



# HALFWAY TO 2030 REPORT ON SDG16<sup>+</sup>

A CIVIL SOCIETY ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS TOWARDS  
PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES



# Executive Summary

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The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent humanity's most ambitious blueprint to create a just, peaceful and inclusive world. In 2015, the international community adopted the SDGs, which featured the ground-breaking inclusion of SDG16+, outlining ambitious commitments towards fostering peace, good governance, accountability, and human rights that need to be addressed to ensure that sustainable development, and the SDGs, are effective, successful and reach all persons. SDG16 is interlinked in hundreds of ways with other SDGs and is key to the overall success of SDGs.

As we reach the halfway point of Agenda 2030, there are some reasons for hope but many more causes for concern. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has outlined in the 2023 Special Edition of the SDGs Progress Report, the SDGs are off track, with most unlikely to reach their 2030 targets. SDG16 is among the least successful – all of the targets are off track, with a sizeable number even regressing. Many were already lagging, and the compounding effects of the conflict in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic have hindered progress even further.

Currently, of the 12 SDG16 targets, none are likely to be achieved by 2030. Only two of the SDG16 targets – birth registration and national human rights institutions – are showing signs of progress, with a handful of indicators in other targets also showing positive but inadequate progress. Five targets, related to peace and violence, children, rule of law and access to justice, fundamental freedoms, and discrimination, are regressing; of particular concern is the declining progress in achieving peace-related objectives. The remaining five targets have changed little since their adoption.

The absence of advancements and the regression in achieving SDG16+ not only casts doubt on the

effectiveness of the SDGs, but also carries tangible repercussions for individuals worldwide. In 2023, an estimated 339 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection globally – the highest figure in decades.<sup>1</sup> Killings of human rights defenders have been increasing substantially since the 2030 Agenda was adopted, with 401 human rights defenders killed in 26 countries in 2022.<sup>2</sup> Globally, it is estimated that approximately one billion children between the ages of 2 and 17 – half of all children in the world – experience physical, emotional or sexual violence every year, with this trend moving in the wrong direction.<sup>3</sup>

This report, which reflects the analysis of hundreds of civil society, UN, and government stakeholders from across the world, substantiates these concerns that progress towards SDG16+ has been slow and uneven, and in many cases backsliding. Around 60 per cent of respondents from our global-constituent survey felt there was backsliding or little progress on SDG16+, both internationally and domestically. A majority felt that governments engaged with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) at (Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), but much less so outside of that process. The biggest challenges were funding, accountability and transparency, lack of data and lack of inclusivity with regards to marginalised communities.

All of these problems highlight the need for civil society to play a larger role in promoting SDG16. Civil society already plays a crucial role in SDG16 implementation; many of the best sources of information on progress of SDG16 are produced by civil society and academic institutions, with citizen-generated data being especially important to show impact at the local level. Spotlight reporting highlights the gaps in the official reporting and should be more formally incorporated within official processes. Positively, more countries appear to be expanding out, formally including civil society and others in their reviews, even if somewhat

<sup>1</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility Reports* 2018–2022.

<sup>2</sup> Front Line Defenders, *Global Analysis 2022*, April 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Hillis S., Mercy J., Amobi A., et al., "Global Prevalence of Past-year Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates," *Pediatrics* vol. 137, no. 3, March 2016, e20154079.

superficially at present. At the same time, limits on civic space and growing authoritarianism are making it harder for civil society to effectively operate.

As we approach the halfway point of Agenda 2030, and in light of the forthcoming 2023 SDG Summit, now is the time for governments, UN bodies, and other stakeholders to make changes, to seriously incorporate SDG16 into national laws, to involve civil society, and to promote inclusive processes. The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) should conduct a detailed review of SDG16 every year and better examine how the interlinkages are working. Governments should be forthcoming in their reviews and data collections on their progresses and deficits.

The 2023 SDGs Summit presents a crucial opportunity for governments and the international community to align SDG16+ action and implementation towards 2030. To make significant progress, governments must bring concrete and transformative commitments to SDG16+ to the SDGs Summit. These commitments should outline clear, verifiable, and quantifiable actions that demonstrate how governments will fulfill their existing obligations under SDG16+. In addition, civil society should be included at all stages of the commitment-making process to ensure people-centered and responsive commitments are made that address the needs of citizens.

Adequate financing is essential for the successful realisation of SDG16+ and the overall 2030 Agenda. Governments and the international community must come to the 2023 SDGs Summit with transformative financial commitments. This includes national

commitments to domestic resource mobilisation and budgetary allocations, as well as financial commitments from donors towards SDG16+. Moreover, reforming the international financial architecture is necessary to address structural barriers and ensure long-term financing for sustainable development.

Accountability for SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda is essential, and commitments made at the 2023 SDGs Summit must be compiled and tracked transparently. The UN Secretariat should establish a web-based platform, possibly utilising the UN SDG Actions Platform, to feature these commitments and facilitate verification. Additionally, the HLPF should be reformed to provide an action-oriented platform for commitments and accountability. This requires raising the level of ambition for the HLPF through the planned review of HLPF in 2024, and integrating commitments and forward-looking actions towards the SDGs into its preparation, programme and follow-up.

For the full report, visit

[www.sdg16now.org](http://www.sdg16now.org)



# Table of Contents

<b>Part I: The Role of SDG16+</b>	6	<b>Target 16.10</b>	48
Chapter 1: Background	7	Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	
SDG16+ as an enabler for the 2030 Agenda	10	<b>Target 16.a</b>	51
<hr/>		Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime	
<b>Part II: The Current State of SDG16+</b>	17	<b>Target 16.b</b>	54
Chapter 3: SDG16+ performance at a glance	18	Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies	
<b>Target 16.1</b>	21	Chapter 4: What is the “non-official data” telling us?	56
Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere		Chapter 5: Synthesis of SDG16+ Consultation	58
<b>Target 16.2</b>	24	Chapter 6: Spotlight Reports	62
End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children		<hr/>	
<b>Target 16.3:</b>	27	<b>Part III: Where do we go from here?</b>	64
Promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice for all		Chapter 7: Showcasing the leadership role of civil society in implementing SDG16+	65
<b>Target 16.4</b>	30	Chapter 8: Recommendations	68
By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime			
<b>Target 16.5</b>	33		
Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms			
<b>Target 16.6</b>	36		
Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels			
<b>Target 16.7</b>	39		
Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels			
<b>Target 16.8</b>	42		
Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in institutions of global governance			
<b>Target 16.9</b>	45		
By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration			

## About the Report

This Halfway to 2030 Report on SDG16+ represents a joint civil society effort to assess progress towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies at this critical halfway point to the 2030 target date for the implementation of the SDGs in 2023. In addition to providing in-depth analysis around key SDG16+ issues, this report is also intended to provide key recommendations to governments and the international community on where action and ambition must be directed in the second half of SDG implementation to 2030. The report also provides insights into the leadership role of civil society in advancing SDG16+ at all levels to-date, showcasing best practices and case studies around civil society action.

This report represents and harvests the expertise, insights and data from over 30 organizations working around SDG16+, all of whom have directly contributed to the report over a period of several months. Alongside these direct contributions, the report has the backing of the more than 330 members organizations of the TAP Network, who have contributed content throughout the drafting of this report. The report also reflects key joint advocacy priorities and messages from the extensive coordination efforts around the Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+, which has garnered over 315 endorsements from CSOs around the world at the launch of this report.

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## About the TAP Network



The Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network is a global civil society coalition working to advance and catalyse ambitious action to achieve SDG16+ to promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The TAP Network's members represent hundreds of civil society organisations (CSOs) around the world, and include a diverse set of experts, activists and practitioners working on a wide range of issues related to both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At its core, the TAP Network provides a platform for joint advocacy and mobilisation at the global level, which is supported by innovative and dynamic storytelling to showcase the leadership role of civil society in advancing SDG16+ at all levels. As a membership-based network, TAP also provides opportunities, tools and resources for sharing and peer-learning among its membership.

You can find out more about the TAP Network at <https://tapnetwork2030.org>

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Part I:

# The Role of SDG16+







## Chapter 1:

# Background

In 2015, the 193 Member States of the United Nations (UN) agreed to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agreement was an ambitious new start to international development, designed to be sustainable, universal, wide-reaching, bold, and most importantly, inclusive. The Goals were developed in a participatory process by thousands of stakeholders, with the expectation that those stakeholders would play a key role in their implementation.

One of the most far-reaching sections of the Agenda is SDG16 which commits to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. Its purpose is to tackle the underlying problems which have limited the realisation of the previous international development programmes for the past 70 years. The 12 targets cover a range of issues including peace and violence, the rule of law, corruption, participatory decision making, legal identity, access to information, human rights, and non-discrimination. Twenty-four indicators set out specific commitments for governments to enact laws and policies and to take actions to put them into practice. There are also a number of related and overlapping indicators and targets in other SDGs which are collectively known as SDG16+ (see box in Chapter 2). Together, these offer a powerful mechanism for addressing some of the most pressing problems undermining development.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, progress towards SDG16+ has been slow and uneven, and in many cases, backsliding. The COVID-19 pandemic reversed progress on the SDGs and put tens of millions back in extreme

poverty. The illegal invasion of Ukraine continues to cause widespread destruction, civilian deaths, and displacement, and worsening energy security, food scarcity and the protection of human security in other settings, while diverting vital resources away from improving the quality of people’s lives towards military and security budgets instead. The two have also distracted the international community’s attention from other critical issues and human suffering. Meanwhile, the climate crisis continues to deepen, further undermining the SDGs. At the same time, authoritarianism has been on the rise with a growing number of people living in countries with significant restrictions to their fundamental freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression. Misinformation and disinformation are increasing while global public access to fact-based, accurate and relevant information has been diminished, alongside growing restrictions and repression of independent journalism.

In the face of these multiple crises, the 2030 Agenda’s commitments to inclusive, responsive, and participatory decision making, along with respect for access to information and fundamental freedoms, have assumed greater significance. The need for amplified commitments and stronger partnerships to ensure accelerated action has become more urgent considering these current crises. Diverting the international community’s attention away from SDG16+, these global threats have negatively impacted its prioritisation and implementation. They have widened the gap between the stated ambition of the 2030 Agenda and where we are headed, based upon current trajectories towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies.



The purpose of this report is to review the progress of both SDG16+ globally at the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda, and the crucial role of civil society in providing the energy, effort and accountability to help achieve it. The following chapters offer a detailed review of how well, at the half-way point, governments have progressed towards achieving SDG16+.

The report will further review how successful the SDG16 targets (and related 16+ targets) have been in supporting other SDGs. Finally, it will highlight how civil society, especially at the national level, can use SDG16+ as a tool for promoting sustainable development in their own countries.



## Additional Civil Society Resources on SDG16+

- > [#SDG16Now Campaign](#)
- > [TAP Network SDG16+ Civil Society Toolkit](#)
- > [Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+](#)
- > [Voices of SDG16+ Campaign: Stories for Global Action](#)

## The role of civil society: opportunities and barriers

At the heart of this report is the importance of the role of civil society. Civil society has long been recognised as a partner in the development agenda. Since the UN was formed over 70 years ago with the joint goals of promoting peace, development, and human rights, the role of civil society has evolved. As far back as the 1968 United Nations Tehran Human Rights Conference, governments called for ensuring “the informed participation of all citizens in the decision-making process affecting national development”<sup>4</sup>. Then, at the 1972 Stockholm Conference, which introduced the concept of sustainable development, governments and the UN were called upon to “provide equal possibilities for everybody, both by training and by ensuring access to relevant means and information, to influence their own environment by themselves”<sup>5</sup>. Later, Principle 10 of the 1992 Earth Summit set out the standards on access to information, public participation and access to justice and Agenda 21

provided the structure for civil society to be widely engaged in the development process.

Civil society plays a key role in the success of Agenda 2030 and its implementation as both a partner to governments and as observers and advocates holding governments to account under SDG16+. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) work across all levels of the SDGs, from local to national to international. Some act as direct implementers of projects providing essential services such as health care and education. Others act as monitors, identifying deforestation, or environmental hazards, or tracking expenditures. Local organisations represent the interest of their communities in crucial areas such as land and development. Human rights groups train communities on their rights and represent individuals and communities harmed by governments actions or inactions and advocate for fair treatment. Many organisations of all

<sup>4</sup> The International Conference on Human Rights, [Resolution XXI. Realization of economic, social and cultural rights](#), 1968, A/CONF.32/41

<sup>5</sup> Action Plan for the Human Environment, Recommendation 7, [Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment](#), Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972, A/CONF.48/14/Rev.1

sizes collect information and data on implementation and make that information available, providing an alternative view to government reporting. Civil society's role is especially important in meeting many of the SDG16+ targets in cases of lacking or inadequate government leadership.

However, civil society faces many challenges in being able to fully and effectively engage. Many governments do not see civil society as a full partner. Engagement is often tokenistic, with CSOs "consulted" by government bodies, but without being given space to offer any real input in processes, as is the case with many Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Most concerning of all, has been the increase in attacks on

CSOs, especially those involved in environmental disputes. Hundreds of environmental and land defenders are murdered every year and many more physically monitored, harassed and attacked with impunity. Many others are legally pressured by governments and private bodies via Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), facing frivolous legal actions designed to prevent them from protesting unjust actions and the denial of their rights. These attacks highlight the importance of SDG16+, with its targets on protecting fundamental rights, public participation and access to justice, and the necessity of implementing the goal fully.



## Additional Resources on SDG16+:

- > [TAP Network and UNDP: Mainstreaming SDG16 Online Course](#)
- > [TAP Network: SDG Accountability Handbook](#)
- > [Pathfinders for Peaceful Just and Inclusive Societies](#)
- > [SDG16 Data Initiative](#)
- > [SDG16 Hub: Full list of SDG16 targets and indicators](#)



## Chapter 2:

# SDG16+ as an enabler for the 2030 Agenda

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A central feature of the SDGs is interlinkages; the goals, targets and indicators are interconnected, with the implementation of each supporting the attainment of the others. Given this interconnectivity, when working towards implementation, various goals, targets, and indicators should be considered in tandem, to safeguard against the potential undermining of essential objectives and the effectiveness of the broader agenda. The preamble of the 2030 Agenda affirms that “the interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new Agenda is realised.” In other words, all 17 SDGs depend upon one another; no single goal can be fully realised alone.

SDG16 was designed to be an enabler, or in other words, to provide support for the achievement of other Goals. SDG16 targets critically important issues that have significant implications for people worldwide, including violence, insecurity, conflict, injustice, exclusion, inequality, discrimination, weak institutions and poor governance. These issues also undermine government capacities to achieve sustainable development across numerous fronts: ensuring identity and reducing bribery and corruption to remove barriers to accessing education and essential services; ensuring public participation to give people a voice and a role in decision making; ensuring access to information to facilitate oversight and transparency; ensuring people’s fundamental

freedoms to give them the opportunity to challenge decisions; ensuring access to justice for people to protect and assert their rights.

SDG16 is rooted in a human rights-based framework to address issues of universal relevance, significant to individuals in all nations. Sustained peace and non-violence, access to justice, rule of law, effective and accountable institutions, inclusive governance, participatory decision making and respect for human rights are all needed in order to advance other areas of sustainable development. They are all key elements of SDG16 that ensure that the foundational objectives of ‘leaving no one behind’ and ‘reaching the furthest behind first’ are upheld.

The success of SDG16 is equally reliant on the other goals. Progress on targets for peace, justice and inclusion directly affects outcomes for all other SDGs, while social, economic and environmental progress plays an equally important role in creating the conditions necessary for peace, justice and inclusion.

## From SDG16 to SDG16+

Of the 169 targets of the SDGs, 36 directly measure an aspect of peace, inclusion or access to justice. The [Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies](#), a group of 43 UN Member States, international organisations, global partnerships, civil society and the private sector, has identified 24 targets from seven other goals – including SDGs 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11 and 17 – that directly measure an aspect of peace, inclusion or access to justice. These additional 24 targets, together with the 12 targets from SDG16, are collectively known as ‘SDG16+.’ Accordingly, SDG16+ encompasses a total of 36 targets from across the SDGs that directly contribute to building more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. As a framework, the SDG16+ targets provide a more comprehensive picture of the actions that are needed to realise peace, inclusion and justice for all, especially for those furthest behind. This report will focus on progress on the SDG16 targets but refer to SDG16+ as relevant.

## SDG16+: Examining the interlinkages with all other SDGs

The following chart illustrates some of the interlinkages between SDG16 and the other goals. It is not meant to represent an exhaustive list of interlinkages or provide a deep analysis of positive or negative relationships or trade-offs, but instead is indicative of potential areas of intersections between SDG16 and the entire 2030 Agenda, utilising existing reflections on interlinkages undertaken by key experts around these issues.



### SDG1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Peace is fundamental to eliminate poverty. The war in Ukraine has caused an estimated 100 million people to remain in extreme poverty. Effective and accountable institutions are necessary to ensure social protections to those in need and to also reduce bribery and corruption to facilitate better services that ensure support is given to those who need it. Reducing illicit financial flows also enables governments to provide resources to those that need it. Access to justice helps secure land tenure.



### SDG2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Food security depends heavily on peace. As the war in Ukraine has shown, global food security can be strongly impacted by regional conflict. The illicit arms trade also creates instabilities that affect food security. Fair representation in international institutions helps correct and prevent trade restrictions. Nationally, effective and accountable institutions are needed to provide support for those in need.

**3** GOOD HEALTH  
AND WELL-BEING



## SDG3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Ensuring healthy lives requires peace. Effective, accountable and inclusive public institutions are necessary for universal health services. Corruption and bribery are major barriers to health care. As the COVID-19 pandemic revealed, access to information is essential for sexual and reproductive health services, medical research and risk management.

**4** QUALITY  
EDUCATION



## SDG4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Birth registration is essential to ensure access to education. It also facilitates the identification of future needs for providing education facilities. Schools need to be safe from violence. The elimination of the use of child soldiers depends on reducing armed conflict. Education is critical for sustainable development and lifestyles, upholding human rights, achieving gender equality and promoting a culture of peace and non-violence.

**5** GENDER  
EQUALITY



## SDG5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Inclusive decision making is strongly related to ensuring women's full and effective participation in society. Access to information is a key component of ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Access to justice is essential for ending discrimination and reinforcing policies for gender equality and empowerment. Reducing violence and trafficking are necessary to end gender-based violence and exploitation.

**6** CLEAN WATER  
AND SANITATION



## SDG6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Effective, accountable and transparent institutions are necessary to ensure that access to safe and affordable drinking water, safely managed sanitation services, and improved water quality is available to all. Responsive and participatory decision making is needed to ensure that local communities are able to effectively participate in water and sanitation management.

**7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY**



## SDG7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Peace is required to ensure that energy costs are stable. Good public services and transparent budgets are needed to develop and build infrastructure fairly. Minimising corruption is needed to ensure that benefits and costs are shared fairly. Public participation is needed to eliminate perverse subsidies which promote carbon-intensive energy suppliers over clean fuels and technology.

**8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**



## SDG8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

SDG16 and SDG8 indicators overlap relating to measures to eliminate human trafficking and modern slavery, while institutions such as National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) can support the fight against modern slavery. Further, eradicating the use of child soldiers relies upon reducing conflict. Access to justice is necessary to ensure that discrimination against women and persons with disabilities is reduced. Minimised corruption is necessary to strengthen domestic financial institutions.

**9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**



## SDG9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Ensuring strong and transparent institutions, especially regarding the efficient management of budgets and reducing corruption, are necessary to develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure. Reducing illicit financial flows opens up available money and helps ensure that it is not siphoned off. Full public participation is necessary to ensure that the initiatives are effective for the communities involved. Multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Construction Transparency Initiative (CoST) bring together governments, companies and local communities to develop projects in an inclusive manner. Access to information facilitates scientific research.

**10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES**



## SDG10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Inclusive, participatory and representative decision making is necessary to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all. The indicators for discrimination and harassment are shared in 10.3.1 and 16.b.1. Access to justice is necessary for both while NHRIs provide a necessary oversight of countries' institutions. Reduction of illicit financial flows is needed to improve the soundness of global financial markets and institutions. Broadening the participation of developing countries in global institutions will improve representation decision making to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions.

**11** SUSTAINABLE CITIES  
AND COMMUNITIES



## SDG11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Significantly reducing violence and securing the rule of law is needed to ensure safe public spaces. Inclusive, participatory and representative decision making is interlinked with participatory, integrated and sustainable human-settlement planning and management as well as ensuring the participation of civil society in urban planning and management. Effective, accountable and transparent institutions are needed to safeguard the public services that maintain cities and human settlements.

**12** RESPONSIBLE  
CONSUMPTION  
AND PRODUCTION



## SDG12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

There is a strong interlinkage between SDG12 and SDG 16.10 on improving public access to information. Reducing the use and release of chemicals is closely interrelated with public access to information through pollution registers and public access obligations in most international pollution conventions. Transparency is a key principle in sustainable procurement. Company sustainability reports, and ensuring sustainable lifestyle information and awareness through education, also improves public access to information. Improving countries' scientific and technological capacities also requires access to information and knowledge.

**13** CLIMATE  
ACTION



## SDG13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Climate migration drives conflicts and attacks on human rights defenders. Access to justice is needed to reduce land grabs. Building successful resilience and adaptive capacity requires effective, accountable and transparent institutions. Local disaster-risk-reduction strategies need inclusive, participatory and representative decision making. Obligations on transparency in the UNFCCC and national policies require effective access to information and improved awareness-raising and education. NHRIs can play a key role in ensuring that institutions are accountable to climate commitments.

**14** LIFE  
BELOW WATER



## SDG14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Successful pollution control needs effective, transparent and accountable institutions. Sustainable management of fisheries requires stakeholder involvement including inclusive, participatory and representative decision making, as well as mechanisms promoting access to information such as the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI), a global multi-stakeholder initiative of governments, companies and civil society to promote sustainable fisheries. There is also a significant link between illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, corruption, and forced labour and human trafficking.





## SDG15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss

The reduction of violence, fighting corruption and transnational organised crime, and promoting rule of law are necessary to reduce deforestation, and land grabs and ‘green violence’. Such activities especially impact indigenous communities and environmental defenders. The sustainable management of forests and protection of biodiversity requires inclusive, participatory and representative decision making, especially as both development and conservation efforts frequently discriminate against indigenous communities. Most countries have adopted Environmental Impact Assessments to protect biodiversity and ensure public participation and access to information.



## SDG17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Domestic resource mobilisation requires an effective fight against corruption and illicit financial flows. Effective institutions with strong oversight of budgets are necessary to ensure that spending is limited within the confines of targets and used for proper purposes. Multi-stakeholder partnerships around transparency and public participation such as the Open Government Partnership have been effective in promoting development at the national level. NHRIs can play a key role in ensuring that institutions are accountable. Regarding birth registration, 16.9 overlaps with 17.19.2.



## Interlinkages between SDG16+ and international law

SDG16+ is heavily linked with many aspects of international law. It (as well as many of the other SDGs) is underpinned by numerous international and regional treaties, agreements, declarations, and resolutions from the UN and regional bodies. These include:

- Human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and their regional equivalents. Under these, many of the SDG16+ targets and indicators, such as the right to life and to be free of violence, protection of migrants, public participation, access to information, and access to justice, can be recognised as legal rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender while the International Labour Organisation's (ILO's) C169-Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention protects indigenous communities.
- Multilateral Environmental Agreements like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions provide for public participation and access to information. The regional Aarhus and Escazu Treaties give strong procedural rights including access to justice and protection of environmental defenders which are already in use for promoting sustainable development in their Member States.
- Anti-corruption agreements like the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and the United Nations Convention on Transnational and Organised Crime (UNTOC) prohibit bribery and fight against illicit financial flows.
- The numerous related declarations of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA), and related treaty bodies established a framework which the goals operate within, and give a legal support to, at both the international and national levels for areas such as, standards for the independence of human rights bodies, accountable institutions and the rule of law. Agreements like the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) and United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), as well as new emerging agreements on human rights, due diligence and Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) reporting, sets out standards for the private sector.

These legal obligations provide a framework for civil society organisations and others to utilise in the pursuit of achieving the SDGs, especially regarding the enforcement of rights through access to justice as a legal right under international law and measured in SDG 16.3. To meet the targets set out in SDG16+ is to achieve the legal obligations that governments have already committed to in ratifying these treaties.



### Additional resources

- > [TAP Network: SDG16+ Toolkit 'Targets Guide'](#)
- > [Danish Institute for Human Rights: The Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

Part II:

# The Current State of SDG16+





## Chapter 3:

# SDG16+ performance at a glance

This section reviews the progress of the twelve targets in SDG16 and their twenty-four indicators. The chapters in this section were drafted by TAP partners with expertise in the subject areas who were asked to write of their opinions on the progress of the targets and individual indicators. Materials from UN bodies with the official data, when available, on progress, and other relevant information was also added.<sup>6</sup> This information is supplemented with non-official information on the progress of the specific indicators from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other sources. Additional data from non-official sources, which highlights other aspects of the target not covered by the official indicators, is also included. The assessment on the progress of the targets is therefore taken as a whole, looking at the official indicators as well as any alternatives.

### Summary: Little progress, much backsliding

Overall, the progress on SDG16 is insufficient. With the exception of a few promising developments, most of the targets and the indicators have not seen significant improvements since 2015, calling into question the ability and willingness of states to be able to implement them, as well as the rest of the SDGs, by 2030. Many are backsliding. Of particular concern are targets relating to peace and violence, which were already backsliding before the Ukraine conflict, following a few years of improvement. Violence against children remains high, even if a few additional countries have committed to ban

violent punishment. Moreover, an increase in political repression and restrictions on civic space have negatively impacted civic society in its ability to help move SDG16 forward. Additionally, the rule of law as well as access to justice have been challenged by severe funding problems, and discrimination rates remains high, especially that which is gender related.

Two targets—birth registration (16.9) and adoption of independent national human rights institutions (16.a)—are showing overall positive progress, but neither is on track to be achieved by 2030. There are also some indicators under other targets which display positive trends but are also lagging; for example, gender-equal representation in parliaments has increased but it is estimated to take 70 years to achieve at current progress rates. Additionally, the adoption of access to information laws has reached 2/3 of countries worldwide but slowed in recent years with many countries facing implementation problems. There have also been positive moves on combating illicit financial flows and ensuring the return of stolen assets, but there is little official data to show exactly how much has improved.

The remaining five targets are showing little or no progress: corruption and bribery remain largely unchanged; many countries' budgets show great deviations in spending from their approved budgets; arms flows are increasingly secretive while organised crime is pervasive; and there has been no virtually no change in 20 years on the voting representation of developing countries in global financial institutions.

<sup>6</sup> The analysis includes public data available up to and including April 2023.

## Challenges with official data

A major problem with SDG16 is the lack of monitoring; with many indicators only having sporadic data collected over a number of years from different jurisdictions, which does not facilitate a clear estimate of progress. Indeed, many indicators took considerable time to develop and are only being considered now. This is highlighted by the relatively low classifications that most have been assigned by the United Nations Statistical Division.<sup>7</sup> Of the 24 indicators in SDG16, only 10 (and part of one other indicator) are classified as Tier I, meaning that they are “conceptually clear”, and that “internationally established methodology and standards are available”, and that data is “regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant”. A majority – thirteen – are classified as Tier II, meaning that while they are conceptually clear, and that internationally established methodology and standards are available, data is not regularly collected by countries. Like the rest of the SDGs, there have been improvements in data collection for SDG16’s indicators: the 2023 count is up from seven Tier I in 2020, six Tier I and seven Tier III in 2018, and six Tier I and eight Tier III in 2016. But clearly, this is still not enough.

Further, many indicators simply do not encapsulate the spirit or breadth of the targets, which undermines their effectiveness. The relative novelty of SDG16 and its 12 targets, as well as their more governance-related focus, raises special challenges in terms of identifying, collecting and analysing data to assess progress. While it is relatively easy to find straightforward and statistically-measurable indicators for many SDG targets – such as sustaining economic growth, and ensuring access to energy, safe drinking water and education – the same is not true for most of the SDG16 targets. How can the rule of law or protection of fundamental freedoms be reduced to a number? One can easily measure whether a country has access to information law, and there is even a sophisticated methodology for assigning a number to how robust that law is,<sup>8</sup> but quantifying implementation is quite another thing.

One of the consequences of this is that there is, in many cases, a tangible gap between the substance of the SDG16 targets and the indicators which have been agreed upon to assess progress towards those targets. Consider, for example, using a) the proportion of victims of violence who report their victimisation, or b) the proportion of unsentenced detainees in the prison population, as surrogates for the rule of law and equal access to justice respectively. Or indeed, government expenditures as a proportion of the budget, coupled with the proportion of people who are satisfied with public services, as a means of assessing whether institutions are “effective, accountable and transparent”. A candidate for the most serious gap is using the number of cases of killings, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture of journalists, trade unionists and human rights defenders as a way of measuring the protection of fundamental freedoms. This has led many civil society organisations to propose alternative indicators for the SDG16 targets.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond these general data dilemmas lie even more profound problems associated with having states collect the official data on many of these indicators. While no State is proud of having challenges in areas such as health care, education and access to clean water, the desire to deny or obfuscate challenges in areas such as the rule of law, effective and accountable institutions, and respect for fundamental freedoms, many of which arise more from a lack of political will than shortages of human or financial resources, is significantly greater. That is why democratic States allocate the task of overseeing respect for human rights to independent national human rights institutions rather than political actors.

Unfortunately, independent reporting, aside from non-official data collection and reporting by civil society organisations, is not built into the SDG processes. In many cases, states have not invested in the new forms of data collection and processing that are required to monitor progress on the indicators under SDG16. Essentially, it is all too simple for states to sidestep accountability for SDG16 failures, simply by failing to report on them at all.

<sup>7</sup> UN Statistics, [Tier Classification for Global SDG Indicators](#) as of 31 March 2023.

<sup>8</sup> See the [RTI Rating](#).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, [SDG16+ Indicators Guide](#)

All of this highlights the crucial nature of non-official data, relating both to indicators but also to wider means of measuring progress, in respect of SDG16. While, historically, States have been neither enthusiastic about nor outwardly opposed to assessing their own governance progress and failures, and inter-governmental actors have not always been proactive in this regard this either, civil society organisations have long been heavily engaged in this area. Indeed, this was an important rationale for creating the SDG16 Data Initiative in the first place, namely, to support and profile the excellent work being done by many civil society organisations in this field (see chapter 6). In addition, civil society organisations can bring distance and objectivity to these often very politically-sensitive areas of assessment, something States almost inevitably struggle with.

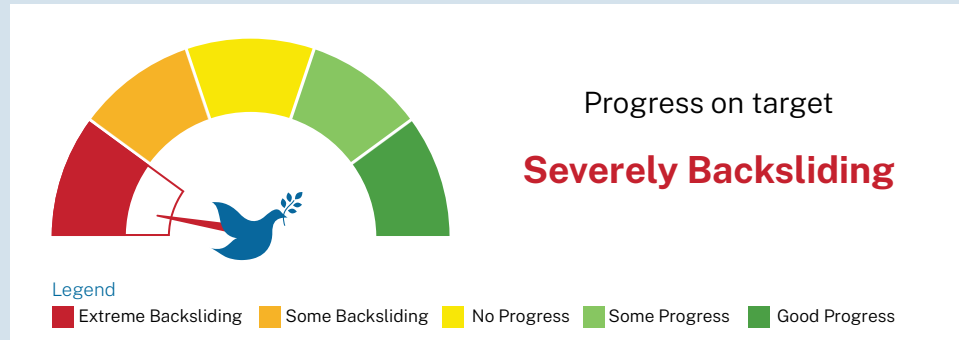
The following chapters in this section of the report are meant to provide a detailed analysis of progress towards each SDG16 target, utilizing both official and alternative indicators. Each chapter has been drafted by some of the foremost global experts from civil society on their respective topics, with many representing key data providers for measuring progress towards key indicators. Materials from UN bodies with the official data, when available, on progress, and other relevant information was also added. This information is supplemented with non-official information on the progress of the specific indicators from CSOs and other sources. Finally, additional data from non-official sources which highlight other aspects of the target which are not covered by the official indicators is included.

In addition to providing background and context regarding the state of progress towards specific official and alternative indicators, each chapter provides an overall qualitative assessment of progress towards the target as a whole, reflecting the expertise of the organizations drafting each respective chapter. Additional information and analysis, including supplemental resources and reports around each target, as well as key recommendations, case studies and additional charts and graphics are included in the online version of the Halfway to 2030 Report.





## Target 16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere



There has been a long-term decline in homicides, the feeling of safety has remained steady, and Positive Peace has improved almost continuously since 2009. However, violence and fragility has peaked in recent years while the number of homicides jumped in 2021. These trends have continued to increase due to the complications of the global pandemic, protracted wars (including Ukraine and other civil wars in Ethiopia and Sudan) and the backsliding of democracy and increasing conflict dynamics in the global north.

### Authors of chapter



**Alliance for  
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## Context and Interlinkages

In 2018, the global landscape witnessed a record high in violent conflicts and fragility, marked by an escalation in conflict trends. In 2023, more than 117 million people will be displaced due to increasing conflict and violence, and an estimated 339 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection globally — the highest figure in decades. Escalating climate change and food insecurity are also compounding violent conflict and violence, and technology is greatly accelerating conflict dynamics.<sup>10</sup>

The 2030 Agenda document clearly linked development and peace, stating “there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.” The goal of SDG 16.1 is to

promote peace, reduce violence, measure whether violence and violent conflict is increasing or decreasing and determined if sustainable peace is being built. Lethal violence affects all societies to varying degrees, whether in conflict or post-conflict contexts, or in the form of criminal or political violence. Violence stunts human, social and economic development indicators and erodes the social capital of communities.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, conflict is a leading cause of food insecurity and displacement. The war in Ukraine has shown how conflict can disrupt access to food and fertilizers worldwide. Addressing violence is, therefore, crucial for all SDGs. The target is also linked with SDG 16.2 on violence against young people and SDG16+ indicators on fostering a culture of peace (4.7), safe education

<sup>10</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility Reports* 2018–2022.  
<sup>11</sup> SDG 16+ Data Initiative Report 2022.



(4.a), violence against women and girls (5.2) and child labour and child soldiers (8.7).

Freedom from violence is also interlinked with major international agreements including the right to life, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. There is also a strong connection between freedom from violence and international humanitarian law.

## Progress on indicators

### Official Indicators:

- 16.1.1: Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age (Tier I)
- 16.1.2: Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause (Tier II)
- 16.1.3: Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months (Tier II)
- 16.1.4: Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live (Tier II)

### Additional indicators:

- Global Peace Index
- Positive Peace Index

There has been a long-term decline in incidents of homicide as measured by 16.1.1. However, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that 457,000 people were victims of homicide in 2021, a notable increase after the number remained relatively steady from 2015 until 2020.<sup>12</sup> Prior to the 2021 increase, there was a projected decline of 19 per cent by 2030. Nevertheless, even this projection fell short of the rate required to meet the goal of a 50 per cent reduction by 2030. Civil society data shows a similar trend. According to the Small Arms Survey's Global Violent Deaths database, homicide rates have been declining for the past two decades and were down 16 per cent between 2016 and 2020.<sup>13</sup> They estimate 78 per cent of all homicides occurred in just 20 countries in 2020.

However, the lack of a universal definition and data-collection methodology for 'intentional homicide' also hinders the ability to measure cases of homicide accurately, resulting in inconsistent reporting and questionable accuracy of the collective data. These challenges ultimately lead to an incomplete assessment of what is driving homicide and how to reduce and prevent intentional homicide effectively. Additionally, homicides might not be relevant to measuring peace and security. If homicides decrease, it may be due to negative peace, rendering it only a matter of time before homicides rise again.

The trends for the number of fatalities in armed conflict (16.2.2) are very negative. 2014 was the most violent year since the end of the Cold War. Additional types of violence – conflict between non-state actors and violence targeting civilians – increased substantially in 2014.<sup>14</sup> In 2018 the world hit a global high in violent conflict and fragility, and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has exacerbated levels of conflict and instability. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported a sharp decline in deaths from 70,000 in 2015 to 11,000 in 2021, but it only applies to 12 conflicts out of an estimated 41 major conflicts. The number increased over 50 per cent in 2022 to nearly 17,000. Civil society sources have found higher rates but similar trends. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program estimates that deaths due to organised violence (state-based armed conflict, non-state conflict, and one-sided violence) hit a high in 2014 then declined briefly before spiking again, with a 46 per cent increase in 2021 alone.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in 2020, the Small Arms Survey reported that 103,00 persons died in conflicts, down from 190,000 in 2016. The war in Ukraine has worsened the situation, but data will not be available for another year to show exactly how much.

However, once again, a shortage of data hinders efforts to address 'intentional homicide' and 'conflict affected deaths' in fragile and conflict-affected settings. There are no universal data collection standards for conflict-related violence, and when data is available, it can be unreliable, even in non-conflict-affected and fragile settings.

There is only limited data available for analysis relating to the reporting of physical violence, psycho-

<sup>12</sup> UNODC, [World crime trends and emerging issues and responses in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice](#), E/CN.15/2023/10, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> [SDG16 Data Initiative Global Report 2022](#), chapter 5

<sup>14</sup> Uppsala University, [New conflict data: 2014 was a very violent year](#), 12 October 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Davies, S., Pettersson, T., & Öberg, M., [Organised violence 1989–2021 and drone warfare](#). *Journal of Peace Research*, 59(4), 593–610, 2022

logical violence and sexual violence (Indicator 16.1.3). According to UNODC, physical-violence data is only available for 41 countries, while sexual-violence data is only available in 32 countries. At the same time, in 2022, the official data for the related SDG16+ Indicator 5.2 describes violence against women and girls as “prevalent across countries and affects women of all ages.” Additionally, violence against women hit record highs during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns.<sup>16</sup> Further, the victimisation surveys usually do not include children. A more significant problem is the definition of each of these offences, which vary significantly between countries.

According to UNODC, the percentage of persons who feel safe walking around alone where they live (Indicator 16.1.4) remained steady between 2016 and 2021, slightly declining from 70 per cent to 69 per cent.<sup>17</sup> There is a significant gender gap present however, with women reporting a rate of feeling safe 10 per cent less than men did. The Gallup Global Law and Order 2022 report recorded the feeling of safety at 71 per cent for 2021, up from 60 per cent in 2014.<sup>18</sup> The Safety Perceptions Index, which is based on the World Risk Poll, found that worry about violent crime was high across most countries but declined slightly between 2019 and 2021.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, first-hand experience of crime was considerably lower than perceived worry. It found that those who accessed traditional and (more unreliable) alternative media sources were 16 per cent more likely to be fearful of violent crime.

## Additional Indicators

SDG 16.1 indicators measure the absence of violence which is critical to ascertain whether a society is becoming more violent or less violent. However, the indicators cannot measure if a country is advancing **Positive Peace**, a form of peace which goes beyond preventing and reducing violent conflict and measures if a society is building sustainable peace.

The Global Peace Index 2022, which measures peacefulness across three domains: ‘Safety and Security’, ‘Ongoing Conflict’, and ‘Militarisation’, found that the average level of global peacefulness went down by

0.3 per cent in 2021, with the largest declines being related to deaths from internal conflict and ‘political terror’.<sup>20</sup> The index has recorded a decline every year since 2014. It found the declines are the largest in established democracies and relate to violent demonstrations and external and internal conflicts.

The SDGs should include Positive Peace indicators such as social cohesion. As measured on leading indices, social cohesion is a critical antidote to building resiliency against grievances which drive violence and violent conflict and to building sustainable peace. Positive Peace is associated with social characteristics that are considered desirable, such as levels of inclusiveness and trust, and not merely the absence of violence. An alternative indicator should include Increase in Social Cohesion which can be measured by: 1. Social Capital, which refers to institutional and interpersonal trust measured against individualism; 2. Social Relations, which refers to horizontal networks that exist between individuals and groups; 3. Confidence in National Institutions, which refers to confidence in government institutions, and is crucial for ensuring successful policy implementation.<sup>21</sup>

This alternative indicator is interlinked and cross-cutting throughout the other SDGs, including SDG 16.3.1 (Victims Report Crime) and 16.3.3 (Dispute Resolution), SDG5 (Gender Equality), and SDG10 (Reduced Inequality). For example, when citizens have confidence in government institutions, including dispute resolution and public safety, they can access trusted public services. Additionally, when a society is equal, people will trust each other and can better work together to build healthy, peaceful and resilient communities.

The Positive Peace Index found that the “attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies” improved by 2.4 per cent between 2009 and 2020, with nearly half of that increase since 2015. One-hundred and twenty-six of the countries assessed recorded improvements in that period. One of the greatest areas of improvement related to the “free flow of information” pillar highlighting the linkages of peace to SDG 16.10 on access to information and 17.6 on access to internet. Its greatest decline was in corruption.

<sup>16</sup> Liz Mineo, [Shadow pandemic of domestic violence](#), Harvard Gazette, June 29, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> UNODC, [World crime trends and emerging issues and responses in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice](#), E/CN.15/2023/10, 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Gallup, [Global Law and Order 2022 report](#); [Global Law and Order 2015 report](#)

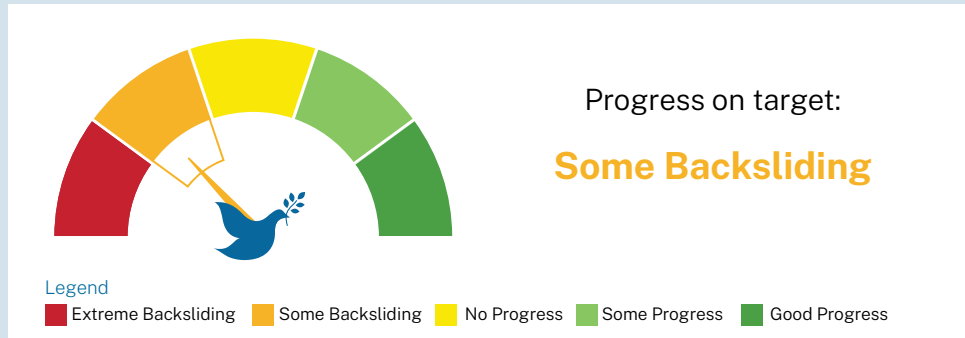
<sup>19</sup> IEP and Lloyd’s Register Foundation, [Safety Perceptions Index 2023 Understanding the perceptions and connections of global risk](#), 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace, [Global Peace Index 2022: Measuring Peace in a Complex World](#), June 2022.

<sup>21</sup> See Christian Albrekt Larsen, [Social cohesion: Definition, measurement and developments](#)



## Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children



While some progress has been made to prevent specific forms of violence against children, such as corporal punishment and trafficking, overall progress has stalled. Certain forms of violence against children—including domestic violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation and child labour—have also increased or are likely to increase as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data on violence against children remains poor, with many cases of violence unreported or underreported.

### Authors of chapter



Explore the full target chapter online for further analysis, case studies and recommendations

## Context and Interlinkages

Ending violence against children—including “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse”<sup>22</sup> – is critical to achieving peaceful, just and inclusive societies and overall sustainable development. Violence against children occurs in every country, community and setting, with devastating, immediate and lifelong consequences for both individual children and societies. It impairs individual children’s brain development, their physical and mental health, and their ability to learn,<sup>23</sup> undermining their childhood development and well-being, and limiting their potential and future productivity as adults. In addition to perpetuating the cycle of violence across generations, violence against children also has catastrophic economic costs for countries; one seminal study suggests the economic costs could be as high

as eight per cent of global GDP, while national studies from a range of countries estimate it may cost up to five per cent of GDP.<sup>24</sup>

A World Vision International analysis of the interlinkages between violence against children and the SDGs found 55 targets across 12 SDGs that are directly or indirectly relevant to ending violence against children, including eight targets that explicitly address the issue.<sup>25</sup> These include SDG16+ targets that address specific forms of violence against children, including violence in schools (Target 4.a), violence against girls (Target 5.2), child marriage and female genital mutilation (Target 5.3), and child labour including child soldiers (Target 8.7). In addition to these targets, violence against children is closely linked to numerous other SDGs that address issues that are either drivers for

<sup>22</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, A/RES/44/25, Article 19(1).  
<sup>23</sup> United Nations [Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children](#). Human Rights Council, 2023. Para. 7.  
<sup>24</sup> UNICEF, Office of the Special Representative on Violence against Children, World Vision International, ChildFund Alliance, Plan International & Save the Children International, [The Violence-Prevention Dividend-Preventing Violence Against Children Makes Economic Sense](#), 2022, p. 2.  
<sup>25</sup> World Vision International, Opportunities to end violence across the Sustainable Development Goals, Internal analysis, 2017

violence against children—such as poverty, substance abuse and gender inequality—and/or protective factors against child violence—such as social protection, education and birth registration. Achievement of many other SDGs is also undermined by the existence of violence against children, including SDG3 (health and well-being) and SDG8 (employment and economic growth).

The right of children to be protected from all forms of violence is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and two of its optional protocols, to which every Member State (except for the US) is legally bound.

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

- 16.2.1: The proportion of children aged 1–17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month (Tier II)
- 16.2.2: Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation (Tier I)
- 16.2.3: Proportion of young women and men aged 18–29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18 (Tier II)

There are significant challenges in assessing global progress to end violence against children given that the phenomenon of childhood violence remains largely undocumented, underreported and unmeasured. Globally, it is estimated that approximately one billion children between the ages of 2 and 17—half of all children in the world—experience physical, emotional or sexual violence every year.<sup>26</sup>

Trends in violence against children appear to be moving in the wrong direction. Multiple and overlapping crises are exacerbating children’s vulnerability to violence including increasing poverty, social and economic inequalities, forced displacement, conflict, climate

change, environmental degradation, natural disasters, food insecurity, widespread violence and political instability.<sup>27</sup> While the achievement of many violence-related targets—including Target 16.2—were already ‘off track’ prior to the pandemic,<sup>28</sup> the pandemic’s impact is likely to have long-lasting negative consequences on future progress to end violence against children. World Vision estimates that the COVID-19 pandemic, and its related quarantine restrictions, lockdowns and school closures, may have put up to an additional 85 million girls and boys at greater risk of violence.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, despite a steady decline in the global prevalence of child marriage over the past decade, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimates that up to 10 million more girls are at risk of becoming child brides by 2030 due to the pandemic.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, an estimated additional 2 million cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) are expected over the next decade.<sup>31</sup> The pandemic increased gender-based violence, with reports of increased domestic violence, especially against girls.<sup>32</sup> Progress against child labour has also stalled for the first time in two decades. Worldwide, 160 million children were engaged in child labour in 2020, with 9 million additional children at risk of being pushed into child labour by the end of 2022 due to increased poverty triggered by the pandemic.<sup>33</sup> School closures during the pandemic also made children more susceptible to recruitment and use by parties involved in conflict, as well as to trafficking, sexual exploitation and recruitment into criminal gangs.<sup>34</sup> In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic increased children’s vulnerability to violence in all its forms.

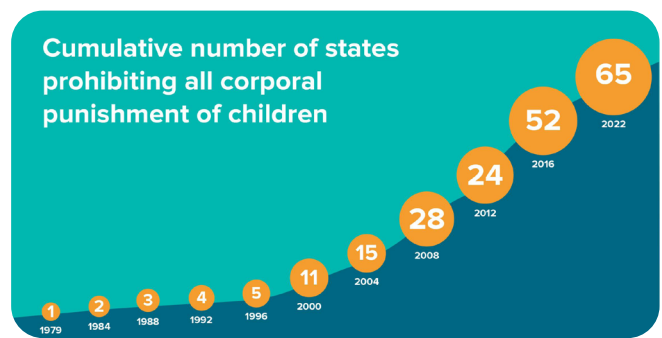
Violent discipline or corporal punishment (Indicator 16.2.1) is the most common form of violence suffered by children worldwide. Physical punishment encompasses “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light”<sup>35</sup>, while violent psychological discipline involves “the use of verbal aggression, threats, intimidation, denigration, ridicule, guilt, humiliation, withdrawal of love or emotional manipulation to control children.”<sup>36</sup> According to UNICEF, in a majority of countries, more than two in three children aged

<sup>26</sup> Hillis S., Mercy J., Amobi A., et al., “Global Prevalence of Past-year Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates,” *Pediatrics* vol. 137, no. 3, March 2016.  
<sup>27</sup> United Nations. *Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children*. Human Rights Council. A/HRC/52/61, 2023, Para. 4; World Health Organisation, *Global status report on preventing violence against children*, 2020, p. v.  
<sup>28</sup> United Nations, *Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Report of the Secretary-General*. A/76/305, 2021, Para 39.  
<sup>29</sup> World Vision International, *COVID-19 Aftershocks: A Perfect Storm*, 2020.  
<sup>30</sup> United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022*, p. 36.  
<sup>31</sup> United Nations, *Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Report of the Secretary-General*. A/76/305, 2021.  
<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>33</sup> United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022*, p. 43.  
<sup>34</sup> United Nations, *Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Report of the Secretary-General*, A/76/305, 2021, Para. 42.  
<sup>35</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 8, The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (arts. 19; 28, para. 2; and 37, inter alia)*, CRC/C/GC/8. 2006.  
<sup>36</sup> UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, 2014, p. 94.



1–14 years are subjected to physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers.<sup>37</sup> Regional estimates suggest there is little variation between boys and girls. While the majority of children worldwide (86 per cent) lack legal protection from violent discipline in all settings including the home, some progress is being made. As of March 2023, 65 countries had prohibited all forms of corporal punishment of children in all settings and 27 more countries had committed to reforming their laws to achieve a complete legal ban.<sup>38</sup> Corporal punishment is more likely to be banned in schools (136 countries), penal institutions (145 countries) and as a sentence for a crime (170 countries), than in other settings including the home, alternative care and day care. Although all countries have the capacity to ban corporal punishment in all settings, at the current rate, it is highly unlikely that all countries will do so by 2030.

Child trafficking (16.2.2) is the recruitment and/or transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation, typically for forced labour and sexual exploitation. According to the 2022 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, children accounted for 35 per cent of all detected victims of trafficking in 2020,<sup>39</sup> the highest proportion since 2004. Among all detected victims of trafficking in 2020, 18 per cent were girls and 17 per cent were boys, with girls more likely to be trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, while boys were more likely to be trafficked for the purposes of forced criminality and forced labour. During trafficking, girls and women are three times more likely to suffer physical or extreme violence (including sexual violence) compared to boys and men, while children are two times more likely to suffer physical or extreme violence compared to adults. Girls are also 1.5 times more likely to suffer violence than women during trafficking, regardless of the type of criminality involved or form of exploitation.<sup>40</sup> In 2020, for the first time, the number of victims of trafficking detected globally decreased. However, this could be the result of lower institutional capacity to detect victims, fewer opportunities for traffickers to operate due to COVID-19 restrictions, and some trafficking operations moving to more hidden and harder-to-detect locations. The United Nations



Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, remains the primary international agreement to combat human trafficking, with 181 states party to the protocol as of February 2023. Despite its near universal ratification and the significant attention and sustained effort afforded to it on the part of the international community, trafficking in persons—including children—remains endemic.<sup>42</sup>

Sexual violence (16.2.3) is one of the gravest forms of violence against children, both girls and boys. Acts of sexual violence, which often occur together with other forms of violence, can range from direct physical contact to unwanted exposure to sexual language and images.<sup>43</sup> Global data on sexual violence is limited and incidents of sexual violence in childhood are likely severely underreported since many victims are unable or unwilling to report them. According to the World Health Organisation’s (WHO’s) Global Status Report on Preventing Violence against Children 2020, an estimated 120 million females—1 in 10 girls—have suffered some form of forced sexual contact before the age of 20,<sup>44</sup> while at least five per cent of young women report experiences of sexual violence in childhood in one-third of countries.<sup>45</sup> There are no global estimates for sexual violence against boys,<sup>46</sup> with a notable gap in the global understanding, research, prevention and response to this type of violence.<sup>47</sup> Progress to reduce sexual violence against children has likely been hindered by the increase in conflicts, natural disasters and other humanitarian crises, as well as the increasing use of digital technologies by children, all of which put children at greater risk.

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF, *Violent discipline*, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> See *End Violence Partnership*.

<sup>39</sup> UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022*, 2022, p. xv.

<sup>40</sup> UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, 2014, p. 25.

<sup>41</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The Protocol*.

<sup>42</sup> Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), 20th *Anniversary of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol: An analytical review*, 2020, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Sexual violence’ is often used as an umbrella term to cover all types of sexual victimisation including child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation.

UNICEF, *Sexual violence*, 2022.

<sup>44</sup> World Health Organisation, *Global status report on preventing violence against children*, 2020, p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> UNICEF, *Sexual violence*, 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Data from 24 mostly high- and middle-income countries show that the prevalence of sexual violence ranged from 8 to 31 per cent in girls and 3 to 17 per cent in boys aged under 18 years. World Health Organisation, *Global status report on preventing violence against children*, 2020, p. 14.

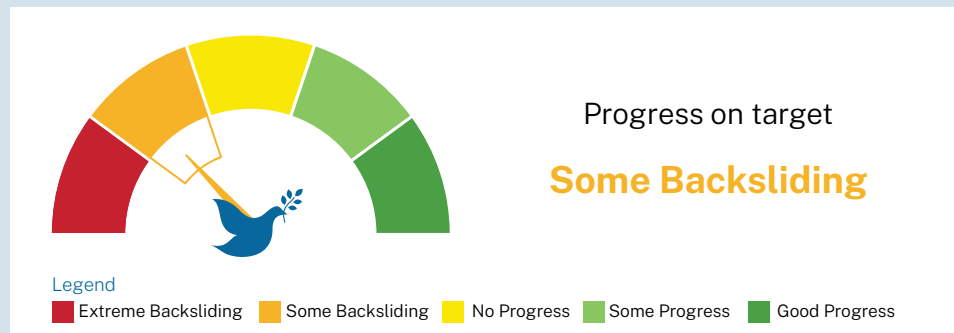
<sup>47</sup> End Violence Against Children, *Uncovering the hidden epidemic of sexual violence against boys*, 2022.

**TARGET 16.3**



**PROMOTE THE RULE OF LAW AND ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

## Target 16.3: Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all



Official data is limited, and that which is available shows no progress or backsliding. Rates of reporting sexual assault remain low, while since 2015, the global proportion of unsentenced detainees has slightly increased. Data from civil society organisations shows worsening situations across the world on the rule of law, access to justice and legal aid. Furthermore, financial, logistical, and security constraints impede the work of grassroots justice defenders and legal aid actors, particularly given the challenging context of increasing authoritarianism and the closure of civic space. Target 16.3 is closely linked with the entire SDG Agenda, and the lack of sustained progress on advancing the rule of law and access to justice does not bode well for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

### Authors of chapter



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## Context and Interlinkages

The United Nations Secretary-General has described the rule of law as a “principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards.”<sup>48</sup> The rule of law promotes equality, fairness and accountability, as well as participation and transparency.

While there is no single definition for access to justice, there is agreement that it is broadly concerned with

“the ability of people to defend and enforce their rights and obtain just resolution of justiciable problems in compliance with human rights standards; if necessary, through impartial formal or informal institutions of justice and with appropriate legal support.”<sup>49</sup> It is equally integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and inclusive growth. “An estimated four billion people around the world live outside the protection of the law, mostly because they are poor or marginalised within their societies. They can be easily cheated by employers, driven from their land, preyed upon by the powerful, and intimidated by violence.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, every day, millions of poor

<sup>48</sup> UN Secretary-General to the Security Council. The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies, S/2004/616, 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Praia City Group, *Handbook on Governance Statistics*, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> OECD/OSI Issues brief: *Leveraging the SDG's for Inclusive Growth: Delivering Access to Justice for all*, 2016; See also Justice for All, *The Case to Fund and Protect Grassroots Justice Defenders*, 2019. Also see World Justice Project, *Measuring the Justice Gap*, 2019, p.5.

and marginalised persons around the world entangled in criminal justice systems face arbitrary and extended pretrial detention, torture, coerced confessions, discrimination, wrongful convictions, stigma, health and livelihood impacts, and other abuses. Lack of justice, including inadequate legal protections and the inability to fairly resolve grievances, is a major reason why people fall into, and remain in, extreme poverty.

Through the rule of law and access to justice, individuals and communities are able to fully participate in society, engage with development processes, and enforce their rights.<sup>51</sup> Legal aid and legal empowerment are critical tools to enable individuals and communities to achieve justice, to ensure that justice systems function fairly and effectively, and to foster good governance and responsive institutions.<sup>52</sup> There is ample evidence demonstrating that rule of law and access to justice are necessary preconditions for achieving and sustaining every other Sustainable Development Goal, particularly ending poverty (Goal 1), achieving gender equality (Goal 5), reducing inequality (Goal 10), ensuring health and well-being (Goal 3), and protecting the environment (Goals 13, 14, 15).<sup>53</sup> They are also linked across a variety of SDG16+ targets, including overlapping with Target 5.2 on reducing violence against women and girls, fundamental freedoms (16.10), and reducing corruption (16.5). National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Supreme Audit Agencies (16.a) can be powerful bodies to promote them.

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

- 16.3.1: Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimisation to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms (Tier II)
- 16.3.2: Unsensentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population (Tier I)
- 16.3.3: Proportion of the population who have experienced a dispute in the past two years and who accessed a formal or informal dispute-resolution mechanism, by type of mechanism. (Tier II)

### Additional Indicators:

- World Justice Project Rule of Law Index
- Global Insights on Access to Justice, World Justice Project (2019)
- Measuring the Justice Gap, World Justice Project (2019)
- Grassroots Justice Network (formerly the Legal Empowerment Network) Annual Member Surveys
- 2016 UNODC/UNDP Global Study on Legal Aid

The availability of data related to Target 16.3 varies by indicator. Data on official indicators suggests that progress is, at best, stagnant, and at worst, backsliding.

There is limited official data on 16.3.1. Only 50 countries have reported data on Indicator 16.3.1 (robbery) via the SDG Database, and even fewer for Indicator 16.3.1 on physical violence and sexual assault. Crime-reporting rates have increased in some countries while decreasing in others.<sup>54</sup> What little information is available on the reporting of sexual assault shows the reported level is only around 30 per cent in countries with the highest level of reporting. At the same time, in 2022, the official data for the related SDG16+ Indicator 16.5.2 describes violence against women and girls as “prevalent across countries and affects women of all ages.”

The UN Statistics SDG Database has official data for Indicator 16.3.2 from 192 countries that have reported it at least once since 2001. According to the UNSG, 30 per cent of the global prison population – 3.4 million people – were unsentenced prisoners in 2021. Data on Indicator 16.3.2 suggests that since 2015, the global proportion of unsentenced detainees has slightly increased. The UN Secretary-General described it as “far from the target of equal access to justice for all.”<sup>55</sup>

Presently, only 5 countries have reported data on Indicator 16.3.3. Given that Indicator 16.3.3 was only established in 2020, the lack of available, comparable, historical data makes it difficult to assess progress over time.

<sup>51</sup> The Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies. *The Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies: A Call to Action to Change our World* (2019).

<sup>52</sup> Justice for All. [The Case to Fund and Protect Grassroots Justice Defenders](#) (2019).

<sup>53</sup> Laura Goodwin & Vivek Maru, “What Do We Know About Legal Empowerment? Mapping the Evidence.” *Hague Journal of Rule of Law* (2017) 9:157-194.

<sup>54</sup> SDG 16 Data Initiative Report 2022, 36-40.

<sup>55</sup> UN Secretary General, *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet, A/78/XX-E/2023/XX* (Advanced Unedited Version), May 2023, p. 22.



## Additional Indicators

The official indicators for SDG 16.3 do not comprehensively measure the broad and multidimensional concepts of rule of law or equal access to justice for all.<sup>56</sup> For example, they fail to measure justice outcomes, or people’s perceptions about the fairness of justice processes and outcomes. The indicators do not track adherence to internationally recognised fair trial rights, such as the right to be heard by an independent and impartial tribunal, or the right to legal assistance.<sup>57</sup> The scarcity of data submitted through the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process, combined with a lack of disaggregated official data from the UN and other international sources, has made it difficult to measure progress towards Target 16.3 since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>58</sup>

Given the shortcomings of the official indicators as noted above, it is critical to look to alternative indicators and sources to measure progress towards Target 16.3. The WJP Rule of Law Index 2022 finds that the rule of law has been declining globally for five consecutive years.<sup>59</sup> Analysis of the World Justice Project’s (WJP’s) legal needs survey data from 101 countries found that only 17 per cent of those who experienced a legal problem turned to an authority or third party to resolve the dispute.<sup>60</sup> An estimated 1.5 billion people “cannot obtain justice for civil, administrative, or criminal justice problems.”<sup>61</sup> Available data also makes clear that there is a severe global crisis in access to legal aid. A 2016 UNODC/UNDP Global Study on Legal Aid found that although many countries recognise the right to legal aid in criminal cases, in practice, many poor and vulnerable accused persons are unable to exercise this right in any meaningful way. Importantly, the study also noted the limited availability of reliable data on legal aid in responding countries.<sup>62</sup> Subsequently, UNODC began collecting official data from countries on access to legal representation (including legal aid services) in criminal cases. Unfortunately, between 2015 and 2020, only 10 countries have reported any data, and only two of these countries have provided comprehensive data.<sup>63</sup>

The indicators also fail to measure access to holistic forms of legal assistance, including through grassroots actors who help communities know, use, and shape the laws and policies that affect their fundamental human rights. Information from civil society groups engaging in legal empowerment efforts at the grassroots level also indicate a growing gap in access to civil legal aid. The 2021 annual membership survey of the Grassroots Justice Network (formerly the Legal Empowerment Network) – the world’s largest community of grassroots justice defenders, representing members from over 3,300 organisations – reveals troubling trends. In 2021, 45 per cent of respondents said their funding situation had worsened, with 78 per cent having to make cuts or unable to operate due to lack of funds. Overall, historical results show that financial struggles for grassroots justice groups have increased since 2018. Furthermore, 50 per cent of respondents stated that members of their organisations or communities had been threatened, arrested, or harassed while pursuing justice in the past year – an increase from 42 per cent in 2019.<sup>64</sup> In an era of rising authoritarianism, governments are increasingly erecting legal and political barriers to civil society activity, restricting access to funding, and fostering mistrust against justice defenders. In many contexts, these challenges impair the ability of grassroots organisations to sustain and safely provide programmes and services that ensure access to justice for communities.

<sup>56</sup> [SDG 16 Data Initiative Report 2022](#)

<sup>57</sup> ICCPR

<sup>58</sup> UNDESA [SDG Indicators-Metadata Repository](#); [SDG Data Initiative Report](#), IEP SDG16+ Progress Report

<sup>59</sup> World Justice Project, [WJP Rule of Law Index 2022](#) Insights.

<sup>60</sup> World Justice Project, “[Global Insights on Access to Justice](#),” 2019, p.7

<sup>61</sup> World Justice Project, [Measuring the Justice Gap](#), 2019, p. 5.

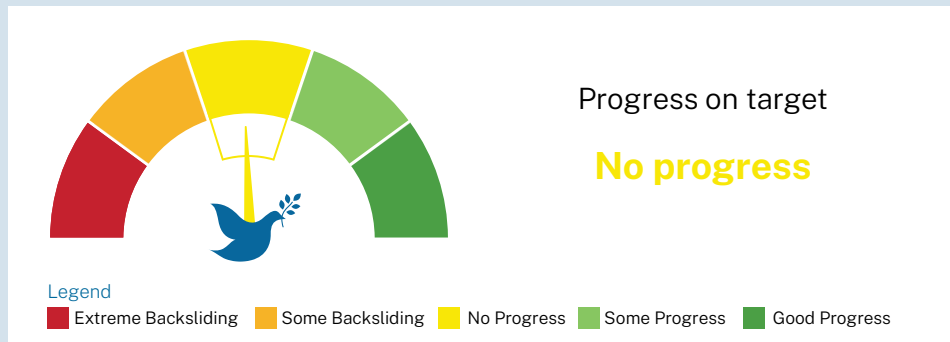
<sup>62</sup> UNODC, [Global Study on Legal Aid: Global Report](#), 2016

<sup>63</sup> [dp-cjs-persons-criminal-courts | dataUNODC](#)

<sup>64</sup> Namati, Annual Grassroots Justice Network (formerly the Legal Empowerment Network) Member Survey, 2021.



## Target 16.4: By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organised crime



There are serious challenges with progress on this target. The indicators are inadequate and official data is scarce. There is some progress on monitoring illicit financial flows (IFFs) and the establishment of beneficial ownership registries. The pervasiveness and widespread nature of all types of illicit economies show that the overall aim of combatting all forms of organised crime remains out of reach. More than three quarters of the global population live in countries with high levels of criminality.

### Authors of chapter



Explore the full target chapter online for further analysis, case studies and recommendations

## Context and Interlinkages

Target 16.4 covers four overlapping but distinct issues: illicit financial flows, illicit arms flows, stolen assets, and combating organised crime. Together, these are some of the most difficult issues facing the world which each undermine sustainable development.

Many billions of dollars are stolen each year from governments and moved internationally. The UN estimates the funding gap—the difference between funds needed to reach the SDGs and the amount currently available—to be \$4 trillion per year for all countries.<sup>65</sup> For developing nations, who need every available dollar to reach the SDGs, this is especially concerning. Illegal flows of weapons undermine peace in fragile countries around the world, increasing the difficulty of achieving the 2030 Agenda. Organised crime often

undermines efforts at peace and stability through violence, arms sales, corruption and illicit financial flows. While finding and returning stolen assets—often originally transferred internationally through illicit financial flows (IFFs)—can be used to fund development projects.

Each of these has deep links to other SDG Goals. The IFF target is linked closely to SDG Target 17.1 which calls on governments to “strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection”. Targets 16.5 on corruption and 16.6 on effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels are linked to reducing IFFs and fighting organised crime since low levels of transparency and weak institutions often

<sup>65</sup> OHCHR, [Trillions needed to close finance gap on Sustainable Development Goals, says UN expert](#), 21 October 2022.

facilitate corruption and tax evasion. The fight against Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) is also strongly linked to arms (16.4.2), peace and violence (16.1) and SDG16+ Target 8.7 on modern slavery and human trafficking. Public access to information (16.10) underpins the fight against IFFs, organised crime, and illegal arms sales, and facilitates oversight on the return and use of stolen assets.

The target is also reinforced by numerous international conventions including the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC), and the Arms Trade Treaty. IFFs also tie into the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

- 16.4.1: Total value of inward and outward illicit financial flows (in current USD) (Tier II)
- 16.4.2: Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments (Tier II)

### Additional Indicators:

- Global Organised Crime Index
- Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer
- Stolen Asset Recovery (StAR) Initiative data on return of proceeds of corruption

Illicit Financial Flows (16.4.1) are defined as “financial flows that are illicit in origin, transfer or use, that reflect an exchange of value, and cross country borders”.<sup>66</sup> Since 2015, there has been significant progress by the UN to develop the indicators and statistical framework to begin to measure IFFs. However, there is currently no official data for this indicator, as UN agencies only received endorsement from the UN Statistics Commission for a new framework for measurement in 2022.<sup>67</sup> Once it is fully in place, 16.4.1 will be a valuable indicator of the magnitude of illicit flows and will grant policy planners, economists and researchers a fuller understanding of the entire

development equation (i.e. total money flowing into a country and total money flowing out). These figures can then be netted which will provide a final figure to be used for programme investment and for addressing the SDG targets.

Further, donor countries are providing substantial financial support to help resource-rich developing nations to build capacity that will enable them to implement policies and procedures to ensure more transparency mechanisms in the sector which, it is hoped, will boost domestic resource mobilisation. There indication of progress regarding the establishment of beneficial ownership registries is also evident, given over 100 governments have committed to implementing these reporting requirements.

It is estimated that the global total for trade-related illicit flows is approximately \$1.6 trillion yearly<sup>68</sup> with developing countries having lost USD 16.3 trillion between 1980 and 2012.<sup>69</sup> There is some official data on several of the components: The UN estimates corruption at about \$3.6 trillion;<sup>70</sup> the OECD estimates tax losses between \$100 and \$240 billion<sup>71</sup>; and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates criminal activity at 1.5 per cent of global GDP or about \$1.7 trillion.<sup>72</sup>

Official data is also scarce for illegal arms flows (16.4.2) of which the official indicator only relates to traceability. The heading for this indicator in the 2022 SDG Extended Report was “countries still face significant challenges when establishing the illicit origin of firearms”. Few countries have systems in place to trace such origins, and even those that do are not fully successful in the pursuit. The UNODC, in a survey of 20 member states from 2016 to 2020, found that authorities successfully traced an average of 28 per cent of seized weapons that were potentially traceable.<sup>73</sup>

There is an estimated \$100 billion worth of weapons transferred every year. The 2021 Global Organised Crime Index found that the trafficking of arms was the third most pervasive criminal market worldwide. This particular form of criminality was highlighted not only for fuelling violence, but for its contribution to furthering other illicit markets and the influence of criminal groups.

<sup>66</sup> UNCTAD and UNODC, [Conceptual framework for the measurement of illicit financial flows](#), 2020.

<sup>67</sup> See SDG Pulse, [Statistical measurement of illicit financial flows, UNCTAD leads global efforts to measure illicit financial flows jointly with UNODC](#)

<sup>68</sup> Global Financial Integrity, [Trade-Related Illicit Financial Flows in 134 Developing Countries 2009-2018](#)

<sup>69</sup> Global Financial Integrity, [Financial Flows and Tax Havens: Combining to Limit the Lives of Billions of People](#), 2016.

<sup>70</sup> United Nations, [The costs of corruption: values, economic development under assault, trillions lost, says Guterres](#), 9 December 2019.

<sup>71</sup> OECD, [Understanding tax avoidance](#).

<sup>72</sup> UNODC, [Transnational organised crime: the globalized illegal economy](#).

<sup>73</sup> UNODC, [World crime trends and emerging issues and responses in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice](#), E/CN.15/2023/10, March 2023.

## Additional Indicators

The official indicators for 16.4 do not address the issue of the tracing and return of stolen assets. Many states release no or inadequate information about their asset-recovery efforts and the public in the affected jurisdictions are therefore often unable to track individual asset-return cases. Similarly, available data on global progress in the return of stolen assets remains sporadic, but it seems clear that only a small fraction of stolen assets and proceeds of corruption are recovered and returned.

Data collected by the World Bank's and the UNODC's Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative (StAR) suggests slightly higher return volumes of proceeds of corruption from 2017 to 2021 than in prior years. However, single cases have a large impact on the global total volume of returned assets. Furthermore, cases take numerous years to proceed. Recent research from StAR identified USD 4.16 billion in proceeds of corruption that states have returned to the country of origin. In response to a survey StAR sent to states, 44 countries and jurisdictions (out of 87 that responded) reported that they had been involved in at least one cross-border asset return involving corruption proceeds between 2010 and 2021.<sup>74</sup> A 2021 paper by StAR found that in addition to the \$4.1 billion in returned assets, states had confiscated another \$267 million and frozen \$5.3bn between 2010 and 2021.<sup>75</sup>

Significantly, the indicator framework for 16.4 does not include indicators to measure how the 'combating' of organised crime could be measured in general. In 2021, the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC) published the first-ever Global Organised Crime Index.<sup>76</sup> The results of the Index find that the global illicit economy is booming<sup>77</sup> and paint a worrying picture of the reach, scale and impact of organised crime. The Index found that 79.2 per cent of the global population live in countries defined by high levels of organised criminality, with state-embedded actors appearing as the most dominant criminal-actor type in the world. One of the strongest correlations emerging from the Index was found to be between the presence of state-embedded criminal actors and poor resilience. This would suggest that those actors may in fact be undermin-

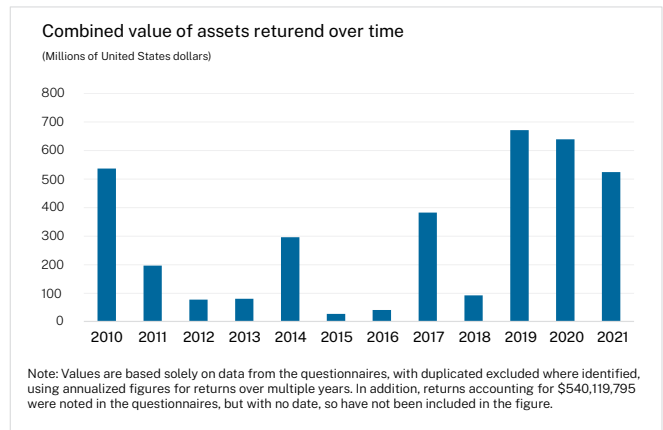


Figure 1 Source & Graphic: StAR: Collection of information on international asset returns, including challenges, good practices and lessons learned (2022), p10.

ing the capacity and resilience of the state to prevent illicit flows, making them one of the most significant impediments to an effective counter organised crime strategy.

Despite the serious and global nature of this problem and the fact that there is a global instrument (UNTOC) to deal with it, international efforts remain largely fragmented, reactive, inadequate and unevaluated. Meanwhile, criminal groups are highly adaptive in seeking out new markets, opportunities and taking advantage of new technologies. The UN response to organised crime is often regarded as, in a narrow sense and separately to the SDGs, as implementing the UNTOC (with its three protocols on human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and illicit firearms manufacturing and trafficking), and its drug control regime. There is also the UNCAC, which includes linkages to transnational organised crime. However, the fight against organised crime and efforts to mitigate its impact are reflected within a much wider ambit of the UN's goals and activities in seeking peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. A 2019 review by the GI-TOC identified a mandate to address transnational organised crime in 79 out of the UN's 102 entities, bodies and agencies, or nearly 77 per cent.<sup>78</sup> The mandate for addressing organised crime extends across the UN System in a way that is expansive, exhaustive and certainly under-appreciated.

<sup>65</sup> UNCAC CoSP Working Group on Asset Recovery, [Collection of information on international asset returns, including challenges, good practices and lessons learned](#), November 2022.

<sup>66</sup> StAR Initiative, [Mapping international recoveries and returns of stolen assets under UNCAC: an insight into the practice of cross-border repatriation of proceeds of corruption over the past 10 years](#), 2021, p. 17.

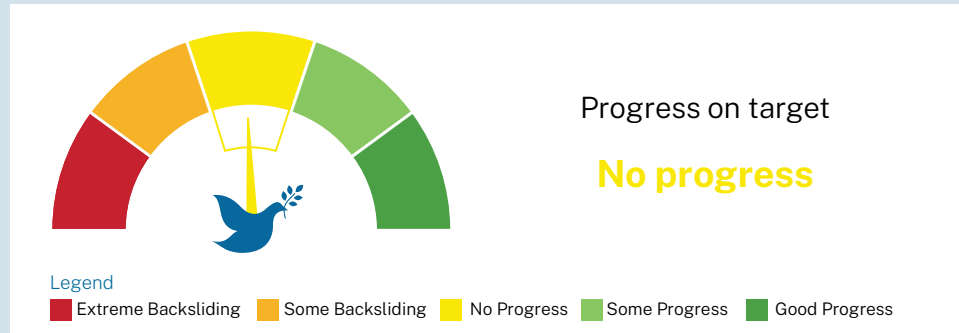
<sup>76</sup> GI-TOC, [The Organised Crime Index](#), 2023.

<sup>77</sup> GI-TOC, [the Global Illicit Economy](#), March 2021.

<sup>78</sup> GI-TOC, [Fragmented but far-reaching – The UN System's mandate and response to organised crime](#), 2019.



## Target 16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms



While nearly every country in the world has signed international agreements to fight corruption, there has been little progress in reducing corruption and bribery globally. In recent years, governments have made numerous pledges to advance anti-corruption efforts, including during the (virtual) Summit for Democracy and via the Political Declaration adopted by the UN General Assembly Special Session against Corruption in 2021. However, follow-up on implementing those commitments is lagging. There is a significant gap between countries’ legal obligations and practices. Investigations into, and prosecutions of, transnational bribery have plummeted, while the publicly-available data on enforcement actions is lacking or inadequate.

### Authors of chapter



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## Context and Interlinkages

Corruption’s discriminatory nature means that the poor and marginalised are disproportionately affected by the way in which corruption restricts economic growth, increases inequality and skews resource distribution. When it comes to the provision of public services, bribery serves as a barrier to access public services as it increases the costs of doing so. As one of the most visible forms of corruption, bribery can also undermine trust in government. Crucially, fighting corruption can help advance the “leave no one behind” principle embedded in the heart of the 2030 agenda.

There are both direct and indirect linkages between corruption and many other areas covered by the SDGs, including access to health, education, inequality, peace and security. Corruption is interlinked with other SDG16 targets including reducing illicit financial flows which often come from corruption proceeds (16.4), access to information (16.10.2) and access to justice (16.3). Violence and corruption often go hand-in-hand, especially in cases of homicide (16.1) and attacks on journalists or land and environmental defenders (16.10.1). Furthermore, bribery and other forms of corruption often disproportionately affect women (5.1, 5.5) and marginalised groups. Also, corruption is



often an enabling factor for environmental crimes and exacerbates pollution, therefore fuelling the climate crisis (SDG 13, 14 and 15).

At the international level, there are strong interlinkages between this target and international and regional conventions on anti-corruption. Countries must criminalise (or at least consider criminalising) a wide range of corruption offences under the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), which 188 states and the European Union (EU) have joined. The UNCAC also requires states to ensure the existence of a body, or bodies, specialised in preventing corruption (Article 6) and in combating corruption through law enforcement (Article 36). Such bodies must have the necessary independence to be able to carry out their functions effectively and without any undue influence, as well as staff with the appropriate training and resources to carry out their tasks and could be considered to operate as oversight bodies, like National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) under 16.a.

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

- 16.5.1 Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months (Tier I)
- 16.5.2 Proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and that paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials during the previous 12 months (Tier I)

### Additional Indicators:

- TI Corruption Perception Index
- VDEM, Public Sector Corruption Index
- World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators & Country Policy and Institutional Assessment

It is difficult to assess progress towards the goal of reducing bribery through official data sources given that most countries do not report official statistics on bribery regularly. The Secretary-General's 2023 report to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on progress states that around 15 per cent of businesses have faced demands to pay a bribe by public officials based on data collected in 153 countries between 2006 and 2023. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported in 2022 that almost one in six businesses face requests for bribe payments by public officials, with a much higher incidence in developing countries than developed ones.<sup>79</sup>

Most of the comparative data available is produced by international organisations such as the World Bank or by civil society organisations like Transparency International. Based on this data, while some countries have seen a reduction in the levels of bribery thanks, partly, to the digitalisation of public services, high levels of bribery remain a concern across most regions of the world. The results from the latest round of the Global Corruption Barometer, which provides data on experiences of corruption for more than 100 countries, also shows that bribery, favouritism and sextortion remain a concern when accessing public services or interacting with public officials worldwide. A 2021 review of the Pacific Region found that 1 in 3 had paid a bribe to receive public services,<sup>80</sup> while for the same period in the EU, 3 in 10 did.<sup>81</sup>

When it comes to international bribery, the Transparency International Exporting Corruption report shows that after some progress between 2015 and 2018, only two countries are now actively pursuing international bribery cases.<sup>82</sup> Out of the 47 countries included in the report, 80 per cent show limited or little to no enforcement.

The UNODC and the United Nations Statistical Commission are currently developing a framework for national statistics bodies to measure corruption through a set of direct and indirect indicators.<sup>83</sup> Such a framework could add much value if it results in improved data collection, more readily available statistics to capture corruption-related offences beyond bribery, and also in encouraging governments to release timely and comparable enforcement data.

<sup>79</sup> UN DESA, [The Sustainable Development Goals Extended Report 2022](#).

<sup>80</sup> Transparency International, [Global Corruption Barometer – Pacific 2021](#), 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Transparency International, [Global Corruption Barometer – EU 2021](#), 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Transparency International, [Exporting Corruption 2022](#).

<sup>83</sup> UNODC, [Statistical framework to measure corruption](#), 2023; UNODC, [Metadata-Statistical framework to measure corruption](#), 2023.

## Additional Indicators

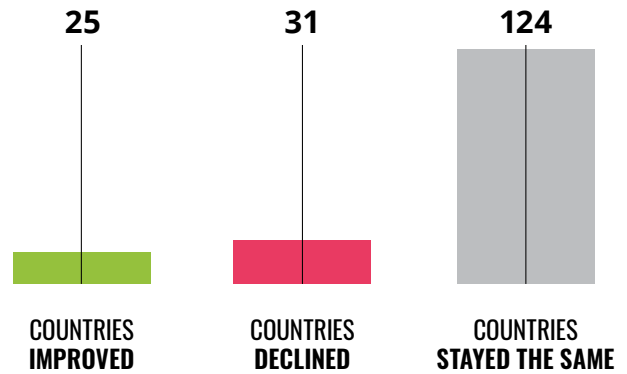
The official indicators take a very narrow view of corruption, focusing on bribery rather than the wide variety of offences that are prohibited under the UNCAC, which has been ratified by nearly every country in the world. A number of other sources, ranging from international CSOs, academics, and international institutions have gathered evidence on various aspects. These sources show little progress in reducing corruption worldwide.

The World Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessment rating indicates that transparency, accountability, and corruption in the public sector rating have remained steady over the past 15 years<sup>84</sup> while the Worldwide Governance Indicators also show little change.<sup>85</sup> Varieties of Democracy’s (V-Dem’s) Public Sector Corruption Index –which measures how often civil servants solicit bribes and other corrupt practices –as well as their Executive Corruption Index –which measures the corrupt practices of government executives – have both recorded very slight declines since 2015. A recent academic assessment comparing laws with practices in 129 countries found a “transparency implementation gap” of 26 per cent between countries that adopted legal practices against corruption and those that actually made information available.<sup>86</sup>

When looking at the results from Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), there is also little progress. Twenty-five countries appear to have made progress in controlling corruption since 2012, but another 31 are doing worse on this front than they did a decade ago. Over two thirds of the 180 countries and territories covered in the CPI, however, remain stagnant. Particularly concerning is the recent backsliding of countries that used to top the index, including, among others, the United Kingdom and Australia.

### CPI SCORE CHANGES, 2012-2022

Number of countries that the underlying data sources largely agree improved or declined, over the period 2012 to 2021, for all 180 countries with data available.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>84</sup> World Bank, [CPIA transparency, accountability, and corruption in the public sector rating](#) (viewed April 2023).

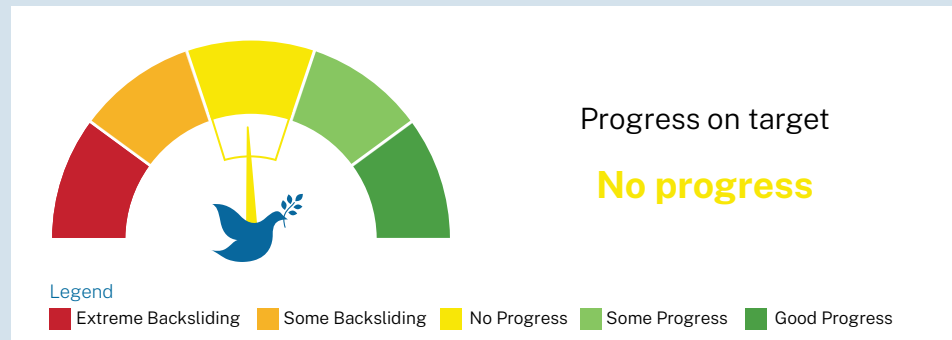
<sup>85</sup> [WGI 2022 Interactive > Interactive Data Access](#) (viewed April 2023)

<sup>86</sup> Mungiu-Pippidi, [Transparency and corruption: Measuring real transparency by a new index](#), Regulation & Governance, 15 November 2022.





## Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels



There has been little progress in improving the target. Many countries show a significant deviation from approved budgets. Transparency of budgets has improved long term while participation is very low.

### Authors of chapter



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## Context and Interlinkages

Ensuring effective, accountable and transparent institutions is crucial for the success of the SDGs, from supporting those in extreme poverty, to health care and education, to sustainable procurement, and protecting the oceans. The ability of governments to implement their budgets as planned—known as budget credibility—is essential for those institutions. Lack of credibility for the planning and budgeting system as a whole can compromise the delivery of critical services necessary for the attainment of the SDGs, and more broadly, inhibit the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, effective public services are at the heart of achieving the SDGs and affect all of them.

Effective allocation and implementation of national resources through government budgets is one critical and core element of how governments can accelerate progress on addressing poverty and inequality to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Many countries face challenges related to governments implementing their budgets as planned, including both the transparency of government spending (as it relates to the prioritised commitments outlined for the SDGs)<sup>88</sup> and strategically allocating spending to deliver services and support for the most vulnerable populations. Budget credibility challenges are especially acute in low-income or fragile states.<sup>89</sup> The target further interlinks with SDG16 targets on corruption (16.5), public participation

<sup>87</sup> Lakin and Cho, [Ring the alarm: governments unlikely to meet SDGs without renewed commitments to spend allocated funds](#), International Budget Partnership Blog, 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Simson, [Transparency for Development: Examining the Relationship Between Budget Transparency, MDG Expenditure, and Results](#), International Budget Partnership Paper, 2014.

<sup>89</sup> These challenges are documented by many international institutions, including the World Bank, PEFA, and ODI. See for example: PEFA, [Global Report on Public Financial Management](#), 2021; Fritz, Sweet, and Verhoeven, [Strengthening Public Financial Management: Exploring Drivers and Effects](#), World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 7084, 2014; Simon and Welham, [Incredible Budgets-Budget Credibility in Theory and Practice](#), ODI Working Paper 400, 2014.

(16.7), birth registration as a service (16.9), access to information (16.10) and national institutions (16.a), as well as the SDG16+ target on institutions and policies for poverty reduction (1.B).

The 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development (FfD) call for governments to report on their spending and progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda pledges to “increase transparency and equal participation in the budgeting process.”

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

- 16.6.1: Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector (or by budget codes or similar) (Tier I)
- 16.6.2: Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services (Tier II)

### Additional Indicators:

- Open Budget Survey
- Sectoral spending

SDG Indicator 16.6.1 focuses on the degree to which governments implement their budgets as planned, which is important for understanding whether governments are keeping their promises and delivering as planned on goods and services for citizens. Analysing and engaging on SDG 16.6.1 can create opportunities for civil society, governments and international development actors to expand the dialogue around the SDGs and ensure that resources for sustainable development deliver as promised.

According to the World Bank Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Secretariat, of the 152 countries with available data for the period 2010–2021, half of the countries show less than 5 per cent deviation in the budget execution compared to the approved budget, while one third of the countries’ budgets deviate within 5-10 per cent, and the budgets

of 18 per cent of the countries show deviation more than 10 per cent.<sup>90</sup> These figures are significant—many countries’ health budgets do not amount to 10 per cent of the total government budget. The larger the deviations, the greater the effects are likely to be on allocative efficiency and service delivery.<sup>91</sup>

Data for 16.6.2 on satisfaction of public services is limited. The UNDP has only recently developed a survey-based indicator focusing on 3 areas: healthcare, education and administrative services provided by governments based on surveys of satisfaction in the last 12 months.<sup>92</sup> The World Bank’s Government Effectiveness Estimate global average – which measures public perceptions relating to the quality of public services and other issues – has remained unchanged from 2015 until 2021.<sup>93</sup>

## Additional Indicators

The indicators for 16.6, do not fully capture the scope of the target. The calculations for SDG Indicator 16.6.1 are based on data in government budget and accounting reports, which should be accessible to the public according to international standards of fiscal transparency. However, in many countries, this data is often not publicly available: International Budget Partnership’s (IBP) latest Open Budget Survey found that almost a third of countries do not publish a year-end report. 76 percent of countries publish the In-Year Report on the implementation of budget policies, 69 percent publish the Year-End Report after the fiscal year has ended, and still fewer – 41 percent – publish the Mid-Year Review. Few countries have government budget reports that provide explanations about budget deviations, meaning there is little public information whether budget deviations are justified, or whether they are impacting the performance of government programmes and services in these sectors. Further, public participation is weak, with no country surveyed providing adequate participation opportunities.

The global transparency scores of countries have increased by 23 per cent in the last 15 years but remained unchanged between 2019 and 2021. No

<sup>90</sup> PEFA, [SDG Indicator 16.6.1 Speaks how Budgets are Affected by COVID-19 Pandemic](#), August 2022.

<sup>91</sup> PEFA, [PEFA Handbook Volume II: PEFA Assessment Fieldguide](#), August 2018.

<sup>92</sup> UNDP, [Manual to Support National Data Collection on SDG Indicator 16.6.2](#), October 2022

<sup>93</sup> The [index](#) measures “perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies.” Government Effectiveness: Estimate(GE.EST).

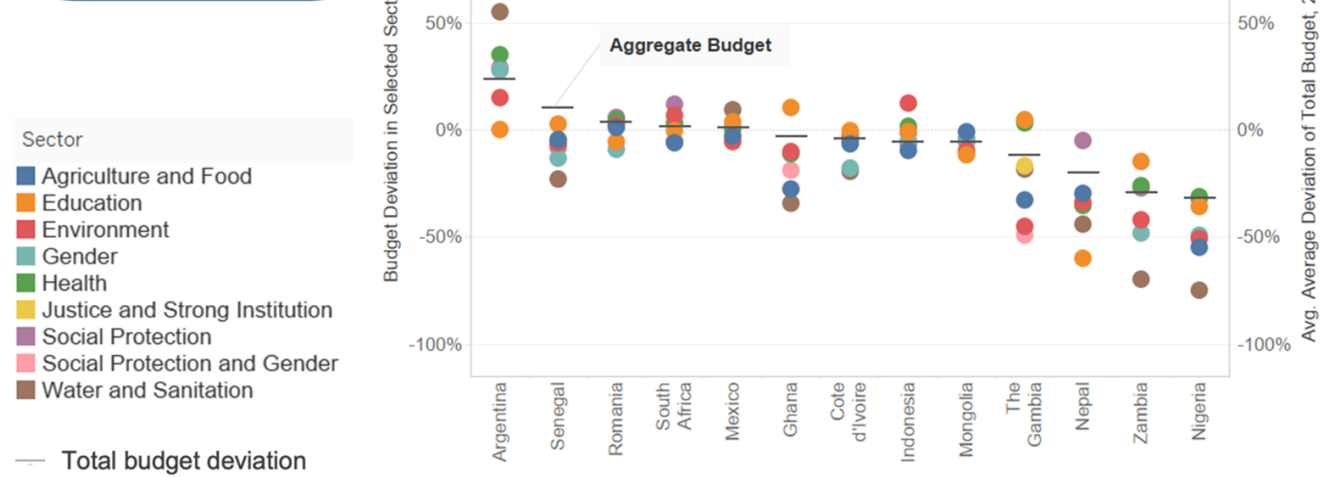
country, among the 120 assessed, meets the minimum standards for adequate accountability on all three measures (scores above 61 on all three). Thirty-five countries have sufficient transparency practices, of which 27 also have adequate oversight practices. However, none of these countries have adequate mechanisms in place for the public to meaningfully participate in the budget process.

Currently, the PEFA only reports SDG 16.6.1 at the level of aggregate central budgetary government and is not yet available at the level of sectors or budget codes, as seen in the indicator’s description.<sup>94</sup> Yet, understanding how credible budgets are at the sectoral level is important for understanding how budget credibility is connected to achieving the SDGs. Previous IBP research has shown that budget credibility issues are often more significant for certain sectors and types of spending. For example, a 2019 IBP paper looking at budget credibility trends in 35 countries found that spending on sectors related to economic growth (agriculture, energy, transport), as well as environmental protection and housing, tend to be underspent, on

average, to a greater extent than spending on defence and social protection.<sup>95</sup>

In 2022, IBP and nine civil society partners collaborated on a series of research briefs and engagements on budget credibility and progress towards achieving the SDGs in seven key sectors.<sup>96</sup> They found that countries often have chronic deviations in specific sectors, which are more than the overall budget execution rates. Across the 13 studies, water and sanitation, gender, and the environment tended to have lower rates of budget execution than other sectors. From 2018 to 2020, deviations between total planned budgets and total realised expenditures ranged on average from overspending of 24 per cent in Argentina to underspending of 32 per cent in [Nigeria](#). In [Ghana](#), underspending in agriculture was around 28 per cent, compared to around 2 per cent across the total budget, impacting programmes that support smallholder farmers to purchase fertilizer and seeds. Ensuring budgets for key sectors and programmes are fully implemented each year can remove a significant barrier to SDG progress.

**Budget deviations in SDG sectors**  
 Source: IBP (2022)



<sup>94</sup> See the [detailed explanation for the methodology of Indicator 16.6.1](#) on the United Nations Global SDG Database

<sup>95</sup> de Renzio, Lakin and Cho, [Budget Credibility Across Countries: How Deviations are Affecting Spending on Social Priorities](#), 2019.

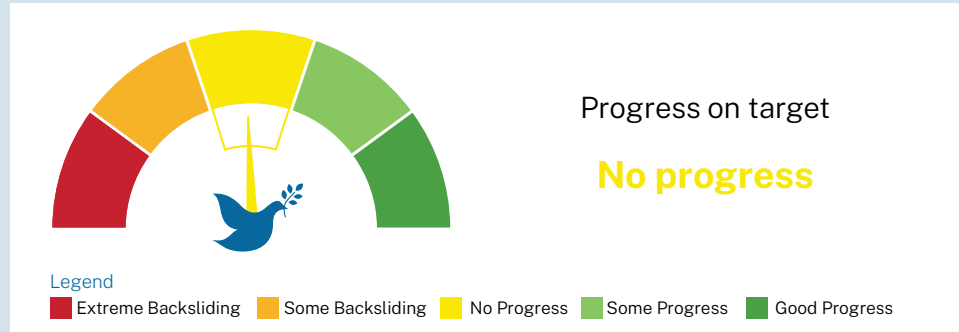
<sup>96</sup> The seven sectors related to the SDGs are: agriculture and food, education, environment, gender equity, health, social protection, and water and sanitation.

**TARGET 16.7**



**ENSURE RESPONSIVE, INCLUSIVE AND REPRESENTATIVE DECISION-MAKING**

**Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels**



Target 16.7 measures both the quality of democratic institutions and the existence of a free environment where participation is possible. Considering this, complementary non-official data shows that relevant indicators – including Clean Elections, Effective Parliament, Impartial Administration and Civil Society Participation – are stagnant or have registered little progress globally, while ‘Civil Liberties’, which enable citizens to participate freely in public life, have declined since 2015. There has been slow progress on official indicators.

**Authors of chapter**



Explore the full target chapter online for further analysis, case studies and recommendations

**Context and Interlinkages**

Out of all the SDG16 targets, none is as closely related to democracy as Target 16.7. Democracy offers several mechanisms which allow citizens to participate in and influence decision making. Voting, a free press and freedom of assembly, among other rights, can raise awareness of societal needs and exert pressure on governments.<sup>97</sup> In contrast, in authoritarian regimes, decisions are taken only by a few people who are impervious to any form of criticism, action or popular control. Inclusive public participation has been at the heart of sustainable development since the adoption of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration in 1992.

As a result, Target 16.7 is not only important for achieving SDG16, but also contributes to all other SDGs, from ending poverty to reducing inequality. Democracy is not only valuable in itself as it relates to human dignity, but also has an instrumental value.<sup>98</sup> As well as enabling moral action,<sup>99</sup> democracy enables citizens to speak up and vote which can result in everything from better policies to the prevention of famines.<sup>100</sup> When citizens are empowered, it is likely they demand better living and working conditions, including quality education, safe drinking water, reduced inequality and food security.

<sup>97</sup> Sen, [Democracy as a Universal Value](#), Journal of Democracy, 10(3): 3-17, 2019  
<sup>98</sup> Sen, Development as freedom, 2019.  
<sup>99</sup> Dahl's [Philosophy Of Democracy, Exhibited In His Essays](#), Annual Review of Political Science, 6: p. 99-118.  
<sup>100</sup> Sen, Development as freedom, 2019.

The target interlinks with other SDG16 targets including 16.6 on accountable institutions, 16.10 on fundamental freedoms, and non-discriminatory laws (16.b) as well as SDG16+ indicators on women's participation (5.5), political, social and economic inclusion (10.2), equal opportunities (10.3) and policies for greater equality (10.4).

It also interlinks with legal obligations for public participation in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the commitment to gender equality in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the resolutions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

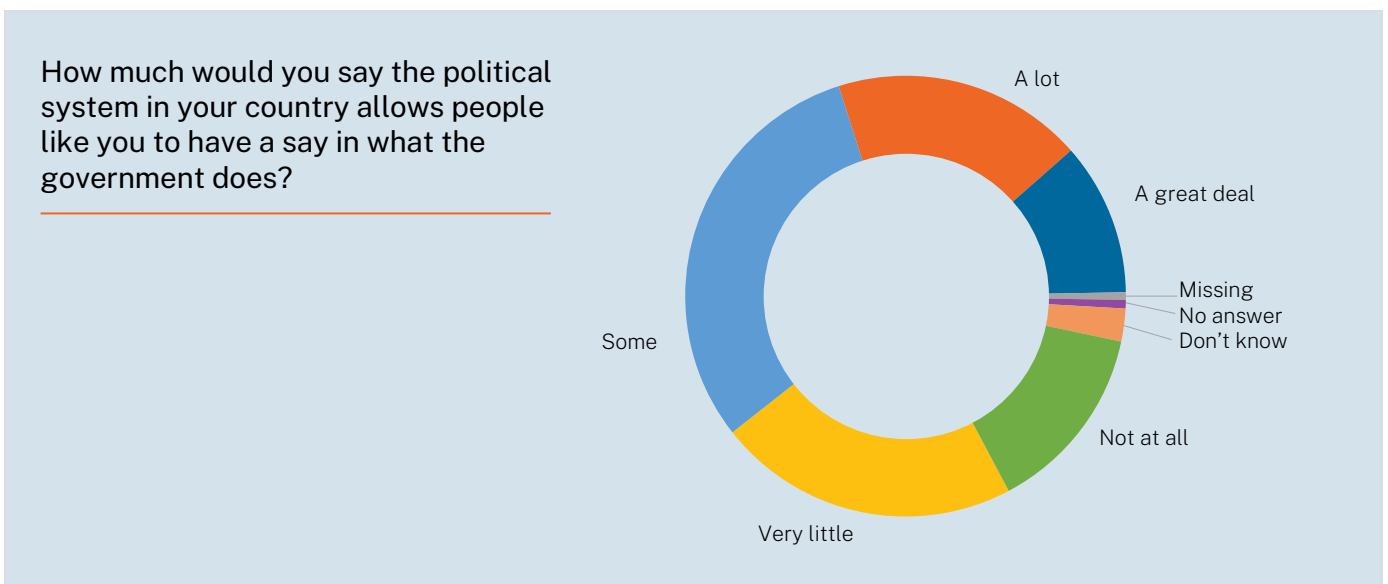
- 16.7.1: Proportion of positions in national and local institutions, including legislatures, public service and the judiciary, compared to national distributions by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups. (Tier I (a)/Tier II (b, c))

- 16.7.2: Proportion of the population who believes decision making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group. (Tier II)

### Additional Indicators:

- IDEA GSoD indicators

There has been slow progress on making parliaments more diverse (16.7.1). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), women held 26.5 per cent of seats in national parliaments as of the beginning of 2023, up from 22.1 per cent in 2015 and 11.3 per cent in 1995.<sup>101</sup> In a notable development that began in 2022, it can be observed that there are currently no operational parliaments in existence wherein there is an absence of women. However, the IPU estimates that at the current rate, parity will not be reached for 80 years. Members of Parliament under the age of 45 (the UN definition of youth) has also slightly increased to 30 per cent, up from 28 per cent in 2016. Nevertheless, the proportion of members under 30 remains relatively low, standing at just 2.6 per cent in 2021, showing a marginal increase from 1.6 per cent in 2016.<sup>102</sup> Leadership positions in parliaments continued to be dominated by men over the age of 46. Minority and ethnic member numbers appear to be low but there is no comprehensive source of data. According



Caption: WorldValues Survey, [Q234A.-How much would you say the political system in your country allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?](#)

<sup>101</sup> IPU, [Women in parliament in 2022: The year in review](#), March 2023.  
<sup>102</sup> IPU, [Youth participation in national parliaments 2021](#).

to UN Women in 2022, women make up 46 per cent of civil service employees, 16 per cent of police and held 42 per cent of judicial positions in 2017.<sup>103</sup>

Official data for 16.7.2 on inclusive and responsive decision making is not yet available. UNDP have developed criteria for using surveys to measure “the extent to which people think that politicians and/or political institutions will listen to, and act on, the opinions of ordinary citizens” as a proxy for public participation.<sup>104</sup> The Praia Group created a Task Team on Participation in Political and Public Affairs in 2021 which is developing and testing methods on measuring public participation.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, the World Values Survey found that in 70 countries surveyed to determine whether people felt they had a say in what the government does, 32 per cent said that they had some impact, 31 per cent said they had a lot or a great deal, and 37 per cent said they had little or no impact.<sup>106</sup> Another question, asking about influence on politics, found that 53 per cent said they had no or very little influence while 34 per cent said they had some influence and 13 per cent said they had a lot or a great deal.<sup>107</sup>

## Additional Indicators

The two official indicators are adequate for measuring the extent to which institutions reflect a society’s demographic composition and for assessing the perceptions of various population groups regarding inclusiveness and responsiveness in decision making. However, these indicators are not fully reflective of Target 16.7. Firstly, regarding 16.7.1, while it is important that institutions reflect the diversity of a society, representation and participation go beyond demographic criteria.<sup>108</sup> Secondly, regarding 16.7.2, while perceptions are important and can work as a proxy to measure performance,<sup>109</sup> it is crucial to understand the quality of institutions themselves. In

short, these indicators are necessary, but insufficient because Target 16.7 also depends on having an enabling context in which citizens can participate without restrictions and where democratic institutions listen to and work for the people.

To complement these official measures, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) offers the following five indicators from its Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices<sup>110</sup>, measuring both the quality of democratic institutions and the existence of a free environment where participation is possible. The indicators cover clean elections, civil liberties, effective parliament, impartial administration, and civil society participation. Using the proposed supplemental data from International IDEA’s GSoD Indices, we can observe that most indicators are stagnant or have experienced small declines since 2015 (and for Civil Liberties there is even a small decline from 2000 levels, when the Millennium Development Goals were set). The exception to this is Impartial Administration, which has registered a slight increase from 0.46 to 0.48, on a scale of 0 to 1.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>103</sup> UN Women, [The Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022](#)

<sup>104</sup> UNDP, [SDG 16.7.2: Ensuring Inclusive and Responsive Decision-Making for Sustainable Development](#), September 30, 2022.

<sup>105</sup> SDG16 Hub, [Praia Group Task Team on Participation in Political and Public Affairs](#)

<sup>106</sup> WorldValues Survey, [Q234A.-How much would you say the political system in your country allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?](#) (viewed April 2023).

<sup>107</sup> World Values Survey, [Q234B.-And how much would you say that the political system in your country allows people like you to have an influence on politics?](#) (viewed April 2023).

<sup>108</sup> SDG16 Data Initiative. 2021. [SDG 16 Data Initiative Report 2021 -Impact of the pandemic on measuring progress towards SDG 16: Looking forward, tackling obstacles.](#)

<sup>109</sup> Upton and Cook, *Oxford Dictionary of Statistics*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

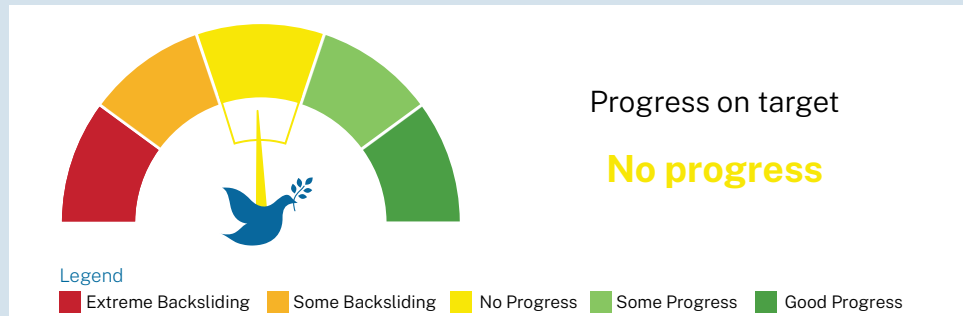
<sup>110</sup> International IDEA, [The Global State of Democracy Indices](#), 2022.

<sup>111</sup> International IDEA, [The Global State of Democracy Indices Methodology](#), 2022.





## Target 16.8: Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance



There has been little change in the percentage of membership and participation of developing countries in international organisations. CSOs and governments report that CSOs are widely engaged in participation in 2030 activities, especially relating to the VNRs. However, much of it appears to be tokenistic, at best. Few countries appear to include CSOs in their official delegations.

### Authors of chapter



Explore the full target chapter online for further analysis, case studies and recommendations

## Context and Interlinkages

Target 16.8 is intended to monitor the imbalances in power at international institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), between rich, developed countries and poorer, developing countries. It is also designed to encourage a shift in voting powers – towards more unrepresented countries and emerging markets – to give them “greater voice and representation in the governance of international economic and financial institutions”. This is crucial for issues such as support and debt relief in institutions like the IMF and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), which vote using a weighted system giving donor countries (such as the US) a majority of the vote.<sup>112</sup>

The target interlinks closely with SDG10 on reducing inequality and shares an indicator with 10.6.1. It also interlinks with 16.7 relating to public participation and an equitable trade system (17.10). Outside of the SDGs, the target links with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda which committed to “broaden and strengthen the voice and participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making and norm-setting and global economic governance”.

However, for civil society, this target is extremely limited, and does not address other imbalances, such as the need for improved civil society engagement in international organisations as embraced in Agenda 2030. Therefore, alternative measurements are considered below.

<sup>112</sup> UNCTAD, [Target 10.6: Participation in institutions](#), 2016. See [IMF Members' Quotas and Voting Power](#), and [IMF Board of Governors](#), May 18, 2023.

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

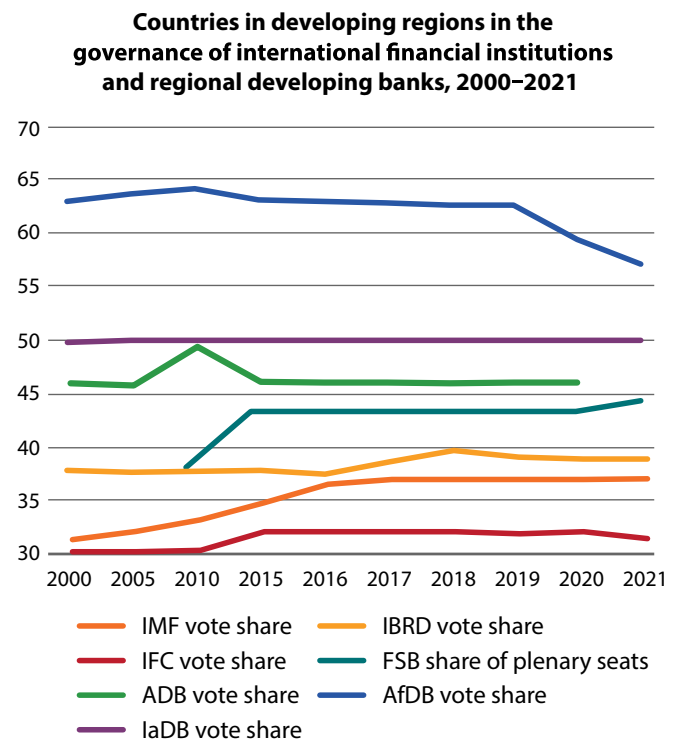
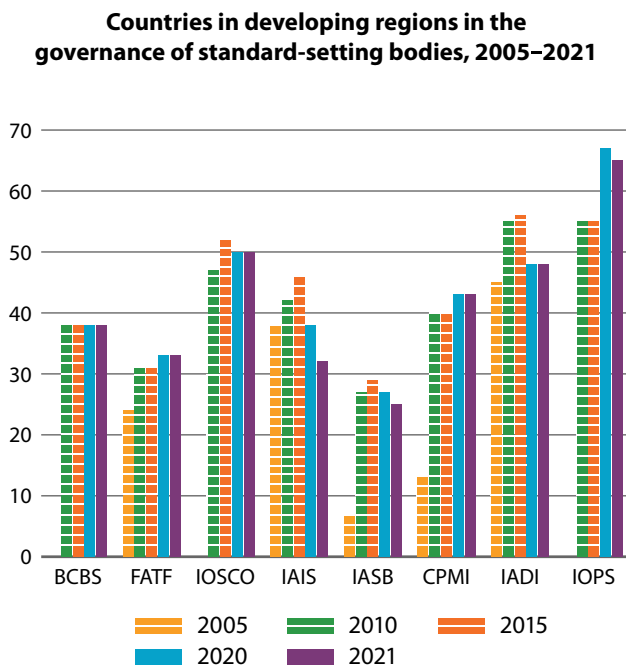
- 16.8.1: Proportion of members and voting rights of developing countries in international organisations (Tier I)

### Additional Indicators:

- CSO participation in VNRs
- CSO participation in official delegations

According to the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development, the membership proportion of developing countries in international financial institutions remained largely unchanged between 2015 and 2021, but a 2021 vote at the World Bank was set to improve that.<sup>113</sup> The Secretary-General in his 2023 report to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) calls for member states to “recognize and address the need for deep reforms of the international financial architecture through a new Bretton Woods Moment, including by enhancing the voice and participation of developing countries in the governance of International Financial Institutions.”<sup>114</sup>

**Representation of developing countries in international institutions and standard-setting bodies, 2000–2021**  
 (Percentages of voting rights or members)



Source: United Nations, Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development, Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2022

<sup>113</sup> United Nations, Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development, [Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2022](#), p 150. While some raw data is available from UN Stats, the last analysis appears to have last been included in the [2017 SDG report](#).

<sup>114</sup> Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet Report of the Secretary-General (Special Edition) (advanced unedited version), April 2023, p. 20.

## Additional Indicators

The official indicator for 16.8 focuses only on developing countries' governmental-level participation in UN bodies. Indicators which reflect a greater role for civil society in international meetings and in the domestic implementation of Agenda 2030 should also be included. This would link the indicator with other Goal 16 targets including accountable and transparent institutions (16.6), inclusive participation (16.7), and civic space (16.10), as well as the inclusion of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in domestic and international processes (16.a). It would also bolster the improvement of partnerships in SDG17.

One area that should be addressed is meaningful CSO participation in international meetings. This includes allowing CSOs to participate as separate delegations – in accordance with the framework of Major Groups originally set up under Agenda 21<sup>115</sup> – and, in keeping with recent initiatives, to broaden the Major Groups system to foster greater inclusivity. CSOs should be recognised as full partners and have a significant role in discussions, debates and decisions at meetings such as the HLPF and in the global, regional forums.<sup>116</sup> The Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums sets out principles on public participation that all signatories of the Aarhus Convention should promote in international fora.<sup>117</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Assembly and Association has also produced detailed recommendations on the engagement of CSOs in Agenda 2030.<sup>118</sup>

Additionally, it is also important to ensure that there are broad-based delegations to the bodies which reflect different interests and knowledge, including CSOs and national human rights institutions. In their 2022 guide, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) recommended including CSOs in official delegations, noting that they are increasingly commonly included by governments.<sup>119</sup>

Another area to monitor is the relationship between inclusive domestic government policymaking and Agenda 2030. A possible indicator relating to this is CSO participation in Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes. UN DESA reported in their 2022 VNRs Synthesis Report that “most countries registered processes for establishing and consolidating stakeholder consultation mechanisms for the SDGs, including the VNR process”.<sup>120</sup> An assessment by a coalition of civil society organisations of the 2022 VNR process found that countries reported that non-state actors were formally included in the processes in 66 per cent of VNR reports, down from 70 per cent in 2019 and 2020.<sup>121</sup> There was little change in CSO engagement in lead councils or committees, but there were improvements in engagement in technical working groups. Participation in high-level governance mechanisms was described as “generally low and imprecise in its nature and scope.” According to reviews for the Global Alliance by the law firm White and Case, nearly all states (37 of 40 in 2021) reported that their VNRs were “the result of inclusive and participatory process”.<sup>122</sup>

However, the joint NGO review found that countries ‘rarely’ referred to CSO spotlight reports in official reports.<sup>123</sup> It also reported that civic space, which facilitates discussion and the implementation of Agenda 2030 (see Target 16.10 review chapter) was shrinking with 12 countries reporting attacks on journalists and environmentalists in the VNRs.

It is important to note that CSO participation is rarely conducted in a meaningful way. NGOs often reported their level of engagement as substantially low. A recent report from UNDP and UN DESA described stakeholder engagement by countries as “insufficient or superficial”.<sup>124</sup> The agencies have created a new analytical framework to assess stakeholder engagement covering inclusion, participation and accountability.

<sup>115</sup> AGENDA 21, Chapter 27: Strengthening the Role of Non-governmental Organisations: Partners for Sustainable Development, 1992.

<sup>116</sup> Progressing National SDGs Implementation, 7th edition, Feb 2023.

<sup>117</sup> Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums, 2005.

<sup>118</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Civil society participation in the implementation of Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development, A/HRC/41/41/Add.2, June 2019.

<sup>119</sup> UN DESA, Repository of Good Practices in Voluntary National Review (VNR) Reporting, 2022.

<sup>120</sup> UN DESA, 2022 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report, 2022.

<sup>121</sup> Progressing National SDGs Implementation, 7th edition, Feb 2023.

<sup>122</sup> White and Case, Review of the 2021 Voluntary National Reviews and SDG16, 2021.

<sup>123</sup> Progressing National SDGs Implementation, 7th edition, Feb 2023.

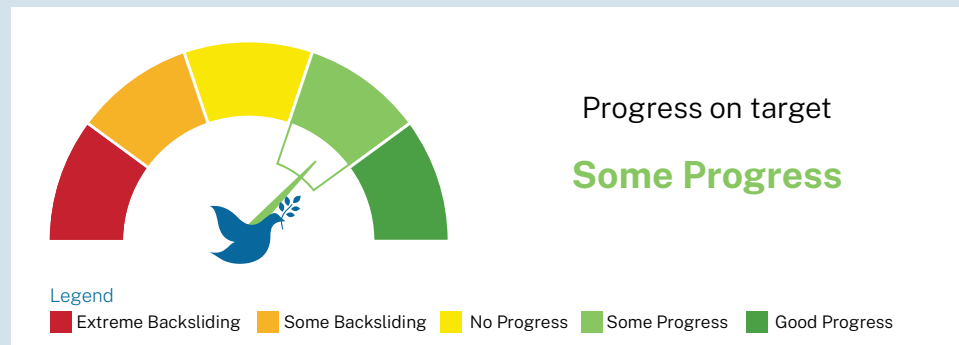
<sup>124</sup> UN DESA, UNDP, WHAT IS A ‘GOOD PRACTICE’? A framework to analyse the Quality of Stakeholder Engagement in implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda

**TARGET 16.9**



**PROVIDE UNIVERSAL LEGAL IDENTITY**

## Target 16.9: By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration



There has been progress on improving birth registration in the past 20 years, but at least 1 in 4 children worldwide are not registered, predominantly in Africa and South Asia. There have also been improvements in providing legal identity, but an estimated 850 million persons worldwide do not have any official record of their legal identity.

### Authors of chapter



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## Context and Interlinkages

Legal identity is defined by the UN as “the basic characteristics of an individual’s identity, e.g. name, sex, place and date of birth conferred through registration and the issuance of a certificate by an authorized civil registration authority following the occurrence of birth.”<sup>125</sup> The official definition goes on to state that legal identity may also be granted by a legally-recognised identification authority if it was not registered at birth; such an authority should be linked to a civil registration system in order to ensure holistic management of legal identity from birth to death.

Recognition and registration of legal identity is critical for the realisation and measurement of around 67 indicators across 12 SDG goals.<sup>126</sup> A lack of identity documents can lead to denial of access to social support, vaccinations and health care, and education. Access to employment, financial services and mobile phone services may also be limited, leading to exclusion from the formal economy and poverty. Civil registration and population registers also provide important resources for effective planning and crisis response, ensuring that no one is left behind. Within SDG16, the legal identity target (16.9) is closely linked

<sup>125</sup> Definition proposed by a Legal Identity Task Force established in 2018 and endorsed by UNSTATs in 2020, see information at the UNSTATs webpage on the [UN Legal Identity Agenda](#).

<sup>126</sup> Jenna Slotin and Karen Bett, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, [One piece of the population data puzzle: civil registration and identity management systems to help the extreme poor](#), October 29, 2019; Mariana Dahan and Alan Gelb, “The Role of Identification in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.” Working Paper. World Bank, 2015.

to, among others, rule of law and access to justice (16.3), prevention of human trafficking (16.2) and prevention of discrimination (16.b). The target overlaps with SDG16+ Indicator 17.19.2 which measures the number of countries which “have achieved 100 per cent birth registrations”.

Recognition of legal identity is also established as a right in international human rights and humanitarian law, which requires that all persons be recognised before the law and that children in particular have the right to a name, birth registration and a nationality, to know and be cared for by their parents, and to the reestablishment of identity if illegally deprived of some or all of these elements.<sup>127</sup> These rights apply to all children without discrimination, wherever they are born, and whoever their parents may be. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons both provide for identity documents to be issued to refugees and stateless persons as a measure of protection. The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018, also called on states to register the births of the children of refugees and migrants and to take other legislative measures to prevent statelessness.<sup>128</sup>

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

- 16.9.1: Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age. (Tier I)

### Additional Indicators:

- Percentage of population with legal identity

There has been a steady improvement in birth registration in the past 20 years<sup>129</sup>. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) currently estimates that approximately one in four of children in the world are still not registered, only slightly improved from the 71 per cent reported in 2016.<sup>130</sup> There are significant regional disparities. While most of the countries in the global north are fully or nearly fully registered, over half of the children in Africa and one third in South Asia were unregistered.<sup>131</sup> A further 25 million were registered in Africa but lack a birth certificate. UNICEF estimated in 2022 that 26 countries in Africa are on track to meet their 2030 obligations, while 22 other countries will need to accelerate their efforts. In Asia, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) reported that the number of annual unregistered births halved between 2012 and 2019.<sup>132</sup>

There are problems with data collection with around 1 in 4 countries lacking sufficient data to monitor 16.9.<sup>133</sup> An academic review of UNICEF data in 2022 found that it was likely overreporting and that the actual level of birth registrations could be as low as almost 1/3.<sup>134</sup>

## Additional Indicators

The official indicator for 16.9 only collects a limited aspect of legal identity, namely, birth registration of children under the age of 5. While this is a long-established metric for the completeness of the legal registration of identity, it leaves significant gaps in recording those who are not initially registered, including older children and adults, and has not always consistently recorded the gap that may exist between the registration of a birth and the issuing of a birth certificate.<sup>135</sup> Further, it does not address the issue of nationality, missing the obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the human rights treaties.

<sup>127</sup> ICCPR, Article 24; CRC, articles 7 and 8 ; CMW, article 29 ; CRPD article 18 ; Convention on Forced Disappearances, article 25(4) . See also [Birth registration and the right of everyone to recognition everywhere as a person before the law : report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/ HRC/27/22, 2014](#)

<sup>128</sup> UNGA, [Global Compact on Refugees, A/RES/73/151, 17 December 2018, paras. 2.8 & 2.9: Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Intergovernmentally Negotiated and Agreed Outcome](#), 13 July 2018, para. 20(e).

<sup>129</sup> UNICEF, [Birth Registration for Every Child by 2030: Are we on track?](#), 2019.

<sup>130</sup> UNICEF, [State of the World’s Children, 2023](#).

<sup>131</sup> UNICEF, [A Statistical Update on Birth Registration in Africa](#), October 2022.

<sup>132</sup> UN ESCAP, [Getting every one in the picture: A snapshot of progress midway through the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade](#), 2021.

<sup>133</sup> UNICEF, [Birth Registration for Every Child by 2030: Are we on track?](#), 2019.

<sup>134</sup> van der Straaten, [Legal Identity for All, or Not? On the Measurement of Birth Registration Completeness](#), March 11, 2022.

<sup>135</sup> Manby, [Legal Identity for All’ and Statelessness](#). The Statelessness & Citizenship Review, 2(2), 248–271, 2020.

<sup>136</sup> World Bank, [ID4D Global Dataset 2021, 2022](#).

According to the World Bank, around 850 million people, half of them children, do not have any form of official identification. Most live in lower-income countries in Africa and South Asia and 35 per cent of women in low-income countries do not have identification.<sup>136</sup> The World Bank estimates that there has been some progress in the last five years, which it estimates as between 100 to 200 million. Accordingly, there have been efforts to enrol adults into population registers, even if their births had not initially been registered. As stated in the UN’s definition of legal identity, it is crucial for these registers to be connected to a civil registration system. This connection ensures that the components of legal identity receive comprehensive protection, which has significant implications for matters such as nationality, inheritance, and more. As noted in the definition of legal identity adopted by the UN, it is important for such registers to be linked to a civil registration system for the elements of legal identity to be more fully protected and impacts on important issues like nationality, inheritance, and others.<sup>137</sup>

It is also important to ensure that, in the push towards complete registration – especially one based on digital identity – other fundamental rights in 16.10 are protected, in particular, privacy. The sharing and extended use of personal information in a comprehensive identity database, especially sensitive information, creates grave risks. In Afghanistan, after the Taliban took control, they used the remaining biometric identity systems to target those opposed to their regime. Identity systems of refugees in other countries have been breached or stolen, leading to threats against already marginalised populations. Furthermore, a person’s inability to join a mandatory digital identification system should not be used to limit their access to other services outlined in other SDG targets such as vaccinations, social support, mobile phones and banking.<sup>138</sup>



<sup>137</sup> See Nubian Rights Forum on [risks](#) of Kenyan ID system.

<sup>138</sup> See Supreme Court of India [decision on Aadhaar system](#) for limits on using system to verify access to bank accounts and mobile registration.

Target 16.1  
 Target 16.2  
 Target 16.3  
 Target 16.4  
 Target 16.5  
 Target 16.6  
 Target 16.7  
 Target 16.8  
**Target 16.9**  
 Target 16.10  
 Target 16a  
 Target 16b

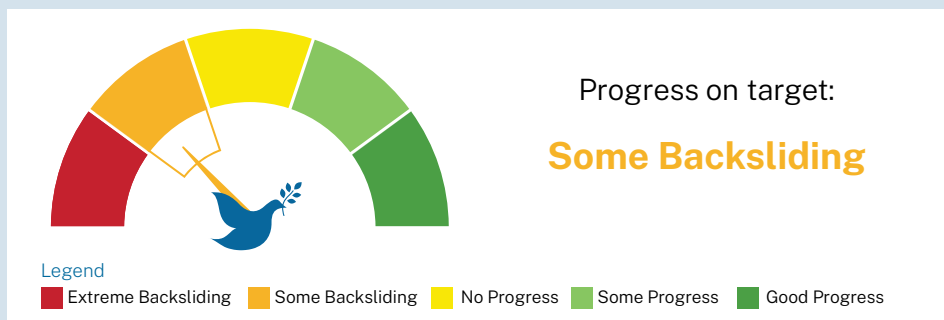


**TARGET 16.10**



**ENSURE PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PROTECT FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS**

## Target 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements



Progress on Target 16.10 is heading backwards. According to official data, there are a high number of attacks on journalists and human rights defenders with serious gaps in reporting, while data from CSOs shows an increase in attacks on journalists, HRDs and trade unionists. At the same time, civic space has been substantially reduced in many countries. More positively, some countries have adopted new laws on access to information. But progress is too slow to meet the target, with indicators suggesting that progress on the implementation of laws has been backsliding.

### Authors of chapter



Explore the full target chapter online for further analysis, case studies and recommendations

## Context and Interlinkages

Access to accurate information and voice opportunities, as well as respect for civic space and the creation of an enabling environment for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), allows individuals to make informed decisions, to participate in decision making and to hold those in power accountable for their actions. As such, advancing Target 16.10 can help address the root causes of many of the world's most pressing challenges, enabling progress towards all other SDGs. This includes poverty, unequal access to health care, economic backsliding and lack of quality employment, all of which are drivers of alienation and polarisation which, in turn, foster institutional mistrust. Ensuring that governments operate transparently – of which the adoption and implementation of access to

information laws (Indicator 16.10.2) is a key component – is critical to the success of any form of public engagement which, in turn, is central to progress on every SDG goal and target. This indicator finds its roots in the basic principles of access to information, public participation and access to justice as set out in Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration.

SDG 16.10 connects closely with other SDG16+ targets such as homicides and conflict deaths (16.1), public participation (16.7) and transparent and accountable institutions (16.6). It's also a key tool in fighting corruption and bribery (16.5) and illicit financial flows (16.4).

SDG 16.10 is also a key link between the 2030 Agenda and the broader international human rights framework. The UN Secretary-General in his 2020 Call to Action for Human Rights, called for human rights principles to inform implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including empowering people and creating avenues for civil society participation. As protected international human rights, public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms are important, both of themselves, and as key underpinnings of accountability, participation, good governance and sustainable development. The Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) has found links to Target 16.10 in over 17 international and regional human rights instruments.<sup>139</sup>

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

- 16.10.1: Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months; (Tier I)
- 16.10.2: Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information (Tier II)

### Additional Indicators:

- CIVICUS Monitor

Attacks on and killings of key civil society actors (16.10.1) is grim and worsening. The UN reports over 300 journalists, human rights defenders, and trade unionists are killed every year, without any signs of that number diminishing.<sup>140</sup> According to CSOs, killings of human rights defenders have been increasing substantially since the 2030 Agenda was adopted. Front Line Defenders reported that 401 human rights defenders were killed in 26 countries in 2022, 80 per cent in just five countries—Colombia, Ukraine, Mexico, Brazil and Honduras.<sup>141</sup> This is up from 156 reported killed in 2015. According to Global Witness, over 1,700

environmental and land defenders have been killed in the past decade, averaging around 200 per year.<sup>142</sup> The number of killings of journalists, as monitored by UNESCO and leading civil society groups, has declined somewhat since 2015, in part due to the fact that some of the most severe conflicts around the world have either ended or diminished substantially in intensity. Trade unionists were murdered in thirteen countries in 2022, compared with six in 2021.<sup>143</sup>

Other issues in the target – kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture – are not officially reported. Out of 162 countries which have submitted Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) between 2015 and 2021, only three, or around 2 per cent, reported at least one attack or killing of a human rights defender. Seven, or around 4 per cent, reported no cases at all, while 94 per cent of countries did not report on 16.10.1 at all.<sup>144</sup>

In terms of access to information (16.10.2), 138 countries had adopted laws or policies on access to information by the end of 2022, but progress has been slowing. About one-quarter of the 96 countries which had not adopted laws by September 2015 had done so by September 2022. Only two countries adopted laws in 2022. If the aim were for 75 per cent of the 96 countries to adopt laws by 2030, the target would not be reached at the current rate of progress.

A greater problem exists with implementation. While no widespread, central assessment of implementation of these laws has been conducted so far, “there is a lot of anecdotal evidence about implementation challenges”.<sup>145</sup>

A similar problem—the lack of VNR reporting—applies to reporting on Indicator 16.10.2. UNESCO, the custodian agency for this indicator, has developed a rather limited eight-question self-assessment survey, of which the adoption and content of laws is the subject of the first five questions. This information is already publicly available through non-official data, specifically the Right to Information (RTI) Rating, which provides an in-depth assessment of the legal framework for access to information in each country which has

<sup>139</sup> See DIHR, [The Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 16](#)

<sup>140</sup> UN DESA, [The Sustainable Development Goals Extended Report 2022](#)

<sup>141</sup> Front Line Defenders, [Global Analysis 2022](#), April 2023.

<sup>142</sup> Global Witness, [Decade of defiance: Ten years of reporting land and environmental activism worldwide](#), September 2022.

<sup>143</sup> International Trade Union Confederation, [2022 ITUC Global Rights Index](#)

<sup>144</sup> International Land Coalition and Alliance for Land, Indigenous and Environmental Defenders, [Crucial Gap: The Limits of Official Data on Attacks against Defenders and Why it's Concerning](#), p. 9.

<sup>145</sup> Ivana Bjelic Vucinic, Laura Becana Ball and Toby Mendel, “[Progress on access to information and respect for fundamental freedoms weak as we approach the SDG halfway point](#)” in SDG Data Initiative 2022 Report, Are we on track to meeting the 2030 agenda?, p. 30.

adopted a law.<sup>146</sup> As noted above however, a widely applied tool to assess implementation of these laws does not yet exist, with implementation being complex matter which is the subject of only three questions in the UNESCO survey.

As such, official reporting on the ‘official’ indicators for Target 16.10 does not give us a comprehensive understanding of what progress is being made towards them. On the other hand, non-official data, which is more robust and reliable, suggests that progress is limited.

## Additional Indicators

There are serious problems with relying on Indicator 16.10.1 as a surrogate measurement for the very broad issue of protecting fundamental freedoms, the aspect of Target 16.10 to which it relates. It is not inconsequential to assess cases of killings, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and the torture of journalists, trade unionists and human rights advocates. However, this covers only the most severe violations and does not track a wider range of infringements, including physical assaults, threats, intimidation, harassment, exile and digital attacks.

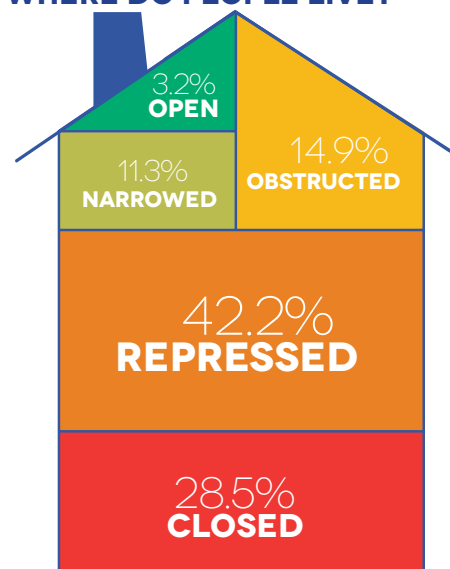
For example, reports by the Council of Europe<sup>147</sup> and UNESCO<sup>148</sup> have emphasised that gender-based violence and harassment, especially online, are more commonly used to intimidate and silence female and non-binary journalists. Female journalists are also frequently targeted by coordinated disinformation campaigns which utilise various techniques – such as deep fakes, hacked photos and rumours of misconduct – to undermine the target’s credibility and reputation. Such targeted harassment curtails the participation of female journalists in public discourse. This, in turn, has a sinister effect on freedom of expression and gender equality goals. None of this is captured by Indicator 16.10.1.

This indicator also ignores the many other ways fundamental freedoms can be undermined beyond physical attacks and harassment, such as through repressive legal frameworks. It also fails to assess measures to prevent and remedy violations of freedoms. Civil

society organisations have called for an expansion of Indicator 16.10.1 to account for other ways in which freedom of expression, access to information and the freedoms of journalists and human rights defenders are restricted; for example, to include stigmatising discourse, criminal and civil legal processes, and internet restrictions as “other harmful acts”.<sup>149</sup>

According to the CIVICUS Monitor – a research collaboration between over twenty organisations from around the world to measure fundamental civic freedoms of peaceful assembly, association and expression – civic freedoms are being curtailed in a growing number of countries, with civil society facing severe attacks in 117 of 197 countries and territories, an increase from 111 in 2018.<sup>150</sup> Global findings released in March 2023 reveal that only 3.2 per cent of the world’s population live in 38 countries or territories with ‘open’ or enabling civic space conditions. Conversely, 28 per cent of the world’s population live in 27 countries or territories with ‘closed’ civic space conditions where the mere exercise of democratic dissent, or posing questions to those in power, can result in imprisonment, forced exile or death. Most recently governments have used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to further restrict fundamental freedoms, including the right to protest.

### WHERE DO PEOPLE LIVE?



BASED ON WORLD BANK POPULATION DATA 2021

Source: CIVICUS Monitor

<sup>146</sup> Centre for Law and Democracy, [RTI Rating](#)

<sup>147</sup> Council of Europe, [No space for violence against women and girls in the digital world](#), 15 March 2022.

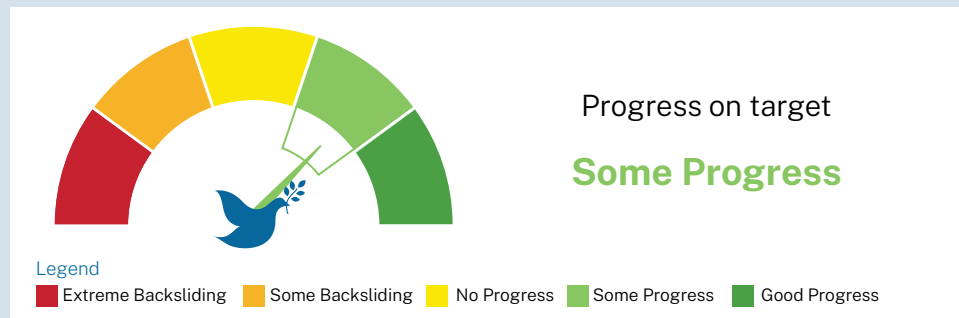
<sup>148</sup> See, for example, Posetti, Aboulez, Bontcheva, Harrison, and Waisbord, [Online Violence against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts](#), UNESCO, 2020.

<sup>149</sup> Ivana Bjelic Vucinic, Laura Becana Ball and Toby Mendel, note 4.

<sup>150</sup> <https://monitor.civicus.org/>



## Target 16.a: Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime



There has been some growth in the creation of fully independent NHRIs since 2015, now existing in nearly half of the countries in the world. However, many countries do not recognise them in their VNRs. Other important institutions, such as supreme audit agencies and ombudsmen, are also playing a key role.

### Authors of chapter



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## Overview and Interlinkages

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are independent state institutions, with a constitutional and/or legislative mandate to protect and promote human rights. NHRIs address discrimination in all its forms, and promote and protect civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights and thus are linked with nearly all of the SDGs as a key means of monitoring their progress. They have key connections with Target 4.7 on human rights education, Targets 5.c on gender equality and 10.3 on discrimination.

Within SDG16, NHRIs are particularly linked with accountable and transparent institutions (16.6), equal access to justice (16.3) and access to information and fundamental rights (16.10)–where they have a key role

in monitoring and promoting human rights–and on the elimination of discriminatory legislation (16.b). In a few countries such as Malawi, the national human rights institution also serves as the oversight and appeals body for the national access to information legislation (16.10.2).

The mere existence of NHRIs will not contribute to the achievement of SDG16 or the 2030 Agenda as a whole. They must be able to operate and have access to processes, both on national and global levels. Resolutions 5/1, 5/2 and 16/21 of the Human Rights Council, as well as the United Nations General Assembly Resolution (UNGA) A/70/163, encourage all relevant UN mechanisms and processes to further

enhance the participation of NHRIs compliant with the Paris Principles, and to allow for their contribution, including those related to the 2030 Agenda, such as the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).<sup>151</sup> Under the Mérida Declaration – which focuses on the role of NHRIs in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – NHRIs have agreed to fully engage with governments, civil society, and other stakeholders in order to promote the Agenda

In addition to NHRIs, other institutions which also play important roles in the achievement of the SDGs, including ombudsmen and supreme audit agencies, should be reviewed as well.

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

- 16.a.1: Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles (Tier I)

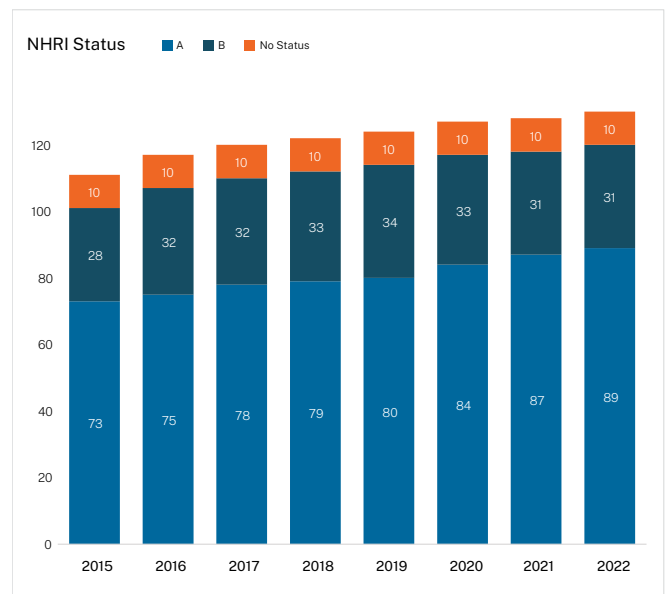
### Additional Indicators:

- Roles of Ombudsman and Supreme Audit Agencies in SDG processes and oversight

Global Indicator 16.a.1 reaffirms that sustainable development cannot be achieved without strong and independent NHRIs. Indeed, to comply with the Paris Principles<sup>152</sup>, they must operate and function independently from government. The Paris Principles constitute authoritative and reliable metrics, adopted by the UN General Assembly, to measure the independence, investigatory powers, mandate, and capacity of NHRIs. All NHRIs are regularly assessed and awarded with either A, B or no status, depending on their compliance with the Paris Principles by a Sub-Committee of Global Alliance of NHRIs (GANHRI), under the auspices of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).<sup>153</sup>

There has been modest growth in fully independent institutions since 2015. According to GANHRI's most

recent review of 130 institutions, as of November 2022, there are 89 'A' status accredited NHRIs (fully compliant with the Paris Principles) and 31 'B' status accredited NHRIs (partially compliant with the Paris Principles), and 10 with 'C' or no status (not compliant with the Paris Principles).<sup>154</sup> In 2015, there were only 73 'A' status NHRIs and 28 with 'B' status.



Caption: Countries with NHRIs. Source: Danish Institute for Human Rights

Even the official data in this indicator is inadequate. In the SDG Indicators Database, SDG Indicator 16.a.1 is significantly underreported as only 29 per cent<sup>155</sup> of countries have included data on it in their VNRs.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, the UN Statistics metadata repository on Indicator 16.a.1. clearly states that the main sources of the data come from GANHRI.<sup>157</sup>

Consequently, there is a point to be made about the lack of awareness of, not only the roles, but even the existence of NHRIs by decision makers domestically, which can also contribute to their underutilisation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and general underrepresentation in other SDG processes.

<sup>151</sup> DIHR & GANHRI, *National Human Rights Institutions: Accelerators, Guarantors and Indicators of Sustainable Development* p. 11

<sup>152</sup> GANHRI, *Paris Principles*

<sup>153</sup> DIHR & GANHRI, *National Human Rights Institutions: Accelerators, Guarantors and Indicators of Sustainable Development*, p. 5.

<sup>154</sup> GANHRI, OHCHR, *Accreditation status as of 29 November 2022*

<sup>155</sup> *SDG Indicators Database*

<sup>156</sup> *Accreditation-GANHRI*

<sup>157</sup> UN Statistics, "SDG indicator metadata: Metadata-16-0A-01", p. 3

<sup>158</sup> *Principles on the Protection and Promotion of the Ombudsman Institution ("The Venice Principles")*, CDL-AD(2019)005-e, March 2019.



## Alternative Indicators

Besides NHRIs, there is a cluster of other oversight bodies found in most countries' legal systems, including ombudsmen, supreme audit agencies, anti-corruption commissions, and information commissions. Some of these other institutions are playing an increasingly important role across many countries in promoting sustainable development.

Ombudsmen, which are typically independent officials appointed by parliaments, often have a similar role to NHRIs, with some having overlapping duties. A major part of their role is to promote human rights, the rule of law and good governance. Many have a specific focus relating to promoting health and gender equality, and protecting future generations and people with disabilities. The UNGA in 2021 noted their importance in “addressing the imbalance of power between the individual and the providers of public services”, key to many of the SDGs, and endorsed their role as independent mediators and overseers to promote the rule of law and good governance.<sup>159</sup>

Ombudsmen can investigate instances of mis- and mal-administration and are therefore important for the progress of many SDGs including 16.3 on access to justice and 16.6 on transparent and accountable institutions. Some, as in Sweden and Kenya, act as the oversight bodies for access to information under 16.10. At their annual meeting in Dublin in 2021, the International Ombudsmen Institute adopted the Dublin Declaration ‘Giving Voice to the Voiceless’, which highlighted the contribution Ombudsmen make to the United Nations Agenda 2030, especially relating to SDG16.<sup>160</sup> The Institute has a membership of 200 Ombudsman institutions from more than 100 countries worldwide.

Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) can also play a key role in monitoring SDG implementation. They are increasingly appearing in VNRs. According to the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), over 100 SAIs have conducted performance audits assessing preparedness for the implementation of the SDGs.<sup>161</sup> The INTOSAI maintains a Working Group on SDGs and Key Sustainable Development Indicators. INTOSAI reports members in nearly all UN Member States.<sup>162</sup>



<sup>159</sup> UNGA, [The role of the Ombudsman and mediator institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights, good governance and the rule of law](#), A/RES/75/186, 2020.

<sup>160</sup> [Dublin Declaration](#), 2021.

<sup>161</sup> INTOSAI, [SDG Atlas](#).

<sup>162</sup> [Full Members-INTOSAI](#) (viewed April 2023)

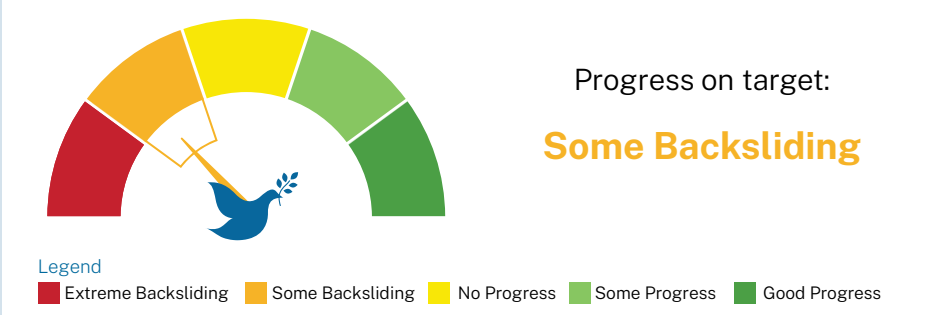


**TARGET 16.B**



**PROMOTE AND ENFORCE NON-DISCRIMINATORY LAWS AND POLICIES**

### Target 16.b: Promote and Enforce Non-Discriminatory Laws and Policies for Sustainable development



There is little official data available, but what little there is reveals that women in particular face high levels of discrimination. Discrimination increased around responses to the pandemic, particularly against poor and indigenous communities.

**Authors of chapter**



Explore the full target chapter online for further analysis, case studies and recommendations

### Overview and Interlinkages

The purpose of Target 16.b is to ensure that discrimination does not adversely impact the fair implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and to safeguard that ‘no one is left behind’. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) defines discrimination as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference or other differential treatment that is directly or indirectly based on prohibited grounds of discrimination, and which has the intention or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.” There are over twenty grounds for discrimination recognised in international law.

Target 16.b overlaps with SDG16+ Target 10.3, with which it shares a common indicator, and Target 5.c, which also relates to legislation on non-discrimination, 5.1.1 on legal frameworks to promote gender equality, as well as 17.18 on improving the collection of disaggregated data. It is strongly linked with 16.a as National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) have the potential to monitor progress and serve as data providers for 16.b and other human rights-relevant targets.

Underpinning the target are numerous international human rights treaties and agreements which prohibit discrimination, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),<sup>164</sup> the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the International Conven-

<sup>163</sup> According to OHCHR, these are: race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national origin, social origin, property, birth status, disability, age, nationality, marital and family status, sexual orientation, gender identity, health status, place of residence, economic and social situation, pregnancy, indigenous status, and other status. See [SDG indicator on prevalence of discrimination \(10.3.1 & 16.b.1\)](#), Joint Second Meeting of UN-CTS Focal Points and ICCS Technical Advisory Group, Lima, 7-8 June 2018.  
<sup>164</sup> See Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 20, Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2, para. 2, ICESCR), E/C.12/GC/20, 2009.

tion on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation.

## Progress on Indicators

### Official Indicators:

- 16.b.1: Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law (Tier II)

Target 16.b is among the few targets that require states to undertake structural measures, such as the enactment of laws and policies. Global Indicator 16.b.1 is a perception indicator that measures people's experiences of discrimination and can therefore give voice to those experiencing discrimination. However, as a subjective outcome indicator, it does not directly measure the structural element to hold states accountable for their commitments to law reform. As of 2022, official data is only available from around 50 countries.<sup>165</sup>

According to the UN OHCHR, around 20 per cent of all persons experienced discrimination between 2017 and 2021, with women reporting discrimination twice as often as men and one third of people with disabilities reporting discrimination.<sup>166</sup> This was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Risk Poll of people in 121 countries found that 21 per cent of people said they faced discrimination in 2021, with the highest based on their nationality and ethnic group.<sup>167</sup>

Other studies focusing on certain aspects also find a high prevalence of discrimination. The OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), which measures discrimination against women in social institutions across 179 countries, has found that while there is some progress, it will take over two centuries to reach the SDG5 targets at the current rate.<sup>168</sup> A 2021 report of 17 countries found that 57 per cent of women reported

facing discrimination in their personal, professional and public spheres.<sup>169</sup> A study of people in 15 countries with mental illness found that nearly 50 per cent reported discrimination.<sup>170</sup>

## Additional Indicators

This indicator will be challenging to operationalise at a global scale, as people are not necessarily aware of the principles of discrimination under international human rights law. Moreover, the way individuals or groups experience discrimination may reflect ingrained social, cultural, economic patterns that can only change over long periods of time.

Existing global, regional and national human rights mechanisms may provide this missing link. The existence of an independent National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) indicates a State's commitment to promote and protect human rights set out in international human rights instruments, and is the global indicator for Target 16.a. Given their monitoring mandate and independent status, as well as the focus on non-discrimination and the range of human rights underpinning the SDGs, NHRIs have the potential to monitor progress and serve as data providers for Target 16.b and other human rights-relevant targets.

Another useful data source to monitor Target 16.b are international human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and various treaty bodies including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the ILO Convention 111. These mechanisms provide access to a wide array of data, and therefore, accurate and context-specific monitoring of 16.b. Many recommendations under these mechanisms have direct links to Target 16.b, as illustrated in a 2016 report, which explicitly links Denmark's most recent Universal Period Review (UPR) recommendations to the SDGs.<sup>171</sup> Progress towards Target 16.b can therefore be measured by the number and extent to which recommendations under the various mechanisms are actioned or left pending. The same human rights mechanisms are also well placed to report on whether recommendations related to discriminatory policies and legislation have been addressed or remain outstanding, thus contributing to a fuller picture of the progress towards Target 16.b.

<sup>165</sup> [The Sustainable Development Goals Extended Report 2022](#): Goal 16.

<sup>166</sup> OHCHR, [Prevalence of SDG Indicator 10.3.1/ 16.b.1 Discrimination](#)

<sup>167</sup> Lloyd's Register Foundation || [World Risk Poll 2021](#), 2022.

<sup>168</sup> OECD, [Social Institutions and Gender Index, SIGI 2019 Global Report, Transforming Challenges into Opportunities](#), March 2019.

<sup>169</sup> Focus 2030 and Women Deliver, [Citizens Call for a Gender-Equal World: A Roadmap for Action](#), 2021.

<sup>170</sup> Brohan, E. et al, (2022). Measuring discrimination experienced by people with a mental illness: Replication of the short-form DISCUS in six world regions. *Psychological Medicine*, 1-11.

<sup>171</sup> Danish Institute of Human Rights (2016) "UPR of Denmark 2016".

## Chapter 4:

# What is the ‘non-official data’ telling us?

## Role of the SDG16 Data Initiative

The SDG16 Data Initiative is a consortium of 18 partner organisations that seeks to support the tracking of commitments made by UN Member States under SDG16, which promotes peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The 18 partners do this in different ways, an important one of which is collecting and curating high-quality, non-official data on progress towards the achievement of SDG16. They then communicate what that data shows about global progress towards this important goal and catalyse action for change based on the data. The initiative also helps identify potential challenges in data quality, availability and coverage, for both official and non-official data, and to mobilise action to address those challenges.

In addition to participating in various SDG-related events, such as the annual Rome conference on SDG16 and the annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) meetings in New York, the SDG16 Data Initiative also publishes an annual report on the results of its partners’ work. The title of the 2021 Report was, *Impact of the pandemic on measuring progress towards SDG 16: Looking forward, tackling obstacles*,<sup>172</sup> while the 2022 Report was, *Are we on track to meeting the 2030 agenda?*<sup>173</sup> In particular, this second report provides a longitudinal view of how well countries around the world are doing in terms of meeting their SDG16 commitments.

## Analysis of progress towards this goal

In its 2022 Report, *Are we on track to meeting the 2030 Agenda?*, the SDG16 Data Initiative focused on how much progress states had made, in general, on

different targets and indicators under SDG16. The Introduction to the Report makes this sobering statement:

*“Overall, the analysis suggests that the international community faces very strong headwinds for meeting many of the 12 targets and 24 indicators that the UN has specified for SDG16. Throughout the report, analysts predict that it is very likely that many key indicators for SDG16 will not be reached by 2030, especially in countries experiencing democratic erosion, protracted conflict and armed violence, and unequal development.”<sup>174</sup>*

If the assertions regarding the significance of SDG16 and its targets—both in their own right and as cross-cutting underpinnings for achieving all other SDGs—hold true, concerns are raised for the overall success of the SDG project. The SDG16 Data Initiative is not alone in raising the alarm about achievement of the SDGs; in September 2019, even before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN Deputy Secretary-General publicly expressed serious concerns about how far behind the world was on achieving the SDGs, noting: “At the current rate of investment, it will be impossible to achieve the SDGs by 2030. This is bad for people, bad for society, bad for the environment and bad for business.”<sup>175</sup>

One of the challenges with the SDGs in general, but again perhaps more significant under SDG16, is the lack of any clear definition of what the actual objective is. The UN set a very vague standard for achievement of all the SDGs, namely ‘substantial progress’.<sup>176</sup> Some indication of what might constitute this may be gleaned from the standards the UN Statistics Division used for one of the three indicators under SDG16 that it assessed in 2022. This was Indicator 16.a.1: “Existence of independent national human rights institutions in com-

<sup>172</sup> [SDG 16 Data Initiative Report 2021](#).

<sup>173</sup> [SDG16 Data Initiative Global Report 2022: Are we on track to meeting the 2030 agenda?](#)

<sup>174</sup> SDG16 Data Initiative Report 2022, p.11.

<sup>175</sup> United Nations, “Attaining Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 Will Be Impossible at Current Investment Rate, Deputy Secretary-General Tells Global Compact CEO Event”, 26 September 2019

pliance with the Paris Principles”, where it suggested that 75 per cent of all countries would be required to merit a ‘target met or almost met’ rating.<sup>177</sup> However, given that the SDGs are supposed to assess progress, it would be necessary to look at how many countries had such institutions in 2015 and what degree of progress 75 per cent would therefore represent.

## Global progress towards SDG16

The 2022 SDG16 Data Initiative Report found that, with the exception of intentional homicides and conflict-related deaths (Indicators 16.1.1 and 16.1.2), progress on each of the various targets and indicators which were assessed in that Report (i.e., Targets 16.1, 16.3, 16.4, 16.5, 16.6, 16.7, 16.10 and their associated indicators) were either ‘limited or non-existent’.<sup>178</sup> This is a matter of serious concern. Moreover, while the decline in conflict-related deaths is to be welcomed, it is largely due to a significant decrease in the intensity of four deadly conflicts, namely in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, three of which can hardly be said to be enjoying improved development outcomes.

This global conclusion, however, masks much complexity in the assessment of progress. In some cases, certain sub-indicators (such as killings of journalists) had declined, while other sub-indicators (such as detentions of journalists) had increased substantially. Contrasting these two factors isn’t possible, yet it is reasonable to conclude that the surge in detentions signifies a serious impediment to the promotion of freedom of expression. In terms of violent crimes,

certain forms of progress remain hard to evaluate. For example, the reporting of sexual assault in Iceland increased from 3.3 per cent in 2015 to 7 per cent in 2020; while this is, statistically, a strong increase (a doubling of the rate), it still remains woefully low. Overall, as the conclusion of the Report notes:

*“There is only one possible conclusion from the extensive and high-quality non-official data presented in this report. The world is, overall, seriously failing to make sufficient progress on the SDG16 indicators. Indeed, in many cases progress has been negligible or even negative.”<sup>179</sup>*

## Recommendations

- States should invest far more attention and resources in both collecting reliable data on the indicators under SDG16, and in reporting publicly on what that data reveals.
- States should, and civil society should continue to, focus data collection and reporting efforts, not only on the official indicators under SDG16, but also on wider means of assessing progress towards SDG16+ targets.
- States, and the wider international community, should increase their support for civil society organisations which are collecting data and reporting on progress towards achieving the SDG16 targets.
- Beyond measuring progress, states should allocate significantly more resources towards effectively making progress on the SDG16 targets.



### Key Resources

- > [SDG16 Data Initiative: Impact of the pandemic on measuring progress towards SDG 16: Looking forward, tackling obstacles, 2021](#)
- > [SDG16 Data Initiative: Are we on track to meeting the 2030 agenda?, 2022.](#)
- > [Access Info Europe and Center for Law and Democracy: The RTI Rating](#)

<sup>176</sup> See, for example, UN Statistics Division, Sustainable Development Goals Progress Chart 2022 Technical Note, which refers to success in achieving different Indicators as “Substantial progress/on track”, see p. 4 and following, [https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/Progress\\_Chart\\_Technical\\_Note\\_2022.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/Progress_Chart_Technical_Note_2022.pdf).

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>178</sup> Note 2, p. 81.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 84.



# Chapter 5: Synthesis of SDG16+ Consultation

In early 2023, the TAP Network conducted an online global survey of stakeholders to collect reflections and inputs on the current state of progress towards SDG16+ at the national and global level, and to unpack the challenges and key recommendations needed to improve implementation of SDG16+ in this second half of implementation towards 2030. [The Global SDG16+ Survey: Halfway to 2030](#) had four key objectives: 1) Understanding perceptions of progress made towards SDG16+; 2) Exploring interlinkages between SDG16+ and all other SDGs; 3) Unpacking key challenges for SDG16+ implementation to date; and 4) Providing recommendations for improving SDG16+ implementation going forward.

The survey collected reflections and insights from any interested stakeholder working to advance SDG16+ for peaceful, just and inclusive societies in over 70 countries in every region of the world. As seen in the figure below, the vast majority of respondents represent international, regional, national and sub-national civil society and community-based organisations. UN bodies and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) also responded.

Civil Society	73.1%
Community-based organization/movement	7.4%
Private Sector	0.9%
Government Representative	2.8%
Academia	5.6%
Media/Journalist	2.8%
National Human Rights Institution	1.9%
Parliamentarian	0.0%
Donor	0.0%
Oversight bodies (Supreme Audit Institution, etc.)	0.9%
Justice-sector actor (judge, paralegal, lawyer, etc.)	0.0%
Inter-governmental organization/United Nations, etc.	1.9%
Individual (no affiliation)	1.9%
Other	0.9%

Figure 1: Stakeholder Groups

### Perception of National Progress

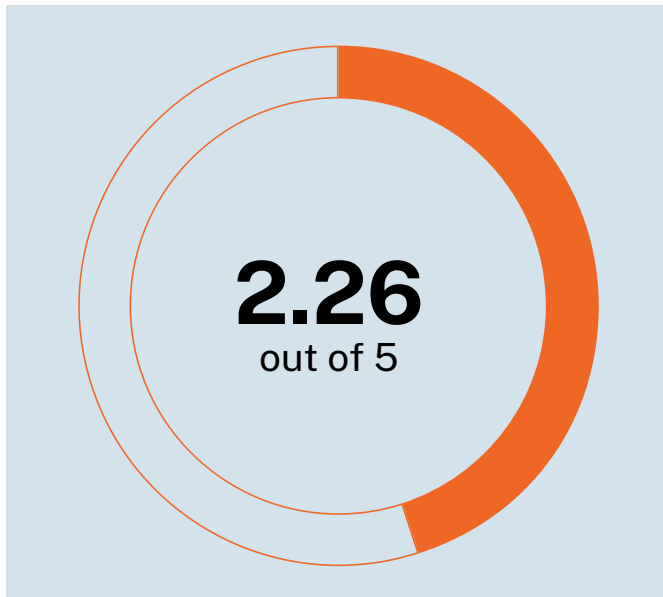


Figure 2: How would you rate progress towards the implementation of SDG16+ overall in your country?

### Perception of International Progress

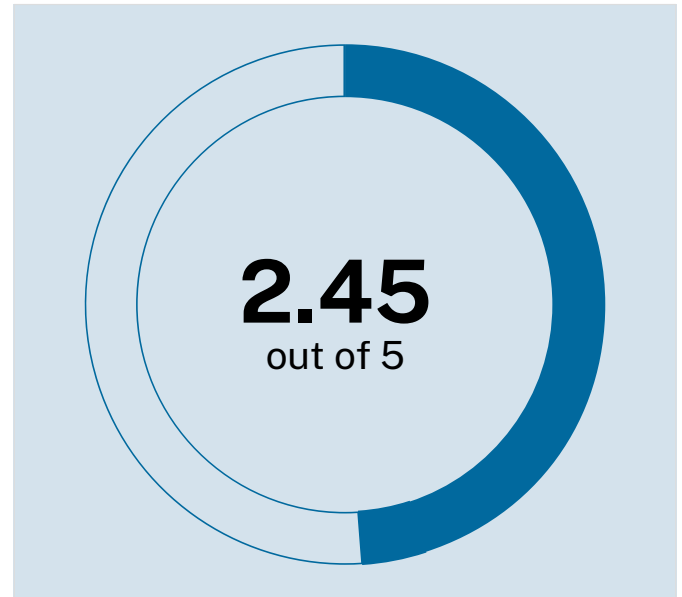


Figure 3: How would you rate progress towards SDG16+ at the global level, from the entire international community?

## Findings

One of the key objectives of the survey was to rate progress towards the overall implementation of SDG16+ at the national level. The majority of respondents (60 per cent) felt that there was no change, moderate backsliding or severe backsliding on SDG16+ at the national level. Additionally, only 37 per cent felt that there was good or excellent progress on the realisation of SDG16+ at the national level.

The survey further aimed to disaggregate respondents' perceptions of individual SDG16+ targets. Specifically, it examined the extent to which respondents felt progress had been made towards achieving the SDG16+ targets at the national level. Using a scale of 0 to 5, the survey revealed that the respondents believe the following SDG16+ targets were the least realised to date:

- 16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.
- 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
- 16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

In contrast, respondents felt that the following SDG16+ targets were the most realised at the national level.

- 16.9: By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.
- 16.8: Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.
- 16.a: Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime indicators.



**Perceptions of Progress Towards SDG16 Targets**

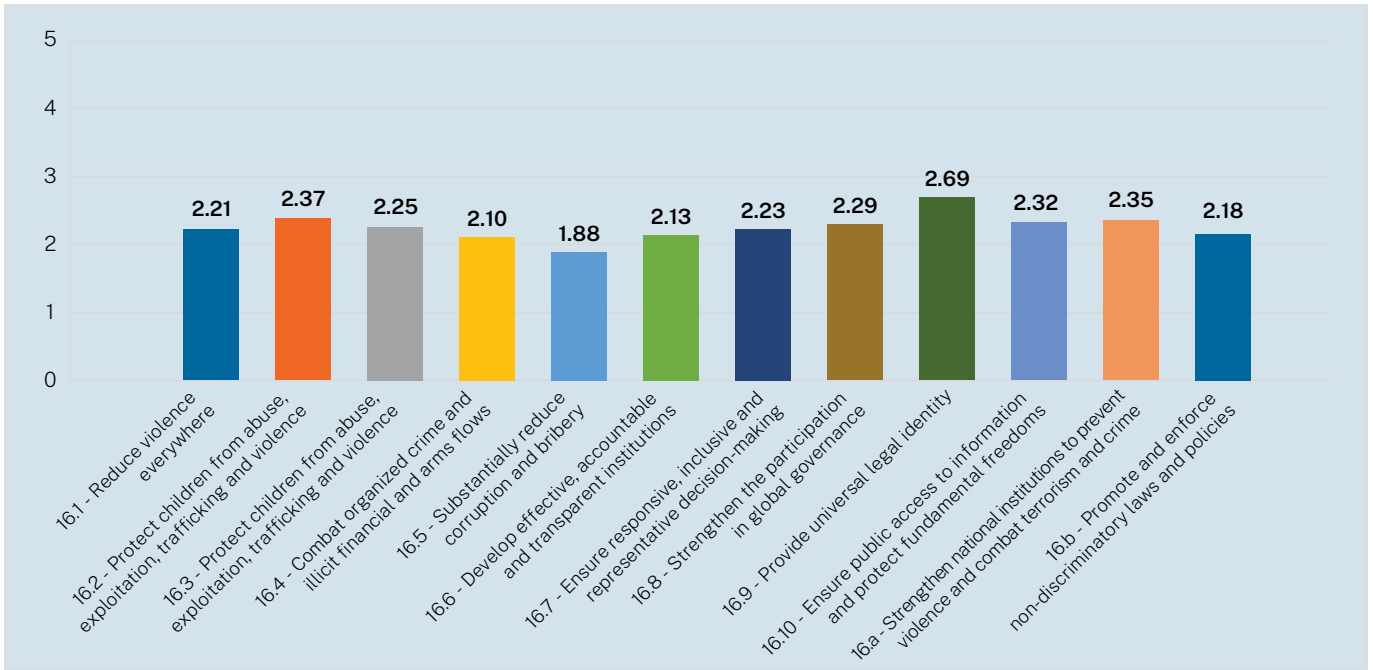


Figure 4: Perception of progress towards SDG16 targets at the national level

Respondents were further asked to examine the extent to which mechanisms or platforms for the government to engage with civil society or other stakeholders around SDG16+ exist at the national level. As seen in Figure 5 below, a majority of respondents believe that their country representatives engage

with civil society and other stakeholders in its Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. However, only 30 per cent of respondents indicated that their government engages with civil society and other stakeholders outside of its VNR process.

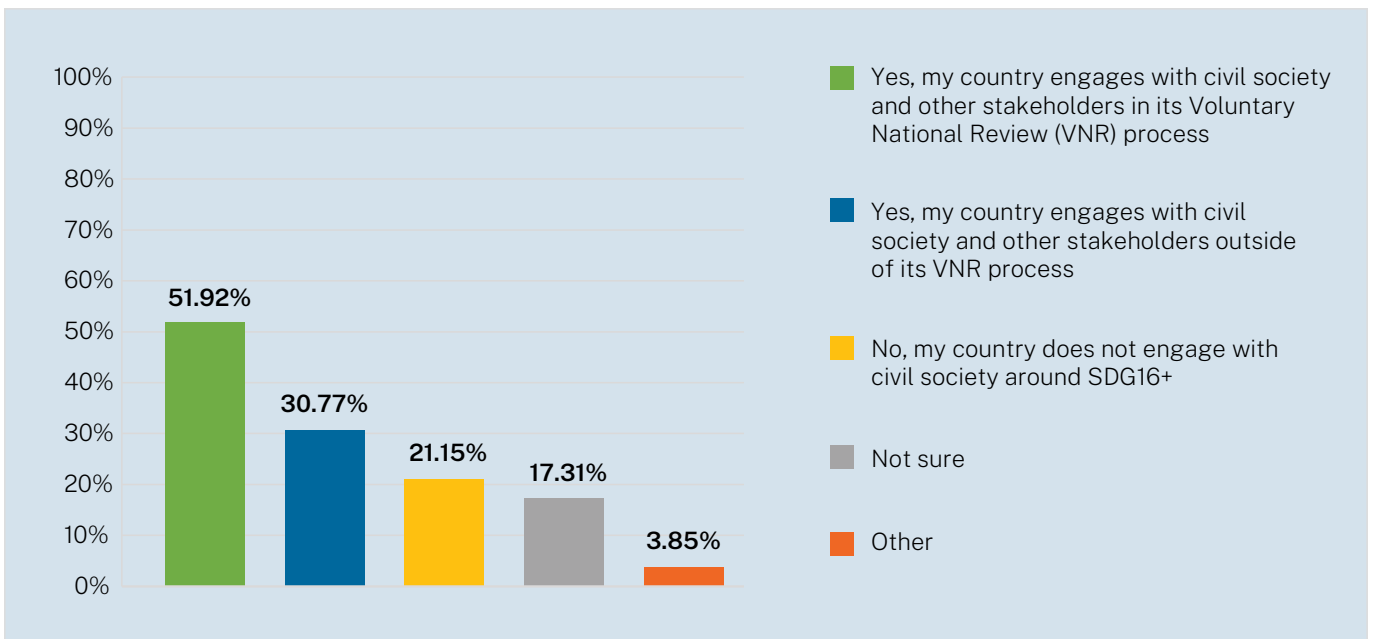


Figure 5: Platforms for engagement with governmental stakeholders on SDG16+ at the national level

In reflecting on their government's inclusivity in engaging with civil society or other stakeholders in the planning, implementation and accountability for SDG16+, two-thirds (67 per cent) of respondents shared that their government engaged with civil society to some degree. However, given that a

prominent contingent of respondents (38 per cent) indicated that their government only observed 'some engagement' with civil society, there is considerable room to improve and deepen processes to enable more robust civil society participation in official SDG16+ processes.

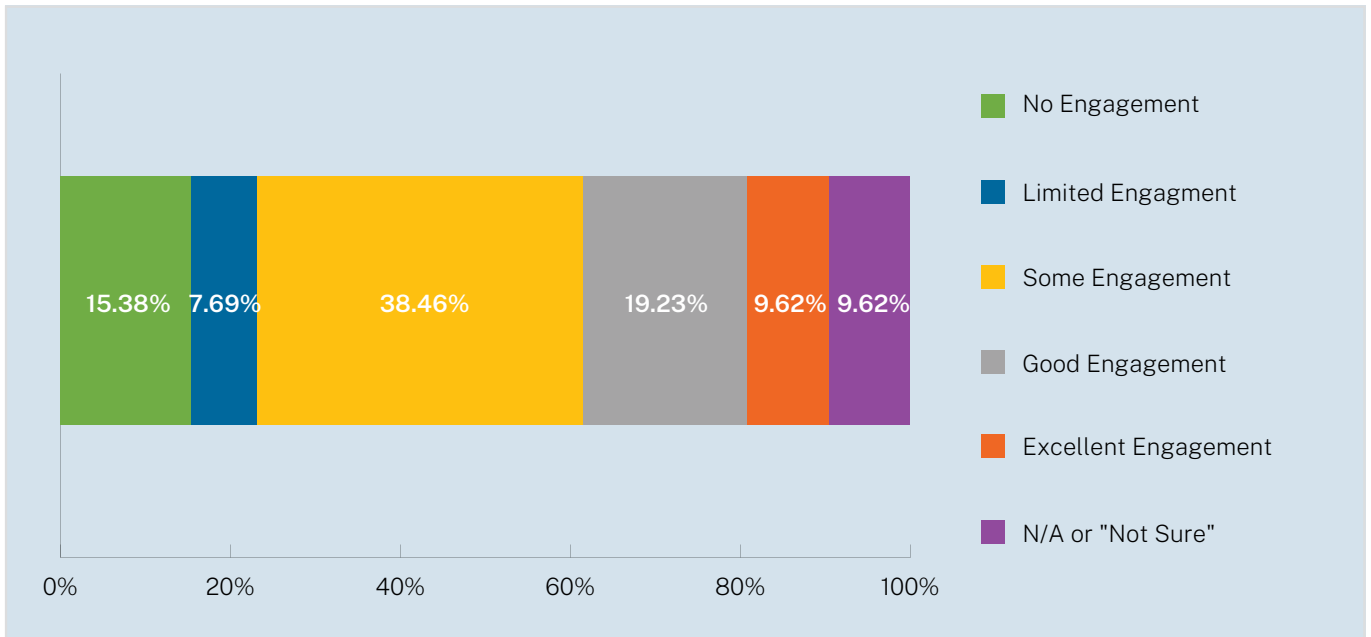


Figure 6: The quality of national government's inclusivity in engaging with civil society or other stakeholders in the planning, implementation and accountability for SDG16+

Reflecting on the specific challenges which hinder progress towards SDG16+ implementation at the national level, the top four concerns were: 1) Lack of funding for overall work on SDG16+; 2) Low awareness of the SDGs with public; 3) Lack of accessible data, or lack of diversity of data; and 4) Lack of inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable communities in national SDG processes.

To augment and deepen support to address these challenges in adequately implementing SDG16+, respondents suggested the following actions as a matter of priority: 1) Increase funding for SDG16+, including civil society; 2) Creating more transparent and accountability processes in implementing SDG16+; 3) Developing an enabling environment for inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable communities across the SDGs; and 4) Engage with CSOs and other stakeholders in measuring and implementing SDG16+.



## Chapter 6:

# Spotlight Reports

At the heart of Agenda 2030 is accountability – that governments have made commitments to improve the lives of their people and are following those commitments with actions to achieve them. To help stakeholders (including civil society) and communities measure how governments are progressing, Agenda 2030 set up a system of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) which encourages each country – and increasingly, sub-national bodies – to report on their activities and progress towards achieving the SDGs. These reports are presented to the UN at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) where each government has the opportunity to provide a concise overview of the reports' key findings before engaging in a focused deliberation on them. Regarding the drafting of this report, all but a handful of governments around the world have submitted reports and presented them at the HLPF.<sup>180</sup>

One significant problem with the official VNR reports is the lack of reporting on SDG16+ issues. Many reports do not address SDG16 at all. Most that do, only cover a small number of the targets, or at best, provide superficial analysis. Controversial issues, such as the attacks and murders of journalists and human rights defenders (16.10), are almost never mentioned. Often, civil society is only tangentially included in the development of these reports, meaning that the emphasis is on governments presenting themselves in a good light and highlighting their achievements, rather than reviewing problems, failures or ways to improve implementation.

To address these missing elements, civil society organisations of all sizes (at the national and international level) have been producing their own alternative 'spotlight' reports. These reports highlight informa-

tion absent in the official national reports and offer recommendations on improvement. Spotlight reports, also known as 'shadow' or 'parallel' reports, are a tradition within civil society groups dating back decades at the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Human Rights Committee, and many other UN bodies which have reporting mechanisms. In some of the mechanisms, the reports have been formally included in the system by UN bodies and are taken into account by member states and UN bodies in the discussions. Even if they are not formally included, the reports are an important source for bodies, Member States, donors, and civil society on the problems and successes of implementation.

To date, hundreds of spotlight reports have been produced by civil society.<sup>181</sup> Some take a global overview, reviewing and commenting on progress across the SDGs, including SDG16. Others take a more thematic or regional approach, looking at progress on particular targets or issues, complimenting and critiquing official reports from UN bodies. Most commonly, national and local NGOs produce their own country reports. These reports are too numerous and varied to summarise in this report.

At the global level, a number of organisations produce SDG-related surveys with information and data on SDG16. These have generally found little progress on SDG16:

- [Action for Sustainable Development](#) has supported national groups in dozens of countries which are conducting VNRs each year with spotlight reports. These reports are synthesised into the People's Scorecard reports. A key area of study

<sup>180</sup> IISD, [Five Countries Yet to Conduct Voluntary National Review](#)

<sup>181</sup> For a partial list, see Major Groups and Other Stakeholders, [Parallel reports](#)

is ‘inclusive governance’ which includes public awareness, transparency and accountability, and citizen participation and civil society engagement. The 2022 synthesis report found that “when participation spaces for non-state actors are available, these tend to be merely informative or consultative in nature, involve a degree of selection regarding which organisations can take part in them, and usually lack a proper connection to the policy-making process... none of the countries that conducted a Scorecard and Spotlight report this year has put in place substantial spaces for stakeholder engagement.”<sup>182</sup> The global average for 2022 for SDG16 was only 9 per cent, rating as extremely low in implementation.

- [The Sustainable Development Solutions Network](#) monitors progress in all 193 UN Member States using a mix of official and unofficial data. For SDG16, using nine indicators, they have found little

progress globally since 2010,<sup>183</sup> and also that major challenges remain in nearly all countries.<sup>184</sup> SDG16 is stagnating for low-income and lower-middle income countries, while moderately increasing for upper-middle-income countries and high-income countries.<sup>185</sup> Only Japan and Iceland are found to have achieved SDG16 with another nine countries on track.

- The annual Spotlight on Sustainable Development report brings together eight CSOs and additional contributors from across the world examining major global issues affecting SDG implementation, including: corruption, illicit financial flows, gender inequality, and public participation.<sup>186</sup> It also includes spotlight reports from dozens of countries.



## Additional Resources:

- > [TAP Network: Resources to Support Spotlight Reporting](#)
- > [Action for Sustainable Development: HLPF toolkits and reports](#)
- > [Major Groups and Other Stakeholders: Parallel reports](#)
- > [Free Press Unlimited: Steps to produce a shadow report](#)
- > [Forus: Guidelines for CSO Shadow Reports](#)

<sup>182</sup> Action for Sustainable Development, [People’s Scorecard Summary Report 2022](#)

<sup>183</sup> Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Woelm, F. 2020. The Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19. Sustainable Development Report 2020. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>184</sup> [Sustainable Development Dashboard](#)

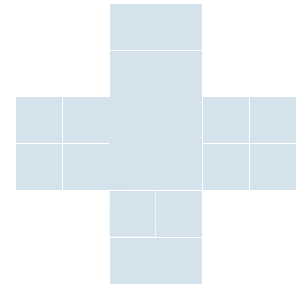
<sup>185</sup> Sachs, J., Lafortune, G., Kroll, C., Fuller, G., Woelm, F. (2022). From Crisis to Sustainable Development: the SDGs as Roadmap to 2030 and Beyond. Sustainable Development Report 2022. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>186</sup> [Spotlight on Sustainable Development](#)

Part 3:

# Where do we go from here?





## Chapter 7:

# Showcasing the leadership role of civil society in implementing and monitoring SDG16+

Across history and societies, the existence of civil society has enabled individuals to hold power to account and advance progressive societal transformations. From the campaigns against slavery and for civil rights, to global poverty reduction and equality campaigns, women's suffrage movements, or the countless grassroots associations and human rights defenders (HRDs) which have sought to enhance their communities' living conditions and demand governmental transparency, the undeniable influence of civil society in effecting positive change is apparent. Today, in every country and community, civil society has emerged as indispensable in creating and sustaining vibrant, inclusive, and participatory societies. From the global to local level, civil society complements governmental efforts, provides checks and balances, and amplifies the voices of individuals and communities, leading to more effective governance, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

Throughout each stage of developing the SDGs, civil society has played an equally critical role. During their most incipient stage, prior to 2015, the SDGs benefited from the vast expertise of a diverse spectrum of civil society, which brought decades of experience to help create a global blueprint for

prosperity and sustainability rooted in human rights. While the development of the SDGs was a truly concerted and universal effort, the contributions of civil society in sculpting the SDGs is most readily evident in the unprecedented decision to include aspirations, targets and indicators around peace, rule of law and inclusive institutions largely housed under the auspices of SDG16. From engaging with national government stakeholders, to developing viable conduits of information-sharing for grassroots groups, to direct engagement and participation in countless UN processes, civil society has worked tirelessly with allies across the international-development and human-rights systems to ensure that the SDGs were underpinned by well-established norms on access to justice, creating peaceful societies and developing participatory decision-making bodies.

Over the course of the last seven years, since the adoption of the SDGs, civil society has served as an integral stakeholder in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. In every corner of the world civil society has played a fundamental role in raising awareness about the SDGs, acting as a watchdog, fostering inclusivity, empowering marginalised groups and creating space for collaboration and coordination. In many places, civil society has prevailed



in supporting the realisation and implementation of SDG16 in spite of attempts by some government officials and private actors to actively silence or diminish their role. As we approach the halfway point of the SDGs, and in light of the global concerns about the failure to fully realise the SDGs, the involvement and impact of civil society is more important than ever. The following paragraphs represent a brief distillation of the innumerable civil society interventions across the world to support the realisation of the principles and ideals enshrined under SDG16.

One key aspect of civil society's leadership role in implementing SDG16 is its ability to raise awareness and mobilise communities. Civil society possesses the power to generate public discourse, educate individuals about their rights, and raise awareness of issues related to justice, transparency, and accountable governance. Through various communication channels and grassroots campaigns, civil society organisations have engaged their constituencies, empowered them with the tools to be agents of change, and inspired them to actively participate in efforts to achieve SDG16. For example, across the world since 2015 the global homicide rate precipitously declined. This welcome drop is not the preserve of any region or one particular factor. However, it is undeniable that civil society groups have played an instrumental role in raising awareness and mobilising communities to create safer societies. The US-based 'March For Our Lives' is one such example. In 2022, March For Our Lives (MFOL) held 450 marches worldwide, leading to over 20 new state laws to curb gun violence in the US and to the establishment of the bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the first federal legislation on guns in 30 years. Today, MFOL has over 300 chapters across the US which are mobilising to address gun violence and usher in a safer future for all.

Moreover, civil society acts as a watchdog, holding governments and institutions accountable for their actions, or lack thereof. By monitoring the performance of governments, advocating for policy reforms, and demanding transparency, civil society organisations ensure that commitments related to SDG16 are upheld. They provide independent assessments,

research, and data analysis that help identify gaps in governance, justice systems and rule of law, prompting governments to take appropriate actions. Globally, the establishment of the International Criminal Court stands as a momentous triumph for civil society, which tirelessly works towards securing justice and accountability for human rights violations. Advocacy by victims' groups has also led to the pursuit of justice through national and specialised courts. Notably, the trial and subsequent conviction of Hissène Habré, the former President of Chad, in Senegal in 2016 for crimes against humanity, was primarily instigated and propelled by victims' associations and NGOs. Similarly, in Eritrea, unwavering activism by citizen groups and diaspora associations played a pivotal role in shaping the formation of the UN commission of inquiry on human rights in Eritrea.

Civil society also plays a critical role in fostering inclusivity and empowering marginalised groups. SDG16 emphasises the need to ensure access to justice for all, promote the rule of law and reduce corruption. Civil society organisations often work directly with vulnerable communities, providing legal aid, counselling and support services. They work tirelessly to advocate for the rights of marginalised groups, address discrimination, and promote social cohesion, thus contributing to the building of inclusive societies as envisioned in SDG16. In Colombia, civil society has been at the forefront of the peace process. Through a range of social media campaigns, organisations such as El Avispero provided spaces for people to actively engage in a broad spectrum of peace-building activities. Moreover, Comisión Étnica para la Paz y la Defensa de los Derechos Territoriales helped to ensure that Afro and indigenous peoples played a prominent role in the peace process, which resulted in the inclusion of a chapter in the final peace agreement focusing on ethnicity.

Additionally, civil society organisations are instrumental in advocating for legal reforms that promote human rights, access to justice, and effective governance. They engage in legislative processes, provide inputs on policy frameworks, and advocate for laws that protect fundamental freedoms, ensure equal access to justice, and promote transparency

and accountability. Their involvement helps shape legal systems and institutional frameworks in line with the principles of SDG16. By means of legal action, civil society has achieved notable successes in upholding empowering laws and overturning restrictive regulations that undermine core values such as equality and inclusion. Since 2015, as hundreds of human rights defenders continue to be killed every year, several countries have adopted national legislation to protect and promote the work of human rights defenders. Through these laws, which have been adopted from Mexico to Cote d'Ivoire, HRDs have been granted legal recognition and protection. The legislation has also helped to ensure that the HRDs operate in a safe and supportive environment, free from attacks, reprisals and unwarranted restrictions. Of nearly two dozen of these laws, civil society was at the forefront of the development of each, by advocating and working with governments to ensure that national legislation on protecting and promoting the work of human rights defenders was in line with international best practice.

These examples are just a microcosm of how civil society plays a vital leadership role in implementing SDG16. Since the SDGs were launched, through raising awareness, advocacy, accountability, inclusivity, collaboration and legal reforms, civil society has driven positive change, promoted peaceful and inclusive societies, and contributed to the establishment of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. We know that civil society is pivotal in supporting governments, businesses and individuals to achieve their human rights and development aspirations. Moving forward, as we embark on the second half of the SDGs and seek to accelerate action on SDG16, we must ensure that civil society is recognised, supported and nurtured by all stakeholders as essential partners in achieving the goals of SDG16 and creating a more just and sustainable world.





## Chapter 8:

# Recommendations:

## A call-to-action for urgent commitments to SDG16+ at the halfway point to 2030

This chapter provides key recommendations from civil society partners working on SDG16+ at all levels. Many of these proposals have been a centrepiece of civil society's advocacy and calls-to-action since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, which highlights the urgency for governments and the international community to act upon these recommendations at this critical halfway point to 2030.

These recommendations are aligned with many joint civil society and SDG16+ community insights from these first seven years of implementation of SDG16+. This includes important linkages with the Rome Civil Society Declarations on SDG16+ from 2019 to 2023, the #SDG16Now Campaign's mobilisation objectives,

the 2023 Global SDG16+ Survey, the 2023 Global SDG16+ Coalition Joint Statement, and inputs from several years of consultations and work within the TAP Network with its hundreds of members and partners.

In light of the overall downward trend in progress towards SDG16+ which has been outlined in previous chapters, the recommendations from this report have been compiled to include the most urgent and action-oriented areas for immediate action and attention from governments, the UN system, the private sector, civil society and the wider international community at-large.

### I. Make bold and transformative commitments to SDG16+ at all levels at the 2023 SDGs Summit

“At this halfway point to 2030, the 2023 SDGs Summit represents a pivotal and indispensable moment for governments and the international community to bring SDG action and implementation back on track. It is therefore critical for governments to come to the SDGs Summit with concrete commitments to action around SDG16+, which outline specific actions they will take to deliver on the SDGs in this second half of implementation towards 2030.”

–2023 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+

**A. Governments must come to the 2023 SDGs Summit with targeted, focused and transformative commitments to SDG16+ action**

- This builds upon the UN Secretary-General’s call for Member States to convey ‘National Commitments to SDG Transformation’ at the SDGs Summit.
- These commitments to act on SDG16+ must fit the SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound) criteria, and should be clear, verifiable and quantifiable actions that outline how governments will deliver on their existing SDG16+ obligations.

**B. Governments must include civil society at all stages of the commitment-making process at the national level**

- This will help to ensure that any commitments brought to the SDGs Summit or beyond are people-centred and responsive to the needs of citizens themselves. Governments must also include civil society in the follow-up from these commitments, including through the Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes going forward.
- Civil society and other stakeholders should also be encouraged to outline similar commitments to action, and these commitments should be featured alongside government commitments at the 2023 SDGs Summit.

**C. Any commitments made around the 2023 SDGs Summit must be adequately compiled and tracked to ensure accountability**

- The UN Secretariat must feature these commitments in a transparent and inclusive web-based platform. This could also include adding these commitments to an existing registry such as the UN SDG Actions Platform.

**D. Reform the HLPF to provide an action-oriented platform for commitments and accountability**

- Member States must raise the level of ambition for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) through the HLPF modalities review in 2024, including by building the ‘National Commitments to SDG Transformation’ into the preparation and programme of the HLPF going forward.
- Particularly in this second half of implementation of the SDGs, the HLPF should provide a platform for action and commitments, ensuring that the HLPF is action-oriented towards addressing any insights from the VNRs in any given year, or any shortcomings in progress to date.

**II. Ensure robust financing for SDG16+ at all levels**

“A lack of financing and investments for SDG16+ across the board has thus far had devastating impacts on a government’s ability to deliver people-centred results across the entire 2030 Agenda. Decades of neglect for investing in institutions has left critical governance processes unable to respond to the urgent crises facing governments and their people today, and weakening their resilience to future global crises. It is therefore critical that financing for SDG16+ should be a top priority for governments and the international community.”

–2023 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+

### **A. Governments and the international community must come to the 2023 SDGs Summit with transformative financial commitments**

- We strongly support the Secretary-General’s call for an ambitious ‘SDGs Stimulus Plan’, which calls for an additional \$500 billion per year towards sustainable development financing.
- For national governments, this includes commitments to domestic resource mobilisation and budgetary commitments to deliver on the SDGs and SDG16+.
- For donors, this also includes financial commitments towards SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda, which can also play a key role in helping donors meet their commitments to 0.7 per cent of GDP for development cooperation.

### **B. Donors must develop and invest in a comprehensive donor-collaborative “Global SDG16+” to ensure investments into SDG16+ are prioritised and coordinated**

- Reiterating calls from the 2022 and 2023 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+, the establishment of a Global SDG16+ provides a critical opportunity for donors to double-down efforts to support SDG16+ and help ensure that civil society and grassroots groups are supported at all levels, around areas that have been desperately underfunded in recent years.
- At a minimum, donors must ensure that their financial support and investments take into account all aspects of SDG16+, to ensure that financing efforts are aligned across the donor community, but also to help prevent work around SDG16+ issues becoming siloed.
- Additionally, we call on governments to ensure continued investment and replenishment of other funds around specific SDG16+ issues, including human rights, such as the UN Peacebuilding Fund, Legal Empowerment Fund, the UN Democracy Fund, and ensure that increased core, flexible funds are provided to grassroots organisations close to communities.

## **III. Reform the international financial architecture to support SDG16+ objectives**

“While the SDG Stimulus can be achieved within the confines of the current financial architecture, adequate long-term financing requires reforming the international financial architecture and overcoming the major structural barriers that predominantly serve wealthy countries and individuals. As a starting point, this calls for delivering on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and other international frameworks.”

–2023 SDG Progress Report Special Edition

### **A. Governments and the international community must commit to supporting measurements of sustainable development ‘Beyond GDP’**

- We support the call for expanding the measurement of economic progress to a ‘Beyond GDP’ model. This is of particular importance for SDG16+, as measurements Beyond GDP are critical for identifying where investments and actions for SDG16+ result in quantifiable, positive impacts for governments and their people.
- By looking beyond GDP and considering a broader range of indicators, such as measures of social inclusion, access to justice, peacebuilding or investment in institutions and governance systems, we can more accurately gauge progress towards SDG16+ and make informed decisions about how to allocate resources and address areas where progress is lacking.

**B. Addressing the sovereign debt crisis with urgency and innovation, including by considering debt cancellation or restructuring**

- Governments and the international community must make efforts to solve the increasingly urgent sovereign debt crisis. To do so, debt cancellation or restructuring must be considered, as well as other innovative mechanisms such as ‘debt swaps’ which will further incentivise action towards SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda overall.

**C. Governments must commit to establishing a ‘Global Tax Body’ through the UN**

- We support and reiterate the call from many civil society groups for the establishment of a global tax body facilitated by the UN, to help the international community address issues around tax evasion, illicit financial flows, and stolen asset recovery and repatriation. Such a body is critical for ensuring transparency of the global tax system, and will help ensure fairness across the entire global economic system.

**IV. Protect and expand civic space and recognise the indispensable role of civil society in delivery on SDG16+ at all levels**

“Society is stronger and more resilient when women and men can play a meaningful role in political, economic and social life, contributing to policymaking that affects their lives, including by accessing information, engaging in dialogue, expressing dissent and joining together to express their views. This includes the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”

–UN Secretary-General’s “The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights”

**A. Governments must remove all barriers in law and practice that prevents civil society from accessing funding from international sources**

- Governments must reform and remove any ‘foreign agent’ or foreign donation laws which place severe restrictions on the ability of civil society organisations in many countries to access funding from international sources. Such structural and legal barriers are a significant challenge particularly for many civil society groups working around SDG16+ issues in particular, and only weaken the delivery of the SDGs and undercut social accountability at all levels.

**B. Governments and the international community must ensure the protection of human rights and other justice defenders**

- In line with governments’ commitments to Target 16.10 as well as the 2016 UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Civil Society Space and other relevant international agreements, governments must not only protect these human rights and justice defenders, but create an enabling environment for the implementation of their work and actively support them and frontline responders at all levels.



## V. Pursue integrated approaches to implementing SDG16+ as a means of improving delivery of the entire 2030 Agenda

“SDG16+ is critical for addressing the root causes of many of the world’s challenges. In a world plagued by violent conflicts, corruption, and widespread exclusion, greater action towards SDG16+ provides a high-yield opportunity for governments and the international community to address key challenges related to SDG implementation overall.”

–2023 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+

### A. Governments must commit to an annual thematic review of SDG16+ through the HLPF going forward

- We reiterate our long-standing call for SDG16+ to be reviewed annually at the HLPF going forward, including through the negotiations around the review of the HLPF modalities taking place in 2024.
- This affirms that SDG16+ strongly links with all other goals, in line with the integrated and indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda. A thematic review of SDG16+ at each forthcoming HLPF will also help realise the Agenda’s universal vision with scale and ambition, balancing all dimensions of sustainable development and ensuring we leave no country and no one behind.

### B. Governments and the UN must ensure that participation modalities at the 2023 SDGs Summit and 2024 Summit of the Future are as inclusive as possible

- Efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of civil society voices from developing countries, as well as marginalised and vulnerable groups, and people living in fragile and conflict-affected.



Transparency, Accountability &  
Participation for 2030 Agenda

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# HALFWAY TO 2030 REPORT ON SDG16+

A CIVIL SOCIETY ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS TOWARDS  
PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES