

# ALIGNING VNRS WITH OTHER REPORTING AND REVIEW MECHANISMS

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## WHAT IS IT?

SDG 16 and the SDGs encompass just one framework that governments, CSOs and others have signed up for that support, directly or indirectly, peace, justice, inclusion, and strong institutions.

Aligning the VNR with related reporting and review mechanisms and frameworks:

- Allows for greater policy coherence, coordination, and impact, and
- Broadens the number of stakeholders engaged; and
- Makes better use of NSOs and other data sources.

Far from exhaustive, examples of such initiatives and review mechanisms include the Open Government Partnership (through National Action Plans); the Universal Periodic Review (UPR); UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures; the UN Convention Against Corruption; and others. Regional organizations also have a mutually-beneficial role to play in using data generated for the VNR for related regional treaties and conventions, and vice versa.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Reporting can often seem burdensome to governments and other stakeholders. Synchronizing relevant frameworks for strengthened SDG 16 impact and reporting provides a tangible opportunity to scale impact, mainstream implementation, and make efficient use of resources, human or otherwise already in use.

By aligning the VNR with other reporting mechanisms, or by mapping when the VNR and other reporting opportunities take place and the data required for each, governments and other stakeholders can optimize these processes for better data, policy coherence and multi-stakeholder engagement.

[Existing national platforms and processes](#), such as the UPR, other human rights monitoring frameworks, and other international treaties, can contribute to VNR production and analysis.

In so doing, stakeholders would be acting on the promise to Leave No One Behind and its supporting its underlying principles of equality and non-discrimination



**Bottom Line:** Given the complementarity between the UPR, for example, and the VNR, more can be done in operationalizing these links through post-VNR processes for stronger SDG 16 implementation.

## HOW IS IT APPROACHED?

### TOOLS AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR COORDINATED REPORTING AND IMPROVED POLICY COHERENCE.

The Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) identified more than 90 percent of the 169 SDG targets as directly linked to human rights instruments and labor standards. In identifying overlap, DIHR's [SDG-Human Rights Data Explorer](#) allows users to explore the links between human rights and the SDGs.

Users can also explore recommendations in relation to all 17 SDGs and 169 targets on how to, for example, identify priority areas for national SDG action plans, tackle discrimination and exclusion, and better support vulnerable groups.

The database uses an algorithm to identify links between the SDG targets and over 150,000 recommendations and observations from international HR mechanisms, including the UPR, UN Treaty Bodies and the Special Procedures under the UN Human Rights Council (HRC).

As of 2020, the database had identified 30,519 recommendations related to SDG 16, including 15,582 from the UPR, 2,595 from special procedures and 12,342 from treaty bodies.

### NATIONAL DATABASES

Similarly, some states have started linking SDG and human rights reporting and implementation processes through national online databases that track the implementation of human rights obligations and the SDGs.

This strengthens accountability, reduces reporting burdens and advances the implementation of SDG16.

Examples include: the [National Recommendations Tracking Database](#), the [Universal Human Rights Index \(UHRI\)](#) or the [Simore+](#), from an inter-American regional perspective.

### MULTISTAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS AND INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENTS

[The Open Government Partnership \(OGP\)](#) has found that a number of commitments made under OGP [national action plans relate to SDG 16 targets](#) and means of implementation.

Every two years, OGP members are required to submit concrete commitments that are co-created between government reformers and CSOs. Every year, an independent assessment of progress is conducted by OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism.

These reports are public and provide a learning and accountability tool that ensures progress is tracked.

OGP Action Plans are effective in getting time-bound, independently monitored commitments from governments on policy reform towards many SDG 16 related issues, for governments and civil society.

## Case Study: Translating SDG 16 Commitments Through OGP and the Access to Justice Secretariat, Canada

Justice Canada has reiterated and reinforced its interest and commitment to SDG 16 through various means and mechanisms, as evidenced by its 2018 VNR, as a member of the Taskforce on Justice, and as a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). In 2019 and under Canadian leadership while Canada was co-Chair of the OGP, the OGP Coalition on Justice was announced. By linking its commitments to justice, through both SDG 16 and the OGP, Justice Canada has been able to support justice-related policy change domestically and internationally.

In the fall of 2019, the Access to Justice Secretariat within Justice Canada was established to drive greater coherence, enable, and enrich partnerships within the government and with civil society and increase policy work on access to justice issues. For example, the Access to Justice Secretariat participates in a Government of Canada interdepartmental taskforce, which seeks to share information and engage with equity-seeking communities to ensure the federal response to COVID-19 is adapted where possible to the needs of these communities.

Recognizing that access to justice and open government are mutually supportive, Justice Canada has proposed that an Open Justice commitment be included in Canada's upcoming National Action Plan on Open Government (NAP). The key principles of open justice – transparency, accountability, innovation, and partnership – are embedded throughout the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDG 16 specifically urges us to develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels. The NAP process brings with it a particularly useful engagement factor, a multi-stakeholder forum and an independent review mechanism that engages civil society. The OGP has been useful for alignment, particularly in terms of the Joint Declaration on Open Government for the Implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and concrete resources to advance justice policy work.

**Take-Aways and Going Forward:** Given its commitment to access to justice, internationally and domestically, Justice Canada has been able to effectively bridge foreign and domestically focused justice work. While this new engagement strategy through the OGP NAP process has not yet been fully put in place due to delays related to COVID-19, it may inform how OGP NAP reporting can be more effectively applied to future VNRs.

\* This case study draws from interviews with Open Government, Justice Canada, Government of Canada.

## A REGIONAL APPROACH

Regional organizations also offer an opportunity to align SDG 16-related reporting for more coherent and impactful policymaking and stakeholder engagement.

For example, regional organizations, such as the [Council of Europe](#), can support SDG 16 advancement and reporting, through relevant and related conventions, by highlighting the overlap in subject matter and data used by governments, members or otherwise, in following up on these conventions (see case study).

## Case Study: Regional Organizations, VNR Processes and SDG 16, the Council of Europe

Rather than creating new activities, programs or projects, the Council of Europe (CoE) has framed and labeled its on-going work in SDG terms. As a regional organization of 47 member states founded on the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, its reporting mechanisms and subject matter provide an opportunity for member states that are reporting on SDG 16 to pull from Council of Europe data and vice-versa. For example, and though not exhaustive, the following is a listing of conventions as related to SDG 16: the European Convention on Human Rights, the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data Framework, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. (Conventions are legally binding treaties, if ratified, though with varying degrees of follow-up depending on the context).

To this end, and in reporting progress in adherence to a convention, the Council of Europe may then offer concrete recommendations through their advisory committees to one of its member states. The CoE has created a website that provides key information for each SDG. Member States can use this information to illustrate that their participation in the CoE also contributes to national implementation of the relevant SDG and this can be referred to in the VNRs.

**Take-Aways and Going Forward:** While Member States themselves are primarily responsible for implementing the SDGs, the CoE, as an international organization, is there to assist and help facilitate the process.

\* This case study draws from 2019 interviews with the Directorate of External Relations within the Council of Europe.

## STRENGTHENING LINKS TO UN CONVENTIONS

UN conventions, such as the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), as well as historic anniversaries, such as Beijing +25, offer additional opportunities to leverage data and reporting mechanisms for more coherent and coordinated policy and programming across institutions.

Many of these processes, from the UPR to the UNCAC review, will continue beyond the 2030 Agenda, so engaging and linking with these processes will be important for sustainability.