



# HLPF 2020

#HLPF2020

#VNRsLatam2020



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## High-Level Political Forum 2020 Analysis: Beyond virtuality

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**Author**

Javier Surasky

**Collaboration**

Celina Manso

**Edition**

Alexandra Roldán

**Graphic Design**

David Vargas

**General Direction**

Philipp Schönrock

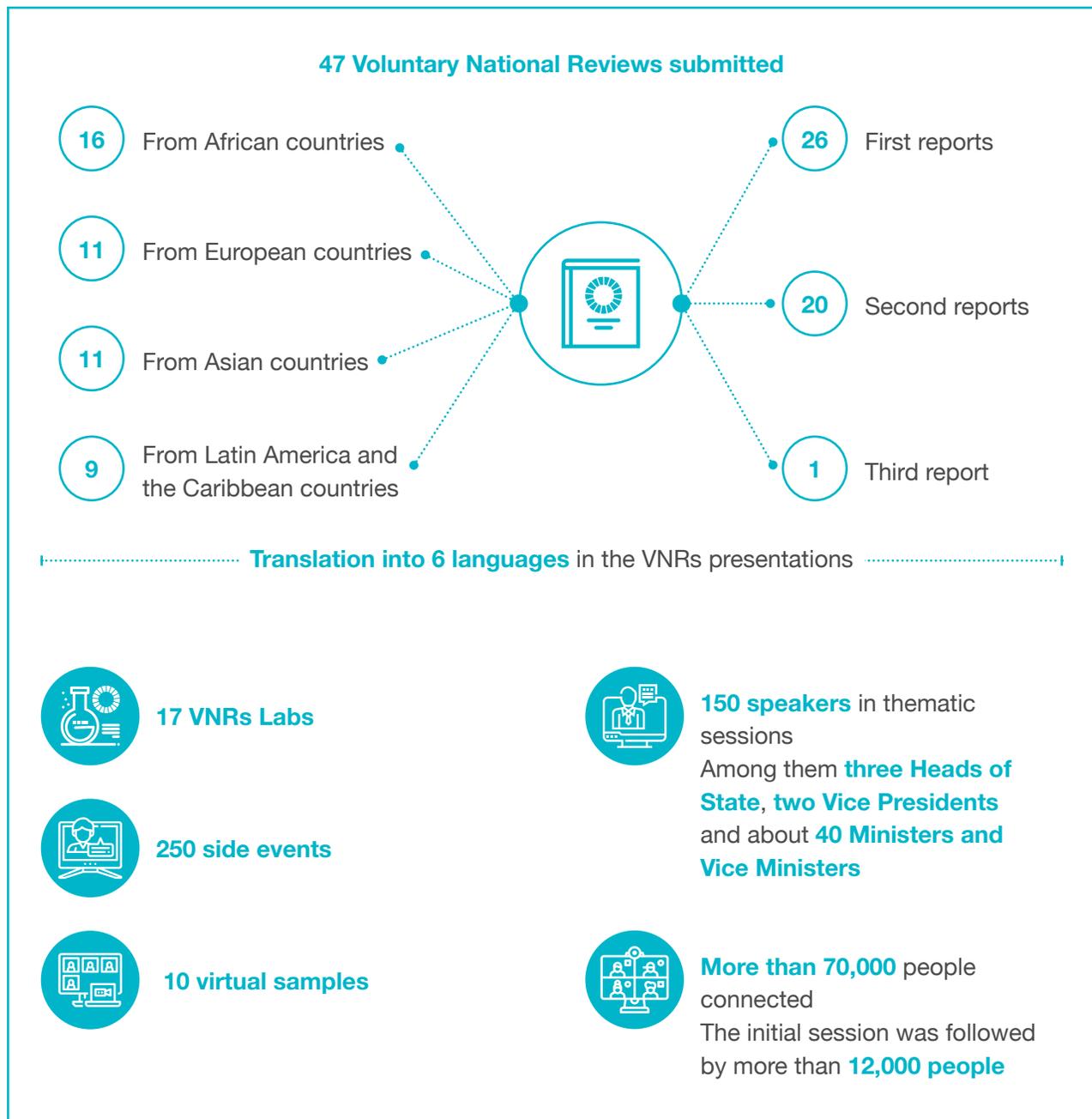
Bogota, Colombia

July, 2020

This work completes a series of publications made by Cepei around the realization of the [High-Level Political Forum \(HLPF\) 2020](#) (see A [Political Forum full of doubts](#) and [First week of the High-Level Political Forum 2020](#)). Find here our first reactions and analysis of its final results.

We will begin by presenting some relevant numbers from this year's session:

### The HLPF 2020 in numbers



**Source:** own elaboration and data provided by Major Groups and DESA

These results show that the **effort made by the UN to organize a virtual HLPF were successful**, despite the difficulties faced by those who wanted to speak during different working sessions. Just as a sample of the commitment shown by the United Nations personnel with the meeting, we can mention the fact that several translations were carried out by professionals from their homes, with all the limitations that this implies.

The virtuality of the HLPF 2020 resulted in a high number of participants, but it also affected the engagement capacity of those in countries with different time zones from New York, while the difficulties and low connection quality from less developed countries clearly exposed the existence of the current digital gap.

**Virtuality did not solved the recurring problem of the short time** that countries and respondents have to make presentations and ask questions after the report expositions. However, this HLPF opened an interesting opportunity when several States committed to receive and make a written response to the doubts and comments generated by their presentation. Creating a platform which gives open access to these answers could solve, at least specifically, one of the most serious

operational problems that affects the Forum dialogue exchanges.

Official side events were also recorded and shared by their organizers. Gathering these recordings in a common place, can be as useful as having the official discussions grouped together, something the United Nations does each year (the recordings are available at the [UN Web TV](#)).

The [Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews](#) (VLRs) presentations, made by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), deserves a special mention. Three Latin America and the Caribbean cities presented their SDGs progress reports: Niteroi (Brazil) and Chimbote and Nuevo Chimbote (Peru, in a joint report between both municipalities).

The plurality in the official HLPF side events organization was affected this year given the existing limitations, but above all because the United Nations allocated a large number of the quota for its own institutions.

Regarding **civil society** representation in the VNRs sessions, this was carried out mainly by the **group of women and youth, boys and girls**. Also, the **native people group** participated broadly.

## Reporting States at the HLPF 2020 and civil society



### In the presentation of the 47 Voluntary National Reviews

Only in one case there were no questions from civil society



### Pre-recorded presentations

- **11 questions were sent in advance** to be considered by the States that made pre-recorded presentations
- **Only one pre-recorded presentation** answered the questions sent in advance by **civil society**
- **2 written responses** were received to the questions asked



### Live Sessions

- Civil society **intervened in 27** national presentations
- **On 3 occasions, even though the floor was open, the connection** between the civil society representative and the virtual platform could not be established **for technical reasons**
- The moderator did not give the floor to civil society during the VNRs presentations **on 5 occasions**

**Source:** own elaboration and data provided by the Major Groups VNR Task Group

As expected, **COVID-19 turned out to be the most discussed topic** in the Forum sessions and in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) presentations. While the United Nations showed a comprehensive approach to face the consequences of the pandemic, the reports clearly gave economic and social prominence, putting off environmental considerations.

Before the HLPF started, we wondered if the Forum would provide concrete content to the call of *“Build Back Better”*. **Few concrete elements emerged around Build Back Better**, but at the same time countries shared successful experiences and plans for post-COVID-19 recovery. Likewise, United Nations high-level officials such as António Guterres

(Secretary General), Amina Mohamed (Deputy Secretary-General) and Mona Juul (President of the ECOSOC) identified areas to consider: Policies to extend social protection, promote clean energy, technology transfers and work that integrates local communities in the responses to be offered.

Beyond the references linked to the new Coronavirus, **climate change mentions were currently present**, with limited references to the fossil fuels use. However, central environmental issues such as land degradation, waste generation, and biodiversity care were largely absent. The lack of references to these specific topics it’s worrying, given that a [World Summit on Biodiversity](#) is scheduled for September of this year.

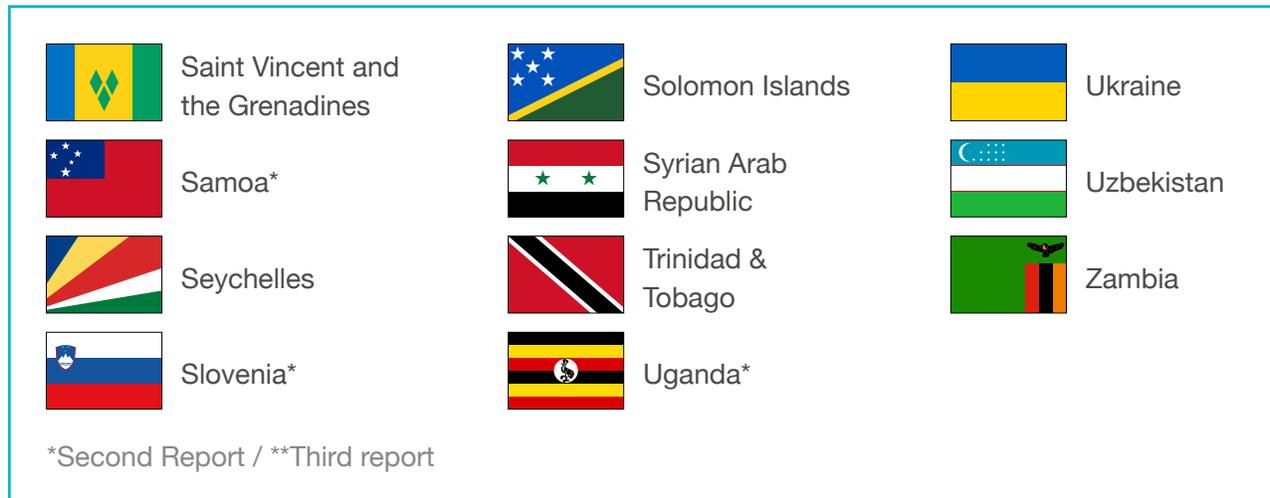
Linked to the environment, **the 2030 Agenda goals to be achieved in 2020, generated little attention.** This presents a significant risk to SDGs achievement. Progress on **target 14.6, which prohibits certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing,** should now be followed through the negotiation taking place in the World Trade Organization.

Focusing our attention on the VNRs, we emphasize that, after the Forum, **three countries (Barbados, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the Solomon Islands) have not published their reports.** The United Nations should not allow VNRs presentations from countries that have not shared their reports, as there is no possibility to analyze them to create a real dialogue. Other countries have published their reports just before exposing them, which is equally unacceptable.

### Voluntary National Reviews presented during the HLPF 2020

|   |                                  |   |                 |   |                     |
|---|----------------------------------|---|-----------------|---|---------------------|
|    | Argentina*                       |    | Ecuador*        |    | Micronesia          |
|    | Armenia*                         |    | Estonia*        |    | Morocco*            |
|   | Austria                          |   | Finland*        |   | Mozambique          |
|  | Bangladesh*                      |  | Gambia          |  | Nepal*              |
|  | Barbados                         |  | Georgia*        |  | Niger*              |
|  | Benin**                          |  | Honduras*       |  | Nigeria*            |
|  | Brunei Darussalam                |  | India*          |  | North Macedonia     |
|  | Bulgaria                         |  | Kenya*          |  | Panama*             |
|  | Burundi                          |  | Kyrgyz Republic |  | Papua New Guinea    |
|  | Comoros                          |  | Liberia         |  | Peru*               |
|  | Costa Rica*                      |  | Libya           |  | Republic of Moldova |
|  | Democratic Republic of the Congo |  | Malawi          |  | Russian Federation  |

\*Second Report / \*\*Third report



The options given to present the VNRs were by pre-recorded video presentation, live presentation or a mix between both, presenting on video, but answering questions live. The videos have been, as it had happened in previous years when this resource was used, more typical of a tourism fair than of a 2030 Agenda review progress Forum: Flora, fauna, typical costumes and beautiful landscapes instead of projects and identification of progress and challenges.

The most critical point of this year's HLPF, was given by the **inability of the UN Member States to agree on a final Ministerial Declaration**. Each working session of the HLPF must be closed with a political document adopted by Ministers, which, according to the resolutions that guide the Forum working modalities, must be approved by consensus and, if this is not possible, by vote. All the previous sessions of the Forum since 2016 failed to adopt their declarations by consensus, being therefore approved by vote. This year different elements were added: A tense international context, the limitation of virtual negotiations, the impossibility of using a voting system and an extremely weak negotiating team. The dispute that impede the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration was given by the inclusion (or exclusion) of territorial occupation as a factor that obstructs sustainable development. The final decision was a frustrating call by the President of the ECOSOC, Mona Juul, in her [HLPF closing](#)

[speech](#) to continue negotiating a final document as soon as possible.

We close this quick HLPF analysis identifying a series of **speeches that, due to their strength or inspirational value**, have been the ones that best reflect the ambition and commitment to achieve sustainable development:

- The [speech of the UN Secretary General](#) during the opening of the HLPF Ministerial Segment.
- For civil society, the [speech of young people](#) delivered by Farai Lwandile Mubaiwa (Youth Employment Service, South Africa) and Tina Hocevar (European Youth Forum).
- For the States, the [speech delivered by the Finland Prime Minister](#), Sanna Marin.
- As an example of a consistent [VNR presentation](#), we point out that of Barbados.

In conclusion, the United Nations High-Level Political Forum leaves a little restlessness and prepares us for the General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly, including the celebration of the UN 75th anniversary, which will also be held virtually in the second half of September.

After this year's HLPF, there is still much to do.



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## **Contact**

**Javier Surasky**

Governance Coordinator

*[j.surasky@cepei.org](mailto:j.surasky@cepei.org)*