United Nations Development Programme

2025 Voluntary National Reviews through the Lens of Peaceful, Just and Strong Institutions

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Abbreviations

ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GPCG	Global Policy Centre for Governance
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
LBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VLRs	Voluntary Local Reviews
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews

Introduction

Nearly a decade since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, countries around the world continue to align their national priorities with its transformative vision for people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. Central to this process are the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), presented annually at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which serve as the primary mechanism for Member States to assess and share progress, challenges, and innovations in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 2025 session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the HLPF was held under the theme "Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind." The in-depth review of five goals: SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), underscored the interdependence between social inclusion, economic resilience, and institutional strength. Against this backdrop, this publication, 2025 Voluntary National Reviews through the Lens of Peaceful, Just and Strong Institutions (SDG 16), provides an analytical overview of how countries are integrating, monitoring, and reporting on SDG 16 within their VNRs.

Since the first VNRs were presented in 2016, the goal of promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, ensuring access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions (SDG 16), has evolved from a relatively underreported and politically sensitive area to a central pillar of national reporting. The 2025 review cycle demonstrates this transformation vividly. Across regions and income groups, countries are increasingly embedding SDG 16 targets into national development plans, aligning governance reforms with evidence-based policy frameworks, and leveraging digital innovation to strengthen transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.

This report examines 35 VNRs presented at the 2025 HLPF, covering submissions from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe and Other States. It assesses how governments are incorporating SDG 16 targets, the extent and quality of reporting, the use of digital technologies to modernise institutions, and the integration of monitoring and evaluation frameworks into policymaking processes. The analysis also explores how SDG 16 interacts with other goals, highlighting, for instance, the role of justice in advancing gender equality, the contribution of strong institutions to economic growth, and the importance of peace and accountability in climate action.

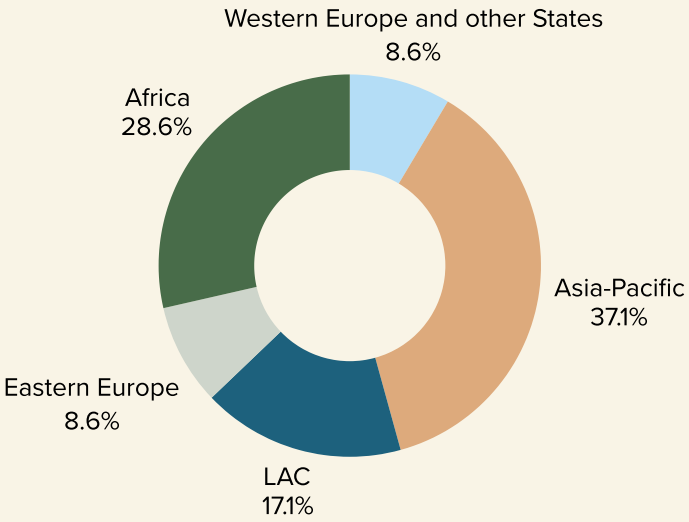
In documenting progress, this publication aims to provide practical insights for policymakers, statisticians, and development practitioners. It showcases country innovations—from digital justice platforms and open-data systems to community-based monitoring and participatory governance mechanisms—that are reshaping how states engage with their citizens. It also highlights persistent gaps, particularly in data disaggregation, institutional capacity, and the operationalisation of inclusive governance principles.

Ultimately, this analysis reaffirms that SDG 16 remains the backbone of the 2030 Agenda. Without peace, justice, and strong institutions, progress towards other goals cannot be sustained. As countries enter the final stretch toward 2030, strengthening transparent, accountable, and responsive institutions is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity for achieving the vision of a more peaceful, just, and inclusive world.

Introduction

Review Criteria

This report reviews the 35 VNRs formally presented at the HLPF 2025. Of the total reports, 10 were from Africa, 13 from Asia and the Pacific, 6 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 3 from Eastern Europe, and 3 from Western Europe and Other States.



Regional Breakdown of VNRs – Total = 35 (100%)

SDG 16 remains a vital entry point of the 2030 Agenda, shaping how countries build the enabling environment for sustainable development. Peace, justice, and strong institutions are widely recognised as the backbone of progress across all other Goals, providing the governance structures, accountability mechanisms, and participatory spaces through which inclusive and sustainable change can be realised. In this regard, digital innovation has become increasingly significant. The expansion of digital tools and processes is not only transforming how states deliver services, but also how they engage with citizens, collect and share data, and ensure that institutions are more effective, transparent, and accountable, as called for in target 16.6. At the same time, digitalisation is enabling greater inclusiveness and responsiveness in decision-making, reinforcing the principles of participation and trust embedded in target 16.7.

Against this backdrop, the analysis considers (i) whether the countries reported on the SDG 16 targets (ii) the extent of the reporting on these targets; (iii) how countries are using digital innovation to strengthen institutions (iv) interlinkages between SDG 16 and other SDGs and (iv) whether and how monitoring and evaluation were part of strategies embedded in the VNRs.

Accountability in Action: What a Decade of VNRs Tells Us About Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Since the first Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) in 2016, Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) has evolved from being underreported to becoming a central focus of national reporting. In its early years, SDG 16 was approached with caution, often referenced sparingly and framed as a "sensitive" goal. Reporting was further constrained by significant data gaps, as many nations lacked the necessary data to monitor progress within their national systems and policies.

Momentum around SDG 16 accelerated following its formal review at the 2019 SDG Summit and the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development. The COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced the importance of effective, accountable, and transparent institutions, bringing renewed attention to government oversight and public trust. By 2024–2025, most countries were reporting on a wide array of SDG 16 targets, reflecting a growing recognition of the goal's centrality to national development agendas.

Over the past decade, there has been a notable increase in focus on areas such as justice and institutional effectiveness. Reporting on access to justice (target 16.3) expanded from modest levels in 2016 to near-universal coverage by 2025, underscoring the widespread acknowledgement that equitable justice systems are foundational to the 2030 Agenda. Similarly, targets related to effective institutions (target 16.6), inclusive decision-making (target 16.7), and non-discrimination (target 16.b) sustained prioritisation, with reporting coverage surpassing 90 per cent by 2025. These trends affirm that effective, inclusive and accountable governance is increasingly viewed as a key enabler of sustainable development.

Child protection (target 16.2) and violence reduction (target 16.1) also increased in prominence, particularly after 2018, with coverage exceeding 95 per cent by 2025. These issues are frequently framed within broader narratives of human rights, youth empowerment, and social protection, reinforcing SDG 16's alignment with the commitment to "leave no one behind." Reporting on fundamental freedoms (target 16.10) and national human rights institutions (target 16.a) also increased, though at a more gradual pace.

Nonetheless, persistent gaps remain. Organised crime (target 16.4), for instance, showed early momentum but later stagnated, with coverage declining to 61 per cent by 2025. This reflects both measurement challenges and governmental challenges in addressing criminal networks. Global governance (target 16.8) continues to lag in focus, with only two-thirds of countries reporting in 2025. Despite its incremental progress, legal identity (target 16.9) remains one of the least mentioned, with only 78 per cent of countries reporting on it.

Although VNRs increasingly highlight SDG 16, efforts to ground reporting in robust evidence are still hindered by data gaps and a lack of disaggregated statistics.

From 2016 to 2025, SDG 16 has undergone a remarkable transformation—shifting from the margins to the mainstream as a central pillar of the VNR process and a defining element of national development discourse.

Accountability in Action: What a Decade of VNRs Tells Us About Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

A Decade of Innovations

Over the past decade, countries have introduced a wide range of innovations and mechanisms to improve the effectiveness of policies on SDG 16. The rapid rise of information technology systems has given a much-needed boost to effective service delivery. For example, online portals that allow citizens to report corruption or submit access-to-information requests are reshaping the relationship between citizens and their governments. These tools not only make public services more efficient but also help strengthen trust by making governments more open, responsive, and accountable.

The ways in which actions and progress on peace, justice, and governance are measured and monitored have evolved significantly, with new metrics integrated into national dashboards, administrative justice data (e.g. court backlogs, legal aid provision) increasingly utilised, and citizen-generated insights from perception and household surveys enriching the evidence base.

Another innovation is the rise of community-based monitoring, particularly in the areas of violence prevention and policing practices. Local groups, often working with civil society and municipal authorities, are using participatory tools to track incidents of violence, monitor police conduct, and promote dialogue between communities and security actors. Indonesia, for example, has established community outreach programs and support groups to encourage victims to speak up and access available services, including mentoring and promoting men's involvement in protecting women and girls from violence.

This grassroots approach not only generates valuable real-time data but also empowers citizens to have a direct voice in shaping safer and more accountable public institutions. By putting communities at the centre, these initiatives strengthen trust, reduce conflict, and ensure that solutions are grounded in local realities.

SDG 16 Priorities from 2016 to 2025

All countries' VNRs reported on access to justice issues in 2025. Child protection, violence reduction and inclusive decision-making were also among the most consistently reported priorities by the majority of countries. The target on effective institutions (target 16.6), then the target on strong human rights institutions (target 16a), followed closely behind. Reporting on legal identity, fundamental freedoms, and corruption also increased, albeit to a lesser extent. Since the first VNR review process in 2016 until now, the highlights include:

2016

Corruption was the most frequently cited issue, with countries introducing new anti-corruption laws. Violence was also widely reported, although it varied in type and severity, covering issues related to intimate partner violence, child abuse and armed conflict.

2017

The range of issues 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 several countries 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

When SDG 16 was under thematic review, nearly all countries had integrated SDG 16 into their VNRs. Member States emphasised 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 LGBTQI+ individuals. Additionally, many countries reported progress in women's political participation, birth registration, and 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 (HLPF). 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 organised crime, terrorism, and financial crimes.

2021

Access to justice emerged as a main priority in the VNRs, with efforts to expand legal aid, reform the courts, and ensure judicial independence. Transparency and anti-corruption measures were widely reported, including oversight reforms, national strategies and whistleblower protections. Many countries emphasised participatory governance, with initiatives to include marginalised 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 significant challenge, especially for sensitive targets like illicit flows and freedom of expression.

2022

VNRs emphasised 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 prioritised 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 and governance frameworks 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.

2024

Nearly all VNRs included SDG 16 with increased coverage of targets such as violence reduction, corruption, inclusive decision-making and fundamental freedoms. However, coverage remains limited for targets such as human rights institutions and legal identity registration. The report highlights strong progress in embedding the SDGs into national plans and frameworks, fostering participation and localisation of SDG 16, and recognising the interlinkages between SDG 16 and other goals (such as gender equality and climate action). On the monitoring side, countries are enhancing data systems (including the use of citizen-generated data and digital dashboards). Still, significant gaps remain, especially in fragile and conflict-affected settings where statistical capacity and disaggregated data are weak.

Percentage of countries including SDG 16 targets in the Voluntary National Reviews 2016 vs 2025

Target covered

Target not covered

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

2016 59%

2025 97%

Target 16.8: Global Governance

2016 45%

2025 64%

Target 16.9: Legal Identity

2016 23%

2025 78%

Target 16.10: Fundamental Freedoms

2016 55%

2025 89%

Target 16.a: Human Rights Institutions

2016 45%

2025 92%

Target 16.b: Discrimination

2016 64%

2025 94%

SDG 16 Coverage in the Report

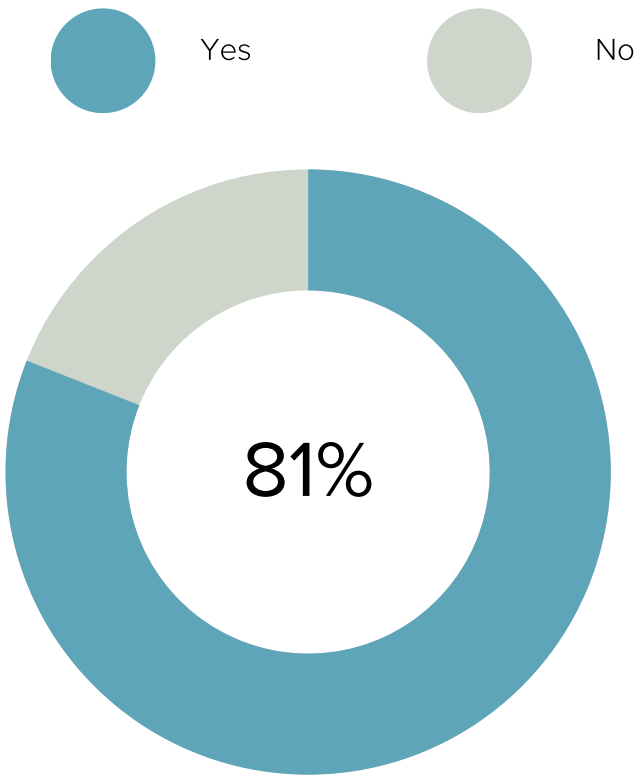
The 2025 VNRs reaffirm that SDG 16 remains a key priority. 10 years into implementation, certain themes have clearly emerged as common and widely shared priorities across different national contexts.

Key areas of SDG 16 receiving greater emphasis across the 2025 VNRs include:

Justice and Rule of Law

Many countries emphasise the importance of accessible, transparent, and accountable legal systems as foundations for sustainable development. A consistent theme was the expansion of legal aid services, digital justice platforms, and institutional reforms aimed at reducing case backlogs and improving efficiency. Several reports underscore efforts to strengthen judicial independence and anti-corruption measures, recognising their role in restoring public engagement. While higher-capacity countries highlighted progress through institutional modernisation and data-driven reforms, conflict-affected states often framed justice sector strengthening as part of broader peacebuilding and state legitimacy efforts.

Figure 1 - Percentage of VNRs with sections/chapters on SDG 16



Inclusion

Inclusion is a universal theme across the 2025 VNRs. In fact, every VNR underscored the role of civil society in advancing the 2030 Agenda. Many countries also reported that the private sector was engaged throughout the process. National consultations enabled broad citizen participation, bringing diverse voices from across sectors and from remote areas, including women, youth, and indigenous peoples. There was also a continuing shift towards localisation. Governments recognised that achieving SDG 16 depends not only on national-level reforms but also on meaningful engagement with citizens at the grassroots. This was documented in several countries' efforts to develop Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR).

Strong Institutions

Building effective, accountable, and transparent institutions is a recurring emphasis across the VNRs. Many governments highlighted reforms to improve public administration, strengthen oversight mechanisms, and expand the use of digital governance to enhance efficiency and citizen trust. Strengthening institutions was frequently linked to broader goals of policy coherence, service delivery, and crisis resilience, particularly in countries recovering from conflict or managing economic and climate-related shocks. Several reports also highlighted institutional innovations, such as integrity commissions, open government initiatives, and e-governance platforms, that help make governance more inclusive and responsive.

Violence

The VNRs identify violence reduction as both a stand-alone priority and a cross-cutting enabler of progress in areas such as poverty eradication, education, and health and was one of the most prominently featured SDG 16 targets in the 2025 VNRs. A recurring feature was the expansion of national strategies and legal frameworks to address gender-based violence and child protection, often paired with investments in community policing, conflict prevention, and victim support services. Several VNRs also noted improvements in data availability, particularly crime statistics and survey data on safety perceptions, although gaps remain in disaggregated reporting.

Non-discrimination

Non-discrimination is a recurring focus in the 2025 VNRs, with countries emphasising legal, policy, and institutional measures to promote equality and protect vulnerable groups. Many reports highlighted anti-discrimination laws and national strategies targeting gender equality, disability inclusion, and minority rights. A notable pattern across VNRs is the growing attention to non-discrimination measures embedded within wider social protection, education, and labour policy frameworks to address inequalities.

SDG 16 Monitoring and Reporting

The VNRs point to a sustained evolution toward more data-driven, and evidence-based approaches to monitoring and reporting on SDG 16. Countries are expanding their indicator frameworks, integrating digital tools, and increasingly valuing qualitative insights and citizen-generated data as complements to traditional statistics. Despite advances, the lack of sufficiently disaggregated data limits countries' ability to reflect the distinct experiences, perceptions, and outcomes of different population groups, emphasising the importance of strengthening national statistical systems and investing in data capacity-building.

Taken together, these recurring themes illustrate that SDG 16 has become firmly embedded in national reporting. The following examples from the 2025 VNRs highlight how different countries have translated these thematic areas into concrete actions and reforms, offering practical insights into the diverse ways governments are advancing peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Bulgaria's VNR

Highlights the country's commitment to combating discrimination and promoting equality, particularly for the Roma community. The Commission for Protection against Discrimination plays a central role in monitoring policies, conducting public awareness campaigns, training officials, advising on legislative reforms and collecting data to inform inclusive policymaking. Bulgaria's National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma (2021–2030) provides a comprehensive framework, with action plans supporting education, health, labour mediation, youth employment, and access to justice, while strengthening institutional capacity to prevent racism. Key measures include targeted support for Roma students and teachers, expanded mediation services, career guidance and training for unemployed Roma, and improved legal awareness and access to justice, especially for women and households living in poverty.

Bangladesh's VNR

Highlights the country's dedication to reducing violence. The report notes a substantial decline in violence against women and children, with intimate partner violence among women falling from 70% to 41% over the past ten years. This progress is credited to the implementation of national action plans, stronger legal frameworks, and expanded public awareness campaigns. The country also reports on its efforts to strengthen the rule of law and ensure equitable access to justice. Community policing initiatives and broader legal aid services have been advanced to foster greater confidence in the justice system, especially among marginalised groups. Efforts to strengthen social cohesion and prevent violence, such as interfaith dialogues, community engagement programs, and inclusive education, have helped reduce communal tensions and encourage community-driven peacebuilding initiatives.

Germany's VNR

Underscores the country's commitment to non-discrimination and inclusive development, aligned with the "leave no one behind" principle of the 2030 Agenda. The VNR highlights an anti-discrimination legal framework, including the General Equal Treatment Act, which protects individuals from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, or sexual orientation across employment, education, and access to services. In education, Germany has implemented inclusive education initiatives, integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools, providing specialised support, and introducing inclusive modules in teacher training programs. The VNR also describes how Germany is promoting equal employment opportunities through workplace policies, anti-bias training programs, and monitoring mechanisms to prevent discrimination in hiring, promotion, and working conditions. In addition, social inclusion programmes targeting marginalised communities, such as refugees and ethnic minorities, provided access to housing, vocational training, and social services to enhance full participation in society.

Eswatini's VNR

Underscores the nation's commitment to inclusive representation, particularly through the integration of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). For the first time, the VNR incorporates assessments from seven municipalities, Ezulwini, Manzini, Matsapha, Mbabane, Ngwenya, Nhlangano, and Siteki, highlighting a localised approach to SDG implementation. A pivotal aspect of this is a collaborative platform for national and local stakeholders to review and validate key findings from both the VNR and VLRs, ensuring that local perspectives and priorities are accurately reflected in the national report.

Guatemala's VNR

Highlights Indigenous engagement as a central feature of its national implementation of the SDGs. Indigenous leaders accounted for half of all civil society participation, ensuring that ancestral perspectives were fully represented in the process. Consultations expanded significantly, by 80% compared to previous cycles, strengthening the diversity of voices and demonstrating a shift in development planning toward inclusion. Policies were shaped with communities rather than imposed on them. This approach reflects Guatemala's commitment to an inclusive, rights-based, and locally grounded model of sustainable development, in which Indigenous knowledge and leadership help shape the national agenda. Policy directions are being updated through these consultations, for instance, by re-including Indigenous authorities with decision-making powers in the Gabinete Específico del Agua (Specific Water Cabinet), which oversees financing for wastewater treatment, addresses industrial overuse and contamination of water sources, and protects environmental defenders.

Qatar's VNR

Underscores the country's strong commitment to evidence-based policymaking, coordinated by the National Planning Council, National Statistical Committee, and other administrative units. Through extensive surveys, data collection, and analysis, including 900+ data points, 251 indicators, and 30 case studies, the VNR informs responsive policies grounded in empirical evidence. The VNR also addresses data challenges, such as disaggregation and accessibility, showing that improving the quality and breakdown of data is essential for effective policy formulation. Complementing these efforts, Qatar launched its 2025 National Data and Statistics Strategy, featuring a central data repository, the Qatar Data Trust Index, the Doha Data Forum, and a digital census, reflecting a comprehensive approach to integrating data at the core of SDG planning, monitoring and implementation.

Saint Lucia's VNR

Emphasises a comprehensive approach to reducing violence and strengthening justice, with a focus on gender-based violence (GBV). Central to these efforts is the National Inter-Agency GBV Task Force, which brings together government ministries, UN agencies, and civil society to coordinate prevention and response measures. These efforts included training and validating the Clinical Management of Rape Protocol. Saint Lucia also enacted the Domestic Violence Act, which strengthens legal protections. Civil society organisations such as Raise Your Voice Saint Lucia have supported over 6,000 women and children through counselling, legal aid, and economic empowerment programmes. Together, these measures demonstrate the country's commitment to safer communities, social cohesion, and stronger institutions.

The Philippines' VNR

Highlights significant reforms on strengthening judicial practices and laws to ensure accountability and alignment with international standards. For example, the Department of Justice revised the implementing rules of the Board of Claims, broadening the scope to include victims of unjust imprisonment, forced detention, and various violent crimes. This reform aims to streamline claims processes and ensure timely justice for affected individuals. The country also enacted legislation which establishes a Judiciary Trust Fund, ensuring sustainable and independent funding for the judiciary.

Strengthening Institutions Through Digital Innovation

Building strong institutions was frequently highlighted in the 2025 VNRs, with digitisation emerging as a key driver of institutional reform. Many countries reported expanding e-governance platforms, digital registries, and online service delivery systems to enhance efficiency, transparency, and citizen access. The use of digital tools for public financial management, procurement, and anti-corruption monitoring is a recurring practice that exemplifies the use of technology to strengthen accountability. Countries also underscored the role of digitisation in strengthening data systems for evidence-based policymaking and in improving the service delivery between urban and rural populations. However, VNRs acknowledged persistent challenges such as digital divides, cybersecurity risks, and limited infrastructure in fragile contexts. Artificial intelligence, for example, was rarely mentioned in the VNRs despite being a critical issue at the *HLPF 2025*. These examples suggest that while digitisation is reshaping governance and contributing to stronger institutions, its positive impact depends on investments in capacity-building and inclusivity.

Belarus' 2025 VNR

Underscores the role of digital platforms in advancing evidence-based governance. The National SDG Reporting Platform functions as an open-access hub for aggregating and summarising data, drawing on international practices and recent domestic reforms in data sharing across state institutions. It provides the foundation for assessing Belarus' achievements and challenges. A key innovation is the regional SDG data platform, completed in 2023, which uses 138 indicators (78 aligned with national measures and 60 tailored to regional contexts) to track disparities and rank regional performance. This tool enables more localised policymaking and supports efforts to reduce inequalities across territories. The national SDG portal and social media channels are intended to ensure public access to progress updates. By combining centralised and regional systems, embedding digital monitoring into policymaking, the country is directly supporting SDG 16 by strengthening institutions and improving accountability.

The Federated States of Micronesia's (FSM) VNR

Emphasises investment in digital infrastructure to bridge the service gaps and expand equitable access. Within the VNR process itself, FSM has used citizen feedback, combining digital and in-person modalities to enhance participation in development planning and service delivery. This includes piloting tools such as community feedback platforms, digital scorecards, and satellite mapping. Such mechanisms have been designed to be inclusive, evidence-based and consistent with both national priorities and global frameworks. The first Starlink satellite gateway in Kosrae now connects over 150 schools, clinics, and community hubs, enabling more than 3,800 students, including those in remote atolls, to access virtual education, e-health, and government services.

Malta's VNR

Identifies accelerating digital transformation and smart mobility as one of its strategic goals. For a highly connected EU member state, digitalisation strengthens its economy and governance frameworks. Malta has invested in user-friendly digital portals for citizen–state interactions, aiming to cut down bureaucracy and improve efficiency. It is using Smart Mobility and Connectivity to support sustainable transport and urban governance, reducing inefficiencies and improving public service delivery. Malta's digitalisation strategies also align with EU-wide commitments on open government and data-driven policymaking. Malta illustrates how digital transformation, when integrated into governance reforms, can reinforce the foundations of SDG 16 by promoting efficiency, transparency, and citizen trust in public institutions.

Nigeria's VNR

Showcases a collection of digital tools that are strengthening national institutions and ensuring evidence-based policymaking. The Nigeria iSDG Model, for example, is a domesticated systems simulator that allows policymakers to test scenarios, assess risks, and align the National Development Plan 2021-2025 and Agenda 2050 with the SDGs. The government realigned the National Statistical System by updating the indicator frameworks and digital data flows to enhance state-level reporting and ensure consistency with global standards. The Inclusive Data Charter Action Plan also supports the process by collecting more disaggregated and digitalised data, ensuring that vulnerable groups are represented and better served by policies. Meanwhile, the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) provides another digital platform for tracking SDG-related resources and linking them to high-impact programmes.

Suriname's VNR

Highlights the government's prioritisation of innovation as a driver of economic sustainability, with particular emphasis on renewable energy and sustainable technologies. The ICT Vision 2030 strategy identifies digitalisation as a core pillar of development. Efforts are underway to use geospatial data, digital dashboards, and participatory tools to enhance transparency and responsiveness to citizens. In the health sector, the Digital Health Agenda 2022–2030 integrates a patient portal, electronic files, and mobile applications into the National Health Information Exchange Platform, enabling real-time data for improved patient care, cost efficiency, and evidence-based decision-making.

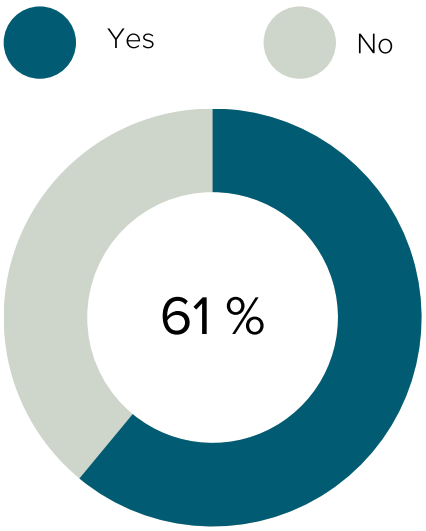
Seychelles' VNR

Indicates that the island faces challenges in service delivery due to limited resources and a dispersed population. Recognising that effective institutions require efficient and inclusive service provision, the country has increasingly turned to digital solutions. The government has developed e-Governance platforms to improve access to public services, reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks, and increase accountability. Digital tools are also being used to identify and support vulnerable groups more accurately, ensuring equitable distribution of benefits and reducing risks of exclusion. Seychelles is also leveraging digital technologies for data collection and SDG monitoring, particularly for SDG 16 indicators related to transparency and institutional performance.

Interlinkages between SDG 16 and other SDGs

SDG 16 is deeply interconnected with virtually all other Sustainable Development Goals, acting as a foundation and catalyst for broader development outcomes. Strong institutions, access to justice, and inclusive decision-making create the foundation for poverty reduction, economic growth, quality education, and health improvements. Accountable governance systems also enable more effective climate action, gender equality, and social inclusion, as laws and policies are enforced fairly and resources are allocated transparently. Several of the 2025 VNRs highlighted that progress on SDG 16 underpins advances across the broader SDG framework and serves as a key enabler of sustainable, equitable, and resilient societies.

Figure 2 - Percentage of VNRs that linked SDG 16 with other SDGs



Bhutan's VNR

Is guided by its unique development philosophy of "Gross National Happiness" and highlights the interlinkages between SDG 16 and climate action. The report emphasises that robust institutions, such as the National Environment Commission, are essential for effective climate governance, transparency, and accountability. These efforts demonstrate how SDG 16 can enhance the effectiveness of climate action, fostering a harmonious balance between environmental sustainability and social stability. The VNR also underscores gender-sensitive approaches, noting from the 2020 Gender and Climate Change Survey that climate change disproportionately increases women's workload and vulnerabilities, reinforcing the need to integrate gender perspectives into climate policies and disaster risk reduction.

Ethiopia's VNR

Highlights the country's peacebuilding focus, which is anchored in the Pretoria Peace Agreement and the Transitional Justice Policy. This commitment is interwoven with priorities such as youth employment (SDG 8), digital innovation (SDG 9), gender equality (SDG 5), and climate resilience (SDG 13), demonstrating how SDG 16 underpins progress across the 2030 Agenda. Ethiopia is using a monitoring and evaluation framework for its Rural Transformation Roadmap. This tool establishes key performance indicators across livelihoods, infrastructure, agro-industrialisation, finance, climate resilience and governance, thereby linking institutional effectiveness (SDG 16.6) to other SDGs and development outcomes. Ethiopia's VNR underscores that progress on peace, justice, and strong institutions is both a precondition for and an accelerator of transformation across multiple SDGs. By embedding peacebuilding, transitional justice, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems into its development agenda, Ethiopia demonstrates how institutional resilience enables sustainable and inclusive growth, ensuring that the benefits of transformation reach all communities.

Kazakhstan's VNR

Emphasises bold steps the government has taken to strengthen its SDG monitoring framework, reflecting the interconnected nature of sustainable development. The government updated its national SDG indicators and analysed linkages across goals. Of the 200 indicators now included in Kazakhstan's updated monitoring system, about 60 emerged as highly influential across multiple goals. Seventeen indicators were found to impact 20 or more others. For example, indicator 16.6.1 on republican budget expenditure directly influences the achievement of 64 SDG indicators. This evidence-based approach, including 25 nationally localised targets, allows policymakers to prioritise high-impact areas, accelerating progress across the 2030 Agenda.

Sudan's VNR

Underscores that peace, justice, and institutional strengthening are essential drivers across the Sustainable Development Goals. It emphasises that reinforcing the rule of law and building transparent governance are key to reducing poverty (SDG 1) by nurturing economic stability and equitable resource distribution. At the same time, ensuring equal access to justice and protecting human rights is vital for reducing inequalities (SDG 10). Crucially, the report highlights how institutional reform is intertwined with gender equality (SDG 5), especially through efforts to secure women's participation in decision-making and access to justice. A concrete development boosting this trajectory is the appointment of Siham Osman, the first woman to serve as Under-Secretary at Sudan's Ministry of Justice, as well as the establishment of the Ministry of Justice's Gender Unit, which aims to promote gender-sensitive legal reforms and ensure that women's rights are effectively protected under Sudanese law. Together, these interlinkages affirm that robust, accountable institutions are the foundation for sustainable development across the board.

Papua New Guinea's VNR

Shows that SDG target 16.6, focused on building effective, accountable, and transparent institutions, is identified in the country's SDG diagnostics as a pivotal accelerator of progress across multiple development goals. Strengthening governance and public financial accountability has systemic effects that resonate beyond the institutions themselves. For instance, enhancing institutional transparency and budgeting credibility directly contributes to improved service delivery in health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4), while also laying the groundwork for poverty reduction (SDG 1) and stronger economic performance (SDG 8). The diagnostics underscore that robust institutions play a foundational role: when public entities function with integrity and openness, resources are better allocated, planning becomes more responsive, and citizen trust, along with participation, increases.

Harnessing Data for Evidence-Based Policymaking and SDG 16 Monitoring

In the 2025 VNRs, data emerges as a cornerstone for evidence-based policymaking, monitoring, and reporting on SDG 16, particularly. Governments are not only expanding indicator frameworks but also embedding data systems into governance processes to ensure policies are responsive, transparent, and inclusive. From open-access national dashboards and big-data platforms to predictive analytics and citizen-driven feedback mechanisms, countries are leveraging both traditional statistical surveys and innovative digital tools to translate data into actionable insights. Several VNRs showcased how improved data collection, particularly disaggregated by gender, age, and location, has informed policy decisions across poverty reduction, climate resilience, and governance reforms. The reports also pointed to challenges, including capacity gaps in conflict settings and uneven data availability across sectors.

Increasingly, data is no longer seen solely as a reporting requirement but as a strategic resource for designing, evaluating, and adapting policies that advance institutional effectiveness, citizen trust, and sustainable development outcomes.

Finland's VNR

Highlights a comprehensive SDG data monitoring framework based on 42 national indicators, regularly tracked and published by Statistics Finland. Results are accessible through the sustainable development portal and informed by the Sustainable Development Council, the Prime Minister's Office, researchers, and civil society. Statistics Finland compiles SDG monitoring data on the open-access National Reporting Platform and has also prepared the Statistical Annex to this VNR. Additionally, the Finnish Expert Panel for Sustainable Development is spotlighted for promoting societal change that considers both the environment and human well-being. As an independent scientific panel, this initiative has been acknowledged for supporting the government's long-term decision-making in prioritising complementary and fair solutions to conflicting sustainability goals.

India's VNR

Highlights a robust, data-driven framework that underpins both sustainable development and governance reforms. The National Indicator Framework, with 118 indicators, tracks SDG progress and informs policy decisions across sectors, including governance, justice, and public administration. Tools such as the SDG India Index, the North-Eastern Region District SDG Index, and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) allow for subnational monitoring, helping identify areas where institutional effectiveness, transparency, and accountability can be strengthened. SDG Coordination and Acceleration Centres in states and union territories facilitate local implementation and ensure policies reflect evidence-based insights. India's Digital Public Infrastructure further supports transparent service delivery, efficient public resource management, and inclusive citizen engagement. Collectively, these systems reinforce SDG16 targets by promoting effective institutions, participatory decision-making, and trust in governance.

Thailand's VNR

Describes the Safe Points app, which uses AI and machine learning to predict crime risks. With high user satisfaction, 72.7% for interface clarity and 75% for information accuracy, the app demonstrates how predictive data is being applied to enhance public safety planning and community awareness. Another impactful tool is the Thai People Map and Analytics Platform (TPMAP), which combines big data with household surveys, including a local census and NEET (not in education, employment, or training) survey. By applying an MPI, TPMAP identifies vulnerable populations and supports the design of targeted interventions and anti-poverty policies.

The Gambia's VNR

Underscores the central role of data in guiding policy and development strategies. The Gambia Bureau for Statistics utilised an SDG Monitoring Survey, which collected most SDG 16 Survey-based indicators presented in the report. Providing valuable insights on the increase of access to justice and reduction of bribery, and on the increase in satisfaction with primary education. For SDG 16, the data contributed to reforms in institutional effectiveness (target 16.6), inclusive decision-making (target 16.7), and access to justice (target 16.3), supporting initiatives such as budget reforms, civic engagement programs, hybrid courts, and legal aid frameworks. These mechanisms ensure policies are targeted, equitable, and aligned with national development priorities.

Malaysia's VNR

Demonstrates how the government has recognised that achieving the SDGs requires strong national ownership and locally tailored solutions. The government created the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) in 2019 as a bipartisan initiative to localise and accelerate SDG implementation across the country. The APPGM-SDG collaborates with 143 parliamentary constituencies, ensuring that both national priorities and local realities shape the SDG agenda. By working directly with communities, the initiative promotes inclusivity, encourages local participation, and strengthens the link between policy-making and grassroots needs. The APPGM-SDG has played a pivotal role in strengthening data-driven decision-making by integrating local data into national SDG reports, bridging the gap between communities and federal policy, and improving data disaggregation by specifying geography and other demographics. It also creates a feedback loop where parliamentary constituencies can track their own contributions to SDG implementation and advocate for resources or reforms based on the data.

A Way Forward: Peaceful, Just and Strong Institutions for a Sustainable Future

In light of the HLPF 2025 roadmap to advance sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, this publication provides an analytical overview of how countries are integrating, monitoring, and reporting on SDG 16 in their VNRs. It offers practical insights for policymakers, statisticians, other data producers, and development practitioners.

The growing prominence of SDG 16 in national reporting not only supports better-informed and more interconnected decision-making but also lays a strong foundation for building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Yet, substantial progress on SDG 16 unfolds as new global challenges arise. Joint efforts must prioritise overcoming digital divides, cybersecurity risks, and limited infrastructure that hinder the collection of disaggregated data on vulnerable populations.

Furthermore, as the demand for robust national statistical systems grows, capacity-building and advocacy strategies are essential to support reporting on sensitive yet critical indicators related to organised crime and governance. As the backbone of the 2030 Agenda, transparent, accountable, and responsive institutions remain central to achieving a sustainable world—one where evidence-based policymaking drives progress and ensures that no one is left behind.

Annex 1

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

Target	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2023	2024	2025
16.1. Violence	9	18	28	41	44	38	38	36	35
16.2. Child Protection	10	17	30	39	34	36	38	33	35
16.3. Access to Justice	14	23	34	40	42	38	37	33	36
16.4. Organized Crime	5	12	20	29	30	26	27	25	22
16.5. Corruption	10	21	37	42	44	35	36	33	29
16.6. Effective Institutions	12	18	33	36	41	40	38	34	34
16.7. Inclusive Decision-making	13	18	21	29	27	34	38	32	35
16.8. Global Governance	10	11	12	19	20	23	29	28	23
16.9. Legal Identity	5	10	20	26	27	25	21	25	28
16.10. Fundamental Freedoms	12	20	24	37	34	32	34	31	32
16.a. Human Rights Institutions	10	11	25	31	37	32	37	27	33
16.b Discrimination	14	17	24	32	33	32	38	33	34
Total	22	43	46	47	45	40	39	36	36

Annex 2

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

Target	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2023	2024	2025
16.1. Violence	41	42	61	87	98	95	97	100	97
16.2. Child Protection	45	40	65	83	76	90	97	92	97
16.3. Access to Justice	64	53	74	85	93	95	95	89	100
16.4. Organized Crime	23	28	43	62	67	65	69	69	61
16.5. Corruption	45	49	80	89	98	88	92	92	81
16.6. Effective Institutions	55	42	72	77	91	100	97	94	94
16.7. Inclusive Decision-making	59	42	46	62	40	85	97	89	97
16.8. Global Governance	45	26	26	40	44	58	74	78	64
16.9. Legal Identity	23	23	43	55	60	63	54	69	78
16.10. Fundamental Freedoms	55	47	52	79	76	80	87	86	89
16.a. Human Rights Institutions	45	26	54	66	82	80	95	75	92
16.b Discrimination	64	40	52	68	73	80	97	92	94

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