

CULTURE IN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE 2023 REPORTS

Culture is currently not well recognised in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, despite its generally agreed and well-evidenced role in this field.

Nonetheless, every country reporting on their progress towards the Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) refers to culture, although the level of emphasis varies strongly.

Different aspects of culture's connection with development come through in the 36 published Voluntary National Reviews:

- Culture as a basis for identity as a starting point for development;
- Safeguarding and promoting culture (and heritage) as a goal in itself;
- Culture as a factor determining success in other policy areas;
- Culture as a means of promoting the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

A significant share of VNRs talk about each of these aspects, with a number underlining clearly that culture should be seen as a pillar of development and highlighting its under-recognition in the Agenda as it stands. However, we are a long way from a full and meaningful integration of culture into VNRs.

A mapping of existing references to culture to the targets proposed in the Culture2030Goal campaign's zero draft of a culture goal demonstrates that such a goal is feasible, and if more widely known and adopted, could stimulate stronger and more meaningful integration of culture into sustainable development planning and reporting.

This report has been elaborated by the
International Federation of Library Associations
and Institutions (IFLA) in the context of the
#Culture2030Goal campaign.

CONTACT

info@culture2030goal.net
www.culture2030goal.net



INTRODUCTION

The [Culture2030Goal](#) Campaign was born out of the concern that the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had a fundamental flaw – a failure to give culture the priority it needs in order to be integrated seriously into national development planning and delivery.

The Campaign has therefore worked to build momentum not just to set the scene for what comes after 2030, but also to encourage the fuller integration of culture into sustainable development planning and delivery now. In this, it has drawn on existing positive, practical examples which can not only show what is possible, but also provide references and guidance for others.

Over the past years, the Culture2030Goal campaign has therefore monitored the place accorded to culture in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), as a means of tracking how well governments are integrating cultural actors and factors into efforts to deliver sustainable development (notably for [2016-2019](#), and again in [2022](#)).

This report continues the series by looking at the Reviews published in 2023, with a view not only to highlighting particularly interesting examples, but also to explore the different types of approach taken by governments in integrating culture into their wider action. A full list of the Reviews, together with links, is in Annex 2.

It is worth noting that the campaign takes a broad definition of culture, that includes all of creators and cultural and creative industries, cultural heritage institutions, and the cultural factors which influence the way in which individuals behave. In this, we are aligned with Fiji's Voluntary National Review, which underlines, 'Recognizing that culture holds different meanings for various communities in Fiji, the policy emphasizes the equal significance of all perspectives'.

This report follows a relatively simple methodology, using a word search for "cultur*", or the equivalent in the language of publication, allowing incidences of the world culture or cultural to be captured. Subsequently, the nature of these references is analysed in order to identify interesting examples and draw overall conclusions. This nonetheless provides a direct picture of how far culture is a part of the way in which governments are approaching sustainable development.

It starts with an overview of the 2023 VNRs and contextual information, before then looking at three key ways in which culture features – firstly as a way of defining national identities, secondly as a goal in its own right, and thirdly as an enabler of other goals. Finally, there is a short look at the place of culture in promoting the SDGs in general, before we conclude with consideration of how well the references to culture in the 2023 VNRs map onto the targets suggested in the Culture2030Goal campaign's zero draft of a culture goal.

THE 2023 VNRS — AN OVERVIEW

At time of writing, 36 VNR reports have been published out of the 40 countries which will present at the UN High Level Political Forum 2023. Of these, more than a third come from Europe (13), followed by 8 from Asia-Oceania, 7 from Sub-Saharan Africa, 4 from the Middle East and North Africa, and 3 from Latin America and the Caribbean. From North America, only Canada is presenting a VNR. Almost all presenters are doing so for the second time, with the only outliers being Chile (presenting for the 3rd time), and the European Union (a 1st time presenter).

Turning to culture, **every single one of the published 2023 VNRS refers to ‘culture’ or ‘cultural’ in some way**, with numbers of references ranging from fewer than 10 to more than 100. While it is welcome that not a single VNR completely neglects the role of culture, it does underline the unevenness of the consideration of it in sustainable development policy planning, delivery and reporting.

Already at the stage of preparation, there appears to be inconsistency in **whether culture ministries are engaged in the preparation of Reviews**. Countries which do highlight their involvement are Chile, Croatia, Fiji, France, Guyana, Singapore, Slovakia, Timor Leste and Turkmenistan, while the relevant Directorate General was involved in the European Union. Others may have consulted, but this is not made clear, leaving open the concern that elsewhere, culture ministries are not even being involved in preparing what is supposed to be a whole of government effort.

CULTURE AS A BASIS FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY

Even ahead of any consideration of goals or actions, VNRS provide an opportunity for governments to set out **what defines their countries**. While this doesn’t necessarily imply any kind of policy action, it does set some important context for overall approaches, not just to the SDGs, but also policy-making in general.

10 VNRS – 28% of those published – talk about the role of culture in this way, for example Barbados, Croatia, the European Union, Guyana, and Saudi Arabia, which state that their culture and heritage (and pride in it) is key to their identity. Some go into more depth, like Bahrain, which states that they have ‘a culture that lends itself to ‘civilization, coexistence, openness to others, and tolerance, has a clear vision and determination to promote and advance human rights’.

The Maldives notes, for example, that learning to understand the culture is key for migrants to integrate, while Fiji notes how its cultural identity leads it to take a more holistic approach to development challenges.

Some VNRS draw on the work of artists or artisans on their front pages, as a way of encapsulating what the country is about, as is the case with Brunei and Fiji.

‘THE FIELD OF CULTURE, IN WHICH THE FREEDOM OF CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC CREATIVITY AND THE PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE ARE THE BASIS OF CULTURAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY, IS A KEY ELEMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT’.

CROATIA VNR 2023

Cultural diversity is also recognised, and indeed is one of the themes which the 2030 Agenda highlights. There are government that highlight that it Others note that it is the plurality of cultures that marks them out, notably Canada (in the case of its first nations), Chile, Poland and Portugal (in the case of different regions), Romania (in the case of the Roma), and Ireland (in the case of Travellers). Bahrain talks more broadly about the co-existence of cultures and civilisations, as does Guyana.

There are more general references from Kuwait, but in all of these cases, cultural diversity is highlighted as a strength and source of pride.

CULTURE AS AN END GOAL

While the consideration of culture in the 2030 Agenda is inadequate from the point of view of the Culture2030Goal campaign, there are nonetheless some narrow references. With a focus on SDG 11 in 2023, target 11.4 on safeguarding cultural and natural heritage therefore features in a number of reports, alongside wider discussion of whether culture is being promoted effectively, without necessarily being seen as instrumental for anything else.

There is an emphasis on **heritage** in half of the published reports – 18 in total. This is perhaps not surprising, given that SDG 11 is in focus this year, and SDG 11.4 underlines the need to safeguard cultural heritage, alongside natural heritage.

In terms of how this features, as already highlighted above, heritage is often a source of pride and identity, as in the case of Barbados, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Some also connect their work around heritage and SDG 11 with existing UNESCO instruments, for example highlighting the Conventions to which they are parties, or the number of World Heritage Sites they have (Bahrain, Lithuania, Poland, Saudi Arabia).

Many talk in broad terms about supporting heritage as a source of strength for example Barbados, Belgium, Bosnia, Chile, Guyana, Mongolia, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia and Turkmenistan. Croatia goes into more depth, setting out updates to its heritage planning and management processes as well as efforts to build awareness and skills, while Lithuania and Slovakia also talk about work to train heritage managers to boost performance.

Many highlight the need to protect heritage from disasters (in particular climate related), notably Barbados, Bahrain, Croatia (in particular in the case of maritime heritage), the Maldives, Poland and Portugal. Syria's VNR notes the damage done during the war in the country as a loss for society, Iceland highlights the value of heritage impact assessments, with policy decisions evaluated according to their potential impact on the sector.

Belgium also talks about the links between heritage and cultural diversity, while Fiji raises the idea of sustainable heritage management. Others focus on the need to uphold the heritage of minority groups, such as Chile, the European Union. Finally, an interesting side-point is Croatia's explicit effort to underline how intangible heritage is also relevant, and should be protected.

'CULTURE BRINGS
STRATEGY TO LIFE,
BLENDING INTENTION
WITH ATTITUDES, NORMS,
KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE,
BEHAVIOURS, AND VALUES
THROUGH THE WORK OF
ALL ORGANISATIONAL
STAFF'. IRELAND VNR 2023

However, as highlighted in the introduction, culture is not limited to heritage, and 14 VNRs indeed underline efforts to **promote the cultural and creative industries in particular, as well as culture more broadly**.

Poland for example stresses its plans to support the development of the cultural economy, while Tajikistan notes its work to invest in cultural infrastructure. The impact of the pandemic on culture - and the efforts to governments to remedy this - is noted in Chile and Guyana.

There are also references to training programmes offered to build the skills to participate in the cultural sector (Belgium, Saudi Arabia), as well as to develop local crafts (Bahrain). Portugal meanwhile makes support for the digitalisation of the cultural sector in its Review, while Guyana notes how its plans to develop road infrastructure should help the cultural sector, as well as plans to support the reach of its own artists through a Cultural Register.

Some countries talk more broadly about their work to promote culture (Bosnia, Chile, European Union, Kuwait) and cultural development (Barbados, Turkmenistan), the value of art and culture in society (Bahrain), or the promotion of indigenous cultures (Canada, Guyana)

A specific area of focus - and one that does also appear in the 2030 Agenda - is **cultural tourism**. The fact of highlighting this clearly does encourage governments to focus on this, with or without reference to subsequent impacts on jobs and growth. 15 VNRs do so, including Bahrain, Barbados, Bosnia, Chile, Fiji, Guyana, Iceland, and Portugal which highlight their work to promote cultural tourism.

Burkina Faso, Croatia, Lithuania, Timor Leste, Tanzania and Turkmenistan do bring in the importance of sustainability, as well as the importance of ensuring benefits to local communities and cultures, notably through their engagement in planning and decision-making. The EU highlights work to rehabilitate heritage sites in order to support tourism.

While not referenced in the 2030 Agenda, **international cultural cooperation** does feature in some VNRs, for example the European Union and Chile, which set this as a goal. Lithuania highlights cooperation with an African organisation, including cultural exchange, while Kuwait sees this as being part of diplomacy efforts.

An interesting angle here is around **cultural rights**, and in particular the right of everyone to participate in the cultural life of the community. Cultural rights do of course feature in international human rights texts, and so logically form part of any rights-based approach to development, although do not get a reference in the 2030 Agenda. Nonetheless, the idea that the right to access and create is essential is widespread, with 20 countries referencing it in some way.

There are broader references to cultural rights, explicitly, in the case of Bosnia, Comoros, Croatia (which suggests that this is key for personal development), Fiji, Iceland, and Lithuania. Meanwhile, the European Union and Portugal do not reference cultural rights, but do talk about the right of cultural participation for all, while Mongolia and Poland underline that there is a right to cultural services, and Guyana mentions a right of access to heritage. The Democratic Republic of the Congo suggests that the cultural wellbeing of the population itself should be a goal.

Ireland notes that COVID has had a negative impact on cultural rights that needs to be addressed now, while the Maldives indicate that climate change risks having the same effect.

There is a strong focus on the cultural rights of persons with disabilities, in the cases of Barbados, Iceland, Slovakia and Tajikistan. Meanwhile, Bahrain references the rights of women to participate in cultural activities, and Belgium, Chile and Romania talk about their work to enable the cultural

expression of vulnerable groups. Finally, Lithuania does reference the importance of artistic freedom as part of a broader cultural rights approach.

The 2030 Agenda in general places a strong emphasis on the **importance of measurement**, and in the case of Goal 11.4 at least, the metric of success is the level of investment in heritage. Only 10 VNRs, however, do include indicators (reflecting perhaps the incomplete nature of these here): Barbados, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Kuwait, Lithuania, Saudi, Turkmenistan, Guyana.

CULTURE AS ENABLER OF THE ACHIEVEMENT OF OTHER GOALS

Beyond consideration of culture as a goal in itself, the impact that cultural factors – and actors – can play in determining the success of efforts to achieve other policy goals also appears in around half of those VNRs that have been published.

The Culture 2030 Goal campaign as a whole argues that culture should be seen as a pillar of sustainable development as a whole, and indeed our earlier work has looked to assess numbers of references to this alongside references to the three other pillars – the economic, social and environmental.

While this report does not attempt to replicate this analysis, it does indicate that over a third of published VNRs indicate an understanding of **culture as a pillar of sustainable development**. This is explicitly the case for Canada (in reference to the approach taken by first nations), the European Union, Guyana, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Mongolia, Portugal, Romania, and Turkmenistan. Meanwhile, Bosnia's VNR suggests that culture has a role in all development area while Fiji includes the concept of 'culturally sustainable development'.

'CULTURE IS A CROSS CUTTING
DRIVER OF A RANGE OF
INTERCONNECTED TARGETS
UNDER DIFFERENT SDGS'
EUROPEAN UNION VNR 2023

Particularly interesting are the Reviews of Lithuania and Portugal, both of which highlight a sense that culture does not receive the attention it deserves in wider development policies, both suggesting that it is 'under-recognised'.

Going beyond more general references to culture as a pillar of development, 17 VNRs point out that culture is – or can be – **an enabler of progress in one or more policy areas**. As the Irish Review sets out, "an organisation and its culture are inherently connected, so bespoke solutions are needed. Culture can be a liability or an asset"

In particular, the importance of taking account of cultural in designing and implementing policies (culturally sensitive approaches) appears in the VNRs of Canada, Guyana, Iceland, Poland, Timor Leste and Tanzania

There are broader references to culture supporting wider outcomes in the cases of Chile, the European Union, Fiji, Lithuania, Mongolia, Poland, Portugal, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, and Slovakia. Romania, for examples, talks about culture as being a 'resource and an enabling factor'.

Going into more depth, the published VNRs highlight a wide range of different areas (covered by existing SDGs) where culture can determine the effectiveness of policies. Many highlight the contribution

that culture can make to boosting **jobs and growth (SDG 8)**. This can be both through supporting the expansion of cultural and creative industries (in the case of Belgium, Bosnia, Burkina Faso, Chile, Croatia, EU, Fiji, Guyana, Romania, and Saudi Arabia), as well as through enhancing broader development and attractiveness of cities, regions and countries (Bosnia, CAR, Chile, EU, Guyana, Mongolia, and Portugal). Going a step further, Portugal, Romania, and Saudi Arabia all suggest that investments in culture tend to lead to stronger innovation.

Culture is also regularly cited as contributing to **health and wellbeing (SDG 3)**. This is the case in the Reviews of Bosnia, Croatia, the European Union, Kuwait, Mongolia, Saudi Arabia, and Slovakia. More specifically, Guyana's review underlines the role of culture in the success of policies around sanitation.

Cultural sensitivity can also be important, for example in advice for healthy eating (as suggested in Chile's VNR), while Iceland's Review discusses the need to build cultural awareness in the health sector in order to provide more effective services to everyone in the population.

As already indicated above, there may be a case for balance. Croatia's VNR for example emphasises that too much cultural tourism may, for example, impose costs on the wellbeing of people living in affected areas.

There are also reviews that link culture to questions of **equality, social cohesion and peace (SDGs 1, 10, 11 and 16)**. Of course to a large extent, it is arguable that the promotion and protection of cultural rights, as already discussed above, also contributes to this.

More specifically, Chile makes the link between cultural initiatives and the struggle against homelessness.

'ANOTHER LESSON WHICH WAS REINFORCED DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD IS THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE IN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING, PARTICULARLY REGARDING SANITATION. CHANGING BEHAVIOURS AND TRADITIONS TAKES TIME AND THUS INTERVENTIONS MUST FACTOR IN CULTURE AND ITS EFFECTS ON BEHAVIOURS AROUND SANITATION'.
GUYANA VNR 2023

'THE POLICY RECOGNIZES THAT CULTURE PLAYS A CROSS-CUTTING ROLE IN VARIOUS DEVELOPMENT AREAS SUCH AS COMMERCE AND TRADE, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT, POVERTY ALLEVIATION, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, LAND MANAGEMENT, HEALTH, AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES, AND EMPLOYMENT'.
FIJI VNR 2023

More broadly, Croatia and Liechtenstein suggest that culture is at the heart of social development, and that it supports social cohesion. Bahrain, the EU and Rwanda echo this, adding in a contribution to peace in general, while Ireland argues that culture helps to build communities. In Kuwait's VNR, culture is seen as helping to combat divisions in society, notably racism and gender divides, and in Syria's there is the ambition to work through culture to address conflict.

Guyana connects culture with resilience, arguing that this "proceeds from a society's own agency in its development and progress". Portugal too talks about how culture is a factor of resilience, as well as addressing social inequalities.

Culture is also cited as a factor in efforts to promote **climate action (SDG 13)**, as well as to spread environmentally friendly behaviours (**SDGs 12, 14 and 15**).

The European Union, for example, makes culture part of its wider efforts to advance the green transition, while Ireland highlights its Creative Climate Action Fund to fund cultural projects that aim to connect people with changes linked to climate. Portugal ensures that cultural actors are part of its National Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development, in order to ensure that they are able to contribute at all relevant moments. Meanwhile, Romania reminds us that efforts to exploit maritime spaces, for example, can lead to harm to heritage – a risk that needs to be managed.

Traditional cultural practices can be at the heart of efforts to ensure better preservation of natural environments and resources. This is the case of Bahrain (where the culture of pearling is cited), Canada (where first nations bring invaluable experience), Croatia (Adriatic fishermen), Guyana (indigenous groups), and Poland (aquaculture).

There is also a role for those taking decisions about how to renovate and ensure the energy efficiency of heritage buildings and cultural institutions (Belgium). Culture is also important in updating the way we treat animals (Chile). Once again, the need for cultural sensitivity in achieving progress is underlined, for example in Zambia's VNR.

To some extent, the contribution of culture to **SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions)** is already covered above, but it is worth adding that Romania's VNR discusses how cultural policies are helping to ensure that Roma communities are participating more actively in decision-making, while Chile more broadly underlines the connection between culture and participation.

Culture is also viewed as being closely related to **education (SDG4)** in 15 VNRs. For many of these, the logic is that a comprehensive and meaningful education for young people must include culture and arts education, in order to produce fulfilled and skilled individuals. This is certainly the case for Bahrain, Bosnia, Croatia, Guyana (which runs heritage camps for youth), Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Saudi Arabia (interestingly at the university level). Interestingly, Croatia suggests that cultural education can be particularly important in building the skills necessary for media literacy and wider critical thinking, while Slovakia argues that it can make a difference in addressing youth issues. France notes that this task can imply work, in particular, for libraries, while France and Fiji both make education part of their wider cultural strategies.

Outside of this, Canada's VNR notes that cultural sensitivity is important for learning materials to be accepted and effective, while Iceland suggests that education in turn can serve to build cultural sensitivity and Ireland focuses on the importance of adapting cultures within universities themselves. Meanwhile, Croatia highlights its Backpack Full of Culture initiative, which is designed to address educational inequalities for the youngest children, especially in remote areas.

'IN GUYANA, THESE COMMUNITIES HAVE TRADITIONALLY USED PAS AND THEIR RESOURCES SUSTAINABLY AND HAVE DEEP CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS TO THESE AREAS. IT HAS BEEN PROVEN, PARTICULARLY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PERIOD THAT STRONG AND FRUITFUL PARTNERSHIP WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS ARE NECESSARY FOR THE PRESERVATION AND EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF GUYANA'S NATURAL HERITAGE. *GUYANA VNR 2023*

A CULTURE OF...

Linked to the examples provided above are the references in over half of VNRs to the concept that behaviours in a wide range of different areas are (or could be) influenced by a specific culture. These go beyond a 'narrow' definition of culture as being purely about individual creators, the cultural and creative industries, or cultural (heritage) institutions, and refer more to culture as a way of being, thinking or doing.

'Cultures of' are referred to, for example, in the case of **accountability and good governance** (Barbados, Central African Republic, Chile, and Zambia), **participation in governance** (Barbados and Comoros), **learning and talent development** (Bahrain (in a company), Belgium, and Saudi Arabia), **peace** (Bahrain and Chile), **entrepreneurship, innovation and openness to adopting new tools** (Bosnia, Burkina Faso, the EU, Guyana, Portugal, Romania, and Saudi Arabia), **equity and tolerance** (Burkina Faso, Comoros, the EU, France, Ireland (in the case of immigrants and persons with disabilities), Portugal, Romania, and Syria), **environmental responsibility** (France, Singapore, Ireland, and Tajikistan), **cooperation** (Ireland), and **health** (Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Tanzania).

Particularly interesting, perhaps, is the idea that **sustainable development itself is a culture**, as is proposed by the Voluntary National Reviews of Bahrain, Bosnia, France, Iceland, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Timor Leste.

At the same time, it is clear culture can be unhelpful, serving to **block or delay efforts** to achieve the SDGs. 12 Reviews note that culture can serve to slow action to address discrimination, harassment and barriers to participation for women: Barbados, Burkina Faso, CAR, Comoros, DRC (access to family planning), France (sexist culture), Portugal, Tajikistan, Timor Leste, Turkmenistan, Tanzania, and Zambia. The urgency of action to address sexist culture in the cultural sector itself, both as a goal in itself and a means to promote positive change elsewhere, appears in Belgium and France's VNRs.

Cultural factors are also cited as a basis for wider discrimination by Barbados, the EU, Iceland (in the case of health inequalities), and the Maldives (non-fulfilment of children's rights), while Singapore associates culture with delays in reducing waste.

While, as set out, these references allude to a broader definition of culture than that traditionally addressed by cultural ministries or policies, there is a case for arguing that it is nonetheless through such policies that we can hope to enhance – or correct – impacts. Indeed, as already suggested in the previous section, cultural policy tools are being deployed in order to effect change in areas where the (culture-driven) behaviours of citizen or specific actors determines outcomes.

CULTURE RAISING AWARENESS OF THE 2030 AGENDA

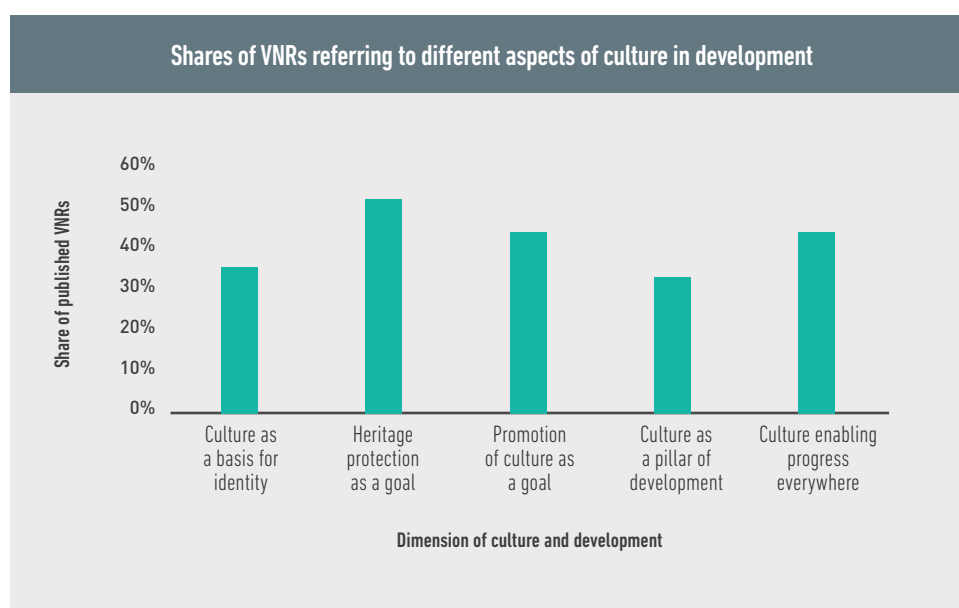
The impact of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals depends on the degree to which governments and citizens are aware of them, and the thinking that underpins them. Culture can, as some Voluntary National Reviews, indicate, play a role here also. Portugal's VNR, for example, stresses "the importance of using culture as a means of dissemination and appropriation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda".

The concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is intended to build the culture of sustainable development set out above and features broadly in SDG 4.7. It includes themes such as human rights, global citizenship and sustainable development itself.

The VNRs of Croatia, France, Ireland and Poland indeed see libraries, as cultural institutions, contributing to spreading this, while Singapore gives culture in general a role in successful ESD. Iceland sets out a call for more resources to be invested in educational research and development, as well as pedagogical practices in line with ESD, as part of its focus on culture. Portugal in the meanwhile references the work of a working group in the city of Braga, led by cultural actors, which promoted reflection on how different players could contribute to achieving the goals.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A CULTURE GOAL?

Following the model established by last year's review of the place of culture in Voluntary National Reviews, this report has looked at three key aspects – culture as an underlying source of identity, culture as a goal in itself (both as concerns the heritage safeguarding mentioned under Target 11.4, and broader culture promotion), and culture as an enabler of success under other goals (both as a general pillar, and linked to specific other goals). In each case, it finds that despite the very limited references to culture in the 2030 Agenda, governments are not only aware of, but are acting on and through culture in order to accelerate progress.



As the graph demonstrates, a significant share of VNRs refers to each of these dimensions. Given the explicit target (11.4) for heritage safeguarding, it is not a surprise that this is the most common type of reference. However, not a single dimension is referred to in less than a third of cases.

Nonetheless, the picture remains uneven. It is noticeable that many of the examples given through this report come from European Voluntary National Reviews in particular. This implies that opportunities to mobilise cultural actors, and act on cultural factors, are being missed, which in turn – we would argue – slows efforts to achieve the SDGs. There is a risk, even, of this becoming a factor of division, with countries already enjoying higher levels of development on different measures also doing more to realise the potential of culture.

It is this inconsistency – arguably the result of the failure to prioritise culture in 2015 by making it an explicit goal – that the Culture2030Goal campaign seeks to correct. In this, we find clear support in the reviews of Portugal and Lithuania, both of which highlight the fact that culture is ‘under-represented’ as things stand. It should be noted that the call for a culture goal also features in the [Declaration](#) of the UNESCO MONDIACULT 2022 conference, “We call on the UN Secretary General to firmly anchor culture as a global public good, and to integrate it as a specific goal in its own right in the development agenda beyond 2030”.

In order to address this issue, the Culture2030Goal campaign released a [zero draft of a culture goal in September 2022](#), at the time of the MONDIACULT conference. This aims not just to support discussion about what could feature in any post-2030 agenda, but enable governments and others to act ‘as if’ a Goal existed already.

The Goal, as set out in the proposal, is to “Ensure cultural sustainability for the wellbeing of all”. Possible targets are:

1. *Realize cultural rights for all, by fostering inclusive access to and participation in cultural life, creativity and diversity of cultural expressions, in particular for women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and vulnerable populations.*
2. *Promote a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity.*
3. *Protect and safeguard all forms of heritage, harness them as a resource for sustainable development, through existing conventions and other policy frameworks, as well as such new mechanisms as may be appropriate.*
4. *Protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions to strengthen the creativity and development capacity of individuals and communities, through existing conventions and such new mechanisms as may be appropriate.*
5. *In devising and implementing policies on cultural and creative industries, sustainable tourism and digital technologies, promote local culture and products, the economic and social rights of artists and cultural professionals and artistic freedom, and develop and implement appropriate monitoring tools.*
6. *Enhance legal conditions and practical opportunities for mobility of cultural professionals and cross-border creativity in the creation of cultural goods, services and practices through international multi-stakeholder collaboration.*
7. *Empower indigenous peoples to strengthen their own institutions, cultures and languages, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations*
8. *Develop a cultural approach in environmental protection and sustainable urbanization, including land planning, landscape management, protection of biodiversity, agriculture and natural areas management, through heritage, local cultures and knowledge, creativity and arts.*
 - a. *Strengthen cultural institutions, including through international cooperation, to build capacity at all levels to realize cultural rights and sustain cultural pluralism.*
 - b. *Ensure, through transversal, multi-stakeholder collaboration, that cultural considerations are taken into account in all international development goals, at the outset of and throughout all policy-making processes, through engaging cultural sector actors, whether or not associated with pre-existing cultural targets.*



As a final exercise, therefore, we have looked to assess to what extent the 2023 Voluntary National Reviews are indeed acting 'as if' such a Culture Goal already exist, by looking at whether the reporting offered corresponds to the targets set out. This is offered in Annex 1, and appears to be encouraging.

Indeed, all VNRs address at least one of the targets, and 2/3 address 3 or more. Over 1/3 tackle 50% or more, and 4 provide input on 8 or more targets. Meanwhile, 8 out of the 10 targets are addressed by at least a third of VNRs.

The table also notes where references are particularly extensive or strong, based on the author's judgement. The area which most commonly receives in-depth attention is Target 3 (heritage), with promoting freedoms and local creation, supporting artists and mobility, realising cultural rights for all, and peace and diversity also being addressed more fully in four or more VNRs.

While the proposed Culture Goal is a zero draft, this is indeed encouraging in terms of indicating its potential applicability in future VNRs and wider sustainable development strategy planning and implementation.

Annex 1 – Reporting on Culture Goal Zero Draft Targets in the 2023 VNRs.

X = some reference, XX = strong reference, blank = no reference, * = not yet published

Country	1. Realise Cultural Rights for All	2. Peace and diversity	3. Protect and deploy heritage	4. Protect and promote diversity	5. Promote freedoms and local creation	6. Support artists and cross-border mobility	7. Empower indigenous peoples	8. Apply a cultural approach in other policies	a. Strengthen cultural institutions	b. Make culture part of wider policy-making
Barbados	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Bahrain	X	XX	XX	X	XX	X				XX
Belgium	X	XX	X			X			X	
Bosnia	X	X	XX		X	X		X		
Brunei		X								X
Burkina Faso		X			X					
Cambodia*										
Canada		X		X			XX	X		X
Central African Republic								X		
Chile	X	X	X		XX	X	X			X
Comoros	X	X				X				
Croatia	XX	X	XX		XX	XX		XX	X	X
DRC				X						
European Union	XX	XX	XX		XX	XX	X	X	X	XX
Fiji	X		XX		X		X	X		XX
France		X								X
Guyana	X	X	XX	XX	XX	XX	X	X	X	X
Iceland	XX	X	X		X			X		X
Ireland	XX	X		X				X	X	XX
Kuwait		X		X		XX				
Liechtenstein		X						X		
Lithuania	X		XX		XX	XX		X	X	X
Maldives	X		X							X
Mongolia	XX		X					X	X	
Poland	X		XX			X			X	
Portugal	X	X	XX	X	X	X		X		X
Romania	X	X		X				XX		
Rwanda		X								

Annex 1 – Reporting on Culture Goal Zero Draft Targets in the 2023 VNRs.

X = some reference, XX = strong reference, blank = no reference, greyed out = not yet published

Country	1. Realise Cultural Rights for All	2. Peace and diversity	3. Protect and deploy heritage	4. Protect and promote diversity	5. Promote freedoms and local creation	6. Support artists and cross-border mobility	7. Empower indigenous peoples	8. Apply a cultural approach in other policies	a. Strengthen cultural institutions	b. Make culture part of wider policy-making
Saudi Arabia		X	XX		X	XX		X	X	X
Singapore		X							X	X
Slovakia	X		X						X	X
St Kitts*										
Syria		X	X							
Tajikistan	X	X				X				
Timor Leste		X			X	X				X
Turkmenistan			X		X			X		X
Tanzania		X			X					
Uzbekistan*										
Viet Nam*										
Zambia		X								X
TOTAL	20	27	19	9	16	16	5	16	11	20
	56%	75%	53%	25%	44%	44%	14%	44%	31%	56%

ANNEX 2 – 2023 Voluntary National Reviews .

In the below, #VNR refers to how many times the country has prepared a VNR

Country	No. of VNR	Published	Link
Barbados	2	X	Link
Bahrain	2	X	Link
Belgium	2	X	Link
Bosnia	2	X	Link
Brunei	2	X	Link
Burkina Faso	2	X	Link
Cambodia	2		Link
Canada	2	X	Link
Central African Republic	2	X	Link
Chile	3	X	Link
Comoros	2	X	Link
Croatia	2	X	Link
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	2	X	Link
European Union	1	X	Link
Fiji	2	X	Link
France	2	X	Link
Guyana	2	X	Link
Iceland	2	X	Link
Ireland	2	X	Link
Kuwait	2	X	Link
Liechtenstein	2	X	Link
Lithuania	2	X	Link
Maldives	2	X	Link
Mongolia	2	X	Link
Poland	2	X	Link
Portugal	2	X	Link
Romania	2	X	Link
Rwanda	2	X	Link
Saudi Arabia	2	X	Link
Singapore	2	X	Link
Slovakia	2	X	Link
St Kitts	1		Link



ANNEX 2 – 2023 Voluntary National Reviews .

In the below, #VNR refers to how many times the country has prepared a VNR

Country	No. of VNR	Published	Link
Syria	2	X	Link
Tajikistan	2	X	Link
Timor Leste	2	X	Link
Turkmenistan	2	X	Link
Tanzania	2	X	Link
Uzbekistan	2		Link
Viet Nam	2		Link
Zambia	2	X	Link

