

# Peace, justice and strong institutions

## EU support for implementing SDG 16 worldwide

### SUMMARY

The 16th sustainable development goal (SDG 16) 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' represents a new milestone compared with the earlier millennium development goals. While several of its targets (such as peace, corruption-free institutions and freedom from violence) were once seen as prerequisites of sustainable development, the adoption of SDG 16 marked the first time that they were globally recognised as development objectives in themselves. To achieve universal recognition, SDG 16 leaves out explicit reference to internationally recognised political and civil rights norms, attracting some criticism. Its very general scope has also stirred controversy regarding the type of data required in order to assess progress rigorously.

The state of play with regard to the implementation of SDG 16 indicates that substantial progress is still needed in order to achieve the SDG targets by 2030. Violent conflicts continue to affect many parts of the world, societal violence remains widespread in many countries and violence against children in particular remains a pervasive phenomenon, especially in developing countries. At the same time, fundamental freedoms have come under increased attack from regimes that disrespect human rights and undermine international and national norms in this area.

The EU has committed to contributing to the achievement of all the SDGs, and the specific targets of SDG 16 have been given special recognition. From the Global Strategy to the 'new consensus on development', various policy documents acknowledge the crucial role of peace, democracy, human rights and the rule of law for sustainable development. The interconnection between the pursuit of these fundamental values and EU efforts to help developing countries achieve the SDGs is obvious in numerous measures undertaken in the framework of EU external action. The European Parliament is a strong champion for these values in the world.



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## SDG 16: an innovative approach, but not without challenges

### Conflict as major hindrance to development

SDG 16 with its overarching objective – the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies and of strong institutions – represents an innovative approach for development cooperation. Its adoption aimed to fill a gap in the previous millennium development goals (MDGs). These did not include an explicit focus on issues such as peace, security and institutions. Not only does SDG 16 bring additional dimensions to the development agenda, it also has a transformative role, enabling the achievement of all SDGs. There is a [broad consensus](#) that peace, security, justice and good governance are mutually interlinked with sustainable development. However, its adoption had to overcome strong controversy. According to [sources](#) familiar with the process of SDG 16 adoption, 'there was strong political resistance in some quarters to linking international development efforts to the pursuit of international peace and security. In the context of negotiating the SDGs, Brazil, India and Pakistan initially argued that including a 'peace goal' would blur the lines between economic development and security, encouraging the United Nations Security Council to interfere in General Assembly business. Some development experts also questioned the wisdom of including the reduction of all forms of violence as an SDG. They worried that it could draw financing away from core economic and social goals to national security-related objectives, such as counter-terrorism.' [Critics](#) also point out that, unlike in the case of other specific development objectives, its implementation faces a certain degree of uncertainty in terms of the methods used to translate it into practice.

Most SDG targets are linked in some way with other targets, depending on them or fostering their achievement. In the case of the SDG 16 targets (see boxed text), this interlinkage is even stronger. The SDG 16 targets are strong enablers for sustainable development in general. First, conflict represents one of the major obstacles to sustainable development, being in many affected countries an unsurmountable hindrance to economic and human development. Countries ridden by chronic conflict are among the least developed in the world (Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan). Conflicts can also easily erase years of economic and human development. For example, Libya's civil conflict erased more than 15 years of steady [progress](#) on its Human Development Index score, which plunged below the 1995 score in the conflict's aftermath. The economic loss caused by the civil war in Syria is [estimated](#) at about US\$428 billion – six times Syria's

#### Targets of SDG 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

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

16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

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

16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organised 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

16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance

16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

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

16.a 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

16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

Source: [United Nations SDG site](#).

GDP in 2010. Syria's GDP plummeted by about 65 % compared to its pre-war level. This trend, correlating conflict and lack of development is expected to endure. [World Bank projections](#) show that by 2030 'between 43 % and 60 % of the world's extreme poor will live in settings marked by fragility, conflict, and violence'. Conflicts also have a [harmful effect on the environment](#), endangering sustainable development. They also have a lasting psychological and social impact on societies (e.g. [sexual violence](#)), undermining sustainable peace.

## Societal violence

One of the most innovative dimensions of SDG 16 is that it does not limit its focus to intra- and interstate conflicts. SDG 16 emphasises that all forms of violence should be eliminated. This potentially includes widespread criminality or the least visible forms of all: violence against children. There is increased awareness that in certain settings pervasive societal violence has become almost as deleterious to development as armed conflict. The [rate of intentional homicides](#) in certain countries (e.g. in Central America) takes a human toll comparable to that of armed conflict, and generates devastating psychological, social and economic effects. According to [research on the topic](#), 'New forms of violence that are distinct from those associated with traditional armed conflict have emerged as a major global concern in recent years. International donors and agencies are spending increasing resources on intervening in a broad spectrum of violence-related threats around the world, ranging from the 'non-conventional armed violence' associated with gangs, youth, and the illicit economy to the everyday violence embedded in communities and family life... When vulnerable citizens cannot count on the state to provide them with basic security and legal protection, they respond by taking matters into their own hands. [...] Chronic violence undermines human development from the micro to the macro levels'. [Research](#) into the subject correlates societal violence with state fragility: 'Chronic violence is most prevalent in countries or regions with long-term state fragility and/or relative state absence, and among people lacking the power to change these conditions in the short or medium term'. Violence against children also has severe consequences for the future of societies. However, it remains the most invisible and pervasive form of violence worldwide.

## The role of good governance

Violence in all its forms is strongly related to poor quality of governance, absence of rule of law and disrespect for fundamental freedoms. Corrupt, non-inclusive and unaccountable institutions generate dissatisfaction among numerous groups and are a driver of conflict. State security forces that are not held accountable when they act without due respect for human rights set off a dangerous spiral of violence. For example, various state abuses and the state's incapacity to respond to the local populations' basic needs [contributed](#) to the rise of fundamentalist groups in the Sahel.

The rule of law and access to justice are contained in a distinct target of SDG 16 (namely number 16.3, see box above) in line with positions affirmed by the UN. In [the 2012 Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the Rule of Law](#) (which prepared the way for the inclusion of the rule of law in the SDGs), UN Member States stated that 'the rule of law and development are strongly interrelated and mutually reinforcing', and that 'the advancement of the rule of law at the national and international levels is essential for sustained and inclusive economic growth, sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and hunger and the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, all of which in turn reinforce the rule of law'. A fundamental principle of the rule of law is access to justice – another component of target 16.3. The importance of [access to justice for all](#) has been broadly recognised. In December 2012, the UN General Assembly adopted the [UN Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems](#) (67/187) – the first international instrument in this area. Respect for the rule of law [contributes](#) to poverty eradication among other things, by reinforcing respect for property rights and therefore the operation of businesses. According to the [OECD](#), 'Effective access to justice services is a crucial determinant of inclusive growth, citizen well-being

and sound public administration[...] Countries with trusted justice systems report higher levels of GDP per capita, property protection rights and national competitiveness'.

A major [obstacle](#) to sustainable development is corruption. Corruption is defined by [the World Bank](#) as the abuse of public office for private (economic) gain. Corruption has multiple negative impacts on societies. According to a G20 document '[Issues paper on corruption and economic growth](#)', 'it is the loss of output due to the misallocation of resources, distortions of incentives and other inefficiencies caused by corruption that represent its real cost to society'. While it is more difficult to prove that corruption impacts GDP growth directly,<sup>1</sup> other impacts on societies are clearly harmful. Corruption weakens public trust in the government, in extreme cases undermining the legitimacy of the state to the point of causing severe political and economic instability. [IMF research](#) shows that corruption reduces global tax revenues by US\$1 trillion yearly, equivalent to 1.25 % of global GDP. Corruption excludes poor people from public services, including health, education and justice.<sup>2</sup> These are exchanged among the rich and the powerful. Corruption has therefore a disproportionate impact on the poor and most vulnerable and thus perpetuates poverty. According to the [World Bank](#), 'empirical studies have shown that the poor pay the highest percentage of their income in bribes'. Corruption is of particular concern in conflict-affected and fragile countries as it fuels and perpetuates the inequalities and discontent that lead to fragility, violent extremism, and conflict.

Illicit flows of money deprive developing countries of precious resources and empower corrupt elites. According to [Global Financial Integrity](#), a US-based think-tank, 'Every year, roughly US\$1 trillion flows illegally out of developing and emerging economies due to crime, corruption, and tax evasion – more than these countries receive in foreign direct investment and foreign aid combined'. According to [the IMF](#), illicit financial flows have a negative impact on the economy and society: they divert resources from public spending and reduce the capital available for private investment, encourage criminal activity, and undermine the rule of law and the political stability of a country.

## Human rights and democratic norms

The approach taken by SDG 16 is unique and innovative in that it proposes a programme of action formally agreed by all states, including those less democratic. The price paid for reaching a universal consensus was a certain dilution of the normative language used, something that has not escaped criticism. This limitation is obvious in the absence of any explicit reference to internationally recognised human rights and democratic norms. The interconnection between all SDGs and human rights is however proclaimed in [the 2030 agenda](#). The preamble mentions that the 17 SDGs 'seek to realize the human rights of all'. The declaration asserts the will of all states 'to protect human rights' and states that 'We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination'. The new agenda is guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including full respect for international law. It is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in international human rights treaties. Many SDG targets are in practice linked to various human rights. According to an [analysis](#) by the Danish Institute for Human Rights, 92 % of the 169 SDG targets are linked to international human rights instruments. However, rights are mentioned explicitly only a few times under the SDGs, mainly in relation to equality, labour rights and human rights education.

SDG 16 states explicitly only a general commitment 'to protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements'. This obligation can be interpreted as too limitative. Certain countries do not recognise the full extent of fundamental freedoms in their internal legislation and have not ratified relevant human rights international instruments, or have done so with important reservations. Despite this limitation, according to the same source quoted previously, 'SDG 16 ('Peace, justice and strong institutions') offers significant transformative potential to improve human rights through institutional, justice and security reform. All SDG 16 targets are in one way or another [linked](#) to international human rights norms.

**Does SDG 16 make too many concessions to undemocratic regimes?**

SDG 16 has been hailed as bringing about for the first time a global consensus on a range of very sensitive issues, such as the role of institutions, public accountability and respect for fundamental freedoms. However, there is also [concern](#) that consensus was obtained by eliminating any clear reference to political processes and democratic norms. There is no reference to the right to vote or to stand as a candidate in free and fair elections, as crucial for accountability and participation. Instead, SDG 16 stops at the very general language of 'responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels'. According to [more outspoken critics](#), 'the SDGs are pushing an agenda carefully calibrated to avoid upsetting the world's dictators, kleptocrats, and this century's worst human rights offenders [...] In other words, the basic freedoms that underpin and advance human development are missing from the SDG equation'.

## Finding the right indicators

The SDGs' purpose is to encourage steady progress until the milestone date of 2030. Finding the [right indicators](#) to measure progress in this context is crucial. In March 2017, at the 48th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) agreed on a list of indicators for all SDGs. The global indicator framework was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 6 July 2017 (resolution [A/RES/71/313](#)). For SDG 16 the list adopted (including some later adjustments) currently contains 23 indicators. These indicators do not cover many important aspects; for example, target 16.3 on the rule of law and access to justice is measured by the (1) proportion of victims of violence who report to competent authorities; and (2) the proportion of unsentenced detainees in the overall prison population. There is no indicator measuring property rights. Target 16.6 – Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels – is measured by (1) primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector, and (2) the proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services. These two criteria do not measure how government can be held accountable for example.

Data availability is another major issue. In 2017, the [Institute for Economics & Peace \(IEP\)](#) published an audit on how in practice to measure 22 of the 23 indicators of SDG 16. It found that only seven indicators have data for more than 90 % of the countries. Most data available is not comparable across countries. The methodological issues and the practical difficulties relating to data collection risk undermining the achievement of goal 16, according to IEP. Meanwhile, the [Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data](#) network finds that despite many limitations relating to data availability, reliability, timeliness and objectivity, 'SDG 16 can currently be measured with enough accuracy to determine progress'.

**SDG 16 – particularly difficult to measure?**

It is a point of debate how realistic it is to measure progress on SDG 16 targets, some of which are quite abstract in nature. One [think tank report](#) outlines the debate as follows: 'Critics argue that 'good governance,' as defined by the 10+ targets, is either conceptually impossible to measure or that relevant data does not exist. Supporters recognize the profound data and measurement difficulties, but believe that a global goal will generate demand for the relevant data – helping make visible corruption and exclusion and injustice and violence that has long hid in the shadows'. Measuring some of the targets, such as corruption, is known to be difficult. Existing indices, such as [Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index](#) (CPI) and the [World Bank's Control of Corruption indicator](#) (CoC), are based on citizens' perception of corruption. According to one [point of view](#) they are 'deeply flawed as corruption measures', even if effective at raising public awareness. Even with regard to [illicit financial flows](#) where there are estimates, there is, according to [Transparency International](#), 'no source or methodology to calculate the progress indicator for target 16.4: a reduction in the total value of inward and outward illicit financial flows. Nor is there an official indicator for measuring the return of confiscated proceeds of corruption to their rightful owners'.

## State of play with regard to implementation

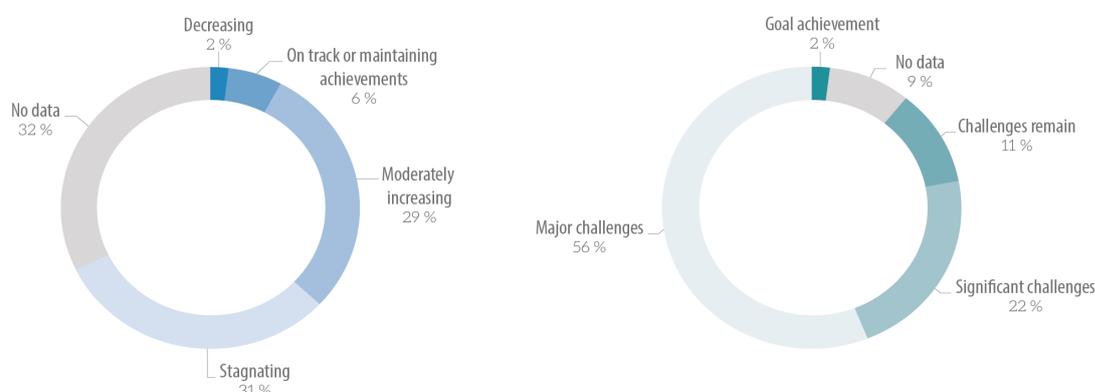
The UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) held its last yearly ministerial meeting in July 2019. It was dedicated to reviewing progress on 6 SDGs, including SDG16. The [UN Secretary-General's report on progress towards the sustainable development goals](#), submitted to the Forum, found that advances in ending violence, promoting the rule of law, strengthening institutions and increasing access to justice were uneven and that renewed efforts were needed. Attacks on civil society were also holding back development progress. The number of intentional homicides had increased slightly. Various forms of violence against children persisted, including violent disciplinary methods in most developing countries, and sexual violence (although data was limited). The share of unsentenced detainees in the overall prison population had remained largely constant at 30 % in recent years. Killings of human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists were on the rise. The births of fewer than half (46 %) of all children under the age of five in sub-Saharan Africa had been registered. Binding laws and policies giving individuals a right to access information held by public authorities had been adopted by 125 countries. In 2018, only 39 % of all countries had in place a national human rights institution compliant with the Paris Principles.

### Stakeholders' views on SDG 16

The July 2019 **high-level political forum on sustainable development** considered the [proposals](#) for achieving the SDGs put forward by various stakeholders. Specifically with regard to SDG 16, for example, women's organisations underlined that militarised economies must shift to economies guided by the principles of human security for all. NGOs highlighted the importance of ensuring transparency and meaningful access to government systems at every level and for every person; and of empowering the most vulnerable with full and equal access to justice mechanisms. Workers and trade unions asked for the universal ratification and implementation of ILO conventions and for a universal labour guarantee.

The official UN monitoring centred around voluntary, country-led review processes and consultation of numerous stakeholders is complemented by surveys conducted by independent organisations. For example, [the Sustainable Development Solutions Network \(SDSN\) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung](#) publish a comprehensive global report based on publicly available data from official data providers (World Bank, WHO, ILO, etc.) and other organisations. Their report has found that human rights and freedom of speech are in danger in numerous countries and that conflicts lead to reversals in SDG progress in many parts of the world. Trends in corruption and press freedom are worsening in more than 50 countries including, in some middle and high-income countries.

Figures 1 and 2 – Share of countries:  
by current degree of progress towards SDG 16 and by degree of achievement of SDG 16



Data source: [Sustainable Development Report 2019](#).

Based on the indicators selected by the report mentioned above, 2 % of countries have already achieved SDG 16: namely Denmark, Iceland and Liechtenstein. The vast majority however still face major or significant challenges. From the point of view of progress towards achieving SDG 16, around one third are making progress, another third are stagnating or even regressing, while for another third there are no sufficient data.

## EU policy

The EU is committed to achieving all the SDGs internally and to cooperating with developing countries to achieve them. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is part of EU primary law, and specific EU legislation – such as the anti-discrimination directives – provide a robust normative framework for the achievement of SDG 16 targets inside the Union. Various EU policies, such as cohesion and social policy, contribute to implementation on a more practical level. [Data](#) collected by Eurostat indicate that the EU is making progress with respect to several targets.

At global level, the EU shares the vision that the main targets of this SDG are valuable goals to be pursued for their own worth, but also crucial levers of sustainable development. Recent EU policy developments have reinforced this approach and put renewed emphasis on eliminating conflict and insecurity, and strengthening institutions and human rights. The EU's [2016 Global Strategy](#) focuses on resilience and capacity-building in the world, in order to prevent conflict, and emphasises the central role of democracy and human rights in preventing conflict. Democracy, trust in institutions and sustainable development lie at the heart of a resilient state. The [new European consensus on development](#), adopted in 2017 by the EU Council, reframes the EU's development policy in response to the SDGs, focusing on fragile and conflict-affected countries. It affirms that 'Good governance, democracy and the rule of law are vital for sustainable development. The rule of law is a prerequisite for the protection of all fundamental rights'. Based on a fourfold framework of action, one dimension is the promotion of peace, peaceful and inclusive societies, democracy, effective and accountable institutions, the rule of law and human rights for all.

## EU indicators

The European Commission uses the EU's [international cooperation and development results framework](#), adopted in 2015 and revised in 2018, to monitor the results of EU-funded action and ensure that EU development aid contributes towards the SDGs.

Figure 3 – EU international cooperation and development results framework for SDG 16

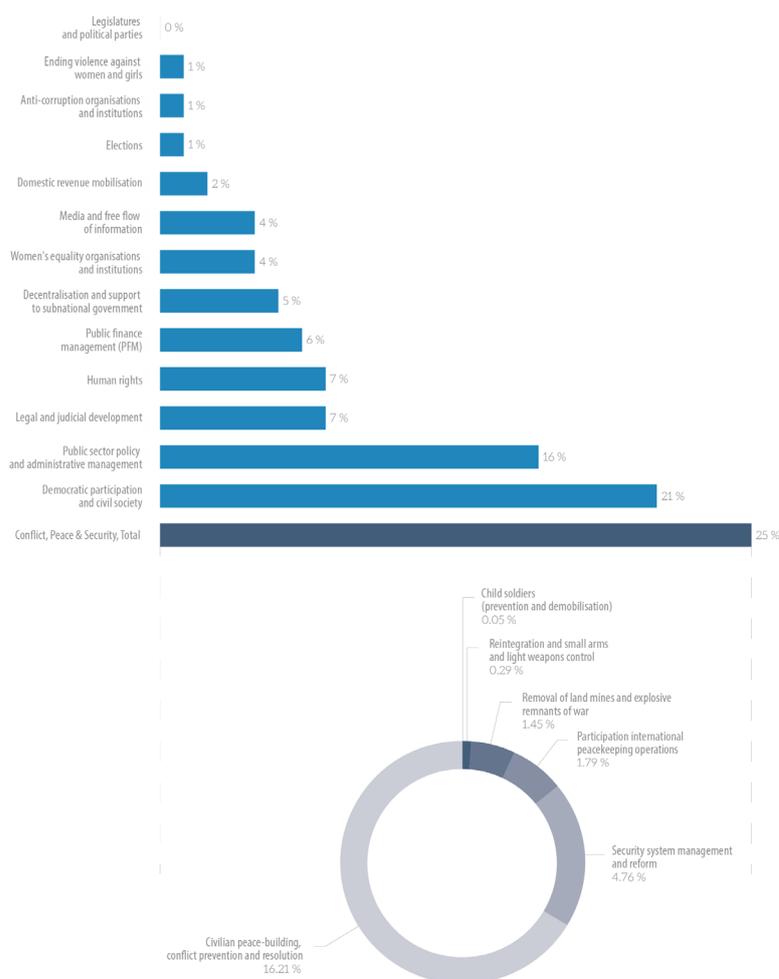
Sustainable Development Goals	Results statement <sup>28</sup>	L1 - Development progress in EU partner countries	L2 - Outputs and outcomes from EU interventions
SDG16	Support accountable and transparent institutions, inclusive, transparent and credible elections and a pluralist democratic system (Box p32, 62)	1.26 - *Voice and Accountability score (as measured by the World Bank Worldwide Governance indicators)	2.24 - *Number of countries supported by the EU to conduct elections and/or improve their electoral process
		1.27 – Government Effectiveness score (as measured by the World Bank Worldwide Governance indicators )	2.25 - Number of government policies developed or revised with civil society organisation participation through EU support
	Continued promotion of the universal values of human rights for all, including the support for enabling space for civil society (61, 62)	1.28 - SDG 16.a.1 Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles (A accredited)	2.26 - Number of victims of human rights violations directly benefiting from assistance funded by the EU
	Support provision of fair justice, including access to legal assistance. (Box p32, 63)	1.29 - *Rule of Law score( as measured by the World Bank Worldwide Governance indicators)	2.27 - *Number of people directly benefiting from legal aid interventions supported by the EU
	Improved human security and democratic governance of the security sector, paying special attention to countries in situation of fragility or affected by conflict (66,68)	1.30 - *SDG 16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population	2.28 - *Number of individuals directly benefiting from EU supported interventions that specifically aim to support civilian post-conflict peace-building and/or conflict prevention 2.29 - Number of state institutions and non-state actors supported on security, border management, countering violent extremism, conflict prevention, protection of civilian population and human rights

Source: Commission staff working document [SWD\(2018\) 444 final](#).

The EU results framework defines the quantitative indicators used to collect data on development progress made by partner countries (L1) and the EU's contribution through EU-funded projects and programmes (L2). On the basis of this framework, the 2018 [Annual report on the implementation of the European Union's instruments for financing external actions in 2017](#) found that EU-funded projects and programmes that ended between mid-2016 and mid-2017 had contributed to the following results (according to the Commission [staff working document](#) on the subject):

- 8 600 human rights defenders were supported;
- five elections were supported where the electoral process was perceived by independent observers as free and fair;
- 57 000 individuals benefited directly from justice, rule of law and security sector reform programmes;
- 309 000 people benefited directly from legal aid programmes, central to ensuring equality before the law by providing the right to counsel and the right to a fair trial;
- 1 420 000 people benefited directly from programmes that specifically aimed to support civilian post-conflict peace building and/or conflict prevention.

Figures 4 and 5 – Sector-specific distribution of EU and EU Member States' development aid for governance and civil society (2015-2018) and break down of aid for conflict, peace and security by sector



Sources: [OECD ODA CRS](#).

In addition to these specific measures, EU development aid for governance, peace and security contributes in various ways to achieving SDG 16. The EU allocates a significant share of its development aid to governance, civil society and securing peace, as illustrated by OECD data on official development assistance (ODA) (see Figures 4 and 5 above).

## Pursuing SDG 16 through various external policies

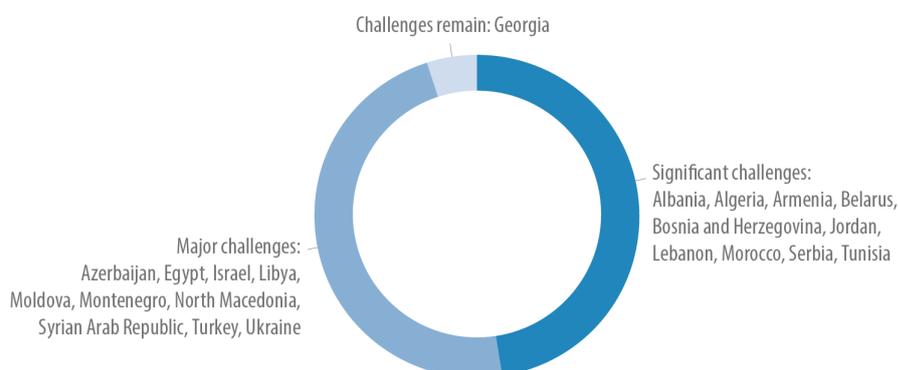
EU measures contributing to the achievement of SDG 16 are broader than EU development cooperation. Promoting peace, human rights, democracy and the rule of law are among the overarching objectives of all EU external action as established in the Treaty and are therefore mainstreamed in various EU external policies, such as common foreign and security policy (CFSP); common security and defence policy (CSDP), economic and financial cooperation; humanitarian aid; trade; enlargement and neighbourhood policies. All these policies contribute more or less directly to [peace and security in the world](#), and when specific measures are implemented consideration must be given to whether they are in line with [human rights](#) and [democratic standards](#). In the framework of its CSDP, the EU currently deploys [16](#) CSDP missions and military operations with various mandates, including military training, capacity-building, counter-piracy, rule of law and security sector reform, and border assistance.

## EU conditionality – contribution to SDG 16

Human rights, democracy and rule of law conditionality frame the EU's trade, development, neighbourhood and enlargement policies, which include on-going cooperation with third countries to promote fundamental values in these areas. It is with (potential) candidate and neighbourhood countries that the EU has established the strongest conditionality mechanisms, to help them achieve objectives in relation to human rights, the rule of law, and good governance, which are closely related to the SDG 16 targets. The various association agreements concluded by the EU with these countries all include a human rights and democracy clause,<sup>3</sup> which states that both parties commit to uphold these principles. Besides, many agreements also include elements relating to respect for the rule of law, and cooperation on good governance. With neighbourhood countries the EU applies [the more for more principle](#), rewarding progress on democratic norms with a closer partnership and more assistance. Conditionality is most stringent for accession countries. Countries that wish to join the Union have to comply with the [Copenhagen criteria](#), including political criteria, namely: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. The European Commission monitors the progress of these countries towards achieving these objectives closely. The EU can limit cooperation with neighbourhood and enlargement countries, and even impose sanctions if they do not comply with fundamental values. Since 2011 the EU has [suspended](#) cooperation with war-torn Syria, and has applied targeted sanctions and trade restrictions. Due to backsliding on reforms, the EU has [reduced](#) financial assistance to Turkey since 2017, while maintaining support for reforms in the areas of democracy, civil society and fundamental rights. During the previous term, Parliament called for accession negotiations with Turkey to be frozen in response to violations of basic rights and freedoms.

Despite this conditionality, some neighbourhood and accession countries have recorded serious backsliding on rule of law and democratic norms (e.g. [Turkey](#)). Most still face serious or very serious challenges to achieving SDG 16 (see Figure 6 below). When it comes to progress, only Georgia is on track towards achieving the goal, according to the 2019 Sustainable Development Report.

Figure 6 – Degree of achievement of SDG 16 in (potentially) candidate and neighbourhood countries



Data source: [Sustainable Development Report 2019](#) (there are no data for Kosovo and Palestine\*).

\* This mention shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine or of Kosovo and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

## Specific examples of EU action with respect to SDG 16 targets

**Reduce violence and end abuse, exploitation and trafficking** (Targets 16.1 and 16.2): The EU funds EU-UN Spotlight Initiative 223, which is aimed at ending violence against women, including human trafficking. In the area of business and human rights, the EU supports the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and ILO norms as a way of enforcing labour rights and eliminating forced and child labour. The EU implements [various initiatives](#) together with the ILO in this respect. The EU funds ILO development cooperation to advance the decent work agenda throughout the world, supporting specific global and national projects. The EU is the ILO's development cooperation programme's largest donor.

The EU is a leading institutional donor when it comes to global efforts to **fight torture and ill-treatment** (Targets 16.1 and 16.2). It encourages third countries to ratify and implement the relevant international norms, supports civil society organisations working on victim rehabilitation and the prevention of torture, and has banned any [trade in items](#) that could be used for torture.

The EU recognises the importance of **universal access to justice** (Target 16.3), particularly in post-conflict settings, where providing victims with recognition and redress, and fighting impunity of perpetrators are of crucial importance for securing lasting peace and reconciliation. In November 2015, the EU Council adopted [the EU's policy framework on support to transitional justice](#), setting out recommendations for EU action. The EU is one of the biggest financial contributors to transitional justice initiatives worldwide.

The EU supports partner countries **reforming their security sectors** (Target 16.3) in order to improve governance, stability and respect for fundamental rights. The 2016 [joint communication](#) – Elements for an EU-wide Strategic Framework for supporting Security Sector Reform (SSR) – lays out a strategic framework guiding all EU instruments (diplomacy, development cooperation and common security and defence policy – CSDP). The EU's areas of engagement include institutional support, training assistance, provision of non-lethal equipment, and support for the establishment or strengthening of effective civilian control and oversight.

**In the area of fighting corruption** (Target 16.5), the EU has focused on helping third countries to conduct institutional and legislative reforms, such as adopting anti-corruption legislation or creating/reinforcing existing institutions to fight corruption. In [its September 2017 resolution](#) the

European Parliament encourages 'a deepening of international commitments to put tackling corruption at the heart of the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a mechanism for fighting global poverty'. A 2015 [study](#) commissioned by the European Parliament found that 'despite calls from the European Parliament and Council, the European Commission's strategy is still developed for enlargement purposes or oriented towards member countries. There is no explicit strategy for how to reduce levels of corruption or safeguard aid funds in the majority of developing countries'.

In order to strengthen local governance and accountability (Target 16.7), the EU supports **local authorities** in partner countries. The Commission [staff working document – European Union \(EU\) cooperation with cities and local authorities in third countries](#) – emphasises the importance of cities and local authorities when it comes to sustainable development.

The EU has provided funding to support **universal birth registration** (Target 16.9). With €4 million in financing from the Development Cooperation Instrument, the **Towards universal birth registration in Africa** programme achieved remarkable success [according to UNICEF](#), resulting 'in catalytic system changes' within just three years – with registration rates almost doubling in regions where it was implemented in Zambia and Cameroon.

In the second [EU action plan on human rights and democracy](#) adopted in July 2015, Action 1 commits the EU to 'supporting the capacity of **national human rights institutions**' (Target 16.A).

## The position of the European Parliament

The European Parliament has stressed in numerous resolutions the importance of the core values promoted by SDG 16 for sustainable development. In its March 2019 [resolution](#) on the annual strategic report on the implementation and delivery of the sustainable development goals, adopted in preparation of the High Level Forum, Parliament reiterated 'the universal values of democracy, good governance, the rule of law and human rights as preconditions for sustainable development as defined in SDG 16 (peaceful and inclusive societies)', and deeply regretted, however, 'the fact that globally, armed conflict and violence are still prevalent'. It also expressed 'concern about the lack of progress in enhancing the rule of law and access to justice in many countries'. Parliament also stressed that promoting peace, participatory democracy, good governance, the rule of law and human rights must be objectives cutting across EU development policy.

## Outlook

There are numerous challenges inherent in attempting to achieve SDG 16 by 2030 and progress is insufficient in many parts of the world, requiring additional effort to speed up implementation. Persistent conflicts, widespread societal violence, increasing restrictions on the work of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society are among the main obstacles slowing down or sometimes even reversing progress. Finding the right data to assess progress is also crucial. Potential priorities for action include:<sup>4</sup> tackling the root causes and drivers of conflict, injustice and exclusion by means of an inclusive approach bringing together governments and non-governmental stakeholders; strengthening informal justice institutions and transitional justice, and the role of women in justice; improving the link between SDG implementation and international human rights mechanisms (such as the universal periodic review); strengthening national human rights institutions; and eliminating restrictive the legal and regulatory frameworks that lead to a shrinking civic space.

## MAIN REFERENCES

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> According to the G20 '[Issues paper on corruption and economic growth](#)': 'There are a number of possible reasons for the low correlation between these two variables: the linkages are likely to be complicated, indirect, time variant, and non-linear. And it is indeed conceivable that corruption actually facilitates growth in situations where prevailing government regulations are growth-impeding. Analysis of such situations reveals, however, that they always represent second- (or third-) best scenarios, and that removing the regulatory impediments to growth is better than circumventing them by corruption'.
- <sup>2</sup> World Bank World Development Report 2004, 'Making Services Work for the Poor'.
- <sup>3</sup> With the exception of the association agreement with Turkey, which was concluded in 1963, long before the clause became common practice.
- <sup>4</sup> See the report of the Global Alliance, [Enabling the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda Through SDG 16+: Anchoring Peace, Justice and Inclusion](#).

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