



The moment is finally here! The [High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) (HLPF) starts in New York today. The HLPF is the essential global forum for reviewing successes, challenges and lessons learned in achieving [the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and its

[17 Sustainable Development Goals](#)

(SDGs), to create a better world for the next generation. To mark the opening of the HLPF, UNRIC interviewed Anne-Sophie Dubrux and Herlinde Baeyens, two Belgian

[UN Youth Delegates](#)

for sustainable development.

You will be part of the Belgian delegation and representing Belgian youth at the HLPF. What is the purpose of this Forum?

Baeyens: The 2030 Agenda is the result of a long process. All countries agreed on the 17 SDGs, but this agreement is not binding. Therefore, it is important to have a forum to follow up

on the implementation of the Goals. It encourages countries to review their efforts and to report on them.

Dubrux: The first part of the Forum will be a thematic review, so it will not be a political negotiation. Experts will sit around the table to discuss how we are progressing and what the main weaknesses are. The focus for this year will be “eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world”, with SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9 and 14 to be reviewed in depth. The second part will be on [the Voluntary National Reviews](#) (VNRs). This year, 44 Countries will tell the world what they are doing to implement the 2030 Agenda and the world will be able to comment if this is (or is not) enough.

This year, Belgium will present [a VNR](#) for the first time. What can we expect and in which areas will we have to step up our efforts?

Baeyens: Belgium decided to present its VNR only two years after the adoption of the Agenda, which is very positive. It is good to know where we are, so that we can work on making progress. However, the VNR is only a snapshot in time and a momentum to create visibility. What is important is that we use the knowledge gained to better implement the Agenda after the HLPF. In this regard, Belgium still has a lot of work to do. Our main concern is that not enough people are aware of the challenges and their complexity. We really need radical political decisions to make the Agenda a reality before 2030. Belgium is not doing well on the Goals surrounding climate change and energy, for example.

Dubrux: I agree! And with respect to lifelong learning, we have to step up our efforts as well. A survey from UNICEF shows that Belgium does well in providing basic education, but we need to make progress on making quality education accessible for everyone, leaving no one behind. I would want to see an education system that prepares citizens to build a sustainable world. Furthermore, it is also important to reconsider how the economy works. At the first production stage, we are not thinking enough about how we will manage our waste. We really need to promote a circular economy. That is a problem in many countries, not only in Belgium.

What will your role be at the HLPF?

Baeyens: We will be official members of the Belgian delegation and organize our own event about youth inclusion. Furthermore, we will try to speak with as many countries as possible to ask them how they include their youth and we will work closely together with the other UN Youth Delegates.

Dubrux: We will also have the possibility to speak as part of [the UN Major Group for Children and Youth](#) (MGCY), which is a group of youth representatives from around the world. They are able to express their views in many sessions of the HLPF. We will have to find a balance between being part of the MGCY and being active as members of our own delegation.

What do you hope the outcome of the HLPF will be?

Dubrux: Our main goal is to create visibility and to raise awareness back home. If people do not know about the Agenda, then they will not get involved to advocate for change and hold their governments accountable. In the next VNR, we would like to see a more participative and inclusive approach. We want to encourage young people to use the VNR and the 2030 Agenda as tools to hold their governments accountable.

Baeyens: It is hard to reach journalists. They say that sustainable development is not “sexy” enough to sell on television. Therefore, we ask our governments to give the national media channels a louder SDG voice. The governments pay these channels to spread their message. It is just a choice to pay for campaigns on sustainable development instead of milk, for instance.