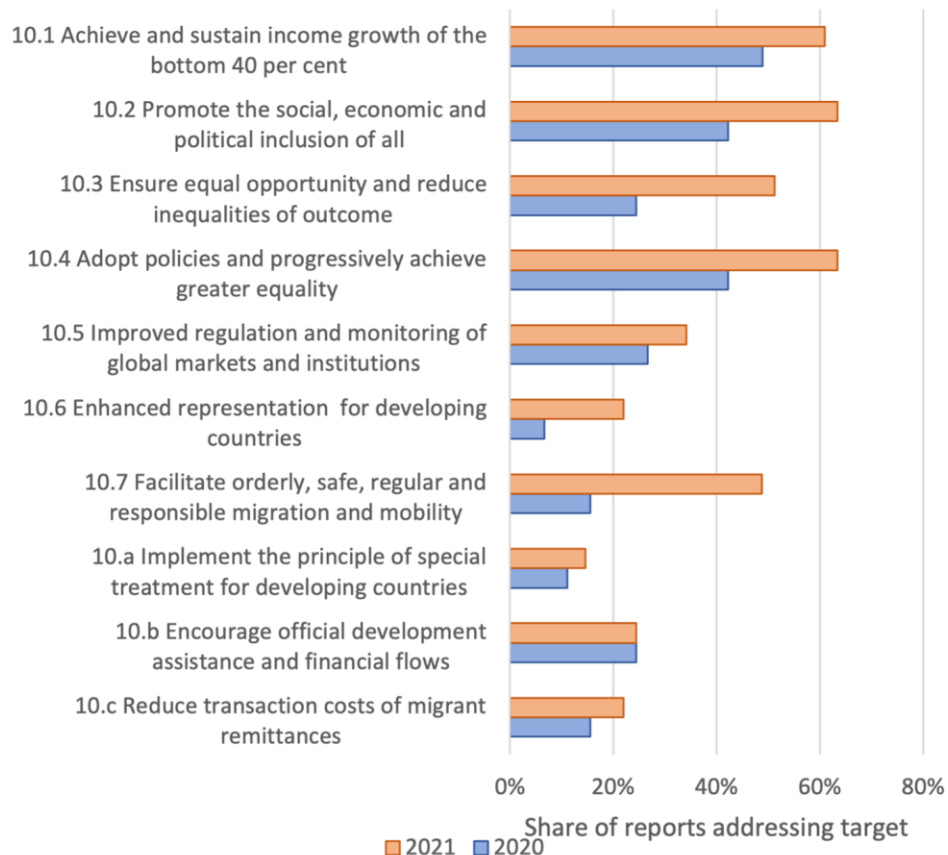
# Reducing inequality should be our top priority during the COVID-19 pandemic—but it isn't

Rolph van der Hoeven

**CDP Member**  
**Professor, International Institute of**  
**Social Studies (EUR-ISS), The Hague**

# Insufficient reporting

- *Reporting on the specific targets of SDG 10 remains grossly insufficient.*
- Only 5 of the 2021 VNRs report on all 11 targets, another 6 on 8-10 targets.
- The share of VNR's reporting on target 10.1 in 2021 was similar to the reporting in 2020, while the share reporting on domestic (10.4 and 10.5) and international targets (targets 10.5, 10.a and 10.b) increased slightly.



*Underlying causes of inequality in most cases not reported on*

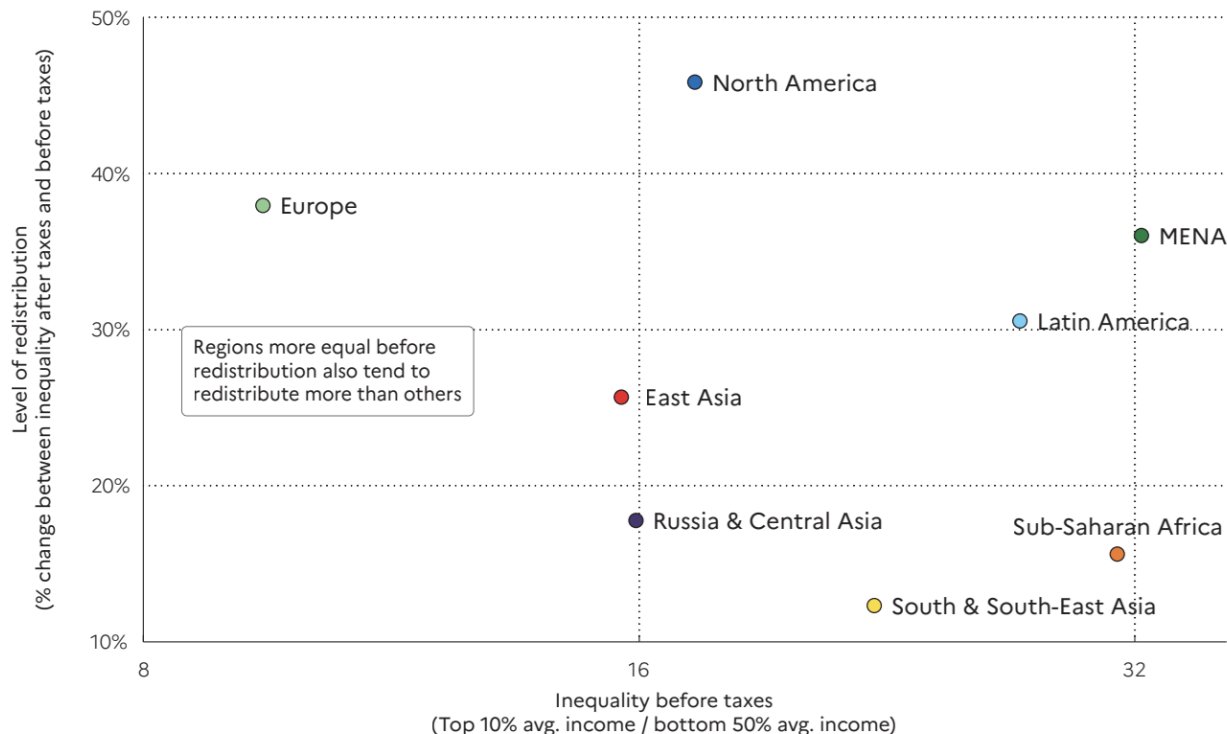
- This continued *deficit on specific targets of SDG 10* and the frequent absence of relevant policy discussions is *especially deplorable in the context of the COVID19 pandemic*, as the pandemic is likely to reverse progress made in reducing income inequality since the financial crisis.
- It is estimated that *the average Gini ratio in emerging and developing countries increased by 6 per cent since the beginning of the COVID19 pandemic*.

| Increased Income Inequality | Income inequality unchanged | Decreased Income Inequality | Unclear income inequality trend | Total VNRs | Clear policy proposals to reduce income inequality | Unclear policy proposals to reduce income inequality |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|--|--|
| 17                          | 10                          | 6                           | 8                               | 41         | 17   | 24   |

Inequality differences after taxes and transfers are mainly driven by inequality differences before taxes and transfers. Pre-tax inequality explains most of the variations in post-tax inequality levels. In other words, *redistribution matters to reduce inequality but does not significantly change country rankings*. Hence important to *foster structural change to tackle root causes of inequality*

**Figure 1.9b**

**Inequality before and after taxes, 2018-2021: Top 10/Bottom 50 income gap**



Source: World Inequality Report 2022



# United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) 2021 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) Reports - Reduced Inequalities

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



VNRs of



**41 COUNTRIES**

Is SDG 10 adequately covered in the VNRs?



**39** VNRs  
mention SDG 10



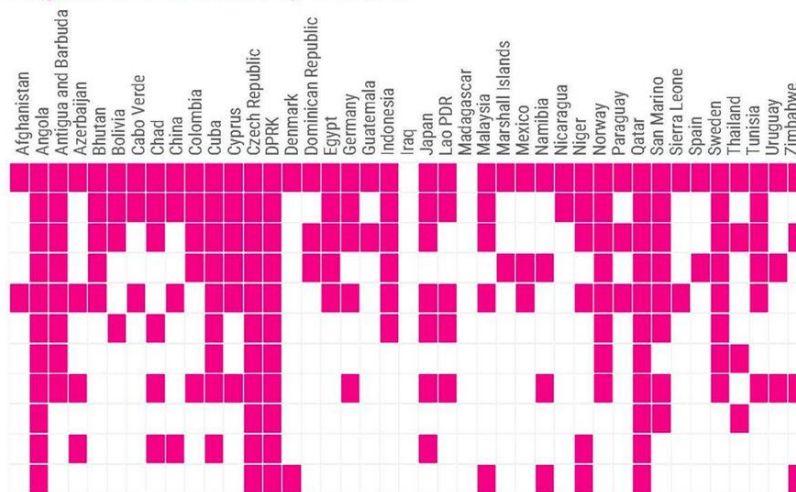
**17** VNRs  
mention most targets



**4** VNRs  
mention all targets

Overview of references to SDG 10 and its targets or indicators by number

Attention to SDG 10 increased slightly, but insufficient reporting on relevant policies to reduce income inequality in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath





# GENDER INEQUALITY

Natalya Volchkova

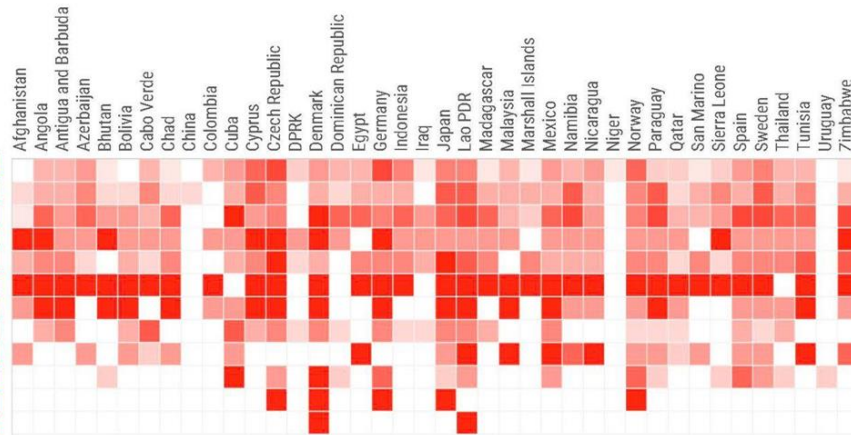
*Center for Economic and Financial Research at New Economic School, Director*  
*Russian Foreign Trade Academy, Vice Rector*



# United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) 2021 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) Reports - Gender Equality



Key policy issues crucial to reduce gender inequality, but many still not mentioned in VNRs



## Lao Peoples Democratic Republic

"The Lao National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences in 2014, produced by the Lao National Commission for Advancement of Women and the Lao Statistics Bureau, marks the country's first-ever national survey on violence against women. Based on nearly 3,000 interviews with women across the country, the report states that one in seven women have experienced physical or sexual violence from their partners at least once in their lifetime."

## Sierra Leone

"In 2020, GoSL established the Sexual and Gender based Violence (SGBV) '116' toll-free hotline was to provide counselling and referral services to SGBV survivors, particularly during the pandemic."

## Zimbabwe

"Thus, women's leadership initiatives were strengthened through the establishment and launch of the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) Zimbabwe National Chapter in 2020 and a youth caucus to drive activities towards women leadership, peace and social cohesion."

\* 40 VNRs were included in this analysis

## Intensity of reporting on SDG5: Gender Equality is not declining over 2019-2021

Topics that get more attention over time:

- Affirmative action
- Gender equality in executive positions
- Harmful practices, etc

Topics that get less attention in 2021:

- International partnership
- Research on gender inequality

## Addressing the causes of gender inequality

Causes and outcomes of gender inequality documented in economic literature:

- Social norms and gender identity
- Motherhood
- ....
- Access to political representation
- Gender differences in hierarchy within firms
- Labor-market discrimination
- Gender differences in occupations and sorting across firms

### Highlights of VNR analysis

- While we document systematically more intensive coverage of SDG5 goals by more developed countries there is a significant dispersion in coverage at any level of development.

### Highlights of VNR analysis

- VNR reports provide information on outcomes of gender inequalities in various dimensions, i.e gender violence, gender wage gap, gender educational gap, etc.
- However the causes of gender inequality are rarely identified and addressed
- There is a clear **gap between the policy scope and the underlying causes of gender inequalities** in different societies
- More efforts should be channelled toward identifying the true roots of gender inequality and addressing them by efficient policies.



# Environment

Trudi Hartzenberg  
**Executive Director, Trade Law  
Centre (tralac)**

## VNRs of

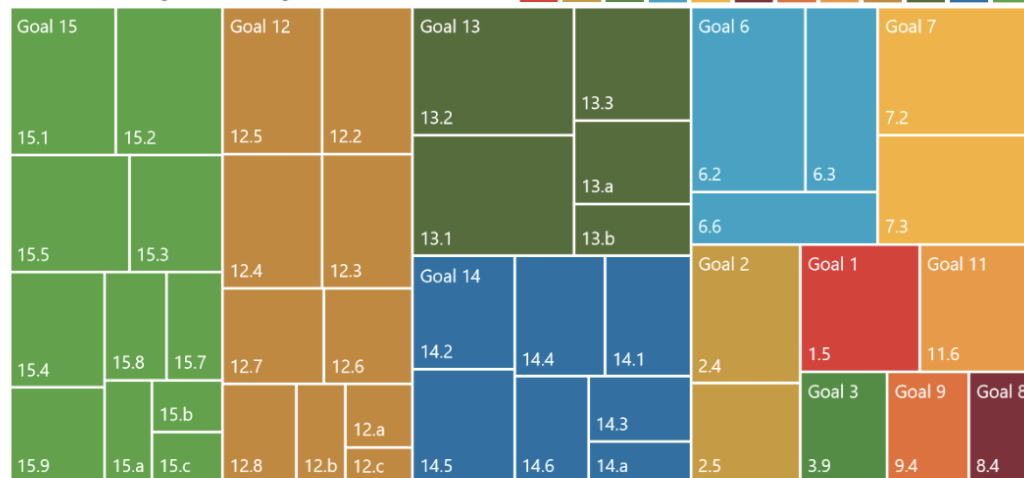


## 41 COUNTRIES

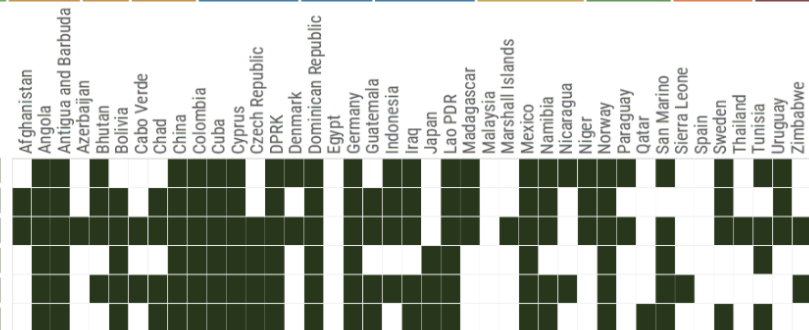
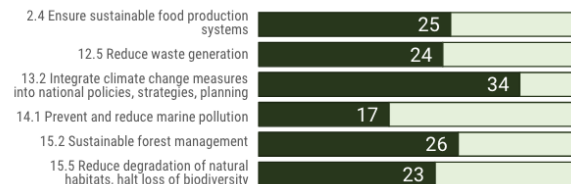


### 39 address action (SDG13)

Increased attention given to environmental targets, but implementation still lacking coverage in VNRs



### Varying coverage of environmental targets (*subset of complete analysis*)



## Case Study: Access to water and sanitation in schools contributes to education outcomes



- 6.1.** Safe & affordable drinking water
- 6.2.** Access to sanitation & hygiene & end open defecation

WASH facilities influence school attendance among adolescent girls in Africa

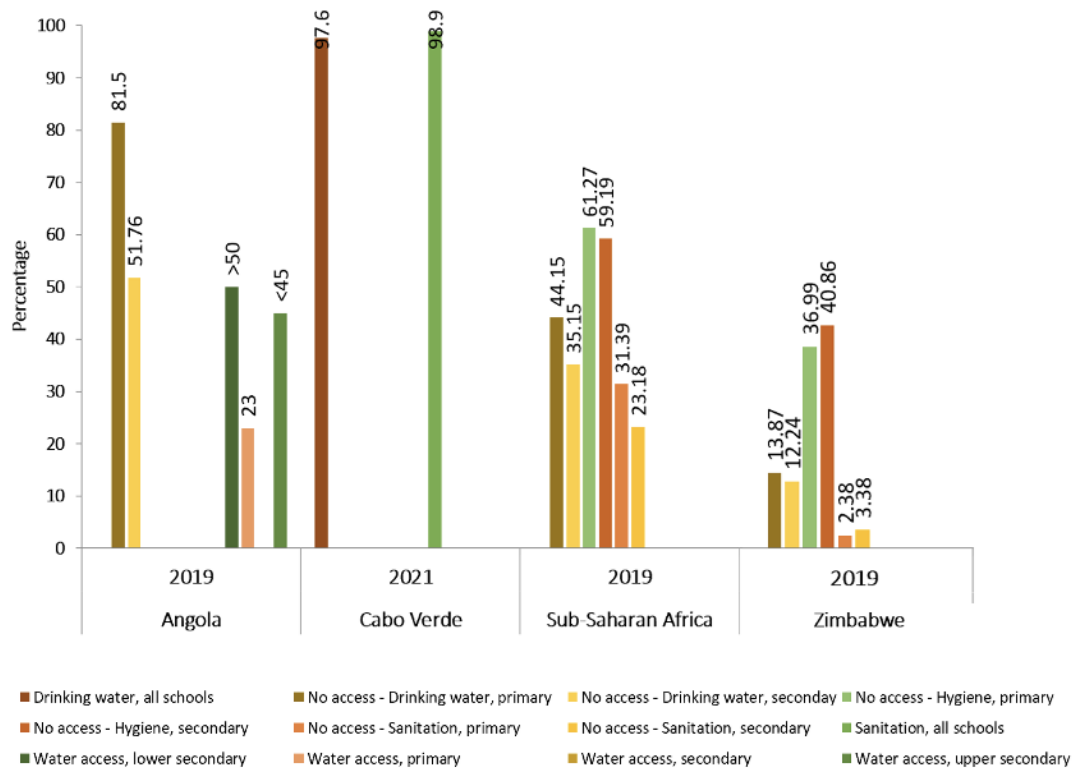
**UNICEF**



- 4.A.** Build & upgrade inclusive & safe schools (proportion with access inter alia drinking water, single-sex sanitation & handwashing facilities)



# Access to water and sanitation in schools – reporting by African countries



**WRAPPING UP**

## Final thoughts

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- Improvements but continuing disconnect with transformative challenge of SDG implementation
- Transformative aspects of the 2030 Agenda still under-reported - especially issues related to environmental sustainability, industry, innovation and technology (SDG 9) and the means of implementation goals.
- Treatment of leaving no one behind, inequalities, still target-driven, not addressing structural determinants.
- Treatment of structural transformation/productive capacities insufficient compared to its role in enabling achievement of SDGs

Visit CDP website page on VNRs for 2021 VNR report, infographics and more

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/voluntary-national-reviews.html>

For more information about CDP visit here: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/category/cdp/>