



16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



PROMOTE JUST, PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

I. SUMMARY

SDG 16 highlights the need for peaceful societies, access to justice and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Its realization is essential for achieving all SDGs, for fulfilling the aim of leaving no one behind and enabling the protection and promotion of all human rights. In 2023, the Global Peace Index noted a slight improvement in peacefulness in the Asia-Pacific region—taken to include East, Southeast and North Asia and the Pacific countries (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023). Scores worsened for six countries in this region, driven chiefly by increased internal armed conflict, while 13 countries recorded improvements. Another revealed a nominal improvement in political and civil liberties in the Asia-Pacific region (Freedom House, 2023). Improvements likely stemmed from pro-democracy and pro-reform movements in some countries, relatively free and fair elections, and eased



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pandemic-related restrictions. However, severe restrictions on civic and political space and fundamental freedoms, including threats and attacks on media and human rights defenders, persisted in the region, alongside profound human rights and humanitarian crises (OHCHR, 2022). Transnational organized crime syndicates in Southeast Asia are expanding in scale and complexity, undermining the region's security and stability. Traditional threats like trafficking and corruption continue alongside emerging issues like trafficking in persons for forced criminality (UNODC, 2023b).

In 2023, a report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UNDP and OHCHR assessed global progress on SDG 16 indicators. Since 2015, one-third of the targets globally showed 'fair' progress, while one-quarter 'stagnated or regressed'. More than 40 per cent of the targets lack sufficient follow-up data. Notably, global data for all SDG 16 indicators became available in 2023, thanks to new initiatives and partnerships involving UN entities, national institutions and experts. Despite this, SDG 16 data remain limited in the Asia-Pacific region, with 58 countries and territories lacking data on six indicators.

The global progress report analysed available data to draw policymakers' attention to the most significant challenges facing people today:

- I. Rising violence and the changing nature of conflict**
- II. Increasingly hidden trafficking of persons**, including a rise in detected cases of child trafficking
- III. A significant gap in people's ability to access justice**
- IV. Corruption affecting individuals and businesses**
- V. Underrepresentation of women in senior decision-making roles**, highlighted by glass ceilings in public service and the judiciary
- VI. Increasing dangers and threats to the lives of human rights defenders and journalists**
- VII. Prevalent discrimination**, with one in six people globally having experienced discrimination on any grounds in the past year, and women being twice as likely as men to report sex- or marital status-based discrimination

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SDG 16 has 24 indicators, with 6 at Tier 1, 17 at Tier 2 and 1 having components under both. Eleven indicators are based on administrative data, while 13 are survey-based. Progress towards SDG 16 at the halfway mark to 2030 remains worryingly slow, with some areas regressing (Figure 1). Trust in institutions is waning as State systems grapple with citizens' expectations amid heightened uncertainty and complex, interrelated risks. Unconstitutional power transitions erode the rule of law and human rights, driving forced displacement and weakening governance systems (UNODC, UNDP and OHCHR, 2023).

SDG 16 can be a powerful vehicle for mainstreaming agreed principles of governance for sustainable development (Economic and Social Council 2018) in the implementation of the other SDGs, i.e., *effectiveness* (comprising *competence*, *sound policymaking* and *collaboration*); *accountability* (comprising *integrity*, *transparency* and independent *oversight*); and *inclusiveness*, which includes *leaving no one behind*, *non-discrimination*, *public participation*, *subsidiarity* and *intergenerational equity*.

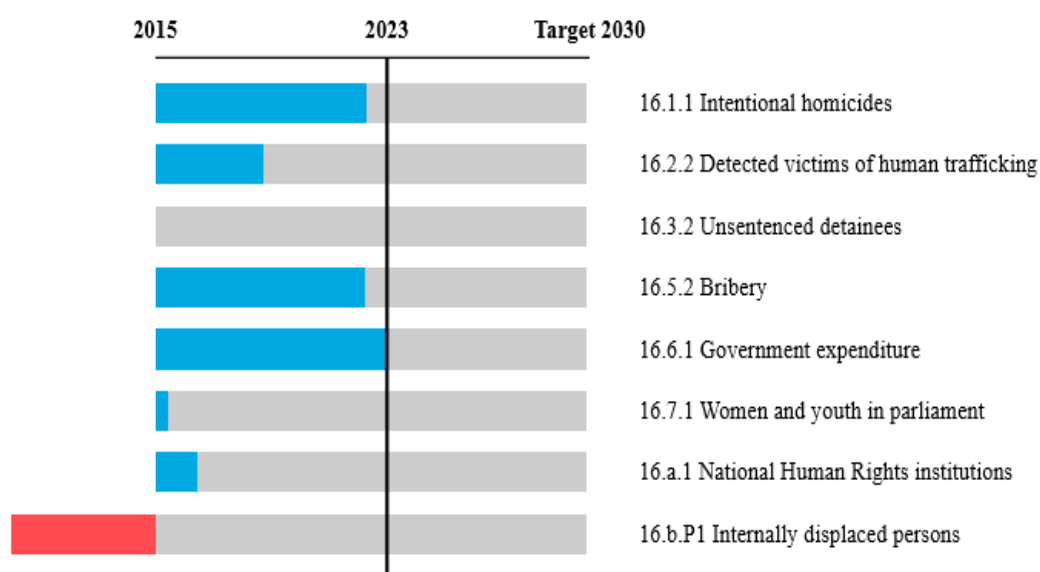


Figure 1 - Progress on Goal 16 indicators towards the 2030 targets

Source: ESCAP (2024).

A. AREAS WITH PROGRESS

Measurable progress towards SDG 16 is limited despite its acknowledged importance for achieving the entire 2030 Agenda and building inclusive, sustainable and resilient

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societies capable of navigating future challenges. Moreover, the progress is either partial or may not be the most significant or impactful.

SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND RELATED DEATH RATES EVERYWHERE (TARGET 16.1)

Under this Target, Asia-Pacific fares better than other regions on Indicator 16.1.1. The UN Crime Trends Survey (UNODC, 2021a) found that in 2021, global homicide rates reached the highest level since 2000, at 5.79 per 100,000 people, up from 5.51 in 2020. In comparison, the homicide rate for all of Asia stood at 2.33 per 100,000 people, an increase from 2.02 in 2020. Though the intentional homicide rate in Pacific countries decreased slightly from 2.95 per 100,000 population in 2020 to 2.90 in 2021, it remains higher than in Asia (UNODC, 2023a). Men remain more likely to be both victims and perpetrators of homicide. Female homicide rates in Asia-Pacific subregions are below the global rate of 2.24, except for in South Asia, where it stood at 2.43 in 2021. Despite this, the region records the largest number of all women killed by intimate partners or family members globally. Across Asia-Pacific, 11 to 64 per cent of women experience physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner (UNFPA, 2023a). Data limitations in conflict-affected countries impact intentional homicide rate data.

DEVELOP EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS (TARGET 16.6)

Effective, accountable and transparent governance institutions are vital for States to deliver better public services and build public trust. The first indicator explores the State's ability to implement budget expenditure without significant deviation, reflecting institutional effectiveness. Indicator 16.1.1 gauges the actual primary expenditure as a proportion of the original approved budget by sector/budget codes. Average deviations from approved budgets decreased from 5–10 per cent in 2015 to less than 5 per cent in 2019. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing intersecting crises, budget credibility deteriorated, reaching nearly 10 per cent deviation in some regions in 2020/2021 (UNODC, UNDP and OHCHR, 2023). In the Asia-Pacific region overall, this indicator remains on track (Figure 1).

National human rights institutions (NHRIs) play a catalytic role in implementing and monitoring SDG targets, serving as a recognized measure of State accountability to human rights obligations (Indicator 16.a.1). In the Asia-Pacific region, only 13 per cent

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of countries have NHRIs compliant with international standards, contrasting with the global average of 43 per cent. East and Southeast Asia, Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand), and Central Asia and South Asia fall below the global average. Since 2018, the number of countries in the region with NHRIs that are partially or fully compliant with the Paris Principles has stagnated, particularly in Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand), and is even at risk of being reversed in Central and South Asia. Thirty years after adopting the Paris Principles, 53 per cent of United Nations Member States in the Asia-Pacific region still lack independent NHRIs. The pace of progress needs to increase to ensure universal coverage of the NHRIs in the region.

B. AREAS REQUIRING ATTENTION AND ASSOCIATED KEY CHALLENGES

END ABUSE, EXPLOITATION, TRAFFICKING AND ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST AND TORTURE OF CHILDREN (TARGET 16.2); PROMOTE THE RULE OF LAW AT THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS AND ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL (TARGET 16.3)

Transnational organized crime increasingly undermines regional stability and the rule of law, with trafficking victims increasingly forced to commit online scams and financial fraud. This issue is particularly prevalent in the region's Special Economic Zones and Mekong countries with weak law enforcement (UNODC, 2023b). Women and girls trafficked for forced marriage, fishing, sex work, and domestic servitude face elevated risks of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation (UN Women/ODI, 2020). Access to justice and support services for migrant survivors of violence is limited, particularly due to their undocumented status in destination countries. The increase in trafficking, illicit drug use and consequent detentions are worsening prison overcrowding, with prison occupancy exceeding official capacity by 300 per cent in several Southeast Asian countries. In turn, this impacts human rights concerns due to inappropriate treatment, facilities, and prisoners' safety. Prison occupancy levels in Southeast Asia have exceeded 100 per cent in many places (World Prison Brief, 2023).

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SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE ILLICIT FINANCIAL AND ARMS FLOWS, STRENGTHEN THE RECOVERY AND RETURN OF STOLEN ASSETS AND COMBAT ALL FORMS OF ORGANIZED CRIME BY 2030 (TARGET 16.4)

Transnational organized crime is an evolving industry. In one Southeast Asian country, the burgeoning scam industry enabled through money-laundering and corruption, may generate between US\$7.5 and US\$12.5 billion annually, profiting organized crime syndicates and fuelling insecurity. The drug market continues to expand region-wide, fuelled by weak rule of law, corruption, conflict and poverty. Synthetic drug production and trafficking are diversifying, with a substantial methamphetamine trade and an expanding ketamine market. Methamphetamine seizures amounted to 151 tons in 2022 for East and Southeast Asia, returning to pre-COVID-19 levels (UNODC, 2023c). Escalating conflict in Myanmar is also affecting regional security and well-being. Opium poppy cultivation increased by 33 per cent between 2021 and 2022 (UNODC, 2023d), reversing a downward trend that started in 2014.

ENSURE RESPONSIVE, INCLUSIVE, PARTICIPATORY, AND REPRESENTATIVE DECISION-MAKING AT ALL LEVELS (TARGET 16.7)

Meaningful participation in the decision-making processes of women, young people, persons with disabilities and specific population groups, including Indigenous peoples, is critical to sustainable development and sustaining peace. The meaningful engagement of young people in governance processes and institutions boosts innovation, agility and representation of diverse interests. However, individuals under 45 are significantly underrepresented in parliament relative to their share of the national population, with Asia-Pacific performing below the global average (Figure 2) (UNODC, UNDP and OHCHR, 2023).

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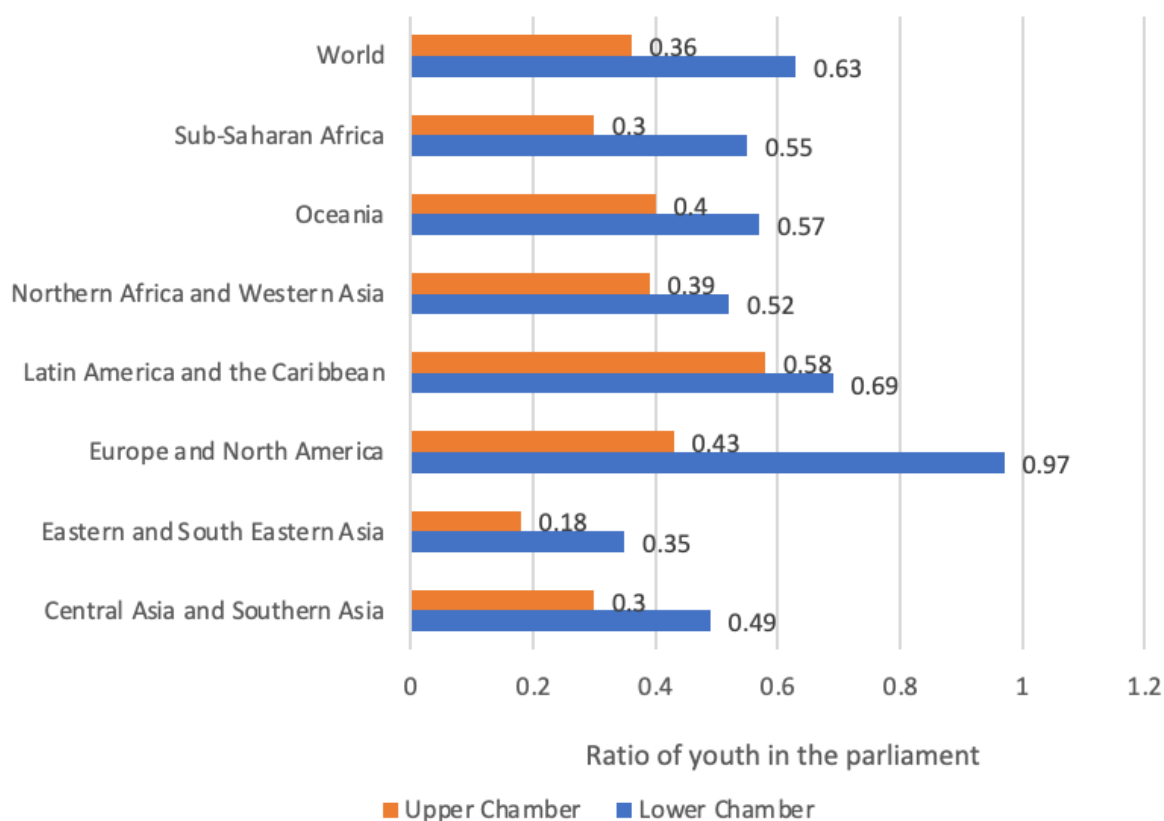


Figure 2 – Ratio of young Members of Parliament to the young national population by type of chamber and region

Source: Inter Parliamentary Union, in UNODC, UNDP and OHCHR (2023).

Note: Figures are correct as of 1 January 2023. Young people are defined as aged 45 or under, with the age of eligibility a lower-bound boundary. Indicator 16.7.1 is based on the ratio between the share of a specific population group in parliament (16.7.1.a), public service (16.7.1.b) and judiciary (16.7.1.c), and the share of the same group in the population. A value of 1 indicates parity, under 1 indicates underrepresentation and over 1 indicates overrepresentation).

PROTECT FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS (TARGET 16.10.1)

Civic and democratic space restrictions persist regionally, severely impacting civil society, human rights defenders, political activists and journalists. More broadly, restrictions impact the right to meaningful public participation, risking human rights, political stability, social cohesion and public health. While creating unprecedented commerce and communication opportunities, the proliferation of digital technologies also enables online harms such as hate speech and misinformation. State and non-State actors leverage digital technologies to target critics and competitors, undermining democratic governance and human rights (OHCHR, 2023a). The average number of human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists killed per day increased from 1 per day between 2015-2021 to 1.2 per day in 2022. Peasant leaders

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and land and environmental defenders accounted for over half of those killed or disappeared. Central and Southern Asia had the highest proportion of killings at 10 per cent due to armed conflict and the violent suppression of protests in some countries in the region (UNODC, UNDP and OHCHR, 2023).

Increased demand for natural resource extraction, combined with weak enforcement of environmental laws, including inadequate impact assessments, has led to environmental and human rights harm in the region. Asia-Pacific is seeing growing harassment, arbitrary arrests, detentions, threats and killings of the groups most affected by environmental harm, including Indigenous peoples, women and other vulnerable groups (UNEP, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires upholding the environmental rule of law and human rights obligations, removing barriers to justice; ending judicial harassment, such as strategic lawsuits against public participation; and ensuring meaningful participation of marginalized groups, including religious and ethnic minorities and Indigenous peoples, as per human rights law.

STRENGTHEN RELEVANT NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, FOR BUILDING CAPACITY AT ALL LEVELS, IN PARTICULAR IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AND COMBAT TERRORISM AND CRIME (TARGET 16.A)

Among the 53 Member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), only Fiji and Sri Lanka have ratified all nine core international human rights instruments (UN Treaty Collection, 2022). Sixteen States are party to eight, 15 to seven and 20 to 6 or fewer. The Central Asian subregion has the highest number of ratified instruments, while Southeast Asian countries have the lowest. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified (52 Member States), while the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families has the fewest ratifications in the region (10 countries), followed by the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (12 countries).

International human rights mechanisms offer valuable recommendations for States to fulfil their human rights obligations. These recommendations identify the implementation gap and guide States in realizing their political commitments under

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Goal 16 and all other goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's Indicator Framework (DIHR, 2023a).

Countries in the region show great variations in accepting individual complaint procedures under international human rights treaties. Nevertheless, these mechanisms offer a crucial avenue for citizens to give real meaning to their rights within national contexts.

NHRIs help ensure State accountability for human rights, integrating them into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and monitoring progress. In politically unstable countries, accountability and violence prevention require additional attention to continue supporting civilian populations and peace processes.

C. AVAILABILITY OF DATA

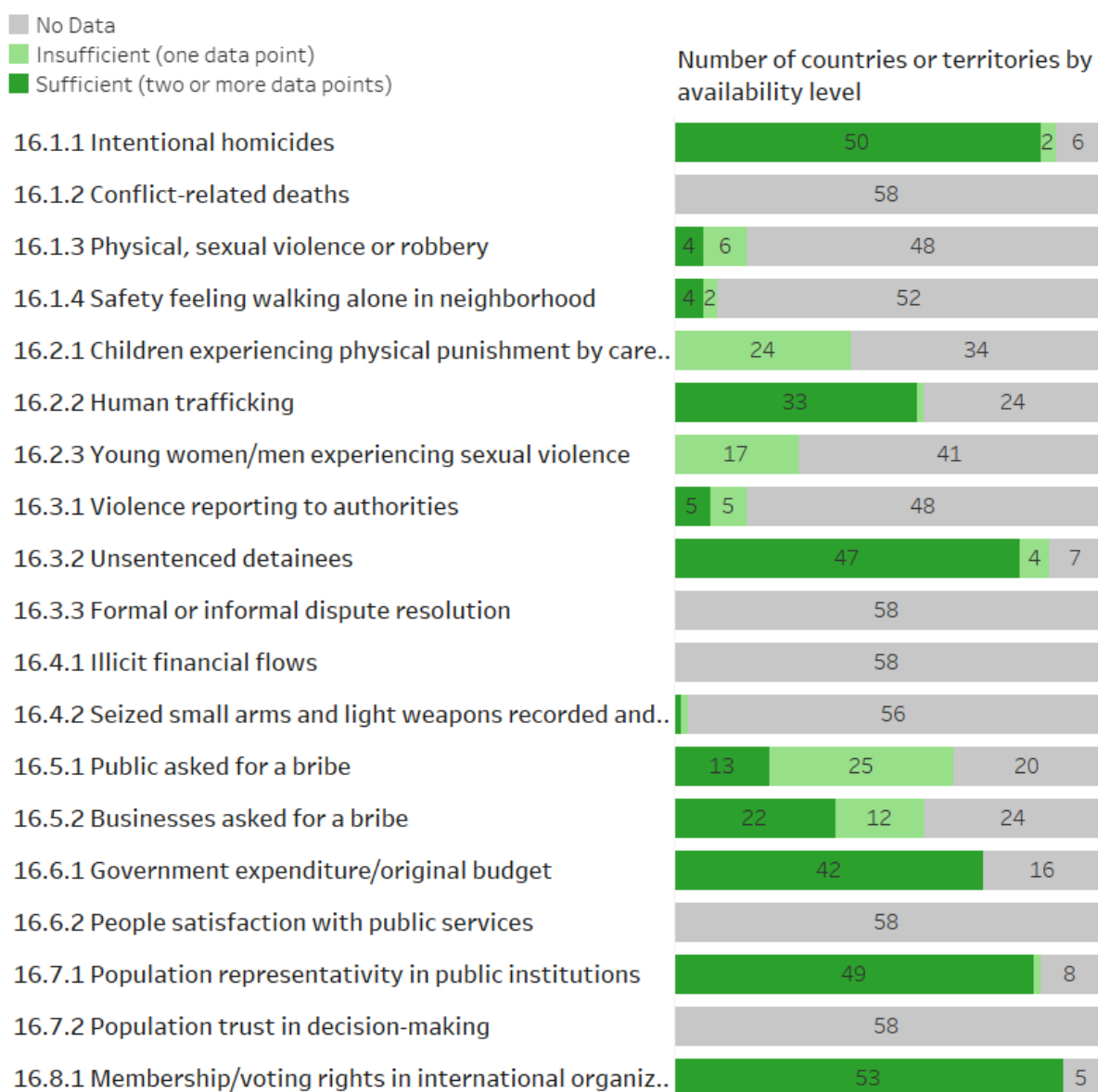
Since 2015, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNODC, United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and OHCHR have served as custodians of 18 of the 24 indicators under SDG 16. Collaborating with national institutions and experts, they have enhanced data quality by developing methodologies to produce globally comparable data on human rights, justice and governance.

In 2023, data became available on all SDG 16 indicators for the first time globally. However, for many, the country coverage continues to be limited (Figure 3). In Asia-Pacific in particular, 58 countries and territories still lack data on six indicators (16.1.2; 16.3.3; 16.4.1; 16.6.2; 16.7.2 and 16.10.1), 56 have no data on Indicator 16.4.2¹; 48 lack data on indicators 16.13 and 16.3.1, and 46 countries and territories have no data on Indicator 16.b.1 (UNODC, UNDP and OHCHR, 2023). Investment is needed to expand data availability, accuracy and disaggregation across different SDG 16 targets and indicators. Such data is critical for informing national policymaking and priority setting and increasing transparency and accountability to citizens. Target 16.1, 16.2,

¹ Global reporting mechanisms that can either support or complement the monitoring of the SDG 16.4.2 indicator include the [UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects](#) (PoA). The [United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific](#) (UNRCPD), is collaborating with Member States, particularly national focal points on the PoA, to support data collection and analysis with support from the European Union.

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and 16.10 indicators lack sufficient data, hindering accurate representation, especially in countries with ongoing political or conflict crises (UNODC, UNDP and OHCHR, 2023). Data on sexual violence against women, young girls and children is largely unavailable; exploring partnerships with UN agencies like UNFPA and UN Women for gender-related data is crucial. The region needs data partnerships for developing information on the enabling environment for human rights defenders and SDG Target 16.10.



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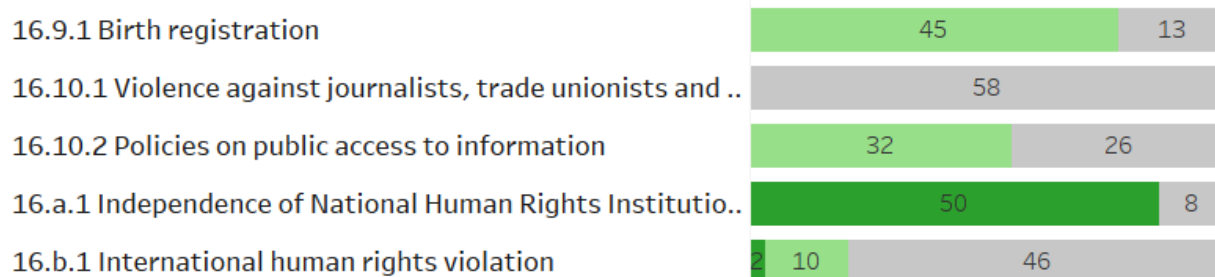


Figure 3 - Data availability for Goal 16 indicators

Source: ESCAP (2023).

III. HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

Incorporating SDG 16 into the 2030 Agenda acknowledges the deep interlinkage of peace, justice, inclusion and development, which is essential for establishing conditions to attain other SDGs. Like the entire 2030 Agenda, SDG 16 is underpinned by a broad range of legally binding human rights obligations (DIHR, 2023b). For example, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (OHCHR, 1966) links to 10 targets under Goal 16 (16.1, 16.2, 16.3, 16.6, 16.7, 16.8, 16.9, 16.a, and 16.b). When States adopt laws or other measures to implement the ICCPR (see Art. 2.2 of ICCPR), they directly contribute to realizing SDG targets 16.6, 16.a and SDG 16.b. When States prevent torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (e.g., Art. 7 of ICCPR and the Committee Against Torture²), this directly contributes to the realization of SDG targets 16.1, 16.2 and 16.10. States can speed up their progress on SDG 16 by following up on their existing human rights obligations, including by implementing recommendations from NHRIs and international human rights mechanisms linked to the specific SDG 16 targets (DIHR, 2023b).

Research indicates that prioritizing accountability, participation and transparency positively impacts social protection, equal opportunities and poverty. When investing in these principles, policymakers enhance the effectiveness of interventions in social protection, poverty reduction, and inequality (UNDP OGC, 2021).

Despite progress, challenges continue to negatively impact women's meaningful participation in public life. Increased violence in politics, including harassment, intimidation, sexual and physical violence, online abuse and gender-biased scrutiny, hinders women's engagement. Targeted attacks on female voters and politicians result in exclusion from voting, forced resignations, and, in extreme cases, assassinations of women politicians (UNDP and UN Women, 2017). The 2023 UNDP Gender Social Norms Index reveals that globally, nearly 50 per cent of people believe men make better political leaders than women (UNDP, 2023a).

² The Committee Against Torture monitors implementation of the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

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The Women, Peace and Security Agenda contributes to SDG 16's aspirations of inclusive, peaceful and just societies by ensuring women peacebuilders are engaged in all processes and that the needs of women, girls and diverse communities are represented. Twelve countries³ within the Asia-Pacific region have committed to the principles of enhancing peaceful and just communities outlined in the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and developed National Action Plans (UN Women, 2023). In 2022, ASEAN developed a Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (ASEAN, 2022). Yet progress in women's involvement in peace processes (per Target 16.7 on responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels) remains slow.

Conflict-related gender crimes are worsening, with a rise in sexual violence by armed actors against women, girls and those with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in conflict-affected areas in Afghanistan and Myanmar (UN Security Council, 2022). The lack of detailed gender and age data for indicators 16.1.3 and 16.2.3 inhibits data clarity. In both contexts, women and girls face significant obstacles in accessing livelihoods, education opportunities and timely and quality health care. Under SDG 16.10.1, journalists, activists and civil society, particularly those centred on youth, LGBTQIA+ persons and women, face arbitrary arrest, detention or forced suspension of services, hindering access to support services or involvement in peace processes. Children and youth are also targeted, with the UN verifying 1,226 grave violations against 939 children in Myanmar and 1,797 against 970 children in Afghanistan (UN Security Council, 2023).⁴

There are 2.6 million stateless persons in the Asia-Pacific region (UNHCR, 2023). Stateless persons are often among the most marginalized and impoverished members of any society. Not being recognized as a national often results in being excluded from a wide range of rights considered in principle to be universal. These include freedom from arbitrary detention, the right to vote and access to education and health care. Non-nationals are often also denied access to the country's benefits

³ Namely, Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Solomon Islands, Republic of Korea, Timor-Leste, and the former government of Afghanistan before August 2021.

⁴ The six grave violations against children: killing and maiming of children; recruitment or use as child-soldiers; sexual violence against children; child abduction; attacks against schools or hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access for children. For more information, on the Six Grave Violations please see <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/>

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and opportunities to contribute to its social and economic development while living there. Fulfilling the right to a nationality for all is key to fulfilling development goals, including eradicating poverty. Stateless people are among those most likely to be left behind in any development process; achieving the SDGs requires addressing statelessness.

IV. PROMISING INNOVATIONS AND PRACTICES

UNDP, UNODC, and OHCHR launched the SDG 16 Survey Initiative, endorsed at the United Nations Statistical Commission's fifty-third session (2022). This cost-effective tool collects data on SDG 16 indicators with a questionnaire and manual covering governance, access to justice, discrimination, corruption, violence, and trafficking in persons (UNODC, UNDP and OHCHR, 2022a, 2022b). Successfully piloted in nine countries, the survey is ready for full implementation across Asia-Pacific.

OHCHR has supported partnerships between national statistical offices and NHRIs to improve data availability on SDG 16.10.1, 16.1.2, and 16.b.1/10.3.1. The Philippines Human Rights Commission is collaborating with its statistical counterparts in identifying groups left behind and collecting data on violence against human rights defenders, as well as on conflict-related deaths (UNDP, 2023a).

The Asia Pacific Forum and the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), in collaboration with OHCHR, are supporting NHRIs in collecting data on SDG 16.10 through a human rights monitoring tool (DIHR, 2023c).

United Nations agencies organized online regional trainings for State institutions working on crime, justice, governance, human rights, non-discrimination and equality in Asia (2021) and the Pacific (2023) on measuring SDG 16 progress. The participants included personnel from statistical offices, police, public prosecution agencies, courts, prisons, ministries of interior and justice, NHRIs, academic institutions and CSOs.

In April 2023, the UN Statistics Division launched the Collaborative on Citizen Data, a platform for collaboration and exchange of practices in the work with non-traditional data sources, including citizen-generated data. The collaborative is developing a conceptual framework for using citizen data to support the generation and use of data produced by non-official sources such as civil society and NHRIs (UNDESA, 2023).

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PROMOTE THE RULE OF LAW AT THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS AND ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL (TARGET 16.3)

Equal access to justice is both a right and an essential tool to achieving all SDGs, particularly SDG5 (gender equality), SDG10 (reduced inequalities) and other SDGs related to equal access to resources (water, energy) and public services (health, education). Access to justice protects human rights, combats inequalities and strengthens governance. Effective justice systems foster confidence in public administration and State legitimacy, contributing to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. UNDP, UNODC and OECD, with civil society, led efforts to introduce a *'people-centred' indicator on access to justice'* (SDG 16.3.3) in the global SDG Indicator Framework in 2020. Now part of the SDG 16 Survey, countries are urged to use this survey tool and regularly report on this indicator.

Judicial integrity and court excellence, aligned with targets 16.3 and 16.6, ensure equal access to transparent and effective justice. A robust, independent judiciary fosters sustainable growth, alleviating poverty and fostering fair, just and peaceful societies. In 2018, with UNDP support, a network of judges was established in ASEAN and beyond. It aims to facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges on good practices and cross-country collaboration to address shared and specific challenges. The Judicial Integrity Network in ASEAN (JIN ASEAN) supports countries in judicial reforms, emphasizing transparency, accountability, integrity, accessibility and court excellence (UNDP, 2023b). In 2019, the Supreme Court of Indonesia and UNDP hosted a second network meeting, debuting the Judicial Integrity Self-assessment Checklist. Developed by UNDP in consultation with the International Consortium for Court Excellence, the checklist helps courts identify measures for improving judicial integrity (UNDP, 2020). In 2021–2023, JIN ASEAN supported country-specific initiatives in Indonesia, Thailand, Lao PDR and Vietnam, organized online and in-person judicial events, and published three research products (UNDP, 2023c, 2023d, 2023e).

In 2021, the Thai Department of Corrections introduced the country's New Narcotics Code, representing a promising step towards improved classification and distinction of drug offenders and users needing health services (Thailand Ministry of Justice, 2021). The law introduces diversion programmes and treatment options for individuals with drug-related issues, focusing on rehabilitation rather than punishment for drug users and possible sentence reduction for small-scale drug dealers. This shift

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reduces the burden on the criminal justice system and promotes compassionate, evidence-based ways to address drug addiction, fostering the reintegration of drug users into society. Furthermore, the initiative reduces prison overcrowding, given that up to 80 per cent of prisoners in Thailand were sentenced for drug-related offences (UNODC and TIJ, 2021).

Fostering regional cooperation is vital in tackling transnational organized crime given that these cross-border crimes are both national and international threats. ASEAN Member States and the People's Republic of China Regional Cooperation Roadmap to Address Transnational Organized Crime and Trafficking in Persons Associated with Casinos and Scam Operations in Southeast Asia, agreed in September 2023, represents a successful example of promotion of regional cooperation in tackling transnational organized crime in Southeast Asia (UNODC, 2023e). The cooperation roadmap consists of strategies to improve preventive responses, identify and protect victims, and strengthen law enforcement and criminal justice officers' capacity to tackle human trafficking and other transnational crimes associated with scam compounds and casinos around Southeast Asia.

Another example of successful regional cooperation is the continued implementation of ASEAN Border Management Cooperation Roadmap among ASEAN Member States, facilitated by UNODC. It aims to strengthen border management through capacity-building for law enforcement and improved cross-border cooperation to address illicit trafficking and transnational organized crime (UNODC, 2021b).

Young people drive innovation in governance and service delivery and are instrumental to the progress of SDG 16

[AI4Gov](#) is a Philippines-based startup that focuses on improving access to information,

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public participation and local services using artificial intelligence. Part of '[Youth Co:Lab](#),' a UNDP and Citi Foundation initiative, AI4GOV developed the KIRA chatbot. KIRA was deployed by the Philippines' Department of Health in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, providing citizens with much-needed guidance on regulations. KIRA is one of several products developed by AI4GOV to improve public services and promote citizen participation through automation, data science and community organizing. The startup employs a team of 12 young leaders in computer science, statistics and social development.

"In AI4GOV, we believe the future is in building relationships, and this means building trust. We can build trust by making public services accessible right at your fingertips and shaped by the voices of the citizens themselves. So, if we want to accelerate the SDGs by 2030, we have to build a digital infrastructure that can help build trust between the government and its citizens." (Lei Motilla, co-funder of AI4Gov)

V. PRIORITY ACTIONS

Urgent attention is needed to address regression or stagnation on certain targets and accelerate SDG 16 delivery, given its role as an enabler for other SDGs. Consider the following priority actions:

PRIORITY 1: STRENGTHEN NATIONAL AND SUBNATIONAL CAPACITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS (TARGETS 16.6 AND 16.7)

Efforts should increase the pace of establishing NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles. Delivery of the SDGs and the human rights obligations underpinning the targets must become a central focus for national planning, oversight mechanisms and domestic budgets. Women, youth, Indigenous peoples, minorities, people with diverse identities, civil society and human rights defenders should have improved access to information and be meaningfully engaged (Target 16.10). Major investments are needed to enhance public sector capacity and develop suitable digital infrastructure. Local and subnational governments should be supported in implementing the SDGs without discrimination at the ground level. An effective regulatory framework is needed to align private-sector governance models with SDG objectives based on respect for human rights. New efforts are required to maximize the data dividend and

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enhance monitoring, follow-up and review of goals. This includes strengthening civic space and public engagement in SDG-related policy and decision-making (UN Statistics Division, 2023).

PRIORITY 2: INTENSIFY EFFORTS ON DATA-COLLECTION AND LEVERAGE AVAILABLE TOOLS, RESOURCES AND THE COLLABORATION EXTENDED BY INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL SDG 16 MONITORING CAPACITIES

Specially developed tools can measure governance, corruption, crime, and access to justice and provide guidance on applying a human rights-based data approach (see SDG 16 Hub, 2023). Efforts should advance data collection (Target 16.1 and 16.2) on the perpetration of sexual and psychological violence, including against children and align efforts with international mechanisms and agendas on Women, Peace and Security, Youth Peace and Security and Children and Armed Conflict. Efforts can involve partnerships with UN agencies mandated to collect data on these indicators. Efforts to enhance data collection on transnational organized crime and its societal impact should increase (Target 16.3 and 16.4). Efforts should prioritize data collection on human trafficking, drug use and illicit financial flows, emphasizing impacts on victims and health. Data is crucial for shaping policies and supporting victims in the evolving criminal landscape. Collaboration to validate data on the enabling environment for human rights defenders (Target 16.10), leveraging the UNSD-led Collaborative on Citizen Data, is crucial. The collection, analysis and reporting of national disaggregated data on the number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture, and other harmful acts against human rights defenders must be strengthened in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 16.10.1 (OHCHR, 2023b). Efforts should also prioritize data collection on people's satisfaction with public services (Target 16.6) and measuring the population's trust in decision-making (Target 16.7), for example by implementing the SDG16 Survey.

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PRIORITY 3: ADDRESS CORRUPTION AS A CATALYST FOR AND ENABLER OF ORGANIZED CRIME AND AS AN INHIBITOR OF PUBLIC TRUST IN GOVERNANCE, BY FOSTERING REGIONAL COOPERATION AND STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY.

Efforts should utilize legally binding tools such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), to which Member States in the region are parties. Corruption undermines the SDGs' achievement by depleting valuable resources and degrading the quality of public services. Combating corruption is a service delivery and development finance concern impacting people's trust in State institutions. Addressing corruption as an enabler of other crimes aligns with the below priorities, notably contributing to reducing illicit activities and their impact in the region (Target 16.4 and 16.5).

PRIORITY 4: PROMOTE SURVIVOR-CENTRED AND EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING AND FOR PEOPLE WHO USE ILLICIT DRUGS (TARGET 16.3)

Survivor-centred approaches should be used, particularly for survivors of sexual, psychological and physical violence, including children (Target 16.1 and 16.2). This includes promoting access to survivor-centred, timely and quality services and justice mechanisms. Promoting survivor-centred and evidence-based policies is crucial for ensuring access to services and protection. Transnational organized crime, emerging crimes and traditional challenges like drug production and trafficking disproportionately impact marginalized individuals, heightening the urgency for a call to action.

PRIORITY 5: ADVANCE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE PRISON OVERCROWDING THROUGH DRUG-POLICY REFORMS.

It is crucial to advance reforms to reduce prison congestion in the region, including revising sentencing thresholds and promoting alternatives for certain drug possession and use sentences. These initiatives will support the progress of Target 16.3 through promoting human rights in Southeast Asia.

V. PRIORITY ACTIONS

PRIORITY 6: CENTRE YOUNG PEOPLE IN SDG 16 IMPLEMENTATION.

Young women, men and gender-diverse persons need enabling environments that are peaceful, just and inclusive for them to exercise agency, positively influence their societies and own their lives. Yet, young people are often affected by violent conflict, do not have a place at the decision-making table or feel that their voice is unheard. There is a need to increase the political representation of young people and institutionalize their meaningful engagement in policymaking and overall governance processes. Leveraging young people's innovative ideas and future orientation can make governance more anticipatory and agile. Meaningful youth engagement is indispensable for achieving peace, justice and inclusion in any country.

PRIORITY 7: ADVANCE THE RULE OF LAW

Advancing the rule of law includes environmental rule of law and recognition and integration of environmental rights, e.g., the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment (UNEP, 2022), access to information, justice and public participation. Concerted efforts are needed to uphold freedoms of association, assembly, opinion and expression, the right to participate in public affairs, protection from abuse by authorities, and access to justice. These rights collectively form the foundation for an enabling environment for human rights defenders. The passing and enforcement of laws that specifically protect human rights defenders is crucial (A/HRC/46/35). This aligns with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and recognizes the important contribution of the promotion and protection of the safety of human rights defenders in the realization of the SDGs, including target 16.10. (OHCHR, 2023b) Systematic monitoring of progress in line with human rights norms and standards at the national and regional levels is therefore essential.

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