

16

2024 Voluntary National Reviews through the
Lens of Peaceful, Just and Strong Institutions

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Financial support: The production of this report was made possible due to financial contributions from the Kingdom of Norway.

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations	4
<hr/>	
Introduction	5
<hr/>	
SDG 16 Priorities from 2016 to 2023	6
<hr/>	
Integration of the SDGs in National Development Plans and Strategies	11
<hr/>	
SDG 16 Coverage in the Report	13
<hr/>	
Interlinkages between SDG 16 and other Sustainable Development Goals	16
<hr/>	
SDG 16 Data Monitoring and Reporting	20
<hr/>	
Annex	23
<hr/>	
Bibliography	24

Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
GPCG	Global Policy Centre for Governance
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
SIODS	Information Systems on SDGs
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LDC	Least Developed Country
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
NC SDG	Nacional Council for the Sustainable Development Goals
PDS	Pathway for the Development of Samoa
RNDS	Revised National Development Strategy
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VLRs	Voluntary Local Reviews
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews

Introduction

In 2015, member states of the United Nations (UN) committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopting a set of transformative and people-centred goals and targets - the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This framework remains the cornerstone for countries in shaping and guiding national sustainable development strategies. The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are a key part of this process, offering countries a mechanism to assess their progress towards the goals and targets on an annual basis.

The 2024 Voluntary National Reviews Through the Lens of Peace, Just and Strong Institutions examine the extent to which member states have integrated SDG 16 in their national priorities and reporting. Have its targets been integrated into national development plans? Are they being monitored and with what data and statistics? How inclusive is the process behind these plans?

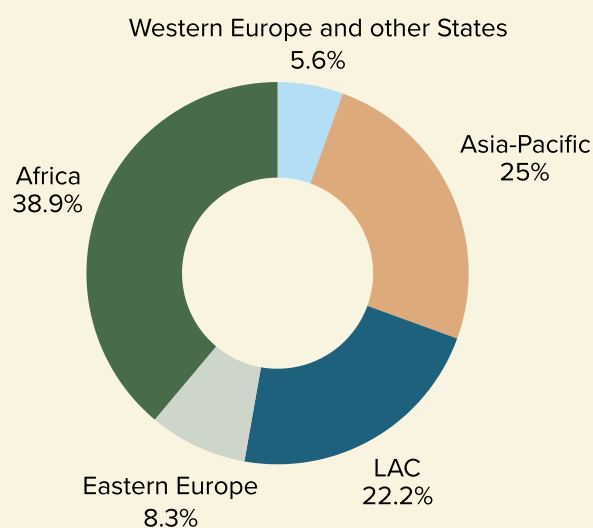
This report aims to provide member states and stakeholders with the insights needed to enhance their efforts in promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions. It tracks how individual targets are being integrated, highlights where tangible progress is being made, and identifies the policies and initiatives that are shaping that progress. Additionally, it highlights the interlinkages between SDG 16 and other goals, underscoring the importance of more effective integration of SDG 16 in national plans and strategies for achieving progress.

Since 2016, when 22 countries presented VNRs in the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), there has been a steady increase in the number of reports, as well as an increase in the coverage of SDG 16 on peace, just and strong institutions.

Review Criteria

This report reviews the 36 VNRs presented in 2024. This year, four countries reported for the fourth time, 13 for the third time and 17 for the second time. Of the 36 VNRs presented, 14 were from countries in Africa, 9 from Asia and the Pacific, 8 from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), 3 from Eastern Europe and 2 from Western Europe and other States.

This analysis considers (i) whether the countries reported on the SDG 16 targets (ii) the extent of the reporting on these targets; (iii) interlinkages between SDG 16 and other SDGs and (iv) whether monitoring and evaluation were part of strategies embedded in the VNRs. For each chapter, this report provides a quantitative and qualitative analysis and illustrates country examples.



Regional Breakdown of VNRs – Total = 36 (100%)

SDG 16 Priorities

Between 2016 and 2024, a substantial increase in reporting was made across all SDG 16 targets. The most significant areas were:

- Violence reduction (Target 16.1)
- Child protection (Target 16.2) and Anti-corruption efforts (Target 16.5)
- Strengthening effective institutions (Target 16.6)

While all targets showed an increase in coverage, Target 16.a (Human Rights Institutions) saw the smallest gain. Additionally, legal identity (16.9) and fundamental freedoms (16.10), though improved, may benefit from further support to sustain momentum.

2016

Corruption was the most frequently cited issue, with countries introducing new anti-corruption laws, and others requiring asset declarations from officials. Violence was also widely reported, though it varied in type and severity - discussing issues related to intimate partner violence, child abuse and armed conflict.

2017

The range of issues had expanded. Countries reported on violence, governance, rule of law, protection of human rights, anti-corruption, and illicit financial flows. There was also emphasis on public service delivery, access to information, and accountability, with some reviews highlighting the enabling role of SDG 16 for broader development goals.

2018

Many countries underscored the enabling function of SDG 16. Several linked peacebuilding and conflict resolution to progress on SDG 16, particularly through gender-sensitive approaches in peace and security policy. Corruption remained a central challenge, along with weak institutions, limited legal frameworks, slow justice systems, and gaps in legal identity registration.

2019

Nearly all countries had integrated SDG 16 into their VNRs. Member States emphasized reducing violence, protecting human rights, improving transparency and institutional effectiveness, and upholding the rule of law. Special attention was given to protecting vulnerable populations, children, youth, women, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI individuals. Additionally, many countries reported progress in women's political participation and birth registration as well as legal identity.

2020

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, 47 countries completed their VNRs and presented them at the High-Level Political Forum. The pandemic had a significant social and economic impact, deepening inequalities and vulnerabilities. Regarding SDG 16, countries focused on reducing violence, child abuse, and corruption, while promoting the rule of law, legal identity, and transparent institutions. Challenges included a shortage of legal professionals, public distrust in the justice system, and case backlogs. Some countries introduced national strategies to combat organized crime, terrorism, and financial crimes.

2021

Access to justice emerged in the VNRs as a main priority, with efforts to expand legal aid, reform courts, and ensure judicial independence. Transparency and anti-corruption measures were widely reported, including oversight reforms, national strategies, and whistleblower protections. Many countries emphasized participatory governance, with initiatives to include marginalized groups in decision-making. Conflict-affected states focused on peacebuilding and violence prevention, while COVID-19 was noted for straining institutions and limiting civic freedoms. Data gaps remained a major challenge, especially for sensitive targets like illicit flows and freedom of expression.

2022

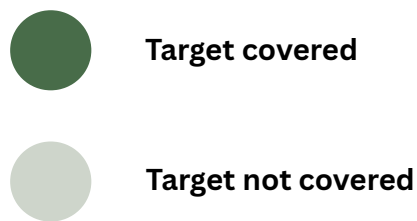
VNRs emphasized the connection between peace, governance, the rule of law, and sustainable development. Countries reported on efforts to strengthen justice systems, promote judicial independence, and fight corruption and terrorism. Participatory approaches, inclusivity, and human rights were seen as essential for social cohesion and development. The reports also highlighted the importance of international cooperation and transparent governance in supporting economic recovery and implementation of the 2030 Agenda, especially in conflict-affected settings.

2023

VNRs prioritized peace and security, highlighting efforts to reduce violence and support conflict prevention. Access to justice and legal identity were central, with reforms expanding legal aid and strengthening civil registration systems. Transparency and accountability continued to be widely addressed. Many countries acknowledged gaps in SDG 16 data and responded by investing in statistical capacity and incorporating citizen-generated and qualitative data. Institutional integration of SDG 16 into national development plans was a key trend. Countries linked SDG 16 to education, gender equality, climate action, and poverty reduction, acknowledging that inclusive and accountable institutions are the bedrock of sustainable and resilient societies.



Graphic percentage of countries including SDG 16 targets in the Voluntary National Reviews 2016 vs 2024



Target 16.1:
Violence



Target 16.2:
Child Protection



Target 16.3:
Access to Justice



Target 16.4:
Organized Crime



Target 16.5:
Corruption



Target 16.6:
Effective Institutions



**Target 16.7:
Inclusive Decision-
making**



**Target 16.8:
Global Governance**



**Target 16.9:
Legal Identity**



**Target 16.10:
Fundamental
Freedoms**



**Target 16.a:
Human Rights
Institutions**



**Target 16.b:
Discrimination**



Integration of the SDGs in National Plans and Strategies

Institutional arrangements for integrating SDGs in sustainable development plans are a critical issue because they directly affect how effectively countries can deliver commitments related to peace, justice, and strong institutions. Strong and inclusive institutional arrangements are also essential for fostering country ownership, ensuring that SDG 16 priorities are integrated into national strategies and reflect the needs and aspirations of diverse stakeholders. Without such arrangements, accountability, coordination, and sustained progress are likely to remain limited.

All the VNR countries for 2024 have embedded SDGs into national strategies, financing frameworks, and policies. The extent to which SDGs have been incorporated into national frameworks varies. Some countries have fully integrated SDGs into their policy plans. Other countries mention that they have integrated the SDGs into their national policy frameworks but offer limited information on the specifics or on the process of integration. Only a small number of countries refer to supporting these strategies with SDG-aligned budgets or Integrated National Financing Frameworks, revealing an ongoing disconnect between stated commitments and actual financing [1]. The list below represents solid examples of how countries are effectively integrating SDGs into their national plans and frameworks.

Colombia

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, the country has established an institutional framework for implementing the SDGs, putting in place various strategies to assess and monitor progress in achieving the Agenda and its SDGs. Colombia's fourth VNR not only acknowledges the overall progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda but also offers a focused reflection on the fight against hunger. This reflection includes the participation of various sectors and identifies actions that help bring together all stakeholders to carry out initiatives that leave no one behind, ensure access to and availability of food across the entire national territory.

Georgia

The country remains strongly committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with a focus on peace, well-being, and inclusive development under the principle of *Leave No One Behind (LNOB)*. This commitment is guided by the country's first long-term national policy document, "Vision 2030 – Development Strategy of Georgia", approved in 2022. The strategy integrates all 17 SDGs and establishes a

framework for coordinated reforms, effective policy planning, and efficient resource use. To support this strategy, the government has adopted several sectoral policies, including the 2030 Climate Change Strategy, which outlines coordinated national efforts to mitigate climate change. Other key documents include the Fourth National Environment Action Programme (2022–2026), the National Health Protection Strategy (2022–2030), and the Unified Education and Science Strategy (2022–2030). Additional reforms advancing the SDGs include the Public Administration Reform Strategy (2023–2026), the Open Government Action Plan (2024–2025), and the National Human Rights Strategy (2022).

Honduras

The country has established a centralized planning framework that includes the creation of a Secretariat for Strategic Planning and the NC-SDG, a multi-stakeholder governance body bringing together government, academia, civil society, unions, Indigenous groups, and local authorities. The SDGs have been systematically integrated into national planning and budgeting through instruments such as the Vision Act, the 2010–2022 National Plan, and the 2018–2022 Strategic

Plan, strengthening policy coherence and institutional accountability across levels of government.

Equatorial Guinea

In 2019, Equatorial Guinea created a National SDG Coordination Commission under the Office of the Presidency, integrating representatives from public institutions, the private sector, and civil society to oversee SDG implementation. According to its 2024 VNR report, this Commission is the primary institutional governance mechanism designed to foster dialogue, ensure commitment, and integrate initiatives from sub-national authorities and civil society into the 2030 Agenda. It monitors and tracks the progress of SDG targets through a National Indicator Frameworks and coordinates the national statistical system to generate necessary data to assess where a country is vis-à-vis the indicators.

Nepal

Nepal has fully embraced the SDGs and this commitment is grounded in the country's constitution, which aspires to build a prosperous, equitable, and diverse society. The SDGs have been mainstreamed into Nepal's development framework through successive periodic plans, including the Fourteenth (2016/17–2018/19) and Fifteenth (2019/20–2023/24) National Development Plans, which prioritized areas such as poverty reduction, health, education, gender equality, infrastructure, environmental protection, and good governance. The Sixteenth Plan (2024/25–2028/29) aims to accelerate SDG implementation and sets out a vision of achieving "Good Governance, Social Justice and Prosperity". Nepal has prioritized thirteen key thematic areas, including macroeconomic reforms, enhancing productivity, promoting productive employment and decent work, social protection, governance reform, and climate action. The plan aims to accelerate SDG implementation through localization,

improved governance systems and coordination, and sustainable resource management. Nepal is also pursuing the goal of achieving permanent graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status.

Oman

The country's national development plans are articulated in *Oman Vision 2040*, which forms the country's long-term strategic framework toward sustainable development. Oman has established a high-level National Committee for SDG follow-up, chaired by the Minister of Economy. The country has also launched the Oman Future Fund and introduced a sovereign sustainable financing framework to mobilize investment for the SDG targets.

Samoa

To address development challenges and guide medium-term sustainable development, Samoa has adopted the *Pathway for the Development of Samoa (PDS)*, - a national framework integrating the global SDG targets into national development plans. The Pathway is centered around three thematic pillars: Empowering Communities, Building Resilience, and Inspiring Growth. These pillars support the national vision of "*Fostering Social Harmony, Safety, and Freedom for All*" and are grounded in *Fa'a Samoa*, - Samoa's traditional way of life centered on *Aiga* (family) and community care. The PDS reflects enduring cultural values that have fostered peace, cohesion, and sustainability since independence. The current 2021–2026 PDS, was developed under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, in consultation with government entities, village and church communities, civil society, and the private sector. It outlines five key strategic outcomes: enhanced social development, a diversified and sustainable economy, strengthened security and governance, environmental protection and climate resilience, and improved infrastructure and public works.

SDG 16 Coverage in the Report

The 2024 VNRs show that SDG 16 remains a priority. The innovative ways in which SDG 16 is highlighted reflect the wide range of dynamic approaches available to advance collective commitments to peace, justice, and strong institutions. While countries continue to present progress on the SDGs in different formats, nine years into implementation, we are seeing certain thematic areas of SDG 16 emerging as universally relevant and recognized priorities across diverse national contexts.

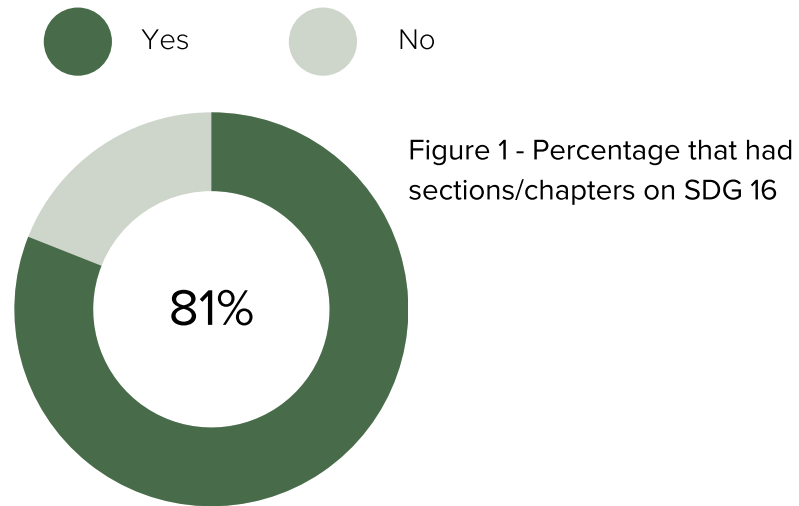


Figure 1 - Percentage that had sections/chapters on SDG 16

The aspects of SDG 16 that are more prominently highlighted across multiple 2024 VNRs include:

- **Inclusion.** Many countries demonstrated a deeper commitment to creating spaces for multi-stakeholder participation. Nearly all VNRs highlighted stakeholder contributions to the 2030 Agenda. These consultations ensured participation from citizens across the country, representing various sectors and identities, from women to youth to indigenous groups. Advancing gender equality, empowering young leaders, and ensuring the civic participation of those impacted by conflict, climate change, and poverty are among the practices that were increasingly highlighted.
- **Localization.** Countries are investing more in multi-level governance approaches to development. Among the 2024 VNRs, 33% referenced Voluntary Local Reviews [2] – a significant increase from 16% in 2022 [3]. Some VNRs report that they have or are in the process of establishing local government bodies or are already engaging regularly with rural-based organizations, indigenous communities and faith-based groups to support SDG implementation.
- **SDG 16 Interlinkages.** Many countries increasingly acknowledge the interlinkages between SDG 16 and other SDGs. In 2024, several examples of the links between SDG 13 on climate action and SDG 16 are highlighted. Some of the VNRs demonstrate that developing climate policies, such as early warning systems, that involve those most vulnerable to climate disasters, can enhance public trust and promote inclusive governance approaches. The connections between SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 16 are also increasingly recognized and reinforced. Examples include the implementation of gender budgeting tools, the empowerment of women leaders, and the application of gender-sensitive approaches in peacebuilding efforts.

- **Transparency and anti-corruption.** There is a continued focus on reducing corruption and enhancing accountability. 81% of the 2024 VNRs reference anti-corruption measures, fraud, bribery or illicit financial flows as challenges to the achievement of SDGs. Many 2024 VNRs emphasize the role of oversight bodies – such as Supreme Audit Institutions, anti-corruption commissions, ombudsman, and national human rights institutions to reinforce transparency and accountability. The VNRs recognize that although legal and oversight reforms are underway in several countries, political corruption and organized crime continue to have severe and far-reaching impacts.
- **SDG 16 Monitoring and Reporting.** The 2024 VNRs mark a notable shift toward inclusive, and innovative SDG 16 data systems. Countries are not only expanding their indicator sets and digital tools but are also recognizing the value of qualitative narratives and citizen-generated data. For instance, Mexico integrates both qualitative insights and citizen-generated data into its SDG 16 reporting, while Kenya incorporates geospatial, administrative, and citizen-generated data into its broader SDG monitoring efforts. Despite these advancements, many countries—particularly fragile states - continue to face significant challenges due to the lack of disaggregated data, underscoring the urgent need for greater support for national statistical systems.

Armenia

Armenia’s VNR included a dedicated chapter on ‘peace’ that reflects Armenia’s experience navigating the impacts of COVID-19, military aggression, and a major humanitarian crisis. It highlights the adoption of the Second Human Rights Protection Action Plan (2023–2025) as a key milestone. A new e-rights platform was also launched, enabling users to explore the Action Plan, track its implementation, review reports submitted by state authorities, and provide comments and feedback on progress. The chapter emphasizes Armenia’s commitment to governance and judiciary reforms, the strengthening of democratic institutions and social protection systems, and an uncompromising fight against corruption as central pillars of SDG 16 implementation.

Palau

Palau’s VNR incorporates SDG 16 into Pillar 2 “Empowering our People” and includes six SDGs (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 16) and 40 targets. Strengthening social protection for vulnerable groups, improving food security, leveraging technology to broaden access to essential services, promoting gender equity in development, and investing in a violence-free future are all key objectives of the Government.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone’s VNR states that “*After being an accelerator SDG for the first half of the 2030 agenda, SDG 16 has been further identified as an ancillary SDG for the remaining years of the 2030 agenda*”. Anchored in the peace and security dimension of SDG 16, the VNR notes that Sierra Leone has remained free from armed conflict during the VNR reporting period. A key development was the establishment of the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion in 2021, which has played a critical role in fostering political dialogue and advancing reconciliation. After the 2023 general elections, the commission was central in mediating post-election disputes between the country’s two main political parties and in supporting the implementation of the Tripartite Agreement on electoral reform and governance.

Uganda

Uganda's VNR places SDG 16 at the core of its transformative agenda, identifying six national commitments to accelerate SDG progress. One of those is “*strengthening SDG coordination and service delivery mechanisms*”, which explicitly targets institutional accountability and governance under SDG 16. There is a particular focus on protecting human rights, reducing corruption and financing, and ensuring the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary as well as upholding the rule of law. The VNR also launched an e-platform to promote stakeholder participation, thereby enhancing transparency and civil engagement under target 16.7 which aims to ensure that decision-making at all levels is responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative, strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of public institutions.

Nepal

Nepal's VNR includes a dedicated section on challenges in public governance and the need for institutional reforms. Here, SDG 16 is referenced explicitly as the framework within which Nepal intends to improve its legislative and judicial systems. The report discusses measures such as capacity building for law enforcement agencies, initiatives to streamline governmental procedures, and efforts to boost public participation in governance. It frames these reforms as integral to fulfilling the targets of SDG 16, highlighting that strong institutions are key to conflict prevention, social stability, and effective service delivery.

The Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands chose five priority SDGs for detailed review – SDG 1, 2, 13, 16, and 17. Within the section on “Peace”, the VNR details the launch of a national security strategy, drafts of a traditional governance and customs and facilitation bill which empowers chiefs and elders to manage local disputes, a conflict prevention and victim rights policy, alongside a focus on reintegration of parties involved in past conflicts and a strategic partnership with churches to promote peacebuilding. These measures directly support SDG 16's emphasis on inclusive and culturally relevant dispute resolution.

Yemen

In its first-ever VNR, Yemen positions SDG 16 as the foundation of its long-term development vision. The country prioritizes a comprehensive and sustainable peace process grounded in the National Dialogue and Riyadh Agreement [4], with strong emphasis on inclusive peacebuilding through the participation of civil society and women's groups. At the time of the report, Yemen aimed to rebuild central and local institutions, expand digital infrastructure, and strengthen governance systems. Plans include the strengthening of national statistical capacities and anti-corruption oversight, and the restoration of justice and rule of law through sustained institutional reform and capacity-building.

Interlinkages between SDG 16 and other SDGs

The interlinkages between SDG 16 and other goals are increasingly acknowledged as critical to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Numerous countries have underscored the importance of strong, inclusive, and accountable institutions as foundational to progress across all sectors.

For instance, Austria integrates gender equality, youth engagement, and international cooperation as cross-cutting priorities, applying SDG 16 principles, such as gender-responsive budgeting and anti-violence initiatives, throughout its national agenda. Belize addresses child marriage not only under SDG 5 but also in relation to SDGs 1, 4, 8, 10, and 16, illustrating how sustainable peace and justice are contingent upon the elimination of harmful practices. Similarly, Brazil incorporates transparency, human rights, and corporate accountability into its economic and environmental strategies, thereby reinforcing the synergies between SDG 16 and SDGs 8, 12, and 17.

Other Member States are advancing the cross-cutting relevance of SDG 16 through national planning and legislative alignment. Costa Rica has identified hundreds of legislative linkages, with SDG 16 among the most frequently referenced. Honduras emphasizes that enhanced governance contributes to improved outcomes in education, health, and other key sectors. Nepal's inclusive democratic approach promotes participation, social equity, and environmental commitments, demonstrating the broad applicability of SDG 16 principles. In conflict-affected settings such as South Sudan, SDG 16 is viewed as foundational for rebuilding institutions and needed for progress in areas ranging from education to economic resilience. Spain calls SDG 16 the human rights SDG. It highlights the integration of human rights across all SDGs, positioning SDG 16 both as a standalone objective and as a guiding framework for implementation. Meanwhile, Vanuatu exemplifies the mutually reinforcing relationship between governance and climate action, where investments in local institutions and civic engagement have led to more equitable and resilient climate responses.

Collectively, these examples underscore that SDG 16 is not only a goal in its own right, but also a vital enabler of sustainable development across the entire 2030 Agenda.

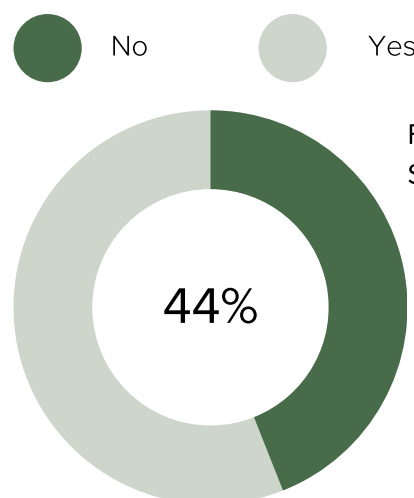


Figure 2 - Percentage that linked SDG 16 with other SDGs

Austria

Austria's VNR recognizes gender equality as a foundational pillar for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda across all levels, - local to global. This commitment is reflected not only in the dedicated targets of SDG5, but also in gender-specific goals across multiple SDGs, including 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16, and 17. The VNR identifies three intersectional priorities: gender equality, youth, and international cooperation, embedding them across all SDG areas, including SDG16. The VNR discusses how gender budgeting is used as a strategic tool for ensuring SDG coherence with gender equality. It also discusses policies to combat gender-based violence and online hate speech along with a focus on enhanced care services which are core aspects of SDG 16.

Belize

Belize's VNR demonstrates a strong commitment to eliminating violence against women and girls, guided by the [CEDAW](#) framework and supported by the [Spotlight Initiative with UN partners](#). A key feature is the country's investment in data collection for evidence-based policymaking. For example, the country tracks rising cases of sexual violence to inform targeted interventions. Belize also developed a 2020 Road Map to End Child Marriage and Early Unions, engaging key sectors—health, education, child protection, and economic development—to empower youth decision-making and prevent harmful practices. Importantly, the roadmap links these efforts not only to SDG 5, but also to SDGs 1, 4, 8, 10, and 16, acknowledging that preventing child marriage is critical to sustainable peace, justice, and inclusion.

Brazil

Brazil's VNR highlights the integration of SDG16 principles, such as transparency, integrity, corporate accountability, and human rights compliance - within broader sustainable development efforts. Through extensive public consultation, stakeholders emphasized the importance of: (i) fair, safe, and inclusive working conditions contributing to decent work and economic growth (SDG8), (ii) sustainable production and reduced environmental impact across value chains (SDG12), (iii) corporate responsibility grounded in legal compliance and transparency (SDG16), and (iv) strengthened partnerships with government, civil society, and private actors to meet national targets (SDG17). The VNR notes that Brazil has made a concerted effort to link good governance and integrity (SDG16) with economic, environmental, and collaborative frameworks, enhancing both public trust and policy coherence across the 2030 Agenda.



Costa Rica

Costa Rica's VNR underscores the legislative alignment with the 2030 Agenda, highlighting that 1,308 legislative bills were mapped against the SDGs. Notably, SDGs 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), 8 (decent work and economic growth), and 17 (partnerships for the goals) account for 41% of all linkages, demonstrating a strong interconnection between institutional governance and broader sustainable development priorities. This mapping exercise not only affirms the central role of SDG 16 within the legislative agenda but also reflects its cross-cutting relevance in advancing inclusive economic growth and effective multi-stakeholder partnerships. Conversely, areas such as responsible consumption, life below water, and clean energy (SDGs 12, 14, and 7) were identified as having fewer linkages, representing just 4.74% of the total.

Honduras

Honduras' VNR demonstrates a comprehensive integration of the SDGs within its national policy framework, with a distinct focus on SDG 16. The government has linked multiple public policies - including the National Energy Policy (*Política Energética Nacional*) and the *Weaving Social Cohesion 2024-2045* cultural strategy (*Tejiendo Cohesión Social 2024-2045*) - to a broad range of SDGs such as poverty eradication, quality education, gender equality, clean energy, decent work, innovation, climate action, and strong institutions.. SDG 16 stands out as a priority with 77 programmes linked to it, underscoring Honduras' commitment to strengthening institutions, promoting peace, and enhancing justice systems as foundational pillars for sustainable development.

Nepal

Nepal's VNR describes the country's commitment to "inclusive democracy" which plays a vital role in advancing the 2030 Agenda. This approach ensures that people from all backgrounds - especially marginalized groups - have a meaningful voice in governance and decision-making. Inclusive democracy enables the development of equitable public policies that guarantee access to quality education and promotes gender-responsive legislation through increased participation of women in politics. It also supports inclusive economic policies that create jobs, foster fair labor practices, and expand opportunities for vulnerable populations. This approach strengthens urban planning and service delivery, ensuring that the needs of all residents are considered, including access to affordable housing and basic services. It also facilitates the design and implementation of environmental and climate policies that integrate the voices of those most at risk. Nepal's experience illustrates that inclusive democracy not only advances specific SDGs —such as SDGs 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 16—but also contributes across the 2030 Agenda.

South Sudan

South Sudan's VNR highlights that South Sudan has prioritized democratic governance as a central focus. The Revised National Development Strategy (RNDS) 2021–2024 also identifies SDG 16 as a key priority, emphasizing its role as a foundational goal that supports progress across multiple other SDGs.

The RNDS is aligned with the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), which aims to maintain peace and stabilize the economy. These core objectives contribute significantly to achieving various SDG targets, such as enhancing institutions for accountable and inclusive governance, promoting economic stability, advancing human capital, developing essential infrastructure for sustainable growth, integrating gender across all development initiatives, and safeguarding vulnerable groups. Additionally, the RNDS underscores the importance of other interlinked SDGs—such as Good Health, Quality Education, Clean Water and Sanitation, Gender Equality, Zero Hunger, and No Poverty. The R-ARCSS roadmap further proposes the creation of Enterprise Development Funds, including a Women’s Enterprise Development Fund, Social Security Fund, and Youth Enterprise Development Fund again demonstrating the inclusive focus of SDG 16.

Spain

Spain’s VNR places human rights at the heart of its Agenda 2030 strategy, meaning that the SDGs mirror human rights obligations and that human rights are present in all the goals, bringing the linkages through this one framework. In practice, this means that poverty eradication, access to housing, water, and food; legal obligations are explicitly connected to a human rights-based approach to development. The VNR stresses that human rights, participation, transparency and accountability are foundational principles for all policy design, implementation and evaluation - core aspects of SDG 16 and throughout the entire 2030 Agenda.

Vanuatu

Vanuatu’s VNR clearly shows how SDG 16 and climate action (SDG 13) reinforce each other. The Government has improved its data collection approaches and strengthened civic engagement to develop equitable climate policies. They have also invested in local government institutions to deliver resilient climate initiatives such as early warning systems protecting those that are most vulnerable to climate disasters. The [Van-Kiram initiative](#), for example, combines indigenous knowledge with scientific data (automated station, buoys, stream gauges) to generate accurate locally relevant climate information. Vanuatu is also recognized for being the first country to lobby the International Court of Justice to recognize ‘ecocide’ as a crime under the Rome Statute and advocating for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty – tying legal frameworks and governance directly to environmental protection and climate action.



SDG 16 Data Monitoring and Reporting

Half-way through the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs are falling behind their targets. In fact, according to the [UN Secretary General's 2024 SDG Progress Report](#), progress towards the targets for peace, justice and strong institutions is only moderate or marginal with more than 30% of targets stagnating [5]. In a challenging global context where countries are facing multiple conflicts and crises, urgent acceleration of the SDGs and SDG 16 in particular is crucial.

Many of the 2024 VNR countries recognize this urgency and are therefore focusing more on data integrity, monitoring systems, and reporting frameworks. This is demonstrated via the development of expanded indicators sets, digital dashboards, local-level data reviews, and institutional capacity building. Countries are also recognizing that reliable SDG 16 data is essential to enhance accountability mechanisms, draft effective policies and ensure sound implementation. The following are selected 2024 VNRs that are acting on SDG 16 monitoring and reporting. These examples demonstrate that 2024 VNRs are increasingly integrating robust data systems with human rights frameworks, supporting more inclusive, evidence-based approaches to SDG 16.

Austria

Austria's VNR stated that it utilized data from Statistics Austria, which has monitored all 17 SDGs from 2016 to 2022. Since 2017, Statistics Austria has produced annual national indicator tables that closely align with the UN indicator framework while incorporating national and regional dimensions. A robust database was developed by the national statistical authority, and data gaps identified in the first VNR were filled through support from academic institutions. Data was deliberately positioned as a central pillar of the review process. This strengthened database enabled the creation of comprehensive indicator tables for each SDG, including SDG 16. The report shows the use of national SDG 16 indicators as proxies for the global SDG 16 indicators. For instance, instead of reporting on satisfaction with public services (SDG 16.6.2), the country opted to use an indicator that measures trust in the political system, which they have been tracking since 2013 and is produced by Statistics Austria.

Georgia

Georgia's VNR described the country's SDG Inter-Agency Council and four themed working groups (including Democratic Governance), which coordinate to align SDG 16 indicators with domestic policies.

The VNR also noted that SDGs are "systematically incorporated into policy at central and local levels," with 32 of 64 municipalities actively engaged in SDG localization, which includes gathering SDG 16 data at the local level. While approximately 200 indicators are regularly tracked and mapped, the country is working to close remaining gaps, especially in human rights and regional metrics, through ongoing review, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with its national SDG strategy.

Kenya

Kenya's VNR demonstrates a comprehensive SDG 16 monitoring approach. Kenya expanded its national indicator set by expanding its national indicators to 168 data points, mapping progress, including for SDG 16 targets related to justice and institutions. The country leads an inclusive countrywide reporting mechanism. Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) have also been drafted with 19 counties actively mapping SDG priorities and data sources. This process is supported by capacity-building initiatives led by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). The country's monitoring process also incorporates geospatial, administrative, and citizen-generated data, including gender-responsive indicators to reflect Kenya's commitment to women's leadership, peacebuilding, and inclusive governance. The country included tracking almost all SDG 16 indicators in their reporting.

Laos

Laos's VNR acknowledged regression on SDG 16 due to weak monitoring. It stressed the need for a whole-of-government approach, stronger resource mobilization, and comprehensive localization to improve data gathering and reporting.

Samoa

Samoa's VNR addresses challenges in measuring progress on SDG 16, citing limited data and capacity for monitoring justice, governance and institutional indicators. The Government transparently highlights the need for improved data systems and accountability frameworks to support their commitments.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's VNR noted persistent insufficiency of the data systems and reporting mechanisms resulting in not having current data to be able to assess progress on several targets, including on SDG 16. The report also notes the misalignment between the report's production and statistical production timelines. This was noted as one of the main challenges in the report.

Uganda

Uganda's VNR demonstrated a robust approach by expanding its SDG indicator framework from 41 data points in 2016 to 135 in 2024. It has strengthened its national SDG Secretariat and Technical Working Groups to coordinate data generation, monitoring, and reporting at both national and local levels. The SDG/VNR Data Fact Sheet includes 127 indicators drawn from Uganda's national systems, underscoring its commitment to evidence-based policymaking. The VNR also informs that one of the four actions that the government will take forward to address the current challenges on SDG 16 is to invest in 'big data' to provide timely information on fast-evolving development challenges.

South Sudan and Yemen

South Sudan and Yemen's VNRs openly acknowledged limited statistical capacity due to instability in their VNRs. To address this, the South Sudan 2024 VNR emphasized the importance of enhanced coordination in the implementation and reporting of the SDGs. To support this effort, an interagency committee, chaired by the Director General of the Ministry of Finance and Planning and co-led by the [National Bureau of Statistics](#) - has been tasked with establishing a national SDG dashboard. This dashboard aims to reflect a strategic shift from primarily [humanitarian aid toward long term development assistance](#) [6] Yemen's VNR highlighted efforts to strengthen statistical and legislative capabilities amid ongoing conflict. Despite challenges such as declining public revenue and operational constraints, the plan emphasizes rebuilding institutions to support more reliable SDG data systems as the country is only able to track 3 SDG 16 indicators.

Mexico

Mexico's VNR showcases the country's data-focused approach to SDG 16. Mexico continues to use its Information Systems on SDGs (SIODS), an online portal under the coordination of the presidency and the National Statistics Office. It reports on 335 indicators, 215 global indicators, 86 national indicators, and 34 regional indicators, including SDG 16. This platform is used to track governance, justice, inclusion and transparency, using both administrative records, household surveys, citizen generated data, and qualitative data. The VNR also indicates that the Government integrates qualitative narratives and citizen-generated data into its SDG 16 reporting.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's VNR stands out for its integration of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) – aligning local feedback with national institutional processes. The VLRs conducted in municipalities such as Harare, Victoria Falls, Bulawayo and rural councils provide local assessments that feed data and insights into the national review. This community-led approach helped address data gaps and improve accountability at all levels. Continuous stakeholder-driven reviews contributed to enhanced data collection and transparent monitoring, accountability and inclusion, which are central elements of SDG16.



Annex 1

Annex 1. Number of Countries that Reported on the SDG 16 targets year by year

Target	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2023	2024
16.1. Violence	9	18	28	41	44	38	38	36
16.2. Child Protection	10	17	30	39	34	36	38	33
16.3. Access to Justice	14	23	34	40	42	38	37	33
16.4. Organized Crime	5	12	20	29	30	26	27	25
16.5. Corruption	10	21	37	42	44	35	36	33
16.6. Effective Institutions	12	18	33	36	41	40	38	34
16.7. Inclusive Decision-making	13	18	21	29	27	34	38	32
16.8. Global Governance	10	11	12	19	20	23	29	28
16.9. Legal Identity	5	10	20	26	27	25	21	25
16.10. Fundamental Freedoms	12	20	24	37	34	32	34	31
16.a. Human Rights Institutions	10	11	25	31	37	32	37	27
16.b Discrimination	14	17	24	32	33	32	38	33
Total	22	43	46	47	45	40	39	36

Annex 2

Annex 2. Percentage of Countries that reported on the SDG 16 targets by year

Target	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2023	2024
16.1. Violence	41	42	61	87	98	95	97	100
16.2. Child Protection	45	40	65	83	76	90	97	92
16.3. Access to Justice	64	53	74	85	93	95	95	89
16.4. Organized Crime	23	28	43	62	67	65	69	69
16.5. Corruption	45	49	80	89	98	88	92	92
16.6. Effective Institutions	55	42	72	77	91	100	97	94
16.7. Inclusive Decision-making	59	42	46	62	40	85	97	89
16.8. Global Governance	45	26	26	40	44	58	74	78
16.9. Legal Identity	23	23	43	55	60	63	54	69
16.10. Fundamental Freedoms	55	47	52	79	76	80	87	86
16.a. Human Rights Institutions	45	26	54	66	82	80	95	75
16.b Discrimination	64	40	52	68	73	80	97	92

Endnotes

1. A Voluntary Local Review (VLR) is a self-initiated report developed by local or regional governments—such as cities, municipalities, or provinces—to assess and communicate their progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the sub-national level.
2. 9th Edition Progressing National SDG Implementation Report 2024 VNRs & UNDESA 2024 VNR Synthesis.
3. The Riyadh Agreement is a power-sharing deal signed on November 5, 2019, between the Yemeni government (recognized internationally) and the Southern Transitional Council (STC).
4. United Nations Security Council. (2020). Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Yemen (S/2020/326). Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2020/326>
5. United Nations Secretary-General. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>
6. International Institute for Sustainable Development. (2024). High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2024 Daily Report – 16 July 2024. Available at: <https://enb.iisd.org/high-level-political-forum-hlpf-2024-daily-report-16jul2024>

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- <https://www.undp.org/publications/2023-voluntary-national-reviews-through-lens-peaceful-just-and-strong-institutions>



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