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Background Guide for the UN General Assembly (UNGA)

SDG 16: Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions

Target 16.7: Ensuring Responsive, Inclusive & Participatory Representation in Decision-Making



TARGET 16.7



**ENSURE RESPONSIVE,
INCLUSIVE AND
REPRESENTATIVE
DECISION-MAKING**

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

- **Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels**
- *Indicator 16.7.1: Proportions of positions in national and local institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups*
- *Indicator 16.7.2: Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group*

*Ensuring Responsive, Inclusive & Participatory Representation in
Decision-Making*

UNGA (General Assembly)

The UN General Assembly

The UN General Assembly (UNGA)¹ is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN), serving as its main deliberative, policymaking, and representative organ. It consists of all 193 UN member states, each having an equal vote. It meets annually from September to December, and occasionally for special or emergency sessions, at the UN headquarters in New York City.

The main function² of the UNGA is to discuss, debate, and make recommendations on subjects pertaining to international peace and security, including development, disarmament, human rights, international law, and the peaceful arbitration of disputes between nations. It also makes key decisions for the UN, such as appointing the Secretary-General, electing the non-permanent members of the Security Council, approving the UN budget, and establishing various subsidiary organs.

The UNGA operates through its plenary, its six main committees, and its bureau. The plenary is the main deliberative organ, where ministers and other high-level representatives discuss and adopt resolutions and decisions on various issues. The six main committees are: the First Committee (Disarmament and International Security), the Second Committee (Economic and Financial), the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and

Cultural), the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization), the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary), and the Sixth Committee (Legal). The bureau is composed of 21 members elected by the UNGA, representing the five UN regional groups. The bureau provides guidance and support to the UNGA on organizational and procedural matters.

In addition to its plenary and main committees, the UNGA also has a number of subsidiary organs that support its work. These include: the General Assembly President's Office, which coordinates the work of the UNGA and its President; the General Committee, which reviews the agenda and makes recommendations to the UNGA; the Credentials Committee, which examines the credentials of representatives of member states; and various boards, commissions, committees, councils, panels, working groups, and ad hoc bodies that deal with specific topics or functions.

The UNGA is a unique and influential forum that brings together governments, businesses, civil society, and other stakeholders to address the most pressing global challenges of our time. By strengthening actions for peace, development, human rights, and cooperation, the UNGA contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and advancing global governance.

¹ un.org/en/ga/

² cfr.org/background/un-general-assembly-unga-role

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SDG16 Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions

SDG 16³ is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations in 2015. It is about promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.⁴

SDG 16 has 12 targets and 23 indicators that cover various aspects of peace, justice and institutions, such as violence prevention and reduction, rule of law and human rights, participation and representation, transparency and accountability, corruption and illicit flows, and international cooperation.

SDG 16 recognizes the vital role of peace, justice and institutions in supporting life on Earth, providing security, dignity, and well-being for millions of people. It also acknowledges the threats and challenges that peace, justice and institutions face from human activities, such as armed conflict, terrorism, crime, violence, discrimination, oppression, corruption, and weak governance.

SDG 16 calls for urgent action to protect and restore peace, justice and institutions, and to ensure their sustainable development for present and future generations. It also seeks to enhance international cooperation and coordination on peace, justice and institution issues, and to increase the participation and benefits of developing

countries, especially those affected by conflict or fragility.

16.7 Responsive, Inclusive & Participatory Representation in Decision-Making

SDG Target 16.7 aims to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, from local to global. This means that people have a voice and a choice in the decisions that affect their lives, and that their views and needs are taken into account by those who have the power and responsibility to make decisions.

This target recognizes the vital role of decision-making in supporting democracy, human rights, and sustainable development. It also acknowledges the challenges and gaps that decision-making faces from various factors, such as inequality, discrimination, corruption, violence, exclusion, and lack of accountability.⁵

SDG 16.7 calls for urgent action to improve the quality and inclusiveness of decision-making at all levels, and to ensure that it reflects the diversity and aspirations of people. It also seeks to enhance the capacity and participation of people, especially the poor and marginalized, in decision-making processes, and to strengthen the oversight and accountability of decision-makers.⁶

⁵ unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-16-07-01c.pdf

⁶ [.unep.org/explore-topics/sustainable-development-goals/why-do-sustainable-development-goals-matter/goal-16](https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/sustainable-development-goals/why-do-sustainable-development-goals-matter/goal-16)

³ sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16

⁴ un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/

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SDG 16.7 requires the implementation of effective policies and measures to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. These include: strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks; enhancing the transparency and access to information; promoting the civic education and engagement; fostering the dialogue and consultation; supporting the civil society and media; protecting the human rights defenders and activists; and mobilizing the resources and technology.

SDG 16 and Target 17.6 are closely linked to other SDGs, such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).⁷

Achieving SDG 16 requires integrated and holistic approaches that balance the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

SDG 16.7 Indicators

The SDG 16.7 indicators⁸ are the measures that are used to monitor and track progress on meeting the

target. There are two indicators for SDG 16.7, which are:

- Indicator 16.7.1: Proportions of positions in national and local institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups⁴. This indicator measures the representation and diversity of different groups in public institutions, and reflects the extent to which they have equal opportunities and access to decision-making power.
- Indicator 16.7.2: Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group. This indicator measures the perception and satisfaction of people with the quality and inclusiveness of decision-making processes, and reflects the extent to which they feel that their views and needs are taken into account by those who have the power and responsibility to make decisions.

These indicators are collected and compiled by various custodian agencies⁹, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the

⁷ unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/

⁸

unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/?Text=&Goal=16&Target=16.7

⁹

unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-09/7f.%2016.7.1%20%28b%29%20UNDP.pdf

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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the World Bank. They are based on various sources of data, such as administrative records, official statistics, household surveys, perception surveys, and civil society reports. They are also subject to periodic review and update by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), which is a group of experts from member states and international organizations that oversees the implementation of the global indicator framework.

Challenges of Implementing 16.7

SDG 16.7 is about ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. However, countries face many challenges^{10 11} in implementing this goal, such as:

- *Inequality and discrimination:* Many people, especially the poor, women, minorities, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups, face barriers and biases in accessing and influencing decision-making processes. They often lack the resources, information, education, and networks to participate effectively and meaningfully. They also face the risk of violence, harassment, intimidation, and

reprisals for expressing their views and demands.

- *Corruption and lack of accountability:* Many decision-makers, especially at the national and local levels, are not transparent and accountable to the people they serve. They may abuse their power and authority for personal gain or political advantage, or they may be influenced by vested interests and external pressures. They may also fail to deliver on their promises and commitments, or to respond to the needs and expectations of the people.
- *Weak institutions and capacities:* Many countries lack the legal and institutional frameworks, the human and financial resources, the data and information systems, and the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to support responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making. They may also face challenges in coordinating and harmonizing different levels and sectors of decision-making, and in ensuring the coherence and consistency of policies and actions.
- *Low civic engagement and trust:* Many people, especially the youth, are disengaged and disillusioned with decision-making processes. They may feel that their voices are not heard or valued, or that their participation does not make a difference. They may also lack the awareness and knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, or the skills and confidence to engage in decision-making. They

¹⁰

[brookings.edu/articles/how-can-we-implement-sustainable-development-goal-16-on-institutions/](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-can-we-implement-sustainable-development-goal-16-on-institutions/)

¹¹[undp.org/blog/sdg-16-accelerator-2030-agenda](https://www.undp.org/blog/sdg-16-accelerator-2030-agenda)

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may also distrust the decision-makers and institutions that are supposed to represent them.

- *Limited international cooperation and support:* Many countries, especially those affected by conflict or fragility, need the assistance and partnership of the international community to implement SDG 16.7. However, they may face challenges in accessing adequate and predictable financing, technology transfer, capacity building, technical assistance, and policy advice. They may also face difficulties in aligning their national priorities with the global agenda, or in complying with their international obligations and commitments.

Trends by Geographic Region

“Popular protests around the world—whether related to government measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of corruption and lack of accountability, or the historic exclusion and injustice against certain groups—has highlighted the ever-greater numbers of people [that] feel forgotten by their political system and unable to shape the decisions affecting their lives.”—UNDP Oslo Governance Center - SDG 16 Policy Brief¹²

Regional trends in implementing SDG 16.7 are as follows:

¹²

undp.org/policy-centre/oslo/publications/sdg-1672-ensuring-inclusive-and-responsive-decision-making-sustainable-development

- *Africa* has made the most progress in implementing SDG 16.7, especially in terms of increasing the proportion of positions in national and local institutions held by women, persons with disabilities, and population groups. However, significant challenges remain for ensuring the perception and satisfaction of people with the quality and inclusiveness of decision-making processes.
- *Asia-Pacific* has also made some progress in implementing SDG 16.7, particularly in terms of enhancing the transparency and access to information, and promoting the civic education and engagement. However, some countries in the region still face issues such as inequality, discrimination, corruption, violence, exclusion, and weak governance that hinder the effective and meaningful participation and representation of people in decision-making.
- *Europe and Northern America* provide high overall scores on the aspects related to SDG 16.7, such as the representation and diversity of different groups in public institutions, and the perception and satisfaction of people with the quality and inclusiveness of decision-making processes. However, some countries in these regions have also seen some declines or stagnation on these aspects, due to factors such as democratic backsliding, erosion of civic space, populist movements, and polarization.

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- *Latin America and the Caribbean* have seen mixed progress in implementing SDG 16.7, with some countries advancing and others declining or stagnating on the aspects related to SDG 16.7. The main challenges for this region include reducing violence and insecurity, strengthening the rule of law and human rights, combating corruption and impunity, and increasing the trust and confidence of people in decision-makers and institutions.
 - *The Middle East* has made some progress in implementing SDG 16.7, especially in terms of increasing the proportion of positions in national and local institutions held by women². However, this region remains the lowest-scoring region in the world on all aspects related to SDG 16.7. The main challenges for this region include resolving armed conflicts and humanitarian crises, ensuring the protection and participation of minorities and refugees, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, and fostering democratic transitions and reforms.
- countries, to assist developing countries in realizing their potential and aspirations for a peaceful and inclusive society.

Overall, the regional trends show that there is still room for improvement in implementing SDG 16.7, especially for developing countries, which face many challenges in ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Therefore, SDG 16.7 calls for the support and partnership of the international community, especially the developed

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What Actions Can Students Take?

Some actions¹³ that students can take to support SDG 16 and its targets are:

- Learn more about the importance of responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making for sustainable development, and the challenges and opportunities that different countries and regions face in implementing this goal. You can read books, watch videos, or visit websites that explain these topics in an engaging and informative way. For example, you can check out the [SDG Book Club reading list for SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions](#), or the [UN website on SDG 16](#).
- Raise awareness and advocate for the protection and promotion of democracy, human rights, and good governance. You can organize or participate in campaigns, events, or projects that highlight the issues and solutions related to SDG 16.7. For example, you can join the [International Day of Democracy](#) on September 15 every year, or the [Open Government Partnership](#) online platform.
- Support local and global initiatives that aim to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. You can donate, volunteer, or partner with organizations that work on these issues, such as

the [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#), the [International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance \(IDEA\)](#), or the [World Justice Project \(WJP\)](#). For example, you can support the [16x16 initiative](#), which is a global initiative implemented by the UNDP Youth Global Programme to support 16 youth-led organizations advancing goal 16.

- Participate in decision-making processes that affect your life and your community. You can exercise your right to vote, express your opinions, join a political party or a civil society organization, or run for office. You can also engage with decision-makers and institutions through various channels, such as petitions, consultations, dialogues, or social media. For example, you can use the [My World 2030 survey](#) to share your views on the SDGs with the UN and its partners.
- Educate yourself and others about your rights and responsibilities as citizens, and the skills and confidence to engage in decision-making. You can enroll in courses, workshops, or online platforms that provide civic education and training. You can also share your knowledge and experience with your peers, family, or community. For example, you can join the [UN Youth Envoy's Not Too Young To Run campaign](#), which aims to empower young people to run for political office.

¹³[.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/student-resources/](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/student-resources/)

 **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**



Source: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>