

UNICRI Input on the Thematic Review of the HLPF 2024

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

- As a United Nations system research and training institute focused on crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law, all of UNICRI's work contributes to the realisation of Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its contributions to the Sustainable Development Goal 16, as set out in its 2023-2026 Strategic Programme Framework focus on five priority areas, namely: Preventing and countering transnational security threats, terrorism, and points of nexus; Countering criminal enterprises, illicit financial flows, and corrupt practices; Promoting responsible use of new and emerging technologies to address crime and exploitation; Preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization; and Promoting rule of law and safeguarding access to justice. Amongst the areas UNICRI works on, several stand out as particularly pertinent for the realisation of SDG 16.
- Tackling *transnational organized crime* is paramount to achieving Goal 16, as it undermines the very fabric of peaceful and inclusive societies. Organized crime syndicates perpetuate violence, corruption, and injustice, impeding progress towards sustainable development. By combatting organized crime, Member States can ensure access to justice for all citizens, strengthen the rule of law, and foster accountable and inclusive institutions. This not only promotes safety and security but also creates an environment conducive to social, economic, and political advancement, ultimately laying the foundation for sustainable development and prosperity for all.
- Linked with this is *nexus between transnational organized crime and terrorism*, which pose a multifaceted threat to the realisation of Goal 16. Examples of this include activities such as the trafficking of cultural heritage, drug smuggling to finance extremist groups, and the exploitation of human trafficking routes by both criminal syndicates and terrorist organizations. In addition to funding terrorist activities, the nexus exacerbates conflicts, and undermine peacebuilding efforts and exploitation of marginalized communities fuels social tensions and weakens governance. Addressing this nexus requires enhanced international cooperation, stronger law enforcement, and addressing root causes such as poverty and inequality. Disrupting this relationship is crucial for promoting peace, inclusivity, and resilient institutions.
- The impact of *climate change* is recognized as one of the cross-cutting themes of UNICRI's Strategic Programme Framework. Climate change and related climate insecurity exacerbate vulnerabilities and socio-economic disparities, increasing the likelihood of criminal activity and conflict, thereby hindering the realization of Goal 16. Heightened competition over scarce resources such as water and arable land can lead to disputes, displacement, and violent crime. Environmental degradation disrupts livelihoods, exacerbates poverty, and fuels illicit activities like illegal logging, wildlife trafficking, and resource plundering. Moreover, climate-induced disasters weaken governance structures and law enforcement capabilities, creating fertile ground for organized crime to thrive. Addressing climate change and its associated insecurities is

therefore crucial for promoting peaceful, inclusive societies, ensuring access to justice, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels.

- A major focus for UNICRI in recent years has been the impact of *digitalization and the digital divide*. Increasing digitalization and a widening digital divide underscore the relevance of Goal 16, as they influence access to justice, inclusive institutions, and peaceful societies. While digital advancements offer opportunities for transparency, accountability, and efficient service delivery, unequal access to technology exacerbates disparities and marginalizes certain groups, hindering their participation in governance and justice systems. Moreover, the digital realm provides new avenues for cybercrime, online radicalization, and attacks on critical infrastructure, posing threats to security and stability. Bridging the digital divide and ensuring equitable access to digital tools and information is essential for fostering inclusive institutions, promoting transparency, and enhancing the rule of law, all integral aspects of Goal 16's vision for sustainable development.
- Effectively addressing each of these areas requires a data-driven and knowledge-based approach and collaboration between government, civil society, private sector, and international organizations. It necessitates comprehensive policies and strategies that prioritize education and capacity-building initiatives to empower individuals and communities, particularly those most vulnerable to exploitation and marginalization. Moreover, fostering innovation and promoting digital literacy programmes are vital to bridging the digital divide and leveraging technology for positive societal transformation. Additionally, robust cybersecurity measures, cross-border cooperation frameworks, and information sharing mechanisms are essential to mitigate the risks posed by cyber threats and digital crimes. By embracing a holistic approach that combines technology with inclusive policies and partnerships, the international community can effectively address these challenges and advance towards the realization of Goal 16 and its vision of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies for sustainable development.