



Sustainable Development Goal 16

*An Expert Group Meeting in preparation for HLPF 2024:
Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in
times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of
sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions*

7 May 2024, United Nations Headquarters, New York

Concept Note

1. Introduction

The theme of the 2024 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) is “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”. The 2024 HLPF will have an in-depth review of Sustainable Development **Goal 1**, End poverty in all its forms everywhere; **Goal 2** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; **Goal 13**, Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; **Goal 16**, Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and **Goal 17**, Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

The HLPF in July 2024 will be the first HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC after the **2023 SDG Summit** - the HLPF convened under the auspices of the General Assembly in September 2023. The 2024 HLPF will support the implementation of the [Political Declaration](#) and other outcomes of the SDG Summit for advancing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The Forum will provide an opportunity to translate the political guidance and commitments from the SDG Summit into tangible policy guidance and practical actions.

In preparation for the review of SDG 16 and its role in advancing sustainable development across the 2030 Agenda, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable

Development Goals (UN-DESA-DSDG), in collaboration with United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other partners, are organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM).

The objective of the meeting will be to take stock of progress made towards SDG 16 and all its targets and identify options to accelerate progress in coming years, given the current context and building on opportunities, lessons learned and good practices that have emerged since the last review of SDG 16 in 2021. The discussions will help inform the thematic review of SDG 16 at the HLPF.

2. SDG 16

At the midway point of the 2030 Agenda, progress towards achieving the SDGs is off track, with only 15 per cent of targets with adequate data projected to be achieved by 2030¹. In the case of SDG 16, data gaps remain a challenge for assessing progress on the various targets in a meaningful manner. This year, for the first time, data are available on all goal 16 indicators, although for some the country coverage continues to be limited and more investment is needed to expand data availability. Several tools have been developed in a relatively short period of time to meet the demands of measuring governance, corruption, crime, access to justice and to provide guidance on applying a human rights-based approach to data. New initiatives and partnerships have been developed to enhance cooperation on measuring SDG 16. However, much more investment is needed to ensure the production of accurate, reliable and disaggregated data if no one is to be left behind. Such data are critical for informing national policymaking and priority setting, as well as increasing transparency and accountability to citizens.

On average, across all SDG 16 targets, only 40 percent of countries have reported data for at least one year since 2015², limiting the information that could drive evidence-informed policies to accelerate progress towards SDG 16. Existing data shows a lack of progress towards SDG 16 at the global level, even though there are some positive trends on specific targets and at the regional and national levels.

Efforts towards preventing and reducing violence, access to justice for all, inclusive governance and peaceful societies show signs of stagnation or regression³. For instance, conflict and violence are on the rise; human rights infringements continue to be recorded in many countries; and access to justice continues to be elusive for large portions of national populations, especially the most marginalized. Discrimination persists globally with one in six people experiencing discrimination in some form, with women and people with disabilities disproportionately affected⁴. One in three persons with disabilities experience discrimination, twice the rate of persons without disabilities. Racial

¹ UNDESA. 2023. Report of the Secretary-General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Special Edition.

² <https://www.undp.org/policy-centre/oslo/publications/global-progress-report-sdg-16>

³ Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 Indicators: A wake-up call for action on peace, justice and inclusion (UNODC, OHCHR, UNDP 2023).

⁴ UNDESA. 2023. *Report of the Secretary-General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Special Edition*.

discrimination, related to ethnicity, colour or language, is among the most common grounds of discrimination⁵.

At the end of 2022, 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced globally⁶. This was an increase of 19 million compared to the previous year and two and a half times the number a decade ago. The year 2022 witnessed a more than 50 per cent increase in conflict-related civilian deaths. In 2021 intentional homicides reached the highest level observed in the past two decades, with approximately 458,000 intentional homicides⁷. Violence-related cases have a crucial gender dimension, with globally nearly 89,000 women and girls killed intentionally in 2022⁸ and are affecting progress on SDG 5 on the promotion of gender equality. Additionally, the year 2022 witnessed a steep rise in the number of killings targeting journalists and human rights activists. The spike in killings in 2022 marks a dramatic reversal of the positive trend seen in recent years⁹.

The available data on violence against children (target 16.2.) is deeply alarming. By the end of 2022, 43.3 million children, including 17.5 million child refugees and asylum seekers, were displaced due to conflict and violence, exposing them to heightened violence and crime.¹⁰ In 2022, children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict, with 27,800 violations reported, including 7,622 instances of child recruitment by armed forces or armed groups.¹¹ Globally, 30 per 100,000 children are in detention, and child labour has risen to 160 million worldwide. Furthermore, online risks and crimes facilitated by technology amount to 15 per cent of children reporting cyberbullying victimization, and electronic service providers identified 32 million reports of child sexual exploitation images in 2021. Moreover, 200 million girls and women alive today in 31 countries have undergone female genital mutilation, and 12 million girls are married annually.¹² However, data collection and analysis related to boys continue to be very low, hindering the understanding of this phenomenon.¹³ In most countries, more than two in every three children are subjected to violent discipline by caregivers.¹⁴

While there was a decrease in the overall number of victims of trafficking in persons from 2019 to 2022, it is challenging to assess the overall size of the challenge due to the fact that many victims remain undetected. The percentage of child victims detected increased from 28 per cent in 2014 to

⁵ Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 Indicators: A wake-up call for action on peace, justice and inclusion (UNODC, OHCHR, UNDP 2023).

⁶ UNDESA. 2023. Report of the Secretary-General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Special Edition. [The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023_0.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

⁷ UNDESA. 2023. Report of the Secretary-General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Special Edition.

⁸ The highest yearly number recorded in the past two decades. UNODC – UN Women, Gender-related killing of women and girls (Femicide/Feminicide), Global estimate of female intimate partner/family-related homicides in 2022

⁹ UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-killings-journalists-50-2022-half-targeted-duty>

¹⁰ Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, 2023, A/78/214

¹¹ Children and armed conflict - Report of the Secretary-General 2023, A/77/895-S/2023/363

¹² Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, 2023, A/78/214

¹³ Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 Indicators: A wake-up call for action on peace, justice and inclusion (UNODC, OHCHR, UNDP 2023).

¹⁴ Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, 2023, A/78/214

35 per cent in 2021 (SDG Indicator 16.2.2)¹⁵. Child victims continue to constitute the majority of victims of trafficking detected in Sub-Saharan Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, and some parts of Asia.

Little progress has been achieved to date in ensuring access to justice for all (target 16.3). The proportion of unsentenced prisoners remains at around 30 per cent of the global prison population and overcrowding in prisons is reported by almost half of countries with relevant data¹⁶ (SDG Target 16.3). Prison conditions are falling short of the goal of promoting increased access to justice and legal support mechanisms to everyone. Moreover, less than half of the population who fall victim to violence in countries with available data report their victimization to competent authorities, with victims of sexual assault reporting less than victims of other crimes. Reporting to competent authorities is the first step in seeking justice for crime victims, to conduct proper investigations and administer justice. However, lack of trust and confidence in the ability of the police or other authorities to provide effective redress, or objective and subjective difficulties in accessing the authorities, can negatively influence the reporting behaviour of crime victims. Reporting rates provide a direct measure of the confidence in the ability of the State to provide assistance and bring perpetrators to justice (SDG Indicator 16.3.1).¹⁷

Corruption (target 16.5) continues to be an issue in all regions. One measure of corruption used for the global SDG indicators, the prevalence of bribery as reported by individuals and firms, remains alarmingly high, with reported prevalence rates surpassing 20 per cent in many countries and with low income countries showing higher level of bribery than low and middle income countries.¹⁸ In addition, corruption continues to undermine the delivery of public services and poses serious challenges to environmental governance and particularly the environmental rule of law, especially in developing countries. It also enables some of the most serious drivers of biodiversity loss, wildlife trafficking and deforestation¹⁹. Many national, regional and international instruments exist to fight corruption, but trend data remain limited and it is not possible to assess if progress has been made to reduce corruption. Those involved in corruption often benefit from impunity. There remains to be challenges in addressing corruption at different levels, legal, operational and enforcement.

Transparency and accountability (targets 16.6 and 16.10) are difficult to measure. Access to information is critical for enabling citizens to exercise their voice to effectively monitor and hold their governments to account. In the period 2015-2021, there was an increase of 30 per cent in the number of countries that adopted laws to guarantee public access to information. However, the implementation of these laws poses challenges in many countries. An essential element of transparency and accountability is universal and meaningful connectivity. The digital divide, which leaves 2.6 billion people unconnected, can undermine efforts towards achieving SDG 16. It's crucial to address this gap and ensure that all individuals have access to digital resources for information,

¹⁵ Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 Indicators: A wake-up call for action on peace, justice and inclusion (UNODC, OHCHR, UNDP 2023).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ <https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/environmental-rule-law-tracking-progress-and-charting-future-directions>

communication, and participation in digital society²⁰. In many cases, activists, including environmental activists, exercising their legally recognized rights of access to information and related rights to participate in public decision making are subjected to harassment and unlawful arrests.

Women are underrepresented at senior levels of decision-making (target 16.7) and continue to face glass ceilings that limit their career aspirations in public service. Women are less equally represented in senior levels in public service roles and in supreme and constitutional courts than in lower-level positions²¹. The numbers of young parliamentarians remain low, with few young people holding leadership positions. In addition to young people's representation in Parliaments, meaningful and sustained youth engagement requires that young people be involved in all aspects of policymaking and decision-making through mechanisms such as youth advisory boards for government entities, youth Parliaments, and regular meetings and dialogue with members of Parliament and local councils²².

SDG 16 target 16.9 that aims to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, is crucial for advancing the 2030 Agenda commitment to leave no one behind. However, hundreds of millions of people still lack proper identification, and about half of the world's countries do not have a universal system for registering births and deaths. There has been some progress on target 16.9 on birth registration. The proportion of those whose birth is registered increased from 71.2 percent in the period 2010-2016 to 77.2 in 2022. However, the birth of almost one quarter of children under the age of 5 worldwide was not registered, denying identity and access to social services to the most vulnerable. At the same time, target 16.9 is not only limited to ensuring birth registration. The UN Secretary General's 'Our Common Agenda' report, makes a specific link between ensuring legal identity for all and ending statelessness. In this respect, progress on target 16.9 requires measures to resolve statelessness and prevent it from occurring, for example by removing gender-discrimination from nationality laws. The fulfilment of the right to a nationality for all is key to the fulfilment of development goals, including the eradication of poverty. Stateless people are among those most likely to be left behind in any development process. As of mid-2023, an estimated 4.4 million people were stateless or of undetermined nationality according to the statistics reported to UNHCR by governments and other sources in 97 countries. The true extent of statelessness is likely to be much greater as approximately half of all countries do not report data on statelessness, including many with known stateless populations.

Improving access to information (target 16.10) is a critical objective of SDG 16. It enables citizens to exercise their voice to effectively monitor and hold their governments to account, including in the context of environmental matters. In 1990, only 14 countries had laws that specifically guaranteed the rights of citizens to access public information. In 2022, this number reached 135 countries with

²⁰ [ITU Facts and Figures 2023](#)

²¹ Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 Indicators: A wake-up call for action on peace, justice and inclusion (UNODC, OHCHR, UNDP 2023).

²² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/12/WorldYouthReport-2030Agenda.pdf>

laws or regulatory frameworks²³. The increase is nearly tenfold, but the need to improve legal frameworks and especially their implementation is more vital than ever.

Developing countries remain underrepresented in international governance institutions, including in the International Monetary Fund and International Finance Corporation²⁴. A reform of the international financial architecture is high on the agenda of the upcoming Summit of the Future to be held in September 2024. One of the topics being negotiated is the wish to ensure that the international financial system would deliver more effectively and fairly for everyone and particularly the Global South, including through objectives that are aligned with the SDGs, debt sustainability, a global financial safety net, and more.

3. Framing the issues

At the SDG Summit in September 2023, countries reaffirmed the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice for all and that are based on respect for human rights, on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions²⁵. The Political Declaration recognized that efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts and foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies have often been fragmented and insufficient²⁶. It further emphasized the need to continue to integrate the SDGs into national policy frameworks and develop national plans for transformative and accelerated action, and make implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the SDGs a central focus in national planning and oversight mechanisms²⁷. The Political Declaration also emphasized the need for strong action to bridge the digital divides and spread the benefits of digitalization, as well as to ensure that human rights must be protected both online and offline²⁸.

A significant feature of the 2030 Agenda is the interlinkages among the SDGs, which must inform policy decisions. Lack of progress on Goal 16 affects the achievement of all the other SDGs, as peace, good governance and effective institutions, access to justice as well as freedom from fear and violence, are critical enablers of sustainable development. Governance has been identified as “an essential lever of the systematic transformations needed to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”, as highlighted in the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2023²⁹, among others. Discussions at the 2021 SDG 16 Conference and in many other forums, as well as the United Nations Secretary General’s Our Common Agenda Report, have indicated the

²³ A steady path forward: UNESCO 2022 report on public access to information (SDG 16.10.2)
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385479.locale=ru>

²⁴ UNDESA, 2023 Financing for Sustainable Development Report: Financing Sustainable Transformations:
<https://financing.desa.un.org/iatf/report/financing-sustainable-development-report-2023>

²⁵ General Assembly of the United Nations, Political Declaration of the SDG Summit, para. 20.
<https://undocs.org/A/RES/78/1>

²⁶ Ibid, para. 26.

²⁷ Ibid, para. 38 s.

²⁸ Ibid, para. 38 c.

²⁹ Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Times of crisis, times of change: Science for accelerating transformations to sustainable development, (United Nations, New York, 2023).

overwhelming need for renewed social contracts between people and their governments, anchored in human rights, which help to build trust in governance and reinforce its legitimacy.

Violence and corruption also undermine sustainable development. Human rights outcomes are critically dependent on rule of law and access to justice for all – including access to legal support and, where necessary, legal aid, and tailored victims’ services –, participation, accountability, and non-discrimination, all key targets of SDG 16. There is also the need for a more people-centered preventive approach to risk reduction, and policies and practices need to be multi-hazard and multisectoral, inclusive and accessible, not only to mitigate immediate risks but to prevent conflicts and foster long-term peace and resilience.

Beyond these linkages at the whole of society level, interlinkages between various dimensions of SDG 16 and specific SDG areas have been increasingly documented in a systematic manner³⁰. Conversely, the success of SDG 16 is equally linked to progress made on other goals, including ensuring access to quality education (SDG 4), advancing on gender equality (SDG 5), ensuring access to affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), reducing inequality (SDG 10), and addressing climate change (SDG 13), among others. Identifying policies that leverage these synergies will be crucial to accelerate progress on SDG 16 in the years ahead to 2030.

The global economic impact of violence was estimated at \$17.5 trillion in 2022, the equivalent of 12.9 per cent of global GDP, or \$2,200 per person. National studies from a range of countries estimate that violence against children has economic costs of up to 5% of GDP³¹. Homicide was the fourth largest component in terms of total costs, and an increase of 1 per cent in the homicide rate could lead to a decline of 0.008 per cent in GDP³². As intersecting crises have unfolded in recent years, the call of SDG 16 to promote peaceful and inclusive societies becomes even more crucial.

In December 2023, Member States in General Assembly Resolution 78/227 reaffirmed the 2030 Agenda, noting “with concern that challenges to access to justice in criminal justice systems undermine the rule of law, the achievement of safe and secure societies, and the right to equal treatment before the law” and encouraging Member States “in accordance with their domestic legislation and within their capacity, to ensure equal access to justice and application of the law to all, including by taking effective measures that are informed by relevant data, such as data on age and gender”, as well as “to collect and use quantitative and qualitative data, disaggregated by relevant factors, to ensure that criminal justice policies and programmes are informed by all available and relevant evidence and data”.³³ The leveraging of digital technologies, and the strengthening of skills in the collection and analysis of digital data, is a priority to ensure that legislation and programming on access to justice is evidence-led.

³⁰ See for example two recent studies by UNDP and IDOS: UNDP, 2022, Connections that matter: How the Quality of Governance Institutions may be the Booster Shot we need to reduce Poverty and Inequality; and UNDP and IDOS, 2023, Connections that matter: How does the quality of governance institutions help protect our Ocean?

³¹ <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/publications/vnr-report-2023.pdf>

³² Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 Indicators: A wake-up call for action on peace, justice and inclusion (UNODC, OHCHR, UNDP 2023).

³³ General Assembly Resolution 78/227, entitled “Equal access to justice for all” (19 December 2023).

While the COVID-19 pandemic had many negative impacts on SDG implementation, innovations in the way public institutions operate and interact with people also arose out of necessity. For instance, Governments explored new ways of delivering public services, often through collaboration with other actors. Tools were mobilized to maintain or expand transparency and accountability around key actions of governments. In some sectors, drastic changes took place, with both positive and negative impacts. Capitalizing on successful institutional innovations undertaken during the pandemic could be a powerful enabler of the type of transformation that is called for to support the realization of the 2030 Agenda. This transformation would be required to truly make public institutions more effective and resilient to both current and future shocks and hazards, more participatory and inclusive, more forward-looking and able to steer societal change, and more transparent and accountable, as called for in SDG targets 16.6 and 16.7³⁴.

In many countries, a large share of the population has the perception that the government does not incorporate the views of many population groups when designing policies. There is an urgent need to design and institutionalize effective and inclusive public participatory mechanisms across all levels of governance to foster community ownership of programs and decision-making processes, increase political participation, perceptions of fairness around public decision-making and the legitimacy of public institution. One legally binding instrument in this regard is the Aarhus Convention, as it is not only an environmental agreement but also a Convention about government accountability, transparency and responsiveness. It grants the public rights and imposes on Parties and public authorities obligations regarding access to information and public participation and access to justice.

The impacts of environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and waste, are making the attainment of SDG 16 targets ever more challenging with the cumulative shocks of environmental crises exacerbating other ongoing crises. For instance, although climate change and related extreme weather events may not always be a direct cause of conflict, it can multiply and amplify existing risks to peace and development. It can disrupt agricultural production, and obstruct access to water, food, health and housing, and can affect the full enjoyment of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. For example, in 2022, 84 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers fled from highly climate-vulnerable countries, an increase from 61 per cent in 2010³⁵. Furthermore, evidence from FAO and WFP suggests close linkages between climate change, food insecurity and conflict.³⁶ Organized violence and armed conflict continue to constitute significant drivers of acute food insecurity in the number of hunger hotspots around the world.³⁷ Addressing the interlinkages between SDG 16 and SDG 2 is indispensable for progress on the entire 2030 Agenda.

³⁴ UNDESA, Transforming institutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals after the pandemic, World Public Sector Report 2023. <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-public-sector-report-2023>

³⁵ UN High Commissioner for Refugees; Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030 Advance copy, December 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/climate-action-focus-area-strategic-plan-20242030>

³⁶ WFP and FAO. 2023. Hunger Hotspots. FAO–WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity: November 2023 to April 2024 Outlook. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8419en>

³⁷ Ibid.

Equal access to justice for all individuals and communities is key to ensure accountability for crimes that affect the environment, including those affecting large groups of people across countries and continents, and committed by legal entities. Human rights defenders in environmental matters, including indigenous leaders, whistleblowers, and climate advocates are at particular risk and require access to justice. Indigenous peoples require access to appropriate accountability mechanisms for crimes committed against them, that consider their ancestral rights, including in situations where the offenders may be private companies or corporations. People displaced due to climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, environmental degradation, pollution and crimes that affect the environment may also require specific measures to ensure their access to justice, as they might be more exposed to becoming victims of trafficking and other crimes.

As SDG 13 recognizes, climate change poses one of the greatest threats to sustainable human development in our time. The recent recognition of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment by the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council has been a breakthrough moment for environmental justice. SDG 16 with its focus on rule of law and legal frameworks, strengthening people-centred and effective institutions, and increasing access to justice and legal empowerment is a critical enabler for progress on SDG 13. At the same time, measures taken to address the climate crisis may lead to fractures in societies and political instability if not properly managed. Initiatives to achieve the SDGs and the objectives of the Paris Agreement should be developed and implemented in an inclusive manner, ensure they leave no one behind and that the transition to more sustainable economic and social models is just and socially fair.

Among the cross-cutting factors that affect progress on SDG 16, there is a need for urgent attention to the human rights implications of the rapid development of digital technologies. In many ways – by facilitating the delivery of social protection services, for example – digital technologies can support the SDGs and help enable the fulfilment of key rights. The responsible use of digital technologies also has the potential to strengthen the effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of public institutions, and to promote equal access to justice for all. The use of digital tools has also helped to enable spaces for young people's meaningful engagement and advocacy, including, for instance, during electoral processes. The increasingly negative assessment of democracy, particularly from the youth, affect the ability of the institutions of democracy to lead the necessary changes to accelerate effective implementation of Agenda 2030. Open government and digital government can improve confidence in institutions by bringing public action closer to citizen and make management more effective and thereby strengthening democracy³⁸.

It is clear, however, that legal frameworks and regulatory reforms have struggled to keep pace with digital technology developments and their implications for upholding human rights. The increasing use of digital technologies in the delivery of essential services is an area in which robust human rights

³⁸ See Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), *Panorama de la Gestión Pública en América Latina y el Caribe, 2023: un Estado preparado para la acción climática (LC/PUB.2023/27-P)*, Santiago, 2024; V. Torres, A. Naser y E. Kaufman (coords.), *Estado abierto y gestión pública: el papel del sector académico*, Libros de la CEPAL, N° 163 (LC/PUB.2023/24-P), Santiago, Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), 2023; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Resilient institutions for a transformative post-pandemic recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean: inputs for discussion (LC/CRP.18/3)*, Santiago, 2021.

assessments and ongoing evaluation are essential to safeguard against discrimination, and an interference with the rights to privacy and equal human dignity. Priority must be given to developing digital literacy, building critical digital infrastructure and strengthening child-sensitive, youth- and gender-responsive and people-centered digital services, while urgently addressing risks to privacy, freedom of expression, discrimination and exclusion, human rights violations, violence against children, and gender-based violence. Advances in the use of digital technologies also need to go hand-in-hand with efforts to ensure universal birth registration systems and access to civil documentation. Practical strategies to address these issues can be considered by the intergovernmental process to elaborate a Global Digital Compact. Moreover, there is a need to build open and transparent technical standards grounded in International Human Rights Law. Standards developing organizations³⁹ can embed human rights into their recommendations to ensure a risk-based approach to the standardization, design, development and deployment of digital technologies.

There is a clear need to strengthen national monitoring systems for SDG 16. According to the latest SDG progress report issued by the Secretary-General of United Nations, Goal 16 is the second to last amongst the 17 goals in terms of proportion of countries with availability of data. International comparability remains very low. Many countries lack necessary resources and capacities for data collection, and significant gaps remain in geographic coverage, timeliness, and disaggregation. Relevant data sources are found in a wide array of institutions from the line ministries in charge of security and, public administration, migration to the justice sector to oversight institutions to national statistical offices. Data from non-traditional sources is also critically important to assess progress on SDG 16. This, however, often poses a challenge in terms of quality, collaboration and coordination.⁴⁰ The prioritization of inclusive participation in the digital economy should include an emphasis on strengthening the digital infrastructure and digital skills necessary to ensure the collection and analysis of data.

The necessity and importance of measuring the quality of governance systems is widely recognized, especially at a time when countries are facing multiple crises with wide-ranging repercussions such as declining trust in government, disengagement from political life and rising inequalities, among others. To fully understand the impacts of these crises and to navigate their way out of them, countries need timely, reliable and internationally comparable statistics on how governance systems are responding. In March 2023, the UN Statistical Commission endorsed an updated Classification of Statistical Activities (CSA 2.0) which includes Governance as a new domain of official statistics.⁴¹ The statistical areas in this new domain follow the general structure outlined in the Handbook on Governance Statistics⁴² developed by the Praia City Group⁴³ and endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2020. This new classification effectively means that Governance

³⁹ Standards developing organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) or the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)

⁴⁰ Many UN and other international organizations and networks produce measurement tools and publish progress reports that inform national and global stocktaking of progress. For instance, UNODC publishes annual reports on homicides; The World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index now covers 140 countries, with a consistent methodology since 2015. UNODC, OHCHR, and UNDP published a comprehensive target-by-target report in 2023.

⁴¹ Governance now a domain in the revised classification of statistical activities (CSA 2.0) What's Next for Governance Statistics? <https://www.sdg16hub.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/Brief%20CSA%202.0.pdf>

⁴² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/praha-handbook-governance-statistics>

⁴³ <https://grupopraia.com.cv/>

is no longer an ‘experimental’ area of statistics but sits on par with economic, demographic and social statistics in the official statistical nomenclature. The endorsed CSA 2.0 also recognizes Human Rights as a new cross-cutting domain of statistics, relevant to governance statistics as well as other domains.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 78/225, underlined the important role of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in actively contributing to the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within its mandate, and in contributing to the lead -up and follow-up to the Sustainable Development Goals Summit held in September 2023. It requested the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice to encourage Member States presenting voluntary national reviews at the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development to share their experiences, progress made, challenges and impediments in implementing those aspects of the 2030 Agenda that are related to the work of the Commission. It also invited Member States and stakeholders to provide to the Commission views on how the Commission can contribute to the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 16, and requested the Commission to transmit that information along with the outcome of its consideration to the HLPF in 2024.

The review of SDG 16 at the HLPF 2024 will assess the progress achieved thus far since the last review of SDG 16 at HLPF in 2021. The review aims to take stock of progress, gaps, challenges and opportunities, and to provide options for accelerating SDG 16 implementation. It will also explore how the interlinkages with other goals can be leveraged for more comprehensive and sustainable outcomes.

4. *Key questions*

1. At the midway point in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, what has been the progress made on the targets of SDG 16? Which targets have seen the most progress and the most significant setbacks?
2. What are the main challenges, obstacles and opportunities facing relevant actors in different SDG 16 target areas, including in the context of multiple crises?
3. Based on the progress and key lessons, what actions and policy options could significantly accelerate progress on SDG 16? How can the necessary political will be generated for these changes?
4. How could governments and other stakeholders effectively leverage interlinkages of SDG 16 with the other SDGs to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda?
5. What strategies can be implemented to achieve universal and meaningful connectivity, and how can this contribute to the achievement of SDG 16? How can the responsible use of digital technologies be harnessed to ensure advancements in peace, justice, and inclusive societies? What types of protections and regulation would need to be in place to avoid negative impacts of digital technologies on security, justice, governance, and human rights,

including child rights and equal participation, and the human right to a healthy, clean and sustainable environment?

6. What approaches could be put in place to maximize synergies among SDGs 7, 13 and 16 to ensure a just and fair transition and minimize risks of increased societal fractures and political instability? What do the trends in relation to the rule of law in environmental matters point to in addressing the drivers of environmental challenges and advancing the recognition of the intersectionality of social and environmental justice?
7. What steps could countries take to ensure adequate financing and capacity development in different areas of SDG 16? How can international cooperation be strengthened to support these efforts? What actions can be taken to fill the financing gaps for youth-led initiatives and youth organizations and to ensure their full, equal and meaningful participation in peacebuilding at all levels?
8. What measures can be implemented to enhance monitoring of SDG 16 implementation and increase the availability of relevant data at all levels? How can countries be convinced of the importance of disaggregated data to measure progress towards equal access to justice for all?

5. Contribution to HLPF 2024

The knowledge and insights of experts from across the world will be crucial to addressing these questions. The EGM will serve to bring together a cross-section of such expertise from a diversity of countries and regions to help:

- Provide substantive inputs into the thematic reviews at the 2024 HLPF and help inform its outcomes;
- Identify cases from regions and specific countries (including those that are conducting or have conducted Voluntary National Reviews) that illustrate challenges or highlight innovative practices;
- Suggest effective presenters for the specific sessions at the HLPF, as well as contributors to blog posts, e-discussions and other activities leading up to the HLPF;
- Contribute to preparations for the Summit of the Future 2024; and
- Influence collaborations and programmes of work going forward.

6. Participation and organization

The EGM is part of a broader review of SDG 16, including specialized reports from various agencies and think tanks. Some of these inputs will also feed into the EGM.

Participation at the EGM will be by invitation. A limited number of experts from civil society, academia, NGOs, and Governments will be invited. Experts from the UN system and other international organizations will also be invited to participate.

Individual sessions at the EGM will address specific themes, as mentioned in the previous section. Discussions will be interactive, with a mix of plenary and group sessions and all participants encouraged to speak openly and informally. To this effect, the meeting will be held under the Chatham House rule.

The EGM will be conducted in English. Presentations/papers/remarks will be made available online after the EGM, as appropriate.

ANNEX 1: SDG 16 targets

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

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

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

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

16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

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

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

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

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

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

16.B Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development