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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 16

PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Teacher's Manual



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L. Brandli, A. Salvia, B. Rebelatto, J. Eustachio, and
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Lead authors: Unisa, South Africa

1. Rudi Pretorius
2. Melanie Nicolau

Contributing authors for the sections on Africa

1. Rudi Pretorius
2. Melanie Nicolau
3. Sanet Carow
4. Zongho Kom

Contributing authors for the sections on Latin America and the Caribbean

5. Luciana Londero Brandli
6. Amanda Lange Salvia
7. Bianca Gasparetto Rebelatto

Contributing authors for the sections on Europe

8. Jasmin Röseler
9. João Henrique Paulino Pires Eustachio
10. Andrea Spada Jiménez, Ph.D.
11. José Eduardo Pires de Oliveira
12. Maria Laura Salomão David

English language editing

13. Unisa: Directorate of Language Services

Translation to IsiZulu and Sesotho sa Leboa

14. Unisa: Directorate of Language Services

Translation to Portuguese

14. Gabriela Rodrigues

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Project leaders

Prof. Dr mult. Walter Leal Filho (Hamburg University of Applied Science), Prof. Dr Luciana Londero Brandli (University of Passo Fundo) and Prof. Dr Rudi Wessel Pretorius (University of South Africa)

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1. Introduction to the SDGs

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to

- provide the link between the SDGs and the MDGs
- explain the origin and overall aim of the SDGs
- name and briefly discuss the five priority areas of the SDGs
- position SDG 16 within the framework of Agenda 2030

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the central component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as agreed on by the United Nations (UN) in September 2015. The 2030 Agenda consists of a set of 17 interlinked goals (United Nations, 2015), with associated targets and indicators, which are to be achieved by 2030.

The 2030 Agenda was developed as an action plan with the purpose of boosting the development of humanity in five priority areas: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships, as well as continuing the progress made with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were in force during the years 2000 to 2015. The MDGs consisted of eight international development goals and were supported with 21 individual targets. Compared to the MDGs, the SDGs have a more comprehensive scope, rely more on collective action and are more detailed, with the message very clear that success will depend on the active support and participation of every nation (Feeny, 2020).

The SDGs provide a framework within which global approaches can be planned and implemented to secure a fair, healthy and prosperous future for the current and future generations (Morton et al., 2017). A key element is that all the SDGs are closely interconnected, and that failure to take this into account will lead to a highly ineffective way to address the sustainability dilemma the world is facing (Van Soest et al., 2019). According to Van Soest et al. (2019), there are key interactions across all areas of critical importance for the SDGs but lie especially within the area of People, as well as between the areas of People and Prosperity, and between the areas of People and Planet. Figure 1 presents the set of 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.



Figure 1: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

Source: United Nations (n.d.)

In a certain way, the SDGs emerged from the MDGs and with the intention of going beyond them. For instance, while the MDGs had one goal for both poverty and hunger (MDG 1), the 2030 Agenda has one goal dedicated to eradicating poverty (SDG 1) and a goal dedicated to ending hunger (SDG 2). The same applies to an extent to SDG 16, and although the premise about the link between sustainable development and peace on which it is based was not new, giving it formal recognition was seen as adding the “missing bottom” of the MDGs (Denney, 2012).

This manual specifically deals with SDG 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions. It is one of the SDGs falling within the area of Prosperity. Officially SDG 16 is formulated as “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access

to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (United Nations, 2024a). SDG 16 foregrounds the effect that rising levels of conflict and violent organised crime, together with escalating geopolitical issues worldwide, have on increased suffering, obstruction of sustainable development and widening the gap for access to justice (Padilla-Vasquez, 2024).

The inclusion of SDG 16 in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda was the first time that expansion of access to justice for all, promotion of the rule of law and expecting accountability and transparency from institutions were universally accepted as part of the strategy to meet development targets and achieve peace on a global level (Ivanovic, 2018; Padilla-Vasquez, 2024). These authors indicate that while SDG 16 is often regarded as one of the transformative shifts forming part of the 2030 Agenda, it stirred a great deal of controversy at the time of its adoption – to the extent that many delegates were of the view that it did not fit into the framework at all.

Working through this manual will provide you with various perspectives on the implementation and progress so far with SDG 16, and the extent to which its transformative potential has been fulfilled at this stage.

Supplementary resources

- Feeny, S. (2020). Transitioning from the MDGs to the SDGs: Lessons learnt? In S. A. Churchill (Ed.) *Moving from the millennium to the sustainable development goals* (pp. 343–351). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Padilla-Vasquez, D. (2024). *Why SDG 16 is a cornerstone for the other global goals*.
<https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/why-sdg-16-is-a-cornerstone-for-the-other-global-goals/>
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<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>

Examples of questions for assessment

1. Introduction to the SDGs

- Name the five areas of critical importance to which the 17 SDGs are linked and explain why these are referred to as the 5 Ps.
- Explain the link between the MDGs and the SDGs.
- Explain how the SDGs differ from the MDGs.
- Explain how SDG 16 fits into the SDGs, and how this compares to the MDGs.

Sources consulted

Denney, L. (2012). *Security: The missing bottom of the Millennium Development Goals? Prospects for inclusion in the post-MDG development framework*. Overseas Development Institute.

Feeny, S. (2020). Transitioning from the MDGs to the SDGs: Lessons learnt? In S. A. Churchill (Ed.). *Moving from the millennium to the sustainable development goals* (pp. 343–351). Palgrave Macmillan.

Ivanovic, A., Cooper, H., & Nguyen, A. M. (2018). Institutionalisation of SDG 16: More a trickle than a cascade? *Social Alternatives*, 37(1), 49-57.

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Van Soest, H. L., Van Vuuren, D. P., Hilaire, J., Minx, J. C., Harmsen, M. J., Krey, V., Popp, A., Riahi, K., & Luderer, G. (2019). Analysing interactions among sustainable development goals with integrated assessment models. *Global Transitions*, 1, 210–225.

2. Defining SDG 16

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to

- define SDG 16 and list its targets and indicators
- explain the significance of SDG 16
- list and explain five advantages of SDG 16
- discuss the interdependencies between SDG 16 and the other SDGs
- discuss the implications of the interdependencies between SDG 16 and the other SDGs
- explain the challenges involved in achieving SDG 16 and discuss examples of actions to overcome these challenges

SDG 16 is concerned with promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and support building of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. In addition, people should be free of fear from all forms of violence and feel safe as they go about their lives everywhere, no matter what their ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation are (Department of Global Communications, 2023).

SDG 16 has been formulated to include 12 targets and 24 indicators, which are listed in Table 1. Ten of the targets are outcome targets. They can be summarised as follows: 16.1: reduce violence; 16.2: provide protection to children from issues such as abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence; 16.3: promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice; 16.4: combat organised crime and the illicit flow of finances and arms, and also substantially reduce corruption and bribery; 16.5: develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions; 16.6: ensure responsive, inclusive and representative decision-making; 16.7: strengthen participation in global governance; 16.8: provide universal legal identity; 16.9: ensure public access to information; and 16.10: protect fundamental freedoms. SDG 16 also includes two means of implementation targets, namely 16a: strengthen national institutions to prevent violence and to combat crime and terrorism; and 16b: promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies (TAP Network, 2021).

Following McDermott et al. (2019), the 12 targets of SDG 16 can be clustered into the following three interrelated main thematic areas:

- (1) **Peace and the reduction of armed conflict:** All forms of violence and abuse, at multiple scales, both organised and unorganised, are covered. Although physical violence is emphasised, psychological violence is also included.
- (2) **Rule of law, accountability, transparency and access to justice:** The rule of law is a major focus of SDG 16, and associated with the international trend to regard legality and legal enforcement as pathways to sustainability.
- (3) **Inclusiveness and participation:** A broader and more far-reaching understanding of inclusiveness and participation is included in SDG 16, aligned with the international discourse on governance and the role of state institutions and national level reporting.

Table 1: Targets and indicators of SDG 16

	Targets	Indicators
16.1	Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.	<p>16.1.1: Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100 000 population, by sex and age.</p> <p>16.1.2 Conflict-related deaths per 100 000 people of the population, by sex, age and cause.</p> <p>16.1.3 Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months.</p> <p>16.1.4 Proportion of the population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live.</p>
16.2	End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.	<p>16.2.1: Proportion of children aged 1 to 17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month.</p> <p>16.2.2: Number of victims of human trafficking per 100 000 people of the population, by sex, age and form of exploitation.</p> <p>16.2.3: Proportion of young women and men aged 18 to 29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18.</p>
16.3	Promote the rule of law at national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.	16.3.1: Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimisation to competent authorities or other officially recognised conflict resolution mechanisms.

	Targets	Indicators
		<p>16.3.2: Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population.</p> <p>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.</p>
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.	<p>16.4.1: Total value of inward and outward illicit financial flows (in current United States dollars).</p> <p>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.</p>
16.5	Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
16.6	Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.	<p>16.6.1: Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector (or by budget codes or similar).</p> <p>16.6.2: Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services.</p>
16.7	Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.	<p>16.7.1: Proportions of positions in national and local institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups.</p> <p>16.7.2: Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group.</p>
16.8	Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.	16.8.1: Proportion of members and voting rights of developing countries in international organisations.
16.9	By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.	16.9.1: Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age.
16.10	Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.	<p>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.</p> <p>16.10.2 Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information.</p>

	Targets	Indicators
16a	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.a.1: Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles.
16b	Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.	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.

Source: TAP Network (2021)

Supplementary resources

- McDermott, C. L., Acheampong, E., Arora Jonsson, S., Asare, R., De Jong, W., Hirons, M., Khatun, K., Menton, M., Nunan, F., Poudyal, M., & Setyowati, A. (2019). SDG 16: peace, justice and strong institutions—a political ecology perspective. In P. Katila, C. J. Pierce Colfer, W. de Jong, G. Galloway, P. Pachero, & G. Winkel (Eds.), *Sustainable development goals: Their impacts on forests and people*. (pp. 510-540). Cambridge University Press.
- TAP Network. (2021). *SDG 16 + indicators guide*. <https://www.sdg16toolkit.org/guides/sdg16-indicators-guide/#:~:text=The%20priority%20indicators%20and%20recommendations%20and%20corresponding%20metadata%20for%20SDG>

2.1 Significance of SDG 16

The available evidence that links development and peace is overwhelming (Hope, 2020). This includes research that shows how insecurity and conflict act as a setback to development gains (United Nations and World Bank, 2018) and how economic development is affected negatively by high levels of violence – usually associated with a reduction in foreign direct investment and a compression of the broader macroeconomic environment (IEP, 2019b). The result of this is that poverty, economic development, life expectancy, education, infant mortality and access to services, to mention a few, will all be affected negatively (IEP, 2019b). This evidence is reaffirmed by the 2030 Agenda in which it is stated that sustainable development is not possible without peace and similarly that no peace is possible without sustainable development (United Nations, 2015a).

In Agenda 2030 the interrelationship between peace and sustainable development is foregrounded by identifying peace as one of five areas of critical importance for humanity – together with people, prosperity, planet and partnerships. Alongside the importance of peace, the 2030 Agenda also recognises the need for just and inclusive societies, provision of equal access to justice, respect for human rights, effective rule of law, good governance at all levels and transparent, effective and accountable institutions. This signals acknowledgement that political goals, such as ensuring inclusion, entrenching good governance and ending violent conflict, are just as important as economic, social and environmental goals, and need to be treated accordingly (Hope, 2023).

SDG 16 therefore emerged as an ‘enabler’ for the entire 2030 Agenda and its significance flows from the fact that it holds the key to achieving the entire 2030 Agenda. Padilla-Vasquez (2024) goes as far as to typify SDG 16 as a cornerstone for the other SDGs. The reason for this, according to the United Nations Development Programme, lies in the focus of SDG 16 on seven requirements of strong institutions (effective, inclusive, responsive, participative, representative, accountable and transparent), as well as on the need for peaceful societies, which are necessary for achieving all the SDGs (UNDP, 2019). This remains relevant whether the SDG has to do with education, health, economic growth, climate change or beyond.

Without sustained peace, which includes more than the mere absence of violence and includes respect for human rights and the rule of law, development targets will be hard to achieve. Without inclusion and access to justice for all, inequality in poverty levels and socio-economic development will increase and commitments to leaving no one behind will be just as hard to meet (UNDP, 2019).

Table 2 provides a diagrammatic representation and overview of important trends associated with each of the three main thematic areas of SDG 16 up to 2022, and serves to enhance understanding of the significance of this SDG, while also illustrating its scope and significance.

Table 2: Observations and trends on the three main thematic areas of SDG 16, based on data up to 2022

Peace and the reduction of armed conflict	Rule of law, accountability, transparency and access to justice	Inclusiveness and participation
<p>Violence is unlikely to be halved by 2030.</p> <p>In 2021, homicide reached its highest level since 2000, with more than 80% of all victims being men, and women are disproportionately affected by domestic killings.</p> <p>Conflict-related deaths decreased significantly since 2015, but the increase of more than 50% in conflict-related deaths among civilians for 2021-2022 is derailing the global path to peace.</p> <p>More than 50% of all children in most countries experience physical punishment/psychological aggression as discipline, with child victims of trafficking almost twice as likely to be subjected to physical or extreme violence as adult victims.</p>	<p>Little progress has been achieved to date in ensuring justice for all.</p> <p>The share of unsentenced prisoners remains constant, at around 30% of the global prison population.</p> <p>Less than half of the population who fall victim to violence in countries with available data report their victimisation to authorities.</p> <p>Victims of sexual assault are less likely to report than victims of other crimes, implying continuing overall distrust of criminal justice institutions.</p> <p>Understanding the global magnitude of and trends in flows related to illicit markets and financial flows remains a challenge.</p> <p>Efforts to reduce/monitor illicit flows of arms remain limited.</p>	<p>Women are over-represented at lower levels of decision-making in the public sector and judicial system, but under-represented at higher levels.</p> <p>Developing countries remain underrepresented in the International Monetary Fund and International Finance Corporation.</p> <p>Although some progress has been achieved, the birth of almost one-quarter of children under the age of 5 worldwide was not registered in 2022.</p> <p>Access to information has improved, as the number of countries with laws guaranteeing public access to information has increased by almost one-third since 2015.</p>

Source: Hope (2023); United Nations (2022; 2023); UNODC, OHCHR & UNDP (2023)

Supplementary resources

- Hope, K. R. (Sr.) (2023). Peace, justice, and inclusive institutions: Overcoming challenges to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 in Africa and beyond. In K. R. Hope (Ed.), *Corruption, sustainable development and security challenges in Africa. Advances in African economic, social and political development*. Springer.

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- UNODC, OHCHR & UNDP. (2023). *Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators*. <https://www.undp.org/publications/global-progress-report-sustainable-development-goal-16-indicators-wake-call-action-peace-justice-and-inclusion#:~:text=This%20report%20presents%20the%20latest%20analysis%20of%20data,decision%20making%20and%20corruption%20erodes%20the%20social%20contract.>

2.2 Interdependencies of SDG 16

Practitioners and scholars generally agree that SDG 16 cannot be understood in isolation and that it has strong interdependencies and links with all the other SDGs (Padilla-Vasquez, 2024; Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, 2019). Several examples of these interdependencies can be supplied, and we have included a selection in Table 3.

In addition to the interdependencies between SDG 16 and all the other SDGs, the SDG 16 agenda also has strong linkages with a number of international agreements and therefore these agreements are relevant to understand many of the SDG 16 targets as well as to guide their implementation. These agreements include the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (United Nations, 2015b), the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (United Nations, 2015c), the New Urban Agenda (United Nations, 2016) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (United Nations, 2015a).

In addition to the interdependencies between SDG 16 and the other SDGs at goal level, 36 of the 160 targets of the SDG framework relate directly to an aspect of peace, inclusion, or access to justice (TAP Network, 2021). While a third (or 12) of these targets are found in SDG 16, the broader set of 36 targets is referred to as the SDG16+ targets

(Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, 2019). The other 24 targets are associated with seven other SDGs, namely SDGs 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11 and 17, and also directly measure an aspect of peace, inclusion or access. These additional 24 targets, together with the 12 targets from SDG 16, collectively contribute directly to building more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. As a framework, the SDG16+ targets provide the full picture of all the actions that are required to realise peace, inclusion and justice for all, especially for those furthest behind.

The additional 24 targets from the other SDGs that make up SDG 16+ are as follows (TAP Network, 2021):

- 1.b Establish institutions and policy frameworks for poverty eradication.
- 4.5 Eliminate all discrimination in education.
- 4.7 Provide education for sustainable development and global citizenship education to all learners, including education on human rights, a culture of peace and non-violence and cultural diversity.
- 4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that provide safe and non-violent learning environments for all.
- 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere.
- 5.2 End all violence against and exploitation of women and girls.
- 5.3 Eliminate child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
- 5.5 Ensure the participation by women and equal opportunities for them for leadership in decision-making at all levels in political, economic and public life.
- 5.c Adopt and strengthen policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality.
- 8.5 Achieve employment and decent work for all women and men, including young and disabled people, and equal pay for work of equal value.
- 8.7 End modern slavery, trafficking and child labour in all its forms, including recruitment and use of child soldiers.
- 8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe, secure working environments for all workers.
- 10.2 Promote universal social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic, or other status.

10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome for all through appropriate legislation, policies and action.

10.4 Adopt fiscal and social policies that promote equality.

10.5 Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such measures.

10.6 Enhance the participation of developing countries in global economic and financial institutions to lead to more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions.

10.7 Facilitate the responsible and well-managed migration and mobility of people, including through appropriate migration policies.

11.1 Ensure access for all to safe housing and basic services and upgrade slums.

11.2 Provide access for all to safe and sustainable transport systems, with special attention to vulnerable people, women, children, disabled and older people.

11.3 Enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management.

11.7 Provide universal access to safe and inclusive public spaces, in particular for women, children, disabled and older people.

17.1 Strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection.

17.10 Promote a global non-discriminatory, equitable, multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Table 3: Interdependencies between SDG 16 and the other SDGs



Research indicates that accountable, transparent institutions increase the poverty-reduction effects of GDP growth by enabling economic, property and other rights, including respect for contracts, which, in turn, provides security and predictability in government decision-making (Allen et al., 2022).



The achievement of SDG 2 is related to peace, political stability, just and inclusive societies and strong institutions (effective accountable and inclusive). Hunger and food insecurity can be a cause of political instability, conflict and war, but can also be the result of such activities, while strong governmental institutions need to support SDG 2 initiatives at all levels (Mollier et al., 2017).

	<p>Increasing accountability is expected to be associated with improved health system performance and to enable increased access to healthcare (Allen et al., 2022).</p>
	<p>Two targets of SDG 16 are directly related to education, namely 16.10, which relates to public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms, and 16a, which relates to building capacity at all levels (Lawrence et al., 2020).</p>
	<p>Participation of women on equal terms with men at all levels of decision-making and political involvement is essential to achieve equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy and the inclusion of the perspectives and experiences of women in decision-making processes (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019).</p>
	<p>Social participation and accountability is expected to contribute to and facilitate durable universal access to water and sanitation services specifically for vulnerable populations (Allen et al., 2022).</p>
	<p>Corruption risks undermine the transition to clean energy in various ways, i.e. by hindering good business practices, which makes it more expensive to operate and reduces competition. Powerful lobbying groups may actively work behind the scenes to <u>hamper the transition</u> (Westmore, 2022).</p>
	<p>Effective and transparent institutions are key to creating an enabling environment for investment, job creation and economic development (United Nations, n.d.).</p>
	<p>Infrastructure development is essential for establishing strong and resilient institutions, ensuring access to justice and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (Brandli et al., 2024).</p>
	<p>It can be anticipated that inequality is less persistent in countries with inclusive institutions, and that social policy instruments and social spending are more effective in countries with inclusive institutions (Allen et al., 2022).</p>
	<p>Rapid urbanisation in developing countries necessitates that urban planning should consider implications for poverty reduction (SDG 1), international partnerships (SDG 17) and peace and justice systems (SDG 16), besides their global environmental impact (Laumann et al., 2022).</p>
	<p>Without good governance, resources can be mismanaged and responsible production and consumption compromised, leading to overexploitation, environmental degradation and social inequalities (Tacconi & Williams, 2020).</p>
	<p>Climate change can exacerbate resource scarcity, which can trigger conflict and instability. Strong institutions and mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution are necessary to mitigate such conflicts (Bedasa & Deksis, 2024).</p>



Successful ocean governance relies on effective, accountable and transparent institutions and representative decision-making and can help to establish peace, justice and strong institutions in the ocean realm (Linner et al., 2023).



Many conflicts, ranging from international to regional to community level, are intensified through environmental degradation and/or disputes over natural resources, but in turn can have a multitude of causes (Obrecht et al., 2021).



Peace and stability are necessary for fostering global partnerships. In conflict-affected regions, instability can disrupt international collaboration, limit investment and hinder progress towards development goals.

Supplementary resources

- Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies (2019). *The roadmap for peaceful, just and inclusive societies: A call to action to change our world*, p. 14. <https://www.sdg16.plus/roadmap>
- TAP Network. (2021). *SDG 16+ indicators guide*. <https://www.sdg16toolkit.org/guides/sdg16-indicators-guide/#:~:text=The%20priority%20indicators%20and%20recommendations%20and%20corresponding%20metadata%20for%20SDG>

2.3 Advantages of SDG 16

Working towards achieving the targets of SDG 16 has several advantages focused on fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. These advantages are summarised in Table 4 (United Nations, 2024).

A primary advantage of SDG 16 concerns the reduction of violence, which is essential for creating safe and stable communities (Colvin, 2022). This implies that the root causes of violence, including poverty and inequality, have to be addressed. The advantage of this is that working towards the achievement of SDG 16 helps to ensure that individuals can live without fear, which is fundamental for social and economic development. Additionally, SDG 16 emphasises the importance of access to justice for all, which is advantageous

for the protection of individual rights and to assist with dispute resolution, thereby contributing to prevent marginalisation of vulnerable people and groups (Van Houten & Edgar, 2023). Building strong, effective and transparent institutions is another advantage of SDG 16, since institutions with these characteristics build trust in public systems and contribute to efficient service delivery (Singh & Singh, 2024). An associated advantage lies in combating corruption and bribery, thus leading to a fairer society and ensuring effective use of public resources. Inclusive decision-making processes are also promoted under SDG 16, with the advantage of ensuring that all voices are heard and that policies are equitable and effective, through which social cohesion and trust in governance is fostered (Gupta & Vegelin, 2023). Lastly, the protection of human rights is a fundamental aspect of SDG 16, ensuring that all individuals can live with dignity and freedom, which is essential for sustainable development (Allen et al., 2022). By upholding rights such as freedom of expression and access to information, SDG 16 lays the groundwork for a just and peaceful society. Overall, the advantages of SDG 16 are interconnected and collectively contribute to creating a world where peace, justice and strong institutions prevail, enabling sustainable development for all.

Table 4: Summary of advantages associated with SDG 16

Advantage	Short description
Reduction in violence and crime	Implementing SDG 16 helps to reduce violence, crime and conflict through promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.
Access to justice for all	Ensuring equal access to justice for all individuals helps to protect human rights and to ensure fairness.
Strengthened institutions	Developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions enhances governance and public trust.
Inclusive decision-making	Promoting responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making ensures that all voices are heard, thus leading to more equitable policies.
Protection of fundamental freedoms	Ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms supports democracy and human rights.
Conflict prevention and resolution	Strengthening the rule of law and promoting non-discriminatory laws and policies help to prevent conflicts and support post-conflict reconstruction.

Source: United Nations (2024)

Supplementary resources

- Colvin, N. (2022). *Implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16: Promoting peace and ending violence*. Issue Brief for the Economic and Social Council Old Dominion University.
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nathan-Colvin/publication/368780894_Implementing_Sustainable_Development_Goal_16_Promoting_Peace_and_Ending_Violence/links/63f956a157495059453ea7b6/Implementing-Sustainable-Development-Goal-16-Promoting-Peace-and-Ending-Violence.pdf
- Gupta, J., & Vegelin, C. (2023). Inclusive development, leaving no one behind, justice and the Sustainable Development Goals. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 23(2), 115-121.
- Pathak, A., & Baibourtian, A. (2024). *The economics of peace: Exploring the interplay between economic stability, conflict resolution and global prosperity*.
<https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/economics-of-peace-interplay-between-stability-conflict-resolution-global-prosperity#:~:text=The%20global%20nature%20of%20contemporary%20challenges%20makes%20international%20collaboration%20fundamental>

2.4 Challenges in the implementation of SDG 16

Despite improved capacity development over several decades, inadequate capacity still hampers SDG 16 in many countries. Hope (2020) explains that this contributes to the overall weakness of institutions, their inability to implement policies and programmes, either in total or in a timely manner, and to influence progress in meeting SDG 16. The insufficient training of judicial officers or their insufficient numbers is an example. This results in the justice system failing through delays in investigation of cases, high rates of unsentenced prisoners and an environment conducive to bribery and corruption. In addition to lacking human resource capacity, many countries also experience a lack of capacity at physical institutional level. In many cases this is linked to deficient information

technology and systems. This means that many tasks are still conducted manually, which is time-consuming and contributes to inefficiency, ultimately hampering the effectiveness of institutions in delivering SDG 16.

While data, and specifically good quality data, is essential for the planning, funding and evaluation of sustainable development activities, the data that is available in many countries, especially in Africa and Asia, does not comply with this requirement. This presents a major constraint to achieving development goals and improving socio-economic conditions, since solutions to social and economic problems rely largely on statistics. Without knowing how many children there are and how they are regionally distributed, a country will not be able to effectively end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children (target 16.2). Further complications in terms of data result from laws on access to information that have not always been implemented effectively. These issues in terms of data, and especially the lack of data, mean that although a clear link between SDG 16 and the other SDGs can be conceptualised, this link cannot be confirmed empirically.

Although service delivery is one of the key elements to ensure the effective implementation of sustainable development, inadequate service delivery continues to occur in many countries across the world – especially in developing countries. A key factor influencing the inadequacy of service delivery is the lack of accountability mechanisms in public institutions leading to a cycle of poor performance and increased risk of collapse of public services. The implications of poor service delivery are that the citizenry are robbed of their fundamental rights to efficiently access public goods and services. It also implies, for instance, that governments would not be able to appropriately ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements, or significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

Insufficient financing is a further challenge hampering the implementation of SDG 16. The significant resource implications to meet the requirements for implementing SDG 16

become clear when considering, for example, that violence and conflict had the effect of almost 70.8 million individuals being forcibly displaced worldwide by 2018, with the global economic impact of violence and conflict at that stage estimated at equivalent to 11.2% of global GDP (IEP, 2019a). Similarly, significant financial impacts are associated with aspects related to SDG 16, such as child marriage and bribery (Hope, 2020). Most developing countries are financially constrained as a result of their lower level development and the reality is that they do not have access to sufficient financial capital to engage in public or private investment to cover the costs to achieve the targets of SDG 16.

Lastly, the lack of political will and leadership constitute a major obstacle to the achievement of SDG 16. Hope (2020), for example, shows that in Africa and Asia the lack of political will and leadership is a major factor influencing (1) the uneven promotion of the rule of law at national and international level and ensuring equal access to justice for all; (2) the insignificant reduction in illicit financial and arms flows, or any strengthening of the recovery and return of stolen assets and combating of all forms of organised crime; (3) any substantial reduction in corruption and bribery in all their forms; and (4) the erosion of civil society participation for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making and observance of human rights. Civil society organisations (CSOs), in particular, are under threat across the world. This has a pervasive impact on the realisation of SDG 16, especially when coupled with the various forms of undermining and erosion of democratic institutions being observed, and negatively affecting electoral processes.

Table 5: Examples of specific challenges in achieving SDG 16, and actions required to overcome them

Specific challenge	Required actions
Inadequate capacity	Rectify things such as an insufficient pool of qualified human resources and dysfunctional organisation structures, through a range of interventions, including but not limited to training.

Inadequate data	Better funding of national data collection efforts and enhancement of the capacity and autonomy of national statistics bureaus is required. Data also needs to be freely shared and made available across all available platforms, including printed and electronic means.
Inadequate service delivery	More effective engagement with local communities and greater efforts in working with and through decentralised and local governance structures.
Insufficient financing	Governments, international financial institutions and private financial markets should direct adequate flows of resources into sustainable investment and also take steps to reduce the flow of resources into unsustainable uses.
Lack of political will and leadership	What is therefore required is the emergence of transformational leadership. In this framework, the role of civil society looms large for holding the local political leadership to account on its commitments to peace and security.

Source: Hope (2020)

Supplementary resource

- Hope, K. R. (Sr.) (2020). Peace, justice and inclusive institutions: Overcoming challenges to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 32(1), 57-77.

Examples of assessment questions

2.1 Defining SDG 16 – introduction

- What are the main groups in which the targets of SDG 16 can be divided?
- List the targets belonging to each of these main groups.

2.2 Significance of SDG 16

- Explain the contribution of SDG 16 as an enabler of the entire Agenda 2030.
- Briefly explain the interrelationship between peace and sustainable development.
- What is the status of the progress in achieving SDG 16 by 2030?
- Briefly explain the comprehensive scope and importance of SDG 16 with reference to three main thematic areas covered by this SDG.

2.3 Interdependencies of SDG 16

- Select any three SDGs and briefly explain how they interact with SDG 16. Use examples from your region/country to illustrate your explanation.
- How is SDG 16 interconnected with the other SDGs? What other SDGs do you think will be most directly affected if SDG 16 is not achieved?

2.4 Advantages of SDG 16

- What will the main advantages be for the world if the goal to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all can be achieved?
- Select any two of the targets of SDG 16 and explain the specific advantages which will result with these targets being achieved. Link these to advantages for your specific region/country.

2.5 Challenges in the implementation of SDG 16

- What are the main weaknesses of SDG 16 and how are they creating challenges for the implementation of this SDG?
- Explain how the interdependencies of SDG 16 with all the other SDGs are a challenge to the achievement of SDG 16. Select two SDGs to use as examples to illustrate your answer.
- What are the difficulties in implementing SDG 16 in your region/country? Which are the main barriers? How can they be overcome?

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3. Overview of various crises that have a negative impact on the achievement of SDG 16

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to

- identify the major crises that have a negative impact on the achievement of SDG 16
- explain how the major crises prevent the achievement of SDG 16
- describe how the impact of current crises on the achievement of SDG 16 differs regionally

SDG 16 can only be achieved through strong political leadership from governments and societies (Hearn, 2016). Since SDG 16 links with almost every other SDG, the aim of leaving no one behind will require the international community to keep its commitment to the poorest and most conflict-affected countries (Hearn, 2016). SDG 16 goes beyond sustainable peace and includes government accountability, effectiveness, inclusivity and building trust (Hope, 2020). The measurement of SDG 16 is therefore important and will lead to a better understanding of the relationship between governance, peace, security and development (Bolaji-Adio, 2015). Due to the linkages with all other SDGs, progress on SDG 16 is critical to progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and countries must attempt to overcome challenges related to SDG 16 in order to meet the targets of other SDGs (Hope, 2020). Overwhelming evidence suggests that insecurity and conflict are major developmental challenges and can set back previous objectives achieved (Hope, 2020). High levels of violence greatly affect economic development by reducing economic investments that affect poverty, economic development, life expectancy and education outcomes (Hope, 2020; Zhao et al., 2022).

Supplementary resources

- Hope, K. R. Sr. (2020). Peace, justice and inclusive institutions: Overcoming challenges to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 32(1), 57–77. doi: 10.1080/14781158.2019.1667320.
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3.1 Climate change

Climate change impacts the achievement of SDG 16 significantly. It increases the conflict and instability in a country or region as it is a threat multiplier that increases the existing social, economic and political tensions. For example, in areas where there are limited resources or scarcity such as water or arable land, conflict will likely increase in areas that are prone to instability (IISD, 2019). Extreme weather patterns and events also result in the displacement and migration of population, and this can result in the overuse of resources within the host community, causing tension within the population (IISD, 2019). Climate change can also place more pressure on governments' capacity to provide essential services and, by default, to maintain law and order (Halsnæs, et al., 2024). Thus, natural disasters often overwhelm public institutions and make it difficult to uphold justice and peace (United Nations, 2021). The economic impact of climate change ranges from damage to infrastructure and related loss of livelihoods and this increases poverty and inequality and thus the potential to trigger social unrest and weaken the rule of law (Desmet & Rossi-Hansberg, 2024). Climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, exacerbating inequalities and making it harder to achieve justice for all, as fair access to resources and justice is made very challenging by climate-induced disruptions.

Supplementary resources

IISD. (2019). *SDG Knowledge Weekly: Climate action, governance, and national and*

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3.1.1 Impact of climate change in Africa

Climate change has negatively impacted the achievement of many of the SDGs. However, the direct and indirect impact of climate change on the continent's ability to focus on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing justice for all and building effective and accountable institutions is of such a nature that Africa will battle to achieve SDG 16 by 2030 (John, 2024). The continent is vast and, in many ways, homogenic, but in other ways regionally very different and thus an explanation of how climate change has negatively impacted on the achievement of SDG 16 is best given by using specific examples.

Sambo and Sule (2024) document that climate change is the reason for the lowering water levels in Lake Chad, resulting in significant water scarcity. There are four countries in Africa (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria) that are negatively impacted by the shrinking water levels of Lake Chad, and this has significantly increased the conflict and human displacement in the region. One of the main results of the reduction in water of the lake is an increase in food insecurity and this has led to increased potential of the disruption of the social order, making it difficult for the governments in the region to maintain law and order. This negatively impacts the achievement of SDG 16 in the region (Nagarajan et al., 2024).

Climate change in Africa has led to the weakening of institutions. In 2019, Cyclone Idai caused catastrophic flooding in Mozambique, displacing hundreds of thousands of people and overwhelming the government's capacity to respond. The disaster strained emergency services, disrupted infrastructure and led to a breakdown in law and order as

resources were diverted to immediate relief efforts (Matseketsa et al., 2024). The prolonged droughts in Somalia have led to severe water and food shortages, exacerbating conflicts over scarce resources. The government's limited capacity to manage these crises has resulted in increased violence and displacement, further destabilising the region (Behrmann & Elin, 2024).

The primary source of livelihood in Africa is agriculture, and the impact of climate change is thus severe on the continent. A reduction in agricultural productivity due to droughts or flooding increasingly leads to economic instability, which in turn increases poverty and the potential for social unrest (Voegele, 2021). Niger has experienced both severe droughts and floods, which have disrupted agricultural production. This has led to food shortages and increased poverty levels, particularly in rural areas, and the resultant economic instability has the potential to induce social unrest.

Climate change patterns have led to the spread of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, and this has placed a burden on health services that are already battling to provide the minimum and essential services to deal with these diseases (Kaseya et al., 2024). Climate-induced displacement forces people to migrate to urban areas, often leading to overcrowded cities with inadequate infrastructure. This can increase crime rates and strain public services, challenging the achievement of peaceful and inclusive societies (Poddar, 2024).

Supplementary resources

- John, M. (2024). Climate change, food insecurity, peace and sustainable development in East Africa: Case study of South Sudan, Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya. In J.C.K. Kiyala, & N. Chivasa (Eds.), *Climate change and socio-political violence in sub-Saharan Africa in the Anthropocene: Perspectives from peace ecology and sustainable development* (pp. 141-165). Springer Nature Switzerland.
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3.1.2 Impact of climate change in Latin America

The varied impacts of climate change, including increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, highlight the urgency of addressing this crisis and the associated social impacts that become more evident. While climate change is not a direct cause of conflict, it can amplify pre-existing social, economic and political tensions, heightening the risk of violence and instability (Whitaker et al., 2025). Similarly, conflict can obstruct efforts to combat climate change by worsening environmental threats, limiting financial resources and compromising the success of climate initiatives.

In Latin America, where socio-political instability, inequality and governance challenges are prevalent, climate-induced disruptions exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events and environmental degradation intensify resource scarcity, particularly in water and arable land, leading to increased competition and social tensions. These pressures are especially pronounced in rural and marginalised communities, where reliance on natural resources is high and adaptive capacity is limited. Consequently, climate change acts as a threat multiplier and leads to more conflicts, undermining efforts to foster stable governance structures.

In 2024, Southern Brazil was hit by its worst flood in over 80 years. The floods affected nearly 2.4 million people, resulting in 183 deaths, 27 missing persons and widespread damage across 478 municipalities in the state. The recovery and restoration efforts enabled the resumption of basic services, such as health, education and transportation, in various municipalities, although there was a noticeable decline in capacity in some areas. At the peak of the emergency, nearly 600 000 people were displaced, with over 80 000 sheltering in official facilities across the state, increasing the protection needs of vulnerable groups, including women, girls, young children and the elderly. Amidst this situation, there was a surge in violence, particularly in shelters, where cases of sexual abuse and domestic violence were reported (CNN, 2024). Women and children faced heightened vulnerability, leading to the establishment of dedicated shelters in cities like Canoas and Novo Hamburgo. Additionally, the crisis exacerbated the separation of children from their families, increasing risks of trauma and exploitation. This is a regional example of how extreme weather events can expose deep structural vulnerabilities, highlighting the urgent need for stronger protection measures for at-risk populations.

Similar challenges are observed across the region. Climate-induced migration has increased across the region, with thousands of individuals forced to leave their homes due to hurricanes, floods and prolonged droughts (Batista et al., 2024). This displacement generates socio-political tensions in receiving areas, where public services and infrastructure are often unprepared to accommodate large numbers of migrants. The lack of comprehensive policies addressing climate-induced migration leads to increased marginalisation, poverty and human rights violations, and, in some cases, displaced

populations become vulnerable to recruitment by organised crime groups, worsening violence and insecurity.

Supplementary resource

- World Bank. [n.d.]. *Internal climate migration in Latin America*. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/es/983921522304806221/pdf/124724-BRI-PUBLIC-NEWSERIES-Groundswell-note-PN3.pdf>

3.1.3 Impact of climate change in Europe

Climate change is not only an environmental crisis, but also a governance and institutional challenge that threatens the achievement of SDG 16. The intensification of climate-related disasters, resource scarcity and environmental degradation has placed enormous pressure on European institutions, undermining social stability, eroding public trust and exacerbating existing inequalities (Knez et al., 2022; Tinazzi, 2024). As climate change accelerates, its impact on peace, justice and strong institutions becomes increasingly evident, affecting legal frameworks, governance structures and human rights protections. The failure of institutions to adapt effectively to climate challenges has led to widespread concerns over transparency, accountability and institutional resilience.

One of the most significant governance challenges posed by climate change is climate-induced displacement (Poddar, 2024). Rising sea levels, droughts and extreme weather events have forced populations to migrate, increasing demands on legal and political systems. Figure 2 shows heat extremes in Europe over the years. The size of a circle is proportional to the area affected by the corresponding heatwave, ranked as more severe by darker colours.

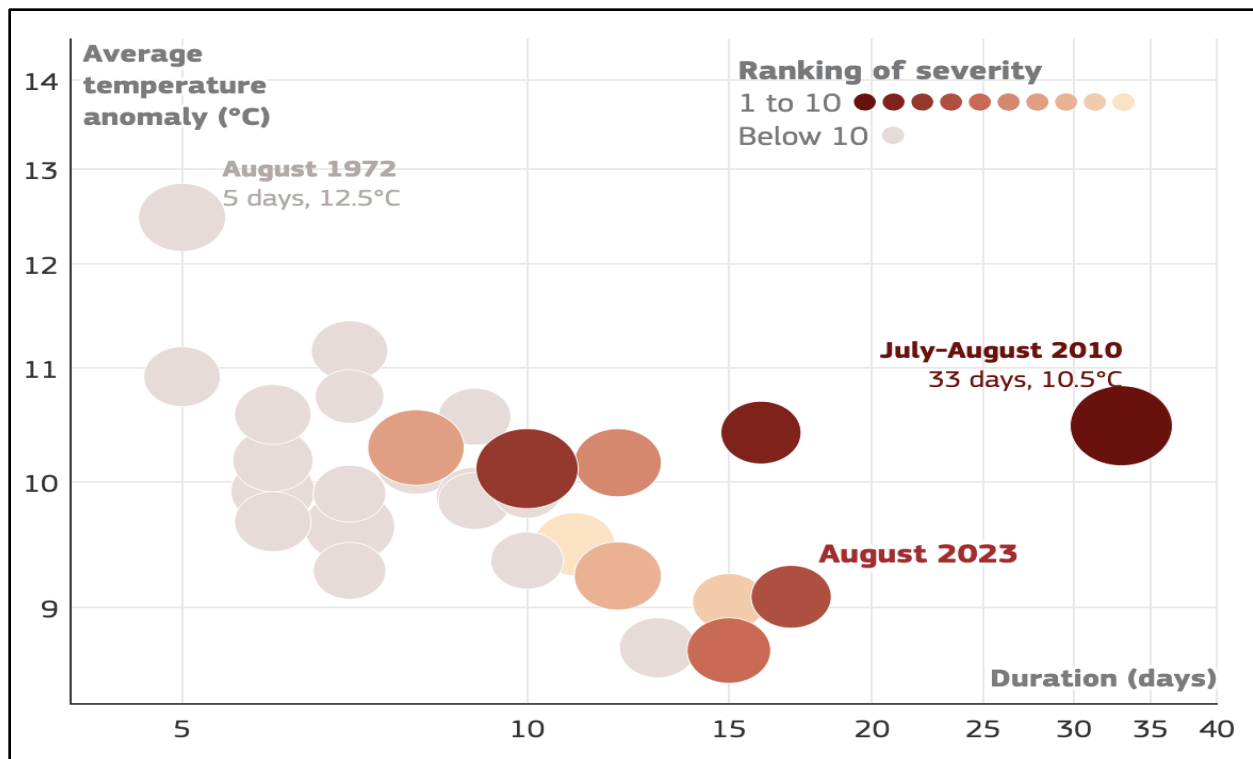


Figure 2: Top 30 severe heatwaves in Europe (1950 – 2023)

Source: DWD (2024)

In Spain, prolonged droughts in Andalusia have led to severe water shortages (Espinosa-Tasón et al., 2022), forcing rural populations to relocate to urban centres such as Seville and Madrid. The influx of climate migrants has created legal disputes over land rights, increased pressure on municipal resources and heightened socio-economic inequalities. Similarly, in Venice, Italy, recurrent flooding has made some parts of the city uninhabitable, leading to growing demands for government intervention. However, mismanagement of flood control projects, such as the MOSE barrier system, has eroded public trust in local institutions, highlighting target 16.6 (effective, accountable institutions).

Climate change has also contributed to the rise of environmental crimes, which thrive in regions where governance is weak (Lynch & Long, 2022). In Greece, wildfires—exacerbated by higher temperatures and prolonged droughts—have been linked to illegal land speculation. Arsonists deliberately set fires in protected areas, exploiting legal

loopholes to reclassify burnt land for real estate development. The Greek government has struggled to enforce anti-corruption measures, revealing weaknesses in law enforcement and regulatory oversight. This issue directly impacts target 16.5 (reduce corruption and bribery in all forms), as organised crime groups take advantage of environmental degradation to pursue financial gains at the expense of sustainability. Likewise, in Sicily, Italy, the Mafia has profited from water scarcity by illegally controlling access to reservoirs and charging inflated prices to local communities. These activities not only undermine public confidence in governance, but also reinforce economic and social inequalities.

The effectiveness of disaster preparedness and emergency response mechanisms is a critical component of institutional resilience in the face of climate change (Tariq et al., 2021). However, the increasing frequency of extreme weather events has exposed significant gaps in institutional readiness. The 2021 floods in Germany's Ahr Valley, which resulted in nearly 200 deaths, demonstrated the failure of local authorities to act on early warning signals. Investigations revealed that government agencies had received flood alerts but failed to coordinate a timely evacuation, leading to unnecessary loss of life (Rhein & Kreibich, 2025; Wüthrich et al., 2025; Zenker et al., 2024).

The inability of institutions to implement effective crisis response measures weakens public confidence and raises concerns about target 16.6 (developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels). Similarly, in France, extreme heatwaves have disproportionately affected elderly and low-income populations, exposing inequalities in access to cooling infrastructure and healthcare services (Grislain-Letrémy et al., 2024). Civil society groups have filed lawsuits against local governments, arguing that authorities failed to implement adequate adaptation measures, demonstrating the intersection between climate governance and legal accountability.

Public access to information and environmental transparency is another major issue linked to climate change (Caputo et al., 2021; Skea et al., 2021). In several European countries, governments have been criticised for downplaying or withholding critical

climate data, limiting the public’s ability to hold institutions accountable. In Poland, coal-dependent industries have lobbied against climate regulations, influencing policy-makers and restricting access to pollution-related health data. This lack of transparency threatens target 16.10 (ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms) by preventing citizens from making informed decisions about their environment and public health. Similarly, in Hungary, climate activists and environmental organisations have faced legal restrictions that limit their ability to advocate stronger policies, reducing civic participation in environmental governance.

Climate-related security risks also pose significant threats to institutional stability (Bremberg et al., 2022). The European Union has identified climate change as a “threat multiplier”, exacerbating tensions over resource allocation, migration and national security. In the Netherlands, disputes over water management have sparked political debates about the government’s responsibility to balance agricultural, industrial and residential water use. Farmers have protested against stricter water regulations, arguing that climate policies unfairly target the agricultural sector, leading to heightened political polarisation. This conflict reflects broader challenges related to target 16.7 (ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels), as governments struggle to balance competing interests while maintaining social cohesion. Table 6 presents climate impacts, institutional challenges and European examples in this context.

Table 6: Climate impact, institutional challenge and European examples

Climate impact	Institutional challenge	European examples
Climate-induced displacement	Restriction of environmental data, policy influence by industry	Spain (Andalusia) Italy (Venice)
Environmental crime	Corruption, illegal land use, organised crime	Greece (wildfires) Italy (water mafia)
Emergency response	Weak crisis management,	Germany (Ahr Valley

failures	loss of public trust	floods) France (heatwaves)
Lack of transparency	Restriction of environmental data, policy influence by industry	Poland (coal industry) Hungary (climate activism restrictions)
Resource conflicts	Political tensions, protests against regulations	Netherlands (water disputes) France (agriculture policies)

Addressing the impact of climate change on SDG 16 requires urgent reforms to strengthen legal frameworks, improve transparency and foster inclusive governance. Without these efforts, climate-related crises will continue to undermine peace, justice and strong institutions, hindering long-term sustainable development. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed vulnerabilities in Europe's governance systems. As we explore its impact, we will examine how the pandemic has disrupted legal frameworks, eroded democratic rights and deepened institutional challenges, emphasising the need for coordinated action to safeguard the foundations of SDG 16 in Europe.

Supplementary resources

- Ballester, J., Quijal-Zamorano, M., Méndez Turrubiates, R. F., Pegenaute, F., Herrmann, F. R., Robine, J. M., Basagaña, X., Tonne, C., Antó, J. M., & Achebak, H. (2023). Heat-related mortality in Europe during the summer of 2022. *Nature Medicine*, 29(7), 1857–1866. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-023-02419-z>
- Castro-Melgar, I., Tsagkou, A., Zacharopoulou, M., Basiou, E., Athinelis, I., Katris, E.-A., Kalavrezou, I.-E., & Parcharidis, I. (2025). Wildfires during early summer in Greece (2024): Burn severity and land use dynamics through Sentinel-2 data. *Forests*, 16(2), 268. <https://doi.org/10.3390/f16020268>

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- Van Daalen, K. R., Romanello, M., Rocklöv, J., Semenza, J. C., Tonne, C., Markandya, A., ... Lowe, R. (2022). The 2022 Europe report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: Towards a climate resilient future. *The Lancet Public Health*, 7(11), e942–e965.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(22\)00197-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(22)00197-9)

3.2 COVID-19 pandemic

The global COVID-19 pandemic was a major challenge to the impact on delivery linked to peace, justice and sound governance, generating a great deal of uncertainty precisely when and where more effort should be focused on strategic plans to achieve the related targets and indicators. The pandemic made it readily apparent how closely connected governance and SDG 16's concerns regarding justice, peace and inclusive institutions are to the other SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. These include guaranteeing inclusive quality and efficient service delivery, facilitating equitable access to health and education services, addressing concerns about integrity and corruption in procurement in the public sector and establishing safeguards to protect human rights and the rule of law. The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted or slowed down advancements in inclusive government, increased domestic and gender violence, reduced the rule of law and equal access to justice for all, and peaceful societies. These challenges undermined efforts toward achieving SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). COVID-19's direct and indirect effects on the achievement of peace, justice and strong institutions by 2030 differ throughout the globe, with sub-Saharan Africa, Central and Southern Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean witnessing the worst of the crisis (UNDP, UNODC & OHCHR, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed just how deeply rooted the many problems are in our society. It also highlighted the need for more

resilient and equitable healthcare systems and strengthened efforts toward achieving SDG 3 (good health and well-being). However, the pandemic also exposed the profound abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children, as well as broadening and weakening the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance (EIU, 2021). The existing challenges to peace, justice and inclusion have been both exposed and magnified by the impact of the pandemic. The pandemic hampered the functioning of public institutions at all levels.

The pandemic revealed how fragile the global community is. The year 2020 was intended to be the starting point of the Decade of Action for implementing the 2030 Agenda. At this crucial juncture in history, when human development was predicted to fall in 2021 for the first time since 1990, reversing progress toward SDG 16 could undo years of hard-won accomplishments in the fight to leave no one behind (Hale et al., 2020). SDG 16, however, is one of the 2030 Agenda's primary facilitators. This idea is fundamental to establishing a society that upholds the rule of law, justice and human rights, as well as good institutions. It also shapes the social compact that unites individuals and institutions. However, COVID-19 impeded the advancement of the 2030 Agenda for good governance and the rule of law.

Supplementary resources

- EIU (Economist Intelligence Unit). (2021). *Responding to the economic and business impacts of COVID-19*. <https://www.eiu.com/n/novel-CORONAVIRUS-outbreak> [Accessed 19 September 2024].
- Hale, T., Angrist, N., Cameron-Blake, E., Hallas, L., Kira, B., Majumdar, S., ... & Webster, S. (2020). *Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker*. Blavatnik School of Government.
- UNDP, UNODC and OHCHR. (2024). *Global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators. At the crossroads: Breakdown or breakthrough for peace, justice and strong institutions*. <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-africa>

- UNESCO. (2024). *Peace education in the 21st century: An essential strategy for building lasting peace*. UNESCO.

3.2.1 Impact of COVID-19 in Africa

In addition to the already devastating effects of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to have a major and devastating impact on the achievement of SDG 16 in Africa. The pandemic exacerbated the situation by weakening the democratic and rule of law principles enshrined in SDG 16. It also brought to light vulnerabilities in governance, such as a constricted civic space, a deterioration of public trust, violence against women, attacks on free and independent media, corruption and violations of human rights of millions of people across Africa (World Bank, 2021; Yuan et al., 2023).

COVID-19 intensified multiple challenges that hindered advancements in the various targets of SDG 16 in the African region, obstructing overall development on the 2030 Agenda. The COVID-19 crisis had a substantial detrimental impact on political and socio-economic conditions, and caused major obstacles to the continent of Africa's efforts toward achieving justice, peace and inclusive and functional institutions.

The following are some of the ways that COVID-19 affected SDG 16 in Africa:

- In sub-Saharan Africa, lockdown protocols imposed by COVID-19 crises exacerbated pre-pandemic authoritarian tendencies that have been utilised to suppress dissent, attack media outlets and human rights advocates and weaken institutions of supervision, such as the legislative branch, the judiciary and national human rights organisations. While it is the duty of governments to utilise their authority to control a global outbreak, there was worry throughout African countries that some states abused their ability to employ emergency legislation to forcibly seal off public areas. Enforcement of lockdowns and curfews sometimes led to human rights abuses. In Uganda, there were instances of excessive force used by security forces to enforce COVID-19 measures, resulting in injuries and deaths

(Mutapi, 2021). Such actions eroded public trust in law enforcement and government institutions.

- During the COVID-19 outbreak, lawmakers exploited social marginalisation as an electoral weapon. Unequal reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic led to a rise in social exclusion and inequality. This is partly because certain communities have been disproportionately affected by policy actions that have deprived them of their rights. This involves facilitating corruption at all levels and encouraging political fragmentation, as well as disparities in access to social security programmes and other social services. The pandemic provided opportunities for *corruption* and *mismanagement* of resources. In Kenya, there were reports of misappropriation of COVID-19 funds and supplies, undermining trust in public institutions (United Nations, 2020). This corruption hindered effective responses to the pandemic and diverted resources away from critical needs.
- The pandemic's aftermath was particularly tough on women. The crises resulted in an upsurge in gender-based violence in Africa. The judicial systems found it difficult to give victims of this crime the access they needed to legal services, and pandemic constraints also made it more difficult for victims to receive complete social care. The pandemic highlighted and worsened existing inequalities. Marginalised groups, including refugees and internally displaced persons, faced greater challenges in accessing healthcare and social services. In camps in Kenya and Uganda, overcrowding and limited resources made it difficult to implement effective COVID-19 prevention measures (United Nations, 2020).
- The COVID-19 pandemic eroded the framework of democracy, reduced freedom of movement, restricted fundamental liberties, compromised transparency and ethics and raised potential for illicit activities and corruption throughout sub-Saharan Africa.
- Many African countries experienced delays in judicial processes due to COVID-19 restrictions. Courts were closed or operated at reduced capacity, leading to a backlog of cases. In South Africa, the suspension of court activities delayed justice for many, particularly affecting vulnerable populations (Mutapi, 2021). In some sub-Saharan African countries, such as Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya, virtual court

procedures were used to resolve legal matters (Fagbemi, 2021). However, there were worries that in situations where there may be notable learning gaps for particular groups and where access to virtual hearings may not be equal for all, virtual discussions could have had a detrimental effect on the standard of justice provided. SDG 16.1 (reduce all forms of violence), SDG 16.3 (rule of law and access to justice for all) and SDG 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making) were all affected by these changes in general.

- COVID-19 had an impact on election procedures. Only a few of the more than 20 African nations that were scheduled to hold elections in 2020 actually did so; several local and national elections were postponed (Ncube & Chirwa, 2023). Political and strategic reasons led to the holding or postponement of some elections and referendums in order to favour results that benefited the ruling class. Protests and low voter turnout characterised the majority of the elections.
- The pandemic exacerbated existing *conflicts* and led to new tensions in several regions. For example, the lockdown in Nigeria resulted in increased economic hardships and this led to intensified clashes between farmers and Herders (Min, 2021). In Ethiopia, the conflict in the Tigray region worsened during the pandemic, with reports of increased violence against civilians (Min, 2021).

These are some of the ways in which COVID-19 hit SDG 16 in Africa. However, there are also opportunities for addressing these issues through recovery efforts that can build back better and greener by investing in resilient and inclusive systems for healthcare, education, social protection, energy, infrastructure, governance and peace. These policies discuss trends on peace, justice and strong institutions across Africa regions in the context of COVID-19 and give significant policy recommendations for improving progress on SDG 16. Rebuilding social cohesion, bolstering public trust and enhancing institutional and governmental responsiveness are essential components of the pandemic recovery process.

Supplementary resources

- World Bank. (2021). *COVID-19 in Eastern and Southern Africa: Four hurdles to recovery in the race to protect the region's poorest*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2021/03/23/covid-19-in-eastern-and-Gsouthern-africa-four-hurdles-to-recovery-in-the-race-to-protect-the-region-s-poorest>
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- Min, Y. (2021). *How COVID-19 has impacted the SDGs in Africa: 2021 SDGs report finds some remarkable progress, but the pandemic has hit hard*. United Nations General Assembly, 79th Session. New York. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2021/how-covid-19-has-impacted-sdgs-africa>.
- Mutapi, F. (2021). *How has COVID-19 hit Africa? Here's what the data tells us*. World Economic Forum. [What impact has COVID-19 had across Africa? | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/articles/economy/what-impact-has-covid-19-had-across-africa/) .
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3.2.2 Impact of COVID-19 in Latin America

Most Latin American countries were affected severely by the COVID-19 crisis in a context of low growth potential, high inequalities and growing social discontent (OECD, 2020). Smaller companies – which represent over 50% of the jobs in the region – suffered the highest economic impact, and a worrying share of workers did not receive access to any type of social protection measure. The lockdowns and economic downturns led to rising unemployment and poverty, increasing social unrest and crime rates, particularly in countries with pre-existing security challenges. Organised crime and drug cartels expanded their influence (International Crisis Group, 2023).

During the pandemic, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced the longest interruption of face-to-face classes among the regions, increasing the gap in learning opportunities and skills development. This also contributed to the increase in vulnerability and more groups being involved in crime and violence. National reports also mention the repercussions of the pandemic on gender-based violence (ECLAC, 2024).

Supplementary resource

UNODC. (2021). *The impact of COVID-19 on organized crime*.
https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/covid/RB_COVID_organized_crime_july13_web.pdf

3.2.3 Impact of COVID-19 in Europe

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted Europe's efforts towards achieving SDG 16. The crisis not only disrupted everyday life, but also exposed vulnerabilities in governance, justice systems and institutional frameworks across the continent.

One of the most visible impacts was on access to justice (target 16.3), as courts across Europe faced severe delays due to the pandemic (Sanders, 2021). Many legal proceedings were postponed or moved online, causing significant backlogs in the judicial system. Countries such as Italy and Spain struggled to maintain their judicial functions, with delays impacting individuals' right to timely legal recourse. This disruption highlighted

the need for judicial systems to be more adaptable and resilient in times of crisis, and the potential of technology to support more efficient, remote legal processes.

The pandemic also put a strain on governance and transparency (target 16.6), especially regarding how governments managed the crisis. In some European countries, the swift implementation of emergency powers led to concerns over democratic backsliding, as governments increased their control without adequate oversight. The pandemic underscored the importance of transparent governance that is both resilient in the face of crisis and accountable to the public (Judi & Kurniawan, 2024; Wardman, 2022). However, it also fostered the adoption of new governance tools, such as digital platforms, to increase public engagement and information sharing in real time, helping to rebuild trust.

On the front of institutional resilience (targets 16.7 and 16.8), the pandemic exposed the weaknesses of many public institutions across Europe. Health systems in countries such as Italy, Spain and the UK were overwhelmed, which strained government efforts to ensure citizens' well-being. Figure 3 suggests that reported COVID-19 deaths across Europe are likely an underestimate, especially during the first two major waves of the pandemic in 2020. During these waves, the number of excess deaths — those exceeding what would typically be expected — was almost double the official count of COVID-19 deaths.

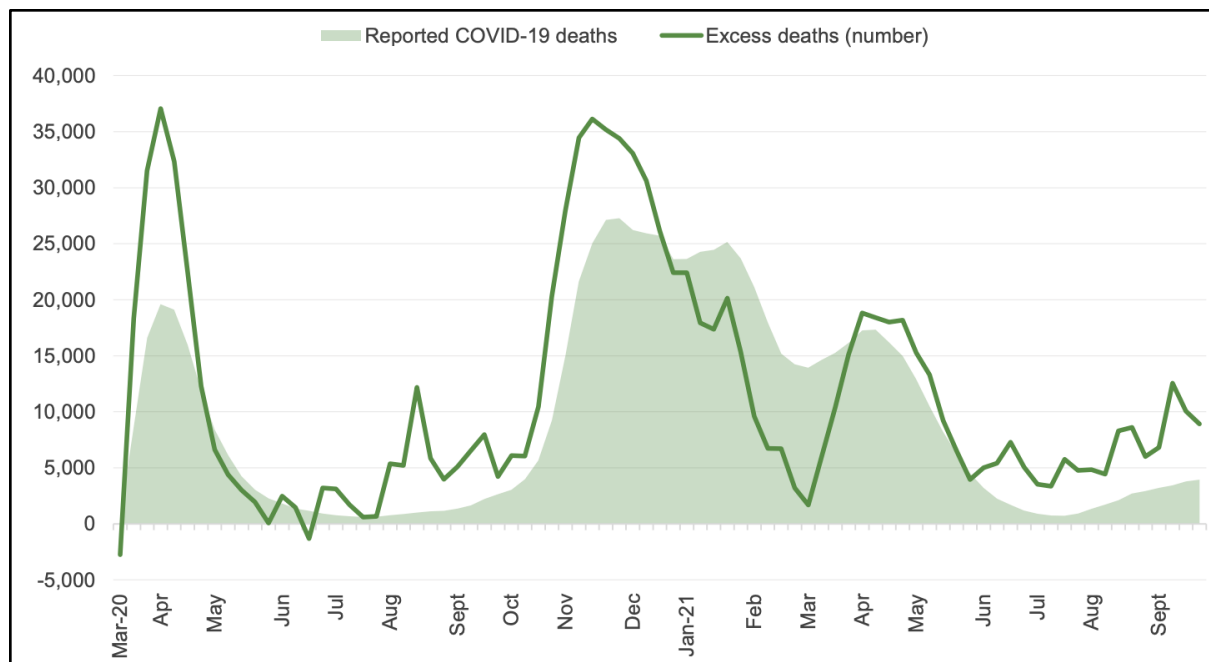


Figure 3: Reported COVID-19 deaths and excess deaths in the EU

Source: Eurostat (2021)

The disruption also affected other sectors, such as education and social services, where institutions had to pivot rapidly to digital solutions to maintain operations (Kang, 2021; Klein & Todesco, 2021). This situation revealed the pressing need to strengthen institutional frameworks to ensure that they are adaptable and able to respond effectively to future crises. The pandemic prompted a shift towards strengthening institutional agility, digitalisation and crisis preparedness, which are crucial for enhancing institutional resilience in Europe moving forward.

The social and economic vulnerabilities (target 16.2) exacerbated by the pandemic were particularly pronounced in marginalised communities. Groups such as the elderly, migrants and low-income populations faced heightened risks, including limited access to healthcare and essential services. The pandemic's economic toll also disproportionately affected SMEs and workers in precarious employment, creating a significant challenge for governments aiming to ensure equitable access to social services and justice (Albiston & Fisk, 2021; Mawani et al., 2021). As a result, there has been a push for more inclusive

social policies that guarantee access to basic services for all, particularly during times of crisis. Table 7 presents the areas of impact of COVID-19 in Europe with key insights.

Table 7: Impact of COVID-19 on SDG 16 in Europe

Area of impact	Key insights
Access to justice	Courts faced delays and backlogs, highlighting the need for adaptable, technology-supported judicial systems for timely legal recourse.
Governance and transparency	Emergency powers raised concerns over democratic backsliding, but digital platforms enhanced public engagement and information sharing, rebuilding trust.
Institutional resilience	Health systems and public institutions were overwhelmed, revealing the need to strengthen institutional frameworks for crisis adaptability and digitalisation.
Social vulnerabilities	Marginalised groups faced increased risks and limited access to services, emphasising the need for inclusive social policies to ensure equitable access during crises.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical vulnerabilities in Europe's progress toward SDG 16, exposing gaps in governance, justice and institutional frameworks. While the pandemic disrupted progress, it also provided an opportunity for governments and institutions to rethink their resilience strategies and improve systems for the future (Afrin et al., 2021; Saulnier et al., 2022). Moving forward, Europe will need to integrate these lessons into their governance models, fostering transparency, inclusivity and adaptability to better prepare for future global challenges and ensure the realisation of SDG 16.

Supplementary resources

- Kuhlmann, S., Hellström, M., Ramberg, U., & Reiter, R. (2021). Tracing divergence in crisis governance: Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in France, Germany and Sweden compared. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 87(3), 556–575.
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- Navarro-Román, L., & Román, G. C. (2022). The devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic among ethnic minorities, migrants, and refugees. In M. El Alaoui-Faris, A. Federico, & W. Grisold (Orgs.), *Neurology in migrants and refugees* (pp. 153–163). Springer International.
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<https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2022.2133034>

3.3 Conflict

SDG 16 covers all forms of organised and unorganised violence and abuse at all scales (Katila et al., 2019) and expresses the need for a people-centred agenda (Hearn, 2016). In recent years, a new global challenge to peace has emerged: how to build and sustain peace within societies rather than only peace at global level (Hearn, 2016).

Since progress in other SDGs depends on SDG 16, significant attempts have been made by UN member states, non-governmental organisations, multilateral institutions, donor agencies and academic research institutions to track progress towards reaching SDG 16.

One of the latest examples of the impact of conflict on the implementation of SDGs in Europe is the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict. The conflict between the two countries leads to a ripple effect, impacting inflation rates, global security, food security and global markets beyond the borders of the two countries (Pereira et al., 2022). Africa, a continent rich in natural resources, remains poor, with various countries in conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Watch List, 2024). South America also experiences conflict, for example on the borders of Brazil, Colombia and Peru, where organised crime is putting the ecosystems of the Amazon and populations at serious risk (International Crisis Group, 2024)

Through the implementation of the SDGs, we aim to fight for a prosperous world for all (Pereira et al., 2022), but conflict constrains this aim and puts the achievement of SDGs by 2030 at risk (Zhao et al., 2022). While achieving SDG 16 presents many challenges, progress is still possible. In order to make progress, the development communities need to focus on factors that can impact the speed of progress on governance reform. These factors include political settlement, economic growth, the quality of international assistance, the presence of external incentives and global norms (Whaites, 2016). However, it is emphasised that the achievement of SDG 16 requires a significant change in mindsets and approaches, coupled with global and local actions (Hearn, 2016; Whaites, 2016).

The International Crisis Group has a global conflict tracker keeping timely information on interactions between and within countries that indicate a drift toward violence or instabilities. This map can be viewed at [CrisisWatch Conflict Tracker | Crisis Group](#) and gives a global overview of ongoing conflict situations in the world. With this picture in mind, one has to take cognisance of the fact that global and local peace forms the base for achieving the SDGs and is needed for the world's future (Pereira et al., 2022).

Supplementary resources

- UNODC, UNDP and OHCHR. (2023). *Global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators: A wake-up call for action on peace, justice and*

inclusion. <https://www.undp.org/publications/global-progress-report-sustainable-development-goal-16-indicators-wake-call-action-peace-justice-and-inclusion>

- Watch List. (2024). *Watch List 2024*. Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/watch-list-2024>

3.3.1 Impact of conflict in Africa

The median SDG Index score for sub-Saharan African countries is 54%, which means that the countries in these regions are 46% behind in reaching the SDGs (Hope, 2020). Many of these countries are currently in conflict situations. African leaders have consistently argued that development and growth are linked to peace and sound governments (UNODC, UNDP & OHCHR, 2023). African states have therefore thrown their weight behind the UN's SDGs and were at the forefront of championing the development of SDG 16 and the shape it assumed (UNODC, UNDP & OHCHR, 2023).

Despite the states' support of SDG 16, Africa continues to face conflict in various forms. These include conflict situations such as war, civil war, the threat of violent extremism and terrorism. Figure 4 illustrates the widespread conflict situation in countries in Africa.



Figure 4: Countries in conflict situations in Africa during 2024 (Geneva Academy, 2024; World Population Review, 2024)

The conflicts in Africa impact almost every aspect of life, such as underdevelopment and poverty, loss of life and property, human rights abuses and violations (Chukwuemeka, 2021). Children exposed to high risk of violence in the Ivory Coast and Uganda suffer major health-related setbacks such as higher infant mortality rates, maternal stress, malnutrition or a deterioration of healthcare services (Tapsoba, 2023). Conflicts also force displacement of people in Africa (Akpuokwe et al., 2024), leading to current conflict situations and mental distress such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (Musisi & Kinyanda, 2020).

The ongoing war in Ukraine also has a devastating effect on the economies of various African countries due to its impact on the global economy. Higher oil prices and international policy interest rates to fight inflation will impact Africa (Ali et al.,). However, researchers suggest that climatic conditions and vulnerability to climate change may contribute towards the risk and tendency of conflict situations (Cappelli et al., 2023). Countries vulnerable to climate change should therefore urgently address these challenges and include peacekeeping forces when planning for the impact of climate change.

Supplementary resource

- Chukwuemeka, E. S. (2021). *Causes, effects and solutions to conflict in Africa*. <https://bscholarly.com/causes-effects-and-solutions-to-conflict-in-africa/>

3.3.2 Impact of conflict in Latin America

The latest reports on SDG progress point to a series of worrying data on conflicts in the region (Agenda 2030 LAC, n.d.). Homicide rates have remained alarmingly high since the 1990s, making Latin America and the Caribbean one of the most violent regions in the world. Despite having only about 9% of the global population, it accounts for nearly a third of all homicides, primarily due to conflicts between organised crime groups. This ongoing violence is supported by and also leads to factors such as widespread social inequality and limited economic opportunities, particularly for young people.

The region continues to struggle with structural challenges like ineffective judicial systems, corruption and high levels of firearm possession, alongside short-term issues such as drug trafficking (Blume, 2022; De Prado & Peláez, 2023). While governments have introduced measures to combat violence, their approaches differ significantly, leading to varied results. The complexity of the security landscape means that some countries have seen improvements, whereas others continue to experience persistent or

escalating violence (Agenda 2030 LAC, n.d.). Limited data is available on illicit financial flows, arms trafficking and the regulation of illegal weapons, contributing to a lack of transparency and accountability (Pérez Ricart et al., 2021) and lack of progress within SDG 16.

The influx of internally displaced persons from regional conflicts exacerbates housing shortages and places pressure on social services, which can lead to more local conflicts. In Venezuela, the political crisis, violence, insecurity, threats and lack of food, medicine and essential services, have made over 7 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide, the vast majority in countries within Latin America and the Caribbean (UNHCR, 2025), such as Brazil and Colombia. Cities in these countries are facing increased demand for housing, healthcare, education and social services, often leading to overcrowded informal settlements and strain on urban infrastructure (IOM, 2024). This influx challenges local governments' ability to maintain safe and peaceful environments for both local residents and immigrants. The pressure on resources and services can exacerbate social tensions, increase crime rates and weaken trust in authorities, making it more difficult to ensure inclusive and effective governance. Additionally, the economic and social instability in Venezuela has disrupted regional trade (UNHCR, 2025), contributing to economic slowdowns and limiting the resources available for investments in sustainability and especially in targets related to peace, human rights and justice.

Supplementary resource

- Bahar, D., Dooley, M., & Selee, A. (2020). *Venezuelan migration, crime, and misperceptions: A review of data from Colombia, Peru, and Chile*. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/migration-crime-latam-eng-final.pdf>

3.3.3 Impact of conflict in Europe

Conflicts in Europe pose significant challenges to achieving SDG 16. The direct and indirect impacts of conflicts undermine institutional stability, weaken the rule of law and create social and political divisions that persist long after active hostilities have ended (Abramson & Carter, 2021; Khorram-Manesh et al., 2023). The consequences extend beyond the immediate conflict zones, affecting regional governance, judicial systems, human rights protection and democratic resilience. The war in Ukraine, tensions in the Western Balkans and rising political extremism in parts of Europe illustrate the broad and deeply rooted challenges that conflicts impose on SDG 16.

The destruction of governance structures and the erosion of democratic institutions are among the most immediate effects of conflicts (Kneuer, 2021). In Ukraine, the Russian invasion has severely disrupted judicial and governmental institutions, forcing legal systems to operate under emergency conditions (Sullivan & Kamensky, 2024). Courts have faced immense difficulties in handling war crimes, human rights violations and property disputes, with displaced populations struggling to access legal resources. The war has also placed immense strain on target 16.3 (rule of law and access to justice), as millions of displaced individuals seek legal recognition and protection in host countries such as Poland, Romania and Germany. Legal systems in these countries have faced backlogs in asylum applications, complicating efforts to provide timely and fair rulings.

Conflicts also challenge target 16.5 (reduce corruption and bribery in all forms) by creating conditions in which governance structures weaken and illicit activities thrive. In conflict-affected regions, the breakdown of regulatory systems allows organised crime and corruption to expand. In Eastern Ukraine, wartime economies have fuelled the growth of black markets, with reports of arms trafficking, illicit financial flows and bribery undermining institutional trust (Chlebowicz, 2024). Similarly, in the Western Balkans, post-conflict governance has been plagued by corruption scandals, where political elites have used reconstruction funds for personal enrichment rather than rebuilding transparent and accountable institutions (Hogic, 2024; Lesschaeve & Glaurdić, 2022). This pattern of corruption not only weakens public trust in governance, but also deters international aid and investment, stalling post-conflict recovery.

The long-term impact of conflicts on democratic governance is particularly evident in the Western Balkans, where unresolved ethnic and political tensions continue to

obstruct the development of strong institutions (Resulani, 2023). The legacy of the Yugoslav Wars has left Bosnia and Herzegovina with a highly fragmented and inefficient political system, characterised by ethnic divisions that hinder governance and legal accountability. This institutional deadlock directly affects target 16.6 (develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels) by limiting the ability of governments to implement policies that serve all citizens equitably. Similarly, in Serbia, post-conflict governance struggles have been exacerbated by political polarisation and challenges to media freedom, restricting public access to information and independent reporting, which are crucial elements of target 16.10 (ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms).

Conflicts also disrupt target 16.1 (significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere) by fostering long-term instability and political extremism. The resurgence of nationalist movements in parts of Europe, particularly in Poland, Hungary and Italy, has been linked to fears over migration and regional security, narratives that have been reinforced by the ongoing war in Ukraine. These movements have contributed to rising hate crimes, political violence and the erosion of civil liberties, creating a hostile environment for minority groups and migrants (Caiani & Weisskircher, 2022). Furthermore, extremist groups have exploited conflict-related discontent to recruit supporters, undermining efforts to promote social cohesion and democratic stability.

Another major challenge is the strain that conflicts place on legal mechanisms for transitional justice and human rights enforcement (Yusuf & Van der Merwe, 2021). The European Union has supported war crime investigations and accountability measures, but legal proceedings remain complex and politically sensitive. In Ukraine, the documentation of war crimes and human rights violations requires coordination between national and international legal bodies, raising concerns about jurisdictional conflicts and the ability to enforce judicial rulings effectively. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has played a role in investigating war-related crimes (Masol, 2022), but political resistance and legal loopholes often delay accountability, affecting the implementation of target 16.3 (promote the rule of law at national and international levels). Similarly, in the Balkans, war

crime tribunals have faced significant political pushback, with some governments refusing to acknowledge past atrocities, thereby delaying reconciliation and institutional strengthening.

The economic consequences of conflicts also have long-term implications for institutional resilience. The destruction of infrastructure and economic networks in war-affected regions leads to prolonged governance challenges, as post-conflict governments must balance reconstruction efforts with broader institutional reforms. In Ukraine, significant resources have been allocated to military defence, delaying critical investments in governance and anti-corruption reforms (Mozharovskyi & Hodz, 2024; Sanders, 2023).

The Western Balkans, similarly, have struggled to attract foreign investment due to lingering instability, with businesses hesitant to engage in regions where political risks remain high. These economic constraints hinder efforts to create strong, well-functioning institutions capable of addressing long-term social and economic challenges, affecting the fulfilment of target 16.6 (effective institutions). However, despite these challenges, some important indicators, such as unemployment rates, have shown signs of improvement in the region. Figure 5 illustrates the decline in unemployment rates across the Western Balkans in 2024, with the unemployment rate for individuals aged 15 and older dropping further in the first half of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.

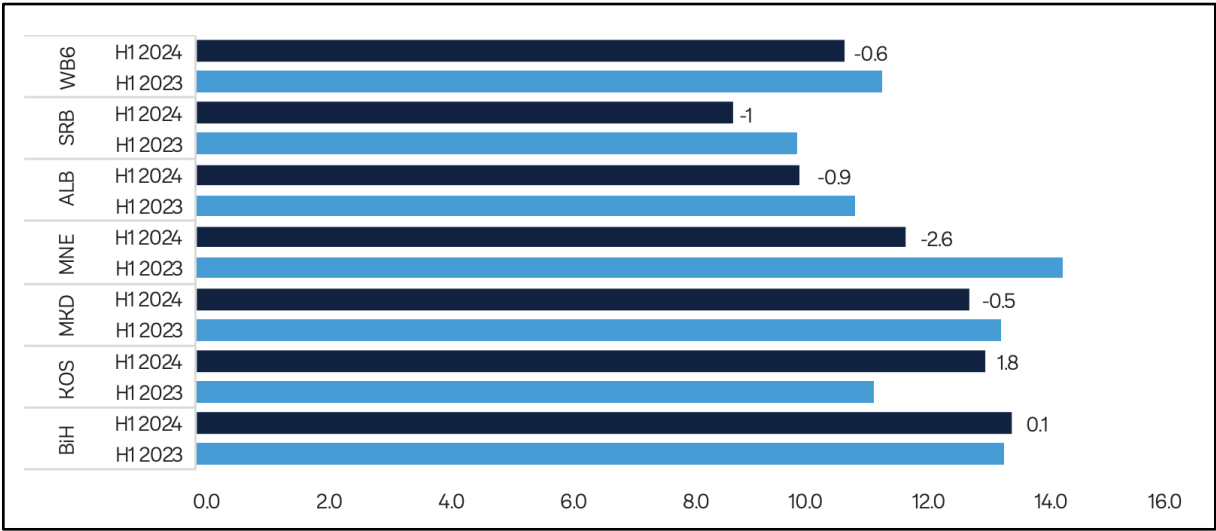


Figure 5: Unemployment rates in the Western Balkans per country
Source: World Bank Open Data (2024)

While conflicts create significant barriers to achieving SDG 16, post-conflict strategies focused on strengthening governance, judicial independence and human rights protections, which offer pathways toward institutional recovery (Vaškevičiūtė, 2025; Zavalniy et al., 2024). Efforts to rebuild judicial systems, promote transparent governance and support inclusive decision-making processes have shown success in some post-conflict regions. The European Union has played a critical role in supporting judicial and institutional reforms in the Balkans, demonstrating that international cooperation and legal oversight can help restore trust in governance. However, sustainable peacebuilding requires addressing the root causes of conflicts, including political exclusion, economic disparities and historical grievances (Oloke & Byrne, 2021). Without these structural changes, institutional fragility is likely to persist, making long-term progress on SDG 16 challenging. Table 8 presents conflict-affected regions, challenges to SDG 16 and targets affected.

Table 8: Conflicts, challenges and targets

Conflict-affected region	Key challenges to SDG 16	Targets affected
Ukraine	War crimes, judicial backlogs, migration crisis	16.3 (rule of law) 16.5 (anti-corruption)
Western Balkans	Ethnic divisions, political corruption, weak institutions	16.6 (effective institutions) 16.10 (freedom of information)
Poland & Hungary	Rise of nationalist movements, democratic backsliding	16.1 (reduce violence) 16.10 (freedom of expression)

Conflicts in Europe, whether ongoing or historical, create significant challenges to achieving SDG 16 by destabilising governance, eroding public trust and weakening legal

frameworks. To recover, Europe must integrate legal accountability, institutional reforms and conflict resolution mechanisms into broader development strategies. Without strong governance, transparency and human rights protection, the underlying conditions for conflict will persist, hindering lasting peace and justice (Asaduzzaman & Virtanen, 2021).

In the next section, we will turn our attention to regional progress in Europe, examining how different areas are addressing these challenges and working towards the achievement of SDG 16 despite the ongoing obstacles.

Supplementary resources

Das, B. C., Hasan, F., Sutradhar, S. R., & Shafique, S. (2023). Ukraine–Russia conflict and stock markets reactions in Europe. *Global Journal of Flexible Systems Management*, 24(3), 395–407. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40171-023-00345-0>

Dodds, K., Taylor, Z., Akbari, A., Broto, V. C., Detterbeck, K., Inverardi-Ferri, C., Lee, K. O., Mamadouh, V., Ramutsindela, M., & Woon, C. Y. (2023). The Russian invasion of Ukraine: Implications for politics, territory and governance. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 11(8), 1519–1536. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2023.2256119>

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Examples of assessment questions

3. Overview of global crises that have a negative impact on achieving SDG 16

- Name at least three global crises that affect the achievement of the SDG 16 targets in your region.

- How has climate change negatively impacted achieving the targets for peace, justice and strong institutions in your region?
- Did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the progress of achieving the various SDG 16 targets in your region? Explain whether this impact was positive or negative.
- Explain how conflict negatively impacts the achievement of peace, justice and strong institutions in your region.

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4. Progress towards the achievement of peace, justice and strong institutions by 2030

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to

- develop an understanding of regional differences in achieving SDG 16
- discuss the various factors that have a negative impact on the achievement of the various targets of SDG 16

Global sustainable development continues to be obstructed by escalating conflict and violent organised crime, which continue to result in significant increases in human suffering. The United Nations (2024) reports that in May 2024, the number of forcibly displaced individuals soared to an unprecedented 120 million and estimates that civilian casualties in armed conflicts increased by 72% in 2023. Corruption remains a significant barrier to sustainable development, with 20% of people reporting that they were asked for or paid a bribe to a public official in the past year (United Nations, 2024). Fair judicial processes are also lagging behind as it is estimated that a third of the world's prisoners await sentencing within a context of unfair judicial processes (Penal Reform International, 2023).

The achievement of all SDGs depend on the successful achievement of the targets and indicators of SDG 16 that encompass the establishment of lasting peace and the prevention of violent conflict. Urgent action is needed to combat corruption and organised crime, strengthen the rule of law and access to justice, build effective and inclusive governance institutions and protect rights and fundamental freedoms (UNODC et al., 2024).

Supplementary resources

- Our World in Data Team. (2023) - *SDG tracker: Measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals*. <https://ourworldindata.org/sdgs> [Accessed 27 September 2024].
- United Nations. (2024). *The Sustainable Development Goals report*. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report> [Accessed 27 September 2024].
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4.1 Regional progress in Africa

Africa has made some strides towards achieving SDG 16 by focusing on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, extending to providing access to justice for all and building more effective and accountable institutions at all levels. Figure 6 reflects the progress respective states in Africa had made towards the achievement of SDG 16 by 2020 (Africa SDG Index, 2020). For the whole continent, it was recorded in 2020 that most of the African states experienced major and significant challenges in achieving SDG 16. The states that experienced major challenges are located mainly in the sub-Saharan region, and those that experienced significant challenges are in northern and western Africa. The island states of Africa still experienced challenges, albeit less than their mainland counterparts in achieving SDG 16, whereas in 2020, no state in Africa was on track to achieving the SDG by 2030.

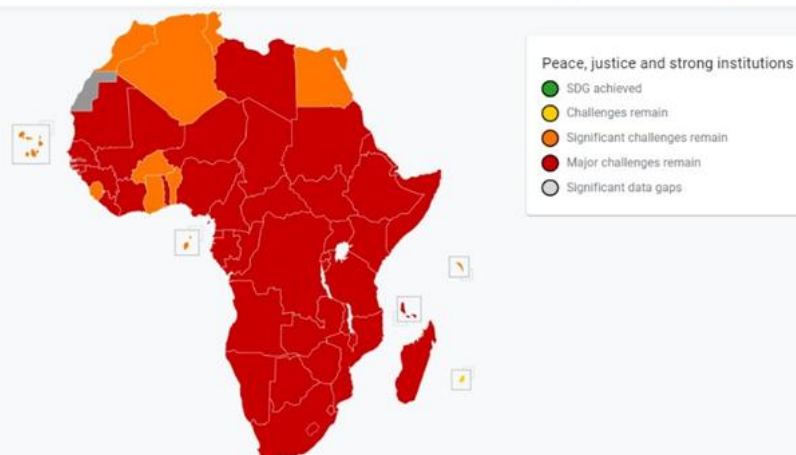


Figure 6: States in Africa progress in 2020 towards achieving SDG 16

Source: <https://countries.africasdgindex.org/#/>

The challenges experienced by the various states in achieving SDG 16 are related mainly to instability, the cause of which is often associated with climate change, conflict and pandemics, as highlighted in section 3. The ongoing conflict and political instability in certain African states present major stumbling blocks to achieving SDG 16, as these issues often lead to human rights violations that hinder sustainable development. In many states this is aggravated by significant financial and human resource constraints that further place major barriers to implementing and sustaining the various initiatives aimed at achieving the various SDG 16 targets and indicators (El Fassi, 2015). It should, however, be noted that the continent experiences uneven limitations regarding reliable data systems (United Nations, 2024) and this impedes individual nations' ability to track the progress or report on implemented policies. This should be taken into consideration when measuring the impact of policies and accurately reporting the implementation of these policies and how these actions have added value to the progress of achieving SDG 16.

While there are several challenges in Africa that impede the achievement of SDG 16, it should be noted that the continent has made some progress in achieving the SDG through the implementation of several initiatives. Attempts to strengthen governance and institutional frameworks are in place through the establishment of the African Unions, African Governance Architecture (AGA) and African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (Chikwanha, 2021; Adeyeye, 2024). The former seeks to promote and protect human and people rights and the consolidation of democratic institutions and culture to

ensure good governance and the rule of law. The latter is critical in embracing a comprehensive agenda for peace and security in Africa that includes early warning identification of conflict, conflict prevention, peace-making, peace-support operations, peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction and development, promotion of democratic practices, good governance and respect for human rights, and humanitarian action and disaster management (African Union, 2024). In collaboration with several international organisations, the APSA has been involved in notable efforts to reduce conflict and promote peace through regional cooperation and peacekeeping missions. However, ongoing conflict (as highlighted in section 3.3) in some regions of Africa continue to pose significant challenges for Africa in achieving SDG 16 by 2030. Satterthwaite and Dhital (2019) report that there have been several improvements in legal frameworks and access to justice in many African countries, but Akpuokwe et al. (2024) point out that there are still many issues related to corruption, limited resources and lack of infrastructure that continue to hinder the progress in achieving the various targets and indicators of SDG16.

A closer evaluation of the various targets related to the achievement of SDG 16 show uneven achievement of the targets (figure 7).

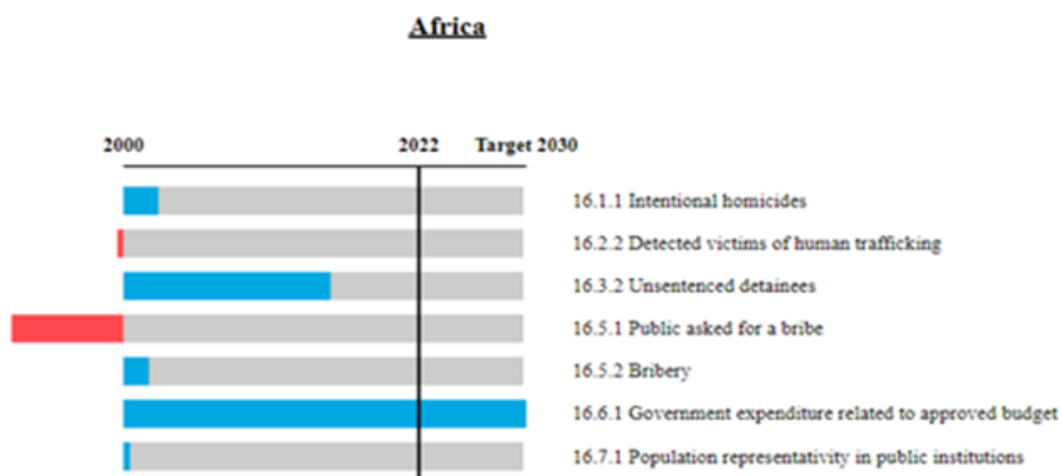


Figure 7: Africa progress in 2022 towards achieving SDG 16

Source: <https://ecastats.uneca.org/unsdgsafrica/SDGs/SDG-progress-2023>

Targets that have shown negative progress

Target 16.2 aims to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. Figure 7 reflects that by 2022, the continent was well behind in achieving this target. However, note that the progress in Africa for target 16.2 differs geographically and the reporting itself is negatively impacted by challenges in data collection and reporting (Knight et al., 2024). Although many African countries have improved their data collection on human trafficking, the quality and consistency of the data remains a challenge. Many African countries have enacted laws and policies to combat human trafficking and the protection of children. Most notable is that of South Africa which adopted the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act (Jongile & Calvino, 2023), and at regional level the African Union has also implemented measures. Despite efforts, Africa still faces significant challenges, including limited resources, weak enforcement of laws and ongoing conflicts that exacerbate vulnerabilities to trafficking and exploitation.

Indicator 16.5.1 aims to reduce corruption and bribery by measuring the proportion of people who had at least one contact with a public official and paid or were asked for a bribe. In Africa, progress has been mixed. Some countries have made significant strides in reducing corruption, whereas others still face substantial challenges. Rwanda has been noted for its strong anti-corruption measures and has seen a decrease in bribery incidents (Githaiga, 2024); Botswana continues to perform well in terms of low corruption levels, often cited as one of the least corrupt countries in Africa (Sander, 2024); Nigeria and South Africa, however, still struggle with high levels of corruption, despite various efforts and reforms (Oyekale et al., 2024).

Targets that must accelerate progress

Indicator 16.1.1 refers to intentional homicides, which includes purposely inflicted death because of domestic disputes, interpersonal violence, violent conflicts over land resources, intergang violence over turf or control and predatory violence and killing by armed groups. Individuals or small groups usually commit homicide, whereas killing in armed conflict is usually excluded from the statistics (UNODC et al., 2024). Africa has made some progress in terms of indicator 16.1.1. The intentional homicide rate in Africa

has generally been high, with some fluctuations over the last ten years, but the continent's average homicide rate was around 12.9 per 100 000 people compared to 12.23 per 100 000 people in 2010 (table 9). Given that the target for 16.1.1 is to reduce the 2015 intentional homicide rate by 50%, Africa must accelerate its efforts to reduce homicide in the respective countries.

Table 9: Average intentional homicide rate per 100 000 people in Africa: 2010 to 2022 (UNODC, 2024)

Region	Subregion	Sex	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	Female	5.20	5.10	5.09	5.10	5.12	5.15	5.12	5.09	5.02	4.95	4.92	5.08	5.30
		Male	22.54	22.60	22.78	22.71	22.89	22.75	22.67	23.07	22.67	22.68	22.11	23.17	23.36
		Total	13.81	13.80	13.88	13.85	13.95	13.91	13.86	14.04	13.81	13.78	13.48	14.09	14.29
	Northern Africa	Female	2.01	2.08	2.05	2.09	2.12	2.05	2.06	2.05	2.04	2.08	2.09	2.35	2.29
		Male	9.37	9.96	9.67	9.97	10.32	9.45	9.51	9.76	9.58	9.66	9.49	10.12	10.45
		Total	5.72	6.06	5.90	6.07	6.26	5.79	5.82	5.94	5.85	5.90	5.82	6.27	6.40
	All Africa	Female	4.59	4.52	4.51	4.53	4.55	4.57	4.55	4.53	4.47	4.42	4.40	4.58	4.75
		Male	19.92	20.11	20.22	20.23	20.46	20.20	20.15	20.53	20.20	20.23	19.75	20.75	20.98
		Total	12.23	12.29	12.34	12.36	12.48	12.37	12.33	12.52	12.32	12.31	12.07	12.66	12.86

In an attempt to promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice at both national and international levels (SDG 16.3), Africa has adopted a number of legal frameworks, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which enshrines the right to equality before the law and equal protection of the law, and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which promotes principles of rule of law, including equality in exercising freedoms and liberties. In particular, measures related to facilitating the speedier sentencing of detainees (indicator 16.3.2) need to be increased in the various countries in Africa and these include improved provision of legal aid to detainees and various prison decongestion initiatives that specifically involve reviewing cases of unsentenced detainees and releasing those who have been held for extended periods without trial (Penal Reform International, 2023).

As a continent. Africa has taken several measures to reduce bribery and corruption (target 16.5) across its countries. The Africa Development Bank adopted the Anti-Bribery Policy and Compliance Guidance for African countries as a measure to assist businesses in implementing measures to prevent bribery in their transactions with public officials (Viol,

2024). At international level, Africa has ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC), which set standards for anti-corruption measures (United Nations, 2024). At regional level, bodies such as the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have facilitated cooperation among member states to tackle cross-border corruption and share best practices (United Nations, 2024). Many countries in Africa have established independent anti-corruption agencies and have strengthened their legal frameworks and in so doing have increased their ability to combat bribery, for example the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission in Nigeria (Nkemdilim & Iyoha, 2024) and the Ethic and Anti-corruption Commission in Kenya (Daud, 2024).

Population representivity in public institutions (indicator 16.7.1) across Africa shows considerable variation by country and region. The goal of representivity is to ensure that public institutions mirror the demographic composition of the population, considering factors such as race, gender and sometimes ethnicity. In South Africa, for instance, representivity is embedded in the Constitution and various laws, including the Employment Equity Act (Rubin et.al., 2024). These laws require that public institutions and workplaces reflect the national demographic profile, especially regarding race and gender. This is part of broader affirmative action measures aimed at addressing historical inequalities. In other African countries, the approach to representivity can differ. Some nations have formal policies and laws to promote demographic representivity, and others may rely more on informal or traditional governance systems. These traditional systems often co-exist with formal state institutions, sometimes complementing them and other times conflicting with them.

Targets that are on track or exceeded planned progress by 2022

Although figure 6 reflects that Africa had exceeded the 2022 targets for indicator 16.6.1 which measures the credibility of government budgets by comparing actual primary government expenditures to the originally approved budget, the performance varies

across African countries. South Africa has made notable strides in improving budget credibility. The country uses the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) framework to assess whether government spending aligns with the approved budget. However, challenges remain, particularly at subnational level, where deviations from the budget are more common (Ajam, 2024). Ghana also faces challenges with budget credibility, often deviating from planned budgets during implementation. This can lead to underfunding in critical social sectors (Sedegah et al., 2024). Overall, while some countries have made progress, achieving consistent budget credibility remains a significant challenge across the continent. Efforts to improve transparency and accountability in public financial management are ongoing and crucial for meeting the SDGs (United Nations, 2024).

Supplementary resources

- Africa SDG Index. (2020). *Africa SDG Index 2020 dashboard*. Sustainable Development Solutions and Sustainable Development Center for Africa. <https://countries.africasdgindex.org/#/> [Accessed 28 September 2024].
- United Nations. (2024). *The Sustainable Development Goals report*. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report> [Accessed 27 September 2024].

4.2 Regional progress in Latin America

Achieving SDG 16 presents significant challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean. Homicide rates in this region have remained high since the 1990s and currently rank among the highest in the world. Although this area accounts for only 9% of the global population, it is responsible for nearly a third of all global homicides. A significant portion of this violence is attributed to conflicts between organised criminal groups vying for control of illegal markets, highlighting the ongoing struggle with organised crime and its severe impact on regional security.

Several persistent structural issues contribute to this climate of violence. Weak rule of law, substantial social inequality and high levels of youth unemployment create

environments where crime and violence thrive. Furthermore, short-term factors such as drug production and trafficking, along with the widespread possession and use of firearms, exacerbate these challenges. Despite these obstacles, many countries in the region are actively working to reduce violence. However, strategies differ widely among nations, and trends in violence reduction vary, reflecting the complexities each country faces.

Data on illicit financial flows, arms seizures and the formal surrender or legalisation of illicit arms remains scarce. The region has not yet achieved high standards of transparency and accountability, which contributes to elevated levels of public distrust and perceived corruption. This lack of institutional transparency and efficiency hinders efforts to build trust in public governance and promote the rule of law.

Vulnerable groups face particular difficulties in exercising their rights to informed and effective participation in public life and policy-making. These groups often encounter significant obstacles that limit their influence in democratic processes, further undermining trust in institutions. Nonetheless, the region has made strides toward ensuring equal access to justice and promoting inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making processes. Efforts are underway to improve public access to information, which is essential for fostering civic engagement and supporting effective governance.

Figure 8 shows the graphic on indicator 16.2.2 (detected victims of human trafficking, by age and sex, per 100 000 population) for 2022, which illustrates the regional disparities in human trafficking across Latin America and the Caribbean. The colour gradient represents the intensity of detected cases, with darker shades indicating higher prevalence. The data suggests that certain countries, particularly in South and Central America, report a significantly higher number of trafficking victims, potentially reflecting both the severity of the issue and variations in detection and reporting mechanisms. Brazil, marked prominently, may indicate a large absolute number of victims, aligning with its population size and role as both a source and destination for trafficking. The map highlights the urgent need for strengthened legal frameworks, cross-border cooperation

and victim protection measures to address human trafficking effectively in the region. However, variations in data collection methodologies and underreporting may impact the accuracy of these findings, necessitating more robust monitoring systems to inform policy interventions.

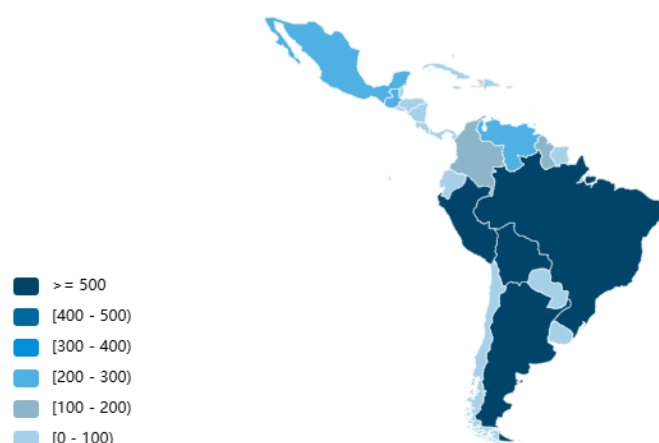


Figure 8: Indicator 16.2.2 (Detected victims of human trafficking, by age and sex, per 100 000 population) for 2022

Source: Agenda 2030 LAC (n.d.) https://agenda2030lac.org/estadisticas/regional-sdg-statistical-profiles-target-1.html?lang=en&target_id=16.1

Figure 9 shows the bar chart on indicator 16.5.2 (bribery incidence: percentage of firms experiencing at least one bribe payment request) for 2023 provides a comparative overview of corruption levels across subregions in Latin America and the Caribbean. The data indicates that the Caribbean reports the highest incidence of bribery among firms, closely followed by South America and the overall regional average. Central America exhibits a slightly lower percentage, though still significant, reflecting the pervasive nature of corruption in business environments. These findings underscore the ongoing challenges in strengthening institutional integrity, regulatory enforcement and transparency mechanisms in the region. While variations across subregions may be influenced by differences in governance structures, legal frameworks and law enforcement effectiveness, the consistently high levels highlight the need for stronger anti-corruption policies and private sector accountability to promote fair and ethical business practices.

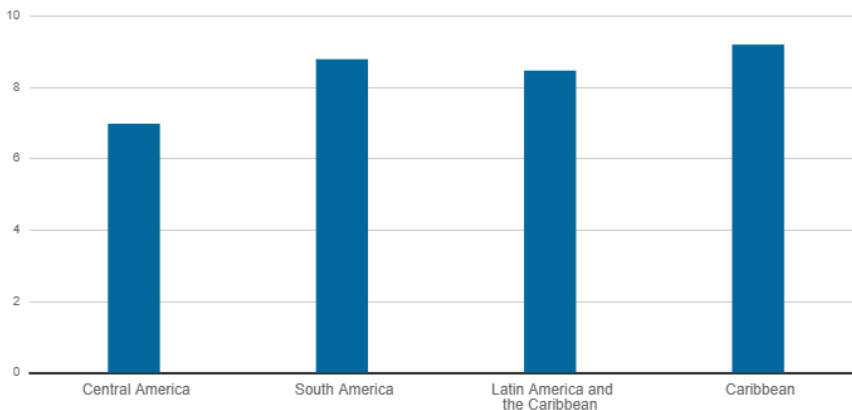


Figure 9: Indicator 16.5.2 (bribery incidence: percentage of firms experiencing at least one bribe payment request) for 2022

Source: Agenda 2040 LAC (n.d.)

Figure 10 highlights indicator 16.7.1 (ratio of female members of parliaments) for 2024 and illustrates the representation of women in legislative bodies across Latin America and the Caribbean, relative to their proportion in the eligible population. The data distinguishes between the Lower Chamber or Unicameral and the Upper Chamber, revealing notable regional variations. South America has the highest ratio in the Upper Chamber, suggesting greater female representation in higher legislative bodies. In contrast, the Caribbean and Central America display relatively balanced ratios between both chambers but remain below parity. The overall regional trend indicates progress in gender inclusion in politics, though disparities persist across subregions. These findings highlight the need for continued efforts to promote gender parity in political leadership through policies such as gender quotas, electoral reforms and capacity-building initiatives to ensure more equitable decision-making processes.

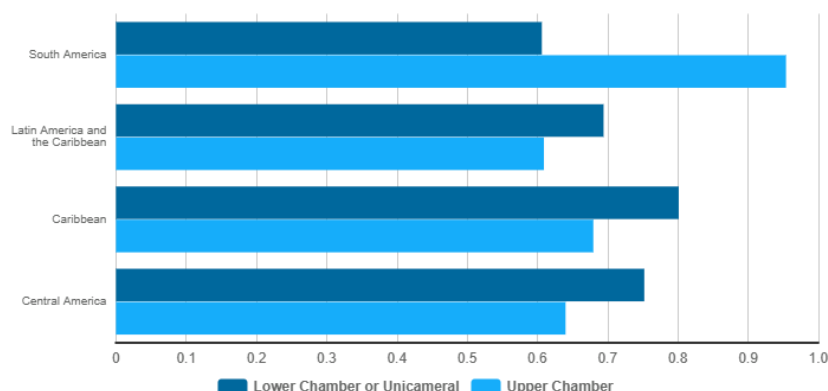


Figure 10: Indicator 16.7.1 (ratio of the proportion of women in parliament to women in the national population with the age of eligibility as a lower bound boundary) for 2024

Source: Agenda 2030 LAC (n.d.)

Supplementary resources

- United Nations Development Programme. (2023). *2nd Global progress report on SDG 16 indicators*. United Nations Development Programme. <https://www.undp.org/publications/2nd-global-progress-report-sdg-16-indicators>
- Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL). [n.d.]. *Regional statistical monitoring*. Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible en América Latina y el Caribe. <https://agenda2030lac.org/estadisticas/regional-statistical-monitoring.html>
- United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). (2023). *Halfway to 2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean: Progress and recommendations for acceleration*. United Nations. <https://caribbean.un.org/en/229018-halfway-2030-latin-america-and-caribbean-progress-and-recommendations-acceleration>
- Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL). (2024). *Annual reports. Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development*. United Nations. <https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2024/en/documents/annual-reports>

4.3 Regional progress in Europe

European countries have made significant progress in addressing SDG 16, which aims to promote peace, justice and strong institutions. This goal includes various targets, each being tackled through initiatives tailored to both regional and transnational needs. Table 10 presents the regional progress for SDG 16 regarding its targets, with examples of European countries.

Table 10: Regional progress in European countries, SDG 16

SDG 16 targets	Examples of regional progress in European countries
16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.	Norway: Achieved one of the lowest crime rates in Europe through comprehensive crime prevention and rehabilitation programmes (Elvegård & Antonsen, 2024; levins & Mjåland, 2021; Lund-Tønnesen & Christensen, 2023)
16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.	Sweden: Implemented national child protection programmes, including anti-trafficking initiatives and comprehensive support systems (Al Imari & AL-Obaidi, 2025)
16.3 Promote the rule of law at national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.	Netherlands: Reformed judicial systems to reduce court backlogs and improve access to justice through online legal services (Schmidt et al., 2021)
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.	United Kingdom: Implemented anti-money laundering regulations and led international efforts to combat organised crime, with a focus on global asset recovery (Ryder et al., 2023; Zavoli & King, 2021)
16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms.	Finland: Regularly ranked as one of the least corrupt countries globally, Finland continues to innovate transparency measures, such as open government data platforms (Koskimaa et al., 2021; Vaarnamo, 2021)

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.	Denmark: Known for its robust public sector reform, which emphasises accountability and transparency through open government initiatives (Bentzen & Bringselius, 2023; Siverbo et al., 2023)
16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.	Ireland: Introduced participatory budgeting and citizen consultations to ensure more inclusive decision-making processes (Harris, 2021)
16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.	European Union: Through platforms like the European Neighbourhood Policy, the EU has enhanced the participation of Eastern European and Mediterranean countries in regional governance (Zardo, 2022)
16.9 Provide universal legal identity.	Portugal: Expanded its e-government platforms to facilitate birth registration and legal identification (Júnior et al., 2022)
16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms.	France: Strengthened freedom of information laws, expanding media protection and transparency (Couzigou, 2021; Holtz-Bacha, 2024)
16.a Strengthen national institutions to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.	United Kingdom: Enhanced counterterrorism legislation and cross-border security cooperation within the EUROPOL framework (Shellaker et al., 2024)
16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies.	Netherlands: Expanded LGBTQ+ legal protections and anti-discrimination policies in employment (Burri, 2022)

In terms of reducing violence (target 16.1), Norway has achieved some of the lowest crime rates in Europe, a success attributed to its comprehensive crime prevention strategies and extensive rehabilitation programmes. These efforts are grounded in a social welfare model that prioritises reintegration over punishment, tackling root causes of criminal behaviour such as poverty, lack of education and mental health issues (Elvegård & Antonsen, 2024; levins & Mjåland, 2021; Lund-Tønnesen & Christensen,

2023). Sweden, similarly, has made strides in addressing target 16.2, focusing on the prevention of violence against children. Through national child protection programmes and anti-trafficking measures, Sweden has set a high standard for safeguarding vulnerable children. These initiatives are bolstered by multi-agency collaborations, including social services, healthcare providers and law enforcement, which work together to ensure both prevention and protection (Al Imari & AL-Obaidi, 2025).

On the promotion of the rule of law (target 16.3), the Netherlands has been a leader in reforming its judicial systems to improve the efficiency and accessibility of legal processes (Schmidt et al., 2021). By modernising procedures and integrating technology—such as online platforms for legal services and court proceedings—the Netherlands has ensured that justice is accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic background. These reforms not only enhance domestic legal systems, but also reinforce the country's role in promoting the rule of law at international level, particularly through its engagement with institutions like the International Criminal Court.

When addressing illicit financial flows and organised crime (target 16.4), the United Kingdom stands out for its approach to combating money laundering and strengthening international cooperation (Ryder et al., 2023; Zavoli & King, 2021). The UK has been instrumental in shaping global regulatory frameworks and promoting asset recovery efforts, particularly through its active participation in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). This international cooperation is crucial in disrupting organised crime networks and ensuring the return of stolen assets to countries of origin. Additionally, the UK's leadership in anti-arms trafficking initiatives aligns with its broader commitment to curbing illicit financial flows, reinforcing its role as a key player in global governance on these issues.

Finland, which consistently ranks among the least corrupt countries globally, has set a standard for reducing corruption (target 16.5) through innovative transparency measures. Finland's strong legal frameworks, coupled with its commitment to open government initiatives, exemplify how sustained efforts in transparency and accountability can

significantly reduce corruption (Koskimaa et al., 2021; Vaarnamo, 2021). This approach is not limited to government action alone; it extends to both public and private sectors, promoting a culture of integrity and trust across all levels of society. Similarly, Denmark has focused on institutional effectiveness and transparency (target 16.6), with its robust public sector reforms. Denmark's emphasis on open government initiatives ensures that citizens are actively involved in governance processes, fostering both trust and accountability in public institutions (Bentzen & Bringselius, 2023; Siverbo et al., 2023). These reforms are designed not only to improve governmental performance, but also to ensure that institutions remain accountable to the public they serve.

The promotion of inclusive and participatory decision-making (target 16.7) has been notably advanced in Ireland. Through initiatives like participatory budgeting and citizens' assemblies, Ireland has actively sought to involve its population in governance processes (Harris, 2021). This ensures that decision-making is not only more inclusive, but also more representative of the needs and desires of diverse communities. By directly engaging citizens in shaping policy, Ireland strengthens democratic legitimacy and fosters a deeper sense of public ownership in governance. These participatory initiatives also enhance social cohesion, as they allow for a broader range of voices to be heard, particularly from marginalised communities.

At regional level, the EU has shown significant leadership in strengthening global governance (target 16.8), particularly through initiatives like the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EU's efforts to engage countries in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean have expanded the participation of developing countries in global governance processes (Zardo, 2022). By fostering cooperation on issues such as trade, security, human rights and environmental sustainability, the EU has not only supported the growth of its immediate neighbours, but has also enhanced its ability to contribute to international decision-making. This highlights the EU's broader commitment to promoting peace, stability and collaboration on a global scale, ensuring that developing countries have a voice in global governance structures.

Efforts to provide universal legal identity (target 16.9) and ensure public access to information (target 16.10) have been crucial in reinforcing transparency, accountability and social inclusion across European countries. Portugal has advanced digital identification systems, streamlining legal registration processes and improving access to public services (Júnior et al., 2022). Meanwhile, France has led initiatives to expand access to government information, strengthening freedom of information laws (Couzigou, 2021; Holtz-Bacha, 2024). These measures not only safeguard fundamental freedoms, but also empower citizens by ensuring that legal recognition and information access are widely available, reinforcing democratic governance and institutional trust across the region.

In parallel, European nations have taken steps to strengthen national institutions in preventing violence and combating crime (target 16.a) while also advancing non-discriminatory laws and policies (target 16.b). The UK has reinforced counterterrorism measures through legislative updates and cross-border collaboration within the EUROPOL framework (Shellaker et al., 2024), and the Netherlands has expanded legal protection against discrimination, advancing LGBTQ+ rights (Burri, 2022). These efforts demonstrate a broader commitment to building more resilient and inclusive societies, where institutional frameworks promote security, social equity and human rights.

Together, these initiatives illustrate the interconnected nature of SDG 16's targets, with European countries making significant strides toward creating stronger, more peaceful and just societies. From reducing violence and improving access to justice to combating corruption and enhancing global governance, the examples provided highlight the region's ongoing commitment to the goals of SDG 16. As European countries continue to refine and expand these efforts, they serve as models for others striving to achieve similar outcomes, both regionally and globally. By fostering inclusive, transparent and accountable institutions, Europe can continue to advance the ideals of peace, justice and strong institutions, paving the way for a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

Supplementary resources

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Examples of assessment questions

4. Progress towards the achievement of SDG 16 by 2030

- How does your current life pattern affect the achievement of the SDG 16 targets?
- In your opinion, will the countries in Africa be able to achieve the SDG 16 targets by 2030?
- Which SDG 16 targets have seen a reverse in progress since 2015? Briefly explain the reasons why the achievement of these targets has regressed since 2015.
- Explain the trend of SDG 16 in the African region since 2005.
- Why can some SDG targets not be measured in Africa?
- Explain the factors that would prevent Latin America from achieving SDG 16.
- Discuss the trend in achieving SDG 16 in Latin America.
- What needs to be done in Latin America to achieve SDG 16?
- Why can some SDG targets not be measured in Latin America?
- Explain the focus of achieving SDG 16 in Europe.
- Describe the role that more sustainable agricultural production can play in Europe in the drive to achieve SDG 16.
- What impact does food waste have on Europe's ability to achieve SDG 16?
- Discuss the various environmental challenges that have an impact on Europe's ability to achieve SDG 16.
- What are the main obstacles to achieving SDG 16 in your region/country?

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5. Case studies

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to

- identify good practices in various regional case studies in achieving SDG 16
- develop and apply a local project aimed at achieving SDG 16
- use the knowledge presented in regional case studies to adapt to a more sustainable way of living

Table 11 provides a global overview of the good practices related specifically to SDG 16, and the following section is dedicated to the presentation of specific case studies in Latin America, Europe and Africa.

Table 11: Examples of best practices related to the achievement of SDG 16

Title and geographic coverage	Objective	Related SDGs	Source
City of Helsinki	Helsinki introduced a new participation and interaction model nearly two years ago. The model was designed together with its citizens. The principles of participation included in the Helsinki model have been established in the administrative regulations, which means that they apply to the operations of the entire city organisation. Helsinki's participation model is based on the knowledge and know-how of the citizens. Helsinki invites city residents and its partners to join the development of the city, its services and areas. The city is a place of community, influential deeds and encounters. Helsinki enables spontaneous activities of citizens. A positive city experience is also conveyed through a good service culture and interactive communications. The decision-making is open and participatory.	10, 11	https://kestavyys.helsinki.fi/en/participation/#:~:text=The%20goal%20of%20the%20participation%20and%20interaction%20model,structures%2C%20goals%20and%20key%20areas%20of%20participation%20work.
New York City	In April 2015, New York City (NYC) committed to the principles of growth, equity, sustainability and resiliency through its groundbreaking One NYC strategy. When global leaders committed to the SDGs in September 2015, NYC recognised the synergies with its local strategy, and established the Global Vision Urban Action platform to use the SDGs as a common framework to both share its experiences and learn from partners in NYC and worldwide. In July 2018, NYC became the first city in the world to report directly to the UN on local implementation of the SDGs through a Voluntary Local Review (VLR). Since then, the NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs launched the VLR Declaration to enable subnational governments to formally commit to the SDGs.	All SDGs	https://climate.cityofnewyork.us/reports/on-enyc-2050/
Niger	Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) is a technique to effectively combat poverty and hunger through land and vegetation restoration. FMNR is a low-cost land restoration technique used to combat poverty and hunger among poor subsistence farmers by increasing food and timber	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15, 17	https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/farmer-managed-natural-regeneration-fmnr-technique-effectively-

	production and resilience to climate extremes. Started in 1983 in Niger, FMNR is a form of coppicing and pollarding, drawing on traditional practices and sensitive to local variations. In FMNR systems, farmers protect and manage the growth of trees and shrubs that regenerate naturally in their fields from root stock or from seeds dispersed through animal manure. FMNR is an easy, low-cost way for farmers to increase the number of trees in the fields.		combat-poverty-and#:~:text=Farmer%20Managed%20Natural%20Regeneration%20%28FMNR%29%20is%20a%20low-cost,and%20timber%20production%20and%20resilience%20to%20climate%20extremes.
Brazil	<p>West 2030: cooperation for sustainable development</p> <p>To solve the complex challenges that Agenda 2030 poses, Brazil adopts two important strategies: bring the 2030 Agenda to the municipalities, and use robust data in monitoring SDGs. The project aims to territorialise the SDGs in the western region of Paraná through localisation and monitoring, focusing on the elaboration and implementation of a Joint Action Agenda for development. The Agendas were constructed in a participatory manner and based on evidence (such as diagnoses of the social, environmental and economic situation, RIAs, data platform and modelling of future scenarios for the state of Paraná).</p>	16, 17	https://revistacultivar.com/news/western-region-of-parana-and-model-in-conservation-agriculture
Global	<p>Generating disaggregated indigenous community-data through the Indigenous Navigator Initiative to achieve the SDGs</p> <p>The Indigenous Navigator is a framework and set of tools for and by indigenous peoples to systematically monitor the level of recognition and implementation of their rights. Indigenous organisations and communities, duty bearers, NGOs and journalists access free tools and resources based on community-generated data. The Indigenous Navigator monitors the implementation of the UNDRIP; relevant international human rights conventions, including ILO Convention No. 169; essential aspects of the SDGs; and outcomes of the WCIP. The Navigator exposes important links between these frameworks, enabling gap analysis by indigenous communities.</p>	All SDGs	https://indigenousnavigator.org/what-is-the-indigenous-navigator
Guatemala	<p>National Priorities for Development in Territories</p> <p>Guatemala has 22 departments (states), divided into 340 municipalities, which are autonomous and have multiple functions according to law. The Secretariat of Planning and Programming of Guatemala (Segeplan) has the task of advising and training these local governments so they can create their local development and territorial ordering plans. Therefore, in 2018, Segeplan published the Guidelines for the Formulation of Municipal Development and Territorial Ordering Plans (PDM-OT for its name in Spanish) as a tool for introducing the national development priorities and the SDGs in local government plans.</p>	All SDGs	https://www.local2030.org/story/view/300
Bahrain	<p>Expat Protection Center</p> <p>The Kingdom of Bahrain's attractive economy has resulted in an influx of migrant workers seeking job opportunities in the country. Bahrain's dedication to the preservation and protection of the rights of all who work and live in the country led to the establishment of the Expat Protection Center. In line with its 2030 Vision to cull the crime of trafficking in persons, a cross-border crime, the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) has spearheaded the administration of the protective services offered to migrants in Bahrain since all declared victims of trafficking have been migrant workers.</p>	5, 8, 10	https://www.lmra.gov.bh/en/page/show/506

Over the years, examples of good practices have been applied in different countries around the world that support the achievement of the various indicators as set by SDG

16. These practices take different approaches and are reflected in the selection of case studies from the three regions.

5.1 Africa

5.1.1 Case study 1 - Rwanda: programme to support anti-corruption, effective application of SDG 16 and related targets 16.5 and 16.6

Contextual setting

Rwanda is a small, landlocked country that is referred to as the "land of a thousand hills" due to its primarily mountainous environment. It was home to more than 13 million people in 2022. It has borders with Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (figure 11). The majority of the population lives in rural areas, while urbanisation is steadily rising. Rwanda is home to three ethnic groups: Hutu (84%), Tutsi (15%) and Twa (1%) (Nyseth et al., 2023). The majority Hutus and the dominant Tutsi minority have experienced tumultuous historical conflict. Three years prior to Belgium's independence, in 1959, the Hutus deposed the Tutsi monarchy. The Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority were embroiled in ethnic conflict, which climaxed in 1994. Rwanda's economic and social structure were in ruins at the time due to civil conflict and genocide (Reza & Stefan, 2017; Heldrink, 2021). Reconstruction and interethnic harmony have defined the years that have followed.

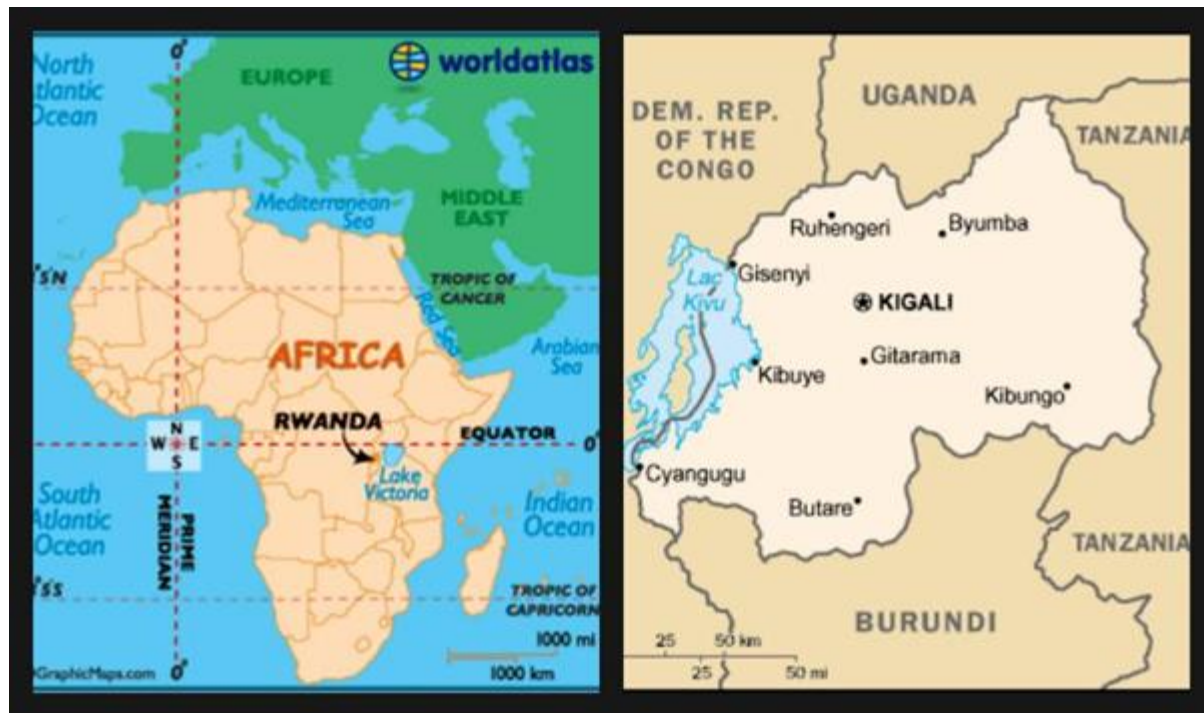


Figure 11: Location of Rwanda and surrounding countries

Source: World Atlas (2020)

Rwanda's anti-corruption strategy is distinctly influenced by its recent past. Leading government officials have believed that combating corruption is crucial to breaking the cycle of violence that has previously resulted in genocide since the late 1990s. The government's policy of zero tolerance for corruption was founded on the belief that corruption threatened society fabric (Baez-Camargo & Tharcisse, 2018). The idea that corruption (target 16.5) and injustice (target 16.6) are related led to the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman, which is now in charge of spearheading the fight against corruption (Transparency International Rwanda, 2019). This programme of anti-corruption focuses on the paths that Rwanda made when it established a rule-based government and a public service with strong integrity standards, thereby decreasing prospects for corruption. It lists the steps Rwanda has taken to combat corruption, the ways in which reforms have changed over time and the successes and difficulties that have resulted from Rwanda's unique strategy. As previously stated, the struggle against injustice following the genocide was associated with corruption. It was recognised as

something that needed to be fixed in order to break the cycle of violence, which also meant educating the public about their legal rights (Behuria & Goodfellow, 2019). In sub-Saharan Africa, a region that consistently scores poorly on international corruption indices, has few success stories in the battle against corruption. The exception is Rwanda, which continuously demonstrates low levels of corruption (Transparency International Rwanda, 2019).

Strategy of the programme

The Rwandan anti-corruption legal model is quite comprehensive. In addition, the government of Rwanda has ratified international treaties and conventions related to anti-corruption activities. These include the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2014, the African Union Convention against Corruption (AUCAC) and the East African Community Treaty against Corruption (Jessen, 2021).

The anti-corruption programme focuses on achieving the following objectives:

At the beginning of the programme on anti-corruption in 2000, Rwanda's corruption and bribery indicators were worrisome and included the following (Sustainable Development Goals Fund, n.d.):

- A very low percentage of the population were very reluctant to report corruption or illegal activities. Corruption or bribery was simply regarded as a common practice, and people thought it pointless as nobody would care.
- Out of the 25.2% who were subsequently recruited in the public or private sector, 41.4% were considered employed by nepotism and bribery.
- Rwanda has witnessed a high level of corruption both in the public and private sectors of the economy. Corruption was considered "the spider's web", a symbol of creativity, the complexities of life and wisdom.
- There was a high frequency level of bribery in the public sector among government officials, especially police and other uniform officials, as well as a high level of nepotism in the recruitment process in the public service.

The anti-corruption model has reduced Rwanda's high degree of corruption to a level comparable to middle-income nations during the past 20 years. For a nation at Rwanda's economic development level, its success in reducing administrative corruption, the kind of corruption that is included in international corruption assessments, is unheard of, and it stands in stark contrast to other nations that have emerged from violent conflict and have had miserable experiences in the fight against corruption.

In addressing these issues, the programme intervention consisted of the following approaches (Sustainable Development Goals Fund, n.d.):

- A framework for the capacity development of anti-corruption institutions should be provided.
- Effective political leadership in the fight against corruption should be encouraged.
- The public should be more vocal in demanding accountability and rejecting corruption.
- Anti-corruption measures should be enforced effectively. Compliance with established standards of accountability should be monitored.
- Anti-corruption monitoring and evaluation systems should be implemented.

Results and impact of the programme

The overwhelming weight of the evidence points to the elimination of petty corruption in Rwanda as a behaviour that has become normal. This is due to the encouragement of "Rwandaness"-related behaviours that uphold the rule of law and are reinforced by severe penalties meted out to those convicted of corrupt offences (Chemouni, 2019). However, fear of consequences is not the only reason that bottom-up corruption control is common; it also addresses a major factor that contributes to petty corruption: the considerable improvements in the standard and accessibility of vital public services.

The goal of Rwanda's anti-corruption framework was to create a public sector that, among other things, values and upholds integrity, acknowledges the need for accountability and openness and makes sure that all legal and regulatory requirements are met. It aims to create an informed populace that holds public servants to a high standard and a level

playing field for business, which cooperates with the battle against corruption. According to World Bank (2019) rankings, Rwanda has improved significantly over the past ten years, going from a score of 20.0% in 1996 to 70.8% in 2010. As a result, Rwanda is now the fourth least corrupt nation in Africa, behind Botswana (79.9%), Cape Verde (74.6%) and Mauritius (73.2%) (Transparency International Rwanda, 2019).

It is commonly acknowledged that corruption hinders and negatively impacts a country's ability to progress. Politically speaking, corruption destroys public trust in government agencies, erodes the authority and legitimacy of the state and discredits the rule of law. From an economic standpoint, corruption drives up transaction costs, incentivises breach of contract, makes resource misallocation and waste easier, deters foreign investment and impedes economic progress.

Challenges experienced

Some of the challenges experienced with this programme include the following (Sustainable Development Goals Fund, n.d.)

- Significant implementation delays were experienced, especially in terms of the law enforcement officers' understanding of duties and responsibilities and lack of morality or equipment.
- Delays occurred in the establishment of the anti-corruption programme and the ombudsman office facility that was expected to serve as the training centre. A lack of other venues for this purpose affected the implementation of training activities.
- Training for local officials was postponed due to delays in financial implication approvals by the Ministry of Finance. As a result, training had to take place outside of the local community, leading to higher costs and a lower number of beneficiaries.
- In order to mitigate the negative effects of corruption on the social and economic facets of society, there is a need for a macro view, corresponding dynamism and dedication. These factors must also be represented in behaviour (MINECOFIN, 2018).

Lessons learnt

The Rwanda case study offers several crucial lessons for African nations, chief among them being the necessity of reducing levels of bribery and corruption in the public and business sectors. Despite Rwanda being unique in many ways, it nevertheless yields important lessons learnt with this programme (Sustainable Development Goals Fund, n.d.):

- The nation's past has produced unique outcomes in terms of its political leadership, political economy and desire to end cycles of conflict.
- Rwanda has achieved the greatest reduction in corruption throughout the last 20 years.
- The programme played a comparatively secondary role in Rwanda's shift from a high level of administrative corruption to the significantly lower level that it currently has. The combination of reforms has made it more difficult for corrupt people to evade the law or to use social justification for their corrupt activities.
- The experience of Rwanda shows how effectively anti-corruption initiatives use local resources to target a particular issue.
- The Ombudsman office was founded; its initial scope encompassed duties related to an asset declaration agency and an anti-corruption agency.
- Organisations implemented a change-driven, entrepreneurial strategy that allowed bottlenecks to be promptly identified and addressed.

The Rwandan example has important implications for those working in development and anti-corruption that go beyond a discussion of the regime's relative authoritarianism. A primary goal of this programme is to illuminate the fundamental causes and motivators of Rwanda's success in combating corruption.

Sustainability and possibility for replication

Considering Rwanda's history of violent conflict and poor income position, its recent accomplishments are remarkable. The anti-corruption initiative in Rwanda is worth replicating by African countries. Due to its significant reduction of endemic corruption and successful achievement of indicators 16.5.1 and 16.5.2, which aim to considerably

eliminate corruption and bribery in all of its forms, the anti-corruption model has a high potential for replication by sub-Saharan Africa and developing nations.

Supplementary resources

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5.1.2 Case study 2 - Conflict in South Sudan

Contextual setting

South Sudan gained independence on 9 July 2011 after gaining autonomy from Sudan on 9 July 2005 (Chom, 2021). South Sudan is bordered by Sudan in the north, Ethiopia in the east, the DRC, Uganda and Kenya in the south and the Central African Republic in the west (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2015).

South Sudan has been involved in conflicts at various levels from national to local since its independence in 2011. This escalated in 2013 when President Salva Kiir dismissed his cabinet; various conflicts ensued, ranging from political parties attacking each other, to ethnic conflict, cattle raiding and the abduction of children and women (Schmidt, 2016; Wild et al., 2018; Mayik, 2020).

South Sudan embarked on a mission in 2017 to achieve Agenda 2030 and its 17 SDGs, which are the global and universal goals to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity (United Nations in South Sudan, 2017).

Strategy of the programme

The rule of law is critical for peacebuilding and forms a core pillar of the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (UNDP, n.d.). The UNDP's Access to Justice, Security and Human Rights Strengthening Programme aims to strengthen the rule of law in South Sudan (UNDP, 2023). The programme responds to the results of conflict by empowering national and local capacities to address impunity and react to the people's need for justice and security through technical, policy and capacity-building support. It also forms part of the UNDP's contribution towards the country's broader peacebuilding and long-term development process (UNDP, 2023).

The programme contributes to the UN Strategic Development and Cooperative Framework (UNSDCF) 2023 – 2025 by "*consolidating peace and transparent, accountable and inclusive governance*" (UNDP, 2023). This aligns the programme with

South Sudan's aim to achieve SDGs 5 (gender equality), 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals).

Results and impact of the programme

The programme's implementation is ongoing, and results are reported per state and nationally. Figure 12 illustrates the different states of South Sudan. The programme's results and impact in South Sudan are discussed with reference to Eastern Equatoria (indicated in a darker grey in figure 12), as the results for this state focus on the challenges experienced due to the lack of rule of law.

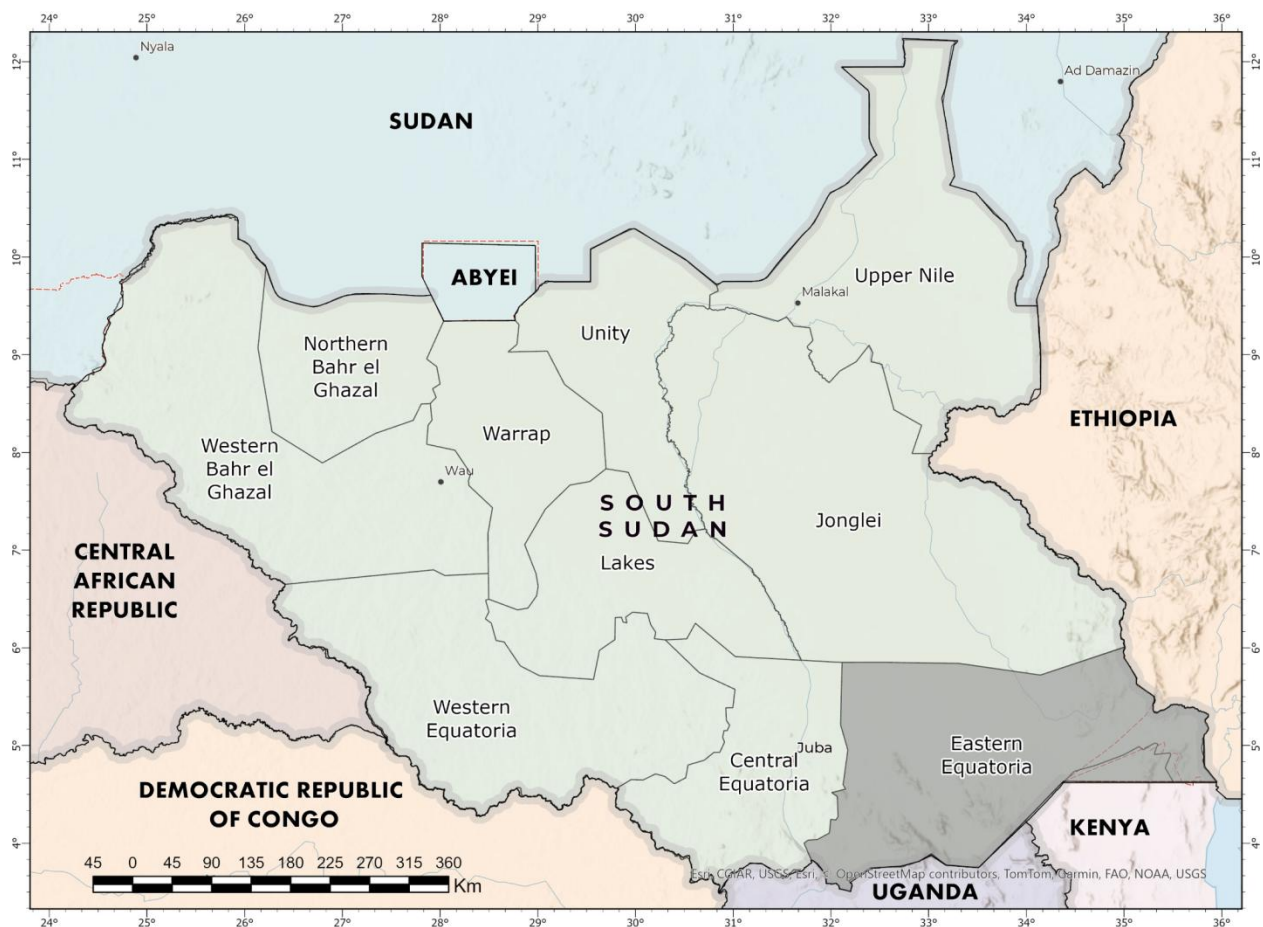


Figure 12: Different states of South Sudan

Source: Common Operational Database (COD-AB), August 2018. Compiled by Sanet Carow

Eastern Equatoria is plagued by rules of law challenges and insecurities. These challenges include cattle raiding, abduction of children and women, revenge killings, road ambushes and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), such as early and forced marriages.

Cattle raiding is a common security and gender concern because of the high prices paid for brides (Mayik, 2020). Clashes between cattle keepers and farmers have resulted in loss of life and displacement. Furthermore, the impact of climate change, the availability of small arms and light military weapons such as rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns and the politicians transforming farmers into militias has escalated a formally cultural practice ruled by ritual prohibitions into excessive violent acts that have a serious impact on peacebuilding efforts and the establishment of the rule of law (Wild et al., 2018; Mayik, 2020). The resulting conflicts and disputes are beyond the capacity of the traditional and community leaders as they involve politicians and militia leaders, who have successfully undermined the roles of traditional and community leaders that in the past governed the practice of cattle raiding (Wild et al., 2018). Cattle raiding has escalated to include the abduction of children and women (Wild et al., 2018; Mayik, 2020). The abducted women are taken as wives and the children are incorporated into the families of the captors (Wild et al., 2018).

Due to the near absence of adequate capacity for formal rule of law institutions in the state, there is a huge backlog and congestion in detention places (UNDP, 2023). Vulnerable groups such as women, girls, boys and SGBV and other conflict survivors have limited access to justice and psychosocial support due to insufficient knowledge of their rights. The UNDP continues to re-establish services through the construction of police stations and by strengthening the justice system through rule of law training and forums (UNDP, 2023).

The key results of the project are as follows (UNDP, 2023):

- Six rule of law clubs were set up in secondary schools to increase a culture of lawfulness among young people. A total of 1 246 young people (1 064 of whom were females) were involved in this project.

- An 85% improvement in the delivery of judgments by traditional leaders was reported, which led to increased confidence by the community in the traditional justice system.
- Four women lead nine of the newly established police-community relations committees.
- Two modern police posts and two B courts were completed and handed over to increase access to services in remote areas. These facilities were also equipped with furniture.

Challenges experienced

Two main challenges were experienced with the implementation of the project (UNDP, 2023):

- **Mistrust with and across different groups of stakeholders:** Some groups were from the opposition, different ethnic groups, youth groups and civil society organisations. These groups dominated and disrupted some activities. Therefore, steps had to be taken to cultivate minimum consensus across deep divisions. These consultations and inclusive processes included previously excluded citizens.
- **Delays in political decision-making:** The activities supported by the programme are political and touch on the interests of economic elites and politicians as well as the average citizen. Critical decisions that had to be made in order for the programme to move forward stalled the process.

Lessons learnt

Three critical lessons can be learnt from the project (UNDP, 2023):

- Participatory decision-making, co-creation and collective approaches have proved to be essential in effective peacebuilding. The process of co-creation and inclusiveness requires an investment in time, efforts to work across borders,

coordination and the necessary dedicated resources. This approach has also been advocated by Wild et al. (2018) and Mayik (2020).

- The programme needs to be flexible and adaptable within the broad outcomes. Because of its adaptability and responsiveness, the activities remain relevant and on course. This is especially true for delayed projects. The programme could therefore respond to changing situations on the ground, such as the impact of the Sudan conflict on South Sudan in the form of returnees and refugees, as well as the impact of feuds over resources such as water and cattle, ethnic rivalry and politically instigated violence (Wild et al., 2018; Mayik, 2020).
- The adaptation of a whole-system approach to justice is needed. However, implementation remains challenging. Legal traditions, separation of powers, professional identity, organisational structures and other traditional values remain in the justice systems, acting as barriers to change and collaboration. This shortcoming is being experienced by the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), which is successful in combating the violence but having problems in assisting South Sudan in implementing SDG 16 (Schmidt, 2016; Abhigita, 2024).

Sustainability and possibility for replication

The inclusion of marginalised groups and increased accountability in the political and governance spheres is crucial for long-term progress on the SDGs (Schmidt, 2016; South Sudan Inaugural SDG Report, 2017). Finding lasting political resolutions to the conflict in South Sudan is the stakeholders' most urgent and widely expressed priority (United Nations in South Sudan, 2017). SDG 16 is seen as an enabler that can unlock pathways for progress in all the other SDGs (United Nations in South Sudan, 2017).

SDGs should not only be applied once conflict has been resolved, but should be an integral part of recovery efforts to build a future with opportunities and common aspirations (United Nations in South Sudan, 2017). There is a need to identify more innovative and cost-saving measures for the implementation of rule of law (UNDP, 2023).

For a more effective justice system, more work is needed for actions across the whole justice system with engaged leadership at every level (UNDP, 2023).

Abhigita (2024) indicates that the United Nations Organisation Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) is experiencing similar issues to those of UNMISS that hinder the implementation of SDG 16 in the DRC. Implementing SDG 16 in conflict areas does not have a one-size-fits-all solution and it requires a deep understanding of the conflict and a multifaceted approach to enable successful implementation of SDG 16 in these countries (Abhigita, 2024).

Supplementary resources

- UNDP. (2023). *Access to Justice, Security and Human Rights Strengthening Programme in South Sudan. Annual Report.* <https://www.undp.org/south-sudan/publications/annual-report-2023-access-justice-security-and-human-rights-strengthening-programme-south-sudan>.
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5.1.3 Case study 3 – Birth registrations in South Africa: Reaching the hard to reach

Contextual setting

Although the history of the registration of births, deaths and marriages in South Africa dates back to the 1700s, it is important to consider the effect that the racially based political history of the country had on this process (Stats SA, 2009). A National Population Register was implemented in 1972, but included only the White, Coloured and Indian groups at that stage, and Black South Africans were only included from 1986 (Nhlapo, 2015). The distinction between population groups for registration of births, deaths and marriages was abolished and replaced by non-discriminatory legislation in 1992 (Bah, 1999). Associated with this political legacy, the birth registration rate was estimated at only 25% in 1991 (Wong et al., 2016). This can be ascribed to, among other things, the

legacy of apartheid policies. This inhibited the trust of especially Black South Africans in any form of government registration, including birth registration. Practical constraints also played a role, a major one being the lack of access to facilities to register a child's birth, especially in remote, rural and poorer areas.

Wong et al. (2016) refer to the negative implications of the non-registration of births, which limits development opportunities and future life chances of such children. They are unlikely to have a birth certificate, implying that they are legally not recognised. This makes it difficult for them to access health and education services and to obtain a passport. Such children are also vulnerable to exploitation, human trafficking and other human rights violations. UNICEF regards birth registration as a fundamental human right. The fact that so many of the world's children do not enjoy this right is regarded as a "scandal of invisibility". The importance of this issue is expressed through target 9 of SDG 16, advocating for provision of legal identity for all by 2030, including birth registration. Progress towards achievement is specified by indicator 16.9.1. This case study deals with the steps taken by the South African government to improve birth registrations, leading to an increase from 25% in 1991 to 85% in 2012, while remaining stagnant thereafter at 88/89% - i.e. still falling short of the 2030 target, but nevertheless a remarkable improvement.

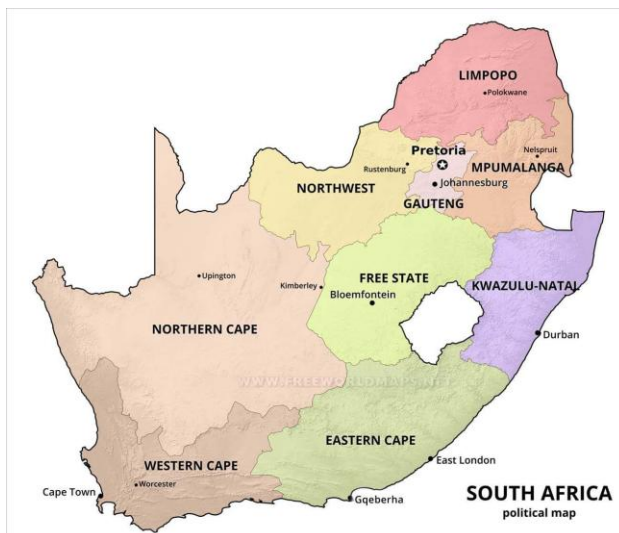


Figure 13: Maps showing A) South Africa and its nine provinces, and B) South Africa's location in the world

Source: A) <https://www.freeworldmaps.net/africa/southafrica/southafrica.jpg>

B) <https://www.freeworldmaps.net/africa/southafrica/location.html>

Strategy of the programme

Birth registration in South Africa is done by the Department of Home Affairs. However, when applying for a birth certificate, more government departments are involved, including Home Affairs, Health, Education, Social Development and several local government offices. The strategy implemented by the government to increase birth registration comprises a multi-dimensional approach involving several departments, and operates on different levels to ensure as wide as possible uptake and impact. The following elements form part of this strategy:

- Beginning in the 1990s, coinciding with the end of apartheid, the government implemented measures to increase access to health facilities in rural areas, with a focus on mother and child health. This provided the opportunity to integrate birth registration into the healthcare system through the establishment of registration points in health facilities.
- The introduction of the child support grant in 1998 created an incentive for parents to register the birth of their children and to obtain a birth certificate.
- To ensure that birth registration processes reach those who live in rural and/or geographically isolated areas, the government has introduced outreach programmes. This includes the provision of mobile units to reach those who are hard to reach.
- Set against a history of apartheid policies, the introduction of democracy in South Africa transformed registration from surveillance to inclusive citizenship, fostering greater trust in the government to improve various civil registration processes.

Results and impact of the programme

The first step by the democratically elected government of South Africa to increase birth registrations was to improve access to the health system. This comprised construction of 1 300 new healthcare facilities from 1994 to 1999. Additionally, healthcare user fees were scrapped: first for pregnant women and children up to 5 years old (1994), followed by fees for all users (1996). This positively affected access to the health system, as Black South Africans had regarded user fees as a major obstacle to access the system. As a result, births in health facilities increased to almost 95% by 2008. This corresponds with the increased birth registration rate from 1998, associated with the integration of the birth registration process into the health system through the establishment of birth registration points in health facilities, which worked well. In this way previous barriers to birth registration were removed, such as transportation and other opportunity costs when families had to separately register their child's birth at a Department of Home Affairs office. Simultaneously, the strengthening of antenatal and postnatal programmes increased awareness by families of the benefits of birth registration, thus making it easier for them to understand the benefits of participating in this process.

Soon after the integration of the birth registration process into the health system, the government implemented the child support grant scheme in 1998. It is managed by the South Africa Social Security Agency (SASSA). To access this scheme, eligible families have to produce their child's birth certificate, meaning that the child's birth must have been registered with the Department of Home Affairs. The grant therefore created an incentive for birth registration and, according to Wong et al. (2016), was hugely impactful. From March 2015, a monthly grant of R330 was paid to households representing an estimated 12 million children. Wong et al. also refer to research that found that the grant positively affected child health and development, food security and nutrition, access to health and early childhood care, and education. This new process implied closer integration of the functions performed by the Department of Home Affairs and SASSA offices, which made it easier for eligible mothers to apply for the child support grant. As a result, the previous process consisting of multiple visits to various offices has been reduced to a two-step process – from the hospital direct to the SASSA office.

Considering the reality that it is expensive for poor families in remote areas in South Africa to travel to a Department of Home Affairs office to register a child's birth and to a SASSA office to apply for the child support grant, the South African government implemented measures to reach out to such families through mobile programmes to make it easier for them to access social services – such as birth registration. Firstly, these programmes were multifunctional, involving different government agencies and departments. Secondly, they reflected local contexts and addressed the specific needs of particular communities. Thirdly, they fulfilled the function of raising awareness among communities about benefits of social service programmes, including birth registration. Examples are the ICROP and Thusong programmes, both ensuring consideration of the local context when such programmes are implemented. Both require coordination among government departments to provide integrated social services, so that families can access a variety of social services in a one-stop way.

Finally, the establishment of a fully democratic government during the early 1990s positively impacted civil registration, including birth registration. Firstly, the 1994 democratic elections required citizens to register to vote, which connected previously excluded citizens to the government's registration procedures. This not only implied the need for identification documents and registration to vote, but also opened the door to apply for social programmes and registering one's child – all important dimensions of democratic rights. Secondly, poverty reduction was an important focus of the new government. Several new social programmes and poverty reduction initiatives followed, including efforts to increase birth registration. Thirdly, equally important was the role that civil society and non-governmental organisations played in deepening South Africa's democracy, with civil society particularly effective in legal activism – also with respect to children's rights and welfare. Birth registration formed part of this activism and was advocated as a right of all South Africans. Legal activists and civil society therefore worked to ensure that this right is extended to all, even those who are hardest to reach.

Challenges experienced

Despite the improvements to the South African birth registration process, there is still considerable variation in the frontline delivery of social services. The research by Wong et al. (2016) points towards inconsistencies in the quality of service delivery at the frontline and in staff training, despite standard procedures that are in place. This leads to several inefficiencies, with applicants often having to visit the Department of Home Affairs and SASSA offices several times to complete the process. This poses a significant barrier and is a disincentive for families to register their child's birth and to claim the child support grant. These repeated trips can incur a significant cost, especially for those who are poor and must travel a long distance. Also to be added is the cost of lost work time, especially for people employed on an informal/irregular basis. This leads to the paradox that although birth registration in South Africa is free, the actual process of registering a child's birth can come with significant 'hidden' costs. A further challenge associated with birth registrations in South Africa is that the requirements disqualify many migrant families, illegal refugees and those who are stateless. In South Africa, these children are effectively invisible to the government, unable to apply for a birth certificate and constrained in their access to health and education services. Although legal activists have mobilised to address this, many of these children continue to be excluded, despite having been born in South Africa. Other challenges include certain cultural traditions that can prevent timely birth registration, and the additional documents and penalty fee that are required if registration is done more than 30 days after a child's birth.

Lessons learnt

- In South Africa, increased contact with health facilities and programmes created opportunities to provide families with health advice, including information on birth registration. The construction of a large number of new healthcare facilities and the elimination of user fees for mothers and children contributed hugely to the success that was achieved, with a marked increase in the number of babies born in health facilities and uptake in antenatal and postnatal care programmes.
- To ensure buy-in, birth registration needed to be easy and streamlined. In South Africa, the process to register births was complicated, inconvenient and inconsistent,

and had a low uptake. The administrative processes were therefore redesigned to make it easier for parents to register their child's birth, to acquire a birth certificate and to apply for the child support grant. The result is a more integrated approach to social services for children by different government agencies.

- An improvement in birth registrations will be easier to achieve if it is incentivised in some way. In South Africa this was achieved through the incentive created by the child support grant. This is because to apply for the grant, families have to present their child's birth certificate, which requires the child's birth to be formally registered.
- For poor and geographically isolated families, costs associated with travel and lost wages due to time away from work are disincentives to register the birth of their children. To address this, the strategy of active reach with the use of mobile systems to deliver such social services to the hardest to reach made a positive contribution to increase birth registrations. In these programmes local context is crucial, and active reach has to be adapted to fit local needs.
- The South Africa case is a good example of how the norm of inclusive citizenship and the government's commitment to democratisation facilitated greater participation in civil registration processes – specifically birth registration. While especially Black South Africans distrusted the government and its efforts to register citizens during the apartheid era, the democratic transition had the effect that citizens are more likely to see formal registration as a path to inclusive citizenship, including the right to legal identity and birth registration

Sustainability and possibility for replication

There is general agreement that the success achieved by South Africa in increasing birth registration is remarkable, especially among those who are hard to reach. The strategy followed by South Africa can be replicated and used as a model by countries in the Global South that are still struggling to improve their birth registration rate. This model includes transforming health facilities, implementing incentives for birth registration, implementing active reach strategies and fostering a sense of inclusive citizenship. Yet, challenges remain that will still have to be overcome. Although South Africa's birth registration rate

is higher compared to some other countries in Africa, it still falls short of target 16.9 of SDG 16 and its specification of universal birth registration by 2030. Worrying at this stage is that the South African birth registration system seems to have “hit the ceiling” (Wong et al., 2016). According to Kruger (2022), South Africa’s birth registration rate has remained stagnant at 88.6% from 2011 to 2016, although this needs to be reviewed when up to date census data becomes available. The question can be asked whether the legislative framework for birth registration in South Africa is optimal for achieving target 16.9 of SDG 16 by 2030. The findings by Kruger (2022) point to the contrary and highlight several factors constraining the efficiency of birth registrations in South Africa. These include the inadequacy of laws and policies, the absence of proper implementation and the failure to remove limitations and barriers to birth registration. Kruger (2022) makes several recommendations to ensure the protection of the right of every child to birth registration. If these are noted and implemented, it should still be possible for South Africa to achieve the target of universal birth registration by 2030.

Supplementary resources

- Kruger, H. (2022). The invisible children-protecting the right to birth registration in South Africa. *Journal for Juridical Science*, 47(2), 55-87.
- Nannan, N., Dorrington, R., & Bradshaw, D. (2019). Estimating completeness of birth registration in South Africa, 1996–2011. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 97(7), 468.
- Nhlapo, M. (2015). An assessment of quality of birth registration in South Africa for fertility estimation. In C. O. Odimegwu, & J. Kekovole (Eds.), *Social demography of South Africa* (pp. 52-69). Routledge.
- Wong, J., Skead, K., Marchese, A., Lim, S., Houshmand, K. & Rau, A. (2016). *Reaching the hard to reach: A case study of birth registration in South Africa*. Reach Alliance, Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto. <https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/research/reaching-hard-reach-case-study-birth-registration-south-africa>

5.2 Latin America

5.2.1 Case study 1 - Mapping of the violence in the Amazon Region

The Amazon is a region of unparalleled ecological, cultural and economic significance, encompassing an extensive area of approximately 5.2 million km², or 59% of Brazil's national territory. It spans the states of Acre, Amapá, Amazonas, Mato Grosso, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima, Tocantins and part of Maranhão. Recognised for its extraordinary biodiversity, vast freshwater reserves and critical role in global climate regulation, the Amazon remains a focal point for environmental conservation and sustainable development discussions. Despite its natural wealth, the region continues to face socio-economic challenges, including limited access to infrastructure, education and healthcare for indigenous and riverine communities. The increasing demand for agricultural expansion and resource extraction has intensified land conflicts, highlighting the complex interplay between environmental conservation, economic interests and social equity. These dynamics shape the ongoing debate on the sustainable management of Amazonian resources and the equitable distribution of its benefits.

The Brazilian Forum on Public Safety (2021), in collaboration with the Institute for Climate and Society and researchers from the Research Group of Emerging Territories and Resistance Networks in the Amazon at the University of the State of Pará, developed the project entitled "Mapping of Violence in the Amazon Region".

Strategy of the programme

The project aims to cross-reference and analyse data on unlawful activities, criminality and public security in the Amazon, while integrating this with the socio-environmental discourse. It recognises the Amazon as a key strategic asset for Brazil, positioning it at the heart of global climate geopolitics. The initiative fosters an open discussion on the interconnectedness of the region's major challenges.

Results and impact of the programme

The findings and conclusions of the project were initially presented in an executive summary released during COP26 in Glasgow. The project, which aims to examine violence and unlawful activities in the Amazon region, focuses on three core areas: land use, criminal activity and the role of public security. By analysing these aspects, the project provides insights into the overlap between environmental issues and public security, highlighting the need for a comprehensive discussion about the region's challenges. The aim is not to exhaust the subject but to highlight the intersections between unlawful actions and territorial disputes, emphasising the limitations of institutional capacities in ensuring law enforcement and promoting citizenship while preserving the forest.

The first chapter of the report addresses the primary environmental crimes in the Legal Amazon, such as land grabbing, illegal fires, timber exploitation and the rise of illegal mining. Understanding these conflicts over land use is essential for comprehending the region's broader issues of violence. In the second chapter, the report connects organised crime and drug trafficking with environmental and land disputes, which lead to violent deaths. The data reveals a troubling trend: an increase in mortality rates in the region, especially in deforested areas. This chapter also underscores the link between organised crime and lethal violence, showing that homicide rates in these areas exceed national averages.

The final chapter focuses on the institutional structure of public security in the Amazon, analysing the role of various state and federal institutions in managing conflicts over land use and addressing violence. It reveals significant gaps in governance, such as a lack of coordination between state and federal agencies and insufficient training for those working with native populations. These weaknesses have been exploited by criminal networks, leading to further violence. The findings argue for a shift away from militarisation and temporary security measures, advocating instead for the strengthening of integrated governance mechanisms to reduce violence and guarantee sovereignty and development in the region.

Links with SDG 16 targets and indicators

The findings of the project align with SDG 16, particularly through the following targets and indicators:

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

Indicator 16.1.1: Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100 000 population;

Indicator 16.1.4: Proportion of population that feels safe walking alone around the area they live.

The report highlights high homicide rates in deforested areas, conflicts over land use and organised crime activities, which contribute to violence in the Amazon.

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

Indicator 16.3.1: Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimisation to competent authorities.

Indicator 16.3.2: Unsensitized detainees as a proportion of the overall prison population

The study discusses the institutional limitations in ensuring justice and law enforcement, as well as the lack of access to legal protection for local communities.

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.

Indicator 16.4.1: Total value of inward and outward illicit financial flows

Indicator 16.4.2: Proportion of seized, found, or surrendered arms whose illicit origin has been traced

The research links illegal mining, land grabbing and deforestation with transnational organised crime, showing the role of illicit economies in fuelling violence.

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

Indicator 16.6.1: Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget

Indicator 16.6.2: Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services.

The report critiques the lack of institutional coordination and resources in law enforcement, revealing governance failures in addressing unlawful activities.

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

Indicator 16.7.1: Proportions of positions in public institutions held by different population groups

Indicator 16.7.2: Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive

The study highlights the exclusion of indigenous and local communities from decision-making processes regarding land use and environmental protection.

Sustainability and possibility for replication

The Mapping of Violence in the Amazon Region project contributes to sustainability by fostering social justice, strengthening governance and promoting the protection of human rights and environmental defenders. By systematically documenting conflicts, land disputes and violence, the initiative provides crucial data for policymakers, civil society and law enforcement, enabling evidence-based interventions that support peacebuilding and sustainable development.

The possibility of replication depends on adapting the methodology to different regional contexts. Similar mapping initiatives could be implemented in other environmentally sensitive and socio-politically complex regions facing land conflicts. Key factors for successful replication include strong institutional partnerships, transparent data collection, community involvement and technological tools for real-time monitoring. By ensuring these elements, the project's approach can serve as a model for addressing violence linked to land disputes, environmental degradation and resource exploitation worldwide.

5.2.2 Case study 2 - The Escazú Agreement

Latin America and the Caribbean, though contributing less to climate change than other regions, faces significant vulnerability to its impacts. In response, the region has become a leader in adopting a human rights-centred approach to climate action. Many countries have integrated human rights into their national climate policies, emphasising sustainable development with a strong focus on people and their rights. On the global stage, Latin American and Caribbean nations have consistently promoted a rights-based perspective on climate initiatives, actively supporting the inclusion of climate issues within human rights frameworks (Parliamentarians for Global Action, 2022).

Adopted under the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Escazú, Costa Rica, on 4 March 2018, the Escazú Agreement — officially known as the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation, and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean — is the first legally binding treaty globally to address environmental human rights defenders specifically. It is also the first regional environmental agreement for Latin America and the Caribbean. This historic treaty safeguards and upholds the rights of environmental defenders, including civil society organisations, NGOs and individual environmental human rights advocates. It places special emphasis on groups leading climate action, such as women, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant communities (ECLAC, 2022b).

Strategy of the programme

The goal of this Agreement is to ensure that Latin America and the Caribbean fully and effectively implement the rights to access environmental information, participate in environmental decision-making and seek justice in environmental matters. Additionally, it aims to foster capacity-building and cooperation to protect the rights of all individuals, both present and future, to live in a healthy environment and promote sustainable development.

Results and impact of the programme

As the only binding agreement emerging from the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), this is also the first regional environmental treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean and the first globally to include specific protections for environmental human rights defenders. Open to all 33 countries in the region, the Agreement was available for signature at the United Nations headquarters in New York between 27 September 2018 and 26 September 2020, and it officially came into force on 22 April 2021, upon meeting the conditions in Article 22 (ECLAC, 2024).

The Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean website (<https://observatoriop10.cepal.org/en>) serves as a clearinghouse that examines legislation, policies, jurisprudence and treaties which secure the rights to access information, participate in environmental decision-making and seek justice on environmental issues, in alignment with Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and the Escazú Agreement.

Key data shows that 24 countries have enacted freedom of information laws, enhancing transparency and public access to environmental information. Additionally, 76% of these countries have adopted provisions within their environmental legislation to promote public participation in decision-making processes. In terms of justice, 20 countries allow individuals or groups to bring legal actions in defence of the environment, empowering citizens to advocate for environmental protection. Furthermore, 7 countries have implemented specific legal measures aimed at safeguarding environmental defenders, ensuring greater protection for those advocating environmental rights.

The "Roadmap for Implementing the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, Uruguay" serves as the roadmap for implementing the Escazú Agreement in Uruguay. It has been developed by the Uruguayan government with support from ECLAC. The purpose of this document is to outline the key actions required for effective implementation of the Escazú Agreement in Uruguay, guided by a strategy of inter-

institutional coordination and grounded in information-sharing and public participation (ECLAC, 2022a).

The third meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 3) to the Escazú Agreement, held at ECLAC in March 2024, made significant strides in advancing environmental justice in the region. This conference focused on the adoption of the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters, a critical roadmap to enhance protection for environmental defenders. With over 700 participants, including government delegates, indigenous leaders, youth and members of civil society, the event underscored the importance of creating a safe environment for those defending the planet. The meeting concluded with the renewal of the mandate for the Presiding Officers and a commitment to continue pushing for stronger implementation of the Escazú Agreement across the region. The next meeting, COP 4, is scheduled for 2026 in Santiago, Chile (ECLAC, 2023).

Links with SDG 16 targets and indicators

The Escazú Agreement is directly aligned with several targets and indicators of SDG 16. Specifically, it strengthens the role of good governance, transparency and public participation, which are fundamental components of SDG 16. Key links between the Escazú Agreement and SDG 16 include the following:

- **Target 16.6 (effective, accountable and transparent institutions):** The agreement promotes transparency by ensuring that citizens have access to environmental information and are able to participate in environmental decision-making processes. This enables public institutions to become more accountable and responsive to the needs of the people, particularly in the areas of environmental protection and sustainable development.
- **Target 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making):** It strengthens participatory democracy by establishing mechanisms for public participation in environmental decision-making, especially for marginalised

groups such as indigenous peoples and environmental defenders. This aligns with the commitment to inclusive governance found in SDG 16.

- **Target 16.10 (public access to information; fundamental freedoms):** It secures the right to access environmental information and protects the rights of environmental defenders, ensuring that citizens can freely access critical information related to environmental matters, empowering them to hold governments accountable.

Sustainability and possibility for replication

The Escazú Agreement promotes sustainability by establishing rights to access environmental information, public participation and justice, which are essential for ensuring long-term environmental governance and human rights protection. It emphasises transparency, accountability and citizen empowerment, fostering sustainable practices in environmental decision-making. Additionally, the agreement's focus on protecting human rights defenders and promoting inclusive participation provides a model for replication in other regions with similar environmental and human rights challenges. The principles of the Escazú Agreement align with SDG 16, which advocates peace, justice and strong institutions, making it an essential framework for advancing transparency, legal access and human rights in environmental matters, and offering lessons for other regions working toward these global goals. By promoting cross-border collaboration and capacity building, the agreement sets a replicable precedent for achieving environmental justice and inclusivity globally.

5.2.3 Case study 3 - Justice 4.0, Brazil

Brazil is known for having one of the highest volumes of lawsuits globally, with 31.5 million new cases, 30.3 million closed cases and 81.4 million pending cases in 2022. The Brazilian judiciary manages some of the heaviest caseloads in the world, with 6 747 cases per judge.

The evolution of e-justice in Brazil has occurred in stages. From 2004 to 2013, the country shifted from paper-based processes to digital court proceedings. Between 2014 and 2020, this transitioned to the automation of judicial workflows, and since 2021, courts have integrated artificial intelligence to improve efficiency.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil's judiciary quickly adapted by implementing digital platforms like the Virtual Desk, allowing citizens to access court services remotely. Hearings and trials became fully online, reducing travel and saving time. The creation of Justice 4.0 Centres further expanded judges' reach, overcoming geographic limitations. By 2022, only 1% of new cases were paper-based, marking a significant shift towards a fully digital judicial system that has helped reduce the backlog.

Strategy of the programme

The Justice 4.0 programme drives digital transformation within Brazil's judiciary, leveraging advanced technologies and AI to provide faster, more efficient and accessible services for all citizens. Led by the National Council of Justice in collaboration with the UNDP, the programme engages key judicial institutions and partners to enhance efficiency, productivity, transparency and collaboration across all courts.

The programme's four pillars are as follows:

- **Innovation and technology:** Implementing cutting-edge solutions to improve citizen services.
- **Data management:** Optimising data management for evidence-based policies and transparency.
- **Combating corruption:** Enhancing asset searches and data optimisation for better legal outcomes.
- **Strengthening institutional capacity:** Fostering knowledge transfer and providing extensive training for judicial staff to ensure system-wide consistency.

Justice 4.0 prioritises sustainable development and ensures no additional costs for courts.

Results and impact of the programme

Digital Platform of the Judiciary (PDPJ-BR)

Brazil has made significant strides in digitalising its judiciary, with 92 courts fully integrated into the PDPJ-BR platform, streamlining judicial processes. The platform's efficiency is evident through the widespread use of notifications (89% of judicial bodies) and Single Sign-On (SSO) implementation (98%). Additionally, 185 data sources are integrated, supporting 14 unified systems that enhance operational effectiveness.

Codex: Unifying Court Case Data

Codex serves as Brazil's central repository for court case information, consolidating data across various systems. It provides real-time access to case content, supporting AI model training and public policy development. With over 7 billion documents and 260 million proceedings, Codex integrates seamlessly into the Judiciary's Data Lake, laying the foundation for future AI and business intelligence tools.

Single Service Portal

The Single Service Portal will centralise all judicial services, ensuring a seamless user experience by linking various procedural systems. This integration will eliminate the need to navigate individual court websites, making the justice system more efficient and accessible for all users.

AI: Empowering informed decision-making

AI enhances Brazil's judiciary by automating tasks and uncovering patterns that aid decision-making. This optimisation frees up time for judges and legal officers to focus on complex cases, accelerating case processing and reducing backlogs. While digital transformation is critical, AI has become indispensable in managing the growing volume of cases.

Digital solutions in the Brazilian judiciary

- SINAPES: Manages AI models to improve judicial data processing.
- Codex: Centralises case information, offering efficient data retrieval.

- Judiciary Statistics Panel: Provides performance metrics to support transparency.
- National Judiciary Strategy Monitoring Panel: Ensures alignment with strategic goals.
- SNIPER: Cross-references data from open and closed sources for enhanced insights.
- Previdenciário: Automates access to social security data, improving efficiency in previdenciary cases.

Judiciary policies in Brazil

- Bacao Virtual: A videoconferencing tool that enables remote participation in judicial proceedings, improving access to justice.
- 100% digital courts: Ensures all judicial acts, including hearings, are conducted remotely and electronically, improving efficiency and accessibility.
- Justice 4.0 centres: Allow judges to perform duties remotely, breaking geographical barriers and offering fully digital services.

Links with SDG 16 targets and indicators

The digital initiatives in Brazil's judiciary, including the PDPJ-BR platform, Codex and the Single Service Portal, align closely with SDG 16:

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

- PDPJ-BR and the Single Service Portal streamline access to judicial services nationwide, ensuring equal access to justice.
- Codex centralises case data, providing real-time access for better case tracking and justice delivery.

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

- PDPJ-BR integrates data from 185 sources, enhancing transparency and accountability in the judiciary.

- AI and machine learning optimise decision-making and improve efficiency.

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

- Bacao Virtual enables remote participation in court proceedings, promoting inclusivity.
- Justice 4.0 centres allow judges to work remotely, ensuring efficient and responsive decision-making.

Sustainability and possibility for replication

Brazil's judicial digital transformation demonstrates significant sustainability potential and offers opportunities for replication in other countries. The key factors contributing to its sustainability and replication potential are as follows:

- **Scalability and flexibility:** PDPJ-BR and other platforms are designed for nationwide implementation, with scalable solutions that can be adapted for different regional or national contexts. Their modular structure allows for expansion as judicial needs evolve.
- **Cost efficiency:** Digital platforms and AI integration reduce operational costs by automating tasks and optimising workflows, leading to long-term savings. The use of cloud technology ensures that these systems can be maintained cost-effectively while avoiding the need for extensive physical infrastructure.
- **Transparency and inclusivity:** By centralising data and providing tools like Codex and Bacao Virtual, Brazil's system ensures transparency and inclusivity, making it easier for citizens and legal professionals to engage with the judiciary remotely. These features make the system adaptable for regions aiming to enhance access to justice.
- **Environmental benefits:** Moving to 100% digital and paperless courts reduces paper consumption and related environmental impacts. This shift supports broader sustainability goals and can be replicated in jurisdictions seeking to reduce their ecological footprint.

- **AI and data integration:** The use of AI for decision support and process automation is an innovative model that can be replicated in countries facing similar challenges of case backlogs and high court caseloads. It not only improves efficiency but also enhances the quality of decision-making by uncovering patterns and insights from data.

These characteristics position Brazil's judicial system as a sustainable model that other countries, especially those with similar challenges in access to justice, efficiency and transparency, can replicate and adapt.

5.3 Europe

5.3.1 Case study 1. Decidim, Barcelona – a participatory democracy platform, Barcelona, Spain

Political and socio-economic context

Barcelona has long been a hub of civic activism, with strong grassroots movements advocating political transparency and citizen participation. However, the Spanish political landscape has been marked by periods of political instability, corruption scandals and low trust in government institutions. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and the rise of social movements such as the 15M (Indignados), demands for more participatory governance intensified. Citizens sought greater control over decision-making processes, particularly regarding urban planning, budget allocations and social policies.

In response to these demands, the Barcelona City Council launched Decidim (figure 14), a digital platform designed to enhance participatory democracy. The initiative emerged as part of a broader movement towards open government, seeking to leverage technology to bridge the gap between institutions and citizens. By providing a transparent and inclusive space for civic engagement, Decidim aimed to combat political

disengagement and restore trust in democratic processes. Figure 14 shows the layout of Decidim's webpage in Barcelona.



Figure 14: Decidim Barcelona's webpage layout

Source: Decidim. Barcelona (2025)

Strategy of the programme

Decidim, which means “We Decide” in Catalan, is an open-source digital platform that enables citizens to actively participate in governance (Mariani et al., 2025). Unlike traditional consultation mechanisms, Decidim allows direct involvement in municipal decision-making through a structured, transparent process (Satorras et al., 2020). The platform includes several key features:

- **Proposal submission:** Citizens can propose policies and initiatives, which are then discussed and refined through deliberative processes.
- **Participatory budgeting:** Residents vote on how public funds should be allocated, ensuring that financial decisions reflect community needs.
- **Tracking and accountability:** Each proposal's progress is openly tracked, ensuring that government officials are held accountable for implementing accepted initiatives.

- **Hybrid participation:** While primarily digital, Decidim also integrates offline components such as town hall meetings and community assemblies to ensure inclusivity.

The platform is designed to be adaptable, allowing other cities and organisations to tailor it to their governance structures (Borge et al., 2023). By making the code open source, Barcelona promotes a broader democratic transformation beyond its municipal borders.

Results and impacts of the programme

The implementation of Decidim has had significant impacts on governance and civic engagement in Barcelona. The platform has led to a measurable increase in citizen participation, with thousands of proposals submitted and deliberated (Mello Rose, 2021). Notably, participation rates among younger demographics and traditionally marginalised groups have risen, demonstrating the platform's ability to engage previously disengaged sectors of the population.

Moreover, Decidim has contributed to greater governmental transparency. By making decision-making processes publicly accessible, the platform has reduced opportunities for corruption and backroom deals. This increased visibility has, in turn, strengthened social trust, as citizens can see the tangible outcomes of their participation.

Additionally, the initiative has empowered citizens by fostering a culture of co-governance. Residents now play an active role in shaping policies that affect their daily lives, moving beyond passive electoral participation. This shift has reinforced a sense of collective responsibility and civic duty, laying the foundation for a more engaged and democratic society.

Possibility for replication

One of the key strengths of Decidim lies in its potential for replication in diverse political and cultural contexts. As an open-source platform, it can be adapted to different governance models, allowing cities and institutions worldwide to tailor its functionalities according to their needs. However, successful replication requires strong political will and institutional commitment to ensure that citizen participation is not merely symbolic, but genuinely integrated into decision-making processes. Without government support and clear legal frameworks mandating the consideration of citizen proposals, participatory platforms risk becoming superficial engagement tools rather than instruments of meaningful policy transformation.

Digital infrastructure also plays a crucial role in determining the success of replication. While Decidim has thrived in Barcelona, where internet access and digital literacy levels are high, cities with significant technological disparities may need to invest in infrastructure and education programmes to ensure broad public engagement. If access to technology is uneven, participatory platforms may inadvertently exclude marginalised communities rather than fostering true inclusivity. To mitigate this, hybrid approaches that combine digital participation with offline engagement mechanisms — such as community meetings — can make the model more universally applicable.

Cultural adaptability is another factor influencing Decidim's replicability. The platform has flourished in a context with a strong tradition of civic engagement, but in societies with lower levels of trust in public institutions, citizen participation may be met with scepticism. Replication efforts must therefore be accompanied by trust-building measures, transparent communication strategies and legal guarantees that ensure that citizen input leads to concrete governmental action. Additionally, a clear administrative framework must be established to define how participatory proposals are evaluated and implemented, preventing bureaucratic inertia from stalling citizen-driven initiatives.

In essence, while Decidim provides a scalable and adaptable model for participatory democracy, its success depends on the local political climate, technological infrastructure, cultural readiness and institutional responsiveness. Cities seeking to implement similar

platforms must carefully consider these elements to create an environment where participatory governance can thrive.

Links with SDG 16 targets and indicators

Decidim is fundamentally aligned with SDG 16:

- **Target 16.6 (develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions):** Decidim enhances institutional accountability by making governmental decisions transparent and publicly accessible. The ability to track proposals and monitor progress ensures that government commitments are verifiable, reducing the risk of corruption and inefficiency. This aligns with indicator 16.6.2, which measures citizens' satisfaction with public services, as Decidim provides a direct feedback mechanism between citizens and government institutions.
- **Target 16.7 (ensure responsive, inclusive and participatory decision-making):** One of Decidim's core contributions is fostering inclusive and responsive governance. The platform actively engages citizens in decision-making processes, giving voice to individuals who may otherwise be excluded from political participation. This aligns with indicator 16.7.2, which measures the proportion of the population who feel that their views are represented in decision-making. By lowering the barriers to participation, Decidim makes governance more equitable and responsive to public needs.
- **Target 16.10 (ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms):** The open-access nature of Decidim ensures that all governmental proposals, discussions and budget allocations are transparent. This aligns with indicator 16.10.2, which assesses the number of countries with guarantees for public access to information. By providing a structured mechanism for government transparency, Decidim safeguards citizens' right to information and enhances their ability to participate in governance.

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5.3.2 Case study 2 - Helsinki's Open Government Initiative, Helsinki, Finland

Political and socio-economic context

Helsinki, the capital of Finland, operates within a strong democratic framework characterised by high levels of institutional trust, low corruption and a commitment to open governance. Finland consistently ranks among the world's least corrupt countries, largely due to its transparent legal system, independent judiciary and well-established civil liberties. This political culture has provided a solid foundation for implementing open government initiatives aimed at strengthening public participation and accountability. Figure 15 shows the UN's SDGs and the Helsinki city strategy.



Figure 15: UN's SDGs and the Helsinki city strategy

Source: Helsingin kaupunki (2025)

Socio-economically, Finland is a highly developed country with one of the highest internet penetration rates in Europe, making it well equipped to implement digital transparency tools. Finnish citizens are generally well educated and technologically literate, facilitating widespread engagement with open government platforms. Additionally, there is a strong tradition of collaborative governance, where public institutions actively work with civil society organisations, academic institutions and private sector partners to improve policymaking (Linåker & Runeson, 2021).

However, despite its positive governance indicators, Finland has faced challenges related to bureaucratic opacity in certain administrative sectors, prompting calls for greater accessibility to government data. In response, Helsinki launched a comprehensive open government initiative to enhance public participation, transparency and access to information.

Strategy of the programme

Helsinki's open government initiative is a strategy aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability and public participation in urban governance. The initiative focuses on integrating digital tools and participatory processes into municipal decision-making, with the goal of creating an open and accessible government. Key components of the strategy include the following:

- **Open data and transparency:** The municipal government publishes real-time data on governance, budgets and policies. This allows citizens to scrutinise government spending, track policy outcomes and engage in informed debates about city priorities.
- **Participatory budgeting:** The city allocates a portion of its budget for direct citizen decision-making. Residents can propose projects and vote on how public funds should be used.

- **Digital governance platforms:** Helsinki provides an integrated online portal where residents can access government documents, participate in consultations and track policy developments. The platform is designed to be user-friendly and accessible, ensuring engagement from diverse population groups.

This strategy not only fosters a more transparent and accountable government, but also strengthens the relationship between Helsinki's residents and their local authorities, ensuring that governance is more responsive to the needs of all citizens.

Results and impacts of the programme

Helsinki's open government initiative has significantly improved institutional transparency and citizen engagement (Jäntti et al., 2023). By making government data freely accessible through digital platforms, the initiative has empowered citizens to monitor public expenditures, assess policy decisions and participate in governance processes more effectively. This has led to a reduction in administrative secrecy, as public officials are now expected to provide clear justifications for their decisions, fostering a culture of accountability.

One of the most impactful aspects of the initiative has been the creation of interactive online platforms where citizens can track municipal projects, access real-time budgetary information and contribute to policy discussions. As a result, trust between the government and the public has been strengthened, as citizens feel more informed and involved in decision-making.

Moreover, Helsinki's approach has facilitated more inclusive policy-making, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered. Through participatory mechanisms, communities that were previously underrepresented in governance — such as immigrants and young people — now have structured opportunities to influence policies that affect their lives. This has contributed to a more equitable distribution of resources and services, aligning governance practices with the needs of a broader demographic.

Another key outcome has been the enhanced efficiency of public services (Kassen, 2021). By analysing citizen feedback and using open data insights, municipal authorities have been able to streamline bureaucratic processes, reducing inefficiencies and improving service delivery. However, challenges remain, particularly regarding data privacy concerns and the need for continuous updates to keep digital platforms functional and user-friendly.

Possibility for replication

Helsinki's open government initiative offers a highly replicable model for cities aiming to enhance transparency, accountability and public engagement in governance. The initiative's foundation is its strong open data policy, which allows public access to government documents, budgets and decision-making processes (Safarov et al., 2017). However, successful replication requires legal and institutional frameworks that mandate transparency. Without legislative backing, efforts to promote open governance may be hindered by bureaucratic resistance or selective disclosure of information, undermining the initiative's intended impact.

Another critical factor in replication is the availability of technological infrastructure. Helsinki's model relies on digital platforms to facilitate citizen engagement and data accessibility, requiring substantial investment in IT infrastructure, cybersecurity and digital literacy. Cities with limited technological capabilities may face challenges in implementing similar systems unless they secure funding or form partnerships with international organisations specialising in digital governance.

Public trust in institutions also plays a key role in determining whether an open government initiative will succeed in a new setting. In societies where government transparency has historically been low, citizens may be reluctant to engage, fearing that increased data availability will not translate into actual accountability. Therefore, replication efforts should be accompanied by public awareness campaigns that educate

citizens on how they can use open government data to advocate better policies and hold institutions accountable.

Moreover, the model's scalability ensures that it can be adapted to different administrative levels, from municipal governments to national institutions. However, customisation is necessary to align the initiative with local governance structures, political traditions and levels of civic engagement. Cities with weaker democratic institutions may need to gradually introduce transparency measures, starting with smaller-scale initiatives before implementing a full-scale open government strategy.

Links with SDG 16 targets and indicators

Helsinki's open government strategy aligns with key SDG 16 targets by promoting transparency, public participation and institutional accountability.

- **Target 16.5 (substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms):** Helsinki's open data policy contributes to reducing corruption by making government operations more transparent and accessible. By facilitating citizen oversight, the initiative helps deter corrupt practices and fosters a culture of integrity in public institutions.
- **Target 16.7 (ensure responsive, inclusive and participatory decision-making):** Helsinki's participatory budgeting and digital governance platforms enable citizens to engage directly in governance. This supports indicator 16.7.1, which tracks the proportion of decision-making positions held by various groups, ensuring that citizens from all demographic backgrounds can influence public policies.
- **Target 16.10 (ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms):** Helsinki's commitment to open government data ensures that citizens have access to essential policy information. This aligns with indicator 16.10.1,

which measures the number of laws and policies guaranteeing public access to information.

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5.3.3 Case study 3 - Umeå's Gender-Responsive Urban Planning, Umeå, Sweden

Political and socio-economic context

Umeå, a city in northern Sweden, is widely recognised for its progressive policies on gender equality and inclusive urban planning. Sweden has a strong political commitment to gender equity, embedded in both national legislation and municipal governance structures. Umeå, in particular, has taken a pioneering role in integrating gender perspectives into urban development, aiming to create public spaces that are safe, accessible and welcoming for all citizens (Sandberg & Rönnblom, 2016).

The city has experienced rapid demographic growth, with increasing numbers of students, migrants and elderly residents shaping urban dynamics. However, traditional urban planning models often failed to consider gender-specific mobility patterns, safety concerns and access to public services, disproportionately affecting women and other marginalised groups. Recognising these gaps, Umeå launched an innovative gender-responsive urban planning initiative to ensure that urban design promotes equity, safety and inclusivity.

Strategy of the programme

Umeå's gender-responsive urban planning initiative is a strategy designed to address the unique needs of different demographic groups, especially women and marginalised communities, in urban spaces. The initiative focuses on integrating gender perspectives into urban design and planning, with the goal of enhancing safety, accessibility and inclusivity in public spaces. Key elements of the strategy include the following:

- **Data collection and analysis:** Gender-sensitive data is collected to understand how different groups navigate the city, particularly with a focus on nighttime movement and safety concerns. This data is used to inform decisions about infrastructure improvements, including lighting and public transport.
- **Urban redesign:** Based on the collected data, urban spaces are redesigned to be safer and more accessible. This includes better street lighting, improved pedestrian pathways and enhanced public transport accessibility.

- **Participatory planning:** The initiative encourages community participation, particularly from women's organisations and advocacy groups, to ensure that urban spaces reflect the needs of diverse population groups. This participatory process includes town halls and public consultations, fostering a sense of ownership and inclusivity.
- **Hybrid approach:** The platform combines digital tools with offline engagements, ensuring that all community members, regardless of their digital literacy or access, are able to contribute to the planning process.

This strategy not only promotes gender equality but also strives to create a more sustainable and inclusive urban environment that benefits all residents of Umeå.

Results and impacts of the programme

The implementation of gender-responsive urban planning in Umeå has led to tangible improvements in urban safety, accessibility and social inclusion. One of the key outcomes has been the redesign of public spaces based on gender-sensitive data collection. By analysing how different demographic groups navigate the city — especially at night — Umeå has introduced better lighting, increased public transport accessibility and redesigned pedestrian pathways to enhance safety. Figure 16 shows an example of Umeå's urban planning with a gender equality perspective.

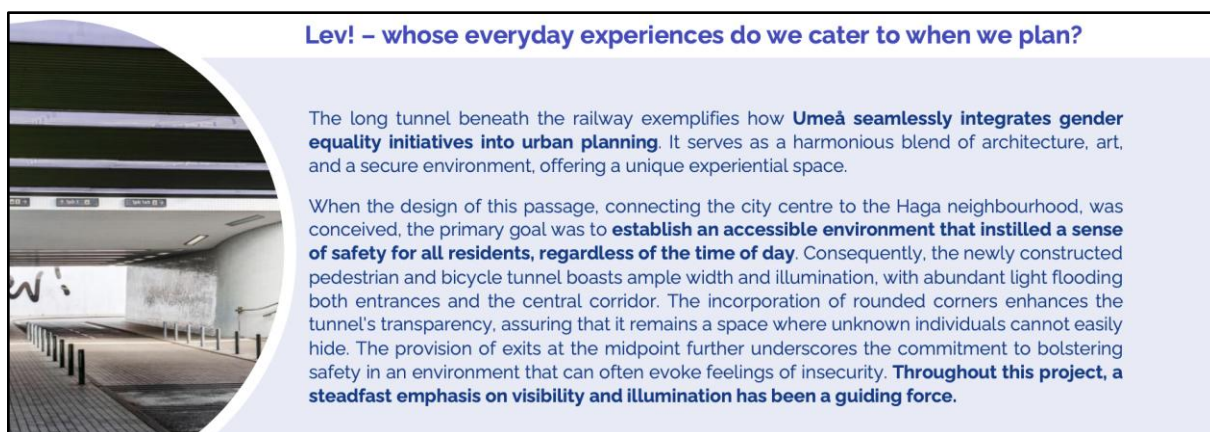


Figure 16: Example of Umeå's urban planning with a gender equality perspective

Source: IURC (2023)

In addition, the initiative has promoted a more participatory approach to urban development, where diverse community groups, including women's organisations and disability advocacy groups, are actively involved in planning processes. This has resulted in urban spaces that reflect the needs of a broader population, reducing social inequalities and fostering a stronger sense of community ownership.

The project has also had economic benefits, as inclusive urban planning has made Umeå a more attractive city for investment, tourism and new residents. By ensuring that public infrastructure caters to the needs of all citizens, the city has strengthened its reputation as a model for sustainable and inclusive urban development. However, challenges persist, particularly in securing sustained funding for long-term gender-responsive planning and addressing resistance from stakeholders accustomed to traditional urban design practices.

Possibility for replication

The gender-responsive urban planning initiative in Umeå has significant potential for replication in other cities, particularly those with a commitment to gender equality and inclusive urban development (Hudson & Sandberg, 2019). However, successful replication depends on various factors, starting with adapting the model to the local realities of each city. Every urban context is unique, with different demographic, social and cultural challenges. Therefore, the strategies implemented in Umeå can be tailored to meet the needs of other populations, considering local specifics, such as mobility patterns, infrastructure needs and levels of civic participation.

Another crucial factor for the replication of the model is political will and institutional support. The success of the initiative in Umeå was made possible by strong political commitment to gender equality, as well as a local government willing to integrate gender perspectives into its urban planning agenda. For replication to succeed, other cities need

to have the backing of their public administrations and ensure that inclusive urban planning remains a consistent priority, with adequate resources to sustain the implementation and continuation of the process over time.

Additionally, technological infrastructure plays a vital role in the replication process. Umeå used a combination of digital tools and gender-sensitive data collection methods to improve urban planning. Cities with varying levels of technological infrastructure will need to invest in digital tools and data collection systems, along with educational programmes to ensure digital inclusion among the population. The adoption of hybrid approaches, combining both digital and in-person strategies, could facilitate the model's adaptation in contexts with lower levels of technology access, ensuring that all communities, especially marginalised ones, can participate meaningfully.

Local culture also represents a determining factor in the model's replicability. In Umeå, the implementation of gender-responsive urban planning was successful due to a strong tradition of gender equality and civic engagement. However, in cities with a history of mistrust in public institutions or with lower levels of social engagement, the introduction of a similar initiative may face resistance (Rönkä et al., 2024). In such cases, it would be essential to implement trust-building measures, such as transparent communication about the benefits of the project and guarantees that citizen proposals will lead to tangible government action. Clear legal frameworks and well-defined procedures for evaluating and implementing participatory proposals would also be critical to overcoming potential bureaucratic inertia and ensuring that citizen-driven initiatives are not stalled.

Links with SDG 16 targets and indicators

Umeå's gender-responsive urban planning initiative directly contributes to the achievement of SDG 16, which promotes peaceful, just and inclusive societies through strong institutions and participatory governance. The initiative aligns with several SDG 16 targets:

- Target 16.1 (significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere):** Umeå's gender-sensitive urban planning has contributed to reducing violence in public spaces by addressing safety concerns that disproportionately affect women and marginalised groups. By improving lighting and increasing accessibility to public spaces, the city has made strides in creating safer environments for all citizens, especially during the night. This initiative supports the broader goal of reducing violence and fostering safer communities, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- Target 16.2 (end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children):** By redesigning public spaces with gender considerations in mind, Umeå has helped reduce the risk of violence and exploitation in areas that are often frequented by vulnerable populations, including children. Improving safety, particularly in high-risk zones, contributes to ending abuse and exploitation, particularly for younger members of society. This supports the broader SDG 16.2 target of protecting children from violence and exploitation.
- Target 16.3 (promote the rule of law at national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all):** The participatory nature of Umeå's urban planning allows citizens, including women and marginalised groups, to actively engage in decision-making processes that shape their environment. This inclusion promotes equal access to justice by ensuring that all demographic groups have a voice in the governance of their public spaces, ultimately supporting the rule of law at local level.
- Target 16.8 (broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance):** While Umeå is not a developing country, the initiative exemplifies how inclusive governance practices can be integrated into urban development, creating a model for other cities, particularly those in developing countries. Umeå's approach to inclusive urban planning provides valuable lessons on broadening public participation and

strengthening local governance structures, which can influence global governance by encouraging more inclusive decision-making practices worldwide.

Supplementary resources

- Hudson, C., & Sandberg, L. (2019). Narrating the gender-equal city — doing gender-equality in the Swedish European capital of culture Umeå2014. *Culture Unbound*, 11(1), Artigo 1. <https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.201911129>
- IURC. (2023). *International Urban and Regional Cooperation – a program of the European Union. Gender equality perspective in urban planning.* <https://www.iurc.eu/>
- Rönkä, A. R., Keisu, B.-I., Kari, S., Lempiäinen, K., Mittner, L., Abrahamsson, L., & Heikkinen, M. (2024). Intersectional gender equality challenges – a review of gender equality research conducted in Fennoscandian Arctic Academia. *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 0(0), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2024.2446760>
- Sandberg, L., & Rönnblom, M. (2016). Imagining the ideal city, planning the gender-equal city in Umeå, Sweden. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23(12), 1750–1762. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2016.1249346>

Examples of assessment questions

- Select a case study in your country that reflects a best practice in terms of achieving the SDG 16 targets in your region. Briefly explain this case study in relation to SDG 16 and explain the best practice that is reported in this case study that will contribute to the achievement of the SDG targets.

- List some good practices that target the implementation of SDG 16.
- What could be your own contribution to SDG 16?
- What impact does your own and everyone's practices have on the achievement of SDG 16?

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6. Examples of exercises and assessments

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to

- reflect on their understanding of the definition of SDG 16
- reflect on their understanding of the significance of SDG 16
- reflect on their understanding of the interdependencies of SDG 16
- reflect on their understanding of the challenges in implementing SDG 16
- provide an overview of the crises that have a negative impact on the achievement of SDG 16
- explain the regional differences of the impact of climate change, conflict and COVID-19 on the achievement of SDG 16
- give an introductory explanation of the regional progress in achieving SDG 16
- reflect on their lifestyle choices and the impact these have on the achievement of SDG 16
- select a suitable case study that reflects good practices in achieving SDG 16 in their own region

Based on the SDG 16 targets and concepts, this section of the manual firstly provides a set of exercises that users (professors, lecturers and teachers) can use with their students to foster ideas, solutions and new initiatives for sustainable development. The level of detail and complexity of these exercises can be regulated according to the educational level of the students. Secondly, a set of shorter assessment questions is also included. These questions cover all the sections in this manual, and require shorter, more to the point answers. For both the exercises and the assessments, you can decide if you want to use them as provided, adapt them according to your own local context and needs or use them as examples and rather develop your own exercises and assessments accordingly.

6.1 Exercises

- Find an SDG 16 charity you want to support. Any donation, big or small, can make a difference.

- Speak up - ask your local and national authorities to engage in initiatives that don't harm people or the planet.
- Know your rights at work. In order to access justice, knowing what you are entitled to will go a long way.
- Vote - by taking advantage of your right to elect leaders in your country and local community, you can help progress in achieving SDG 16.
- Stay informed - follow your local news.
- Support initiatives that support the manufacturing and selling of real products of local communities and vulnerable populations such as refugees.

6.2 Assessments

1. Introduction to the SDGs

- Name the five areas of critical importance to which the 17 SDGs are linked and explain why these are referred to as the 5 Ps.
- Explain the link between the MDGs and the SDGs.
- Explain how the SDGs differ from the MDGs.
- Explain how SDG 16 fits into the SDGs, and how this compares to the MDGs.

2.1 Defining SDG 16 – introduction

- What are the main groups in which the targets of SDG 16 can be divided?
- List the targets belonging to each of these main groups

2.2 Significance of SDG 16

- Explain the contribution of SDG 16 as an enabler of the entire Agenda 2030.
- Briefly explain the interrelationship between peace and sustainable development.
- What is the status of the progress in achieving SDG 16 by 2030?
- Briefly explain the comprehensive scope and importance of SDG 16 with reference to three main thematic areas covered by this SDG.

2.3 Interdependencies of SDG 16

- Select any three SDGs and briefly explain how they interact with SDG 16. Use examples from your region/country to illustrate your explanation.
- How is SDG 16 interconnected with the other SDGs? What other SDGs do you think will be most directly affected if SDG 16 is not achieved?

2.4 Advantages of SDG 16

- What will the main advantages be for the world if the goal to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all can be achieved?
- Select any two of the targets of SDG 16 and explain the specific advantages which will result with these targets being achieved. Link these to advantages for your specific region/country.

2.5 Challenges in the implementation of SDG 16

- What are the main weaknesses of SDG 16 and how are they creating challenges for the implementation of this SDG?
- Explain how the interdependencies of SDG 16 with all the other SDGs are a challenge to the achievement of SDG 16. Select two SDGs to use as examples to illustrate your answer.
- What are the difficulties in implementing SDG 16 in your region/country? Which are the main barriers? How can they be overcome?

3. Overview of global crises that have a negative impact on achieving SDG 16

- Name at least three global crises that affect the achievement of the SDG 16 targets in your region.
- How has climate change negatively impacted achieving the targets for peace, justice and strong institutions in your region?
- Did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the progress of achieving the various targets of SDG 16 in your region? Explain whether this impact was positive or negative.

- Explain how conflict negatively impacts the achievement of peace, justice and strong institutions in your region.

4. Progress towards the achievement of SDG 16 by 2030

- How does your current life pattern affect the achievement of the SDG 16 targets?
- In your opinion, will the countries in Africa be able to achieve the SDG 16 targets by 2030?
- Which SDG 16 targets have seen a reverse in progress since 2015? Briefly explain the reasons why the achievement of these targets has regressed since 2015.
- Explain the trend of SDG 16 in the African region since 2005.
- Why can some SDG targets not be measured in Africa?
- Explain the factors that would prevent Latin America from achieving SDG 16.
- Discuss the trend in achieving SDG 16 in Latin America.
- What needs to be done in Latin America to achieve SDG 16?
- Why can some SDG targets not be measured in Latin America?
- Explain the focus of achieving SDG 16 in Europe.
- Describe the role that more sustainable agricultural production can play in Europe in the drive to achieve SDG 16.
- What impact does food waste have on Europe's ability to achieve SDG 16?
- Discuss the various environmental challenges that have an impact on Europe's ability to achieve SDG 16.
- What are the main obstacles to achieving SDG 16 in your region/country?

5. Case studies

- Select a case study in your country that reflects a best practice in terms of achieving the SDG 16 targets in your region. Briefly explain this case study in relation to SDG 16 and explain the best practice that is reported in this case study that will contribute to the achievement of the SDG targets.
- List some good practices that target the implementation of SDG 16.
- What could be your own contribution to SDG 16?

- What impact does your own and everyone's practices have on the achievement of SDG 16?

7. Closing statement

This manual provided an introduction to some crucial aspects of SDG 16, while turning the focus to global crises that currently have a negative impact on its achievement as well as its progress in three regional contexts. Case studies highlighting best practices, examples of exercises and assessments, and supplementary readings formed part of this introduction to SDG 16. In this way you were exposed to a variety of information, resources and perspectives on this SDG and also obtained and developed your own insights.

To be able to teach SDG 16 successfully, a working knowledge of its architecture and internal interactions is essential, with the material supplied in these manual forming a good basis to work from. An equally important aspect relates to the interdependencies between SDG 16 and all the other SDGs, some with which it operates in full symbiosis, and this has also been introduced in this manual. With all the impacts and challenges highlighted in this manual, it is clear that far-reaching changes and large-scale transformations will be required to achieve SDG 16 by 2030.

We trust that this manual has kindled your interest in SDG 16 and why it is so important. Similarly, we trust that this has empowered you to offer a class or a series of classes on SDG 16, and/or to be innovative and develop your own classes, while using some of the information and resources provided.