

THE 2030 AGENDA, SDG 16, AND THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW

THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Adopted in 2015 by all 193 UN Member States, [Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (the 2030 Agenda) is a 15-year global plan of action “to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all, while strengthening universal peace in larger freedom”.

In many ways, the 2030 Agenda, with its pledge to “Leave No One Behind” (LNOB) and its [17 SDGs and 169 targets](#), builds upon its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

However, unlike the MDGs and as one (of several) distinguishing features, the SDGs include a goal centered on [transparent, accountable and participatory governance](#), [rule of law](#) and peaceful societies: Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16).

Also unlike the MDGs, the SDGs also apply to all countries universally.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

The 2030 Agenda pledges to leave no one behind (LNOB) and articulates that Member States will endeavor to reach the furthest behind first.

With its emphasis on inclusive and accountable governance, access to justice, sustained peace, human rights, and non-discrimination, SDG 16 is key to ensuring that the most vulnerable and marginalized are engaged as actors and beneficiaries of the 2030 Agenda.

- This is directly in line with the principle of LNOB.

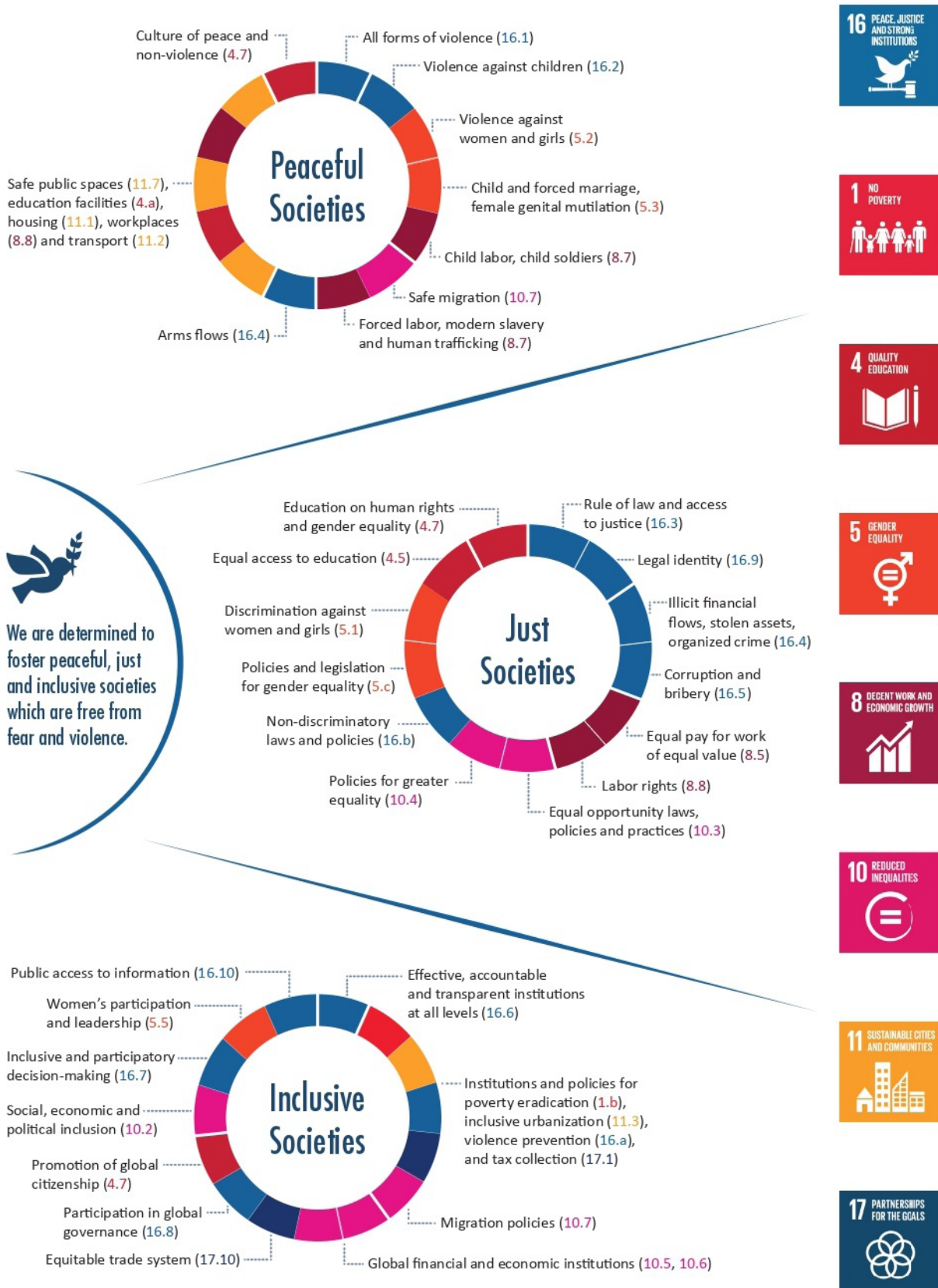
SDG 16 AS A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL AND AS AN ENABLER

SDG 16 seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, to ensure access to justice for all, and to develop effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

It is both an outcome and enabler of sustainable development, given its interlinkages with other SDGs.

- Without peace, justice, and inclusion, achieving SDGs such as ending poverty (SDG 1), ensuring education (SDG 4) and promoting economic growth (SDG 8) would be difficult or impossible.
- Responsive and accountable institutions uphold the rule of law and protect human rights and ensure equal opportunity and access to basic services.
- At the same time, strengthening women’s participation and leadership (SDG 5) connects to improving inclusive and participative decision-making.

To this end, beyond [SDG 16's 12 targets](#), there are [24 targets from seven other SDGs](#) that are linked to peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Together, these targets are referred to as [SDG16+](#).



- While focused on SDG 16, this resource will also refer to SDG 16+.

SDG 16 AND HUMAN RIGHTS

SDG 16 carries the human rights principles of inclusion, participation, transparency, accountability, equality, and non-discrimination.

Such principles underpin the 2030 Agenda and are expressly translated into action in SDG 16 targets. SDG 16, therefore, is a catalytic and critical component of an integrated 2030 Agenda, grounded in human rights and focused on bringing about more inclusive and just systems, an ambition made all the more relevant, given the current global context.

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS (VNRS)

The [Voluntary National Review](#) (VNR) is a voluntary, member state-led, peer-learning process through which progress made in achieving the SDGs is presented.

They [are the 2030 Agenda's review component](#) and a tool for member states, often with civil society organizations and others, to capture successes, challenges, and next steps.

They also aim to facilitate experience sharing in order to identify opportunities and challenges for acceleration, while strengthening policies and government institutions and mobilizing multi-stakeholder support and partnership towards SDG implementation.

VNRS AND THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

Conducted by developed and developing countries, VNRs are presented at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which takes place annually under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

While VNR presentation at HLPF is important, [it is not an end in itself](#). Rather, it is a means to accelerate action, accountability, and stronger subsequent reporting.

- To this end, VNRs are improving, including through statistical annexes that are increasingly accompanying VNR reports.

Post-VNR processes offer an important opportunity for all stakeholders to deliver on SDG 16 and the larger 2030 Agenda more coherently.

RESOURCES FOR IMPROVED REPORTING

- The Global Alliance's [SDG 16 reporting guidelines](#) provide important VNR support and guidance for strengthened SDG 16 implementation.
- UN Women's [guidance note](#) supports gender-responsive VNRs.
- The TAP Network's recently updated [SDG 16+ Toolkit](#) provides guidance for CSOs, particularly in developing [spotlight or parallel reports and analyzing these vis-à-vis government reviews](#).

OVERARCHING CHALLENGES

THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE 2030 AGENDA

The 2030 Agenda is a political declaration. It is not legally binding for member states.

[There are no defined consequences if countries fail to make serious efforts to meet the SDGs or their targets.](#)

- However, the 2030 Agenda carries significant political weight, with specific obligations and targets that member states have committed to.

ELECTORAL CYCLES

Changes to leadership and government administrations through electoral cycles can diminish ownership of the SDGs or shift priorities.

Such changes may threaten implementation of policy commitments related to the SDGs and SDG 16, including as linked to NDPs, national strategies, and sector reforms.

It is therefore important to engage all political parties to ensure longer-term sustained policies despite political changes.

CHALLENGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPES

The global fight against inequality, exclusion, corruption, impunity, and injustice highlights the deeply challenging nature of political landscapes in many contexts and the relevance of SDG 16 universally.

In 2020, global protest movements and pro-democracy mass mobilization were at an all-time high. In 2020, this upswing in mass, and often organic, political mobilization and protest was followed by an extraordinary movement for racial justice and an end to systemic abuse. [There have been more coups in the last year than in the last five years combined.](#)

While some governments are creating enabling environment for transparency, accountability, and a diversity of voices, many others are restricting them, applying [“states of emergency” and clamping down on fundamental freedoms around expression, assembly and civic space.](#)

- [According to the V-Dem Institute’s Democracy Report 2021, there is an “accelerating wave of autocratization” affecting 1/3 of the world’s population – 2.6 billion people, and impacting developing and developed countries alike. This includes threats to freedom of expression and media, repression of civil society and disruption of democratic practices.](#)
- [A recent report by the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding found that COVID-19 measures continue to curb, shape, and threaten civic space, reducing opportunities for dialogue, increasing citizen mistrust, and decreasing political transparency.](#)

The [2021 Edelman Trust Barometer](#) found 2020 to be a year defined by “an epidemic of misinformation and widespread mistrust of social institutions (government, business, NGOs and media) and leaders around the world”.

DATA

[SDG 16 is considered one of the most difficult SDGs to monitor.](#)

Collecting, disaggregating, and monitoring SDG 16 related data continues to be challenging due to administrative, political, and capacity issues.

National Statistical Offices have not historically focused on SDG 16 related issues. Further, while [complementary ‘non-official’ data exists, it is not often used.](#)

As highlighted by the [2020 SDGs report](#), timely, high-quality, open and disaggregated data is key to understanding, managing, and mitigating the effects of COVID-19, and to building responses that support countries to get back on track to achieving the SDGs.

RESOURCES FOR DATA

- [SDG 16 Hub](#)
- [SDG 16 Data Initiative](#)
- [UN Sustainable Development SDG Database](#)
- [Praia City Group on Governance and Statistics](#)

FINANCING

Greater financial investment in SDG 16 across actors and sectors is critical, including in capacity-building, policy guidance, data and analytics, technology for scale, and partnerships. As highlighted by the OECD, [global efforts to finance the recovery have been generally unequal](#), with resources being diverted from SDG 16 related initiatives and efforts to more immediate health measures.