

CULTURALLY INFORMED, CULTURALLY GROUNDED, CULTURALLY POWERED: CULTURE IN THE 2025 VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS (VNR)

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) presents its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) as a reflective journey toward sustainable development, rooted in cultural wisdom and guided by strategic planning. Like a traditional canoe navigating vast Pacific waters, FSM charts its course through nine national development priorities, drawing from traditional values and steering toward inclusive growth.

Voluntary National Review of the Federated States of Micronesia 2025

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



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transforming Our World – the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development arguably contains a significant culture-shaped hole. Despite calls for this in the run-up to its agreement in 2015, there is no dedicated culture goal, but rather a scattered collection of narrow references.

From the point of view of the Culture2030Goal campaign, this represents a key weakness in the overall agenda, risking meaning that the cultural factors that can have a decisive influence on the full range of other policy areas are neglected. Similarly, it leaves the culture sector itself with little sense of ownership or engagement and means that governments in turn are less likely to engage them in policy action, despite the major contribution they can make.

The mission of the Culture2030Goal Campaign is to promote the stronger consideration of culture in sustainable development, from a dedicated goal in future global agendas to real-world implementation in diverse national policy frameworks. One element of our work in this direction is to monitor how far, despite the absence of a goal, culture is already being integrated in different ways into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Following a comprehensive report for the VNRs for [2016-2019](#) (and a similar effort looking at Voluntary Local Reviews for [2016-2020](#)), the Campaign then adopted a simpler and more sustainable model for monitoring. This has been used to produce reports in [2022](#), [2023](#), and [2024](#). This is the 2025 edition.

The report, overall, makes clear that despite the minimal role accorded to culture in the 2030 Agenda, it is common for national governments to recognise its importance in reality. At the same time, this recognition is uneven. While some countries are well advanced both in promoting culture as a goal in itself and as an enabler of other goals, others are lagging behind. The potential for an explicit goal to bring everyone up to the same level is clear.

Looking across the themes covered by the ten targets proposed in the Culture2030Goal [zero draft of a Culture Goal](#), all but two appear in at least a third of VNRs. This pattern is similar to that seen last year, implying that there is a critical mass of experience and practice to show that it is feasible to have a goal.

Analysing the different dimensions of the relationship between culture and sustainable development more broadly, a majority of countries submitting VNRs this year recognise the determining role of culture in the achievement of other goals. Either as an enabler or a barrier, the need to take account of and address behaviours and attitudes in order to achieve lasting change is clear. In many cases, it is explicitly recognised that the (more narrowly defined) arts, culture and heritage sector has a unique power to make this happen. Again, this is a pattern that is consistent with that from last year.

Finally, an analysis of references to culture broken down by clusters of individual Sustainable Development Goals demonstrates that there are no policy areas where cultural actors or factors are irrelevant. The most commonly referenced clusters of SDGs are around agriculture, environment and climate, community and resilience, and growth, jobs and innovation. There are notable differences in which clusters are most referenced between 2025 and 2024.

Across this analysis, there is a clear critical mass of support for sustainable development policies that are informed by cultural factors, grounded in cultural realities, and powered by the culture sector. This underlines that there is nothing uncommon or unfeasible about approaches to sustainable

development that fully realise the potential of culture. Good practice already exists across a wide range of geographies – Finland, the Federated States of Micronesia, Malta, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Seychelles and Suriname all stand out. It is just a case of generalising it – something that a dedicated Culture Goal would be well placed to accelerate.

This is a message that, we hope, will not only help culture actors – ministries, NGOs and practitioners alike – to make the case for culture to be recognised as a goal, but will also directly speak to those active around sustainable development more broadly.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2025 edition of the Culture2030Goal Campaign's assessment of the place of culture in Voluntary National Reviews of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

This report comes within the context of the Campaign's work to ensure a more complete recognition of the importance of culture in sustainable development efforts, both as a goal in itself, and as an enabler of progress across the board. It does this by demonstrating to what extent culture is already being incorporated into this work, and how. As such, it shows what is already feasible in terms of a bigger place for culture in development agendas.

At the same time, it also provides an indication of the work that is still left to do in order to ensure both that culture is adequately recognised as a goal in itself, and that the full potential of culture is realised.

The report follows the same methodology as previous years, with the 35 Voluntary National Reviews presented during the UN High-Level Political Forum subject to a search for any references to *cultur** (allowing for words such as culture, cultures, cultural, sociocultural or more) to be captured.

The references were then analysed and coded according to three different frameworks:

1. The targets included in the Culture2030Goal Campaign's draft culture goal, as originally presented at MONDIACULT 2022, and currently being updated for MONDIACULT 2025.
2. A set of different dimensions of the relationship between culture and sustainable development, focusing on the different roles that culture may be given.
3. Clusters of Sustainable Development Goals themselves.

The next three parts of the report look at each of these frameworks in turn. Each starts with an explanation of the framework, then presents the evidence from 2025 Voluntary National Reviews, and finally provides some brief statistical analysis, including comparisons with data from 2024. Page numbers given refer to the pages in the VNRs – a list of these and links to them is provided in Annex 1.

PART 2: REFERENCES TO CULTURE2030GOAL PROPOSED TARGETS

The first framework through which this report will explore the 2025 Voluntary National Reviews is provided by the Culture2030Goal Campaign's draft Culture Goal. This provides an effective way of road-testing the goal, seeing to what extent its proposed targets are already being incorporated into – or at least recognised – in efforts to deliver on the SDGs.

The full targets (which will be updated later this year), are as below, with shorthand used in section titles as well as graphs.

1. Realise 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 tool;
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 urbanisation, 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 realise 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.

These are addressed in turn in the following sections, followed by overall analysis. In Annex 2, a grid showing which countries cited each target is provided.

2.1 Target 1: Uphold Cultural Rights

Almost half of the VNRs this year highlight the importance of cultural rights, with El Salvador, Eswatini, Finland, Ghana, the Kyrgyz Republic, Qatar, Seychelles, and Suriname all referencing them explicitly. The Dominican Republic, additionally, focuses on the cultural rights of women (p62), and Suriname on those of indigenous peoples (p110).

Elsewhere, key components of cultural rights, such as the right to participate in cultural activities (Bulgaria (p32), Finland (p131), Japan (p45), Malta – which highlights access to cultural spaces (p159)), rights to language and culture (for the Roma in Finland (p32) and for all in FSM (p59)), rights to cultural education (Germany (p20), FSM (p20)), broader cultural development (Gambia (p16)), respect for cultural difference and practices (Guatemala (p53), FSM (p14)), and the recovery of stolen cultural assets (Kyrgyz Republic (p141)).

Seychelles underlines the value of supporting members of its diaspora to maintain their cultural connections (p120), while Papua New Guinea stresses the cultural rights in particular of displaced persons, who are at risk of losing their cultural identity and so social cohesion.

MODERN LIFESTYLES AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES CAN ERODE TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS AND LANGUAGES, LEADING TO A LOSS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY AND COHESION. SUPPORTING CULTURAL PRESERVATION IS ESSENTIAL FOR MAINTAINING COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND FOSTERING SOCIAL COHESION.
PAPUA NEW GUINEA VNR (P36)

2.2 Target 2: Promote a culture of peace and respect for cultural diversity

IT FOCUSES ON INCLUSION AND RESPECT FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY THROUGH COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS AND COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES, ENSURING A BROADER IMPACT... THE INVOLVEMENT OF STAFF WHO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF THE COMMUNITIES, AS WELL AS THE USE OF INTERPRETERS, ENSURE THAT ITS PROGRAMMES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL WOMEN, RECOGNISING THEIR CULTURAL DIVERSITY...
GUATEMALA VNR (P67)

46% of this year's VNRs highlight the value of respect for cultural diversity and the promotion of a culture of peace, including Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Iraq, Kazakhstan, FSM, Qatar, and Suriname. Japan takes pride in the cultural diversity on show at its Expo 2025 (p3), and Nigeria and Papua New Guinea more broadly across its population (p3 and piii respectively).

Eswatini notes that instilling a culture of peace forms part of its

training for teachers (p65), as do Malta (p58), FSM (p59), and Qatar (p79). Finland highlights efforts to overcome discrimination notably against the Roma (p33). Malta too looks to address intercultural challenges and enable people to work across cultures (p161). El Salvador notes the importance of making cultural diversity part of wider development efforts, with an additional pay off in terms of peaceful societal relations (p103), as does Suriname as part of its drive to boost malaria implementation (p83).

2.3 Target 3: Protect and promote heritage

Over half of 2025 VNRs refer to the importance of protecting and promoting heritage. Bangladesh, Belarus, Israel, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Qatar, Saint Lucia, and Seychelles. In addition, Belarus, Finland, Malta, FSM, Qatar, Seychelles and Suriname refer to UNESCO heritage conventions, while India sets out plans to strengthen legal protection more broadly (p31). Malta (p13) even places the preservation of heritage as one of its five strategic goals, and highlights investments both in state- and privately owned heritage in order to maintain them in good condition and maximise their contribution to broader development.

THE 'IRRESTAWRA DAREK' GRANT SCHEME PROVIDES FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO OWNERS OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS TO PROMOTE AND INCENTIVISE RESTORATION WORKS. THIS INITIATIVE IS AIMED AT KEEPING HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN ACTIVE USE AND PROMOTING BEST PRACTICES IN CONSERVATION. ADDITIONALLY, THE INCENTIVE AIMS AT MAKING HISTORIC AREAS MORE AFFORDABLE AND ATTRACTIVE. THE PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP IS ALSO ANOTHER BENEFIT DERIVED FROM THESE SCHEMES. THROUGH THIS SCHEME, HISTORIC SPACES HAVE BEEN REPURPOSED FOR PUBLIC BENEFIT, SUCH AS THE RENOVATION OF A DILAPIDATED HISTORIC BUILDING INTO A SOUP KITCHEN AIMED AT SUPPORTING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS, INCLUDING EX-PRISONERS AND OTHERS REINTEGRATING INTO SOCIETY.

MALTA VNR (P107)

PRIDE IN TRADITION MUST BE MATCHED BY PROTECTION IN POLICY. FSM'S CULTURAL LEGACY IS FADING WITHOUT NATIONAL SAFEGUARDS, FORMAL EDUCATION, OR RESILIENT FUNDING. PRESERVING HERITAGE MEANS EMBEDDING IT INTO CURRICULA, LAW, AND THE ECONOMY—BEFORE IT'S LOST TO TIME.

FSM VNR (P19)

Bhutan connects the preservation of heritage to the wider importance of sustainable growth (p56), while India, Malaysia and Seychelles connect it to the promotion of traditional livelihoods and so stronger economic and environmental outcomes (p30, p51, and p134 respectively), and the Federated States of Micronesia to more effective education (FSM (p20)). Qatar highlights how heritage preservation contributes to the wider liveability of cities and towns (p17), as does Suriname (p116). To do this, it is nonetheless important to integrate heritage policies into wider development plans, as recommended by Papua New Guinea (p95).

A COORDINATED APPROACH IS TAKEN TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY, ALLOWING EVEN THE MOST REMOTE COMMUNITIES TO ENGAGE MEANINGFULLY IN THE CELEBRATION AND REVITALIZATION OF THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE. FURTHERMORE, THE FESTIVAL'S ORGANIZATION INVOLVES SCHOOLS, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND LOCAL BUSINESSES, FOSTERING A COLLECTIVE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN SAFEGUARDING AND CELEBRATING SEYCHELLES' RICH CULTURAL LEGACY.

SEYCHELLES VNR (P130)

There is strong awareness of threats to heritage, through misappropriation (Kyrgyz Republic (p141)), climate change (Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) (p6)), war (Sudan p9, p39), migration (PNG (p36)) and simply neglect (FSM (p10)). Saint Lucia also highlights heritage in the context of its broader disaster risk management approach (p135). Sudan in particular highlights the costs of its civil war on its rich and varied heritage (P39).

The importance of comprehensive and properly supported heritage policies is clear in the VNRs of FSM (p19) and Suriname (p116). While only 8 VNRs refer to indicators of spending on culture, it is worth highlighting the more sophisticated targets established by FSM (p59), and Seychelles' discussion of how to provide disaggregated around spending on culture and the positive impacts that better data would provide (p131).

2.4 Target 4: Promote cultural diversity and wider production

40% of this year's VNRs highlight efforts to promote cultural activity in general, including Angola, Bulgaria, Lesotho, and Kazakhstan.

Angola in particular talks about supporting culture as part of its desire to build a society that values and enhances human capital (p11), Qatar associates work here with wider social development (p29), Thailand with social cohesion, and Suriname with a more balanced and equitable post-colonial social and economic model (p136).

Indonesia sees support for culture-based industries as potentially boosting youth employment and activity (p76), while Lesotho and Seychelles indicate that festivals can have the same effect (p76 and p130 respectively).

Focusing specifically on cultural diversity, the Kyrgyz Republic argues that it can support sustainable tourism (p109), and Kazakhstan celebrates work to enhance international intercultural understanding (p116). From a different international perspective, Seychelles emphasises its national diaspora policy which aims to 'harness the diverse cultural, economic, human, and social capital of Seychellois abroad to foster inclusive growth and reduced inequalities' (p119).

El Salvador is looking to invest in its cultural development (p18) and sees supporting cultural activities as helping to support peace and social

TO HARNESS THE POTENTIAL OF CULTURE AS A SECTOR OF ACTIVITY, IT IS NECESSARY TO ENSURE THAT THE BASIS AND BEDROCK OF CULTURE, AS WELL AS THE CONDITIONS FOR ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE WORK, ARE FUTURE PROOF.

FINLAND VNR (P26)

cohesion more broadly (p103). Malta too underlines a desire for cultural development, supported by a combination of talent development, audience engagement and heritage innovation (p107). FSM sets out as a target to have a comprehensive coordination and programming for cultural events (p59). Inversely, Finland's VNR reports concerns from the sector about the impact of cuts (p131).

2.5 Target 5: Promote local creators and protect creators' rights

Looking beyond policies to support the culture sector as a whole, 43% of VNRs talk about efforts to support local culture and artists' rights.

Guatemala underlines steps to boost culture-based labour opportunities to support local community development (p58), as does Indonesia (p76) and India, which highlights a folk artist employment model which aims to provide both economic security and heritage protection (p37). FSM too sets out plans to support crafts and traditional arts with grants and market linkages (p20) and indeed defines a target in its own culture goal around support for local economies through culture (p59).

SEYCHELLES IS FOCUSING ON HIGH VALUE, LOW IMPACT TOURISM TO BOOST ECONOMIC RETURNS PER VISITOR WHILE REDUCING PRESSURE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES. THIS APPROACH ENCOURAGES MEANINGFUL VISITOR ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL CULTURE AND PROMOTES GREATER COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, ENSURING THAT TOURISM BENEFITS ARE MORE WIDELY SHARED.
SEYCHELLES VNR (P97)

IN THE YEARS FROM 2022 TO 2024, THE COUNCIL AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSIONER FOR MATTERS RELATING TO DISABLED PERSONS CONDUCTED A DIALOGUE PROCESS WITH ORGANISATIONS FROM THE CULTURE SECTOR AND WITH ASSOCIATIONS AND ADVOCACY GROUPS REPRESENTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. THIS PROCESS CULMINATED IN A SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS ON PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION IN THE CULTURE SECTOR: "CULTURE NEEDS INCLUSION - INCLUSION NEEDS CULTURE". THE RECOMMENDATIONS IDENTIFY THE ACTION THAT MUST BE TAKEN SO THAT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HAVE ADEQUATE OPPORTUNITIES TO ACCESS CULTURAL EDUCATION AS WELL AS VOCATIONAL AND HIGHER EDUCATION FOR CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC PROFESSIONS.
GERMANY VNR (P20)

Lesotho's VNR mentions how festivals can provide a space for local artisans (p52), and Malta talks about how the Festa tradition of festivals provides a space for a wide variety of creators to make a living (p108). Similarly, Seychelles' Moutya festival provides a space to recognise and promote local arts and heritage, as well as to reinforce national identity and pride (p130).

Ethiopia (p130) connects this to efforts to drive sustainable tourism through strengthening and promoting local practice, as do Indonesia and Malaysia which sees local culture promotion as connecting to ecotourism (p78 and p51 respectively). The Philippines, Saint Lucia, Seychelles and

IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE MAYA, GARIFUNA AND XINCA PEOPLES, PARTNERSHIPS WERE SUGGESTED IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS: PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY BY RECOVERING ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE (CRAFTS, WEAVING, PAINTING, LOCAL PRODUCTS, AMONG OTHERS).
GUATEMALA VNR (P67)

Suriname make efforts to make culture central to sustainable tourism (p40, p31, p137 and p122 respectively). Seychelles in particular highlights how irresponsible tourism can have a harmful cultural impact (p139).

A number of countries highlight the need to focus on equity within the cultural sector, notably between and men (Bulgaria (p51)), for persons with disabilities (Germany (p20)), and more broadly (Finland (p128)).

2.6 Target 6: Facilitate creator mobility

Just two VNRs reference the importance of enabling the mobility of creators, with Kazakhstan reporting on its engagement in cultural cooperation initiatives as part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (p114) and Central Asian collaborative initiatives (p116). Malta also highlights exchanges with Ethiopia (p59) and cross-border work around heritage (p108).

2.7 Target 7: Indigenous culture

12 VNRs – just over a third – highlight the specific need to work with Indigenous communities, providing the space and support for them to safeguard and advance their own culture. India for example highlights concerns about the erosion of traditional knowledge and highlights advanced promotion both of traditional craft and of Indigenous food systems and ecological knowledge (p30), while Papua New Guinea underlines the threat posed by modern lifestyles and external influences (p36). Saint Lucia includes traditional knowledge as being potentially vulnerable to loss as a result of disasters (p135).

FROM SACRED SITES AND CUSTOMARY LAW TO NAVIGATION AND ORAL TRADITIONS, CULTURE INFLUENCES ALL DIMENSIONS OF LIFE. YET, WEAK DOCUMENTATION, LIMITED LEGAL PROTECTIONS, AND DECLINING INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFER THREATEN CULTURAL CONTINUITY.
FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA VNR (P19)

More broadly, Bangladesh (p61), Bhutan (p56), Finland (p31), Ghana (p110), Nigeria (p2), Papua New Guinea (p1), Saint Lucia (p27), and Suriname (p104) all underline the need for Indigenous and local cultures to lead in shaping broader policy initiatives in order for them both to avoid causing harm and boost policy effectiveness.

Other specific tools referenced include providing stronger legal recognition for Indigenous and traditional culture and knowledge (India (p31), Suriname (p112)), more investment in preservation (Malaysia (p58)), support for participatory celebration of traditional expression (Seychelles (p131, p136)), and investment in culturally grounded education (Suriname (p104)).

BY GROUNDING GLOBAL AGENDAS WITHIN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND ALIGNING THEM WITH NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS, PNG IS BOTH FULFILLING ITS INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND CRAFTING A SUSTAINABLE PATH FORWARD FOR THE BENEFIT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA VNR (P1)

The Federated States of Micronesia make a strong connection between the protection and promotion of Indigenous culture and broader sustainable development. This includes stronger roles for traditional leaders in managing cultures and adapting interventions, affecting for example education, urban development, justice services and food systems (p17)), and more broadly highlights the imperative

of ensuring that sustainable development policies are culturally grounded (p45). It is clear in making the protection and promotion of Indigenous culture a core part of its own proposed goal for culture (p59).

2.8 Target 8: Integrate culture into urban development and environmental policy

20 VNRs – almost 2/3 – discuss the strong interconnection between culture on the one hand, and urban development and environmental sustainability on the other. Bulgaria (p138), Czechia (p19), the Philippines (p21), Federated States of Micronesia (p46), and Suriname (p56, p177) all note how local governments are making culture a key part of their efforts to achieve sustainable development. Bhutan's plans for Gelephu Mindfulness City emphasise the importance of integrating cultural values and wider philosophy around building with nature into urban planning (p56). Qatar too affirms its belief in the connection between heritage preservation and urban identity (p164).

Czechia in particular discusses how cultural infrastructures can be key to building community cohesion and belonging (p41), as do Kazakhstan (p35), Malta (p159), and Qatar (p163). Meanwhile El Salvador sees cultural activities as a route towards social peace and connectedness (p55, p103). Gambia underlines the need to consider cultural adequacy in housing provision (p70).

On the environmental front, Finland explicitly recognises culture as creating the opportunity for a 'turning point' (p64) which can help change behaviours in ways that support sustainable development and ecological balance. Kazakhstan, Lesotho and Nigeria also underline the importance of culture in effective climate education (p179, p76 and p95 respectively), given how this can extend reach and engage people more effectively.

Finland also highlights in particular the need to take account of culture when looking at forestry policy, which can otherwise risk becoming acrimonious (p71). Indonesia too highlights forest management as an area where it is particularly essential to take account of culture in order to achieve goals (p54). There is a similar story for Seychelles around fisheries management, where taking account of culture is essential for policy effectiveness and inclusivity (p153). In Suriname too, the importance of recording, working with and promoting cultural practices around coastal environments is highlighted (p132).

More broadly, Japan highlights the relevance of cultural practices around its relationship with nature as central to wider efforts to promote more sustainable environmental policies (p94). Saint Lucia too confirms that it sees environmentally sustainable development as having a cultural dimension (p112), while in Suriname, the value of ‘including those dimensions of Surinamese culture that embody positive values and practices and indigenous knowledge about the environment’ is mentioned (p132).

In parallel, the need for the cultural sector itself to model green behaviours is recognised, with the KEMUT network in Finland (p70), and the Green Culture Contact Point initiative in Germany (p25).

2.9 Target a: Promote cultural and heritage institutions

Just under a quarter of the 2025 VNRs – 8 – highlight the importance of supporting culture and heritage institutions and enabling them to work together internationally. Finland and Qatar highlight the role of libraries, archives and museums in promoting sustainable development, and so the need in turn to support them to be effective (p27 and p166 respectively), and Papua New Guinea focuses on its support for museums and galleries in particular (p95). Malta and the Federated States of Micronesia talk about heritage sites more broadly (p107 and p54 respectively).

Others focus more explicitly on the need for protection of such institutions and centres, such as Kazakhstan (p151), and Sudan where the damage to museums and libraries is listed (p9).

Some countries highlight the need to prepare these institutions for the shift to a stronger focus on sustainability, notably Germany (p25) and Finland (p70).

2.10 Target b: Incorporate culture into wider planning

THESE CHALLENGES UNDERSCORE THE NEED FOR TARGETED AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS TO ENSURE THAT INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE CHT ARE NOT LEFT BEHIND IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS.

BANGLADESH VNR (P61)

43% of respondents talk about how they have made culture part of wider policy-making processes, supporting both the effectiveness of policy and ensuring consistency with cultural development policy goals.

This report has already mentioned the importance of taking account of cultural factors in order to mean that policy interventions are appropriate

and achieve their goals, as in Bangladesh (p61). In discussing Target 8, it has also looked at how culture has been integrated into urban development and environmental policies – these points will not be repeated here.

However, and building on this, we can see examples of efforts to mobilise the cultural sector to achieve wider goals, such as support for young adults (Dominican Republic (p150)), health (Ethiopia (p41), FSM (p24, p61), Nigeria (p82), Papua New Guinea (p1)), equality for Indigenous groups (in particular around health) (Guatemala (p52)), gender equality (Japan (p196), Kyrgyz Republic (p52)), education (FSM (p17)), and promoting the SDGs more broadly (Sudan (p17)).

Elsewhere, the Dominican Republic underlines that culture is relevant to the achievement of a wide range of SDGs (p168), and Nigeria advocates for 'continuous situation analyses and surveys [to] inform policy and programming, helping to identify gaps, track progress, and tailor interventions to specific cultural contexts' (p22).

BUUSAA GONOFEE EXEMPLIFIES HOW CULTURALLY GROUNDED, COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INITIATIVES CAN ALIGN WITH GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS WHILE DELIVERING TANGIBLE AND SCALABLE RESULTS.
ETHIOPIA VNR (P41)

THE [NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR RESPONSIBLE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT] WAS A VISIONARY POLICY IS AIMED AT RECALIBRATING PNG'S DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY, ADVOCATING FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT AWAY FROM UNSUSTAINABLE, WESTERN-STYLE ECONOMIC MODELS DRIVEN BY CAPITALIST AND CONSUMERIST IDEOLOGIES. THIS APPROACH IS ROOTED IN OUR TRADITIONAL WISDOM AND ECOLOGICAL HARMONY. THESE VALUES PROVIDED A CULTURALLY RELEVANT FOUNDATION FOR WELCOMING THE SDGS. BY GROUNDING GLOBAL AGENDAS WITHIN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND ALIGNING THEM WITH NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS, PNG IS BOTH FULFILLING ITS INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND CRAFTING A SUSTAINABLE PATH FORWARD FOR THE BENEFIT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA VNR (P1)

Papua New Guinea underlines the need to integrate cultural considerations into work to address gender inequalities (p26), to develop meaningful HIV prevention initiatives (p38), and to promote peace (p46). Seychelles too highlights the need to take account of cultural factors in addressing crime (p32), and Suriname also stresses the importance of cultural factors in the effectiveness of efforts to wipe out malaria (p60). Meanwhile, El Salvador highlights the role of cultural relations in addressing poverty (p15), and Suriname its place in agriculture policy (p57) and food governance (p56)

2.11 Overall analysis

Graph 1 provides an overview of the data, showing the share of VNRs referring to the themes of each goal. Data for 2025 is in blue, and that for 2024 – for reference, is in orange.

This shows us that overall, the most commonly referenced area is around the interaction between culture and policies for urban development, environment and wider land use. Cultural heritage is the second most frequently referenced, followed by cultural rights. Compared to last year, there has been a noticeable drop in references to heritage and artist mobility, but the overall pattern of references is relatively similar.

Graph 1: Share of VNRs Referencing Each Target

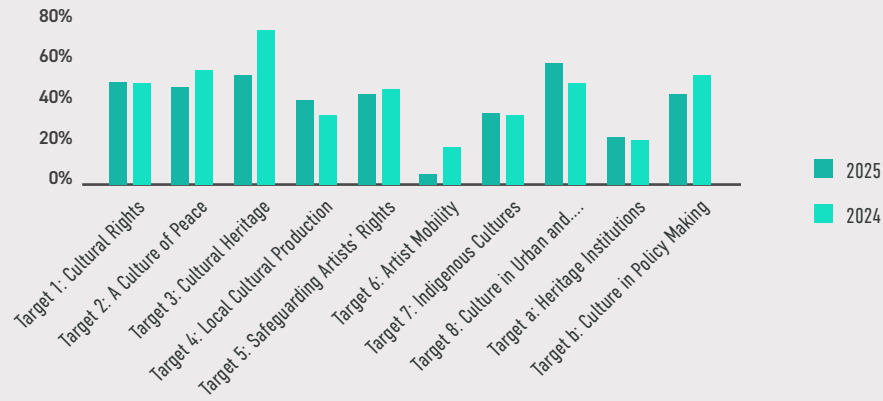
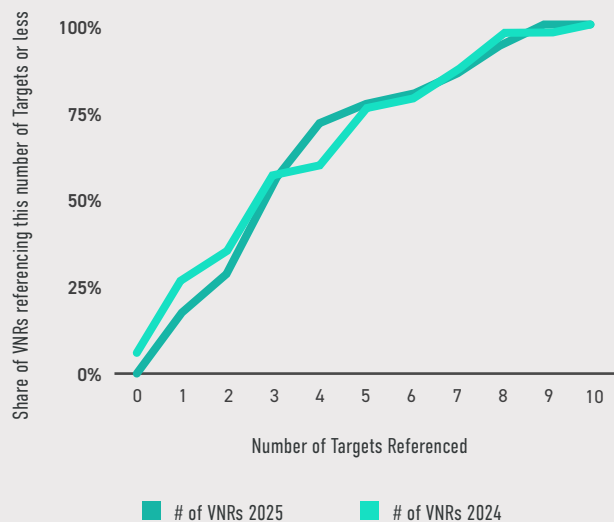


Table 1 and Graph 2 then present data around the number of different targets referred to by each Voluntary National Review, again providing data for both 2024 and 2025. From Table 1, we can see that in 2025, it was most common for Reviews to refer to three different targets, with the average being 3.91. In 2024, the two most common numbers of targets referred to were 1 and 3, and with a slightly lower average of 3.81 targets per review. There were no reviews in 2025 that contained nothing relevant to any of the Culture2030Goal targets, compared to 2 last year. At the same time, one VNR in 2024 referred to all of them, with none doing this in 2025.

Table 1: Number of VNRs Referring to Different Numbers of Targets

# of Targets	# of VNRs 2025	# of VNRs 2024
0	0	2
1	6	8
2	4	3
3	9	8
4	6	1
5	2	6
6	1	1
7	2	3
8	3	4
9	2	0
10	0	1

Graph 2: Patterns in Shares of VNRs Referring to Culture2030Goal Targets



Graph 2 helps explain the spread by looking at cumulative numbers. The lines therefore show what share of the total referred to each number of targets or less – for example, 71% of VNRs this year referred to 4 targets or less, while only 59% did so in 2024. Meanwhile, 94% of VNRs this year referred to 8 targets or less, while 97% of VNRs did so last year. The overall message from the graph is that the overall pattern of references is relatively similar from one year to the next.

A table showing which countries refer to which targets is included in Annex 2, but it is worth highlighting that Finland, the Federated States of Micronesia, Malta, Seychelles and Suriname stand out for referring to 8 or more targets, while Papua New Guinea and Qatar are just behind on 7, reflecting a comprehensive approach to integrating culture into development.

PART 3 DIFFERENT WAYS OF RELATING TO CULTURE IN VNRS

This next part follows the approach used by this series of reports over the past few years, exploring the broader ways in which the relationship between culture and wider development strategies is seen and expressed through VNRS. These are not particular related to any one SDG, or even target under the Culture2030Goal Campaign draft goal, but underpin these.

The different dimensions covered are therefore as below, with more detail in each section:

1. Whether culture ministries themselves are identified as contributors. Where they are, this demonstrates that culture is formally recognised as a 'stakeholder' in discussions
2. Culture as a driver of identify. This reflects the understanding that culture can play a key structuring role in what makes a country a country, and so colour all other actions taken.
3. Sustainability in cultural policy refers to efforts to apply sustainable development principles to the cultural sector itself, primarily through promoting equity within the sector, or through greening activities.
4. 'A culture of...' captures the frequent references to the idea that wider behaviours and attitudes in different areas are fundamentally a question of culture
5. Culture as a determinant brings together illustrations of where it is recognised that for policies to be effective, it is vital that they take account of cultural factors
6. Culture as a pillar of development looks at those countries which have effectively recognised the need to view culture on the same level as other key development policy areas or themes
7. Cultural indicators refers to those VNRS which include hard data about culture, primarily spending on cultural and natural heritage (indicator 11.4.1 in the SDGs)
8. Culture as a barrier collates cases where VNRS report that cultural factors are more problematic, leading to discrimination or the continuation of harmful practices
9. Culture promoting sustainability rather than explores how culture – and in particular the cultural sector – can help raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and the themes that underlie them.
10. Culture and tourism is a little more specific, picking up on the reference under SDG 8 to the importance of ensuring that tourism complements rather than harming culture.

Each of the sections below covers one of the above, followed by a short analytical section at the end.

3.1 Culture Ministry Involvement

Of the 35 countries undertaking VNRS in 2025, just under a third (11) explicitly noted that their Ministry of Culture was involved: Angola, Bulgaria, Finland, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Malta, Suriname and Thailand.

FSM'S VNR WAS CULTURALLY GROUNDED IN VALUES DRAWN FROM ALL FOUR STATES: YAP'S TARAG (PLANNING), CHUUK'S FAIRO (RESPECT), KOSRAE'S LULAFONGI (SPIRITUAL REVERENCE), AND POHNPEI'S KAIROIR EHUTE (UNIFIED VISION). THESE VALUES GUIDED A RESPECTFUL, INCLUSIVE, AND LOCALLY MEANINGFUL PROCESS, IN ALIGNMENT WITH GLOBAL EXPECTATIONS FOR TRANSPARENCY AND NATIONAL OWNERSHIP.

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA (P54)

However, recognising that not all countries have culture ministries, it is worth noting Germany's recognition of the value of better engaging stakeholders from the cultural sector in order to strengthen the VNR process (p57). Saint Lucia highlights its work to integrate the SDGs in Kwéyòl culture, in order better to ensure a sense of ownership (p27), and Suriname highlights its engagement with the Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname (VIDS) (p104).

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Papua New Guinea are

particularly interesting in terms of grounding their entire VNR and indeed SDG implementation process in general in culture. This, PNG argues, allows for an approach that 'rooted in our traditional wisdom and ecological harmony. These values provided a culturally relevant foundation for welcoming the SDGs' (p1).

3.2 Culture as a driver of identity

Culture can be a key part of the way in which countries and nations see themselves, and in particular see what holds them together and makes them unique. These characteristics can be seen as strengths and a source of pride, but also as factors that may complicate policy interventions. 37% of 2025 VNRs underline the connection between culture and identity.

Sometimes, there is simply a broad reference to cultural foundations (Belarus (p9), Seychelles (p130)), while in others, it is aspects such as the connection with nature (Japan (p94), Finland (p71)).

THE STRENGTH OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA LIES IN OUR DIVERSITY – HOME TO MORE THAN 800 DISTINCT LANGUAGES AND CULTURES. DESPITE THE COMPLEXITIES INHERENT IN THIS DIVERSITY, WE HAVE MAINTAINED NATIONAL UNITY AND IDENTITY THROUGH A SHARED VISION OF COLLECTIVE PROSPERITY.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA VNR (P3)

Malaysia chooses to use a cultural image for the front cover of its VNR – songket cloth that is connected with important ceremonies and cultural heritage (p0), and Sudan highlights the combination of influences that has shaped it, from the ancient to the more modern (p10).

In some cases, it is cultural diversity that is highlighted, both as a richness and as a factor that may add complexity, as in Angola (p49), India (p3), Indonesia (p52), Federated States of Micronesia (p6), and Nigeria (p3). In the case of Finland, the report highlights how terms unique to each language may provide a means of advancing sustainable development more effectively (p27).

3.3 Sustainability in Cultural Policy

It is not just the case that culture and cultural policies contribute to wider sustainable development – they also need to integrate this same logic. This is both a goal in itself, and a means of ensuring that the sector continues to be effective and active into the future. 5 VNRs refer to this in one way or another.

A number of reports refer to the importance of efforts to drive equality in the sector. This can refer both to gender equality (as highlighted by Bulgaria (p51)), work to make sure that the sector is friendly to persons with disabilities (as in Germany (p20), and wider social inclusion (Czechia (p41)).

THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED, DESPITE THE FACT THAT IT IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR INCLUDING, FOR EXAMPLE, THE ENERGY CONSUMPTION OF CONCERTS AND THEATRE PERFORMANCES, OR THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT OF MUSIC FESTIVALS.
CZECHIA VNR (P41)

The other area of focus is around the greening of the cultural sector, as also referenced by Bulgaria (p124), Czechia (see quote, p41), Finland through its KEMUT network (p73). Germany through its Green Culture Contact Points (p25), and Qatar (p127).

3.4 A Culture of...

The view of culture taken by the Culture2030Goal campaign goes beyond narrower definitions focused on the culture sector and traditional cultural policies and takes account also of wider behaviours and attitudes. In VNRs, there is frequently reference to there being a 'culture of' something – either desirable or undesirable. While these are not always explicitly linked with a cultural intervention, they arguably relate strongly to the sort of psychological and behavioural factors that culture is well placed to shape. Indeed, 66% of VNRs in 2025 make some reference to this.

Looking across the report, the following examples emerge:

- **Healthy living:** Ethiopia's VNR highlights the importance of cleanliness (p27)
- **Gender equality:** Bhutan talks about the importance of a culture of support and cooperation by men around women's health (p40), Guatemala about tackling macho culture (p55), and Japan for inclusivity of women in general (p44).
- **Respect for diversity:** this features in the reviews of the Dominican Republic (p128), that of Iraq and Qatar (p227) (in the form of culture of tolerance), and that of Malaysia in terms of a culture of human rights (p146), as does Papua New Guinea (p111).
- **Inclusivity:** Ghana's VNR calls for a culture of inclusivity (p112), and Japan for a culture of understanding between generations (p44). Papua New Guinea (p111) also highlights this. Thailand also highlights the need for culture change to allow youth voices to be heard (p83).
- **Green behaviours:** Bulgaria sees a shift to environmentally friendly transport as requiring culture change (p80), while Finland suggests sustainability needs a cultural change (p20). Japan (p204) and Qatar (p117) call more generally for a culture of sustainability, and the Kyrgyz

Republic for a culture of sustainable development more generally (p117). Malta talks about a culture of reuse (p115), but also about cultural barriers to sustainability (p163).

- **Learning:** Guatemala's VNR calls for a culture of developing skills for life (p59), Malta for a culture of reading (p115), and Qatar and Seychelles for a culture of lifelong learning (p146 and p26 respectively)
- **Innovation:** this is highlighted by Bulgaria (p80), Germany (p46), India (p132), Malta (p92), Qatar (p80, p98), Saint Lucia (p114)
- **Entrepreneurship:** Nigeria highlights an entrepreneurial culture as a strength (p72), as does Saint Lucia (p90)
- **Continuous improvement:** closely tied to the above, India prioritises a culture of continuous improvement (p214)
- **Social responsibility and integrity:** this comes up in the VNRs of Bulgaria (p80), the Dominican Republic and Kazakhstan (in particular in relation to business (p148 and p39 respectively)), the Kyrgyz Republic (p147), Qatar (p223).
- **Collaboration:** this features in the reports from Iraq, Israel (p42) and Malta (p57), while Nigeria is looking for a culture of volunteering (p77)
- **Resilience:** Malta highlights the need for a culture of readiness around disaster response (p120)
- **Democracy:** the VNRs of Ethiopia (p27) and ... highlight this, while Finland's stresses the need for a culture of open discussion and exchange (p70) and Germany's the need for a culture of cooperation (p32).
- **Good governance and government effectiveness:** this is highlighted by Ethiopia (p140), Ghana (p112), Indonesia (p25)
- **Statistics:** a number of countries suggest that a statistical culture is necessary, notably Guatemala (p30), . Linked to this, India calls for a culture of data-driven decision-making (p212), and Qatar for a culture of informed governance (p98)
- **Transparency** also features, for example in the VNR of Iraq, and accountability in that of Malaysia (p143). Nigeria worries about a lack of a record-keeping culture (pxxiii)

3.5 Culture as a determinant

A core argument of the Culture2030Goal campaign is the need for sustainable development policies to build on and work with culture, because otherwise they risk simply failing to meet their goals. As such, culture can be a fundamental determinant of sustainable development. This is recognised by 2/3 of the countries carrying out VNRs in 2025.

CULTURE AS A TURNING POINT: THE NECESSARY AND IMPORTANT ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITION HAS BEEN RECOGNISED. A CULTURAL TURNING POINT REQUIRES CHANGES IN SOCIETIES' SHARED MEANINGS, VALUES AND NORMS, AS WELL AS IN WAYS OF OPERATING AND OF SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ECOLOGICAL BALANCE.
FINLAND VNR (P64)

IT IS INCREASINGLY EVIDENT THAT TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE MUST BE GROUNDED IN THE COUNTRY'S UNIQUE CULTURAL IDENTITY, ECOLOGICAL REALITIES, AND FEDERAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE. WHILE NATIONAL-LEVEL SDG TRENDS OFFER ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS, FSM'S REAL PROGRESS LIES IN HOW DEVELOPMENT IS LIVED AND LED AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL—THROUGH CULTURAL RESILIENCE, LOCAL INNOVATION, AND ADAPTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY.

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA VNR (P18)

At a high level, the Federated States of Micronesia underline that the promotion of Indigenous knowledge and identity can help realise their potential as enablers of development (p10). Papua New Guinea too sets out how change needs strong cultural foundations (p1) and goes further in underlining that inclusion and long-term thinking require spiritual, cultural and human development (p11). Suriname sets out the need for 'participatory and culturally grounded methods and community-led projects (p56).

There is recognition in Finland that culture can be decisive in driving behaviour change, as in Finland (see quote), and in Sudan part of the success of Emergency Response Rooms is put down to their ability to draw on culture and traditional knowledge (p13). In Suriname, in contrast, the failures of agricultural policies in the country's interior is blamed on a failure to adapt to local cultural realities (p57).

In a number of cases, we can see the determining role of culture in the understanding that it is crucial for interventions to be culturally appropriate in order to be effective. This is the case with Bangladesh and its work with Indigenous communities (p61), and with Ghana in talking about the localisation of the SDGs (p110). Nigeria highlights how culture and street plays can reach further than just written materials (p95), while Papua New Guinea sets out a range of examples (p45), and the Philippines underlines the need for cultural sensitivity when working to support persons with disabilities (p51). Seychelles stresses the need for culturally appropriate approaches to oceans policies (p32).

There are also plenty of examples of countries citing the cultural determinants of various other goals, including health (cited by Bhutan (p39), FSM (p45), Suriname (p60)), hygiene (Ethiopia (p80)), sexual and reproductive health (Guatemala (p52)), regional development (Czechia (p19)), poverty (El Salvador (p15)), housing (Gambia (p70)), gender equality (Guatemala (p58), Indonesia (p52), Kyrgyz Republic (p52), education (Eswatini (p65), FSM (p17)), disaster risk management (Ethiopia (p41), Iraq), the adoption of green behaviours (Finland (p71, Japan (p94), Nigeria (p102)), agriculture (Guatemala (p57)), Papua New Guinea (p26)), climate education (Lesotho (p76)), sustainable fisheries (Malta (p124, Papua New Guinea (p104), Suriname (p132)), food systems (FSM (p17)), wildlife

CULTURE AS A TURNING POINT: THE NECESSARY AND IMPORTANT ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITION HAS BEEN RECOGNISED. A CULTURAL TURNING POINT REQUIRES CHANGES IN SOCIETIES' SHARED MEANINGS, VALUES AND NORMS, AS WELL AS IN WAYS OF OPERATING AND OF SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ECOLOGICAL BALANCE.

FINLAND VNR (P64)

protection (Nigeria (p102), urban development (FSM (p17)), the operation of justice systems (FSM (p17), conflict resolution (Papua New Guinea p45)), and crime (Seychelles (p32)

More specifically, some VNRs highlight that change is not possible at all without the engagement of cultural leaders, such as in Nigeria where their engagement in reducing early marriage is seen as essential (p20, p84). Similarly in Papua New Guinea, they are seen as essential stakeholders (p40).

3.6 Culture as a pillar of development

Going a step beyond simply seeing culture as a determinant of development, is it also presented as something akin to a pillar of sustainable development, alongside the economic, social and environmental ones traditionally cited. The recognition of culture as a pillar of sustainable development is another explicit priority of the Culture2030Goal campaign. 10 VNRs can be seen as making his point.

In particular, Bhutan highlights culture as a dimension of development alongside the economic, social and environmental (p5), as does El Salvador in a list that also includes educational and emotional dimensions (p14), and Finland in a list that includes security, rule of law, and democracy (p61). Bulgaria names it as one of its five defined axes of development (p19, Malta as one of its five strategic goals (p13), the Federated States of Micronesia as one of its nine development priorities (p139), and Papua New Guinea as one of the 6 pillars of its development strategy (p11).

More specifically, Indonesia names cultural resilience as one aspect of its wider plans around disaster risk management (p139), and Saint Lucia underlines that environmentally sustainable development has a cultural (as well as an economic and cultural) dimension (p112).

Some reports even highlight cultural sustainability, which is at the heart of the Culture2030Goal campaign's proposed goal. This is the case with Finland (p45, p62) and Qatar (p253).

3.7 Culture indicators

The current 2030 Agenda only includes one indicator directly relevant to questions around culture – the level of spending on cultural and natural heritage. 7 VNRs include data on this: Angola (p84), Bangladesh (p81), Bulgaria (p77), Israel (p166), Kazakhstan (p54), Malta (p102), and Thailand (p146), while the Seychelles highlights problems linked to a lack of data (p131).

ENHANCING DATA COLLECTION MECHANISMS AND
ENHANCING REPORTING ON HERITAGE-RELATED
INVESTMENTS WOULD NOT ONLY IMPROVE THE
CAPACITY OF SEYCHELLES TO TRACK PROGRESS
TOWARD SDG 11 MORE ACCURATELY, BUT ALSO
FACILITATE BETTER RESOURCE PLANNING AND
POLICY DESIGN FOR CULTURAL PRESERVATION
EFFORTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.
SEYCHELLES VNR (P131)

3.8 Culture as a barrier

Another aspect of the role of culture in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is around where it can represent a barrier to progress. This is very much the reverse face of situations where culture can act as a positive determinant of development. Again, this implies a broader definition of culture than arts and heritage, reaching more into behaviours and attitudes. 20 VNRs – 57% – refer to these.

Key types of barriers cited include:

- **Barriers to equality in general:** DR (p93), Guatemala (p26), Indonesia (p52, 64), Iraq, Lesotho (p44), Kyrgyz Republic (p56), Malta (p68), Nigeria (p86), and Papua New Guinea (vii);
- **Barriers to gender inclusion in particular:** El Salvador (p116), Papua New Guinea (p80) and Suriname (p77), and notably in politics: Gambia (p47), Nigeria (p25), Papua New Guinea (pvii), and in the form of gender-based violence Ghana (p40), Papua New Guinea (viii, 26), female genital mutilation (Nigeria (p21)), and poorer access to land and technology (Indonesia (p165), Papua New Guinea (p30));
- **Barriers to children attending school:** Angola (p22), and notably girls Eswatini (p91), Ghana (p46), and Papua New Guinea (p30);
- **Barriers to access to health in general:** Nigeria (p82);
- **Barriers to women's access to health:** Bhutan (p39), Ghana (p40 – contraception), Nigeria (p4), and Papua New Guinea (p39);
- **Barriers to efforts to reduce early marriages** (Nigeria (p20, p87);
- **Barriers to stamping out harmful cultural practices in general:** Germany (p63);
- **Barriers to integration of foreigners** Czechia (p24) **and minorities** (Israel (p42), Suriname (p112)), as well as wider intercultural barriers (Malta (p161));
- **Barriers to lifelong learning:** Guatemala (p59), and especially for women Papua New Guinea (p67);
- **Barriers to engagement of youth:** Thailand (p83), and protection against practices such as being sent back to origin countries for discipline (Finland (p154)).
- **Barriers to adopting more sustainable practices:** Malta (p163);

3.9 Culture promoting sustainability

A further angle from which we can look at the role of culture in delivering on the SDGs is in the role of the cultural sector in popularising the 2030 Agenda, and building understanding of, and support for, what it is seeking to do. 6 VNRs this year make reference to this role.

IN ADDITION, SCIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT CULTURAL CHANGE CAN BE RAPID. THE QUESTION IS NOW: IN WHICH DIRECTION IS CULTURAL CHANGE MOVING? THEREFORE, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO COMMUNICATE THAT REAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE EXIST.

FINLAND VNR (P64)

For example, Czechia, in addition to the role of culture in changing behaviours, underlines how libraries serve as local community centres promoting the SDGs (p41). Finland's VNR notes a growing readiness amongst cultural actors to talk about the Goals and wider sustainability (p20), to the point of filling in gaps in sustainability education provision (p71). Nigeria underlines how cultural leaders talking about the SDGs can help (p101), and even reach further that other channels, while Saint Lucia's conscious effort to incorporate the SDGs into Kwéyòl culture is seen as a way of building engagement (p27). and Papua New Guinea's VNR also references the need to engage culture in order to achieve effective awareness-raising around sustainability issues (p80).

3.10 Tourism and culture

SEYCHELLES IS FOCUSING ON HIGH-VALUE, LOW-IMPACT TOURISM TO BOOST ECONOMIC RETURNS PER VISITOR WHILE REDUCING PRESSURE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES. THIS APPROACH ENCOURAGES MEANINGFUL VISITOR ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL CULTURE AND PROMOTES GREATER COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, ENSURING THAT TOURISM BENEFITS ARE MORE WIDELY SHARED. *SEYCHELLES VNR (P97)*

One of the other areas where culture is referenced in the SDGs is in the context of sustainable tourism which protects and promotes local cultures. 37% of the 2025 Voluntary National Reviews highlight activities in this space.

A number of countries simply underline their desire to enhance cultural tourism as an economic sector, building on the richness of their cultures (Dominican Republic (p82), Ethiopia (p130), Japan (p146), Lesotho (p52), Malaysia (p46), Malta (p85), Papua New Guinea (p96), and Saint Lucia (p31)). The Federated States of Micronesia notes potential here, but regrets that heritage tourism is currently limited (p20)

Others connect cultural tourism closely with ecotourism, combining cultural and natural heritage preservation (Indonesia (p78), while Suriname notes how, when well-managed, it can help preserve culture and natural heritage (p122). Seychelles, in warning against the risk of mass tourism, rather sets out an approach that brings a wide range of benefits through cultural engagement.

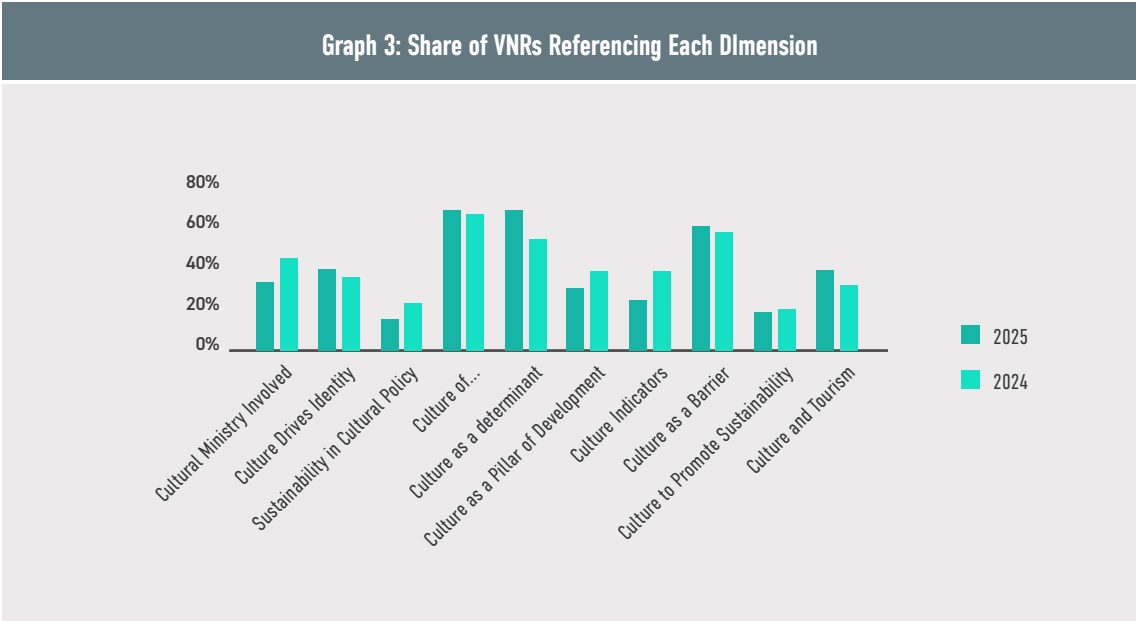
Meanwhile, Kazakhstan notes the value of cooperation between countries around culture and tourism (p114).

3.11 Overall analysis

The results shared above can also be displayed in a graph, once again using 2024 data as a reference. This is gone in Graph 3 (below).

Once again, the pattern in 2025 is relatively similar to that in 2024, with perhaps the biggest gap in the share of VNRs including indicators around culture (primarily spending on cultural and national heritage).

Beyond this, there was slightly more attention in 2025 than in 2024 to connections between culture and



identity, ‘cultures of’, culture as a determinant of development, culture as a barrier and culture and tourism.

On the other hand, a lower share of VNRs had been put together with the involvement of culture ministries or referred to the promotion of sustainable development in culture, the notion of culture as a pillar of development, or the role of culture in promoting sustainability more broadly.

Overall, this points to strong recognition that in addition to the narrowly defined cultural sector, culture can have a more structuring impact on possibilities to achieve development goals across the board. At the same time, this is not necessarily translating into consideration of culture as a pillar of development or even seeing culture ministries themselves as being actors in overall sustainable development policy.

PART 4 REFERENCES TO CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF DIFFERENT VNRS

This final part looks at the references to culture in this year's VNRS from the perspective of different SDGs, grouped together as in previous years. The information presented here helps to underline that there is already strong recognition of the role of culture in driving progress across the 2030 Agenda.

The clusters of SDGs used are:

1. Equality and Inclusion (SDGs 1, 5 and 10)
2. Agriculture, Environment and Climate (SDGs 2, 12, 13, 14, and 15)
3. Wellbeing (SDGs 3, 6 and 7)
4. Education (SDG 4)
5. Growth, Jobs and Innovation (SDGs 8 and 9)
6. Community and Resilience (SDG 11)
7. Peace and Governance (SDG 16)
8. Partnerships (SDH 17)

4.1 Equality and Inclusion

A first group of goals relate in particular to questions around equity – notably SDG 1 – No Poverty, SDG 5 – Gender Equality and SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities. Around half of the countries presenting VNRS in 2025 – 17 – connect these with culture in some way.

One aspect of equity is equity in access to basic rights, including access to culture. The importance of this is highlighted by Bulgaria (p32), as are wider cultural rights for all (Dominican Republic (p62), and Eswatini (p95)). Finland's VNR worries about people on lower incomes being particularly at risk from cuts to culture spending (p131), while Gambia emphasises the need for cultural development for all (p16). Japan notes that culture can have a role in determining what is an adequate standard of living (p119), while Suriname connects cultural participation with wider societal participation (p110).

[CONCERNING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES] [GUATEMALA]
HAS IMPLEMENTED LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMES
AND HUMAN RIGHTS WORKSHOPS, AS WELL AS
ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORKS.
IT FOCUSES ON INCLUSION AND RESPECT FOR
CULTURAL DIVERSITY THROUGH COMMUNITY
CONSULTATIONS AND COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL
AUTHORITIES, ENSURING A BROADER IMPACT... THE
INVOLVEMENT OF STAFF WHO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE
OF THE COMMUNITIES, AS WELL AS THE USE OF
INTERPRETERS, ENSURE THAT ITS PROGRAMMES ARE
ACCESSIBLE TO ALL WOMEN, RECOGNISING THEIR
CULTURAL DIVERSITY...
GUATEMALA VNR (P57)

There is awareness that culture can offer a key to providing effective support to groups which may face multiple vulnerabilities, and which in particular may otherwise be more likely to resist or reject interventions. This is the case for Bangladesh and Guatemala in their work with Indigenous peoples (p61 and p53 respectively), while in El Salvador, the ‘quantity and quality’ of cultural relations is seen as being key to helping to overcome poverty (p15).

There is an extensive focus on the interaction between culture and gender equality (Dominican Republic (p93), El Salvador (p16), Eswatini (p91), Gambia (p47), Guatemala (p26), Indonesia (p66), Lesotho (p44), Kyrgyz Republic (p56), and the Federated States of Micronesia (p22, p24), Papua New Guinea (various)). Cultural factors are seen as representing a barrier, as well as allowing harmful practices to continue (Ghana (p40), Nigeria (p14), Papua New Guinea (pviii)).

Beyond gender, Finland sees a strong cultural dimension in its efforts to combat the marginalisation of Roma people (p32, p33), while Guatemala highlights this in its work better to support Indigenous peoples (p53). Israel notes cultural barriers to the engagement of its Arab population in high-tech professions (p42). The Philippines see culture as helping to drive better inclusion of persons with disabilities (p51).

On the more positive side, proactively working through culture is seen as an essential way of overcoming challenges. This is the case, for example, in Bhutan where there is work to develop a culture of care for material health among men (p40), and in Japan where culture is given a central role in enacting long-term changes in attitudes around women’s involvement (p196). Nigeria looks to engage cultural leaders in addressing harmful practices towards women (p25, p84). Qatar has engaged cultural leaders in efforts to enhance the position of women in technology (p97).

Malaysia sees culture as a key vector of efforts to uplift Indigenous communities (p58), and Qatar to better support children with autism (p151). At the same time, Papua New Guinea underlines that this can be a complex balancing act – purely in-community responses can lack transparency and fail to draw on expertise (p35).

The cultural sector itself is of course also expected to live these goals, promoting gender equality (Bulgaria (p32)), inclusion for persons with disabilities (Germany (p20)), and wider diversity (Finland (p128)).

SDG 10 in particular includes targets around migration. This also has an important cultural dimension. Czechia notes that cultural factors can also hold back the integration of foreigners into host countries (p24), while on the side of migrants themselves, the Federated States of Micronesia and Papua New Guinea stress the risks of cultural dislocation (p48 and p36 respectively). Malta offers cultural orientation to migrants to help them integrate more effectively (p99).

THESE COMMITTEES FOSTER A MORE LOCALIZED APPROACH TO GBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE, ALLOWING FOR MORE TAILORED INTERVENTIONS THAT REFLECT THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC REALITIES OF EACH PROVINCE. THIS DECENTRALIZED STRUCTURE ENSURES THAT SOLUTIONS ARE MORE RELEVANT AND EFFECTIVE IN ADDRESSING THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA VNR (P25)

4.2 Agriculture, Environment and Climate

A second cluster of goals relate to agricultural, climate and environmental issues – SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 12 (Sustainable Production and Consumption), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). 22 countries (63% of the total) highlight the connections between culture and work in these areas.

Again, there is an understanding that cultural factors are a key factor in shaping both current practice and the effectiveness of reforms, such as in forest management (El Salvador (p141), Finland (p71), Federated States of Micronesia (p65)), food systems management (India (p30), Federated States of Micronesia (p17), Suriname (p57)), attitudes to waste (Papua New Guinea (p97), Qatar (p124)), fisheries (Malta (p124), Papua New Guinea (p102), Seychelles (p62)), conservation (Papua New Guinea (p108)), and wider relationships with nature (Japan (p94)).

IT IS EQUALLY CRUCIAL TO
ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT, PARTICULARLY AMONG
ARTISANAL FISHERS, TO GUARANTEE
THAT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
ARE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE AND
SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE.
SEYCHELLES VNR (P153)

Progress around these goals is closely linked to behavioural change, among producers and consumers alike. Bulgaria notes the importance of promoting a culture of greener transport (p120), Iraq a culture of respect for the environment, and Malta a culture of reuse (p115). Japan is aiming to develop a culture of sustainability and green behaviours (p204), as is Seychelles (p141, p150), and Kazakhstan talks about an environmental culture more broadly (p174).

Meanwhile India suggests that through drawing on its culture, it can strengthen collective awareness and action (p30), as does Lesotho (p76). Kazakhstan explicitly makes culture part of its climate education initiatives (p179), as does Nigeria (p95). Nigeria also argues that working with cultural beliefs is supporting stronger wildlife conservation efforts (p102), and Suriname focuses strongly on ensuring interventions around agriculture are strongly culturally grounded (p57).

Implicit in this is also that cultural factors can also work against the adoption of more sustainable practices, as Malta and Nigeria point out (p163 and p96 respectively).

In parallel, some also highlight that policies in these areas should take account of cultural objectives, such as the promotion of cultural diversity (Indonesia (p52)), while Malta suggests that the right policies can maximise synergies between fisheries policies and cultural policy goals (p126).

Papua New Guinea also sees close links between efforts to preserve biodiversity and cultural heritage (p105), and Qatar sees its marine ecosystems as being vital to its wider cultural heritage (p215). Qatar also sets out its plans for an integrated approach to ecological and cultural heritage protection, through an approach mixing education, community engagement and ecosystem-based management (p215).

Meanwhile the Philippines makes cultural heritage part of its wider national adaptation plan (p30), and Saint Lucia highlights the importance of the cultural dimension of its National Environment Policy (p112). It highlights a multinational project in the Caribbean focused on maintaining heritage through actions around ecosystem protection, sustainable fisheries and improved livelihoods (p146).

Again, the cultural sector itself is recognised as having a role, be it through greening buildings (Bulgaria (p124)), or use of materials and greener mobility within the sector (Czechia (p41), Finland (p73)). Germany has established a network of Green Culture Contact Points to provide education and information to cultural actors to improve their performance here (p20).

4.3 Wellbeing

The third cluster of goals addresses questions of wellbeing, both when it comes to Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3), Access to Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6) and Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7). 12 VNRs – around a third of the total – make a link between culture and progress here.

As already highlighted in other parts of this report, there is strong recognition of the connection between culture and health, with Bhutan for example citing cultural barriers as a social determinant of health (p39), as does Nigeria (p82, p83).

HARMFUL CULTURAL AND
TRADITIONAL PRACTICES
CONTRIBUTE TO LOW IMMUNIZATION
UPTAKE, POOR ATTENDANCE FOR
ANTENATAL AND POSTNATAL CARE,
AND REDUCED RATES OF HOSPITAL
DELIVERIES.
NIGERIA VNR (P83)

Israel highlights the role of cultural norms around food (p53), the Federated States of Micronesia around wellbeing in general (p61), and Ethiopia about cleanliness (p79).

Connected to this, efforts to change culture to ensure better results are also clear – Ethiopia talks about the need to invest in culturally sensitive behavioural change to improve performance around sanitation and hygiene (p79). Similarly, the Federated States of Micronesia connect the success of vaccination programmes to taking a culturally appropriate approach (p45). Papua New Guinea notes how programmes around HIV prevention (p38) and menstrual health (p40) need to be customised to culture, and Suriname its drive to eradicate malaria (p60).

The culture sector is recognised as having a role in promoting wellbeing in Malta (p55) and Japan (p39)), while Papua New Guinea sees culture more broadly supporting this (p1). Qatar notes how embedding conservation into culture is bringing benefits for water use efficiency (p109).

4.4 Education

SDG 4 (Quality Education), including learning at all life stages, and support for young people to realise their potential, represents another area where links with culture are strong; 17 VNRs (49% of the total) do so.

As with other areas, sometimes cultural practices can be a barrier, for example to children staying at school (Angola (p22)), and in particular girls (Eswatini (p91), Ghana (p46), PNG (p30)), as well as to lifelong learning in general (Qatar (p88)). Meanwhile, El Salvador suggests more broadly that it needs a new educational culture (p54), and Qatar wants a stronger culture of innovation in the sector (p80).

More positively, cultural activities are presented as a means of integrating young adults more effectively (Dominican Republic (p32), Indonesia (p76)), although Thailand suggests that cultural norms can hold back youth participation.

Again, VNRs also underline the need for cultural appropriateness, for example in the case of Indonesia's efforts to support an Indigenous tribe in its interior (p54), and in the Federated States of Micronesia (p17). Indeed, they cite the example of a project that combines new connectivity with local culture to support much stronger education (p20).

Some countries highlight the importance of cultural education as part of a comprehensive curriculum (Germany (p20)), while Malta looks to connect its heritage preservation and education policies (p109). Qatar also integrates national identity and cultural heritage into its education system, arguing that this contributes to personal development and national cohesion (p79). At the same time, it also is worried that delivering this will require a more stable domestic workforce to do this (p88). The Federated States of Micronesia, in addition to the example cited above, also include a target for cultural education in its proposed culture goal (p59).

4.5 Growth, Jobs and Innovation

Goals 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) touch on the economic pillar of sustainable development. Once again, there is good recognition of how this connects with culture, with 19 (54%) of the VNRs this year linking these.

Already in section 3.10 there is coverage of the links between culture and tourism, but looking beyond this, there is recognition that culture is part of a society that values and enhances human capital, as well as a diversified and prosperous economy (Angola (p11)). The idea that cultural preservation is part of a balanced economic model comes through in Bhutan's VNR (p56). Entrepreneurship itself can be cultural, as Saint Lucia notes (p90).

India highlights in particular the economic potential of folk arts, with the right support and recognition of traditional skills (p37), and the Federated States of Micronesia underline a commitment to invest in the cultural industries as part of a wider growth strategy (p59), as does Saint Lucia (p96). Indonesia sees cultural enterprises as offering employment for younger people (p76).

Looking more at SDG 9, Qatar and Saint Lucia both highlight the cultural factors behind innovation (p96 and p100 respectively), with Qatar in particular presenting work to draw on cultural insights to get more women into technology (p97), and to incorporate culture as a means of developing AI systems that are responsive to national and regional needs (p240).

4.6 Community and Resilience

SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) is another broad goal, with 21 VNRs – 60% of the total – refer to connections between culture and at least one relevant target. Two key themes of SDG 11 – sustainable urban development and heritage preservation – are nonetheless already addressed in sections 2.3 and 2.8 of this report. This section will not repeat those points but will rather highlight another theme included under this SDG – resilience and disaster response.

In this context, cultural is a pillar of broader resilience by Indonesia (p139), while Iraq suggests that cultural interactions can boost overall resilience. Ethiopia cites a community-based disaster risk management project which ‘exemplifies how culturally grounded, community-driven initiatives can align with global development goals while delivering tangible and scalable results’ (p41). The Federated States of Micronesia similarly underline how traditional knowledge combines with other factors to build resilience at local level (p45).

There are also references to a culture of readiness (Malta (p120)), while Sudan suggests that the success of its Emergency Response Rooms initiative – a youth driven initiative focused on finding solutions for people facing disaster – is deeply rooted in Sudanese culture (p13).

The importance of addressing risks to cultural heritage (including Indigenous knowledge) from disasters, and so incorporating this into strategies, is noted by Saint Lucia (p135).

4.7 Peace and Governance

SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) is not only wide-ranging, but also quite explicitly focused on enablers of progress across other goals. 13 VNRs – 37% of the total – tie this in some way to culture.

There is a strong emphasis on the importance of getting the right culture within government, for example to drive a culture of results (Dominican Republic (p119)), of evaluation (Dominican Republic (p123) and of institutional responsibility and integrity (El Salvador (p22), Qatar (p223)). The Federated States of Micronesia references the importance of better integrating culture and cultural leaders into decision-making processes in general (p14), and in particular to the way the justice system works (p17).

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SOCIAL
PEACE, CITIZEN SECURITY AND
COMMUNITY COHESION IS BEING
CONSOLIDATED THROUGH
INNOVATIVE ACTIONS LINKED
TO ART, ENTERTAINMENT AND
CULTURE..
EL SALVADOR VNR (P103)

Looking outside of government, the value of a culture of democracy is noted by the Dominican Republic (p128) and Ethiopia (p27), as well as of respect for human rights more generally (Finland (p47), Malaysia (p146), Papua New Guinea (p111)).

There are also references to the need to change wider business and citizen culture to favour integrity (Dominican Republic (p148), and peaceful coexistence more broadly (El Salvador (p22), Gambia (p61), India (p234), Iraq, Papua New Guinea (p46), Qatar (p227)). Seychelles sees action to address cultural factors as key to reducing crime (p32).

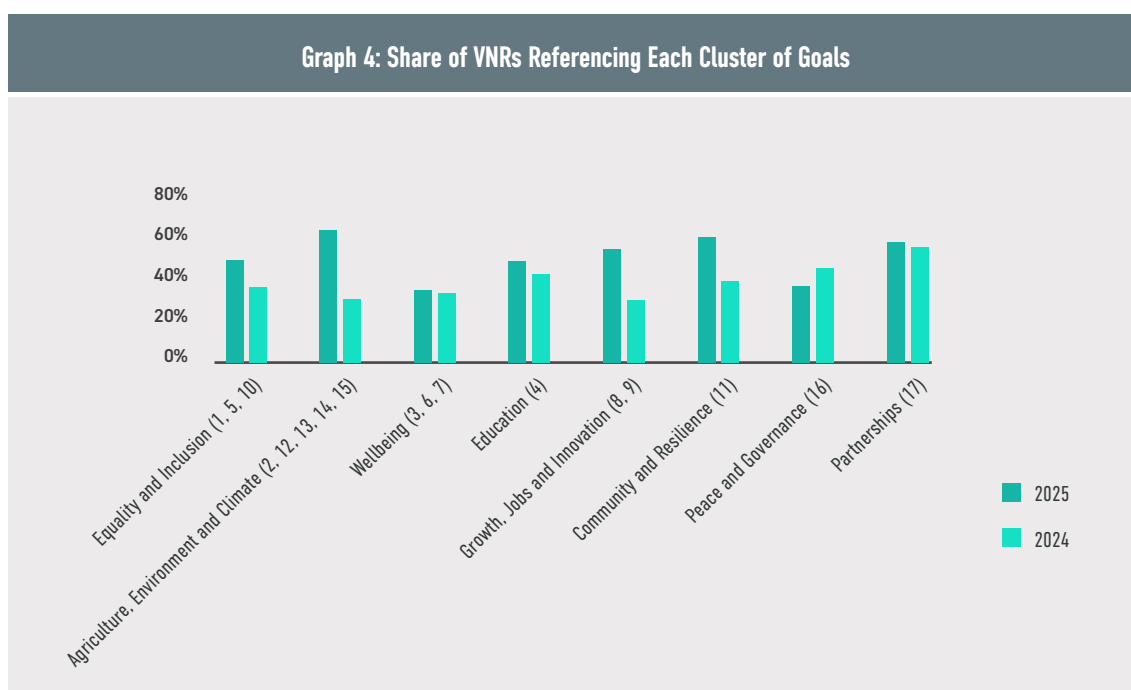
4.8 Partnerships

Finally, SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) is another broad, enabling goal, highlighting the importance of international cooperation as well as the mobilisation of resources and stakeholders to drive progress elsewhere. 6 VNRs – 17% of the total in 2025 – refer to this in some way.

Particular examples include Kazakhstan, which celebrates the place of cultural cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (p114), and efforts to bring together cultural and volunteer leaders from across the Central Asia region (p116). Malta too highlights international collaborations based on adherence to UNESCO conventions as a means of better achieving goals and strengthening relations (p109). Finally, Seychelles presents its National Diaspora Policy as a means of building international connections that bring benefits to the origin and new countries alike (p119).

4.9 Overall Analysis

Graph 4 shares the overall shares of VNRs referring to each of the clusters of goals set out above, again with data for 2024 for comparison.



The overall story for 2025 is the strong focus on agriculture, environment and climate goals, followed by that on community and resilience. This may in part be explained by the strong focus on environmental goals this year – there is a much higher share of VNRs referring to these this year than last (63% vs 30%). The only cluster to which a lower share of VNRs makes reference is peace (SDG 16) – 45% vs 37%.

There is also a different pattern, with no overlap in the top three clusters from one year to the next (agriculture, environment and climate, community and resilience, and growth, jobs and innovation in 2025, compared to peace, education, and equity and inclusion in 2024). Once again, this may be partly down to the SDGs in focus from one year to the next, but it underlines the breadth of ways in which culture can be seen as relevant.



PART 5 CONCLUSIONS

This review of the place of culture in the Voluntary National Reviews of SDG implementation in 2025 further contributes to the evidence that despite the failure to include a culture goal in the 2030 Agenda, culture is nonetheless present to a greater or lesser extent in what governments are doing to deliver.

Going beyond the fact that every single VNR refers to culture in at least some way, there is also a critical mass of countries in 2025 – just as there was in 2024 – which have decided to take a comprehensive and holistic approach. They both see culture as a goal but also recognise that it is a determinant of the effectiveness of wider policy initiatives, both through the contribution of the cultural sector, and as the driver of attitudes, behaviours and actions.

The report in particular vindicates the overall shape of the draft Culture Goal proposed by the Culture2030Goal campaign, and which will be released in revised form ahead of the MONDIACULT 2025 conference in September 2025, with the themes covered by all but two of the targets all appearing in at least a third of VNRs each.

We also continue to see countries recognising and working with a wide range of the interactions that exist between culture and sustainable development, as well as setting out the importance of culture across the full range of SDGs.

This report will, we hope, represent a valuable tool for those looking to advocate for a greater role for culture not just in future development agendas, but in practical development policies today. We also encourage actors in the wider development space to draw on this report as evidence of the feasibility – and arguably the reality – of the mobilisation of culture as part of successful sustainable development strategies.

Annex 1 – List of 2025 Voluntary National Reviews and Countries referring to each culture goal proposed target.

Country	URL link	VNR number	T1 Cultural Rights	T2 Culture of Peace	T3 Cultural Heritage	T4 Local Cultural Production	T5 Safeguarding Artists' Rights	T6 Artist Mobility	T7 Indigenous Cultures	T8 Culture in Urban and...	Ta Heritage Institutions	Tb Culture in Policy-making
Angola	Link	2				X						
Bangladesh	Link	3			X				X			X
Belarus	Link	3			X							
Bhutan	Link	3			X				X	X		
Bulgaria	Link	2	X	X		X	X			X		
Czechia	Link	3								X		
Dominican Republic	Link	3	X	X								X
El Salvador	Link	3	X	X		X				X		X
Eswatini	Link	3	X	X								
Ethiopia	Link	3					X					X
Finland	Link	3	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Gambia	Link	3	X							X		
Germany	Link	3	X				X			X	X	
Ghana	Link	3	X						X			
Guatemala	Link	4	X	X			X					X
India	Link	3			X		X		X			
Indonesia	Link	4				X	X			X		
Iraq	Link	3		X								
Israel	Link	2			X							
Japan	Link	3	X	X						X		X
Lesotho	Link	3				X	X			X		
Kyrgyz Republic	Link	2	X		X	X						X
Kazakhstan	Link	3		X	X	X		X		X	X	
Malaysia	Link	3			X		X		X			
Malta	Link	2	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
Micronesia	Link	2	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Nigeria	Link	3		X					X	X		X
Papua New Guinea	Link	2	X	X	X				X	X	X	X
Philippines	Link	4			X		X			X		

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Qatar	Link	4	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
Saint Lucia	Link	2			X		X		X	X		
Seychelles	Link	2	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Sudan	Link	3			X						X	X
Suriname	Link	2	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Thailand	Link	3				X						

