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RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: BUILDING PEACEFUL, JUST, EQUAL, AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES IN A DIVIDED WORLD

PATHFINDERS
FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES
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About the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies

The Pathfinders are a group of UN member states and more than one hundred international organizations, civil society, and private sector partners working to accelerate action to implement the SDG targets for peace, justice, equality, and inclusion (SDG16+). For more information: **www.sdg16.plus**.

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Executive Summary

At the heart of the 2030 Agenda is a vision of a world free from fear and violence, anchored in commitments to build more peaceful, just, equitable, and inclusive societies. This vision is captured in the SDG16+ framework. It represents a broader approach to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 and stipulates that numerous targets across all 17 SDGs have the potential to contribute to peace, justice, equality, and inclusion while creating the conditions needed to improve outcomes for other SDGs. 2023 marks the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda. As such, it is not only timely, but critical to assess where we are on SDG16+ globally, highlight successes amidst significant challenges, and think through strategic approaches to drive its implementation over the next seven years. This would both catalyze and help to sustain progress across the SDGs, and combat the impact of the interlinked and cascading crises affecting people's everyday lives everywhere.

None of the targets for SDG16 are on track, with many of the targets or the broader SDG16+ framing also exhibiting little or no progress.[1] This stagnation (and in some cases regression) is occurring against the backdrop of multiple, global crises, here referred to as the **polycrisis**. This term encompasses the interconnectedness of crises and their ability to generate harmful impacts greater than what individual crises would otherwise produce on their own. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic alongside the global climate crisis, the Ukraine war and its spillover effects, and the severe debt predicaments faced by many countries have coincided with an overall decline in trust in public institutions, increased societal polarization, and a weakened social contract.

These compound challenges are reflected, e.g., in persistently high levels of **global violence**, perpetrated in both public and private spheres, and at great human and material cost. Rates of intentional homicides were, for instance, on the decline (2015-2020)[2] but have recently seen a bounce back. Homicides predominantly take place in urban contexts, with other forms of interpersonal violence also most common in highly populated areas. Both pose an increasingly serious threat to meeting the 2030 Agenda. Another significant global challenge pertains to **access to justice**, and the ability of all people to meet their justice needs in a fair and timely manner. Though we know that the 'justice gap' is sizeable, and in many places increasing (including due to the pandemic), it is difficult to pinpoint its full size with precision, given the scarcity of relevant data. Yet, challenges vis-à-vis access to justice are also reflected in the popularity of informal and customary justice systems, on which the vast majority of people globally rely. The justice gap in turn relates to the state of global **inequality, exclusion, and division**, which while challenging in pre-pandemic times, saw a significant deepening with the onset of the COVID-19. The pandemic illustrated how different forms of inequality and exclusion, including gender equality, are exacerbated by crises, and likewise impact and exacerbate the nature and scale of the crises, themselves. As with violence and injustice, inequalities are rife in today's polarized societies, which are characterized by mistrust in public institutions and between groups.

These challenges are, however, neither given nor insurmountable. There is ample evidence and experience to show that solutions exist and **a more peaceful, just, equitable, and inclusive world is possible.** As such, we need to increase the scale of our ambition, action, and commitments on SDG16+, as a goal and as an enabler, while being strategic

about which of its targets most speak to domestic constituencies, can deliver progress across the SDGs based on national contexts, and best reduce the impact of crises. Better data and stronger transparency and accountability in how it is gathered and applied in policy and practice will significantly help advance such efforts. As societies around the world grapple with the polycrisis and its effects, the rationale behind SDG16+ merits our undivided attention. If properly implemented, leveraged, and invested in, it can produce and incentivize progressive policies and programs that can rebuild trust and mend fractured societal relationships. Further, the framework can help ensure that policies are inclusive, informed by power relations, and targeted to address the range of problems that impact people and their communities most.

The inclusion of SDG16+ in a universal global development agenda was a groundbreaking achievement. It offers actionable approaches to, and solutions for, progress not only on peace, justice, equality, and inclusion, but also across the SDGs and as a means by which to rebuild trust in institutions and governance systems globally. It is therefore incumbent on state and non-state actors, communities, and people at all levels to pursue these approaches with the urgency and dedication they deserve.

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This brief report attempts to illustrate this point and give an overview of the state-of-play on SDG16+ globally, while highlighting solutions in policy and practice across contexts and next steps. More specifically, it first offers an outline of the SDG16+ framework, after which snapshots of some of its key components are presented: i) global violence; ii) access to justice; and iii) inequality, exclusion, and division. These snapshots are complemented by a forward-looking section, which describes key approaches and the means by which SDG16+ can be, and has been, advanced, drawing upon examples from national, and subnational levels. A concluding section highlights forthcoming opportunities for urgently needed advocacy, policy development, and collaboration on peace, justice, equality, and inclusion (SDG16+) at all levels through 2030 and beyond. Finally, this report is intended to be complementary to, and supportive of, the work of partners in this space, including those focused on different components of SDG16+.

Introduction

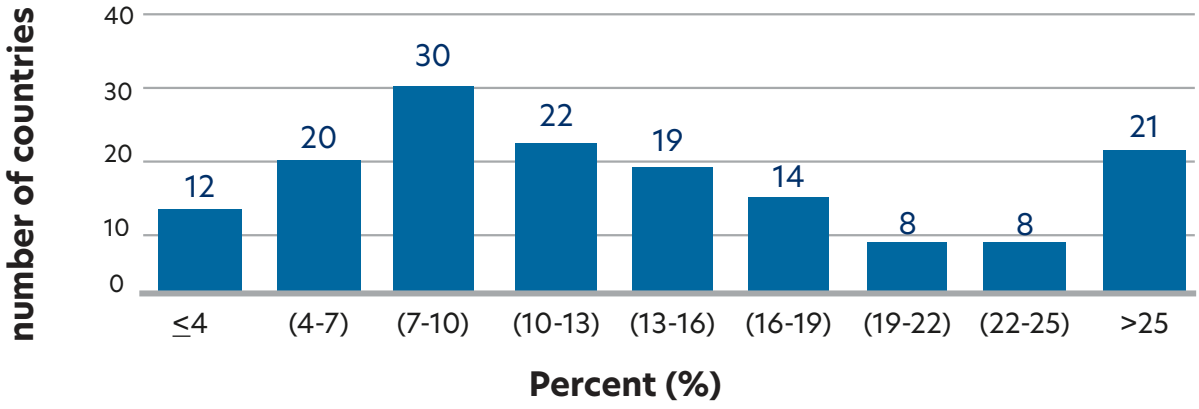
AMIDST A POLYCRISIS HALFWAY THROUGH THE SDGS

Halfway to 2030, the world is at a serious inflection point. For the third year in a row, we are not on track to meet most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As put by the UN Secretary-General, "the SDGs are in deep trouble."[3] The backdrop for this regression is a series of interlinked global crises, which impact every facet of daily life across social, economic, and environmental domains. Collectively, these crises can be described as a **polycrisis,** in reference to their interconnectedness across multiple global systems that "*produce harms greater than the sum of those the crises would produce in isolation.*"[4] The knock-on effects are internationalized, with shocks in one region able to cause cascading crises far away.[5] One recent analysis showed that of 90 countries with complete data across six crises (outlined below), 72 countries are at high or moderate risk of suffering from at least three crises at the same time.[6]

A key feature of the polycrisis pertains to **global conflict and violence levels**. According to the Institute of Economics and Peace, global peacefulness in 2022 deteriorated for the 11th time in 14 years, albeit by a small margin.[7] This finding is reflected in levels of violence and suffering both off and on the battlefield. Today, the world is seeing the largest number of violent conflicts since 1946, though war deaths have declined.[8] To this point, the vast majority of global violent deaths do not take place in conflict zones but are intentional homicides, which mostly occur in urban contexts.[9] Further, and despite the decline in war deaths, the impacts of conflicts and other disasters are immense. By mid-2022, some 103 million people are estimated to have been **forcibly displaced**.[10]

Other flashpoints can be found in the spillover effects of armed conflicts (and in the **polarizing** responses to them), notably the war in Ukraine, which has severely impacted **access to affordable energy supplies** and **global food insecurity**. In the months following Russia's 2022 invasion, the Food and Agriculture's Food Price Index reached all-time highs.[11] Combined with high inflation rates and disrupted global supply chains, these crises have in turn aggravated a **global debt crisis,** which is affecting countries across the Global North and the Global South, though most severely lower-income countries. Today, some 58 percent of the world's poorest countries find themselves in debt distress or at high risk of falling into it.[12] This debt challenge is further complicated as around half of the world's poorest countries (mainly low- and middle-income countries) lack market access to capital on acceptable terms to help finance the SDGs.[13]

Figure 1: Rising cost of food across countries



Source: The Pathfinders analysis is based on the latest available data from June to August 2022 from: https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/food-inflation, which reports official data from countries. Created originally in the Menon, Roshni, *An Age of Crises, Prospects for inequality and division* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, February 2023), https://s42831.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/An-Age-of-Crises-Prospects-for-inequality-and-division.pdf, p. 16.

The unrest and global disparities emerging from these crises both exacerbate and feed into the ongoing impacts of the **COVID-19 pandemic**. Beyond its monumental global health impacts, stringent pandemic response efforts, including rapidly enacted emergency orders, laws, and directives, have exposed systemic **exclusion** and weaknesses in national social, political, and economic systems, with immediate negative effects on the global economy. Such significant socio-economic fallouts may only be surpassed by the gravity of the global **climate crisis.** Recent figures by the World Meteorological Organization show that there is a 66 percent chance that the world will [temporarily] exceed the 1.5-degree temperature threshold by 2027, a key long-term target of the historic 2015 Paris Agreement.[14] Addressing the climate crisis is not only about preventing potentially irreversible environmental impacts. It is also a matter of reducing inequality and exclusion as well as conflict risk, as the crisis exacerbates existing social, economic, and environmental fault lines and societal cleavages.[15]

Climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, accordingly, have clear justice and rule of law implications.[16] Environmental and other forms of **injustice**—whether real or perceived—cannot be delinked from the conflation of crises outlined above. When states and decision-makers prove unable or unwilling to address the multitude of problems faced by people, and trust in public institutions wanes, their perceptions of injustice can proliferate, which perpetuates grievances and can increase conflict risk.

Sustained exposure to these multiple and cascading crises has caused the reversal of three decades of hard-earned development gains, including in poverty reduction.[17] Pre-existing social and economic **inequalities** have been deepened as new ones have been created, with the poorest and most vulnerable people bearing the brunt of its impacts. Women, in particular, have suffered lost livelihoods, including as a result of increased unpaid and domestic care work and forgone educational opportunities, alongside alarming spikes in domestic violence.[18]

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRUST AND THE ROLE OF PEACE, JUSTICE, EQUALITY, AND INCLUSION

Among the cumulative effects of the polycrisis are both a rise in anti-democratic populism, amidst unaddressed grievances, real or perceived, and an increase in the likelihood of unrest and political violence. Between 2019 and 2022, the incidence of protest increased by an average of 44 percent across 179 countries measured.[19] To this end, the UN Secretary-General has repeatedly pointed to the importance of rebuilding and strengthening the social contract.[20] This means addressing the growing disconnect and limited confidence that exists between groups in different societal contexts, as well as between people and the institutions in power mandated to serve them. A recent global survey underscores this disconnect.[21] It shows that global polarization (across multiple domains) is at an all-time high, mainly due to high levels of distrust, notably in government and media institutions, alongside weak social fabrics (i.e., lack of shared identity), and systemic unfairness. As highlighted by Southern Voice on the fallout of COVID-19: "*In many contexts, the social contract between the state and its population is under strain, with diminishing levels of trust in governance systems, democratic political processes being disrupted as the pandemic is used to centralize and consolidate power.*"[22]

The cascading impacts of the polycrisis are, however, neither given nor inevitable. Rather, they are a reflection of our collective willingness to catch up and address its drivers. In practice, this means that it is within our means to enact policies and pursue initiatives that strengthen trust and collaboration across societal divides while recognizing that the nature of these will differ by context. Further, it means putting in place inclusive and responsive governance systems that can deliver better public goods and human rights for all.[23] Put differently, success is possible, despite the stresses wrought by compounding global crises, with ample evidence-based policies and examples on which to draw.[24]

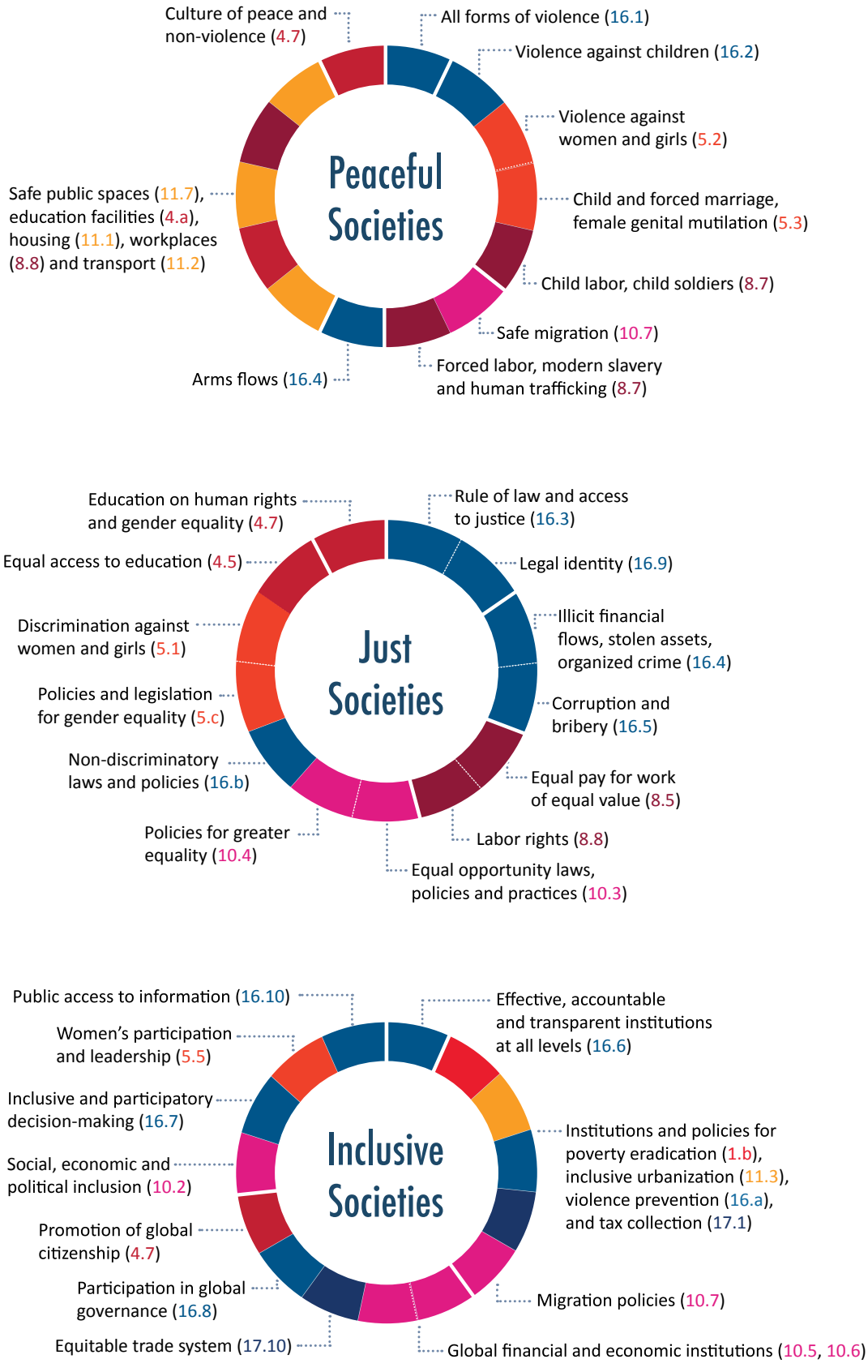
The SDGs, and SDG16+ in particular, offer such a path. Addressing these crises and their wide-ranging impacts requires a sharpened focus on, and a renewed commitment to, globally agreed agendas. Its features of accountability, transparency, participation, and inclusion provide the means for stakeholders at all levels—global, regional, national, and sub-national—to build more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, and make urgently needed progress across the SDG spectrum in the years ahead.

Why SDG16+: An Outcome and an Enabler

Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16) reflects a global consensus that progress in development necessitates the meaningful advancement of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies at all levels, and in an integrated manner. SDG16 represents an important and relatively novel approach to sustainable development globally and helps to differentiate the 2030 Agenda from its Millennium Development Goals predecessor.[25] The goal's 12 targets[26] and accompanying indicators were specifically designed to help countries address—and measure progress on—often contentious issues pertaining to violence and conflict, inclusive, equitable, and accountable governance, access to justice, and safeguarding human rights. It also does so through an SDG framework that encourages country-owned and led approaches that are inclusive and participatory by nature. To this end, it is incumbent on *all* countries to do so regardless of income level or geographical location given the universality of the 2030 Agenda and its foundational commitment to *leave no one behind* (LNOB).

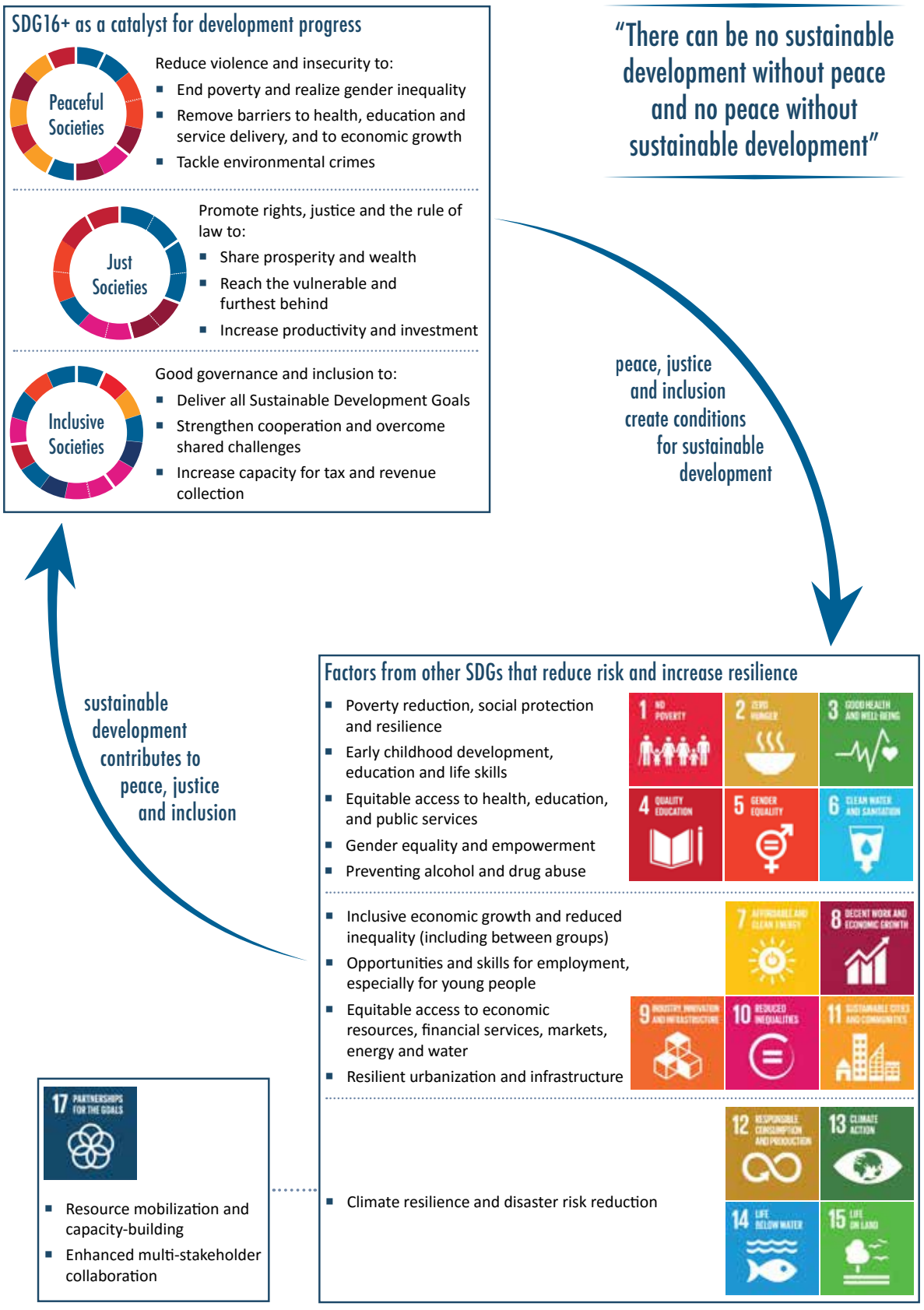
The focus of this report, *SDG16+,* encompasses a broader approach to SDG16. Its premise is that multiple targets across the SDG spectrum can contribute to peace, justice, equality, and inclusion while in turn strengthening the systems, and improving the environment needed, for improved outcomes in other areas. In its 2019 '*Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies*,'[27] the Pathfinders identified 36 targets across eight SDGs that correlate with peace, justice, equality, and inclusion.[28] They address, for instance, key aspects of lethal violence, including against women and children; access to justice; a voice in decision-making; and addressing corruption. And while such positive correlations are foundational to SDG16+, the inverse is also true, i.e., regressive trends on peace, justice, and inclusion can have a negative impact on related targets. Given both its breadth and depth, the Pathfinders produced the *Roadmap for Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies* in 2017, and updated it in 2019, to unpack the various components of SDG16+ and assist in its implementation.

Figure 2: SDG16+ Targets Wheel



Source: Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies. *The Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies – A call to action to save our world*. (New York: NYU Center on International Cooperation, 2019). Available at https://www.sdg16.plus/_files/ugd/90b3d6_3f2076ddce8b4b9f8ee46b292c7c8454.pdf

Figure 3: SDG16+ As an Enabler for the 2030 Agenda



Source: Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies. *The Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies - A call to action to save our world*. (New York: NYU Center on International Cooperation, 2019). Available at https://www.sdg16.plus/_files/ugd/90b3d6_3f2076ddce8b4b9f8ee46b292c7c8454.pdf

There are numerous examples that illustrate the importance and enabling potential of SDG16+. For instance, the World Bank estimates that by 2030, up to two-thirds of the world's extremely poor will live in areas affected by fragility, conflict, and violence[29]. Yet SDG16+ reminds us that efforts to e.g., end poverty (SDG1), ensure access to education (SDG4), reduce inequality (SDG10) or good health and well-being (SDG3) are unlikely to succeed in contexts where people are subject to violence, injustice, or exclusion, or unable to address grievances. Societies with lower levels of violence and political instability are more productive, have better access to information, and suffer less from corruption and ineffective governments[30].

Reduced inequality and exclusion not only benefit the poorest in society, but all members—more equal societies have better-sustained growth rates[31]—and better performance on health[32] and education[33] goals. Justice for all enables people to claim their legal identity, access their rights to legal and non-discriminatory legal processes, and resolve basic employment, property, and family disputes, along with fair treatment in the criminal justice system. And climate action will struggle to gain popular support without policies that manage its distributional impact.[34]

Though such interactions between SDG16+ targets may appear evident; they often interact in complex and indirect ways and remain largely understudied. Box 1 explores recent research in this area.

Box 1: Interlinkages unpacked

Between December 2020 and June 2021, UNDP and the German Development Institute conducted an academic literature review and analysis to investigate the correlation between key aspects of SDG16 (accountability, participation, and transparency), and SDG10 (inequality) and SDG1 (poverty).[35] The research found that investing in these features of SDG16 (also captured in the SDG16+ framework), can generate important dividends in the effectiveness of interventions on areas, including social protection, poverty reduction, and reducing inequality. Furthermore, the study found positive correlations between increased accountability and the poverty reduction effects of per capita GDP growth, as well as between increased social accountability and social protection. In addition, the study demonstrated how increased transparency can positively impact the capacity of governments to redistribute wealth and spend on social services. Similarly, in 2023, UNDP and the German Institute of Development and Sustainability, released a second study on the interlinkages between SDG16 and SDG14 (Life Below Water).[36]

SDG16+ highlights the cohesive and integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda. It offers important pathways to address the multiple and cascading crises we face today and to craft coherent, strategic, and forward-looking policies for a just and sustainable pandemic recovery. And couched in the universal nature of the SDGs, SDG16+ offers stakeholders and advocates alike a *legitimizing* framework, which can be leveraged to facilitate agenda setting, and [potentially] put a spotlight on sensitive, highly normative, or otherwise contested issues (e.g., corruption).

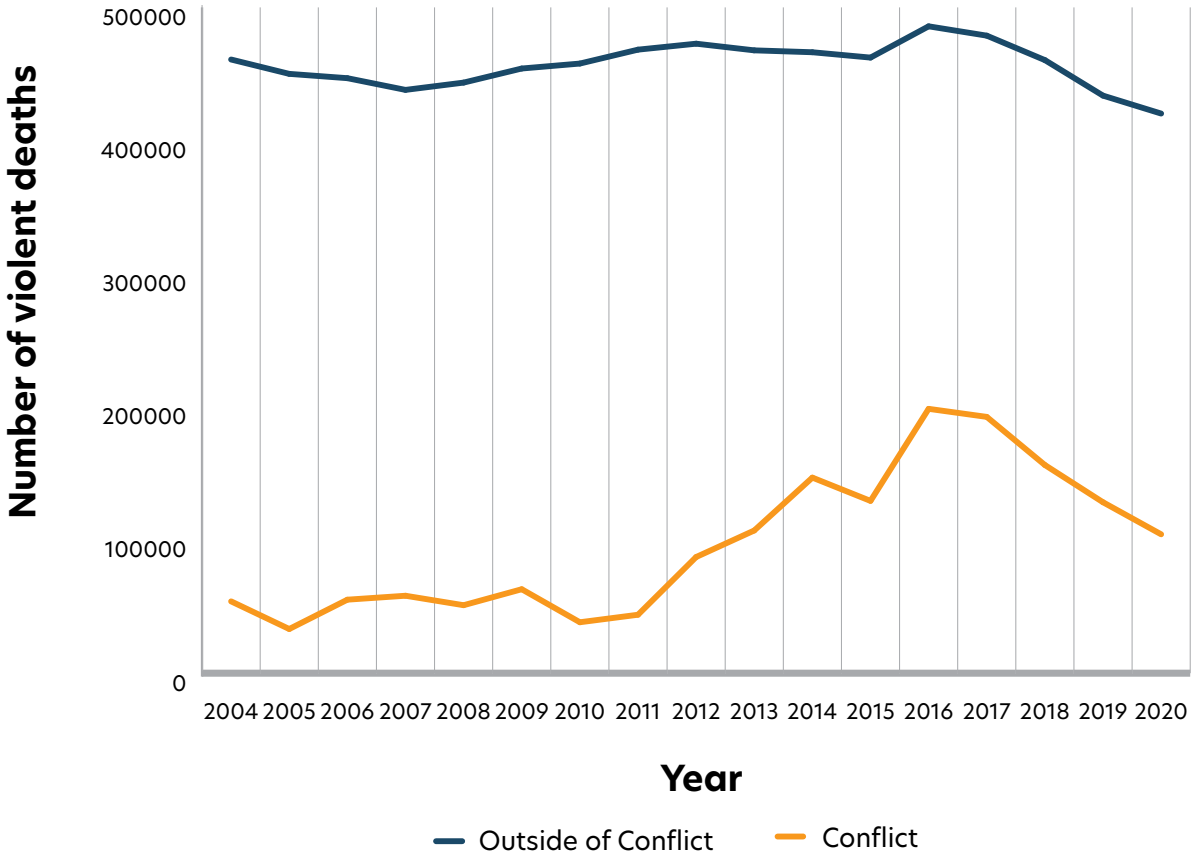
SNAPSHOT: THE STATE OF GLOBAL VIOLENCE

Violence and its devastating impacts are complex, continuously evolving, and require of us to ask *where* and *when* it is being perpetrated (in contexts of war or not?), *why* and *by whom* (to illustrate its drivers, and gendered nature), and *at what cost* (to illustrate its human and material impacts)? Albeit with imperfect data sets (different actors often use forms of measurement and units of analysis, often too narrowly focused on conflict and lethal violence), navigating these questions help us to devise targeted and people-centered approaches that address grievances (e.g., linked to inequalities and injustice), potentially prevent violence and mitigate its effects. SDG16.1 and efforts to halve global violence are pointing in a negative direction and are not on track to be met by 2030.

Homicides and the urban context

In recent years, there has been a concentration of conflict violence and fatalities, most notably the war in Ukraine and the (now subsiding) wars in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Yemen.[37] However, despite the prevalence of violence in conflict-affected contexts, an estimated 80 to 90 percent of lethal violence takes place outside of conflict zones,[38] the most observed form being intentional homicide. While a slight global reduction in homicides can be observed (from 2015-2020), rates remain exceptionally high in some regions. The average homicide rate in Latin America is, for instance, 20 per 100,000 (and the leading cause of death for people aged 15-49) compared to one per 100,000 in East Asia and in Europe.[39]

Figure 4: Comparison between violent deaths that happen in conflict or outside of conflict



Source: Based on data from Small Arms Survey's Global Violent Deaths Database. Available at https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/database/global-violent-deaths-gvd

Box 2: Violence, conflict, and fragility: correlated, but not synonymous

According to the OECD's 2022 States of Fragility report, some 80 percent of conflict-related deaths in 2021 were concentrated in fragile contexts. However, between 2010 and 2020, 23 of the world's fragile countries (representing 23 percent of the world's population) did not experience any form of violent conflict, and 51 of them did not experience any war during this time period. Fragility is a broad concept in that it reflects the exposure of different forms of risk combined with insufficient mechanisms of the state or communities to manage or mitigate those risks. So, while fragility is certainly correlated with higher risks, and susceptibility to violence (notably high rates of violence against women), it is neither synonymous with conflict nor violence.

Homicides are most prevalent in highly populated contexts. Urban violence is linked to the pressures of rapid urbanization and tends to be associated with different forms of economic and social deprivation, as well as inequality. Cities are a key area of focus, not only because of high urban violence rates but as it is a relatively under-studied phenomenon and context-specific responses at scale are needed to prevent and reduce it. Violence in cities is by no means uniform. It is often clustered and affects different segments of the population and geographical locations, in different ways – all the way down to neighborhood and street level. A recent study[40] of violence in the US where nearly nine of ten homicides are committed in urban settings[41] points to a long-lasting relationship between violence and *place*. This refers to the concentration of gun violence in a small number of disinvested neighborhoods as well as "micro-geographic places" within these neighborhoods that experience even higher rates of violence.

Box 3: SDG indicator 16.1.1: Measuring intentional homicides

Homicide rates slightly declined in most regions between 2015-2020 (hovering between 430,000 and 450,000 every year).[42] Based on these figures, the UN projected an overall 19 percent decline from 2015 to 2030, which demonstrated that progress is possible. However, the reasons for this drop are not clear and it is difficult to assess the extent to which progress is due to effective policy (or is better reflected by e.g., increased population rates, or authoritarian crackdowns). Importantly, this slight reduction in homicides does not account for the spike in murders seen in many countries during the pandemic.[43] From a gendered perspective, the vast majority (82 percent) of homicides worldwide are committed by and against men and boys,[44] with male identity and masculine norms being key drivers.[45] This means that overall (declining) trends mainly reflect male homicide victims as femicide rates have remained largely stable over the 2015-2020 period, with some regions have seen pandemic-related increases in femicide.[46]

The pervasive nature of interpersonal violence

Interpersonal violence is the most pervasive form of violence. It is prevalent across the Global North and Global South and is, according to the World Health Organization, an increasingly serious threat to attaining the SDGs.[47] It is also commonplace in urban settings although the specific, global share of interpersonal violence in cities is not known.[48] Interpersonal violence includes any type of violence that happens outside of conflict, including intentional homicides, assaults, and certain types of violence such as violence against women, violence against children, and intimate partner violence.[49]

Box 4: Violence against women is commonplace, globally

Intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence are the most prevalent forms of violence experienced by women in every country in the world. Nearly one in three women globally have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their lifetime[50] with the highest rates being in Asia-Pacific.[51] The magnitude of the problem is only matched by its urgency with nearly 245 million women globally ages 15 and above having experienced intimate partner violence in the last 12 months. Due to social stigmas, and difficulties associated with reporting and speaking openly about it, estimates are likely to be higher.[52] COVID-19 made women and girls even more susceptible to violence via increased food and economic insecurity, restrictions in movement, and social isolation.[53]

Interpersonal violence brings severe repercussions for survivors, but the nature, scale, and scope of these effects can be difficult to fully grasp. Here, survey data can play an important complementary role to official government statistics, which tend to be limited and inaccessible because of under-reporting in part due to limited public trust in law enforcement and justice institutions.[54] One such measure is the share of people feeling safe walking alone around the area in which they live after dark, which is reflected in SDG indicator 16.1.4. Here trends have remained largely unchanged between 2016 and 2021 (with survey data showing an average of 69 percent of the population feeling safe or very safe) though regional variations are significant. Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean as well as Australia and New Zealand are the regions where people report feeling least safe. Perceptions of safety are also highly gendered. Across all regions, women continue to feel significantly less safe than men,[55] a figure which also correlates with high rates of intimate partner violence.

Costing violence

The impacts of violence are commonly measured in terms of lives lost, as well as physical and psychological injury. Applying an economic lens to this measurement is not without controversy, but is nevertheless important as economic consequences of violence can cause significant human suffering and backsliding on all SDGs. In fact, policymakers (as well as insurance companies and courts) regularly account for these costs e.g., in allocating public funds for prevention and community security. **Understanding the numbers can help incentivize investments in violence prevention, especially where there are competing policy priorities at national level.** In measuring the costs of violence, Klugman emphasizes the need to distinguish between *tangible costs,* such as loss of income and costs of law enforcement, and *intangible costs*, including the 'hidden' costs of pain and suffering (often through compensation).[56] While more difficult to quantify, intangible costs are estimated (per violent incident) to be much larger than tangible costs (9:1 by some assessments). One estimate of gun violence in the US in 2020, accounting for immediate (incident), subsequent (treatment), and quality of life-related costs, was put at US$557 billion, or 2.6% of GDP.[57]

Globally, the Institute for Economics and Peace estimated the economic impact of violence in 2021 to be US$16.5 trillion (in Purchasing Power Parity, or PPP terms). This figure reflects the expenditures and economic effects of containing, preventing, and dealing with the

consequences of violence, and comprises both direct and indirect costs (or tangible and intangible costs). It also includes indicators such as military expenditures, conflict deaths, and homicides.[58] This figure, which increased by 12.4 percent from 2020, is equivalent to one-tenth of the world's economic activity (Gross World Product).

Box 5: Limited progress in reducing illicit arms flows – with implications for interpersonal violence and the urban context[59]

SDG indicator 16.4.2 measures the share of seized, found, or surrendered illicit arms whose origin or context has been traced. Such knowledge is important to help reduce illicit flows of small arms, but systematic tracing remains a challenge. Between 2016 and 2020, only 28 percent of seized and marked weapons could be traced (based on data from 20 countries). Global efforts to strengthen regulatory frameworks, management of stockpiles, and regional and international cooperation to reduce small arms proliferation are anchored in the 2001 *Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects* (PoA). Despite this landmark, and subsequent, agreements, over 1 billion small arms are estimated to be in circulation, 85 percent of which are in civilian possession. This figure is even more striking when considering that nearly 50 percent of all violent deaths are caused by small arms. And despite the significance of the PoA, it does not refer to controls on ammunition, which increases the risks of deadly violence and conflict.

Men and boys make up the majority of the perpetrators and victims of armed violence. Small arms are also frequently used in gender-based violence and intimate partner violence where the vast majority of victims are women. However, the effect of small arms in those instances can be difficult to quantify, since they can also be used as intimidation and coercion tools, even if no shots are fired. According to the Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control, more gender-responsive small arms control can help reduce violence in non-conflict as well as conflict contexts. And with most violent deaths occurring outside of conflict zones, the implications of small arms proliferation are especially aggravating in cities where most interpersonal violence is perpetrated. As increasing and irregular urbanization compounded by the effects of globalization increase levels of urban crime and violence, small arms possession, and proliferation have become headline issues in efforts to reduce global violence.

SNAPSHOT: ACCESS TO JUSTICE

'Access to justice' refers to the ability of all people to meet their justice needs, and the options available to prevent and resolve injustices in a fair, timely, and inclusive manner. The opposite is reflected in the justice *gap* that exists between people and the [justice] institutions mandated to serve them.[60] Access to quality and timely justice around the world, already in short supply, is often a primary casualty in crises. For instance, the justice implications of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with its economic fallout has had profound, often disastrous impacts on everyday people and institutions alike. Just as in contexts of armed conflict and violence, the pandemic magnified, exacerbated and often de-prioritized pre-existing justice challenges, including disputes over land and housing, labor, debt, family, violence and crime, and service delivery.[61] As the pandemic took its toll, justice systems were overwhelmed and resources became increasingly scarce, particularly as these systems also were critical to response and recovery efforts.[62]

Understanding the justice gap

The actual size of the justice gap is difficult to establish given data challenges (see Box 6 below), but it is widely acknowledged to have worsened because of COVID-19.[63] Before the pandemic, the *Justice for All* report estimated that 5.1 billion people around the world lacked meaningful access to justice while some 1.5 billion people experienced a civil, administrative, or criminal justice problem that they were not able to resolve.[64] Moreover, pre-pandemic, some 253 million people lived in conditions of extreme injustice with no legal protection, while an estimated 4.5 billion people were excluded from opportunities that are offered by law (e.g., vis-à-vis marriage or owning property).[65] Exclusion from such opportunities disproportionately affects marginalized, vulnerable, and at-risk groups, and underscores the importance of meeting the 2030 Agenda's commitment to leave no one behind. It impacts, for instance, people who lack legal identity (SDG targets 16.9 and 17.19): an essential means to access basic public services, including justice, and exercise their political rights. Today, an estimated 1.1 billion people live without any form of legal identity, which also provides significant obstacles to long-term pandemic recovery.[66]

Our understanding of access to justice (and the justice gap) is complemented by trends in the rule of law, defined as a durable system of laws, institutions, norms, and community commitment.[67] According to the World Justice Project (WJP), the rule of law has seen a continued deterioration in a majority of countries worldwide for the fifth year in a row. This weakening has a direct or indirect impact on 4.4 billion people, over half of the world's population (though the decline has subsided somewhat in 2022).[68]

When justice systems, which are often people's main or only connection to the state, are absent or unable to address people's problems – social unrest, grievances, and distrust are likely to follow.[69] People's loss of trust in public institutions is directly linked to their experience or perceptions of institutional performance, and factors such as corruption, elite or state capture, poor or limited access to [justice] services, and unfair treatment by state officials. In turn, such trust deficits point to the greater issue of how justice is *experienced* by people, and their perceptions of public authorities' ability to deliver outcomes that effectively resolve their problems.

Box 6: SDG target 16.3 (access to justice) and persistent data challenges

SDG 16.3 measures the promotion *of the rule of law and ensuring access to justice* (even though the target only covers 3 indicators). Between 2015 and end-2021, there is no significant evidence of improved (or deteriorating) performance vis-à-vis access to justice for a clear majority of countries. This points to challenges in both achieving 16.3 and to gathering the necessary data to measure change (progress or regression).[70] For instance, country data for indicator 16.3.1, which measures the share of victims of violence who reported their victimization to competent authorities (or conflict resolution mechanisms) is generally scarce or inconsistent.[71] These limitations are reflected in how only 10-30 percent of crimes worldwide are reported to the police,[72] which directly impacts crime-reduction and policy-making efforts. It also points to the importance of complementary data sources (and the role of civil society in collecting them) as well as the need to adequately fund data collection, a costly undertaking.

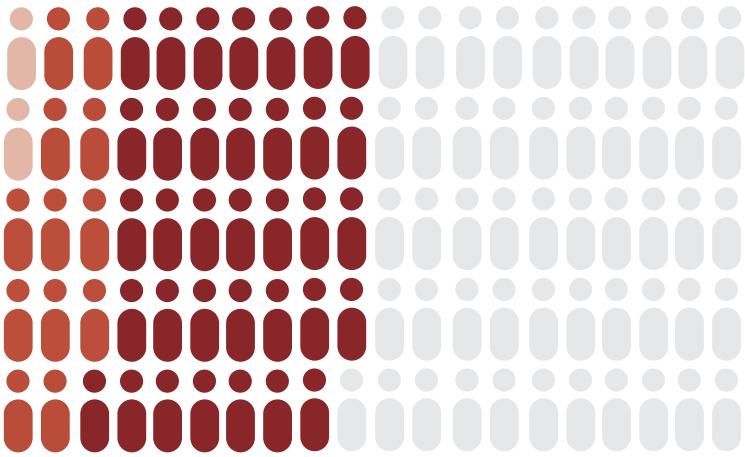
In the case of indicator 16.3.1, crime victimization surveys are a main way to understand the otherwise hidden scope of [unreported] crime and the reasons for under-reporting. According to UNODC, only 65 countries have implemented a stand-alone survey or module on crime victimization.[73] Such surveys can, and have, been used as proxies to better understand *levels* of trust, or rather mistrust, in authorities. Survey results in Kenya, for instance, show that only one-third of people trust the police and less than half say the government is doing a good job of reducing crime.[74]

The role of informal and customary justice systems

SDG16.3's two indicators, which focus on *formal criminal* justice systems are, as of February 2022, complemented by a new global indicator: **16.3.3**. It measures the share of the population that has experienced a dispute and accessed either a formal or *informal* dispute resolution mechanism. While less than ten countries have reported relevant data thus far, it is an important development given the scale of the justice gap, and as its helps measure people's *de facto* access to justice from a people-centered perspective.

The indicator sheds light on the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) and paralegals in improving people's access to justice, as well as that of other Customary and Informal Justice (CIJ) actors, which together are (by far) the most common means by which people around the world address their justice concerns.[75] Its reference to formal *and* informal mechanisms also reflects the need for partnerships between the two (e.g., in how several constitutions in Latin American countries recognize the rights of indigenous peoples), and cross-cutting approaches to justice (e.g., across the housing, education, and health sectors).[76] Notwithstanding their popularity, CIJ systems and actors are by no means uniform and must be understood in a plural sense as they vary by context, tend to be highly diverse and evolve over time. They include a range of justice and dispute resolution providers, including traditional, indigenous, community, and religious systems, each rooted in different value systems and affiliations to the state.[77] CIJ systems are a particularly common recourse for people in poverty, marginalized groups as well as women who often face the most systematic and disproportionate exclusion from formal justice systems.

Figure 5: Pathways taken to resolve legal issues



49% of people experienced some form of legal problem in the last two years.

29% of those people sought any form of advice or support.

17% of those went to an authority or third party for legal support.

Source: Based on data from World Justice Project, *Global Insights on Access to Justice*, (World Justice Project, 2019), https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/global-insights-access-justice-2019.

For this reason, CIJ mechanisms are integral to the discourse around *people-centered* justice, and efforts to address people's everyday justice problems. They tend to be perceived as legitimate with much public trust vested in them and are therefore key to broader discussions about building trust and strengthening the social contract. This legal heterogeneity often raises concerns (notably among donors) about accountability, gender equality, as well as human rights norms and standards, including due process.[78] These understandable concerns, combined with bureaucratic impediments frequently disqualify CIJ systems from donor (and sometimes state) support and engagement despite formal justice systems, notably in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, displaying similar traits and risks of engagement.

SNAPSHOT: INEQUALITY, EXCLUSION, AND DIVISION

Equality and inclusion are foundational to the 2030 Agenda's commitment to leave no one behind. Despite inequalities being common prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some positive global trends could be discerned. For instance, before COVID-19, inequalities between countries were declining and data on SDG10.1 (though problematic in many ways as an indicator of inequality) showed the incomes of the bottom 40 percent of the population (across 119 countries with data) growing faster than the national average in a majority of countries. But with the onset of the pandemic, and amidst a lack of access to medical technologies and stimulus financing, combined with disproportionate impacts of food, fuel, and fertilizer price rises, inequality increased between countries for the first time in decades alongside a reversal of poverty reduction gains. Such reversals are sustained through divergent recovery processes, with this 'Reversal Problem' making the achievement of the SDGs (and SDG16+) by 2030 increasingly unlikely.[79]

The proliferation of inequality affects individuals and entire groups, through income and wealth disparities, both uneven political access and representation. In this respect, the SDG16+ targets demonstrate how social accountability, poverty reduction, access to justice, inequality, and violence and conflict risks must be viewed in tandem. The joint UN-World Bank Pathways for Peace report also emphasizes this and points to inequality between individuals or households, and especially group-based inequalities and exclusion enforced by the state, as producing a higher risk of violent conflict.[80] Conversely, interpersonal violence can increase inequalities in opportunity, whereas collective violence can increase inequalities between groups.[81] A recent update to this report re-emphasizes this linkage between inequality and the risk of violent conflict with reference to the global inequality trends generated by the pandemic.[82] In short, inequalities are critical drivers of different crises while these crises in turn tend to perpetuate inequalities.

A self-perpetuating cycle: crises exacerbate inequalities and vice versa

The global climate crisis is another fitting example of how different forms of inequality and exclusion become more pronounced, visible, and painful during crises (while also hindering efforts to address them). Consider discrepancies in global income distribution: the top 10 percent are liable for nearly half of the annual global carbon emissions whereas the bottom 50 percent are responsible for only 12 percent, and still carry a disproportionate burden of their impacts.[83] Yet another example can be found in the pandemic as infection and inequality rates were found to be correlated over time.[84] In many countries, the pandemic

also led to the breakdown or underperformance of governance systems, resulting in overzealous enforcement of pandemic response measures and the closure of civic space. Poor and marginalized groups felt the heaviest economic impacts and suffered social exclusion, which was often instrumentalized as a political strategy.[85]

Per the polycrisis framework, inequality and exclusion can shape and amplify crises and at the same time be a primary consequence of them. With respect to gender equality, the UN Secretary-General points out that current rates of progress are on pace to leave half of the world's population—and the world's workforce—behind.[86] While both men and women saw increases in unpaid care workloads due to the pandemic and related response measures, women carried the largest burden, in particular women living in poverty, single mothers, essential workers, and members of minority racial and ethnic groups.[87]

Box 7: The geopolitical dynamics of inequality and exclusion within and between countries

The discrepancies in opportunities and outcomes that are experienced by people and groups cannot be understood in isolation or be confined to domestic contexts. Rather, these dynamics are often similarly reflected in relations *between countries* and are further complicated by persistent global crises, including the pandemic, and an unstable geopolitical order alongside a multilateral architecture in need of more public trust, inclusivity, and accountability.[88] Notably, diverging economic [pandemic] recoveries caused inequalities between countries to increase for the first time in a generation. And as pertains to the global debt crisis, it has seen poverty deepen, and socio-economic divides expand in many countries, while other countries are experiencing [relatively] strong economies and reduced national deficits. Similarly, as many countries have experienced a highly unequal pandemic recovery, others have seen an 'equality dividend' linked to their ability to absorb and withstand its shocks (e.g., lockdown restrictions) - as has been observed in parts of countries with high civic capital and social trust, such as Italy.[89] These dynamics also persisted in the shift towards digitalization, and in the rollout of vaccines, both within and between countries.[90] As the SDGs apply to all countries—across the Global South and Global North—it is imperative to be mindful of these asymmetries, and account for each country's unique circumstances and contexts in building more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

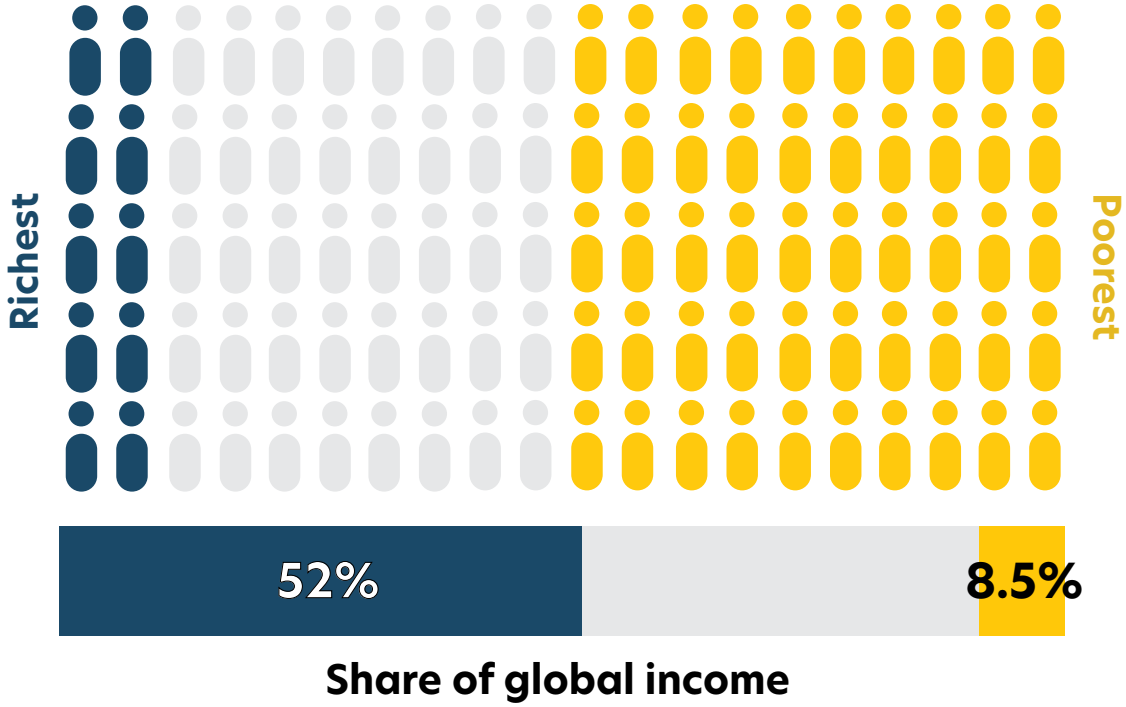
Economic inequalities and gender

Inequalities resulting from the pandemic are in many ways economic in nature. For instance, pre-existing inequalities in the labor market were exacerbated, as the ability to work remotely correlates strongly with pre-pandemic earnings as well as education. And surveys conducted in 2021 showed that poorer households lost incomes and jobs at higher rates than their richer counterparts.[91] Such economic disparities are also firmly anchored in group- and identity-based inequalities. To illustrate, in most countries, people in the bottom 40 percent of income distribution are more likely to only have completed primary education, or no education at all - and are more likely to be under the age of 15.[92] Relatedly, countries with high levels of education inequality between ethnic and religious groups (in the 2000s) saw a likelihood of violent conflict double that of countries with more equally distributed education.[93]

Economic inequalities on a global scale are sizable. As of 2021, the richest ten percent of people made 52 percent of income, while the equivalent earnings for the poorest half was 8.5 percent (measured at PPP).[94] Global wealth-based inequalities are even more pronounced

as the poorest half own two percent of global wealth, while the richest ten percent own 76 percent.[95] The most unequal regions by income (where the bottom 50 percent have the smallest share of national income, between nine and 12 percent) are Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South and Southeast Asia.[96]

Figure 6: Share of global income by population



Source: Chancel, Lucas; Piketty, Thomas; Saez, Emmanuel; Zucman, Gabriel, *World Inequality Report 2022*, (World Inequality Lab, 2021), https://wir2022.wid.world/

Economic inequalities are also a prominent feature of gender inequality, which (in all its forms) is one of the most consistent and pervasive social disparities, as highlighted above. It is prevalent in every country on earth, and women's [relative] absence from the workforce results in major GDP losses.[97] That said, women's share of income has improved over the past three decades, albeit only slightly.[98] And despite earning less, and being under-represented in many sectors across the labor market, women perform unpaid care and domestic work at a rate 3.2 times higher than men.[99] These inequalities are structural forms of occupational segregation and are often heavily influenced by discriminatory social norms, and accompanied by increased risks of violence, abuse, and exploitation – all of which are more prominent during times of crisis. By one estimate, it will take another 286 years at the current rate to remove discriminatory laws and close prevailing gaps in legal protections for women and girls.[100]

Corruption and illicit financial flows

Both gender and economic inequalities can be reinforced and consolidated by corruption (as reflected in SDG target 16.5), including by undermining government capacity to spend on social services. And such inequality can in turn motivate corrupt behavior, including where it is systemic, and people may have no other choice than to pay bribes in order to access services – or where organized criminal networks may co-opt or capture elements of state power.[101] Conversely, increased transparency has the potential to generate positive

effects on equality.[102] These points underscore that corruption is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon and requires a holistic approach to address it. According to Transparency International, the prevalence of corruption globally (vis-à-vis how it is *perceived* by people) has remained unchanged for over a decade.[103] Positive trends in the absence of corruption have been observed in 26 countries.[104]

A closely related issue pertains to tax evasion and avoidance, which too significantly exacerbates inequality and leads to major revenue losses. These challenges, combined with corruption and the tenacity of illegal markets contribute to the scourge of illicit financial flows, reflected in SDG indicator 16.4.1. Its impacts, which include aggravated inequalities, are felt globally, albeit disproportionately in developing country contexts. For instance, the annual capital flight from across the African continent is estimated at US$88.6 billion (or 3.7 percent of its GDP). These illicitly extracted resources easily surpass Overseas Development Assistance flows to the continent and are equivalent to half of the continent's SDG financing gap.[105] Official global data for SDG indicator 16.4.1 are lacking as the illegality and opacity of illicit flows make them inherently difficult to measure.

Inequality, trust, and the social contract

Inequality and exclusion are manifested in people's experiences of unfair or unjust treatment—real or perceived—by actors and institutions in power - not only the state. Inequality and exclusion are therefore central to how we understand the [weakening] social contract, which is reflected in narratives that perpetuate division, justify self-interested economic action, elite (or state) capture, or widen development gaps.[106] Trust in public institutions and governance systems, which are in short supply across the globe, is another important measure of the general health, and inclusivity, of social contracts.

Societal polarization, as driven by mistrust, is also more severe today than it has been in past years, and contributes to declining pluralism, unequal political representation, and the closing of civic space.[107] The 2023 Edelman survey found that levels of trust differ starkly between income groups. It notes that people in the "top quartile of income live in a different trust reality than those in the bottom quartile."[108] Such discrepancies are often exacerbated by divisive and polarizing narratives that pit groups against each other, blaming grievances on specific population groups (e.g., migrant, religious, ethnic, indigenous, or other minority groups). These narratives, promoted by state and non-state actors alike, tend to present advancements on equality and inclusion as a threat to some groups, and are aided by the spread of misinformation and disinformation.[109]

Box 8: Measuring discrimination

There are numerous SDG16+ targets and indicators that directly or indirectly address inequality. One such SDG indicator is 16.B.1 (also reflected in indicator 10.3.1), which measures the *proportion of* the *population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months based on discrimination prohibited under international human rights law.* Data (from 49 countries) between 2017 and 2021 show that about 20 percent were discriminated against in at least one way that is prohibited under human rights law. In this context, women are more than twice as likely to report discrimination on the grounds of sex,

particularly in urban settings while one-third of disabled people have personally experienced discrimination. This points to the importance of human rights-based approaches in addressing discrimination.[110] It also speaks to the importance of quality, timely data on inequality and exclusion, as a global public good.[111]

While data coverage on inequality is better than for several other SDGs, there is much information that remains lacking, incomplete, or outdated. This hinders effective policymaking and implementation. Data limitations pertain to economic policies such as how economic growth is distributed across the population, as well as to social disparities linked to age, the environment, or gender. The production of gender data is a particular challenge. UN Women points to three key challenges, including i) under-prioritization and under-funding in national budgets; ii) technical and financial challenges (e.g., in measuring unpaid care and domestic work, or violence against women); and iii) limited accessibility of available data.[112]

Photo Credit: UN Photo / Helena Murkens

The Way Forward on SDG16+

The 36 targets across the SDGs covering peace, justice, equality, and inclusion relate to fundamental aspects of well-being. As such, they directly address perceptions of security, trust, and respect, critical against a backdrop of rising polarization, growing trust deficits, and the polycrisis. Halfway to 2030, making progress on SDG16+ is not only an urgent priority but an absolute imperative. And despite an incomplete data picture, competing priorities, weak political incentives, and accountability mechanisms, it is incumbent upon decision-makers and the constituencies that they serve to place SDG16+ firmly on the policy agenda. The following messages and cross-cutting approaches illustrate how this can be done, and how to advance SDG16+ in tangible, practical ways.

Box 9: SDG16+: a framework with potential and promise

The peace, justice, equality, and inclusion targets of the SDGs are among those most off-track. At the halfway point to 2030, and against the backdrop of multiple, cascading crises that are impacting every aspect of our lives, urgent, measurable, and accountable action to implement SDG16+ is a priority. Decision-makers at all levels can and must step up, and galvanize the political will and related resources needed to implement targets related to peace, justice, and inclusion. Similarly, constituencies must actively hold their leaders accountable and ensure that unmet promises come at a cost.

SDG16+ targets must receive the attention they merit and deserve. SDG16+ is not up for debate but rather a settled and universally applicable framework, which, in this regard, affords it a certain status. And while the principles and commitments signed onto by all countries are universal in nature, the approaches deployed to achieve them are not. It is imperative to account for context specificity and the unique circumstances of each country and territory, including in the achievement of more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

There is ample evidence that shows that progress is possible. There is, in this regard, nothing inevitable about regressing on the SDG16+ targets. High levels of violence, inequalities, injustice, and marginalization are in many ways the result of policy choices, which are informed by reverse incentives for leaders, uneven power relations, and unaccountable governance systems.

The SDG16+ framework can be seen as a comprehensive set of tools, or a mechanism that holds the promise to deliver for all countries and people. It provides a legitimizing framework to make progress on critical issues that for some actors may be controversial or sensitive. For this reason, the discourse and language around SDG16+ must be appropriately applied, including by facilitating dialogue with strategic partners such as policymakers and donors. The SDG16+ framework can also be leveraged for agenda setting, by raising awareness of the most critical issues and priorities, and lending rhetorical power to stakeholders and networks that may otherwise struggle to exercise it.

SDG16+ is not only the purview of countries and decision-makers. Progress often begins at local and sub-national levels and necessitates the participation and inclusion of all segments of society, across political, economic, and social sectors, as well as at community-level and among civil society actors. At the same time, certain challenges (notably linked to the polycrisis) transcend borders and states, and require strong collaboration at global and regional levels.

1) Promote efforts to rebuild trust, reduce polarization, and address unequal power relations.

Eight years into SDG implementation, we must redouble efforts to restore the social contract and respond to the polycrisis by ensuring that policies and interventions mitigate its impact on people's lives and account for issues that matter most to them.[113] In this regard, it is important to focus on visible policies that can help instill trust and confidence in the effectiveness, fairness, and credibility of institutions (as well as between groups) at all levels. This includes policies that advance social justice, reduce corruption, and increase solidarity between groups. Building trust, notably in government and media institutions, is critical to address polarization in society, though this can involve a degree of risk, especially in divided societies or moments of crisis.[114] Efforts to restore the social contract must be approached in a broad, and context-specific manner that transcends the more common [in western settings] orientations that emphasize a dichotomous state-society relationship. Rather, they must account for the agency of all segments of society, including informal institutions and marginalized groups. Further, they must account for the various rights, duties and responsibilities that govern the relationship between those who hold power and those who are both subject to—and beneficiaries—of it.

Box 10: Reparations to victims of armed conflict in Colombia

In 2011, the Government of Colombia passed the Victims and Land Restitution Law, which sought to guarantee truth, justice, reparations, and non-repetition of the country's armed conflict to some 9.4 million of its registered victims. The law, which was only intended to last ten years was extended for another ten in 2021 and established measures, including restitution of abandoned or stolen land, humanitarian assistance, monitory compensation, as well as rehabilitation measures. Importantly, these various measures had a 'differential approach' to ensure that

particularly vulnerable groups, including women, children, ethnic groups, the elderly, and the disabled were guaranteed protection. By including marginalized groups, this policy contributes to trust-building through social justice and solidarity between groups participating and affected by the conflict, including the national government, the FARC-EP ex-combatants, and the victims.

The law was in this [and many other respects] highly ambitious and respectful of victims' rights. In its first decade of implementation, it helped establish a nationwide victim registry, recognize individual as well as collective reparations (for different political organizations and communities), reconstruct the memory of the conflict, its causes, and dimensions in addition to offices and courts across the country to secure land restitution. These wide-ranging initiatives not only brought utility and value on their own merit. Their inter-connected nature (and equitable implementation) ensured that reparations efforts also had a conflict resolution and prevention logic. Further, it provided the basis for socio-economic development, with a view to leaving no one behind. Despite its ambitions, the system faced several challenges. To date, only 9% of land restitution claims have been resolved by judges, and informing victims of their rights is often an uphill battle. Still, the extension of the law (and the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement) offers important opportunities to advance its implementation, build trust in public institutions, and apply SDG16+ in practice.[115]

2) Ensure that policies are attuned to the people-centered realities that exist.

For interventions across all SDG16+ targets to be effective and credible they must be premised on *people-centered* approaches that account for the perspectives and priorities of people and their communities. This also means adapting policies to the empirical realities of social, economic, and political systems rather than drawing on unrealistic expectations or normative biases. It may, for instance, require a more localized approach to addressing homicides and interpersonal violence, or reassessing the utility of engaging CIJ systems. This is particularly important in fragile and conflict-affected settings where interventions must account for different and often underserved institutional landscapes, and how they are understood and experienced by people. Admittedly, this can be a challenging proposition as e.g., donors (and the constituencies they in turn answer to) may be sensitive to reputational or programmatic risks vis-à-vis human rights or bureaucratic concerns. To this end, adopting a clearer understanding of approaches to risk, how they are operationalized, and balanced against other objectives can be helpful.

Box 11: Meeting people's justice needs in South Brooklyn, New York[116]

In response to an increase in criminal and drug-related offenses in the Red Hook neighborhood of South Brooklyn, New York, the **Red Hook Community Justice Center** (RHCJC) was created in 2000. It was established with the aim of restoring social cohesion through crime reduction and improving trust in the justice system, which has historically been low among its largely Black and Hispanic residents. The center is the first multi-jurisdictional community court in the country and is a unique public-private partnership that has engaged all levels of government: county, city, state, and federal. Using a "one-stop shop" model, it addresses family, civil, and criminal cases, with one judge presiding over all cases, as opposed to them being heard in separate courts. Its justice

models are mainly restorative and rehabilitative, which is a-typical in the United States context. They include an alternative sentencing program, which focuses on treatment in addition to punishment for those convicted, as well as a variety of programs designed to restore public safety and trust in justice, sometimes mandating participation in those programs as part of a sentence.

While the center took years to establish, it was done in a participatory manner with a locally appointed task force to ensure local residents' input was part of both planning and implementation. Assessments have shown that its focus on justice issues of direct concern to residents has paid off. An independent evaluation in 2010 found that the number of arrests, the recidivism rate (the tendency of a convicted criminal to re-offend), and the use of jail time had dropped since RHCJC's establishment. Importantly, survey results from 2016 showed that a majority of respondents had positive perceptions of it, with an overwhelming majority reporting that they felt it was effective at dealing with crime. A majority also reported fair treatment by the court, which is critical as studies have shown that litigants who feel their sentencing was fair are more likely to comply with court-mandated sanctions and abide by the law in the future.

Box 12: Reducing deadly violence in Palmira, Colombia[117]

In 2011, the homicide rate in the Colombian city of Palmira peaked at 98.1 per 100,000 people, following a spike in violence. This figure was nearly 16 times the global average (at 6.2 per 100,000) and a devastating blow for the city's 350,000 inhabitants. But just one decade later, Palmira saw a more than 60 percent reduction in homicides. This striking result was achieved through the PAZOS strategy, implemented by the mayor's office. The first, crucial step in this program was to recognize that violence was concentrated, both in geographic and demographic terms, and target the sectors of the population which were most affected by it. This meant focusing on the 22 out of 180 neighborhoods where more than half of all homicides occurred and targeting the population between 15-29 years old, who were both the main perpetrators and victims of violence.

The PAZOS strategy adopted an *interrupt - intervene - prevent* framework. This translated into offering work-oriented training, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people to enhance their socioeconomic outlook and socio-emotional development while also rechanneling resources to existing youth violence prevention programs. Activities implemented by the program included helping young people prepare resumes, using soccer as a recruitment and violence prevention tool, offering technical training in different skills, and creating community kitchens that provided daily meals to over 500 vulnerable people. During the conceptualization and implementation of the PAZOS Strategy, Palmira received support from Peace in Our Cities, a unique network of cities, community-based, and international partners working to reduce the most serious forms of violence in their communities.

3) Build evidence on SDG16+ interlinkages, then apply them in practice.

There are several important and insightful studies that have helped underscore the linkages between SDG16+ targets and between SDG16+ and other SDGs. However, there is much left to be understood about these dynamics, including by examining *how* they interact with each other in different contexts (both positively and negatively). Accordingly, there is a strong

case for governments, both from national and regional perspectives, to invest in innovative and integrated efforts to build a broader and deeper evidence base that can inform and guide policymakers. Applying a 'systems thinking' approach to SDG16+ implementation, including in efforts to address the polycrisis dynamics can be helpful in this regard. This entails building 'connective tissue' between different levels and systems and can help break down sectoral silos with the aim of promoting interdisciplinary, cross-cutting solutions.[118]

In the policy (development and implementation) domain, it is important to emphasize strategic prioritization and sequencing efforts to identify (and mitigate) different types of risk, and necessary (or unintentional) trade-offs. Failure to do so can result in incoherent policies with possible adverse impacts,[119] which can, for instance, contribute to drivers of conflict and violence.

Box 13: Leveraging and localizing SDG16 as an enabler across development goals – lessons learned from Indonesia's Voluntary National Review[120]

At the 2021 UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF), Indonesia presented (its third) Voluntary National Review (VNR), with SDG16 situated as an enabler and showing how its policy application can better serve the country's broader development goals, pandemic response, and efforts to support the green economy to achieve national resilience (thus reflecting the *SDG16+* framework), amidst challenges. Specifically, it highlights SDG16 as an enabler for national reforms across seven other SDGs (SDGs 8, 12, 13, 2, 3, 1 and 10), noting efforts in anti-corruption awareness campaigns, access to information and institutions, legal aid and legal identity as part of this enabling framing. Indonesia's VNRs draws primarily on national-level statistics to measure and illustrate progress across its development objectives, but it also spotlights the role of civil society organizations, particularly in collecting community data at the local level. (Localizing sustainable development is a mandated priority for its National Development Plans).

For instance, it highlights the role of the Women Headed Family Empowerment Foundation (PeKKA) in monitoring the implementation of government social assistance programs during the pandemic. PeKKA, a non-government agency working to alleviate poverty and seek justice for vulnerable groups, managed to collect community data in 90 villages – across 20 provinces, primarily on the barriers to social assistance distribution. They identified, for instance, vulnerable people who had not received any form of assistance or services outside of their homes (due to e.g., mobility constraints of elderly people). Based on their findings, they made recommendations to village governments, and as a result, also improved data on social assistance beneficiaries who had been left behind.

Box 14: Regional agreements with an SDG16 lens – the Escazú Agreement, Latin America and the Caribbean

The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation, and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, also known as the Escazú Agreement, seeks to do just that: guarantee people's access to information, justice, and decision-making in environmental matters.[121] It is the only binding agreement resulting from the Rio+20 conference, and the first to include specific provisions on the protection of human rights and environmental defenders.

The treaty's adoption in 2018 was the culmination of three years of mobilization of government, civil society, and human rights and environmental experts across sectors and countries.[122] At the heart of the Escazú Agreement lies the understanding of the interconnectedness between environmental decision-making and the protection of human rights, access to justice, and accountability in one of the world's most dangerous regions for human rights defenders (as well as one with high levels of inequality).[123] It links countries' commitments to the Paris Agreement and those to the SDGs, particularly SDG16, as it represents a tool for transparency, as well as an enabler for realizing the larger 2030 Agenda.[124] Under the agreement, states are to develop guidelines to ensure the safety of defenders, many of whom belong to indigenous communities, and protect the rights of vulnerable groups. It also requires states to assist the public in requesting and accessing information, notably in indigenous territories that hold most of the region's biodiversity.[125.] Finally, the agreement also reinforces the commitment to ensuring the right of future generations to a healthy environment.[126] Of the 25 signatories, it has been ratified by fifteen. Progress on implementation of the agreement has remained slow and continues to face opposition within some countries in the region.[127]

4) Invest in - and diversify - data on SDG16+.

Investing in data collection systems at scale to improve data coverage for SDG16+ indicators is a matter of urgency as we are in many regards 'flying blind'. Increasing the availability of quality, timely and context-specific data on the range of issues covered under SDG16+ can be done in numerous ways, including by providing longer-term financing and capacity building for NSOs, and by accounting for complementary data sources, including from civil society. Where technically (and politically) feasible, such data sources can help fill gaps in official statistics and better reflect the perspectives and daily challenges people and communities face. And to meet the commitment to Leave No One Behind, significant investments are needed to improve the availability of disaggregated data, notably on age, geographical location, and gender. Better gender-specific data can help us understand the hidden or unaccounted-for challenges faced by women, e.g., pertaining to intimate partner violence. Improving the availability of quality and timely data can unlock a wealth of opportunities. For instance, it can help in understanding the security implications of climate change, people's unique justice needs, and the productive roles that CIJ actors can play in providing people-centered justice. Furthermore, it can help advance the visibility of statelessness by generating critical evidence on stateless persons and encouraging their inclusion in SDG reporting.[128]

Box 15: Innovations in governance statistics

Since 2015, the Praia City Group on Governance Statistics has worked to develop international, harmonized standards in support of data production on governance, peace, and security, and to promote the measurement of SDG16 targets. In 2020, for instance, it published the seminal Handbook on Governance Statistics, followed by a Guidance Note on Governance Statistics in the COVID-19 Era. The Praia City Group is the only global platform specifically dedicated to strengthening National Statistical Offices (NSOs) capacity and expertise in producing timely and reliable governance statistics. This work is critical as NSO's often struggle due to limited access to finances and the lack of internationally accepted methodologies.[129] Incomplete data

has significant impacts on the effectiveness of (and trust in) public institutions and their ability to deliver services. It also impedes our broader understanding of issues such as inequality and discrimination – needed to develop the evidence-based policies, laws, and frameworks that can help address it (as emphasized in SDG indicator 16.b.1 and 10.3.1, see page 15 above).[130]

As part of its work with NSOs, the Praia City Group established two Task Teams (with NSOs from Peru, Norway, and Tunisia) with the aim to develop [conceptual and measurement] frameworks on participation in public and political affairs, and on non-discrimination and equality. With regards to the latter, they are working to produce comprehensive, survey-based statistics on discrimination and participation with an emphasis on their comparability (across time, cultures, languages, and contexts). The initiative focuses on both *indirect* discrimination such as laws, policies, and practices that result in unequal outcomes (e.g., discrimination against people with no legal identity), and *direct* discrimination such as unfavorable treatment (e.g., on the basis of skin color).

5) Prioritize participatory approaches and the inclusion of civil society and subnational actors.

Quality data is also essential to promoting (and institutionalizing) people-centered approaches to SDG16+. Such approaches not only require insight but also proximity to the various challenges and issues that affect people most. At the outset, this calls for more participatory and inclusive engagement with stakeholders (by governments and donors in particular), including private sector and civil society actors. It also calls for better collaboration with sub-national actors (beyond civil society) and authorities, and where the interface between those who govern and the governed is the closest. People-centered approaches must transcend symbolic or box-ticking engagement in favor of genuine inclusion at all stages of policymaking, and in the implementation of key legal and policy frameworks. For instance, consulting with civil society is critical throughout the VNR cycle (in the lead-up to, during, and after the process), and in the planning and implementation of national development strategies and planning frameworks.

Inclusion and participation should not only be seen as moral imperatives but as practical ways of advancing SDG16+. Consider, for instance, the educational and economic benefits of securing full gender equality in the labor market – or how addressing hierarchies in ethnicity, race, class, or religion can reduce societal divisions and levels of conflict and violence. Leaving no one behind in practice means that inequality and exclusion dynamics—and the power imbalances that inform them—must be accounted for across policy agendas. To this end, it is important to measure the impacts of policies and how these are distributed among different groups in society, and accounting for the agency and voice of affected groups in the design and implementation of policies. And meaningful, sustained, and inclusive engagement with civil society can help do just that. Civil society actors are often those who implement the policies in question and tend to be the closest to—and most knowledgeable of—the contexts in which they work.

Box 16: Developing an integrated and inclusive care system in Uruguay[131]

Over the past six years, Uruguay has undergone a process to reform how care is recognized and delivered with the aim to "*generate a co-responsible model of care, shared by families, government, community and market.*" The reforms also had a specific focus on gender equality so that *"Uruguayan men and women may share care responsibilities in an equitable manner as an attempt to do away with the unjust gender-based division of work."* At the heart of these efforts has been the recognition of a 'right to care' through creating the National Care Act and establishing the National Integrated Care Service (NICS) with implementation overseen by the multi-stakeholder National Care Board. These institutional and regulatory developments are complemented by communications efforts aimed at transforming cultural and social norms around caring in order to encourage a more equitable distribution of labor.

This model points to the value of intervening at multiple levels, from financing expansion of services, enhancing regulation, and ensuring appropriate oversight to transforming the socio-cultural norms that inform how care is delivered. It also points to the importance of inclusivity and engaging multiple stakeholders in the process.

Box 17: Participation and inclusion for more equitable land reform in Sierra Leone

In August 2022, Sierra Leone's Parliament unanimously passed two land laws that empower local communities to protect their lands against industrial development. They include the Customary Land Rights Act, which grants land-owning and land-using communities the right to Free Prior Informed Consent over all industrial projects on their lands; and the National Land Commission Act, which establishes local land use committees to secure effective and holistic land administration, and mandates that those committees have at least 30 percent female representation.

At least 20 percent of arable land had been leased to foreign businesses, but surrounding populations saw little of the profits: local communities reported being excluded from investment negotiations on their land and not receiving the promised share or payment. They also denounced the impacts of these investments: deforestation, landslides, and soil erosion.

The process by which these laws came about was highly inclusive and participatory across stakeholders and levels. Through intensive collaboration between government actors (national, district, and local), parliament, civil society and grassroots organizations, local leaders and committees, communities are now entitled to have a say in whether investments can be made on their land and are able to negotiate their value. The laws also translated commitments or conditions to which investors consented to legally binding agreements between communities and companies, and in ecologically sensitive areas and old-growth forests, industrial development (mining, timber, and agri-business) has been banned. This achievement followed years of advocacy, mobilization, and organization by local communities, as well as support for global civil society organizations and related networks, including Namati and the Grassroots Justice Network.[132]

More and smarter financing is needed for SDG16+

Current financing levels for SDG16+ are inadequate and often unpredictable as illustrated by recent cuts in Overseas Development Assistance by several donor countries.[133] Moreover, financing is also unevenly disbursed and implemented between and among countries, and often insufficiently monitored and tracked. In this regard, it is important to build [SDG16+ specific] momentum around the UN Secretary-General's plan to inject 'stimulus' financing into the SDGs to the tune of US$500 billion per year. This is necessary, it is argued, to address high debt costs and reduce risks of debt distress, scale affordable long-term development financing, and expand contingency financing to countries in need – all integral solutions to address the polycrisis.

Importantly, financing challenges are not only a matter of efficacy or prioritization but more so about sheer volume. And in ensuring sufficient financing levels, the issue of progressive taxation must feature more prominently on the policy agenda (i.e., the ideas and frameworks already exist but require added momentum and political support), alongside reform to international financial institutions and efforts to unlock more money at the global level, such as through Special Drawing Rights (SDR) allocation. Here, domestic and international efforts can work together. For instance, on tax, solutions must be geared towards increased levels of taxation and enforcement for improved domestic resource mobilization, including through e.g., temporary solidarity taxes for the wealthy, which have been implemented in multiple contexts during times of crisis.[134] At the international level, solutions must also focus on fortifying [international] tax regimes to address tax evasion and avoidance, and dramatically reduce illicit financial flows – all of which are forms of theft, which undermine collective efforts to build more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

Box 18: Making an economic case for violence prevention and reduction

Given the economic rationale inherent in policymaking processes, measuring the economic costs of violence can prove beneficial, despite ethical concerns noted in the snapshot on global violence above. Generating evidence for the economic benefits of violence prevention and reduction can (alongside the moral imperative) help increase the political and economic appetite for investments in the same. An important example can be found in the *Pathways for Peace* report, which points to evidence of the cost-effectiveness of prevention of violent conflict for countries at risk of violence as well as for the international community. It argues that, in addition to saving lives, prevention minimizes direct and indirect costs of violence to a tune of 1:16, though estimates vary. In other words, for every dollar invested in effective prevention, up to $16 can be saved in the future.[135]

With respect to interpersonal violence prevention (including homicides), detailed information is required about the effectiveness of interventions as well as the costs incurred by violence to get an accurate sense of the savings made by averting it. Such measurements are, however, an imperfect science as costs (and savings) will vary across contexts. Caveats notwithstanding, estimates by Klugman based on 30 evaluations of violence prevention programs (from 16 developing countries and 13 developed countries with relevant data on costs and impacts) show that most violence prevention programs offer good value for money with evidence being somewhat stronger in high-income countries.[136] A good example can be found in the global **Cure Violence** program where estimates of the cost of one prevented violent incident ranges from

$3500 to $4500. A version of the program in Trinidad and Tobago found the number of shootings to have dropped by nearly 39% within seven years of implementation while the prevention one violent crime was estimated at $3577.[137]

Box 19: Financing for people-centered justice: a low-cost investment

The justice sector support represents 1.4 percent of overseas development assistance (much of which focuses on legal and judicial 'institutional' development as opposed to critical front-line services and CIJ).[138] Even with this limited funding, ODA can make a significant difference if it takes a data-driven and evidence-based approach. Research indicates, for example, that the prison population can be reduced significantly and with low cost if donors invested in prison paralegals.[139] Similarly, forthcoming ODI research indicates that the total cost of universal access to key elements of front-line justice (1) criminal justice defenders for pre-trail detainees; and (2) universal access to community-based legal advice and assistance) is estimated at under $240 million a year across all low-income countries. This is 8% of the current total aid to justice (including aid for human rights). The key takeaway for countries and donors interested in ensuring equal access to justice for all is this: the business-as-usual approach is not going to work. We know this and we know the solutions: what we need is political will demonstrated by effective allocation of resources and financing, which is people-centered and evidence-based.

Photo Credit: UN Photo / Cia Pak

Events & Opportunities to Advance Peace, Justice, Equality, and Inclusion

A number of events over the next two years offer important opportunities to advance SDG16+, as an outcome and enabler of the larger 2030 Agenda, and as an approach to restoring trust in institutions and across groups, amidst the polycrisis. The list below notes events that are both UN and IFI-focused and that would target both ministries of foreign affairs, as well as ministries of finance and other line ministries. While the below is globally focused, attention should always be given to opportunities to affect change at regional, national, and local levels as well as to local actors. This includes civil society, community, and grassroots organizations that are among the most instrumental in advancing peace, justice, inclusion, and equality. The upcoming SDG Summit is a particularly important moment for governments, civil society, multilateral, and international organizations, and others to take stock of what is needed to make urgent progress in the years ahead and act accordingly.

The 2023 SDG Summit

The SDG Summit, convened under the auspices of the UN General Assembly, will review the status of the 2030 Agenda at its halfway point. It will bring together a wide array of stakeholders to review the implementation of all 17 SDGs in view of the multiple cascading crises facing the world. As such, it offers both stocktaking and agenda-setting opportunities to be leveraged to accelerate progress on peace, justice, inclusion, and equality (SDG16+). These include opportunities to:

i) Articulate, in no uncertain terms, the importance of having peace, justice, equality, and inclusion in a global development agenda. Agreeing to such foundational tenets as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was a groundbreaking achievement that should not be forfeited, particularly amidst breakdowns in the social contract.

ii) Fine-tune priorities among member states and other stakeholders on the most pressing short-, medium-, and long-term solutions to advance SDG16+, in policy and practice, including by highlighting the work and advocacy of 'SDG16+ champions.'

iii) Acknowledge commitments made (in 2019 and 2023), including leaving no one behind and strengthening accountability mechanisms therein. Global inequality, injustice, and violence are not merely technical challenges but rather policy choices that can be addressed in tangible, measurable ways. Strengthen transparency and accountability around SDG16+ implementation, including in national development plans, action plans, and strategies, and as related to the VNR process [with an eye to HLPF 2024]. This could be done, as in the case of some countries, through government-led VNR audits.

iv) Create new synergies and strengthen coalitions between advocates, policymakers, implementers, and champions of SDG16+ at all levels, such that the advocacy at global levels is translated into meaningful and sustainable investment in policy and programmatic change at national and subnational levels. In this sense, it is important to reaffirm commitments to inclusive engagement with civil society and subnational engagement and leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships to advance SDG16+.

v) Disseminate forward-looking messaging on the means of implementing SDG16+ in the coming years, including policy priorities and investments in data gaps, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and sustainable financing. Importantly, stakeholders and advocates alike should prioritize generating evidence and sharing knowledge on the 'how to' of SDG16+ implementation, measurement, and reporting. This includes decision-making issues linked to trade-offs, sequencing, and strategic prioritization.

vi) Call for ambitious, sustainable, and predictable financial commitments to invest in accelerated action on SDG16+, by mobilizing international and national resources (inter-governmental approach), and by building on the UN Secretary-General's proposed SDG Stimulus plan (of $500 billion annually between now and 2030). This mobilization should focus on providing protection and safeguarding the interests of the most vulnerable populations in the short-term, and developing resilience in the long-term to withstand the pressures of the polycrisis. Financing commitments must also aim to create fiscal headroom (with a view to the long-term) particularly in low- and middle-income countries, to tackle the most urgent challenges vis-à-vis violence, injustice, inequality, and exclusion.

In addition, it will be important to promote an SDG Summit Political Declaration addresses peace, justice, equality, and inclusion as critical and enabling components of the 2030 Agenda (SDG16+ framework).[140]

Beyond the 2023 SDG Summit: a long-term game

Following the SDG Summit, there are several important opportunities at the regional and global levels to continue the momentum around SDG16+. To do so will require amplification of, support for, and tracking of solutions when and where they happen, working across levels to drive policies that leverage the multiplier effect of peace, justice, equality, and inclusion, harnessing interlinkages through better data, and strengthening accountability mechanisms, in data collection and policy implementation, to sustain positive change. This will also require new and more risk-informed approaches, particularly on the part of donors, longer-term investment, and more efficient use of political, social, and financial capital by governments and other stakeholders.

Opportunities to leverage include:

- The **High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development Forum** to be held just after the SDG Summit in September 2023. (This is also an opportunity to bring through the relevant messages from the Paris Summit on SDG Financing held in June 2023).
- The **IMF Annual Meetings in Marrakesh**, Morocco in October 2023, as well as the 2024 World Bank Spring Meeting in 2024. This includes drawing out links between SDG16+ and Marrakesh's themes of building resilience, securing a transformational recovery, and reinvigorating global cooperation.
- The **Regional Forums** leading up to HLPF 2024. Taking place across the UN's five official regions, these enable regional actors to come together, along with national and sub-national to exchange good practices and think through regional solutions to national problems. They feed into the High-level Political Forum.
- **HLPF in July 2024.** This will be an important HLPF, as SDG16 will be under review. As such, it offers an opportunity to also track progress and accountability towards commitments made at the 2023 SDG Summit.
- **The Summit of the Future in September 2024**. While much is still unknown about what this Summit and its Pact for the Future will entail, it, and its foundational *Our Common Agenda* Report, was designed to turbocharge the SDGs. As such, there will be overlap, most likely through a New Agenda for Peace and a New Vision for the Rule of Law. Similarly, the **World Social Summit** in 2025 provides an opportunity to continue to weave the golden thread of peace, justice, equality, and inclusion as key to development and growth, foundational for rebuilding trust and critical to leaving no one behind.

In the MY World survey, conducted in 2013 as the Millennium Development Goals were wrapping up and the Sustainable Development Goals were being finalized, over a million people from around the world were asked what they wanted out of the development system.[141] Their response: that this new development agenda be broader, be universal and address underlying inequalities, insecurity, injustice and exclusion, in addition to more traditional development objectives. SDG16+ speaks directly to these demands, solidifying its centrality to any development agenda for people and planet.

As we approach the Summit in September, it is imperative that, as an SDG16+ community, we prove that *we the peoples* remains central to our work, ambitions, and actions. In a divided world, highlighting solutions that work, as well as the integrated approaches needed for scaled progress on peace, justice, equality and inclusion is critical for rebuilding trust and advancing the larger 2030 Agenda. This is the time to leverage the power and possibility of SDG16+. We need to rise to this challenge, through to 2030 and beyond.

Endnotes

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