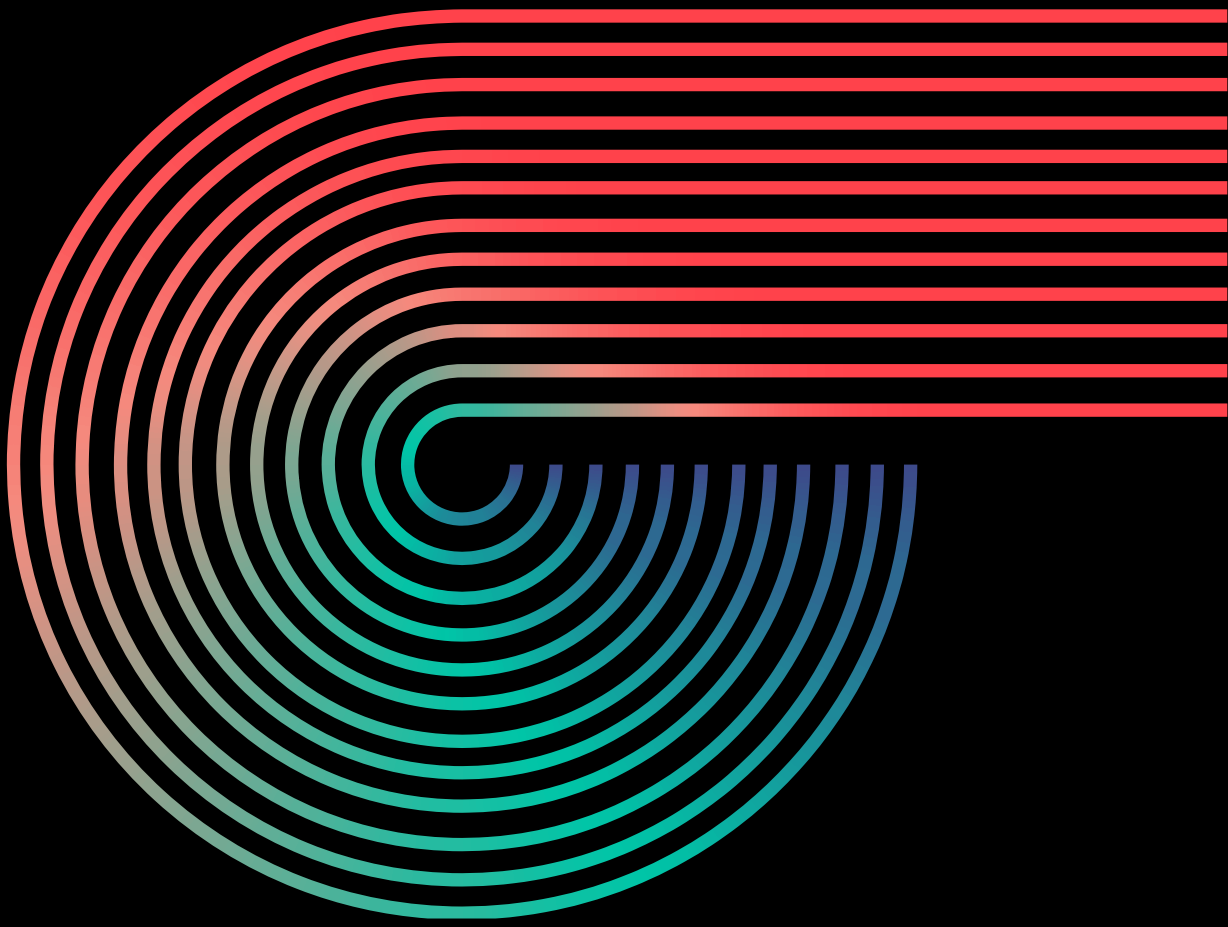
SDG 16 Data Initiative Report 2022

Are we on track to meeting the 2030 agenda?



Members of the SDG16 Data Initiative

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Contents

Abbreviations

CLD	Centre for Law and Democracy
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
FOIAnet	Freedom of Information Advocates Network
FPU	Free Press Unlimited
GFMD	Global Forum for Media Development
GSoD Indices	Global State of Democracy Indices
GVD database	Global Violent Deaths database
HiiL	Hague Institute for Innovation of Law
IAALS	Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System
IAEG-SDGs	Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators
IAFQ	Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RTI	Right to information
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TAP Network	Transparency, Accountability and Participation Network
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNODA	United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WJP	World Justice Project

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Introduction

Fletcher D. Cox, Visiting Scholar, International IDEA

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focused on the pursuit of human and ecological flourishing. The SDGs aim to inspire state action and global cooperation not only to end poverty and preserve environmental sustainability but also to improve the global quality of health and education, to encourage equitable economic growth and to support the pursuit of peace, justice and inclusive institutions.

Overview

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focused on the pursuit of human and ecological flourishing. The SDGs aim to inspire state action and global cooperation not only to end poverty and preserve environmental sustainability but also to improve the global quality of health and education, to encourage equitable economic growth and to support the pursuit of peace, justice and inclusive institutions.

SDG 16 is a cornerstone of the overall agenda and is directly related to democracy. Promoting *peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development*, ensuring *access to justice for all* and building *effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels* (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs n.d.a) are critical threshold conditions for democracy *and* development. International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Indices (International IDEA 2022), for example, include measures for all of the key features of SDG 16, including peace (personal security), inclusivity (suffrage and civil society participation), access to justice and inclusivity (suffrage, civil society participation and corruption). SDG 16 is built upon the premise that democracy, peace and sustainable development are inseparable: resilient democracy is essential for sustainable development.

The SDG16 Data Initiative is a consortium of 17 organizations that use non-official data to track progress towards the achievement of SDG 16. Official data used within the global SDG indicator framework (United Nations Statistics Division n.d.a, n.d.b) have important limitations. Many official indicators do not offer comprehensive time-series measures and often do not directly correspond with their underlying concepts. For SDG 16.3, for example, the official indicators cover (a) unsentenced detainees; (b) a number of victims of violence; and (c) people who have used a dispute resolution mechanism. The 'rule of law' is a far broader concept and requires more direct and more comprehensive indicators. Official analyses of SDG 16, such as the UN's most recent 2022 evaluation report (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2022: 58–59), need to be complemented by other sources of data and processes of analysis. The SDG16 Data Initiative aims to meet this goal. It draws upon complementary data sets and rigorous global monitoring processes to track progress on SDG 16 and to help identify unaddressed challenges in data quality, availability and coverage.

The COVID-19 pandemic made capacity development efforts and data collection processes extremely difficult for states and UN institutions with official monitoring and evaluation mandates. Organizations involved as custodians (UNDP n.d.) of various sets of indicators related to SDG 16 also experienced major setbacks and delays. This effectively increased the importance of global cooperation for broad, collaborative burden-sharing related to data collection, management and trend analysis. To continue to address global knowledge gaps, the SDG16 Data Initiative worked throughout 2022 to assess challenges and opportunities for advancing the 2030 Agenda's goal of peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

The Initiative presents its sixth annual *Global Report*, a resource for governments, UN officials and civil society organizations interested in measuring and making progress on SDG 16 targets. The report identifies positive and negative trends and assesses the likelihood of achieving SDG 16 targets, halfway towards the 2030 deadline. The report includes recommendations for conceptual orientation, monitoring and evaluation, and for strategic agenda-setting in a global context that presents complex challenges for

meeting key targets set for SDG 16 and the overall 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This introduction presents the main findings from each chapter, written by experts from partner organizations within the SDG16 Data Initiative. Chapter 1, by the Transparency, Accountability and Participation Network (TAP Network), highlights the importance of two types of interdependence. Effective data and trend analysis requires careful identification and assessment of the interlinkages between various SDG targets and indicators. High-quality data and trend analysis is critical for identifying interlinkages among various SDGs. Effective sustainable development policymaking, similarly, requires careful identification and assessment of relationships and interlinkages among SDGs in order to create synergies and ensure meaningful implementation.

Chapter 2, by the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) and the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), presents complementary data related to SDG Target 16.10, which calls on states to 'ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements'. The chapter analyses trends related to violence against and harassment of journalists, online gender-based harassment, trends related to freedom of information and constitutional changes related to the right to information. Chapter 3, written by the World Justice Project (WJP), focuses on SDG 16.3, a target aimed at strengthening the rule of law and equal access to justice. The chapter highlights gaps in measurement of access to dispute resolution and discusses unmet justice needs due to increasing delays in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

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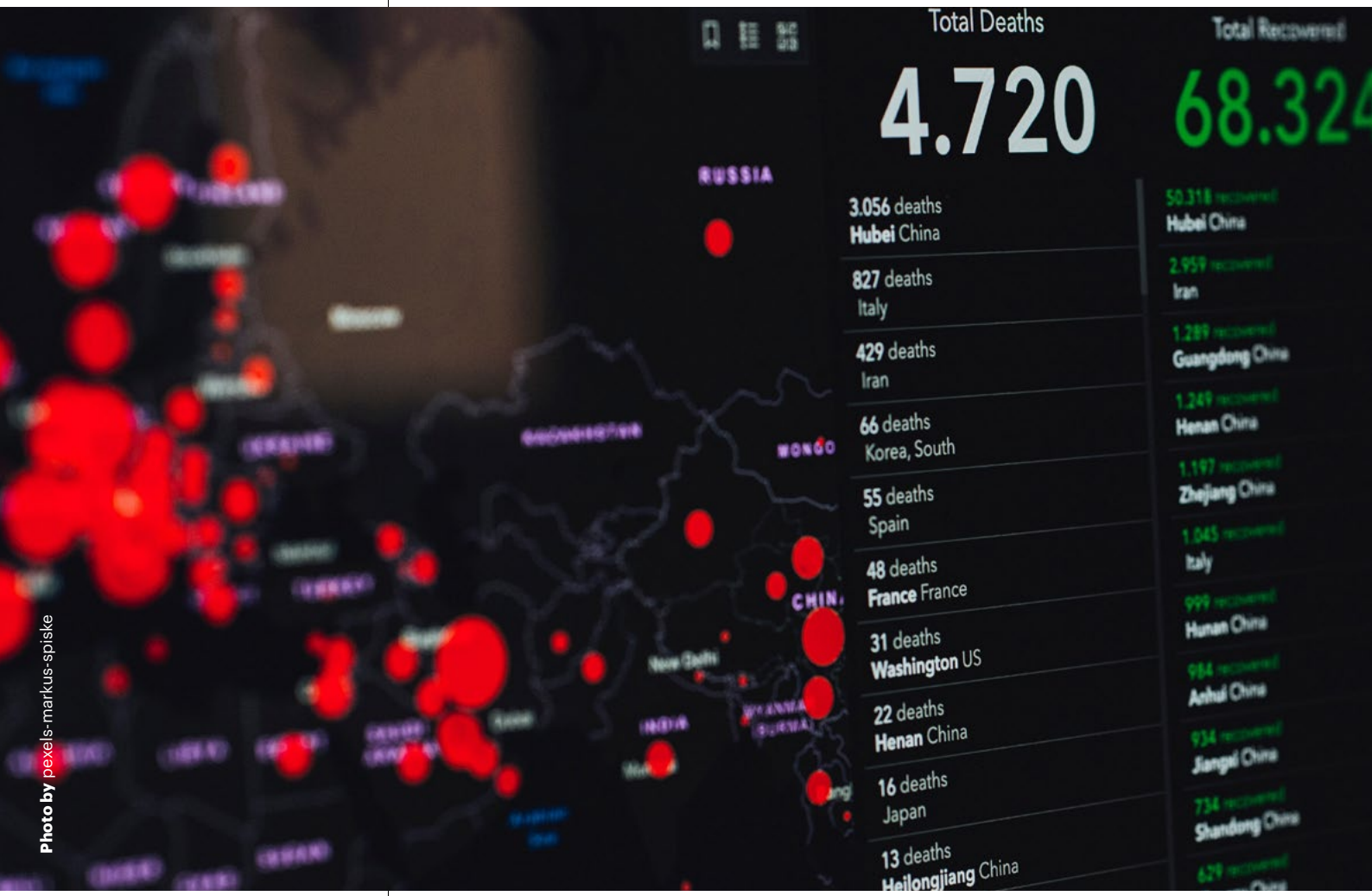

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Chapter 4, by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), presents an overview of indicators from the Global State of Democracy Indices, which help measure SDG Targets 16.3 (rule of law and access to justice), 16.5 (corruption), 16.6 (accountable and transparent institutions) and 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making). International IDEA's analysis identifies multiple flat and negative trends that raise major questions about the feasibility of reaching current SDG 16 targets by 2030. Chapter 5, by the Small Arms Survey (Small Arms Survey), focuses on Target 16.1, the reduction of multiple forms of violence. Drawing upon the Small Arms Survey's Global Violent Deaths (GVD) database, the chapter highlights ongoing challenges facing fragile, conflict-affected countries and societies experiencing high homicide rates, which create barriers to achieving SDG 16.

The SDG16 Data Initiative is grateful to the TAP Network, the Global Forum for Media Development, the Centre for Law and Democracy, the World Justice Project, Namati, International IDEA and the Small Arms Survey for their work on this report. The Initiative would also like to thank International IDEA for its coordination role for the SDG16 Data Initiative in 2022 and its support in developing this report.

Key findings

The timeline for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is at the halfway point. The year 2022 stands out as a key moment for assessment, reflection, and clarification of priorities for all actors involved in this collaborative pursuit. Globally, data collection remains an ongoing challenge for both official and non-official sources. Drawing upon complementary data sets and evidence, the 2022 report provides a snapshot of key indicators at the halfway mark. Overall, the analysis suggests that the international community faces very strong headwinds for meeting many of the 12 targets and 24 indicators that the UN has specified for SDG 16 (UNDP n.d.). Throughout the report, analysts predict that it is very likely that many key indicators for SDG 16 will not be reached by 2030, especially in countries experiencing democratic erosion, protracted conflict and armed violence, and unequal development.

In **Chapter 1** the TAP Network identifies the persistent challenge of 'siloed efforts' for the overall 2030 Agenda. If states, UN agencies or civil society organizations act within silos and fail to identify the deep 'interlinkages' or the 'integrated and indivisible' nature of the 2030 Agenda, this can lead to missed opportunities for collaboration and cooperation, less effective monitoring and evaluation, and less government accountability. Evidence of decreasing investment in and commitment to international institutions involved in global governance corresponds with this concern. With more states becoming more 'inward-looking' rather than 'outward-looking', operating conditions are likely to become increasingly difficult for organizations involved in promoting the SDG agenda.

Siloed efforts also can limit possibilities for raising global awareness of and mobilizing support for sustainable development. To counter this trend, the TAP Network argues that increased collaboration between states and international organizations can be realized with an increased focus on interlinkages across the 2030 Agenda. Focusing on the pursuit of quality education for girls, for example, has the potential to create progress on multiple indicators, including maternal health (Goal 3), poverty eradication (Goal 1), gender equality (Goal 5) and local economic growth (Goal 8).

More broadly, the Interlinkages Working Group of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) has noted that interlinkages across the 2030 Agenda can be identified and examined in multiple ways, including 'across the 3 dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental)' as well as 'across the 5 thematic areas of the 2030 Agenda (peace, planet, people, prosperity and partnerships)' (United Nations Statistical Commission 2019).

In **Chapter 2** the Global Forum for Media Development and the Centre for Law and Democracy's analysis of SDG 16.10 not only identifies critical gaps in the data available to accurately measure global trends related to freedom of speech and information but also draws upon complementary data to identify emerging opportunities and barriers. Goal 16.10 includes two indicators: the first (16.10.1) is focused on the protection of journalists, activists and media professions, and the second (16.10.2) is focused on institutional development, or formal rules that protect citizens' right to information.

The use of data in unpacking these interlinkages in a clear and accessible way is vitally important for several reasons.

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Chapter 2 presents evidence of mixed trends and missing data needed to capture a full picture of adequate protections and freedoms for media professionals. Data on journalist fatalities show that the overall number of fatalities has fallen since 2015; however, there is also evidence of increasing numbers of imprisoned journalists and civil society activists during the same period. This finding suggests that data used to measure 'progress' on Goal 16.10 needs to incorporate a broader scope of the risks media professionals currently face. Data on threats and intimidation, gender-based threats, health risks, regional variation and variation in risks to journalists within different types of conflict settings, including in emerging crises such as the escalation of the interstate war in Ukraine, is necessary for more effective monitoring of Goal 16.10.1.

An assessment of data quality and trends related to 16.10.2 leads to a similar insight: progress has been 'modest', and expanding the scope of assessment is necessary. For example, data focused on measuring the extent to which rules protecting the right to freedom of information align with international standards provide evidence of progress.

In 2015, 107 of the 193 UN member states had formal protections in line with international standards. Today, that number has increased to 133, up 27 per cent. The Centre for Law and Democracy, however, notes the difference between measuring institutional type and institutional quality: institutional change is far less difficult to measure than institutional implementation. Early data focused on measuring the 'quality of laws' paints a very different picture: a dramatic decline in the overall average quality of laws from 2010 to 2015, with 'the 2015–2020 average. . .nowhere near as high even as the average for 2005–2010 or even 2000–2005'. A detailed analysis of progress on 16.10.2 remains difficult due to ongoing methodological differences between various organizational approaches to measurement, including the RTI Evaluation model of the CLD, UNESCO and the Freedom of Information Advocates Network (FOIAnet).

Chapter 3 assesses data and progress related to access to justice, a key component of SDG 16. The findings from this chapter raise major questions about access to data, the quality of data and worrying trends observable within complementary data sets, including the WJP's Rule of Law Index. Conceptually, the WJP argues that an adequate evaluation of global progress on access to justice requires a 'people-centred approach'. This is because surveys consistently indicate that citizens do not always engage formal justice systems to address legal challenges. For example, 'only 17 per cent of respondents in the WJP's global legal needs survey reported taking their problem to an authority or other third party for mediation or adjudication'.

The WJP identifies concerning trends related to SDG 16.3 that should raise major questions for organizations involved in global governance processes related to access to justice. Assessing three official and two unofficial indicators, they note multiple flat and negative trends. For SDG 16.3.1, over the past four years, more countries have experienced erosion in the rule of law than improvement. While official crime rate data collection processes are still under development after seven years, complementary data show worrying trends, such as falling levels of crime reporting across countries as diverse as Chile, Mexico and the United States. Falling crime reporting rates indicate an erosion of trust in formal justice institutions. For SDG 16.3.2, the global trend for unsentenced detainees shows no improvement since 2015 and has in fact remained flat over the past 20 years. The long-running protracted nature of this problem suggests very strong barriers to measurable improvement by 2030.

For SDG 16.3.3, the WJP addresses the major knowledge gap on 'access to dispute resolution', using the WJP Rule of Law Index. Notably, WJP data indicate that 1.4 billion citizens report 'unmet justice needs', and tracking of the timing of legal proceedings over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic indicates very significant backlogs for justice institutions globally. 'Delays in justice' are likely to continue and constrain global progress on SDG 16.3. Overall, the WJP identifies four priorities for policymaking and advocacy necessary to reverse these trends, including increased investment in data reporting capacity for SDG 16.3, an increased focus on 'people-centric' approaches to access to justice and increased investment in local/grassroots service provision. The fourth recommendation intersects with a key finding of Chapter 2—ensuring the protection and security of local justice providers and advocates who are involved in advocacy focused on improving government accountability, especially related to issues of access to local justice.

Chapter 4 uses International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Indices (GSoD Indices) (International IDEA 2022) to assess four dimensions of SDG

The Small Arms Survey measures of Target 16.1.1 indicate that some progress has been made in the reduction of homicide rates. In the SDG era, the overall global homicide rate has fallen from 5.38 to 4.52 per 100.000 population, a reduction of 16 per cent.

16: rule of law and access to justice (16.3), corruption (16.5), accountable and representative institutions (16.6) and inclusive decision-making. Overall, International IDEA presents strong evidence for flat and negative trends, similar to the analyses provided in prior chapters. The chapter boldly argues that there are strong reasons for predicting that SDG 16 targets will not be met by 2030 without major course corrections. The analysts do not find evidence that the Agenda for Sustainable Development has created the intended global wave of policy change, or a 'critical juncture', similar to the Montreal Protocol, where multiple states simultaneously experienced political and institutional change that opened pathways for sustainable development through highly coordinated global policymaking.

International IDEA analysts draw this conclusion from four primary findings using complementary data from the GSoD Indices. First, International IDEA analyses SDG 16.3 using two measures—access to justice and the rule of law ('trends in predictable enforcement'). The first measure indicates that most countries show no significant change since 2015 and no statistically significant evidence of progress overall. On the second measure, a negative trend is visible: 21 countries experienced erosion in effective provision of the rule of law, many of which had previously scored relatively highly. Second, corruption measures in the GSoD Indices initially indicate very little change; however, using a model that accounts for variation in income level (using World Bank data), some positive evidence of progress emerges in the establishment of anti-corruption institutions in 'low-income countries'.

Third, measuring SDG 16.6 (using 'parliamentary effectiveness' as a proxy measure), similar to declines in the rule of law, captures evidence of 'democratic decline'. International IDEA argues that it is highly unlikely that SDG 16.6 will be met by 2030, given the trend of falling parliamentary effectiveness even across formerly high-performing countries. Fourth, International IDEA also finds evidence of a very flat trend in measures of 'civil society participation' and 'representative government', which suggests ongoing challenges and barriers to progress towards the bold goal of ensuring 'responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels' (United Nations n.d.b). International IDEA analysts note that, while the overall agenda clearly articulates bold ideals that are inherently difficult to measure, applying complementary measures from the GSoD Indices should raise major questions about the current state of the overall agenda.

Chapter 5 focuses on the use of complementary data to assess SDG 16.1, the goal of 'significantly [reducing] all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere'. This goal introduces a need for measuring varieties of violence, including patterns of armed violence such as intentional homicide (16.1.1) and patterns of armed conflict (16.1.2). The Small Arms Survey analysts draw upon the GVD database to identify patterns of change and to assess the likelihood of significant progress at the halfway point of the implementation of the SDGs. Overall, the chapter argues that global trend analysis is not as useful as regional and national analysis, considering the very high level of regional variation in patterns of change and in drivers of various forms of social conflict and armed violence.

The Small Arms Survey measures of Target 16.1.1 indicate that some progress has been made in the reduction of homicide rates. In the SDG era, the overall global homicide rate has fallen from 5.38 to 4.52 per 100.000 population, a reduction of 16 per cent. When accounting for gender dimensions, evidence suggests that, overall, men remain at higher risk of intentional, violent

homicide than women and girls, but with a high level of variation across regions (Jamaica, Lesotho, the Central African Republic and Botswana have the highest homicide rates, while Brazil, India, Mexico and the United States have the highest aggregate totals). The Small Arms Survey analysts argue that it remains unclear whether this target will be reached, due to ongoing uncertainty around the threshold for 'significant progress', as well as the ongoing challenge of 'authoritarian solutions', which can backfire, and the difficulty of tailoring national and regional responses that are effective in the short term.

Patterns of conflict-related deaths, used to measure progress towards SDG 16.1.2, are also messy and require a nuanced assessment and response. For example, global numbers of 'battle-related deaths' remained flat from 2004 to 2011 but then rose significantly, peaking in 2016, and have been falling ever since. This is due to reductions in conflict intensity in a few major cases that drove escalation in the 2010s, including in Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen. The Small Arms Survey argues that, at the halfway point, even though there are fewer armed conflicts, the most pressing conflicts not only are increasing in intensity but are also increasing the possibility of spillover effects and broader regional instability. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is especially concerning. This war is creating new challenges for reaching the targets set in SDG 16.1.2. Rising conflict intensity risks increasing the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons (SALW), which can affect forms of 'everyday' violence, which are very difficult to measure, and risks increasing 'transnational conflict spillovers', which increase the possibility of 'development in reverse' even in countries currently on track to meet SDG targets.

Chapter 5 echoes a long-standing finding from the World Bank's *2011 World Development Report*: the previous global development agenda, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), led to significant gains in most countries, except for a particular cluster—'low-income, fragile and conflict-affected' states (World Bank 2011). The World Bank Working Group on Fragility, Conflict and Violence continues to highlight the risk that, by 2030, two thirds of the world's citizens experiencing extreme poverty are most likely to live in fragile, conflict-affected and violent settings (World Bank n.d.).

Overall, our interrogation of both official and non-official data sets in 2022 suggests that there are very strong reasons to predict that the global community is not on track to meet key targets for SDG 16. The findings in this report indicate the need for renewed focus on preventing 'democratic decline' or 'backsliding', protecting civil society organizations and media professionals involved in the increasingly high-risk work of defending media freedom, protecting human rights and providing access to justice. The drivers of the erosion of trust in formal justice institutions also stand out as a particularly important issue area for ongoing research. The findings also indicate a need for concentrated attention on the mitigation and prevention of armed conflict. As was the case with gains lost during the pandemic, the increasing intensity of current armed conflicts has the potential to contribute to the erosion of progress and the unravelling of gains for other SDGs, to increase humanitarian costs and to undermine international cooperation. Overall, we echo Secretary General António Guterres's call for renewed multilateralism in *Our Common Agenda* (United Nations 2021). Rigorous data monitoring and global collaboration remain as essential as ever for accelerating progress towards the achievement of SDG 16.

Data are the driving force behind decision-making, and they offer essential insights into the status and well-being of the global community.

Photo by martin-sanchez

1

John Romano & Alonna Despain, TAP network

SDG interlinkages: using data to explore synergies and advance the 2030 agenda

Data are the driving force behind decision-making, and they offer essential insights into the status and well-being of the global community. In terms of the Sustainable Development Goals, good data[1] can help mitigate significant gaps, move the 2030 Agenda in the right direction and work as the backbone of the idea of leaving no one behind. Vitally, data offer an important opportunity to highlight the interlinkages between the SDGs adequately.

At a base level, an interlinkage is simply a connection between at least two things. In terms of the SDGs, interlinkages are how the 17 goals are connected; in fact, UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1 expressly states that the 'Sustainable Development Goals and targets, including the means of implementation, are universal, indivisible and interlinked' (United Nations General Assembly 2015). The Interlinkages Working Group of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) has noted that interlinkages across the 2030 Agenda can be defined and examined in multiple ways, including 'across the 3 dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental)' as well as across 'the five thematic areas of the 2030 agenda (peace, planet, people, prosperity and partnerships)' (United Nations Statistical Commission 2019).

In other words, the successful implementation of one goal can have an enormous impact on the successful implementation of other goals. Similarly, inaction on one goal can have severe consequences across other goals. Nilsson, Griggs and Visbeck (2016) spoke to this point in their research, noting that 'implicit in the SDG logic is that the goals depend on each other—but no one has specified exactly how'. They point to two examples of these relationships. First, they write that if we pursue the use of fossil fuels to increase energy access (Goal 7), we would simultaneously backtrack on the progress of mitigating climate change (Goal 13), having clean oceans with sustainable ecosystems

(Goal 14), having sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11) and overall health, due to the increased air pollution (Goal 3) (Nilsson, Griggs and Visbeck 2016). Conversely, pursuing quality education for girls (Goal 4), the authors claim, would enhance overall health, including sexual and maternal health (Goal 3), assist in eradicating poverty (Goal 1), improve gender equality (Goal 5) and increase local economic growth (Goal 8) (Nilsson, Griggs and Visbeck 2016). These are only two examples out of an extraordinarily vast number of interactions within the 2030 Agenda, but looking at these specific cases shows how detrimental it is to SDG implementation when states, UN agencies or civil society act within silos. It clearly highlights the damage that can be done when these interlinkages are not considered or identified. However, it also shows the positive, mutually reinforcing actions that can be achieved when we have the tools to help us identify these interlinkages.

In addition to the aforementioned interlinkages, interlinkages can also be found between the SDGs and other international and statistical frameworks (Nilsson, Griggs and Visbeck 2016). One example of this is the international human rights frameworks. The Danish Institute for Human Rights, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has generated a database that identifies and links information and recommendations from the international human rights system and treaty bodies to the 2030 Agenda. This system provides an additional way to monitor SDG implementation by linking the recommendations of human rights treaty bodies, such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), to the achievement of the 169 targets of the SDGs. The platform considered 145,000 recommendations from 67 human rights mechanisms and found that 59 per cent of the recommendations were *directly* linked to a specific SDG target and therefore are highly relevant to states' progress on the SDGs (Danish Institute for Human Rights 2019). Likewise, progress on the SDG targets is directly relevant to the realization of human rights.

The use of data in unpacking these interlinkages in a clear and accessible way is vitally important for several reasons. As was highlighted above, the first is the ability to find and utilize synergies. Utilizing synergies would help global policymakers to create more coherent, multi-stakeholder policies and partnerships, bridging policy fields for more positive implementation of the SDGs. Second, a deeper understanding of these interactions can result in more effective monitoring and evaluation practices. Third, analysing data on the complex relationships between multiple SDGs could help the global community identify the root causes of the problems we are facing rather than just surface-level symptoms, enabling deeper and longer-lasting solutions.

Yet, data are key not only for measuring progress and implementation but also for identifying challenges, gaps and limitations, thus enabling us to better direct our focus and service delivery efforts. Furthermore, the use of SDG data can also be a strong reinforcer of accountability; when data lay out the clear costs of inaction (or ineffective, siloed action), those data become ammunition for actors to hold their governments accountable to the commitments they made on the 2030 Agenda.[2] Finally, data can help change how we see and understand the world, and raise general awareness of the importance of sustainable development. Good visualization and storytelling through data can have an incredible impact because they help individuals care about how the challenges and priorities surrounding the SDGs are linked to their everyday lives. If data concerning the SDGs and their interlinkages are communicated in a way that is clear, easy to understand and easily accessible, then we can enable people 'to discover, understand, and communicate patterns and interrelationships in the wealth

of data and statistics that are now available' (United Nations Statistics Division 2017: 15).

Unpacking the complex multitude of interlinkages across the 2030 Agenda is a critical step towards more meaningful implementation of the goals and targets. However, the first step in ensuring meaningful implementation is to gather good and inclusive data on the SDGs and their interlinkages. Those data must then be used to strengthen communities and meaningfully advance towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. The work currently being done by states to unpack and address the multitude of relationships within and around the 2030 Agenda is inadequate; much more needs to be done. Civil society is clearly committed to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals and is constantly working to generate much-needed data concerning their implementation, including with respect to their interlinkages. As we move into the second half of SDG implementation, it is time for states and other international actors to step up their commitments and their actions on these interlinkages; if they do not, we risk falling even further behind.

The use of data in unpacking these interlinkages in a clear and accessible way is vitally important for several reasons.

Photo by sunguk-kim

Building on the SDG16 Data Initiative's previous global reports, this chapter looks at the various methodologies developed by UNESCO and civil society experts to assess national progress on SDG Indicators 16.10.1 and 16.10.2, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses and showcasing their findings.

Photo by bank-phrom

2

Progress on access to information and respect for fundamental freedoms weak as we approach the SDG halfway point

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Countries
Global

Target

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

Introduction

SDG Target 16.10 calls on states to 'Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements'. As such, it covers both a general human rights notion—protection of fundamental freedoms—and a more specific human right falling within the scope of that notion—ensuring public access to information. There are two indicators under Target 16.10, as follows:

» 16.10.1: 'Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months'; and

» 16.10.2: 'Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information'.

Building on the SDG16 Data Initiative's previous global reports, this chapter looks at the various methodologies developed by UNESCO and civil society experts to assess national progress on SDG Indicators 16.10.1 and 16.10.2, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses and showcasing their findings. However, this chapter also includes an important focus on progress towards achieving Target 16.10 as we approach the halfway point of the time frame set for achieving the SDGs.[3]

SDG 16.10 is a powerful tool for states to monitor progress on a key SDG objective (SDG16 Data Initiative 2021), given the cross-cutting nature of the rights that it refers to. The 2021 global report notes that it is widely recognized that the values covered by Target 16.10—freedoms in general and access to information in particular—are important not only in their own right but also for the sustainable achievement of other human rights, as well as wider development objectives.

The UN General Assembly, for example, emphasized the importance of freedom of information in Resolution 59(I), adopted at its first session, in 1946: 'Freedom of information is a fundamental human right and the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated' (United Nations General Assembly 1946; SDG16 Data Initiative 2021). In practice, however, states are engaging only in limited reporting on Indicators 16.10.1 and 16.10.2, and tend not to include civil society organizations in the monitoring and reporting that they do (UNESCO 2022b).[4]

Measuring progress on Indicator 16.10.1 over the last 7.5 years

Indicator 16.10.1 focuses on various forms of very serious abuse—specifically killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture—perpetrated on certain categories of people—namely media workers, trade unionists and human rights advocates. All of these forms of abuse are crimes, but the idea here is that where they are directed at these categories of people they represent something more, namely an attack on human rights. For example, where these abuses are specifically directed at media workers, the goal is often to stop them from reporting on a matter of public interest, such as corruption or organized crime. As such, they represent an attack on everyone's right to receive information about these public interest issues, which is part of the right to freedom of expression, and, ultimately, an attack on accountability and democracy itself. To this extent, they represent surrogate measurements of respect for human rights.

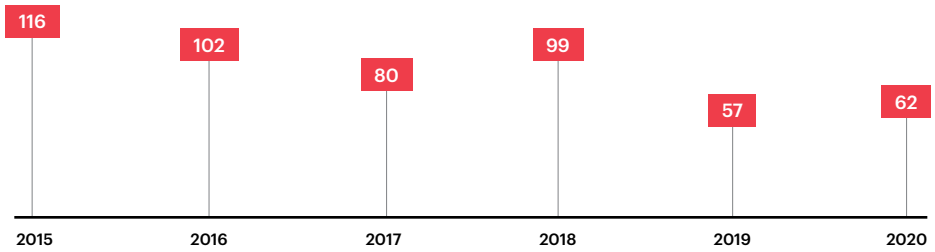
Civil society organizations have noted that states are often identified as perpetrators of threats against journalists and media, especially those with authoritarian governments (Voces del Sur 2020). The findings of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) for the year 2020 indicate that 'Criminal groups were the most frequently suspected killers of journalists in 2020, while politics was the most dangerous beat' (CPJ 2020b), while also noting that a record number of journalists were jailed because of their work in 2020, as governments cracked down on coverage of COVID-19 or attempted to suppress reporting on political unrest (CPJ 2020a).

UNESCO has maintained an Observatory of Killed Journalists since 1993, which now serves as an official source of information on Indicator 16.10.1, while the CPJ, an international human rights NGO based in the United States, has collected non-official data on killed, imprisoned and missing journalists since 1992. According to UNESCO's Observatory of Killed Journalists, 632 journalists have been killed since 2015 (UNESCO n.d.).

According to *Journalism Is a Public Good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development—Global Report 2021/2022 Highlights (UNESCO 2021b)*, the number of journalists killed has been declining since 2015, and this trend is also reflected in the CPJ's data.[5] These trends are reflected in Figures 2.1 and 2.2.

Figure 2.1.

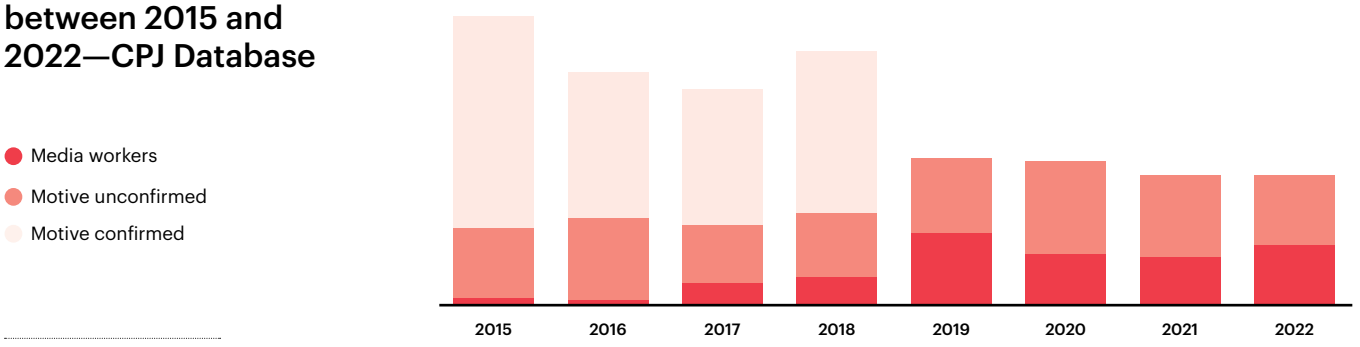
Journalists killed between 2015 and 2020—UNESCO Observatory



Source: UNESCO, *Journalism Is a Public Good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development—Global Report 2021/2022 Highlights* (Paris: UNESCO, 2021).

Figure 2.2.

Journalists and media workers killed between 2015 and 2022—CPJ Database



Source: CPJ, Killed Journalists database, [n.d.].

Additional non-official data

A very different trend is noted when looking at the CPJ data on the number of journalists who were imprisoned over the same period. This number has broadly continued to rise since 1992, including since 2015.

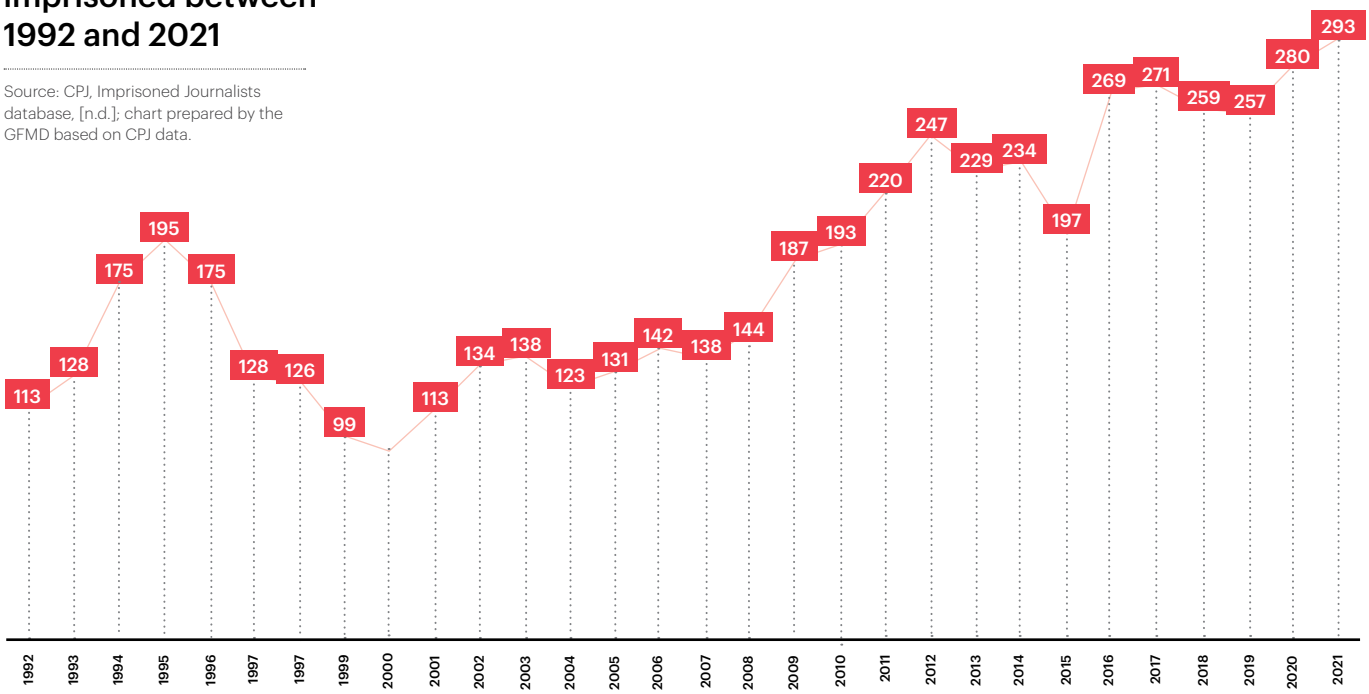
UNESCO's *World Trends* report draws the same conclusion: 'While journalist killings have declined in the past five years, imprisonment has reached a record high' (UNESCO 2021b: 19). The same report also notes that countries with the highest numbers of killings tend to have relatively low rates of imprisonment, while countries with a large number of imprisoned journalists do not register similarly high levels of killings (UNESCO 2021a: 93). It is not clear exactly what conclusion can be drawn from this, but it may suggest that some countries rely on repressive legal frameworks to control speech, while others rely more on attacks.

Media development organizations, including the GFMD member Free Press Unlimited, have called on the UN to incorporate non-official civil society data on the safety of journalists into monitoring mechanisms, arguing that, 'while statistics provided by national governments form the foundation for assessing countries' performance in relation to SDG 16.10.1, data provided by local civil society organisations ("shadow reports") can be complementary to official statistics and serve to highlight discrepancies between datasets' (FPU 2021). A good example of support to help civil society organizations engage in shadow reporting on the safety of journalists is Free Press Unlimited's toolkit for shadow reporting on SDG 16.10, developed with support from UNESCO (FPU n.d.a).

Figure 2.3.

Journalists imprisoned between 1992 and 2021

Source: CPJ, Imprisoned Journalists database, [n.d.]; chart prepared by the GFMD based on CPJ data.



Insights that Indicator 16.10.1 fails to capture

There are many nuances pertaining to the general issue of the safety of journalists that are not captured by looking only at the number of killed journalists. Recent reports, including the UNESCO *World Trends* report, have analysed this data further and found the following:

» Greater attention needs to be given to threats, including various forms of online violence, that affect women and minority journalists.

» The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated health challenges for journalists, including their risk of exposure to the virus while collecting news.

» In some regions—such as the Arab world, Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe—the number of killings halved, while in others—such as the Asia-Pacific region—there was an increase.

» UNESCO's *World Trends* report notes that from 2016 to 2020 the proportion of killings of journalists which occurred outside of countries experiencing conflict increased.

However, the data reflected in this part of this chapter does not extend to 2022 and therefore does not capture recent killings and other attacks on journalists, including those resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Out of 46 journalists killed in 2022 as of mid-August 2022, UNESCO's Observatory reports 10 journalists killed in Ukraine, representing 21 per cent of the total, while the CPJ reports that, out of 45 journalists and media workers killed, 15 (33 per cent) were killed in Ukraine. Free Press Unlimited reports having assisted more than 700 journalists from Ukraine from the beginning of the invasion through to the end of June 2022 through their Reporters Respond programme, which provides support such as emergency assistance, legal support and safety advice to media professionals in distress (FPU n.d.b).

Almost as important as the number of killings is the rate of impunity, and global impunity levels remain very high, with nearly 9 out of 10 (87 per cent) murders of journalists remaining unsolved, often even after many years. Reports also indicate that, at the country level, the rates of killings of journalists and impunity for those killings are typically proportional, with a high number of murders normally being associated with a high prevalence of impunity (UNESCO 2022a).

Intersection of online violence and gender

Since 2015 many organizations and reports (for example, Council of Europe 2022; Posetti et al. 2020) have indicated that gender-based violence and harassment—both online and offline but especially online—is disproportionately used to intimidate and silence female and non-binary journalists. Coordinated disinformation attacks, for example, are overwhelmingly directed at women journalists. From deep fakes to hacked photos to rumours of impropriety, vicious smear campaigns targeting the appearance, character or behaviour of female journalists are particularly common, threatening not only their credibility but also their safety. All too often, online harassment leads to offline violence (ARTICLE 19 2020).

These patterns of abuse have a very direct impact not only on the mental health of their targets but also on the work of female journalists and their presence on social media, thus exerting a chilling effect on freedom of expression. As noted in the global study *Online Violence against Women Journalists*, conducted by the International Center for Journalists and UNESCO in 2020 (Posetti et al. 2020),

these attacks have led to women limiting their participation in public debate and, for those who continue despite the harassment, to self-censorship. Together, these impacts pose a very significant threat to media freedom.

Figure 2.4, which classifies incidents of sexual harassment against journalists and media workers across Europe by type, shows that over 80 per cent of the cases where data on the context of the incident was collected took place online (European Centre for Press and Media Freedom n.d.).

Expanding the scope of violations tracked as part of Indicator 16.10.1

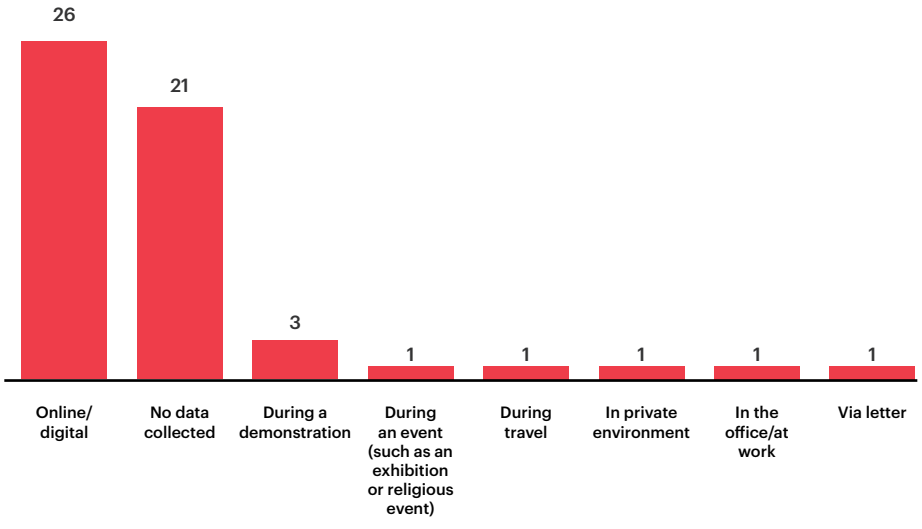
A number of reports and analyses of SDG Target 16.10 and its Indicator 16.10.1 have advocated expanding the scope of violations tracked to include additional types of attacks, such as physical assaults, threats and intimidation, harassment, exile and various forms of digital attack (FPU 2020: 5).

For example, the civil society organization Voces del Sur prepared a report calling for the refinement of the methodological approach to Indicator 16.10.1 and for the inclusion of a wider scope of violations—including through the addition of a general 'other harmful acts' category—to account for all the ways in which freedom of expression, press freedom, access to information and the safety and security of journalists are restricted. Some of the issues they recommend covering include attacks, stigmatizing discourse, criminal and civil legal processes and Internet restrictions (Voces del Sur 2021: 16).

Many civil society organizations track various forms of violations against journalists, including online violations, which can help meet the data challenge associated with expanding Indicator 16.10.1.[6]

Figure 2.4.

Predominance of sexual harassment incidents in the digital context reported in Europe from 2015 to 2022



European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, Mapping Media Freedom, Filtered by Type of Incident "Sexual Harassment", [n.d.], <https://www.mapmf.org/explorer?f.type_of_incident=Sexual+harassment>, accessed August 2022.

Photo by mikhail-pavstyuk

Overview of Indicator 16.10.2

The second indicator under Target 16.10 is far more directly linked to the delivery of the target since it measures two key phenomena, namely the adoption and the implementation of legal guarantees for access to information—increasingly referred to globally as the right to information (RTI) in recognition of its status as a human right—which directly respond to the reference to ensuring 'public access to information' in the main target. It may be noted that Target 16.10 refers to achieving this objective 'in accordance with national legislation and international agreements', the latter of which sets clear standards for how to assess progress, especially given how well developed international standards are in this area.[7]

However, the presence of relatively clear standards does not mean that assessing progress on RTI is simple. While it is relatively easy to track the adoption of legal guarantees for this right, assessing the degree to which these guarantees conform to the standards of international law is far more complex. And assessing how well states are doing in terms of implementing those guarantees is even more complex, requiring an on-the-ground assessment of a multifaceted institutional, bureaucratic and social phenomenon.

Progress towards the achievement of SDG Indicator 16.10.2 can only be described as modest—unless one sets the overall goals very low. While the world is on track to reduce the number of countries which lack RTI laws by 50 per cent between 2015 and 2030, we rather far behind if the level of ambition was increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent.

Analysis of progress in terms of adopting RTI guarantees

Focusing first on the adoption of RTI guarantees, the CLD, in collaboration with Access Info Europe, launched the RTI Rating in 2011,[8] which is now globally recognized as the leading methodology for assessing not only whether or not a country has a developed framework for guaranteeing RTI but also the strength of that framework. The RTI Rating uses 61 different indicators grouped into seven main categories to assess whether the legal framework reflects international standards governing RTI, covering a very wide range of issues focusing on questions such as how broad the scope of coverage of the law is, how user-friendly the procedures for making and responding to requests are, how narrowly and carefully drafted the exceptions to the right of access are, where effective independent appeals are available to those whose requests for information are denied, and whether there are effective systems for promoting the right.

As we approach the halfway point of the SDG process, it is worth considering the number of states which have adopted what might be termed 'developed legal frameworks for RTI', meaning legal rules which, whatever form they take—such as a constitutional guarantee, primary legislation, a decree or something else (referred to below as 'laws')—at the very minimum establish a functioning system for making and responding to requests for information. As of September 2015, when the SDGs were formally adopted by the UN and the 15-year time frame for moving forward to achieve them began, 107 of the 193 UN member states had such laws in place, leaving 96 more to do so. As of today, 26 more have adopted RTI laws, or 27 per cent of the 96 outliers in 2015.

This is undoubtedly a very welcome development, but the question still arises as to whether or not this should be deemed a success, an issue about which the SDGs provide very little guidance.

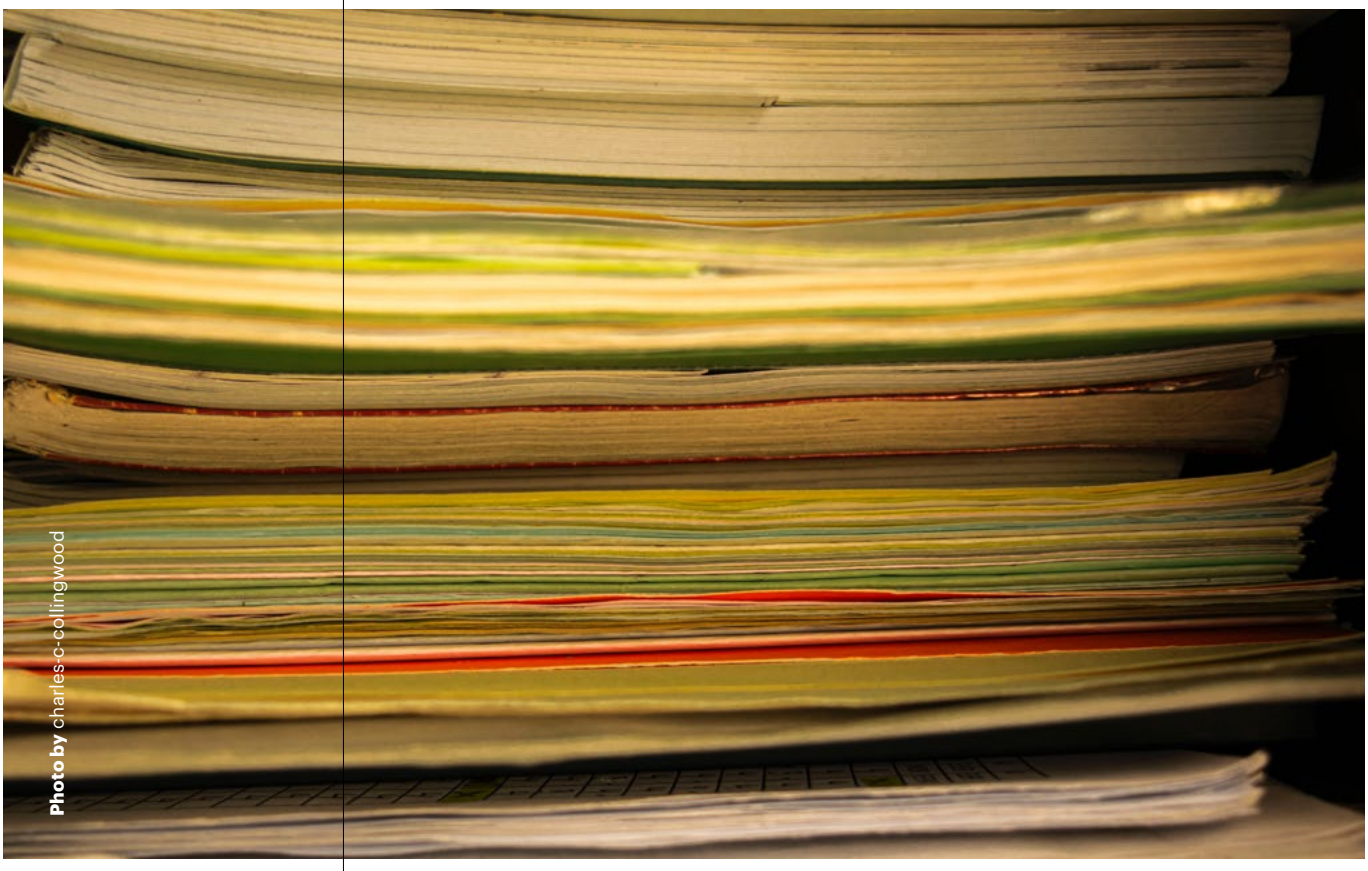


Photo by charles-c-collingwood

If the goal is to reduce the number of countries which lack RTI laws by 50 per cent between 2015 and 2030, the 27 per cent achieved so far means that we are fully on track, being more than halfway there by the midway point. However, given that adopting an RTI law is only the very first step towards actually delivering this right, and that it is a rather simple step at that, setting our sights at only a 50 per cent reduction seems excessively modest. If we adjust the goal to a 75 per cent reduction, we would need another 46 laws to be adopted in the second half of the SDG implementation period, or almost twice as many as we managed in the first half. From that point of view, the achievement over the first half is rather modest.

At least as interesting is an assessment of how strong the laws passed during this period were. As Figure 2.5 shows, the strength of laws consistently increased between 1990 and 2010, as measured by the average score of RTI laws adopted over five-year ranges. That changed dramatically between 2010 and 2015, even though a healthy number of laws, 23, were adopted during that period,[9] with the average dropping back to about the 2000 level. The good news is that there was a slight rebound between 2015 and 2020, albeit working from the very low 2010–2015 average so that the 2005 or 2010 average has still not been achieved. So far, the strength of laws adopted since 2020 has been weak, albeit with just five laws adopted, a small sample size.

Implementation of RTI guarantees

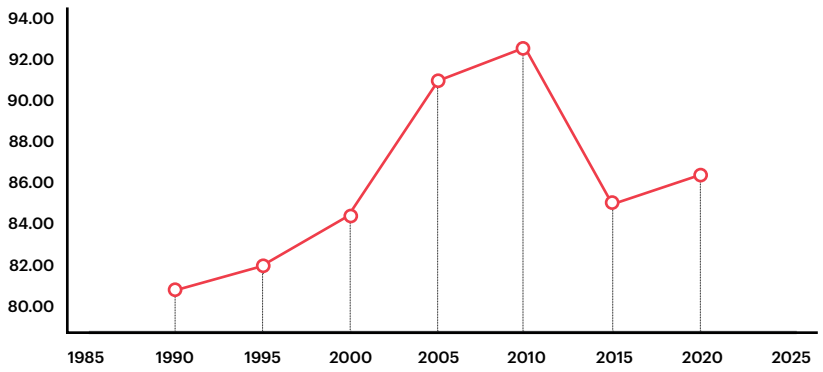
Turning now to the issue of progress on implementation of RTI laws, it is much harder to generate comparative data. The RTI Evaluation (CLD n.d.a), which is an in-depth assessment methodology developed by the CLD, does not allocate an exact score to countries, given the difficulty in conducting assessments which are strictly comparable. Instead, it allocates a rough green–yellow–red grade. In addition, only a few of these more comprehensive assessments have been completed so far.

UNESCO has a mixed self-assessment methodology which is completed by states; the assessment, which generates scores, garnered 102 responses in 2021. However, there are a number of reasons why it is hard to use these data to log comparative progress on implementation. First, only four of the nine points awarded relate to implementation issues (UNESCO 2021c). Second, the methodology changed considerably in each of 2021, 2020 and 2019, the first year it was applied. Comparative data are thus available only from 2021, with the 2022 results not yet having been published. Third, the fact that the data are self-generated and not independently verified by UNESCO seems to have created some skews in the data results. For example, fully 34 of the 102 respondents, or exactly one third, earned scores of at least eight out of nine points, or 89 per cent, which does not seem realistic. On the other hand, seven countries earned a score of zero, including two which have RTI laws, which is impossible given the way scores are allocated.[10]

A third methodology for assessing implementation was developed by the Freedom of Information Advocates Network (FOIAnet n.d.), the main global network bringing together RTI advocacy organizations and individuals focusing on this right. FOIAnet developed a test methodology in 2017, which a number of its members applied, and the methodology was then revised in 2018.[11] As such, comparisons can be made between country performance since 2018, and a number of FOIAnet members and other civil society organizations have been applying the FOIAnet methodology, some on a regular basis. However, so far there is still no central depositary for these assessments.

Figure 2.5.

Average strength of RTI laws by five-year ranges



Source: Access Info Europe and Centre for Law and Democracy, Global Right to Information Rating Map, [n.d.], <https://www.rti-rating.org>.

Beyond more statistical assessments, however, there is a lot of anecdotal evidence about implementation challenges—both currently and in the past. A dramatic example of this, albeit dating from before the advent of the SDGs, was the so-called six-question campaign, which involved putting six fairly simple requests for budget information to relevant authorities in 80 different countries both with and without RTI laws. Only 26 per cent of the responses to the 480 requests resulted in the provision of all the information requested, and 38 per cent of all requests were met with no answer at all, or mute refusals, even after three tries (Access Info Europe, CLD and International Budget Partnership 2011).

Conclusion on SDG Indicator 16.10.2

Progress towards the achievement of SDG Indicator 16.10.2 can only be described as modest—unless one sets the overall goals very low. While the world is on track to reduce the number of countries which lack RTI laws by 50 per cent between 2015 and 2030, we are rather far behind if the level of ambition is increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent. The evidence shows that the average quality of laws adopted between 2015 and 2020 improved compared with those adopted between 2010 and 2015, but the earlier period witnessed a dramatic decline in the average quality of laws over the previous five-year period (i.e. 2010–2015), and the 2015–2020 average is nowhere near as high as the average for 2005–2010 or even 2000–2005. It is thus clear that more needs to be done in terms of adopting and improving the strength of RTI laws.

On the implementation side, more still needs to be done to generate reliable, longitudinally comparative data. Globally comparative methodologies for producing such data started to be developed only after the SDGs were adopted, and most have been evolving since then. The scale of application of some of these methodologies needs to be increased, while not all of them provide for a strict comparative assessment (albeit that is not a criticism). Anecdotal evidence, especially from civil society organizations, while formally less scientific than hard data, still provides an important indication of where states are trending in terms of implementation. In this area, unfortunately, the evidence is very largely negative, suggesting that important challenges still remain for the positive implementation of RTI laws.

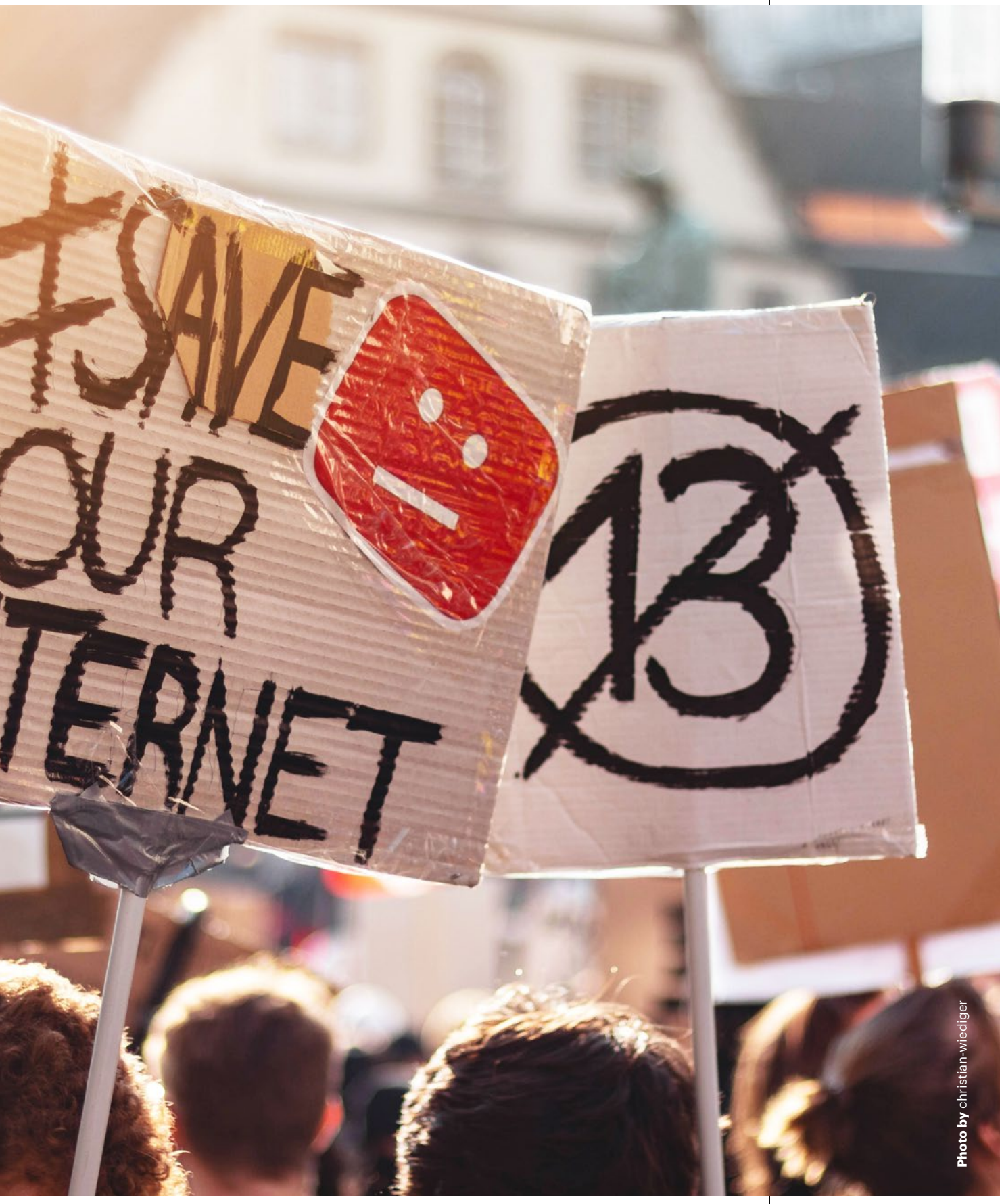


Photo by christian-wiediger

Traditionally, discussions of justice and the rule of law have centred on formal institutions and actors, such as judges, courts and laws. A people-centred approach pushes back against this and instead centres on the lived experiences of those whom justice institutions are meant to serve—individuals and their communities.

Photo by gayatri-malhotra

3

Access to justice and the rule of law: assessing progress on SDG 16.3

Kathryn Grace Hulseman,
World Justice Project

The World Justice Project is grateful to Namati for their support and data for this chapter.

Countries
Global

Target

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

What is SDG 16.3 and why does it matter?

Peace, justice and inclusion are critical components of the global development agenda. The 2030 Agenda, established by the United Nations in 2015, seeks to 'strengthen universal peace in larger freedom' by advancing progress in terms of economic, social and environmental development (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2015). The 2030 Agenda consists of 17 unique but interconnected Sustainable Development Goals. The rule of law and access to justice are central not only to the advancement of SDG 16—which calls on countries to 'promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2015)—but to the entire 2030 Agenda overall.

The SDGs were adopted in 2015 with the intention of achieving them by 2030. The halfway point of the 2030 Agenda is rapidly approaching, and as the global community looks ahead to this, it is important to take stock of the progress made over the past seven years and strategize for further advancement in the next seven years.

This chapter will explore the relevance of SDG 16.3 to global development and take stock of the progress made since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. First, it will discuss the importance of Goal 16.3 and the necessity of a people-centred, data-driven approach. Second, the Goal 16.3 indicators will be reviewed. Available data will be utilized to take stock of progress since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Third, there will be consideration of the sustained impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to justice. Then, the issue of data coverage will be considered. Lastly, some key recommendations will be offered.

Fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda requires advancement of Goal 16, particularly SDG 16.3. Goal 16 consists of 12 components. The focus of this chapter is SDG 16.3, which articulates the need to 'promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all' (United Nations

Crime reporting rates offer important insights into both the rule of law and trust in justice institutions.

Photo by jurisdiction

Statistics Division n.d.c). It is important to recognize that SDG 16.3 does not exist in a bubble; rather, advancing progress on SDG 16.3 and Goal 16 more broadly is intrinsically tied to the achievement of other SDGs. Research from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) notes that 'access to justice is a core state function. . .associated with peace-building and state-building, economic growth and investment, as well as equity and social justice' (Manuel and Manuel 2021: 10). For example, SDG 10 seeks to reduce inequalities through sustained growth in income, equal opportunities for all and improved regulation, among other sub-goals (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2015). These aspirations are closely linked to improvements in the rule of law and access to justice: as the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor notes, 'even the best laws are mere paper tigers if poor people cannot use the justice system to give them teeth' (Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor and UNDP 2008: 31). The inability to obtain access to justice reinforces poverty and exclusion via various mechanisms, including risks to personal safety, property and land (Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor and UNDP 2008: 33). Similarly, strengthening the rule of law is critical for advancing environmental justice and achieving SDGs 13, 14 and 15, which focus on environmental preservation and climate action. Research from the World Justice Project and the Inter-American Development Bank found that the environmental rule of law in Latin America and the Caribbean is hampered by enforcement challenges, coordination struggles, limited accessibility to dispute resolution mechanisms and barriers to public participation (Pinheiro et al. 2020: 8). Furthermore, the report found that 'countries' broader governance context impacts their environmental governance' (Pinheiro et al. 2020: 8), underscoring the interconnectivity of the rule of law and access to justice with the environmental justice components of the 2030 Agenda.

A people-centred approach is necessary for advancing effective progress on SDG 16.3. Traditionally, discussions of justice and the rule of law have centred on formal institutions and actors, such as judges, courts and laws. A people-centred approach pushes back against this and instead centres on the lived experiences of those whom justice institutions are meant to serve—individuals and their communities. The WJP takes a people-centred approach to understanding the

rule of law and access to justice through research and data collection that is rooted in understanding how people experience these issues in their daily lives. The WJP's prior research has found that most people who experience a legal problem do not seek advice or support from formal institutions and actors: only 17 per cent of respondents in the WJP's global legal needs survey reported taking their problem to an authority or other third party for mediation or adjudication (WJP 2019a: 7). Findings from a recent study done by the Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiiL) and the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System (IAALS) in the United States reinforces this: only 14 per cent of Americans reported seeking help for their legal problems through the court system (HiiL and IAALS 2021: 105).

Fulfilling the global commitment to SDG 16.3 demands concrete, measurable progress. SDG 16.3 operationalizes the goals of advancing the rule of law and access to justice through three official indicators that measure crime reporting, unsentenced detainees and access to dispute resolution (Table 3.1). Additionally, the SDG16 Data Initiative leverages data from the *World Justice Project Rule of Law Index*® to provide complementary indicators on civil and criminal justice. While SDG Indicator 16.3.3 has formalized the measurement of access to justice, the complementary indicators on civil and criminal justice remain relevant, as they offer additional information on access to justice, particularly in the interim until countries begin reporting official data on Indicator 16.3.3.

'Putting people at the center of justice is key to reviving the bonds that hold our societies together and re-establishing trust between people, communities, and governments' (WJP 2022).

Table 3.1.

The SDG 16.3 indicators

There are three official indicators accepted by the United Nations for measuring SDG 16.3. For further information on the official indicators, visit the UN Statistics website: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/?Text=&Goal=16&Target=16.3>. In addition to the official indicators, the SDG16 Data Initiative utilizes data from the WJP Rule of Law Index for two complementary indicators. While these indicators are not recognized by the UN, they provide additional, relevant information on Goal 16.3.

Indicator	Definition	Custodian
16.3.1	Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to the competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms.	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
16.3.2	Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of the overall population.	UNODC
16.3.3	Proportion of the population who have experienced a dispute in the previous two years and who accessed a formal or informal dispute resolution mechanism, by type of mechanism.	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNODC and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
Unofficial Indicator—Civil Justice	People's ability to effectively and peacefully resolve their grievances through accessible formal and informal dispute resolution mechanisms (WJP 2021a: 24).	N/A: these data are collected and produced by the World Justice Project, but as it is an unofficial indicator it does not have a designated custodian.
Unofficial Indicator—Criminal Justice	The effectiveness of a country's criminal justice system, assessed by its ability to address grievances and hold people accountable for offences (WJP 2021a: 25).	N/A: these data are collected and produced by the World Justice Project, but as it is an unofficial indicator it does not have a designated custodian.

The global community is falling short of the goals articulated in SDG 16.3

Crime reporting rates offer important insights into both the rule of law and trust in justice institutions.

The global community has experienced an erosion of the rule of law in recent years, and this is reflected in the shortcomings on Goal 16.3. The *WJP Rule of Law Index 2021* found that the rule of law continues to struggle globally, as a greater number of countries declined in the rule of law than improved, marking the fourth consecutive year of negative progress (WJP 2021a: 2). Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, there has been a lack of sustained improvement on SDG 16.3.

Violent crime reporting rates generally remain low, and few countries recorded improvements between 2015 and 2020.

Crime reporting rates offer important insights into both the rule of law and trust in justice institutions. Indicator 16.3.1 measures the proportion of victims of violence who reported the crime committed against them to the police. Crime reporting rates offer two key insights into the rule of law and justice: they provide information about confidence in the police and the proportion of crimes that go unreported—the 'dark figure' of crime (United Nations Statistics Division 2019). The SDG Indicator Database collects crime reporting rates for three types of violent crime—physical assault, sexual assault and robbery.[12] Data availability varies among the three types of crime, and few countries overall have data available in the Database. To assess progress on SDG 16.3 since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, this chapter considers trends from countries that reported data in both 2015 and 2020, the most recent year available. Due to limited data availability, it is important to note that this analysis is inherently limited.

Crime reporting rates for robberies suggest a lack of progress towards indicator 16.3.1. Only six countries—Australia, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and the United States—have data on robbery reporting rates available for both 2015 and 2020. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, three of the six countries—Australia, Colombia and Peru—have demonstrated improvements. Despite the improvements, robbery reporting rates for Colombia and Peru remain well below 50 per cent, indicating a need for improvement. Of the eight countries that reported data in 2020, the highest reporting rate was in Australia, where approximately 64 per cent of robberies were reported to the police. This is in stark contrast to Mexico, where less than 11 per cent of robberies were reported in the same year, and Antigua and Barbuda, with a reporting rate of 3 per cent.

Crime reporting rates for physical assault were more likely to decline than improve. Data on physical assault reporting rates are available in both 2015 and 2020 for seven countries. Of those seven, only two—Colombia and Mexico—saw an increase in crime reporting rates. Five countries saw worsening reporting rates across that same period, with the most marked decline observed in Peru. From 2015 to 2020 the Peruvian crime reporting rate dropped eight percentage points to 40.7 per cent, indicating that more than half of physical assaults in the country go unreported. Twelve countries have 2020 physical assault reporting rates available. Of those countries, Antigua and Barbuda had the lowest reporting rate—0 per cent—followed closely by Myanmar, at 0.06 per cent. Australia recorded the highest rate of physical assaults reported to the police in 2020—51.7 per cent (United Nations Statistics Division n.d.b: Data Series 16.3.1). This indicates that, even in the best-case scenario, one in two physical assaults does not get reported to the police.

Figure 3.1.

Countries where the police reporting rate for robbery improved from 2015 to 2020

Of the 14 countries that reported data in 2015, only 6—Australia, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and the United States—have data on physical assault reporting rates available for 2020. Three of those countries—Australia, Colombia and Peru—saw improvements in their crime reporting rates from 2015 to 2020.

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database, [n.d.], <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>, data downloaded on 19 July 2022.

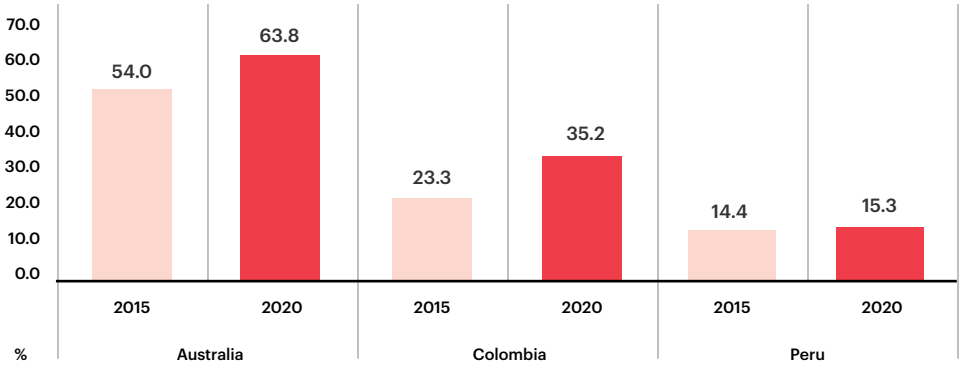
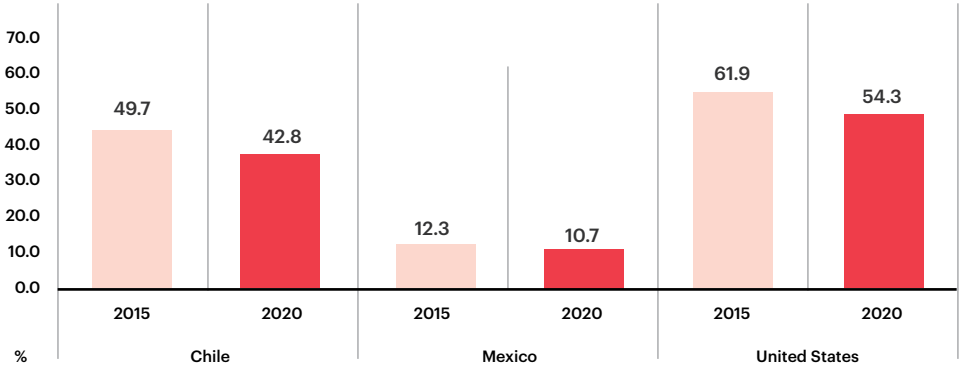


Figure 3.2

Countries where the police reporting rate for robbery worsened from 2015 to 2020

Chile, Mexico and the United States saw their police reporting rates for robbery worsen from 2015 to 2020, highlighting a lack of progress despite the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database, [n.d.], <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>, data downloaded on 19 July 2022.



Available data indicate that reporting rates for sexual assault tend to be among the lowest of those for violent crime overall, although particularly low data coverage limits understanding of this issue. Since 2004, 26 countries have reported data on sexual assault reporting rates at least once, compared with 37 countries reporting on physical assault reporting rates, and 49 countries reporting on robbery reporting rates. Only two countries—Iceland and Mexico—reported data in both 2015 and 2020, making it extremely difficult to assess the global impact of the 2030 Agenda on this indicator. Iceland's sexual assault reporting rate more than doubled from 2015 to 2020, increasing from 3.3 per cent to 7 per cent. In Mexico, however, the reporting rate declined slightly.

In 2020 only three countries reported data. The highest reporting rate was recorded in Iceland, where 7 per cent of sexual assaults are reported to the police. Mexico follows with a reporting rate of 6.64 per cent, while Antigua and Barbuda has a sexual assault reporting rate of only 1 per cent (United Nations Statistics Division n.d.b: Data Series 16.3.1). The available data indicate that the highest recorded rates of sexual assaults reported to the police are in the United States, where the most recent data available indicate that 33.9 per cent of sexual assaults are reported to the police (2019), and Paraguay, where the reporting rate is 31.2 per cent (2018).

Globally, there has not been any notable progress on Indicator 16.3.2.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the global proportion of unsentenced detainees has remained virtually unchanged. Pretrial detention is a multifaceted issue with negative consequences for both human rights and development (United Nations Statistics Division 2019: 3). Data reported in the SDG Indicators Database point to an overall stagnant trend in pretrial detention. While there was a slight decline in the overall proportion of unsentenced detainees in the first decade of the 21st century, any improvements have since been erased. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, the proportion of unsentenced detainees globally has increased slightly, by 0.9 percentage points. This lack of progress is deeply troubling, as nearly one in three individuals who are held in detention have not been able to exercise their rights. Furthermore, the lack of progress over the past two decades presents a challenging reality—that SDG 16.3 (i.e. the goal) that may not be achieved by 2030.

In 2020 there was notable global variance in the rates of pretrial detention. The highest rates of pretrial detention were observed in Central and Southern Asia, where regionally more than one in two people detained have yet to be tried (57.2 per cent). On the other end of the spectrum is Europe and Northern America, where the proportion of unsentenced detainees is approximately one in five (21.6 per cent).

Figure 3.3

Countries where the police reporting rate for physical assault improved from 2015 to 2020

Of the 14 countries that reported data in 2015, only 7—Australia, Chile, Colombia, Iceland, Mexico, Peru and the United States—have data on physical assault reporting rates available for 2020. Two countries saw improvements in their crime reporting rates from 2015 to 2020: Colombia and Mexico.

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database, [n.d.], <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>, data downloaded on 19 July 2022.

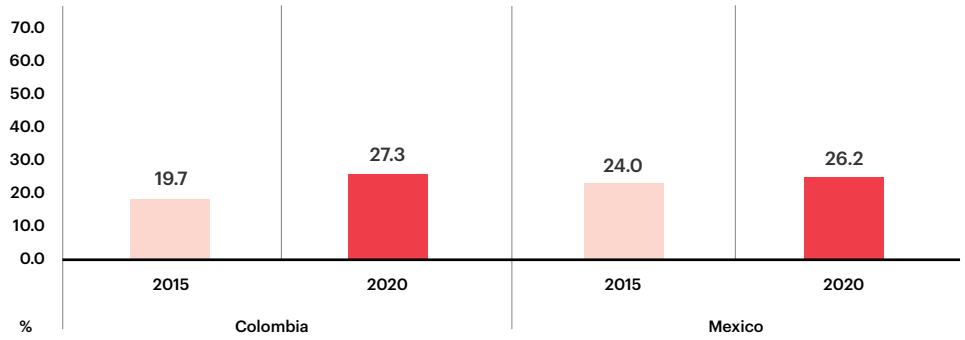
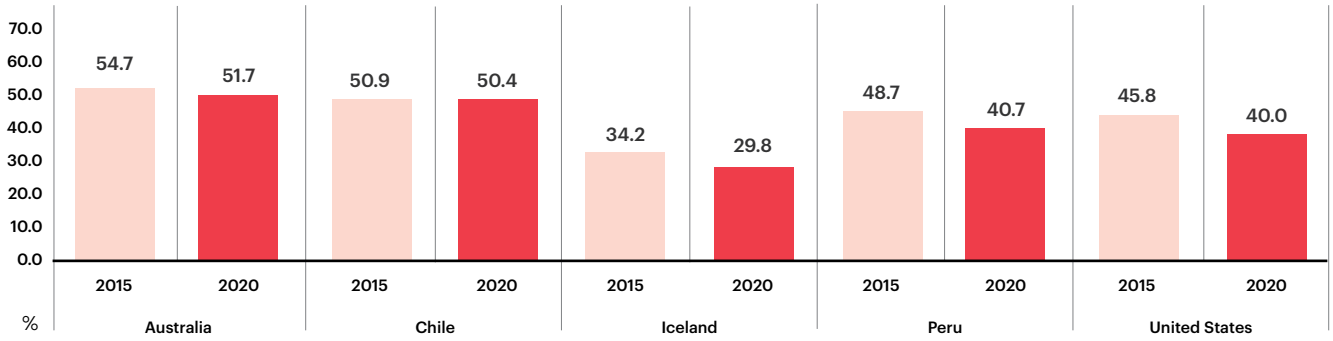


Figure 3.4

Countries where the police reporting rate for physical assault worsened from 2015 to 2020



While Mexico's and Columbia's reporting rates for physical assault improved from 2015 to 2020, the other five countries for which data are available reported declines. Australia, Chile, Iceland, Peru and the United States all reported police reporting rates for physical assault that were lower in 2020 than they were in 2015.

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database, [n.d.], <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>, data downloaded on 19 July 2022.

Figure 3.5

Unsentenced detainees as a percentage of overall prison population, global, 2000–2020

Globally, the proportion of unsentenced detainees relative to the overall prison population declined in the first decade of the 21st century but has since increased. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the proportion of unsentenced detainees has increased by 1 percentage point.

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database, [n.d.], <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>, data downloaded on 19 July 2022.

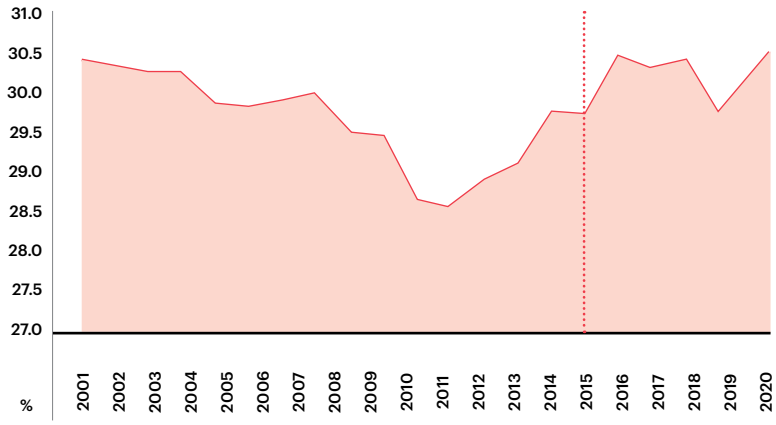
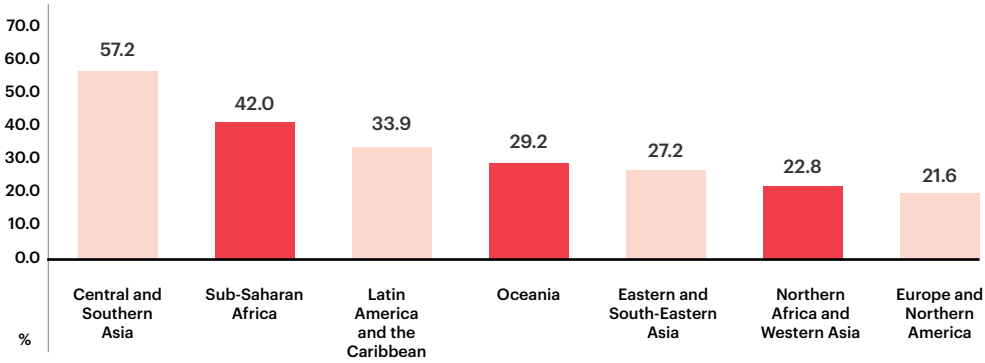


Figure 3.6

Unsentenced detainees as a percentage of overall prison population, by region, 2020

Regional variance in pretrial detention is notable, with the rate of pretrial detention in Central and Southern Asia being more than twice as high as in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Europe and Northern America.

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database, [n.d.], <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>, data downloaded on 19 July 2022.



Indicator 16.3.3 lacks official data, but complementary data sources indicate that some regions have seen improvements while others have experienced declines.

No official data exist yet for Indicator 16.3.3, but research suggests that there are serious challenges pertaining to access to justice. Indicator 16.3.3 is the newest of the SDG 16.3 indicators, having been officially adopted by the UN in spring 2020 (SDG Knowledge Hub 2020). As of August 2022 the SDG Indicators Database did not include any official data for this indicator, and it is unclear if countries have reported official data as of yet. While a lack of official data makes it challenging to assess the current state of Indicator 16.3.3 globally, unofficial data point to serious challenges. In 2019 the WJP's 'Global Insights on Access to Justice' found that justice problems were ubiquitous, had a negative impact and frequently went unmet (WJP 2019a: 6–7). Globally, an estimated 1.4 billion people have unmet civil and administrative justice needs (WJP 2019b: 13). National-level research from other organizations underscores these findings. The Legal Services Corporation found that in the United States the justice gap is particularly deep for low-income individuals, with low-income Americans not receiving enough to resolve 92 per cent of their civil justice problems (Legal Services Corporation 2022).

Regional trends in the WJP's complementary indicators on civil and criminal justice have been uneven since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, with some regions displaying stronger progress, while others have declined. The SDG16 Data Initiative leverages data from the *WJP Rule of Law Index*—specifically Factor 7 (civil justice) and Factor 8 (criminal justice)—to provide additional insights into SDG 16.3. While these unofficial data are not a substitute for the official SDG 16.3 indicators, they complement the above data to provide further insights into access to justice and the rule of law. The *WJP Rule of Law Index 2021* includes 139 countries, 102 of which were also included in the 2015 iteration of the *WJP Rule of Law Index*. Looking at the average regional factor scores of the countries for which both 2015 and 2021 data are available, some regions have seen better progress than others. On Factor 7 (civil justice), there has been limited progress since 2015. Three of the six regions—Eastern Europe and Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and the EU, EFTA and North America—have not seen any change in their average score from 2015 to 2021. Sub-Saharan Africa reported a small improvement of one percentage point, while the Latin America and Caribbean regional average declined by two percentage points. With regard to Factor 8 (criminal justice), more regions saw declines in their average scores than improvements.

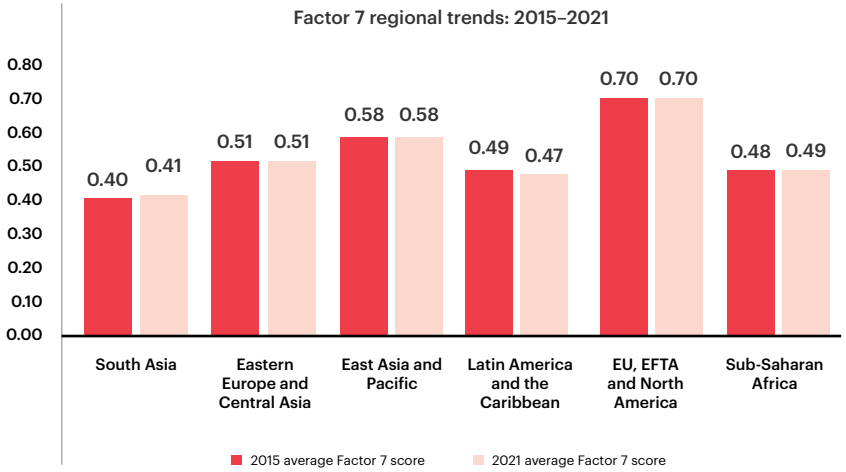
No official data exist yet for Indicator 16.3.3, but research suggests that there are serious challenges pertaining to access to justice.

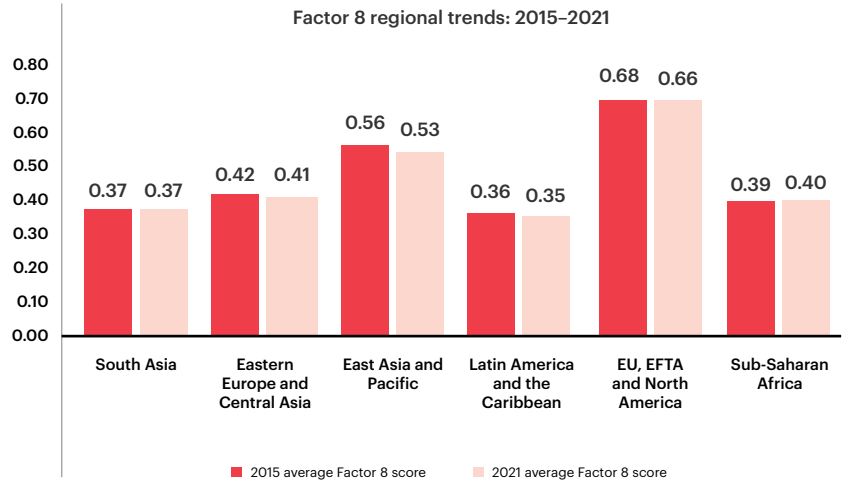
Figure 3.7

Regional averages in Factor 7 (civil justice) and Factor 8 (criminal justice) of the WJP Rule of Law Index, 2015 vs 2021

Some 102 countries are covered in both the 2015 and 2021 iterations of the WJP Rule of Law Index and are used to calculate the regional averages above. Countries added to the Index after 2015 are excluded from the regional averages in order to ensure consistency. Factor 7 (civil justice) improved in four regions from 2015 to 2021 (South Asia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Sub-Saharan Africa), while East Asia and the Pacific and the EU, EFTA and North America regions saw declines. The same two regions—the EU, EFTA and North America region and East Asia and the Pacific—also declined in Factor 8 (criminal justice). The other four regions saw improvements over the six-year period.

Source: World Justice Project, *World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2021* (Washington, DC: WJP, 2021), <https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/WJP-INDEX-21.pdf>.





The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new challenges for access to justice.

Data from the *WJP Rule of Law Index 2021* indicate that delays in civil justice, administrative proceedings and criminal adjudication are widespread. The analysis provided in the *WJP Rule of Law Index 2021* found that '94% of countries in the Index experienced increased delays in administrative, civil, or criminal proceedings' (WJP 2021b: 3).

Research from the Legal Empowerment Network reinforced these findings and highlighted the disproportionate impacts the COVID-19 crisis has had on uniquely vulnerable groups. It found, for example, that institutional responses to the COVID-19 pandemic 'impaired the ability of women and girls to seek recourse when subjected to violence', due to closures of courts and shelters and the enforcement of curfews, quarantines and confinement measures (Legal Empowerment Network 2021: 23–24).

No official data exist yet for Indicator 16.3.3, but research suggests that there are serious challenges pertaining to access to justice

Poor data coverage is a key issue in understanding SDG 16.3

A key challenge in understanding progress on Goal 16.3 is inconsistent—or outright lacking—data coverage. The SDG Indicators Database is a crucial repository of information that can be used to track progress on the 2030 Agenda. As illustrated in this chapter, however, the number of countries reporting data varies significantly. Indicator 16.3.1 includes data on crime reporting rates for sexual violence, robbery and physical assault. While 49 countries have data available on robbery reporting rates (for at least one year from 2000 to 2020), only 37 countries have data available on physical assault reporting rates, and 26 countries have data on sexual violence reporting. Furthermore, only a handful of countries reported data in 2020. The relative lack of data coverage makes it very challenging to grasp the full status of crime reporting rates and track progress on this indicator.

Data coverage on Indicator 16.3.2 is much better than on 16.3.1, with 195 countries reporting data for at least one year in the SDG Indicators Database. However, fewer than half of countries (88) reported data for 2020. Some countries have only reported data for a few years. This inconsistency in data coverage and reporting makes it more challenging to identify trends, progress and change.[13]

Official data on Indicator 16.3.3 are not yet included in the SDG Indicators Database, highlighting a key area for growth.

As Indicator 16.3.3 was adopted relatively recently, it is not yet apparent how many countries are reporting official data. The complementary indicators utilized by the SDG16 Data Initiative from the *World Justice Project Rule of Law Index* provide important insights on access to justice; however, improving data coverage on Indicator 16.3.3 is critical for advancing Goal 16 overall.

The new SDG 16 survey offers a unique opportunity for improving data coverage and enriching understanding of these topics. The United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights jointly developed the survey, which has been piloted in eight countries. Three countries—El Salvador, Togo and Tunisia—are beginning to integrate the survey modules into their own national surveys and will be able to use the data to 'inform national policy making and report on the indicators globally' (SDG 16 Hub n.d.). There are survey modules on access to justice and violence, which will directly facilitate data collection on Indicators 16.3.1 and 16.3.3 (SDG 16 Hub n.d.).

Key recommendations

Enrich data collection and data use to improve understanding of Goal 16.3 and drive informed decision making. In 2021 research from the WJP and the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies highlighted three data priorities that are necessary for advancing people-centred justice: understanding the scope, nature and impact of justice problems; designing and delivering people-centred justice strategies; and measuring what works, and then learning and adapting (Chapman et al. 2021: 4). As highlighted in this chapter, there is a critical need for improved data collection and data use. Data can shine a light into dark spaces of injustice and illuminate effective strategies for advancing progress on Goal 16.3 and the 2030 Agenda at large. Investing in data collection, data use and data-driven strategies is central for meeting the ideals of the 2030 Agenda.

Diversify data collection methods and utilize data from across the justice ecosystem. As highlighted in 'Grasping the Justice Gap', leveraging data from across the justice ecosystem 'is fundamental to designing inclusive and effective justice strategies across a continuum of need' (Chapman et al. 2021: 14). One opportunity to do this is engaging through data partnerships: 'strengthening administrative and survey data partnerships with other social sectors—including health, labor, housing, land, and the environment, among others—is a core strategy to reduce costs and build more inclusivity' (Chapman et al. 2021: 13). Another opportunity for strengthening data coverage and analysis on SDG 16.3 is going beyond administrative and survey-based data to utilize other types of data, such as that generated through qualitative research (Chapman et al. 2021: 7). One example of this in practice is the Legal Empowerment Network's research on gender justice in the context of COVID-19. This project utilized a participatory approach that sought to 'not only produce useful data and insights, but also enrich participants by facilitating peer learning and community-building' (Legal Empowerment Network 2021: 17). As the global community looks ahead to 2030, collaboration across the justice ecosystem serves as a critical means of advancing understanding and progress on SDG 16.3.

Emphasize people-centredness throughout the justice service provision life cycle. Research demonstrates the value of people-centred services:

Photo by pexels-sora-shimazaki

analysis by the ODI found that investing in people-centred justice generates benefits that extend beyond the justice sector (Manuel and Manuel 2021: 33). The benefit–cost ratio for a basic people-centred justice system is estimated to be 5:1 in low-income countries and 4:1 in OECD countries (Manuel and Manuel 2021: 22). Better data collection and data use are one key step towards people-centred services, but the design and implementation life cycle should be considered holistically. Various resources exist to inform the design of people-centred justice services. For example, the OECD criteria for people-centred justice service design and delivery emphasizes the importance of evidence-based planning, equality and inclusion, collaboration and integration, and effectiveness, among other criteria (OECD 2021: 80–81).

Invest in service providers, particularly those at the grassroots level. Grassroots justice service providers, such as legal empowerment organizations, offer important contributions to advancing SDG 16.3. Legal empowerment initiatives enable individuals to understand the law and leverage it for their benefit (Task Force on Justice 2019: 70). Namati's most recent survey of members of its Legal Empowerment Network found that financing is a key constraint experienced by grassroots legal empowerment organizations. The survey gathered information from 310 organizations across 68 countries. Financial struggles among respondents have increased notably since 2018, with nearly half of respondents (45 per cent) saying that their funding situation had worsened in recent years (Legal Empowerment Network 2022: 11). The consequences of worsening financial positions will likely be felt directly by people in need, as 78 per cent of respondents reported that they would have to make operational cuts or, in some cases, might cease operating entirely due to the financial challenges (Legal Empowerment Network 2022: 12). Organizations such as the Legal Empowerment Fund are making important advances on strengthening financial flows to grassroots organizations (Fund for Global Human Rights n.d.), but this should be complemented by other financial initiatives at the regional, national and sub-national levels.

Work to ensure the safety of justice service providers and justice actors. Namati's Network Survey found that safety and security concerns were key issues for grassroots justice actors. In the 2021 survey, the majority of respondents (74 per cent) reported experiencing difficulties carrying out legal empowerment work due to the political and social contexts in their countries (Legal Empowerment Network 2022: 18). Threats faced by grassroots justice defenders are part of a larger issue of the risks faced by people on the front lines of advancing democracy.

Conclusion

Fulfilling the promises of the 2030 Agenda will require intentional action to strengthen access to justice and the rule of law. As the data show, there has been inadequate progress on Goal 16.3 since 2015, and shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic have only further complicated the matter. Advancing access to justice and the rule of law is necessary not only to fulfil the promise of Goal 16 but moreover to achieve the interlinked goals of the 2030 Agenda at large. As the global justice community looks forward to the mid-point of the 2030 Agenda and strategizes for the road ahead, improved data collection and data use should be emphasized as key actions for achieving these important goals. The coming years will offer continued opportunities for justice actors to collaborate with one another and drive renewed action towards advancing access to justice for all and promoting the rule of law.

Development Goals actually stimulate action? In particular, this chapter uses data from International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Indices to evaluate progress towards four of the targets under SDG 16 that relate to the quality of governance.

Photo by ev-Mz6vYiI8CSA

4

The 2030 Agenda as a critical juncture: measuring progress towards inclusive, accountable and democratic governance

Alexander Hudson,
International IDEA

Countries
Global

Target(s)

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

16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

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

Introduction

In the resolution adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, member states argued that the Sustainable Development Goals would 'seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. The Goals and targets will stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet' (United Nations General Assembly 2015).

This chapter seeks to provide an empirical evaluation of the last part of this claim. Did the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals actually stimulate action? In particular, this chapter uses data from International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Indices to evaluate progress towards four of the targets under SDG 16 that relate to the quality of governance. These are targets 16.3 (rule of law and access to justice), 16.5 (corruption), 16.6 (accountable and transparent institutions) and 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making). This data source helps to complement the official indicators by providing a democracy-oriented measurement of the relevant phenomena. The GSoD Indices combine observational data and expert evaluations to estimate the values of 28 aspects of democracy (at three levels of aggregation) for 173 countries, from 1975 to 2021. Each of the measures is a composite score that includes data from different sources, minimizing bias and error. As such, the GSoD Indices provide high-quality indicators of progress towards these targets.

A critical juncture is a 'period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies' (Collier and Collier 1991: 29)

Method

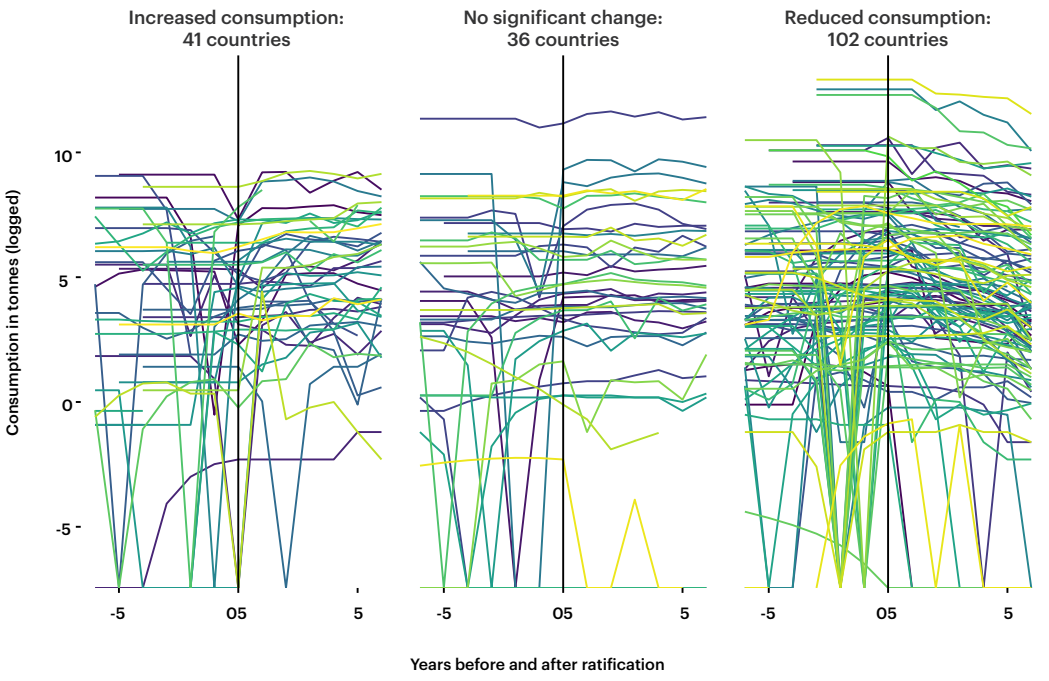
Many of the SDG targets required regulatory and financial changes, but the targets that this chapter considers required something even more difficult: changes in political institutions. While formal and informal institutions most often change very slowly and are path-dependent (North 1990; Pierson 2000), there are examples of what social scientists call critical junctures (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), where seemingly stable processes are diverted at a particular moment, following a different trajectory thereafter. If the adoption of the 2030 Agenda was to have an effect on usually stable and self-reinforcing political institutions and cultures, it would have needed to be a critical juncture for many countries that had historically performed poorly on the SDG 16 targets.

How would we know if the adoption of the 2030 Agenda represented a critical juncture for a country with respect to one of these targets? A critical juncture is a 'period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies' (Collier and Collier 1991: 29). Thus, if the adoption of the 2030 Agenda was indeed a critical juncture, we should observe that there was a significant change either in the indicators of the targets or in the institutions and processes that underlie that performance.

By way of an analogy, we could consider the extent to which ratification of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer changed countries' behaviour in terms of consumption of ozone depleting chemicals. The Montreal Protocol is widely viewed as one of the most successful international agreements of at least the last half century, and by 2010 it had

Figure 4.1

Consumption of ozone depleting chemicals



Source: United Nations Environment Programme, [n.d.], <https://unepgrid.ch/en>.

accomplished its purpose to a great extent. It is the only UN treaty to have been ratified by every independent state on the planet (UNEP 2018).

It would not be fair to directly compare the Montreal Protocol with the much broader aims of the 2030 Agenda. However, it is a useful marker for how national performance on a relevant metric can change following ratification of a treaty. For the purposes of data visualization, we can centre the national-level data on the year in which each country signed the protocol, and assess changes in consumption six years afterward (matching the interval in the data that is available with reference to the 2030 Agenda). Graphing the trends in this way (Figure 4.1), we can see that 102 countries reduced their consumption by more than 25 per cent by the sixth year after ratification, 36 countries experienced minor changes (between a reduction of 25 per cent and an increase of 25 per cent), and 41 countries increased their consumption by more than 25 per cent.[14] We can compare the distribution of countries and trends shown here as we consider each of the targets under SDG 16.

Now, it may be that a noticeable inflection point in the longer-term trend for the complex social processes that are considered by SDG 16 is too much to expect. For example, what international organizations usually define as corruption is a long-established part of business and government in many countries. The kind of cultural, legal and political changes that would be required to produce significant changes in the level of corruption are not the work of a moment. Nonetheless, it has now been seven years since the world community agreed to the 2030 Agenda. If indeed this has accelerated change towards achieving 'peaceful, just and inclusive societies', we should begin to see these effects.

The remainder of this chapter takes the general approach of seeking critical junctures and applies it to four of the targets under SDG 16: 16.3 (rule of law and access to justice), 16.5 (corruption), 16.6 (accountable and transparent institutions) and 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making). The four are quite closely related. For example, it is difficult to imagine initiatives towards accountable and transparent institutions that do not also have positive effects on corruption and the rule of law. However, the GSoD Indices include indicators that can be used to more closely track progress towards each of the goals. In the sections that follow, each is examined in turn, while bearing in mind the 'integrated and indivisible' nature of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations General Assembly 2015).

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

Target 16.3 actually includes two closely related but separable concepts: the rule of law and access to justice. While, for some scholars, access to justice (of a certain kind) might be considered to be a component of the rule of law, for others, a thicker understanding of what justice requires leads to a clear separation of the liberal concept of the rule of law and a more progressive concept of access to (substantive or distributive) justice (Ghai and Cottrell 2009: 2–3; Lucy 2020). For reasons of both conceptual clarity and data availability, it is preferable to separate these two concepts as we explore the impact of the 2030 Agenda. The GSoD Indices include a composite measure of **access to justice** and a composite measure of what International IDEA calls **predictable enforcement,** which may be

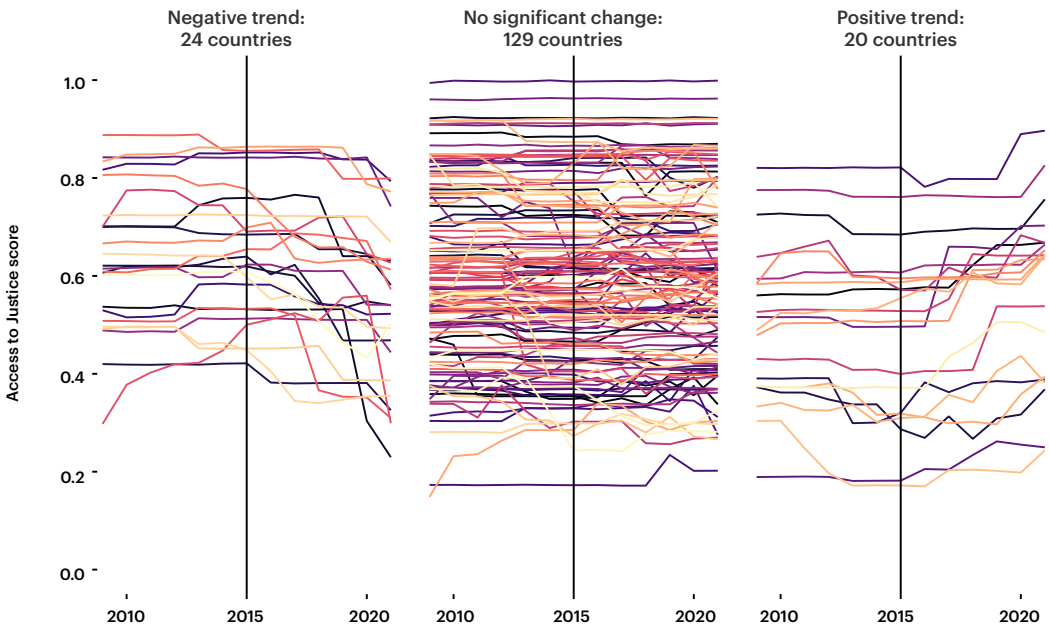
taken in this context to be one of the core features of the rule of law and stand in for the larger concept.

Beginning a pattern that will be followed throughout this chapter, we can use these GSoD Indices indicators to assess the extent to which countries have improved their performance since 2015, when the 2030 Agenda was established. A useful metric here is what we might call a statistically significant improvement. Each of the GSoD Indices indicators is measured with an acknowledgement of the imprecision in the estimate. The reported values are the best estimate of the true value of the indicator, but there is a distribution within which the true value could fall. For the purposes of this analysis, we stipulate that an improvement in a country's score is statistically significant if the value in 2021 is more than two standard deviations higher than the score in 2015. In simpler terms, this means that we can be at least 95 per cent certain that the difference in the score is the result of real changes in the world, and not due to measurement error.

Applying this approach to the GSoD Indices indicator for access to justice (Figure 4.2), we see that the vast majority of countries have experienced no significant change in their performance in the years since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Additionally, more countries have declined in their performance (24) than have improved (20). Given this apparent non-effect, we need not dig deeper into the causes of change (which could be unrelated to the 2030 Agenda). Rather, we can say that as of the end of 2021 (the end of the period covered by these data) there was no evidence that the world was on track to achieve SDG 16.3. As the central panel of Figure 4.2 highlights, there is presently a wide variation in the levels of access to justice between countries. Very few have consistently performed at a high level.

Figure 4.2

Trends in access to justice

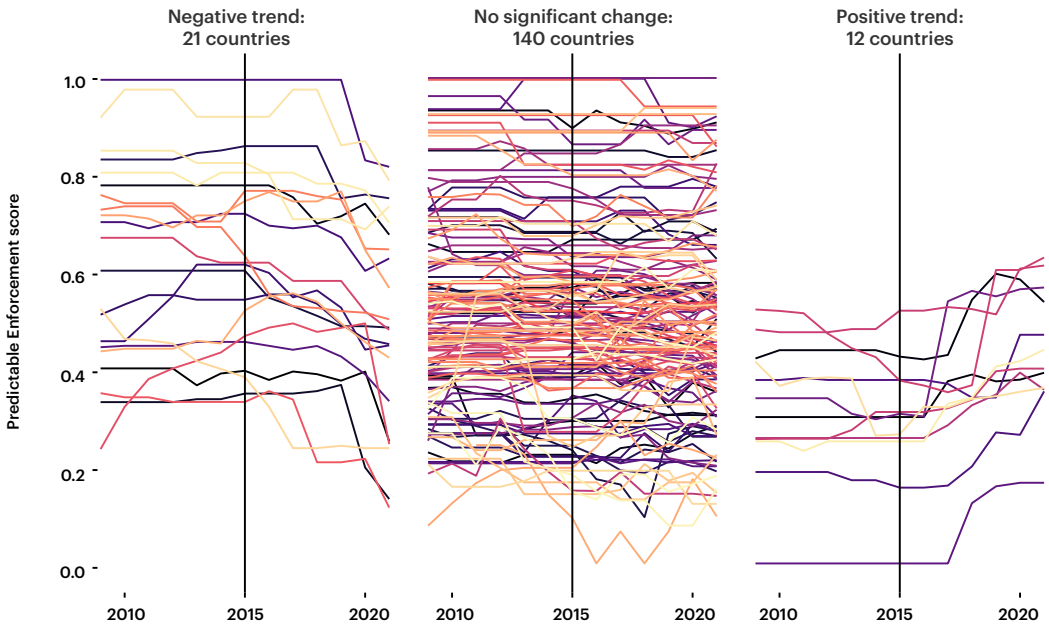


Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices v. 6.1, 2022, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/>.

The picture is even worse for the measure that is more closely associated with the rule of law: the GSoD Indices indicator for predicable enforcement. As Figure 4.3 shows, 21 countries had significantly worse performance in 2021 than they did when the 2030 Agenda was adopted. Only 12 had significantly improved. Note also that the left-hand panel illustrates the fact that previously very high-performing countries are among those experiencing declines, suggesting that the world is well and truly going backwards with regard to the rule of law. At this point, significant scepticism regarding the likelihood of achieving SDG 16.3 is warranted.

Figure 4.3

Trends in predictable enforcement



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices v. 6.1, 2022, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/>.

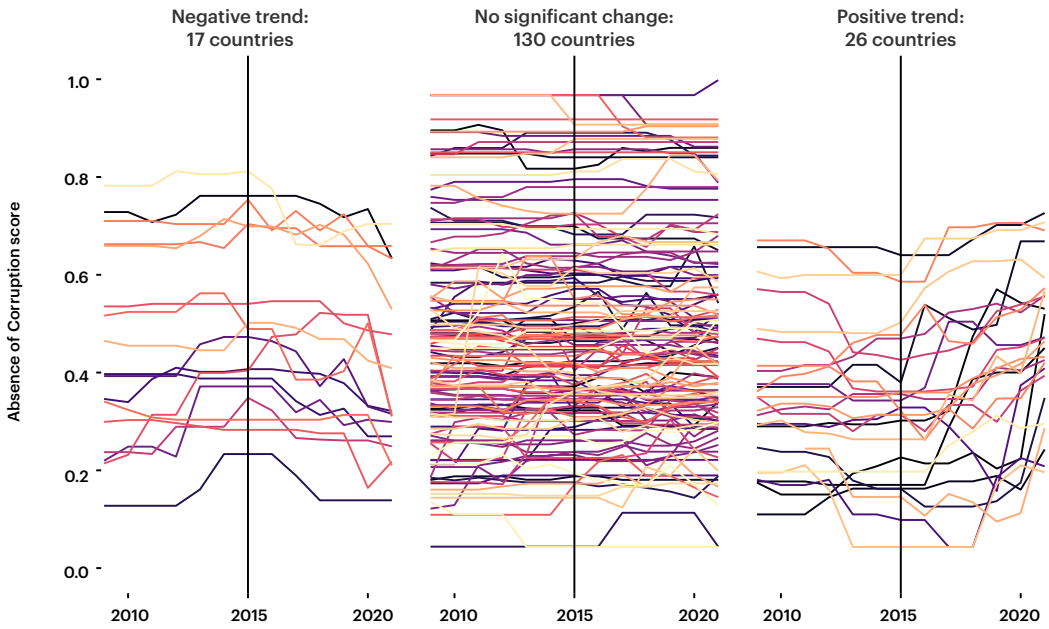
SDG 16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

Unlike Target 16.3, which calls for the promotion of a broad good, the narrower scope of Target 16.5 invites measurement. But what would count as a substantial reduction in corruption and bribery? Most likely a notable and significant decline in broadly accepted measures of corrupt practices in government would suffice. Here again, we can turn to a composite measure from the GSoD Indices **(absence of corruption)** to assess the extent to which this has been realized. The target does not require that corruption be fully stamped out, but that there should be a significant reduction in countries with historically high levels of corruption and bribery. Indeed, fighting corruption is a precondition for action towards many of the targets across the 2030 Agenda. In many contexts, corruption harms economic growth (Gyimah-Brempong 2002), and even where that is not the case, it has deleterious effects on state programmes that should target poverty reduction and improved service delivery (Gupta 1998).

As a first look at progress towards SDG 16.5, we can again use a comparison of trends. Figure 4.4 shows that the outlook for this target is more positive than it is for Target 16.3, but it is still not indicative of a global movement towards reducing corruption. As the figure illustrates, 17 countries have significantly reduced their performance on this indicator (meaning that they now have higher levels of corruption). The majority of countries (130) are substantially unchanged, while 26 countries have made significant progress against corruption.

Figure 4.4

Trends in absence of corruption



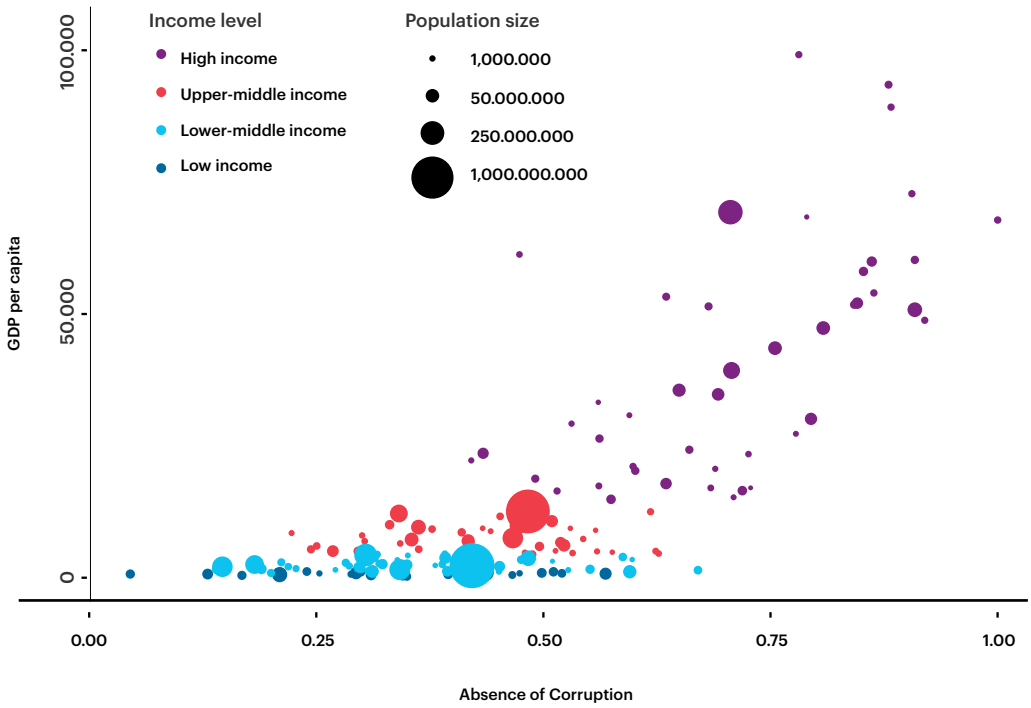
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices v. 6.1, 2022, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/>.

However, to this first level of analysis we can add the well-known fact that corruption is negatively correlated with national wealth (Husted 1999). This relationship is illustrated in Figure 4.5. The baseline correlation does not take into account the high level of variation at similar income levels.

Figure 4.5 highlights this variation by using World Bank income groups to colour the points. Looking at the data, this also suggests that, as we consider progress towards SDG 16.5, we should take income into account.

Figure 4.5

GDP per capita and absence of corruption

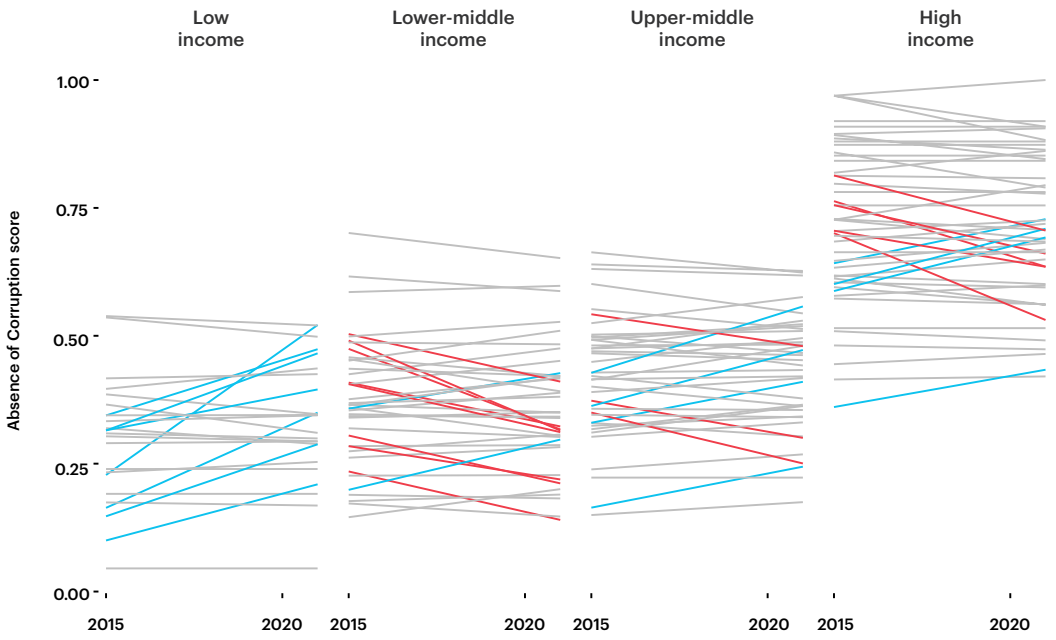


Sources: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices v. 6.1, 2022, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/>; World Bank, World Development Indicators, [n.d.], <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>.

This income-sensitive approach produces a slightly different interpretation of the extent to which we have made progress towards SDG 16.5. In Figure 4.6, countries are separated by World Bank income groups. Countries that have experienced a significant advance (using the same standards of statistical significance described above) are blue, while those undergoing a significant decline are maroon. Looking at the data this way, the relationship between corruption and income level is clear, but what emerges is a better understanding of the countries in which progress has been made. Note that there are seven countries in the low-income group that have made significant progress in the GSoD Indices indicator for absence of corruption. The lower-middle-income group and high-income groups both present an overall negative picture, while the upper-middle-income group is mixed. This reinforces academic research that has shown that wealth is not a broad predictor of the effectiveness of anti-corruption programmes (Spector 2016), but also corresponds to the finding that new anti-corruption institutions were more likely to be established in lower-income contexts (Gemperle 2018).

Figure 4.6

Advances and declines in absence of corruption by income level



Sources: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices v. 6.1, 2022, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/>; World Bank, World Development Indicators, [n.d.], <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>.

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

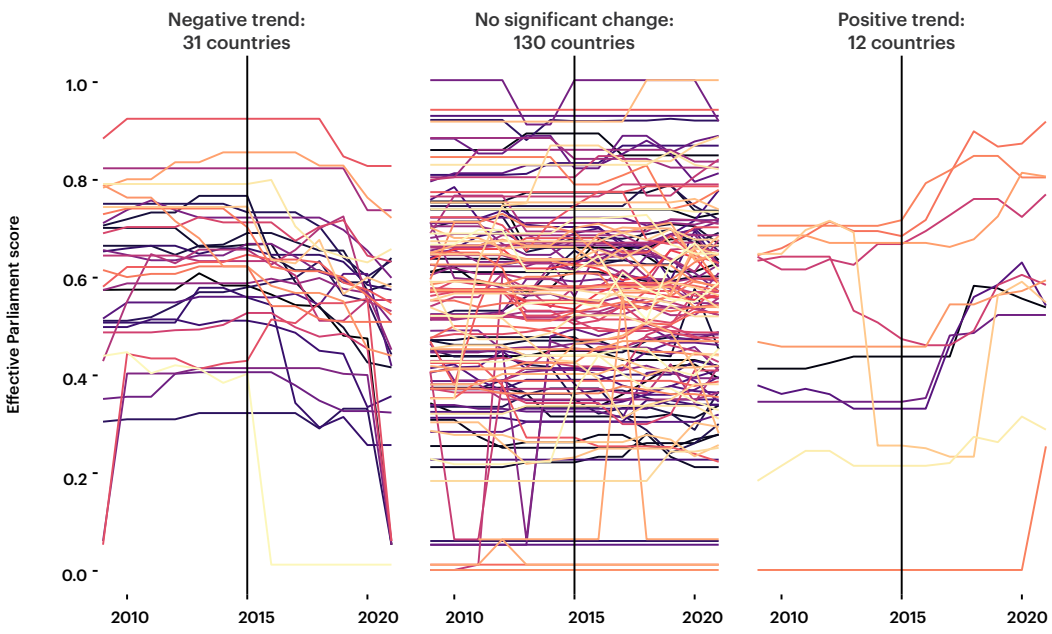
Target 16.6 is almost too broad to measure. It is possible that some effective institutions are not transparent, and some accountable ones are not effective. Nevertheless, the ideal political institution would have all of these qualities. As with the matter of corruption considered in Target 16.5, achieving Target 16.6 would provide support to many of the 2030 Agenda's other goals. Wherever public money is being spent, citizens should be able to exercise a form of oversight. Institutions of government should be open to scrutiny, accountable to the public and effective in their actions. While the GSoD Indices do not capture the full range of indicators for this broad goal, the composite measure of **effective parliament** captures oversight and accountability of the executive quite well.

The GSoD Indices data show that the world is not making significant progress towards this target. Rather, it is clear that performance has declined. In 2021, 31 countries had significantly declined compared with 2015, while only 12 had improved. Those with declines included formerly very high-performing countries (Japan, the Netherlands and Slovenia). This is also an indicator that is strongly affected by coups d'état, self-coups and other interruptions in democratic processes (see the sharp declines in 2021).

The GSoD Indices lack coverage for many sub-national governments, and do not cover the supranational level at all, making it impossible to say what the trend might be below or above the level of national governments. However, the available data present a clear picture of democratic decline, suggesting that, without a dramatic turnaround, Target 16.6 will not be achieved.

Figure 4.7

Trends in effective parliament



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices v. 6.1, 2022, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/>.

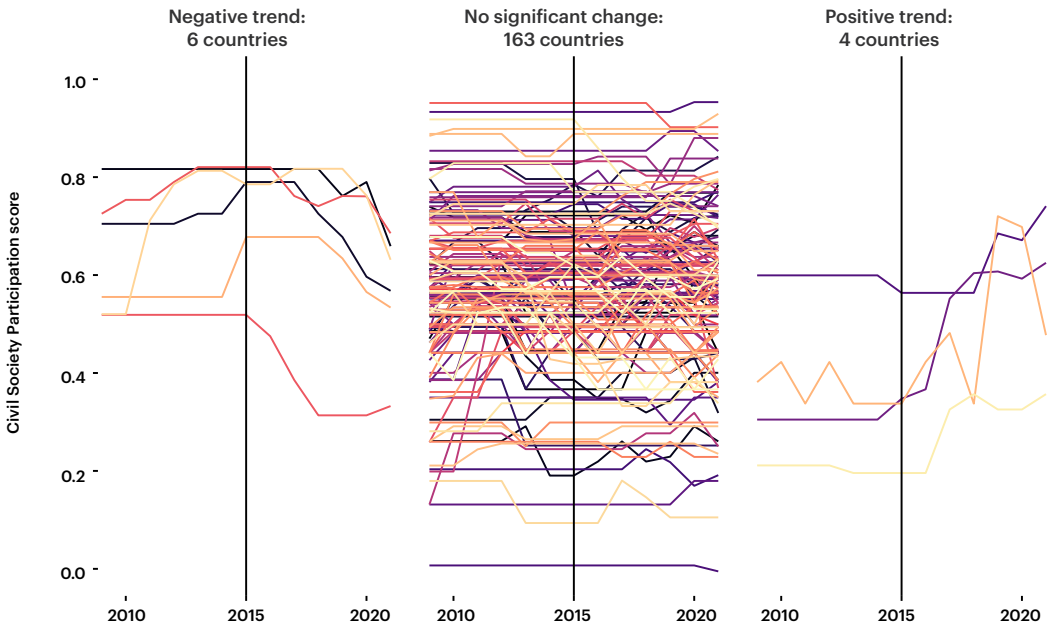
SDG 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

Target 16.7 requires a democratic system of government while allowing for a diversity of institutional arrangements. Democracy should allow for 'popular control over public decision-making and decision-makers, and equality between citizens in the exercise of that control' (International IDEA 2021: vii). Measuring progress towards Target 16.7 could proceed in many different ways. Inclusion and participation are more straightforward to measure than responsiveness, and this section will focus on those two aspects of this target. Turning again to the GSoD Indices data set, we can utilize a composite measure of **civil society participation** (which includes indicators of the extent of consultation in decision-making) to measure the degree of inclusion and participation, as well as a higher-level measure of **representative government,** which includes a number of indicators that are associated with the procedural quality of representative democracy.

Civil society participation is an important enabling factor for democracy, and in many cases is also closely related to development at the local level (Barkan, McNulty and Ayeni 1991; Skidmore 2001). GSoD Indices data show that rates of participation in civil society tend to be relatively stable. Figure 4.8 shows that, compared with 2015, six countries declined significantly, four advanced significantly, and most of the world (163 countries) experienced no significant change.

Figure 4.8

Trends in civil society participation



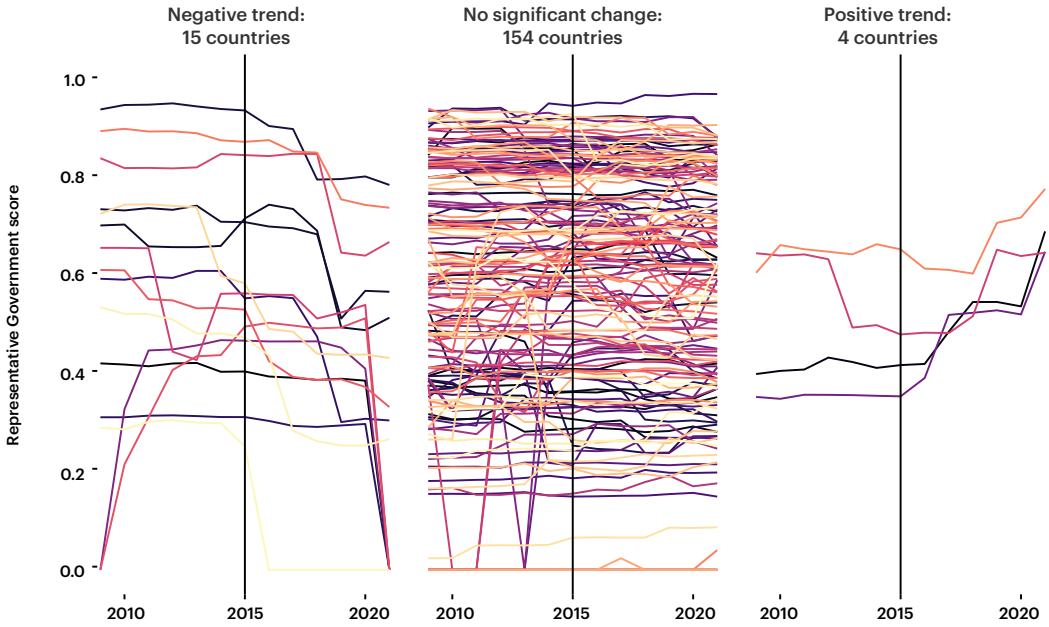
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices v. 6.1, 2022, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/>.

In recent years there has been increasing interest in the possibility that democratic innovations such as citizens' assemblies, popular consultations and deliberative polls might improve participation and responsiveness in democracies. While there have been some much-celebrated successes (such as the citizens' assembly that considered amendments to the Irish Constitution) (Farrell, Suiter and Harris 2019), the overall record suggests that these innovations will not increase participation or responsiveness. By design, these processes involve very few people, and their outcomes are most often non-binding recommendations to an elected government—many of which are not taken up (Wells 2022). While such processes can have an important impact on the formation of public opinion (Knoblauch, Barthel and Gastil 2019), they will not substantially move the needle on Target 16.7. Instead, the institutions of representative democracy will need to be reformed and rejuvenated to reach this target.

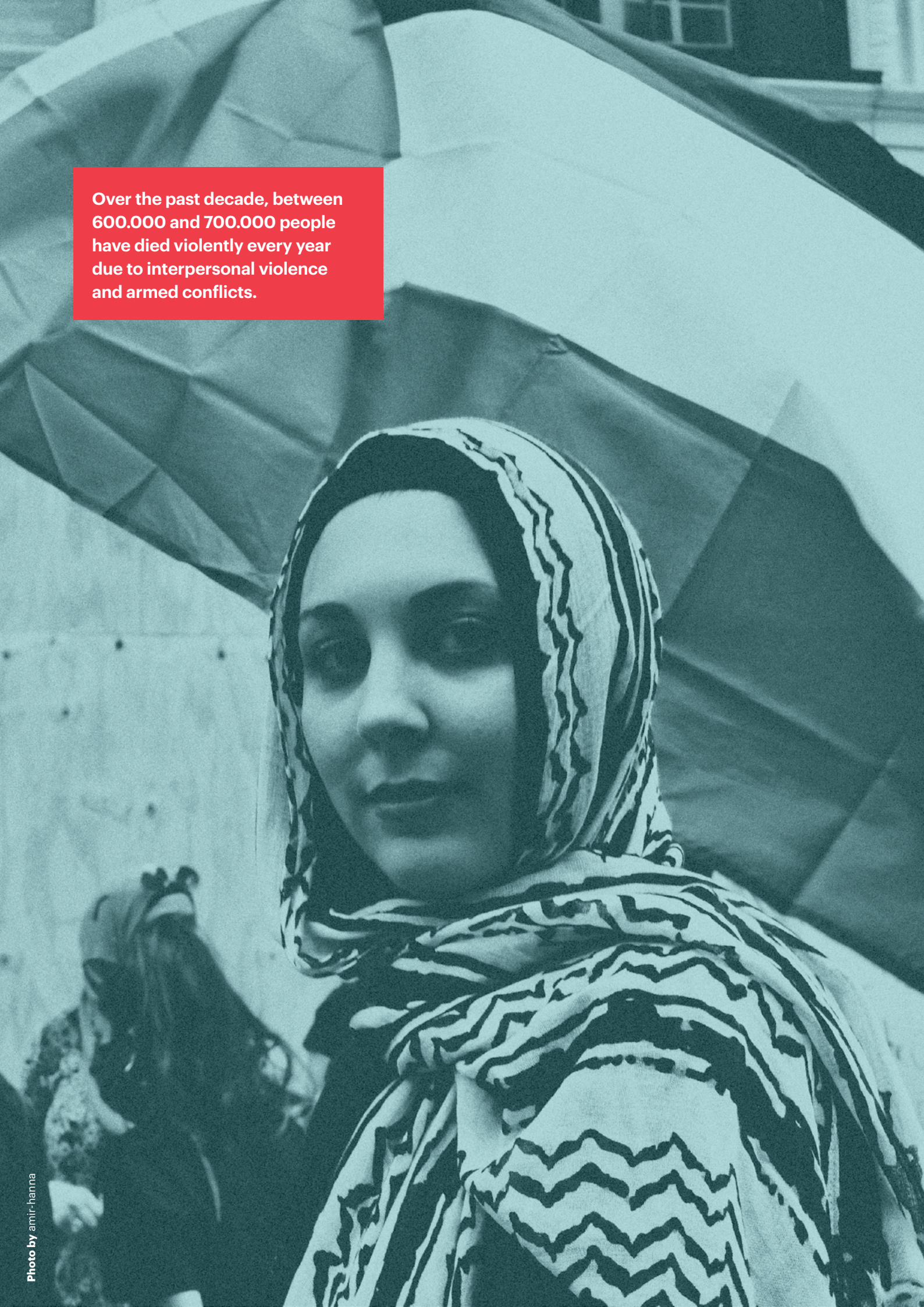
Seven years into the work towards meeting the goals of the 2030 Agenda, it does not appear that representative institutions are on track to achieve these targets. As Figure 4.9 shows, only four countries have significantly improved their performance in the GSoD Indices composite indicator for representative government. Over the same period, 15 countries significantly declined in their performance. As with effective parliament, discussed above, some of the declines are associated with coups d'état and other acute challenges to democratic performance. Others are the result of more gradual processes of democratic erosion (International IDEA 2021). Taken as a whole, however, the data show that, without a significant change in the next seven years, Target 16.7 is not likely to be achieved.

Figure 4.9

Trends in representative government



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices v. 6.1, 2022, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/>.



Over the past decade, between 600.000 and 700.000 people have died violently every year due to interpersonal violence and armed conflicts.

Photo by amir-hamna

5

Are we on track to significantly reducing lethal violence?

Gergely Hideg, Gianluca Boo and Anne-Séverine Fabre, Small Arms Survey

Countries
Global

Target(s)

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

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

Introduction

Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, states have pledged to 'promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs n.d.a). SDG Target 16.1 stresses that all states should 'significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere' (United Nations Statistics Division n.d.c).

Over the past decade, between 600.000 and 700.000 people have died violently every year due to interpersonal violence and armed conflicts. The most common forms of this type of lethal violence are intentional homicide (Indicator 16.1.1) and conflict-related death (Indicator 16.1.2), the rates of which are monitored to measure progress towards Target 16.1. Besides the desirable direct outcome of reducing avoidable deaths, the peace-related components of SDG 16 are essential enablers of the other SDGs.[15]

Lethal violence affects all societies to varying degrees, whether they are in a conflict or post-conflict situation or suffering from everyday forms of criminal or political violence. Violence stunts human, social and economic development and erodes the social capital of communities. Failure to address SDG 16.1 with adequate policies risks worsening violence, injustice and exclusion, but also reversing progress towards all the SDGs, including education, health and climate action (Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies 2019). The absence of peace, fragile human safety and the lack of strong governance prevent or disrupt the development and implementation of the whole spectrum of SDGs and, importantly, obstruct any possibility of reliably measuring progress towards other goals and indicators.

The Small Arms Survey's Global Violent Deaths database is a key tool for assessing lethal interpersonal and collective violence, as well as progress towards SDG 16.1 (Small Arms Survey n.d.).

The Small Arms Survey's Global Violent Deaths database is a key tool for assessing lethal interpersonal and collective violence, as well as progress towards SDG 16.1 (Small Arms Survey n.d.). The GVD database collates open-source data on the number of victims of violence from a multitude of national and international sources, focusing on the realms of criminal justice and mortality statistics. Using estimations where data are lacking, the GVD database combines data on direct conflict deaths and intentional homicides into a single 'violent deaths' indicator. It also keeps track of lethal violence against women and violent deaths by firearms, as well as lethal violence against women by firearms. The database covers 222 countries and territories worldwide since 2004. Similar to the previous versions, the latest update (2022) of the GVD database, covering the period 2004–2020, has a delay of two years, an interval needed to acquire annual statistics from national and international sources.

The SDG framework commits countries to strengthening their efforts to develop and integrate strategies to reduce (lethal) violence and prevent conflict through national, regional and multilateral development plans, programmes and policies. It also requires that countries back these commitments with adequate resources and leadership as well as statistical frameworks to track progress towards the different targets. This chapter uses the GVD database to assess Indicator 16.1.1 and Indicator 16.1.2, and ultimately the likelihood of achieving SDG 16, halfway towards the 2030 deadline (United Nations n.d.a).

The state of play Indicator 16.1.1—intentional homicides

The Small Arms Survey's GVD database estimates that approximately 353,000 people died as victims of intentional homicide globally in 2020 (Figure 5.1). This translates to 4.52 victims of intentional homicide per 100.000 population. Since 2004 the GVD database has recorded a global decrease in homicide rates. In the 2007–2015 period, due to the increase in global population and near stagnation of homicide rates, the absolute number of homicides increased. From 2016—the year after the adoption of the SDGs, when the UN member states started to implement SDG 16–related programmes—a substantial reduction in homicide rates was observed (down 16 per cent, from 5.38 intentional homicides per 100.000 population in 2016 to 4.52 in 2020). This trend, together with decelerating global population growth, also resulted in a record-low number of victims of intentional homicides in 2020: 353,000 victims of homicide versus 403,000 at their peak, in 2016.

Most homicide victims are males. In 2020 approximately 24 per cent of homicide victims were women or girls. The homicide rate among males is more than four times as high as among females (7.2 versus 1.8 per 100.000 men and women, respectively). By 2020, however, the standardized homicide rate reached a record low for women and men alike. For the first time since 2004, fewer than 70.000 female homicide deaths were registered by the GVD database (2016 had over 77,000 female homicide victims).

When combined, the 20 countries that recorded the highest number of intentional homicides in 2020 are responsible for 78 per cent of all global homicides (Figure 5.2). The list of countries that are the main contributors to global homicides, and those that are the most unsafe to live in—in terms of the likelihood of homicide victimization—only partially overlap. Large countries produce a large number of homicides, even if their rates are relatively low. For

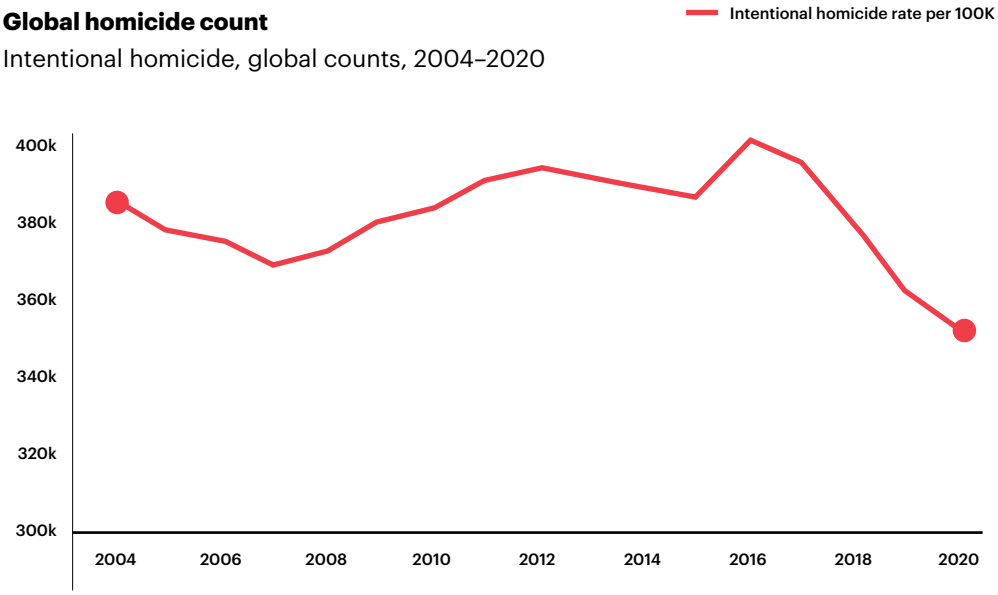
example, India's nearly 41,000 intentional homicides make it the country with the second most murders. Due to its large population, however, the homicide rate is only 2.9 per 100.000 population, nowhere near the levels recorded by the 20 least safe countries, and well below the global average. When accounting for population size, the least safe countries—in terms of intentional homicides—are Jamaica (44.7 per 100.000 population), Lesotho (41.9 per 100.000 population) and the Central African Republic (40.3 per 100.000 population).

Figure 5.1

Global homicide trends between 2004 and 2020

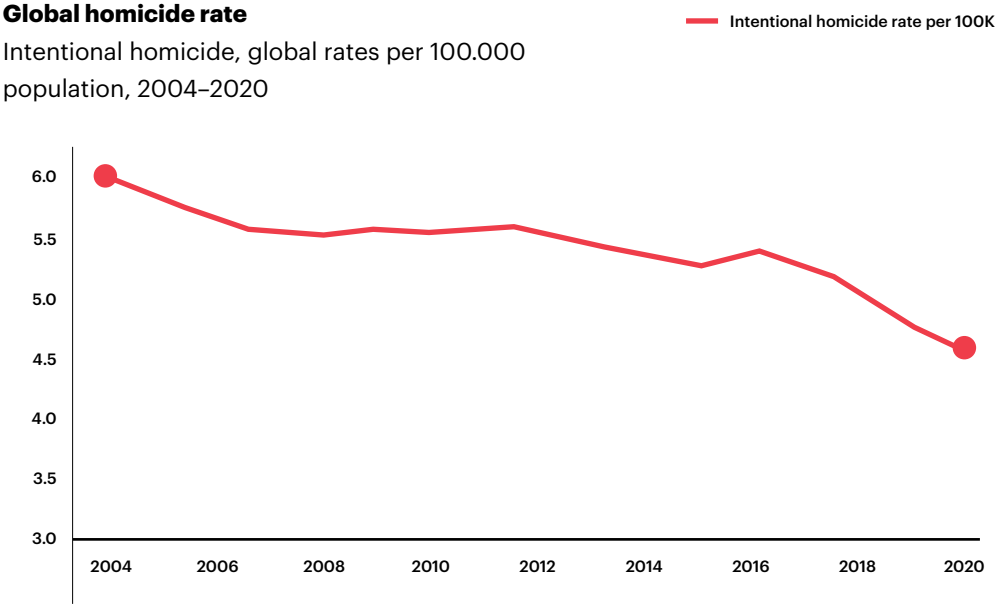
Global homicide count

Intentional homicide, global counts, 2004–2020



Global homicide rate

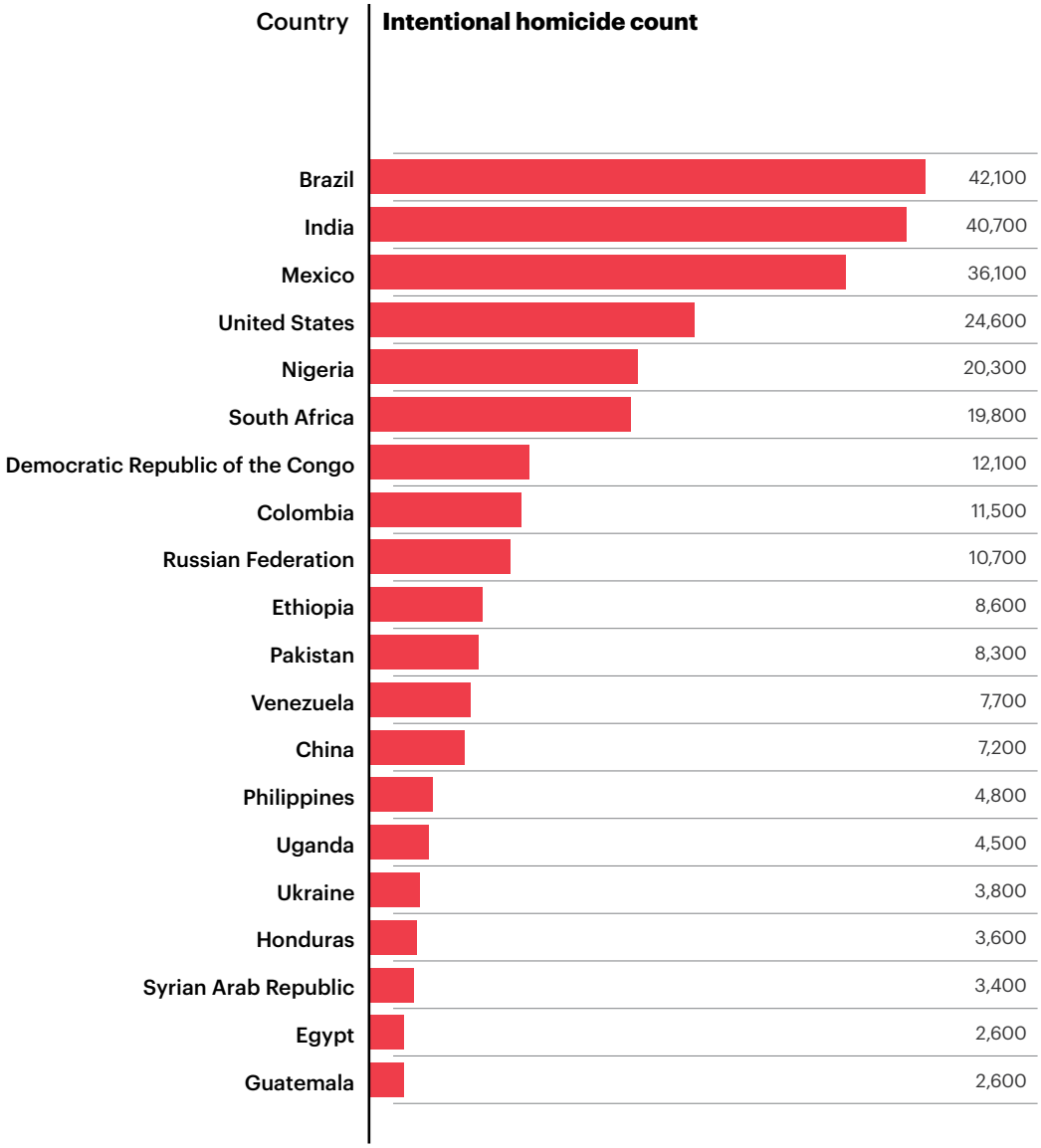
Intentional homicide, global rates per 100.000 population, 2004–2020

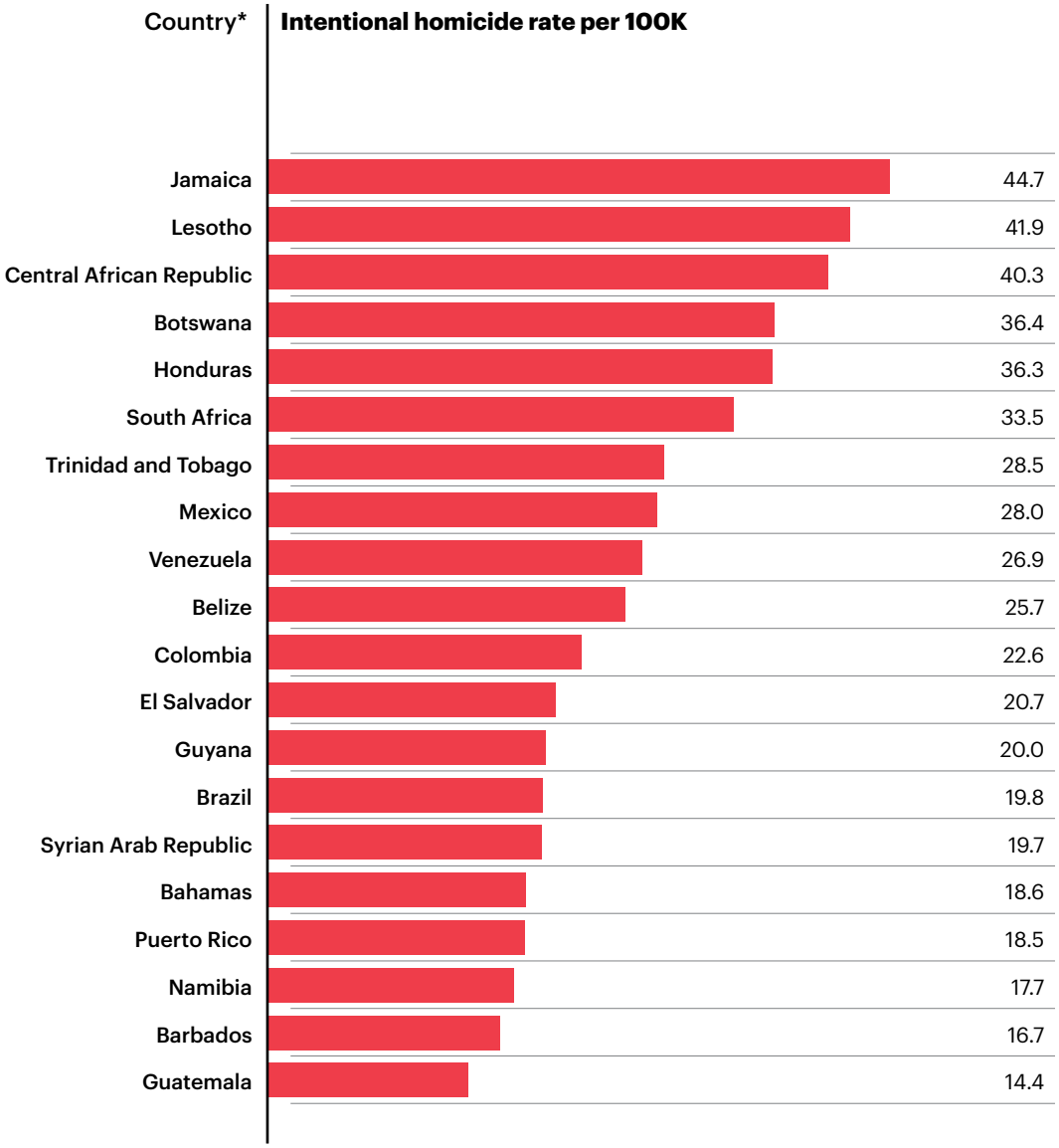


Source: Small Arms Survey, Global Violent Deaths, [n.d.], <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/database/global-violent-deaths-gvd>.

Figure 5.2

Top 20 countries with the highest intentional homicide counts and rates (per 100.000 population) in 2020





* Omitting countries with less than 200,000 population due to high statistical volatility. Should this rule not be applied, the following countries would have made the top 20 list of countries with the highest homicide death rates: British Virgin Islands (62.8), Turks and Caicos Islands (33.6), United States Virgin Islands (29.7), Saint Lucia (28.3), Anguilla (26.7), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (26.1), Dominica (20.8), Saint Kitts and Nevis (18.8) and Saint Pierre and Miquelon (17.3).

Source: Small Arms Survey, Global Violent Deaths, [n.d.], <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/database/global-violent-deaths-gvd>.

Indicator 16.1.2—conflict deaths

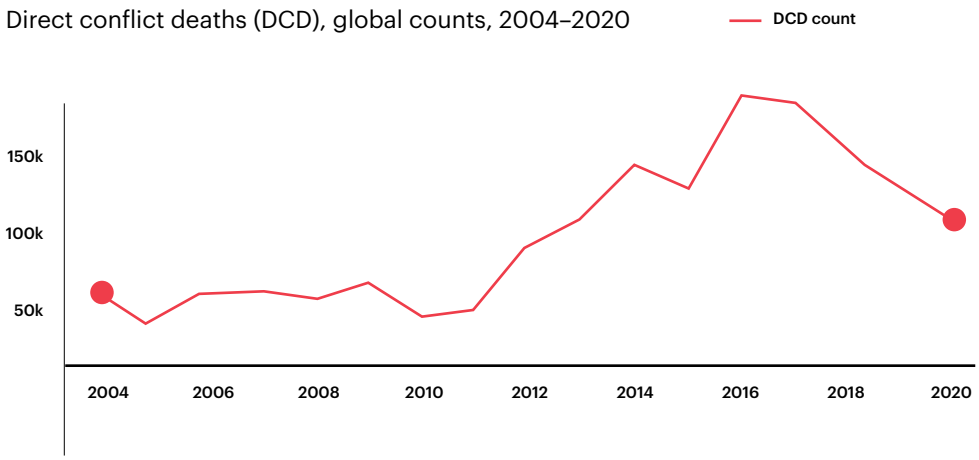
One in five of those who died violently in 2020 died in armed conflict. The year 2020 saw at least 104,000 battlefield deaths globally, which should be considered a low estimate, considering the difficulties of detecting and recording such deaths (e.g. Salama 2018: 4–5; OHCHR 2022a: 2–3, paragraphs 2 and 7). Though difficult to fathom as war rages in Ukraine and is producing tens of thousands of battlefield fatalities, the years preceding the Russian invasion saw a very significant reduction in global conflict deaths. The year 2020 saw about half as many direct victims of armed conflict when compared with 2016. This steep decline is the result of the decreasing intensity of the four most deadly conflicts of the past decade: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Figure 5.3

Global conflict death count and rates (per 100.000 population) between 2004 and 2020

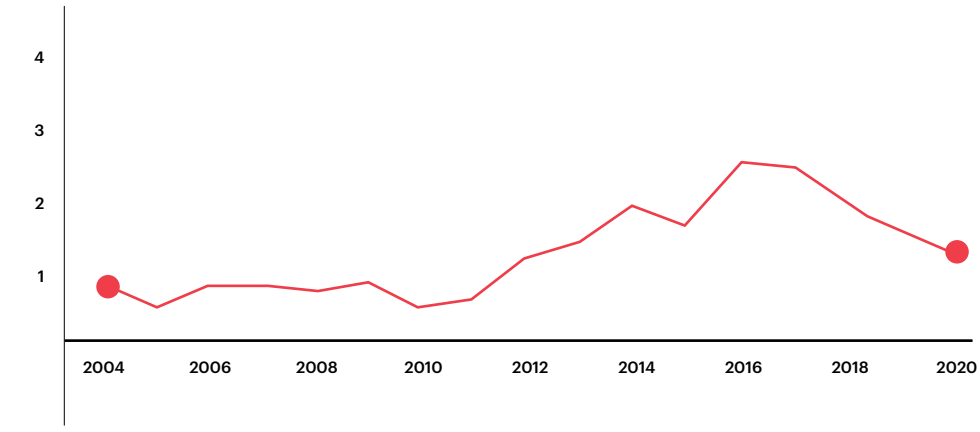
Conflict death count

Direct conflict deaths (DCD), global counts, 2004–2020



Conflict death count

Direct conflict deaths (DCD), global rates, 2004–2020



Source: Small Arms Survey, Global Violent Deaths, [n.d.], <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/database/global-violent-deaths-gvd>.

In 2020 Afghanistan was the world's deadliest conflict, claiming the lives of about 31,000 people, but this high toll still represents a reduction from its previous peak of over 43,000 fatalities, reached in 2018. As of 2020 Yemen was the world's second-deadliest conflict, with about 20.000 victims, but, again, the situation was worse in 2018, when 34,000 died in the hostilities. Despite the very positive fatality reductions in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, the Western Asia region remained most exposed to conflict deaths in 2020, with a fatality rate of 12.3 per 100.000 population.

The news from Africa is less encouraging: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Nigeria as well as the Sahel region have seen an increase in conflict activity and associated battle-related deaths. There is very little reason for optimism overall. It is not yet possible to assess how many lives will be lost as a result of the current conflict in Ukraine—despite ongoing efforts to do so (Varghese 2022; ACLED n.d.; OHCHR 2022b; Vazhnye Istorii 2022; Mediazona n.d.)—but the war's impact on global trends will surely be significant.

Lacking methodology—estimates for indirect conflict deaths

While Indicator 16.1.2 explicitly requires that the rates of direct and indirect conflict deaths be monitored, the existing measurement focuses on one component of conflict fatalities—direct conflict deaths. The rate of direct conflict deaths is based on the count of individuals (combatants and civilians combined) who were identified to have been killed by armed violence in and around battles: they are the victims of war who were bombed, shot, hit by shrapnel, etc. and then died of the injuries they sustained. This does not give a full picture of conflict-related mortality. As a result of armed conflict, large segments of the population may be deprived of safe housing and goods essential for their survival. Armed conflict also tends to bring about the widespread or local collapse of vital services like policing and crime prevention, healthcare provision, essential utilities or even humanitarian assistance. These and similar other factors (e.g. economic slowdown, shortages of medicines or reduced farming capacity that result in a lack of access to adequate food, water, sanitation, healthcare and safe working conditions that are caused or aggravated by the situation of armed conflict) can lead to additional—so-called indirect—loss of life. While there is an understanding that such indirect conflict deaths are as important as direct deaths when assessing the human costs of conflict, there is no established methodology to measure such deaths yet; however, a body of research already exists for estimating such losses (Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development 2008: Chapter 2). The OHCHR—the international custodian of Indicator 16.1.2—is currently looking at possible definitions of indirect conflict death and associated methodologies for assessing its extent (United Nations Statistics Division 2018: 4).

In the 17 years covered by the GVD database (2004–2020), the world witnessed 6.5 million victims of intentional homicide, with a yearly average of 383,000 victims, or 5.4 victims per 100.000 population.

Halfway to 2030

An overall reduction in homicides is unlikely to be enough

In the 17 years covered by the GVD database (2004–2020), the world witnessed 6.5 million victims of intentional homicide, with a yearly average of 383,000 victims, or 5.4 victims per 100.000 population. A comparison between the periods 2004–2015 and 2016–2020 shows an overall reduction of 11 per cent of this form of lethal violence, from an average of 5.6 to 5.0 victims of intentional homicide per 100.000 population. Disaggregated data confirm this positive trend, where, between the two periods, intentional homicides committed against men and boys decreased by approximately 10 per cent, from 8.9 to 8.0 victims per 100.000 population, and by 14 per cent for lethal violence against girls and women, from 2.6 to 1.9 victims per 100.000 population. Although these figures suggest a global reduction in the intentional homicide burden, whether or not we can consider the world to be on track to reach this objective will depend on the interpretation of what a 'significant' reduction means in the language used in Indicator 16.1.1. The current trend, however, is unlikely to be sufficient to reach a target of a 50 per cent reduction by 2030 that some optimistic stakeholders and NGOs (Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies n.d.) considered as potentially achievable, although some of these estimates used a longer time horizon.[16] Furthermore, any positive projections (United Nations Statistics Division 2022) for 2030 risk being invalidated by the recent increase in intentional homicides in some parts of the world, particularly in Northern and Central America (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2022), which are yet to be included in the global harmonized data sets, such as the GVD database.

The struggle to reduce endemic lethal violence

The overall reduction in homicide rates observed during the period from 2016 to 2020 is the result of contrasting regional and subregional trends (Figure 5.4).

Declining regional rates: In Asia, an overall decrease of 23 per cent, from 2.8 to 2.1 victims per 100.000 population, was partly contrasted by a sharp increase of 16 per cent in Western Asia, from 4.7 to 5.4 murder victims per 100.000 population, mostly associated with the dramatic security situation in Iraq. Europe was the only continent where a general decrease, of 33 per cent overall, from 4.3 to 2.9 victims per 100.000 population, was reflected across all its subregions. Eastern Europe in particular recorded a drop in intentional homicide rates of 32 per cent, from 9.0 to 6.1 victims per 100.000 population, driven by a significant overall reduction of lethal violence in the Russian Federation and Ukraine[17] in the 2016–2020 period compared with previous years.

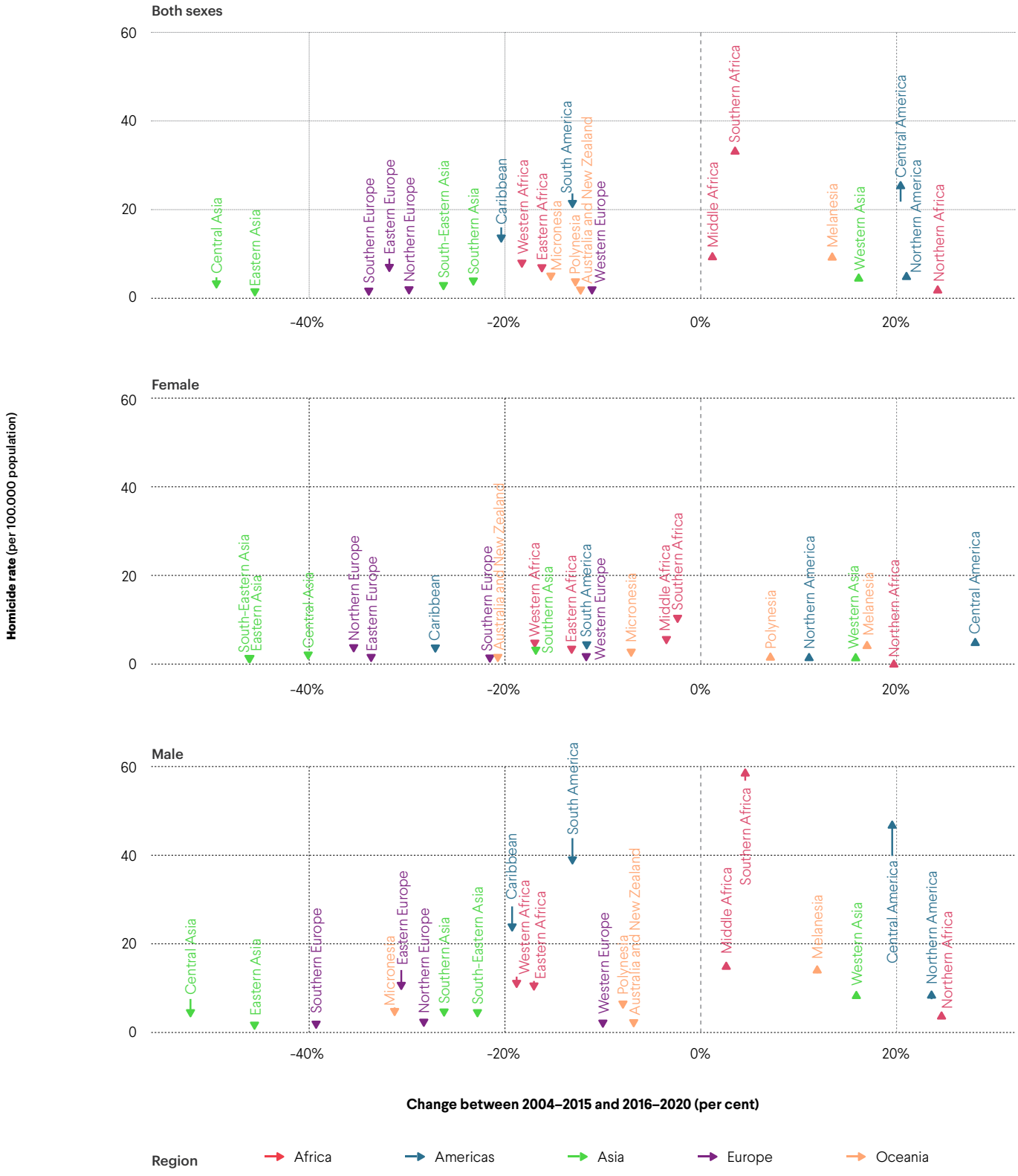
Increasing regional rates: Oceania witnessed an 8 per cent increase in intentional homicide rates between 2004–2015 and 2016–2020, from 3.2 to 3.4 victims per 100.000 population. This trend was driven by a rise of 14 per cent in Melanesia (from 8.9 to 10.1 victims per 100.000 population), which in turn can be linked to the volatility of the figures in one of the least populated regions of the world, where, due to small population sizes, even small changes in the annual number of murder victims could relatively heavily influence the standardized homicide rates.

Mixed regional trends: The remaining regions presented conflicting trends, notably in the Americas, which overall experienced a modest reduction of 1 per cent, from 16.1 to 15.9 victims per 100.000 population, in intentional homicide rates between the two periods. In this region the reductions recorded in South America (13 per cent) and the Caribbean (20 per cent) were contrasted by an overall increase in Northern (21 per cent) and Central America (20 per cent). While Africa witnessed an overall diminution of 9 per cent, from a rate of 8.5 to 7.7 victims per 100.000 population between the two periods, a 1 per cent increase was observed in Central Africa, and a 4 per cent increase was detected in Southern Africa, from 32.9 to a record of 34.0 intentional homicides per 100.000 population in the latter. These regional trends suggest that between the 2004–2015 and 2016–2020 periods the decrease in intentional homicides generally occurred in subregions where this issue was already relatively marginal. Except for South America and the Caribbean, however, the situation failed to improve significantly in the parts of the world where violence is more endemic.

Photo by lacie-slezak

Figure 5.4.

Intentional homicide rates (per 100.000 population) by sex and subregion, trends between the periods 2004–2015 (bases of the arrows) and 2016–2020 (points of the arrows)



Source: Small Arms Survey, Global Violent Deaths, [n.d.], <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/database/global-violent-deaths-gvd>.

Tackling male homicides without forgetting females

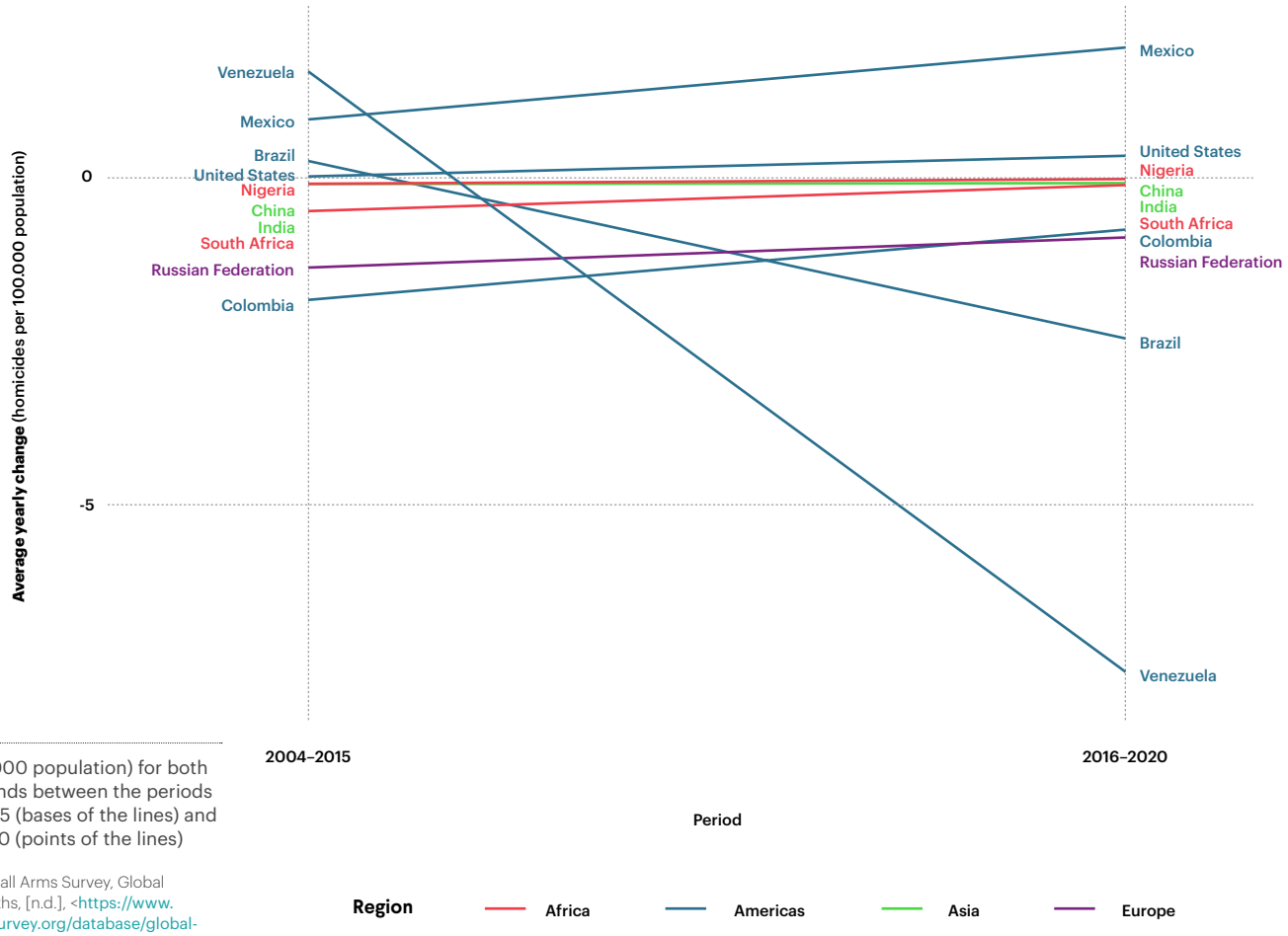
The regional and subregional assessment of disaggregated data generally confirms the trend observed for both sexes combined (Figure 5.4). Given that the overwhelming majority of homicides are committed against men and boys, sharp changes in homicide rates in this group often determine the overall homicide trends for the entire population. This is notably the case in Eastern Europe, where the aforementioned reduction in homicide rates was due to a spectacular 31 per cent drop among males, from 14.1 to 9.8 victims per 100.000 population, supported by a 35 per cent reduction among females, from 2.9 to 2.2 victims per 100.000 population. A similar trend could be observed in the Americas, with a decline of 13 per cent among males (from 43.9 to 38.1 victims per 100.000 population) and 12 per cent among females (from 4.0 to 3.5 victims per 100.000 population) in South America, and in the Caribbean, with a decrease of 19 per cent among males (from 28.4 to 23.0 victims per 100.000 population) and 37 per cent among females (from 3.8 to 2.8 victims per 100.000 population) between the two periods. Conversely, Central America's rising homicide rate was due to an increase of 20 per cent among males, from 39.8 to 47.6 victims per 100.000 population, and 28 per cent among females, from 4.5 to 5.7 victims per 100.000 population.

The only subregion where the trends in lethal violence against male and female victims did not coincide was Polynesia, where an overall decrease of 4 per cent was reflected only in the homicides committed against males, which decreased by 8 per cent, but not by the homicides committed against females, which increased by 7 per cent between the periods 2004–2015 and 2016–2020. However, the small total number—113—of homicides perpetrated against girls and women between 2004 and 2020 in this subregion underscores the volatility of the rates for the two periods.

Whether or not the objective of significantly reducing violent deaths by 2030 will be reached, the disproportionately higher homicide rates for males are tempting countries to address forms of homicide affecting men. For example, curbing organized-crime-related deaths may be achieved through negotiations or targeted law enforcement action, resulting in a large decrease in lethal violence such as the several instances of gang truces in El Salvador (e.g. Renteria 2020; Meléndez-Sánchez 2022).[18] On the other hand, over half of all female homicides committed globally in 2020 were perpetrated within families (UNODC 2021: 3), and the implementation of national policies tackling lethal violence in the public sphere may only partly reduce the burden of homicides in both sexes equally by potentially leaving women behind (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2022). Reducing lethal violence among women and girls requires broad and systematic strategies to combat gender-based violence and assist women and girls exposed to such violence with effective protection from their abusive contexts, families or partners.

Figure 5.5.

Average yearly changes in intentional homicide rates



(per 100.000 population) for both sexes, trends between the periods 2004–2015 (bases of the lines) and 2016–2020 (points of the lines)

Source: Small Arms Survey, Global Violent Deaths, [n.d.], <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/database/global-violent-deaths-gvd>.

Thinking globally and acting nationally to reduce lethal violence

There have been undisputable achievements in the global reduction of intentional homicide between the periods 2004–2015 and 2016–2020. How much of it is attributable to better policymaking due to the implementation of SDG-related policies and programmes is hard to determine. However, in the eight years left until the culmination of the 2030 Agenda, the trends observed in this chapter show that it is possible to reduce lethal violence, a phenomenon that has devastating effects on a country's institutions, economy and social cohesion. Figure 5.5 indicates the possible impact of national policies targeting homicides in the SDG era; it is unclear, however, whether the existing trends in the various countries where improvements have occurred are the result of SDG-related policies or programmes that might have been introduced after 2015. Any lines that points downwards signifies a positive trend co-occurring with the adoption of the SDG targets, meaning that from

2016 to 2020 the pace at which the homicide rate dropped increased, or the rate of growth was lower, compared with the period preceding the adoption of the SDG targets. In Brazil, for example, homicide rates were increasing before 2016, but then they began dropping, which is a clear improvement. On the other hand, several countries (e.g. Colombia and Russia) had a trend of homicide reduction already before the adoption of the SDG targets, and their current reduction rate is more modest than the previous trend. This means that, while they are contributing to the global reduction in homicides, their performance is a bit worse compared with the pre-SDG period.

During the period 2004–2020, 10 countries recorded a yearly average of above 10.000 intentional homicides, and altogether these countries recorded almost 4 million victims, or 60 per cent of the intentional homicides recorded globally over 17 years. These pivotal countries are located in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe and showed contrasting average yearly changes in intentional homicide rates between the periods 2004–2015 and 2016–2020 (Figure 5.5). During the first period, Brazil, Mexico, the United States and Venezuela witnessed an average yearly increase, with a maximum of 1.7 more homicides per 100.000 population per year in Venezuela. Between 2016 and 2020 the situation further deteriorated in the United States (average yearly increase of 0.4 homicides per 100.000 population) and Mexico (average yearly increase of 2.0 homicides per 100.000 population). As mentioned, the pre-2015 negative trend reverted in Brazil (average yearly decrease of 2.5 homicides per 100.000 population since 2016) and particularly so in Venezuela (average yearly decrease of 7.6 homicides per 100.000 population).[19] The remaining countries witnessed a steady trend towards a reduction in intentional homicide rates during the period 2004–2015 and continued this progression, but at a slower pace. The most striking example is Colombia, which registered a record average yearly reduction of 1.9 homicides per 100.000 population in 2004–2015, which decreased to a rate of 0.9 during 2016–2020. The strikingly different security situation of these countries underscores the need for overcoming one-size-fits-all policies to reduce the burden of intentional homicides in the next eight years.

Repressive policies are not the right approach

Perhaps surprisingly, some of the countries with the most spectacular reduction in homicides between the periods 2004–2015 and 2016–2020 are often labelled as using 'authoritarian methods' in combating crime. The Russian Federation and China, for example, witnessed important drops in both homicide counts and homicide rates, which may be at least partly attributed to increasingly repressive national policies (Radio Free Asia 2022) and the establishment of tight state surveillance systems (e.g. Giles 2019). While this approach seems to have been successful in the short term, it is arguably not a desirable long-term solution to curb this form of interpersonal violence at the expense of an increase in state-driven violence and oppression. Additionally, a lack of independent oversight in autocratic systems decreases the credibility of these statistics (e.g. Lysova and Shchitov 2015; Smith 2018).

Between 2004 and 2020 the world was struck by at least 41 major conflicts (Mc Evoy and Hideg 2017: 40–41), resulting in 1.7 million fatalities, including men, women and children.

A world with fewer but more deadly conflicts after 2015

Between 2004 and 2020 the world was struck by at least 41 major conflicts (Mc Evoy and Hideg 2017: 40–41), resulting in 1.7 million fatalities, including men, women and children. Despite a reduction in the number of conflicts, however, the number of related fatalities dramatically increased from an annual average of 75,000 during the period 2004–2015 to 152,000 between 2016 and 2020. Despite the aforementioned recent decline in annual fatalities, the average rate of global conflict-related deaths rose by 83 per cent, from 1.1 to 2.0 fatalities per 100.000 population, between these two periods. Amid the beginning of another conflict, in Ukraine, the call of the UN Secretary-General to find alternative solutions to fighting is more important than ever to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. This necessity is even more critical because, as stressed by the World Bank over 10 years ago, no low-income fragile or conflict-affected country achieved a single United Nations Millennium Development Goal (World Bank 2011).

From 2004 through 2020 the wars in Afghanistan, Yemen and Iraq—with the addition of Syria in 2011—recorded an overwhelming majority of the world's conflict-related fatalities. Combined, these four countries witnessed 1.2 million deaths, accounting for three quarters of the global conflict-related deaths during this period. These countries, located across Southern and Western Asia, recorded a significant increase in both average yearly fatalities and fatality rates:

- Afghanistan witnessed a 277 per cent increase in fatality rates, from 25.1 to 94.7 per 100.000 population, between the periods 2004–2015 and 2016–2020.
- In Syria the overall increase was 129 per cent, from 79.5 to 182.1 fatalities per 100.000 population, between the periods 2004–2015 and 2016–2020. However, when considering that the conflict started in 2011, the average for the first period was 192 fatalities per 100.000 population, which translates to a 5 per cent decline between the two periods.
- The recent worsening of the conflict in Yemen reflects an 891 per cent increase in fatality rates, from 8.2 to 81.0 fatalities per 100.000 population.
- The serious situation witnessed in Iraq during the period 2004–2015, with 48.1 conflict-related victims per 100.000 population, deteriorated by 9 per cent, to an average rate of 52.3 from 2016.

The death toll from long-term conflicts in Africa also appears to be worsening (an increase of 29 per cent, from 1.8 to 2.3 fatalities per 100.000 population), although not as significantly as in Asia (an increase of 109 per cent, from 1.3 to 2.7 fatalities per 100.000 population). Overall, the global increase in conflict deaths is likely to worsen given the recent escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, where the number of conflict-related fatalities recorded between 2004 and 2020, 9,735, is likely to have substantially increased in the six months between February and August 2022 (Interfax-Ukraine 2022).

Photo by joel-heard

Target 16.4 and illicit arms flows

Associated with violence and insecurity, illicit arms flows are also covered by SDG 16, under Target 16.4, which aims, inter alia, to significantly reduce these flows. The metrics proposed to measure progress towards this target are specified as the annual proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority, in line with international instruments (Indicator 16.4.2). This indicator assumes that the higher this rate goes the better the controls in place to curb the illicit flow of small arms in the country.

Measuring progress towards Indicator 16.4.2 has been very challenging because of its focus on tracing—that is, determining when weapons have become illicit—a process that is not quite established in many countries, requires resources that are not always available, and involves international cooperation—for example, to fulfil tracing requests (United Nations Statistics Division 2022; UNODC 2020: 45). Despite the development of tools to systematically collect data on Indicator 16.4.2, such as the UNODC's annual Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (IAFQ) and the revised template for the national reports to the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons,[20] significant data gaps persist, to an extent that renders the monitoring of progress very difficult. For example, the 2020 *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking* was able to present findings on Indicator 16.4.2 for only 14 countries using IAFQ results (UNODC 2020: 46–48). These findings include the fact that some countries, such as Azerbaijan and the Bahamas, which seized smaller quantities of firearms (on average 215 and 362, respectively, for 2016 and 2017), had very high proportions of traced firearms, which was assumed to be related to the lower burden for tracing efforts. Azerbaijan and the Bahamas initiated tracing for almost all the 215 and 362 firearms that they seized on average, in 2016 and 2017, while countries such as Argentina and Australia, which seized larger numbers (more than 20.000 firearms per year, in 2016 and 2017), had smaller proportions (less than 20 per cent).

Based on data from 20 countries, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the UNODC, the co-custodians of Indicator 16.4.2, found that about one third of seized weapons were successfully traced[21] between 2016 and 2020. About 60 per cent of the firearms were traced back to a national registry, while the remaining firearms were linked to a foreign one (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2022: 58). They also indicated that national authorities destroyed about half of the weapons seized, found or surrendered between 2018 and 2019. Both the UNODA and the UNODC support and call for more efforts on the part of states to monitor progress and implement instruments aimed at reducing illicit arms flows by providing training and other capacity-building opportunities.

The partial coverage of illicit arms flows measured by Indicator 16.4.2 and its lack of data underscore the need for complementary indicators to SDG 16.4. For example, the Small Arms Survey has developed several databases that support the monitoring of illicit arms flows, including the Transparency Barometer, which assesses the transparency of major small arms exporters through their authorized small arms export reports. On a scale up to 25 points, states scored on average 12.61 points in the 2021 Transparency Barometer, with Switzerland, the Netherlands and Germany being the most transparent exporters of small arms (Hainard and Shumska 2021). This edition highlighted again the low reporting rate (Hainard and Shumska 2021) of major exporters to the UN Register of Conventional Arms and the Arms Trade Treaty. Research has looked at other complementary indicators such as illicit market prices of arms and ammunition, homicides by firearms (Floriquin, Lipott and Wairagu 2019), as well as indicators related to diversion and stockpile management, such as the Small Arms Survey's database for unplanned explosions at munitions sites, which collects data on accidental explosions at ammunition depots.

Despite being halfway through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the monitoring of illicit arms flows is still incomplete and emerging, especially at the global level, making it difficult to identify global trends. However, existing indicators at the regional and national level can supplement this data gap. In this perspective, the Small Arms Survey and other organizations have been supporting regional (e.g. a firearms roadmaps) and national initiatives that include systematic data collection and case studies on arms trafficking–related matters, using surveys, court documents, ballistics databases, media reports, seizure data and expert interviews. This, however, cannot replace a global effort to reflect on the problem of illicit arms flows systematically, enabling the monitoring of the progress towards this important SDG target.

Almost all of the targets examined in this report are assessed as having made limited or no progress towards the relevant indicators, with the exception of intentional homicides and conflict-related deaths (Indicators 16.1.1 and 16.1.2), albeit the latter were assessed before figures from Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 could be taken into account.

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6

Nearly halfway: but where are we?

Toby Mendel, Centre for Law and Democracy

Countries
Global

Target(s)

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

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

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

16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

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

Introduction

The SDGs were adopted on 25 September 2015 at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, although they formally came into force only on 1 January 2016. They run until the end of 2030, which makes the end of June 2023 the exact midway point. As we approach the end of 2022, or seven full years of working on achieving the SDGs, close to the halfway point, it is very relevant to assess where we are in terms of achievement. This is complicated in part because of the vague standard for achievement which was set by the UN, namely 'substantial progress' (United Nations Statistics Division n.d.d: 4 ff). What constitutes 'substantial progress' is not clear, although for one of the three indicators under Goal 16 that the UN Statistics Division assessed in 2022, namely Indicator 16.a.1 (existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles), it uses 75 per cent to represent the number of countries required to merit a 'target met or almost met' rating (United Nations Statistics Division n.d.d: 48).

Almost all of the targets examined in this report are assessed as having made limited or no progress towards the relevant indicators, with the exception of intentional homicides and conflict-related deaths (Indicators 16.1.1 and 16.1.2), albeit the latter were assessed before figures from Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 could be taken into account. This is far from an outlying assessment. In September 2019, for example, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN Deputy Secretary-General made a public statement about how far behind the world was on achieving the SDGs, noting that, 'At the current rate of investment, it will be impossible to achieve the SDGs by 2030', and suggesting that the world was facing 'a $2.5 trillion annual SDG investment gap' (United Nations 2019).

As with many of the SDGs, COVID-19 has had a serious impact on both the achievement of and measurement of progress on the Goal 16 indicators.

This chapter looks in more detail at the failure to achieve Goal 16, with a particular focus on the targets that are reviewed in the rest of this report, namely Targets 16.1, 16.3, 16.4, 16.5, 16.6, 16.7 and 16.10. It starts with a review of some of the wider factors that impact the overall assessment here, such as particular challenges in setting achievement standards—that is, honing in on exactly what 'substantial progress' means for Goal 16—the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both progress and data collection and the sometimes very substantial achievement differences when the data are assessed in different ways, such as through a gender lens or in terms of different regions or countries facing particular challenges.

Background considerations

While the question of what constitutes 'substantial progress' can be challenging for many of the SDG indicators, it is particularly challenging for the 23 indicators responding to the 12 targets under Goal 16, given their strong focus on governance issues and consequent sensitivity to features such as the current political dispensation in each country. Of course, this is to some extent true for a lot of goals and targets. But while different governments might allocate more or less attention and resources to issues such as transportation, variation in terms of the more governance-related issues addressed in Goal 16 can be much greater. Compare, for example, Indicator 9.1.1 (proportion of the rural population who live within 2 km of an all-season road) and Target 16.7 ('ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels'), which is rather more sensitive to the government of the day.

This points to another complexity for many of the indicators under Goal 16. While progress on a large proportion of all SDG indicators is predominantly unidirectional (i.e. we mostly only record advances, although, of course, setbacks are always possible), this is far less the case for many of the Goal 16 indicators. For example, as Chapter 3 of this report shows, we are witnessing the fourth consecutive year of measured declines in the area of the rule of law globally. Chapter 4 also highlights either significant or modest declines in a number of areas, such as access to justice, rule of law, accountable institutions and participation. And Chapter 2 highlights that, while the number of countries with access-to-information laws has increased (this is essentially a unidirectional phenomenon, as countries almost never repeal these laws), the quality of those laws, while higher than following the serious decline registered between 2010 and 2015, was still far lower than the average for 2000–2005, let alone 2005–2010.

It is also the case that, even with reasonably determined efforts by government, progress on some Goal 16 indicators is challenging. Thus, there are no established pathways to ensuring progress in terms of addressing corruption, a particularly stubborn problem to root out, or even to reducing violence in society, although, of course, there are strong recommendations in each of these areas. As such, what is deemed to constitute 'substantial progress' may need to take this 'challenging' factor into account.

Not all of the indicators under Goal 16 are even numerical in nature, such as Indicator 16.10.2 (number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information). While the number of countries with laws can be counted, Target 16.10 makes it clear that these must be 'in accordance with. . .international agreements', which clearly goes beyond just counting laws,

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while implementation is again a very complex, essentially non-numerical metric.

Another important feature of the Goal 16 indicators is what might be described as the significant 'surrogacy' of many of them. Essentially by definition, indicators represent a surrogate means of assessing whether the primary target has been met. But the gap between the targets and the indicators varies considerably and is generally quite high for Goal 16. Consider, for example, Indicators 16.3.1 (proportion of victims of violence who report these crimes) and 16.3.2 (unsentenced detainees as a proportion of the prison population) as means to assess the rule of law and access to justice, or Indicator 16.10.1 (number of cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, trade unionists and human rights advocates) as a means to assess the protection of fundamental freedoms. As a result of this, the extent to which achievement of the indicators actually reflects progress on the targets and then the overall goal can be questioned. Because of this, many advocates have proposed extending the scope of the indicators under Goal 16.

As with many of the SDGs, COVID-19 has had a serious impact on both the achievement of and measurement of progress on the Goal 16 indicators. Unlike some of the claims made just above, it is not clear whether this has been more serious for Goal 16 than other goals. And it is possible that some Goal 16 indicators—perhaps such as intentional homicides, Indicator 16.1.1—might actually have benefited from the pandemic. However, the overall negative impact of the COVID-19 shutdowns on participatory decision making; effective, accountable institutions; the rule of law; and fundamental human rights and freedoms has been well documented (e.g. Mendel and Notess 2020).

As for all SDG indicators, good data are essential to measuring actual progress. Here again, at least some Goal 16 indicators face additional challenges

due to the recent vintage of efforts to collect data on them. For example, a leading report on achievement of the SDGs relied on just 11 data sources, about one half of which do not even respond to SDG 16 indicators (Sachs et al. 2022: Table A.5).[22] There is some evidence that states are also not collecting anywhere near comprehensive data on the Goal 16 indicators, and this is to some extent reflected in relatively weak reporting on these indicators in the Voluntary National Review reports (UNESCO 2022b).[23] While civil society efforts to collect data on Goal 16 indicators have been quite extensive, including as outlined in this report, important gaps still remain. Indeed, for some indicators, methodologies for collecting data are still developing or have only been finalized recently. For example, UNESCO is the custodian agency for Indicator 16.10.2 but only first developed and applied a methodology for this in 2019 and then amended its methodology considerably in both 2020 and 2021, with 2022 being the first year the same methodology was reapplied, leaving limited space for longitudinal comparison.[24]

As with many SDG indicators, those under Goal 16 are sensitive to a number of cross-cutting factors such as gender, overall level of country development and historical disadvantage of groups within a country. For example, Chapter 3 highlights regional variations in terms of the rule of law while noting that the justice gap is particularly high in the United States for individuals in low-income households. Chapter 4, looking at the rule of law, corruption, accountable institutions and participation in decision making, consistently highlights regional differences in terms of achievement. Chapter 5, looking at intentional homicides and conflict-related deaths, notes that, while these have declined significantly since 2015, there are considerable regional and country differences. While homicides perpetrated against females represented only 24 per cent of all homicides, over one half of those in 2020 were perpetrated within the family. Conflict-related deaths dropped dramatically between 2015 and 2020, although for countries like Afghanistan and Syria, which made an important contribution to this decline, the mitigation or resolution of the conflict can hardly be equated with wider progress on achieving the SDGs. In a closely related development, killings of journalists have also dropped significantly since 2015, but the proportion killed outside of conflict contexts has actually increased. Furthermore, gender-based violence and harassment against female and non-gender-conforming journalists, particularly online, has increased dramatically (albeit this is not captured by Indicator 16.10.1). Given that a core goal of the SDGs is to 'leave no one behind', described by the UN as 'the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals' (United Nations Sustainable Development Group n.d.), these variations within the overall figures are clearly a matter of concern.

A final background consideration is the powerful linkages between progress on Goal 16 and the overall achievement of the SDGs. This is the subject of Chapter 1 of this report, and some of the other chapters also stress this in relation to the specific indicator(s) they look at, but it bears highlighting again here. There is an enormous body of literature about the powerful development drivers that are engaged through having effective, participatory and accountable institutions, an absence of corruption, strong rule-of-law systems and respect for fundamental human rights. To quote just one leading statement on this, by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 59(I), adopted in its very first year of operation, in 1946:

Freedom of information is a fundamental human right and the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated.
(United Nations General Assembly 1946)

As such, a failure to achieve 'substantial progress' on the Goal 16 indicators bodes poorly for the achievement of the rest of the SDG agenda.

Overview of actual progress

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, with the exception of intentional homicides and conflict-related deaths (Indicators 16.1.1 and 16.1.2), the different chapters of this report suggest that progress on each of the various indicators assessed has either been limited or non-existent. It is not the aim of this chapter to repeat information provided in the other chapters, but giving a brief overview of reported progress on each indicator can help impart a more concise sense of overall progress on Goal 16.

Chapter 2 (Chapter 1 looks at interlinkages rather than a specific indicator or set of indicators) focuses on Target 16.10, with its two indicators: 16.10.1, on the number of cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, trade unionists and human rights advocates (the focus here is on journalists only), and 16.10.2, on the adoption and implementation of guarantees for public access to information. The number of journalists killed has been broadly declining since 2015, with UNESCO reporting 116 killings in 2015, 62 in 2020 and 55 in 2021 (UNESCO n.d.), while the leading civil society data on this issue, from the Committee to Protect Journalists, reported 100 killings in 2015, 50 in 2020 and 45 in 2021 (CPJ n.d.b). However, both organizations report significant increases in the area of imprisonment of journalists. The CPJ data, for example, show 198 journalists in jail as of 31 December 2015, as compared with 284 in 2020 and 294 in 2021 (CPJ n.d.c).[25] This might be described as a one-step-forward-two-steps-back situation.

The number of journalists killed has been broadly declining since 2015, with UNESCO reporting 116 killings in 2015, 62 in 2020 and 55 in 2021 (UNESCO n.d.), while the leading civil society data on this issue, from the Committee to Protect Journalists, reported 100 killings in 2015, 50 in 2020 and 45 in 2021 (CPJ n.d.b).

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The overall picture from these results is clear, with the vast majority of countries never falling below 75 per cent for all of these metrics, not experiencing any significant change and all but one of the metrics seeing more countries decline than improve.

As for Indicator 16.10.2, as at the time of writing, 26 of the 96 UN member states which did not have access-to-information laws in place as of September 2015 had adopted such laws, representing a 27 per cent reduction in countries without laws. Given that this puts the world on track to achieve an approximately 54 per cent drop in such countries by 2030, and that adopting a law is by far the easier part of the two elements of this indicator (the other being implementation of those laws), this can be described as only a modest achievement. This conclusion is further bolstered by the relatively weak strength of the laws adopted between 2015 and 2020, as compared with 2000–2005 and 2005–2010 (but not 2010–2015, when the average quality of laws declined significantly). Reliable comparative data on implementation are, unfortunately, still lacking at this point. However, anecdotal evidence points to even weaker performance in this area.

Chapter 3 looks at the two indicators under Target 16.3, or the rule of law, namely the proportion of victims of violence who reported their victimization (Indicator 16.3.1) and unsentenced detainees as a proportion of the overall prison population (Indicator 16.3.2). Here, again, assessing progress is complicated. In terms of reporting violent crimes, for example, there are significant differences between different types of such crimes, with Chapter 3 looking at robberies, physical assaults and sexual assaults. Furthermore, in many cases countries logging progress still remain at very low rates of achievement. In Iceland, for example, reporting of sexual assault went from 3.3 per cent in 2015 to 7 per cent in 2020. While this does represent progress, this rate remains lamentably low. While the United States logged a better, albeit still low, rate, it increased only nominally, from 32.5 per cent in 2015 to 33.9 per cent in 2019. Significantly, increases in reporting rates were largely matched by declines across the three types of violent crimes, suggesting a lack of overall progress. At the same time, this chapter highlights a serious problem with the lack of data on this issue, noting that, even just for at least one year between 2000 and 2020, only 49 countries had data on robbery reporting rates; 37 countries, on physical assault; and a mere 26 countries, on sexual violence.

When it comes to unsentenced detainees, the world has actually gone backward since 2015, with the proportion increasing by nearly 1 per cent. Although significant progress was made in this area between 2000 and 2010, the backsliding over the following two decades has more than erased those gains, such that the rate today is higher than in 2000. On Target 16.3, then, it is hard to see even one step forward, while backsliding is clear.

Chapter 4 is more wide-ranging in the targets and indicators it covers, looking at four different targets, namely Targets 16.3 (rule of law and access to justice), 16.5 (corruption), 16.6 (accountable and transparent institutions) and 16.7 (responsive and participatory decision making). In addition, rather than relying on the Goal 16 indicators, this chapter relies on measurements in International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Indices (International IDEA n.d.).

For Target 16.3, Chapter 4 separates out two concepts, access to justice and predictable enforcement. For the first, the large majority of all countries—129 out of 173, or 75 per cent—have experienced no significant change since 2015, while more countries declined (24) than advanced (20). For the second, an even larger majority—140, or 81 per cent—experienced no significant change, while 21 declined and only 12 improved. As such, the fairest assessment is that there has basically been no overall change on these metrics.

The picture is not much different for corruption, where 130 countries experienced no significant change, 17 declined and 26 improved. While this is the only metric in this chapter where

more countries improved than declined, the numbers are small (with nine more improving, or about 5 per cent of the total number of countries), especially when compared with the large mass of essentially frozen countries. Interestingly, 7 of the 26 improving countries were in the low-income group, while the high-income group had mixed progress, suggesting that income is not a predictor of progress in this area.

For Target 16.6, on institutions, Chapter 4 uses a composite measurement of 'effective parliament'. This was the worst-scoring metric, with 130 countries experiencing no significant change, 31 declining and only 12 improving. A number of countries experienced very sharp declines in this area since 2015, representing serious interruptions in democratic processes, such as coups d'état.

Finally, for Target 16.7, on participation, Chapter 4 again replies on two metrics, namely civil society participation and representative government. Perhaps surprisingly, given numerous reports suggesting that attacks on civic freedoms are increasing sharply around the world, this metric had the highest number from among all of the metrics analysed of countries not experiencing significant change, namely 163, or 94 per cent, with 6 declining and 4 improving. The 'no significant change' group for representative government was also very high, at 154, or 89 per cent, with 15 declining and 4 improving.

The overall picture from these results is clear, with the vast majority of countries never falling below 75 per cent for all of these metrics, not experiencing any significant change and all but one of the metrics seeing more countries decline than improve. Needless to say, this is a far cry from the 'substantial progress' that the SDGs are seeking to achieve.

Chapter 5 looks at violent deaths—from intentional homicides and armed conflict, respectively—the one area where significant improvements appear to have been made. The chapter starts out by noting that violent deaths represent only a tiny portion of all experiences of violence, albeit with the most extreme consequences. Between 2016 and 2020 the rate of intentional homicides per capita globally dropped by 16 per cent. While this is undoubtedly an important achievement, it remains unclear what 'substantial progress' on Indicator 16.1.1 would be. The chapter notes that some optimistic estimates of what was achievable were calling for a 50 per cent reduction, which the current rate of 16 per cent at the halfway point is clearly not on track to deliver. Here, as for many indicators, there are significant regional differences, with all but 1 of the top 20 countries (in terms of high rates of homicides) being in Southern America, the Caribbean or sub-Saharan Africa.

Conflict-related deaths also declined very significantly between 2016, when they were at their peak, and 2020, indeed dropping by nearly one half, although this does not take into account Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which is ongoing and intense at the time of writing. The drop is due mainly to a significant decrease in the intensity of the four most deadly conflicts of the past decade, namely in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. However, and importantly, the chapter notes that, although the past four years witnessed a significant decline, the rate is still much higher today than it was in 2004, due to sharp increases from around 2010 to 2016. As such, longer-term progress on Indicator 16.1.2 may be questioned.

Conclusion

Assessing progress on the Goal 16 indicators is complicated for a number of reasons. While these issues are present for all SDG indicators, in most cases they have a more significant or deeper impact in relation to the Goal 16 indicators. It is often hard, for example, to determine what 'substantial progress' represents for these indicators, which, as the discussion above makes clear, can trend strongly backward as well as forward. It is also the case that at least some of the Goal 16 indicators are only weakly linked to the delivery of the targets they are supposed to reflect, such that tracking progress on those indicators provides only a very partial indication of the state of achievement of the primary targets.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant barriers for the whole world in terms of both achieving and measuring the achievement of the SDGs, including Goal 16. Data collection, absolutely central to any proper assessment of progress, remains challenging for a number of Goal 16 indicators even beyond the impact of the pandemic. This is also reflected in the relatively weak coverage of Goal 16 indicators in the VNR reports provided by different states, while the methodologies to assess progress on some indicators have been developed only very recently, thereby precluding longitudinal comparisons.

The data so far show that it is important to look beyond overall averages to underlying trends based on issues such as gender, overall level of country development and impact on disadvantaged groups. Given that a core principle of the SDGs is to leave no one behind, it is very important to be aware of and, where necessary, take measures to address such variations. For example, the data presented in this report highlight several concerning trends in relation to gender, such as the fact that one half of all intentional homicides involving females are perpetrated within the family and that online violence against female and non-gender-conforming journalists has grown on a massive scale.

Overall, progress on all of the seven targets assessed in this report is arguably very weak. For many, the non-official data relied upon show stagnation, backsliding or only very limited progress which cannot possibly be said to represent a halfway point towards substantial progress, which is where the world should be at this point. Even for the small number of countries where greater progress has been achieved, serious questions remain about how significant this is. For example, intentional homicides have dropped by 16 per cent since 2016, but it is not clear that that qualifies as being on track for substantial progress by 2030. Conflict-related deaths have dropped significantly since 2016 but remain well above the prevailing rate in 2010. The number of countries which lack legal frameworks for the right to information has dropped by 27 per cent, but would a 54 per cent reduction by 2030 in this fairly simple achievement qualify as substantial progress? Also, the strength of these new laws as assessed against international standards, which is built into Indicator 16.10.2, remains weak.

There is only one possible conclusion from the extensive and high-quality non-official data presented in this report. The world is, overall, seriously failing to make sufficient progress on the Goal 16 indicators. Indeed, in many cases progress has been negligible or even negative. Given the centrality of the values represented in Goal 16 to achieving sustainable development outcomes in many other areas which are reflected in the SDGs, the failures on this goal suggest wider challenges for the overall SDG agenda. Countries around the world thus need to focus far more attention and resources on achieving Goal 16.

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Endnotes

1. This chapter is too brief to fully expound on what it means for data to be 'good', but good data tend to be disaggregated (by age, gender, ethnicity, disability, migratory status, etc.) and unbiased; they are both collected and shared in multiple languages; and they include vulnerable groups—rural, impoverished, lacking in education, etc.—that are often left out due to a lack of technology or other access.

2. Monitoring and reporting are essential for driving action. Resources such as the *SDG16+ Civil Society Toolkit* (TAP Network 2021: 89) go into further detail about the importance of good data in ensuring implementation and accountability, and they provide recommendations for civil society actors to engage with official data on SDG16+ and the SDGs more broadly.

3. This is formally in March 2023, the midway point between September 2015, when the SDGs were formally adopted, and September 2030, when they come to an end.

4. According to UNESCO, out of 136 countries which provided VNR reports from 2019 to 2021, only 74, or 54 per cent, reported on Indicator 16.10.2.

5. The CPJ's methodology differs from UNESCO's inasmuch as it distinguishes between motive-confirmed and motive-unconfirmed killings, which provides important additional insights into the background and context of the murders.

6. Just a couple of examples of this include the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom's Mapping Media Freedom, a crowd-sourced platform that enables anyone to upload an alert that relates to threats against journalists and media workers across Europe (https://www.mappingmediafreedom.org/), and the Digital Monitoring Database, by the BIRN Investigative Resource Base and the SHARE Foundation, which monitors digital threats and trends, raises awareness about violations of digital freedom and issues policy recommendations (https://monitoring.bird.tools/).

7. Those wishing to learn more about this can take the course launched recently by UNESCO and the CLD, UNESCO Massive Open Online Course: Access to Information Laws and Policies and their Implementation, signup available at <https://unesco-ati-mooc.thinkific.com/courses/unesco-massive-open-online-course-access-to-information-laws-and-policies-and-their-implementation>.

8. The home page for the RTI Rating is at <https://www.rti-rating.org>, while the Country Data page, showing the results of the assessment of laws, is at <https://www.rti-rating.org/country-data/>.

9. In other words, the data were not just skewed by one or two outliers.

10. The author is in possession of these data.

11. It now includes both the methodology and a scoring sheet for recording results, which can be found, respectively, at <https://foiadvocates.net/wp-content/uploads/SGD-16.10.2-measuring-implementation.18-09.rev_.docx> and <https://foiadvocates.net/wp-content/uploads/SGD-16.10.2-Data-Sheet.score_.rev-1.xlsx>.

12. The SDG Indicators Database includes aggregated data by country as well as sex-disaggregated data. The data utilized in this chapter are the overall aggregate figures and are not gender-disaggregated.

13. This assessment of data coverage is based on data that were accessed and downloaded on 19 July 2022.

14. For graphing purposes, the values are displayed as the natural log of consumption in tonnes, but the distinction in levels of change uses the untransformed values.

15. For an analysis of the interplay between homicide rates and the Sustainable Development Goals, see, for example, UNODC (2019) or Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development (2011: Chapter 5).

16. See, for example, Cambridge University's findings from a global violence reduction conference in 2014 (Krisch et. al 2015), assessing the possibilities of halving lethal violence over 30 years.

17. As often happens in the immediate aftermath of conflicts, homicide-related deaths increased remarkably in Ukraine during the 2016–2020 period (detection and recording of homicides improve and, as remnants of hostilities still result in higher-than-normal rates of lethal violence, homicide counts tend to increase). Despite this increase, however, the average homicide rate for 2016–2020 remained below the average level for the 2004–2015 period.

18. Such gang truces can be fragile, however, and can send the wrong message by creating de facto impunity for severe crimes.

19. Note that the sharp decrease in Venezuela's homicide rate may be to some extent artefactual, as the population size to which the number of homicides is compared may in reality be significantly lower than the population count in the UN Population Division World Population Prospects data that the computations use. This is due to the mass outward migration from Venezuela since 2014, resulting in true resident population counts potentially millions below the current estimates. See, for example, UNHCR (n.d.).

20. The full name is the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

21. This means that either the firearms seized from an illegitimate owner were found in a national or foreign registry, or the point of diversion was established in another way.

22. The study included a survey on property rights by the World Economic Forum which does not match any Goal 16 indicator.

23. UNESCO has reported that only 54 per cent of all countries which provided VNR reports between 2019 and 2021 reported on Indicator 16.10.2.

24. The 2021 methodology can be found in UNESCO (2021c).

25. The CPJ provides a snapshot of those in jail on 1 December each year rather than data about those imprisoned and then released during the year.

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