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Office on Drugs and Crime

UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

UNDP

Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16

Indicators on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies

SDG16

Contents

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Foreword

We present this third joint Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16—our compass for peaceful, just and inclusive societies—during a time marked by unyielding turbulence. New and ongoing conflicts rage, violence takes and ruins lives, people are forced to flee their homes and find their rights denied and curtailed wherever they go. The rising tide of conflict, combined with unrelenting climate change and economic upheavals, has created what United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called, in his Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025[1], "a global development emergency."

Yet we remain driven by the conviction that there are solutions to these intertwined and collective crises. They are within our reach. They require a renewed, unfaltering focus on SDG 16, the linchpin of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They require us to set our sights on the targets of Goal 16 with renewed energy, tackling the violence, corruption, injustice and exclusion that hold back progress across all the Goals. Peace, justice and inclusion are not only goals in their own right. They are the foundation for achieving every other Goal.

Without systemic protections—universal access to justice, the rule of law, and accountable governance— efforts to eradicate poverty, combat inequality or respond to climate emergencies lose their moorings.

Conversely, when SDG 16 is placed front and centre, it can become a catalyst for real change. Strengthened justice systems help deliver better health, education and environmental outcomes. Accountable institutions underpin effective environmental governance. Inclusive, non-discriminatory decision-making consistent with international human rights standards strengthens social cohesion, boosting resilience to national and global shocks.

This report brings together the latest available data on all of the internationally agreed SDG 16 indicators, to ask: what story do the numbers tell? The multifaceted nature of SDG 16 is reflected in the diversity of agencies responsible for gathering data and compiling these indicators. And this report is testament to these agencies' commitment to working together as part of the United Nations family to bring about change. This year's report also shines a special spotlight on the situation of displaced populations, illustrating through data how failures to fulfil the promise of Goal 16 lie at the heart of the forced displacement crisis. We are grateful to all our partners who contributed to this report, and who share our dedication to achieving Goal 16 and the entire 2030 Agenda.

This shared dedication, rooted in human rights and anchored in solidarity, must continue to drive us forward. The 80th anniversary of the United Nations invites reflection: we are striving to achieve not just a set of time-bound goals, but a vision for humanity. The opening lines of our United Nations Charter reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, justice and equality: the very same principles that sit at the heart of Goal 16.

We stand united in urging Member States, parliaments, civil society, national justice and human rights institutions, international and local partners to accelerate efforts. We must focus both on reaching the targets of Goal 16 and on strengthening the data systems needed to provide evidence for informing and monitoring decisions. Otherwise, we are steering without a compass.

The new data presented here equips Member States with clearer insights into both the gaps and opportunities for action. We recognize the enormity of these challenges. But we also see the immense potential of coordinated action through the tried-and-tested UN system. This report is an invitation to reflect, renew, and rally behind the promise of SDG 16.

As custodians of global SDG 16 indicators, we reaffirm our commitments to accompany and support Member States towards peace, justice and inclusion, grounded in human rights. Together we can turn the tide.

Volker Türk

United Nations High
Commissioner for Human Rights

Ghada Waly

Executive Director,
UNODC

Haoliang Xu

Acting Administrator &
UNDP Associate Administrator

[1] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2025.pdf

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AfDB	African Development Bank
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ATI	Access to Information
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
EWIPA	Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas
FDS	Forced Displacement Survey
FSB	Financial Stability Board
FSDO	Financing for Sustainable Development Office
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPCG	Global Policy Centre for Governance
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
HDI	Human Development Index
HRD	Human Rights Defender
IaDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICVAC	International Classification of Violence against Children
IDA	International Development Association
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IFFs	Illicit Financial Flows
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union

LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
MP	Member of Parliament
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights)
PEFA	Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability
PoA/ITI	Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons and its International Tracing Instrument
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDESA	United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
UNSC	United Nations Statistical Commission
US$	United States dollars
WHO	World Health Organization

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Snapshot of Key Findings

Peaceful societies:

Intentional homicides and deaths during conflicts

There has been a global reduction in the rate of **intentional homicide** since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. However, progress remains short of the target of significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere, interpreted as a 50 per cent reduction in the homicide rate by 2030. Almost 60 per cent of all women who were killed intentionally in 2023 were killed by their intimate partners or family members.
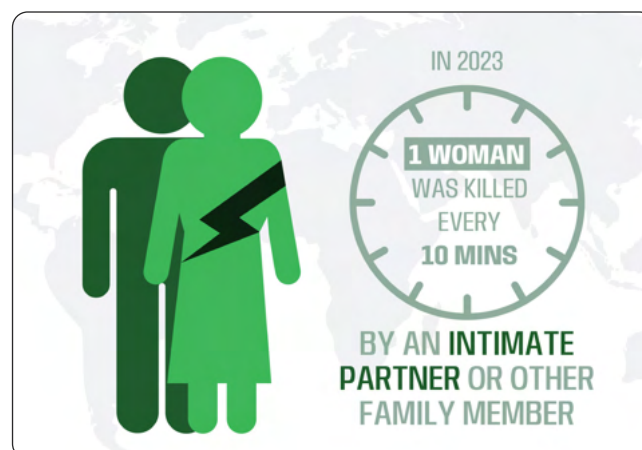
In 2024, at least one life was lost every 12 minutes amid armed conflicts. With a growth of 40 per cent compared to the previous year, 2024 marked the third consecutive year of steep rises in **conflict-related deaths of civilians** and persons of undetermined status, claiming at least 48,384 lives.

Violence and the threat of violence

Every 14 hours, somewhere in the world a journalist, trade unionist, or human rights defender was killed or disappeared. Globally, 502 cases of killing and 123 cases of disappearance of **human rig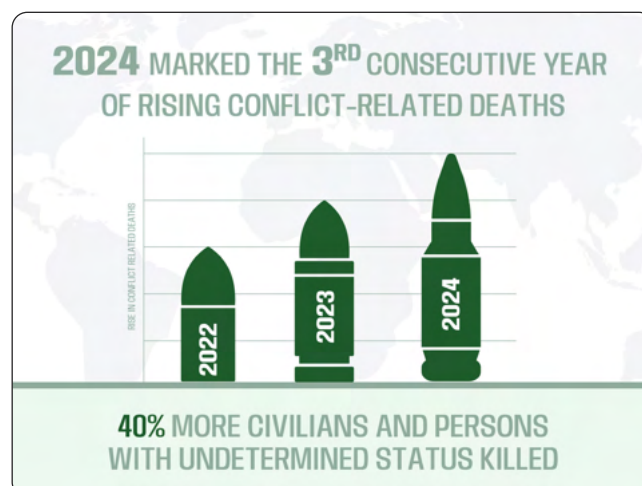hts defenders, journalists, and trade unionists** were recorded and verified in 2024. While these numbers show a modest decline compared to 2023—13 per cent and 7 per cent respectively—they remain alarmingly high. And critically, they remain far from the target of zero attacks on those who dare to speak out.

Women and men are not impacted by the same type of violence. The median prevalence of **sexual violence** in countries with data is 3.0 per cent for women compared to just 0.4 per cent for men. However, the median prevalence of **physical violence** is 4.1 per cent for men as compared to 3.2 per cent for women. Physical assault, one form of physical violence, shows a decreasing trend in 19 out of the 29 countries for which this trend can be determined.

Around 70 per cent of people globally report **feeling safe walking alone in their area after dark**, a figure that remained relatively stable from 2017 to 2024. Women generally feel less safe than men across all regions. Among the 79 countries with available data from 2021 to 2024, the proportion of women reporting feeling safe walking alone in their area at night was, on average, 12 percentage points lower (at 60 per cent) than that reported by men (at 72 per cent).

Violence against children

Around the world, 1.6 billion children – or 2 in 3 – regularly endure **violent punishment by caregivers** at home. Levels of violent discipline at home, which can take the form of psychological aggression and/or physical punishment, exceed 50 per cent in the majority of the 84 (mostly low- and middle-income) countries with available data from 2016 to 2024.

Globally, more than 370 million (or 1 in 8) girls and women alive today have experienced **rape or sexual assault as children**. Among boys and men, between 240 and 310 million (or around 1 in 11) are estimated to have experienced contact sexual violence (i.e., rape or sexual assault) in childhood. In fragile settings, girls face an even greater risk, with the prevalence of rape and sexual assault experienced in childhood standing at slightly more than 1 in 4.
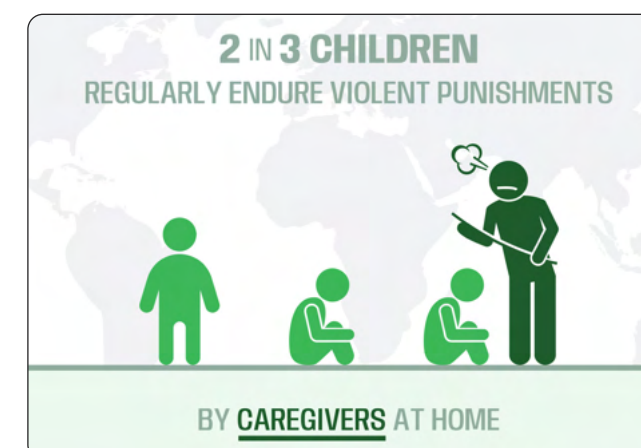
Abuse, exploitation and human trafficking

Globally, 38 per cent of all **victims of trafficking** detected in 2022 were children. This is a significantly larger share of child victims than the 13 per cent detected in 2004, when global data collection began. Distinct patterns of exploitation are evident for boys and girls. The majority of girl victims detected (60 per cent) are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. By contrast, some 45 per cent of boys detected are trafficked for forced labour and another 47 per cent are exploited for other purposes, including forced criminality and forced begging.

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Just societies:

Rule of law and access to justice

The global prison population was estimated at 11.7 million individuals in 2023, representing a global prison-population rate of 145 prisoners per 100,000 population. A third (3.7 million) of the **global prison population** was held in pre-trial detention, a share that has remained stable between 2015 and 2023, and is similar globally among men and women.

On average, a smaller share of victims of sexual assault **reports their experience to authorities** than do victims of physical assault or robbery. The median proportions of victims who reported their victimization to competent authorities were 35 per cent for physical assault, 45 per cent for robbery, and 15 per cent for sexual assault. In general, these reporting rates remain low and show a lack of trust in and lack of access to the criminal justice system across different categories of victims.

There are significant differences between countries in the proportion of the population that reports experiencing a dispute and **accessing a dispute resolution mechanism**—an indicator of civil justice introduced by Member States in 2020. In some countries, less than half of people experiencing a dispute (46 per cent) sought resolution through formal or informal channels, while in others, almost everyone (94 per cent) accessed a dispute resolution mechanism. Gender gaps in access to justice vary by context: in some countries, men and women access justice at similar rates; in others,

women face significantly greater barriers, while in a few, men do.

Illicit financial and arms flows

The first official country-level estimates of **illicit financial flows** (IFFs) have shown alarming cross-border amounts related to criminal activities. Results from the first experimental estimates of tax and commercial IFFs also highlight their significance. If redirected to the formal economy, illicit financial flows could serve as a vital source of funding for sustainable development initiatives and help bridge the financing gap.

Countries still face significant challenges when establishing the **illicit origin of firearms**. Based on data from 55 countries, on average around three quarters of seized firearms are potentially traceable, consisting mainly of firearms that have unique

markings that can be used for identifying their illicit origin. In 2022-2023, national authorities collected 860,598 weapons, of which 50 per cent were subsequently marked, 66 per cent were recorded, 65 per cent were destroyed and 42 per cent were traced, highlighting significant increases in the percentage of subsequently destroyed and traced weapons, compared to 2020-2021.

Corruption

Available survey data from 142 countries and territories suggest that, on average, roughly one in every five citizens who interacted at least once with a public official in the past year was asked to pay a bribe. The prevalence of bribery among the population varies considerably within regions. In the period 2010-2016, the median population bribery prevalence at the global level stood at 12.2 per cent, while the corresponding figure was 16.0 per cent in

the period 2017-2024, suggesting relative stability in global trends.

Protective institutions

Independent National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are crucial for advancing sustainable development in line with human rights standards. Since 2015, the number of countries with NHRIs that comply fully (A status) with the Paris Principles, the internationally agreed minimum standards of accreditation for NHRIs, has grown from 70 to 89, covering 46 per cent of UN Member States and observers. This means that 55 per cent of the world's population now lives in a country with an independent NHRI.

Additionally, 7 out of 10 national parliaments have a committee with an explicit mandate to address human rights, which can help provide oversight and support the integration of human rights considerations into legislative processes.

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Inclusive societies:

Effective, accountable institutions

Globally, the majority of people express **satisfaction with education, healthcare and government services**, with little difference observed between men and women. Government services such as obtaining a passport, a national identification document, marriage, birth or death certificates, receive a high satisfaction rate with an average of 67 per cent. Education services score less well on average, with 58 per cent of people expressing satisfaction with their country's educational system. Healthcare services have a global satisfaction rate of 57 per cent, but with great variation across countries ranging from as low as 9 per cent to as high as 93 per cent. Despite these broadly positive findings, a considerable share of the population remains dissatisfied with public services.

WORLDWIDE, PEOPLE ARE SATISFIED WITH
67% OF COUNTRIES' GOVERNMENT SERVICES
58% EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM
57% HEALTHCARE SERVICES
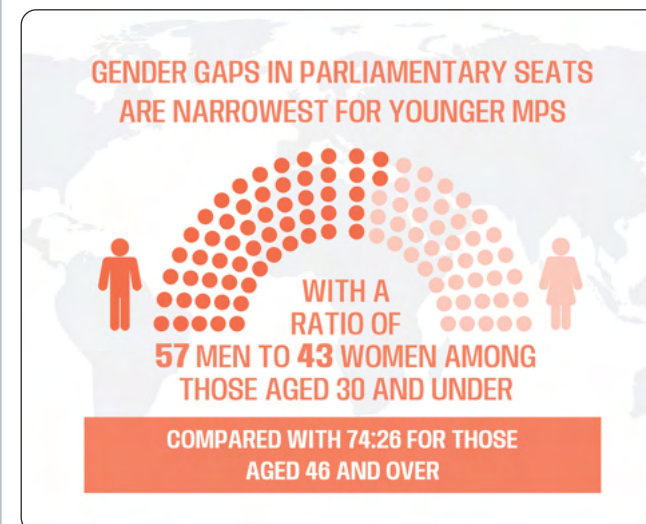BUT WITH WIDE VARIATION AMONG COUNTRIES

Inclusive decision-making

Between 2020 and 2025, progress towards gender parity and more proportionate representation by age group in parliamentary representation remained incremental and uneven, with some signs of deceleration. **Women and young people also remain sidelined in leadership roles** and as chairs of powerful parliamentary committees — finance, defence and foreign affairs — with progress from 2020 to 2025 slow, uneven and showing signs of stalling.
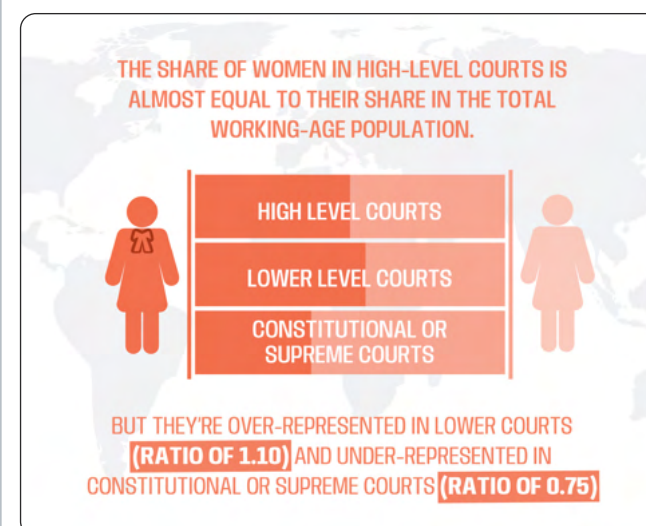
There is one bright spot: among younger MPs, gender gaps narrow — with a male-to-female ratio

of 57:43 for those aged 30 and under, and 63:37 for those aged 40 and under — suggesting that **younger parliaments are more gender-balanced.**

GENDER GAPS IN PARLIAMENTARY SEATS ARE NARROWEST FOR YOUNGER MPS
WITH A RATIO OF **57** MEN TO **43** WOMEN AMONG THOSE AGED 30 AND UNDER
COMPARED WITH 74:26 FOR THOSE AGED 46 AND OVER

Globally, the latest available data show that women remain **underrepresented across public service, the judiciary, and national legislatures**. Current gender representation ratios stand at just 0.80, 0.90, and 0.54 respectively, falling short of reaching parity (which would be represented by a value of 1.0).

Women are disproportionately concentrated in clerical and administrative positions in public service, as well as in low-level courts within the judiciary. Women remain notably underrepresented in senior government positions and in high-level, constitutional and supreme courts.
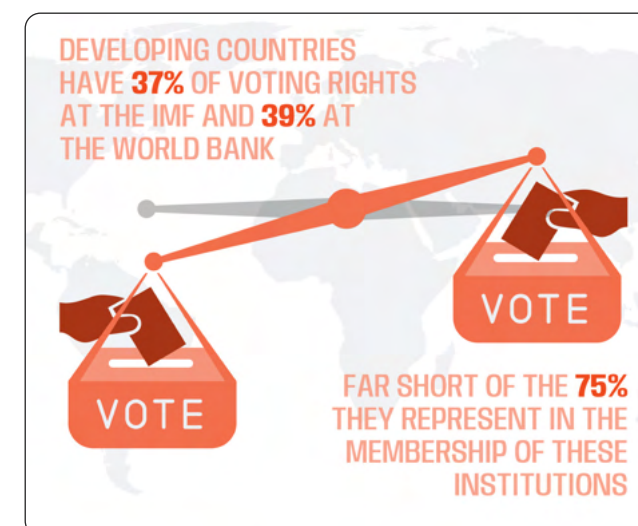

THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN HIGH-LEVEL COURTS IS ALMOST EQUAL TO THEIR SHARE IN THE TOTAL WORKING-AGE POPULATION.
HIGH LEVEL COURTS
LOWER LEVEL COURTS
CONSTITUTIONAL OR SUPREME COURTS
BUT THEY'RE OVER-REPRESENTED IN LOWER COURTS **(RATIO OF 1.10)** AND UNDER-REPRESENTED IN CONSTITUTIONAL OR SUPREME COURTS **(RATIO OF 0.75)**

The year 2024 presented an unprecedented opportunity to (re)build and strengthen inclusive governance systems. Known as **the "super year" of elections**, approximately 3.7 billion people – representing half of the world's population across 72 countries – had the opportunity to shape the global political, social and economic landscape through voting, many for the first time. While voting is a fundamental aspect of political participation, meaningful engagement in public life goes beyond the ballot box. On average, less than half of people in high- and middle-income countries believe that their country's political systems enable them to have a say in government decisions or that their voices influence policy outcomes.

IN HIGH-AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES
FEWER THAN HALF OF PEOPLE FEEL THEY HAVE A SAY IN GOVERNMENT DECISIONS OR POLICY OUTCOMES
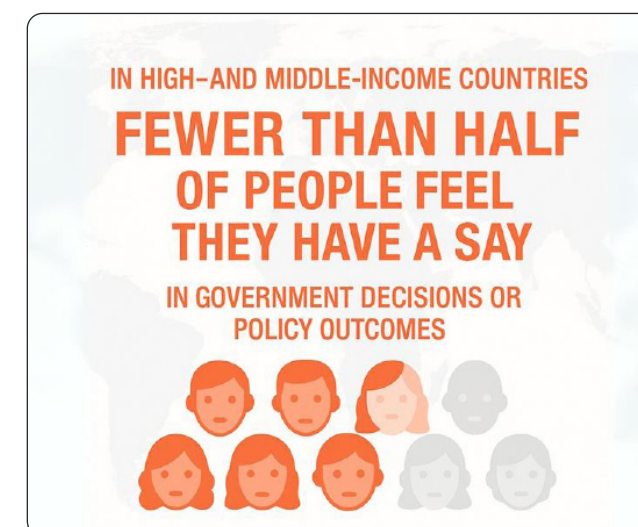
Participation in global decision-making

Despite repeated commitments and some limited progress, developing countries remain underrepresented in the global system of governance of international financial institutions, regional development banks, and standard-setting bodies. **Voting rights** reforms were last adopted at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2015 and at the World Bank's main lending arm in 2018. Developing countries currently retain 37 per cent of the voting rights at the IMF and 39 per cent at the World Bank, short of the 75 per cent they represent in the membership of these institutions.

Legal identity for all

Birth registration levels worldwide have been rising steadily, and the progress achieved should be celebrated. Over 500 million children under 5 have had their births registered in the last five years. But there are still 150 million children around the world who remain unregistered and therefore 'invisible'.

150 MILLION CHILDREN UNDER **FIVE** ACROSS THE GLOBE HAVE NOT HAD THEIR BIRTH REGISTERED–BARRING THEIR ACCESS TO LEGAL IDENTITY

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES HAVE **37%** OF VOTING RIGHTS AT THE IMF AND **39%** AT THE WORLD BANK
VOTE
VOTE
FAR SHORT OF THE **75%** THEY REPRESENT IN THE MEMBERSHIP OF THESE INSTITUTIONS

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Legal protections for access to information

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14

1990   2025

THE RIGHT TO ACCESS PUBLIC INFORMATION IS LEGALLY GUARANTEED IN **139 COUNTRIES**, A REMARKABLE INCREASE FROM JUST **14 COUNTRIES** IN **1990**
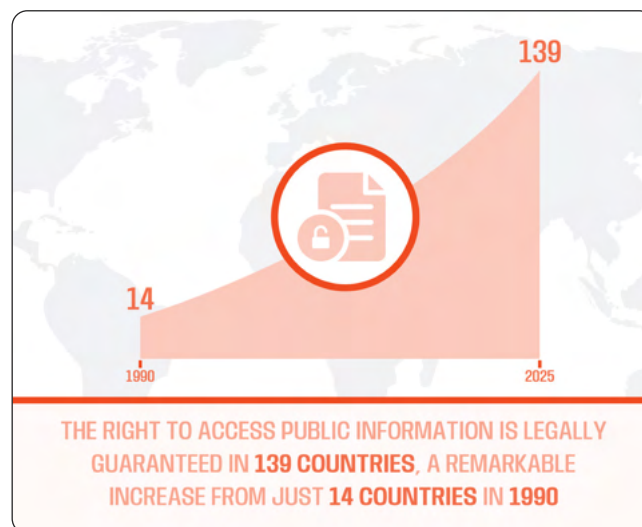
In 2025, **the right to information** is legally guaranteed in 139 countries, a remarkable increase from just 14 countries in 1990. This global progress highlights a growing international commitment to transparency, accountability, and the role of access to information in supporting the SDGs.

Preventing discrimination

1 IN 5 PEOPLE
REPORT EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION

WITH HIGHER RATES AMONG
WOMEN, THE POOR, THE LESS EDUCATED AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

New evidence from 119 countries reveals groups most discriminated against and an upward trend in global **experience of discrimination**. On average, one in five individuals globally report having been discriminated against on at least one ground prohibited by international law in the past 12 months, with most countries reporting prevalence rates between 13 and 26 per cent. Persons in least developed countries report higher discrimination rates, on average (24.3 per cent), compared to other country groupings.

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development set out a vision of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, grounded in human rights. Goal 16 is central to realizing this vision and serves as a foundation for all other Sustainable Development Goals.

However, nearly a decade into implementation, data reveal that not a single target under Goal 16 is fully on track. This challenge is shared by Goals 1 (no poverty), 5 (gender equality) and 6 (clean water and sanitation). Progress under Goal 16 remains uneven, fragile, and in many areas too slow to meet the ambition of the agreed Agenda.

Still, there are important gains to recognize. Over the past five years alone, homicide rates have edged downward. More than 500 million children under five have had their births registered, closing long-standing gaps in the realization of the right to legal identity. Access to information —legally guaranteed by specific laws in 139 countries today—opens new pathways for transparency and accountability. Accredited national human rights institutions in 114 countries now cover more than 60 per cent of the world's population. Two thirds of citizens report satisfaction with essential government services. Three quarters of seized firearms are now potentially traceable—an important step in curbing illicit arms flows.

Yet these gains are precarious, and in some cases overshadowed by worsening realities. Civilian deaths in conflict have surged since 2022, with one life lost every 12 minutes in 2024. Progress towards gender parity in representation in parliaments, public service and judiciaries remains too slow. Access to justice remains elusive for too many: one third of the global prison population is still held in prolonged pre-trial detention, and fewer than half of victims of violent assault report it to authorities. Discrimination—affecting one in five people globally, with higher rates among women, the poor, and persons with disabilities—appears on the rise. The share of people who feel unsafe has not improved. Two out of three children are subjected to violent discipline, and millions report sexual abuse. In fragile settings, one in four girls experienced rape or sexual assault in childhood. At least one human rights defender or journalist was killed or disappeared every 14 hours last year. Less than half of people living in high- and middle-income countries believe that their country's political system enables them to have a say in government decisions or that their voices influence policy outcomes. These setbacks strike at the very foundations of peaceful, just and inclusive societies, impeding progress across other Sustainable Development Goals.

The report further highlights how the lack of advancement on SDG 16 is fuelling a steady rise in forced displacement, with 123.2 million people fleeing conflict, persecution, violence, and other human rights violations in 2024: an increase of more than 50 per cent compared to 2020.

Data gaps compound these challenges, leaving countries without a clear compass to guide policy and measure progress. For many indicators, data remain insufficient or not disaggregated enough to capture who is most at risk of being left behind. Yet, there is reason for cautious optimism: a decade of collaborative efforts has expanded the evidence base for Goal 16, with more indicators now regularly reported and more internationally endorsed methodologies in place. As of the 2025 reporting cycle, 56 per cent of countries had reported data on at least one Goal 16 target since 2015, up from 40 per cent in 2023 and just 23 per cent in 2019.

The lesson is clear: accelerating progress on Goal 16 is imperative. Peaceful, just and inclusive societies are the bedrock on which all other dimensions of sustainable development rely. Advancing this Goal requires effective actions at national level as well as strengthened international cooperation.

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This report consolidates the latest evidence to guide collective action. Structured around the core dimensions of Goal 16, it underscores both the urgency of the moment and the deep interconnection between peace, justice, and inclusion within the 2030 Agenda.

SDG 16 and human rights: an inextricable link

The success of SDG 16, as for the 2030 Agenda in its entirety, depends on grounding its implementation firmly in human rights. The indivisibility and universality of human rights are not only foundational to SDG 16 but also essential for its realization.

There is no single blueprint for achieving all the SDG 16 targets, diverse and wide-ranging as they are. But by viewing the core dimensions of the Goal — peace, justice and inclusion — as well as the need for robust evidence, from the perspective of internationally-agreed human rights obligations, we can carve out a path towards fulfilling both these human rights obligations and the development targets of Goal 16.

Peace cannot be sustained without respect for human dignity. Addressing the root causes of violence, conflict, and forced displacement must align with States' duties under international human rights law. This includes measures that uphold and protect the supreme right — the right to life — in all its civil, political, economic, and social dimensions.[a]

Justice depends upon equal enjoyment of rights and access to remedies. Adhering to the international human rights normative framework ensures that justice systems are not only accessible but also fair and responsive to the needs of all.[b]

Inclusion, likewise, demands the active participation of all individuals, especially those most marginalized, in shaping the institutions and decisions that affect their lives. Efforts towards achieving targets in this area must aim to mobilize the maximum available resources of countries[c] and to leave no one behind, without discrimination of any kind, whether based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.[d]

Reliable, disaggregated **data** are critical to both human rights assessment and SDG 16 implementation. Evidence is essential to reveal patterns of inequality, identify gaps in access to justice, track progress toward peaceful and inclusive societies, and call out governments and institutions when they veer away from the right path. Data efforts must be aligned with the human rights-based approach to data, in which all aspects of the design, collection, processing and dissemination of data respect human rights obligations. Enhancing capacity and collaboration in data collection and dissemination is vital to improve the measurement of SDG 16 and end the invisibility of marginalized groups.[e]

Peace cannot endure without justice. Justice cannot thrive without inclusion. Inclusion cannot be realized without peace, and none of these can be sustained without human rights.

[a] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 6.

[b] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 2 and Article 14.

[c] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 2.

[d] Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 2.

[e] For example, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 31. pdf

Peaceful Societies
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development

UN Photo/Harandane Dicko

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Peaceful Societies

Peace is the quintessential prerequisite for progress. Development cannot be sustained when people are living in fear, when resources are diverted to conflict, and when infrastructure is destroyed. A large number of armed conflicts around the world means that peace remains elusive for many, and with it, the fulfilment of basic human rights.

A peaceful society is not merely a society free from recognized armed conflict. Peace has many dimensions, including civil, social and structural elements that allow people to live peaceful lives. For peace to be meaningful, there must be an absence of violence or the threat of violence, allowing people to conduct their lives and pursue their aspirations in safety and dignity, without being curtailed by insecurity or fear. Violence, whether in armed conflicts, in communities or hidden behind the walls of homes, takes lives, destroys livelihoods, curtails the enjoyment of human rights, creates fear and stifles progress.

Conflict is also the principal root cause of forced displacement, resulting in the loss not only of homes and communities, but also of enjoyment of rights such as education, health, and adequate housing. Mass displacements of populations cannot and will not end unless there is peace.

The right to life is the most basic of all rights, and it is gravely undermined wherever violence persists. At the same time, all forms of violence compromise the rights to liberty and security of person, and the right to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. These are not abstract concepts: they are core protections that underpin human dignity and social stability.

News reports and current political discourses tell us that we are further than ever before from the goal of peaceful societies—but what are the verifiable facts? What do the numbers tell us? Are we truly seeing an increase in violence?

This chapter focuses on the progress, or lack of progress, demonstrated by indicators related to different forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and human trafficking, including violence against children and violence against human rights defenders.

Topics and SDG indicators covered in this chapter are:

Topics	SDG Indicators
Intentional homicides and deaths during conflicts	• **16.1.1** (Homicide) • **16.1.2** (Deaths in conflict)
Violence and the threat of violence	• **16.10.1** (Violence against human right defenders) • **16.1.3** (Physical, psychological and sexual violence) • **16.1.4** (Feeling safe)
Violence against children	• **16.2.1** (Violence against children by their caregivers) • **16.2.3** (Sexual violence against children)
Abuse, exploitation and human trafficking	• **16.2.2** (Human trafficking)

Progress towards peaceful societies: what the data tell us

Intentional homicides and deaths during conflicts

• **Homicide** (16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age)

> There has been a reduction in the global rate of intentional homicide since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. However, progress remains short of the target of a 50 per cent reduction in the homicide rate by 2030.

Target 16.1 calls on Member States to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Reducing the number of intentional homicides – that is, `unlawful deaths inflicted upon persons with the intent to cause death or serious injury` – is crucial to meet this target. This is because homicidal violence is responsible for many more deaths worldwide than armed conflict and terrorism combined[2] . Intentional homicide can be considered the ultimate crime, which not only blights the lives of the victim's family and community, but also creates a violent environment that negatively impacts on society, human rights, the economy and government institutions[3].

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global intentional homicide rate has declined from 5.9 per 100,000 people in 2015 to 5.2 in 2023. The only exception was a spike in

> **If the current pattern persists, global homicide rates could fall to 4.5 per 100,000 by 2030: a positive trend, but not enough**

Figure 1: Trends in and projections of the global homicide rate (per 100,000 population) by sex, 2000-2030
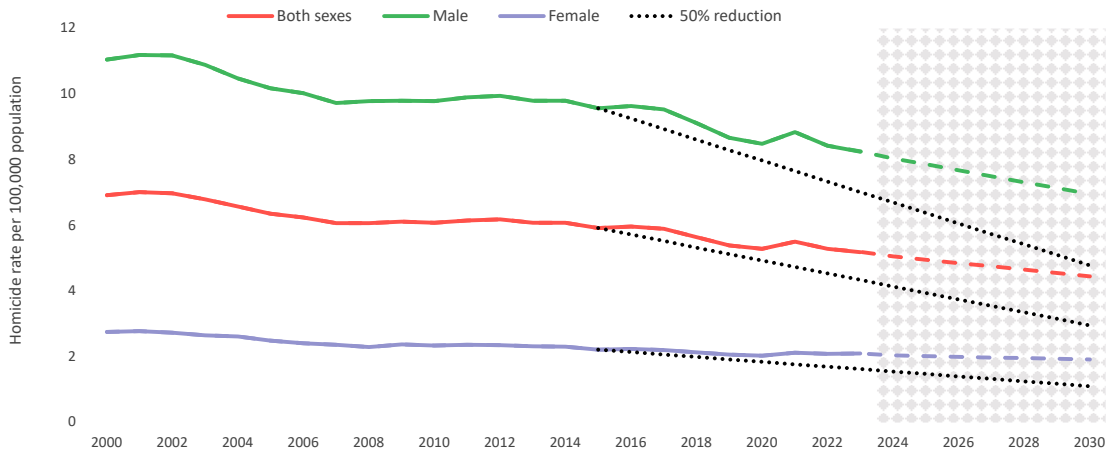
Source: UNODC estimates based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and data from other sources, such as the WHO Mortality Database, reviewed by Member States.
Note: Projections for the years 2024 to 2030 represent linear extrapolations of trends observed for the years 2015-2023. Male/female homicide rates are estimated as the number of male/female homicides per 100,000 male/female population

[2] UNODC. Global Study on Homicide 2023.
Available at: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/global-study-on-homicide.html
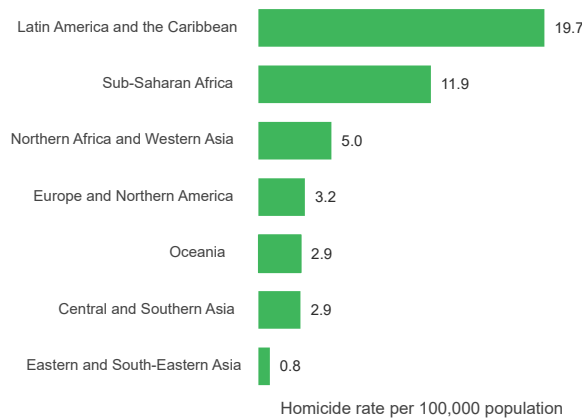
[3] Ibid.

2021, partly due to the economic impact of COVID-19 and to increased organized crime and gang-related violence, and sociopolitical unrest in various countries. Projecting the trend in the homicide rate from the period of 2015-2023 to 2030 suggests that, if this pattern of violence persists, the global homicide rate could decrease to 4.5 victims per 100,000 population by 2030, representing a 25 per cent decrease in the rate since 2015. While this is a positive development, it still falls short of the SDG target of a significant reduction, which we can think of as reducing the rate by half.

Although the rate of intentional homicide remains much higher for men than women, the homicide rate for men dropped by 14 per cent from 2015 to 2023, while the female rate dropped by only 5 per cent over the same period. While in 2023 close to 90 per cent of male homicides were committed outside the home, 60 per cent of female homicides were committed by intimate partners or family members.

Homicide rates vary significantly by region. Latin America and the Caribbean, a region more impacted by organized crime and gang-related homicidal violence than any other region, continues to have the highest homicide rate globally, at 19.7 victims per 100,000 population in 2023. Sub-Saharan Africa had an estimated 11.9 victims per 100,000 population in 2023, although the lack of data in this region makes this figure uncertain. In 2023, these two regions together accounted for almost two thirds of all victims of intentional homicide worldwide. By contrast, the rate of intentional homicide in other regions of the world ranged from 0.8 victims per 100,000 population in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia to 5.0 in Northern Africa and Western Asia.

> **Homicidal violence takes the largest toll in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Figure 2: Rate of intentional homicide per 100,000 population by regions, 2023

| Region	Homicide rate per 100,000 population
Latin America and the Caribbean	19.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	11.9
Northern Africa and Western Asia	5.0
Europe and Northern America	3.2
Oceania	2.9
Central and Southern Asia	2.9
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	0.8

Source: UNODC estimates based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and data from other sources, such as the WHO Mortality Database, reviewed by Member States.

In 2023, men represented about 4 in 5 victims of intentional homicide across the world. Furthermore, close to 90 per cent of male homicides took place outside the home, notably due to organized crime and gang-related violence. Lethal violence within the family, in contrast, takes a much higher toll on women than on men. Almost 60 per cent of all women who were killed intentionally in 2023 were killed by their intimate partners or family members, compared to 12 per cent of all male homicides. This represents some 51,000 women and girls killed at home by people closely related to them, meaning that, in 2023, roughly one woman was killed every 10 minutes by an intimate partner or other family member. Long-term trends

in most subregions with sufficient data availability show that the rate of these killings has been relatively stable from 2015 to 2023. Given this relative stability and the preponderance of domestic killings amongst all female homicides, the overall female homicide rate has decreased by only 5 per cent between 2015 and 2023. By contrast, the homicide rate for men decreased by 14 per cent over the same period. These differences highlight the need for policies to address this persistent gap and better protect women from domestic violence.

> **Although men constitute the majority of victims of intentional homicide, progress in reducing the homicide rate of women and girls is much slower**

Figure 3: Rate of female victims of intentional homicide committed by intimate partners/family members per 100,000 female population in subregions with sufficient available data, 2010-2023
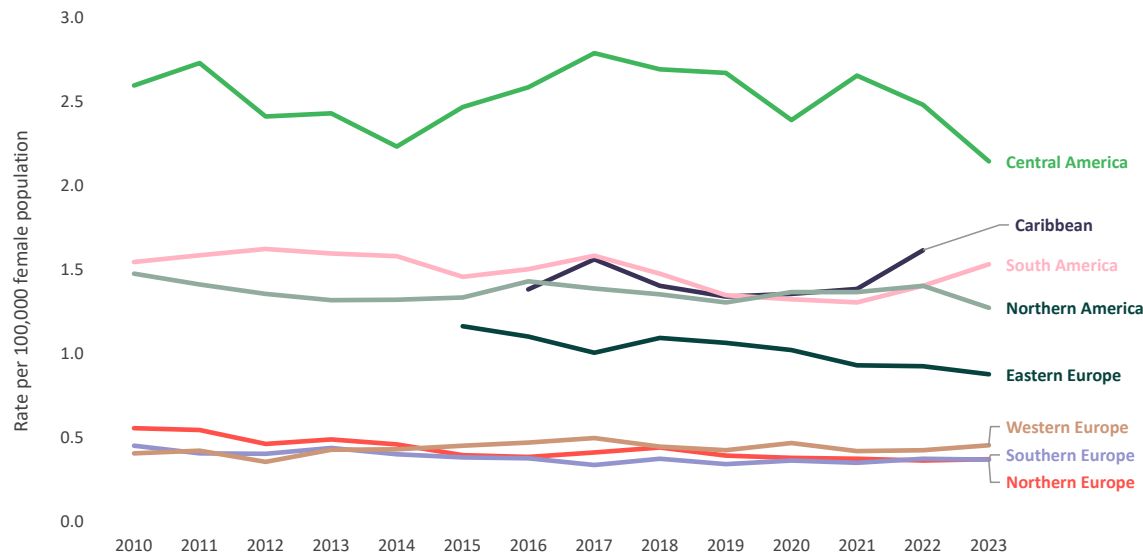
Source: UNODC estimates based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and data from other sources, such as the WHO Mortality Database, reviewed by Member States.
Note: Projections for the years 2024 to 2030 represent linear extrapolations of trends observed for the years 2015-2023. Male/female homicide rates are estimated as the number of male/female homicides per 100,000 male/female population.

- **Deaths in conflict** (16.1.2 Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause)

> In 2024, at least one life was lost every 12 minutes amid armed conflicts. With a growth of 40 per cent compared to the previous year, 2024 marked the third consecutive year of steep rises in conflict-related deaths of civilians and persons of undetermined status, claiming at least 48,384 lives.

Available data on 16 of the world's deadliest conflicts underscore the urgency for stronger protection measures and sustainable peace efforts.

Although most recorded deaths are of civilians, determining whether a victim was a civilian or a combatant can be challenging, if not impossible, especially during intense hostilities. Between 2015 and 2022, the proportion of conflict-related deaths with undetermined status fluctuated between 4 and 8 per cent. However, this figure surged to nearly 30 per cent in 2023 and 2024.

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While it was not possible to classify the primary cause of half of the deaths in 2024, heavy weapons and explosive munitions were the foremost tool of lethal violence in Northern America and Europe and in Eastern Asia and South-eastern Asia. In Central and Southern Asia, planted explosives and unexploded ordnance continued to pose significant threats, underscoring the long-term dangers of protracted conflicts.

> ### Documented conflict-related deaths continue on steep rise

> Figure 4: Number of deaths (civilian + undetermined status) and percentage change from previous year
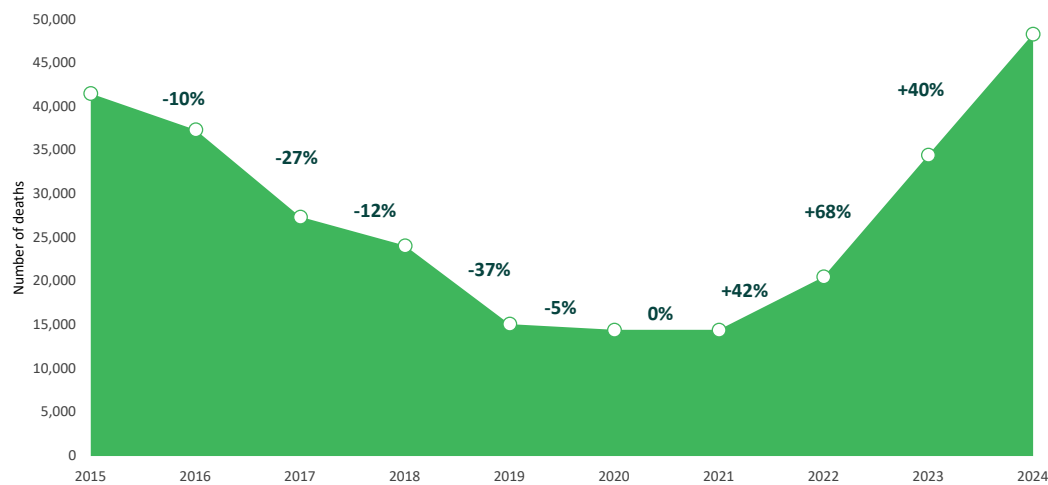
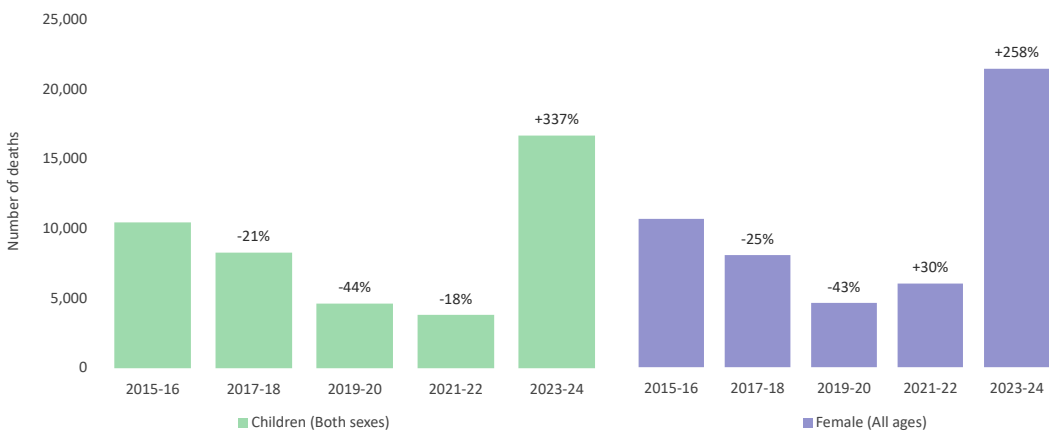Source: *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).*
Note: *Determining the victims' status is not always possible, especially during intense hostilities. Between 2015 and 2022, the proportion of conflict-related deaths with undetermined status fluctuated between 4 and 8 per cent. However, this figure surged to nearly 30 per cent between 2023 and 2024.*

International human rights law includes special provisions for the protection of women and children. OHCHR recorded that more than 21,000 women and nearly 17,000 children lost their lives during the period 2023-2024. This is about four times more children (+337 per cent) and women (+258 per cent) killed in conflict than in the previous biennium. Of those, 8 in 10 children and 7 in 10 women killed in the conflicts occurred in Gaza.

These distressing figures reveal a stark deviation from the trajectory towards global peace, security and sustainable development. Immediate and concerted efforts are imperative to reverse this trend and to adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law.

> ### There's been a sharp surge in civilian deaths – four times more women and children killed in just two years

> Figure 5: Documented conflict-related deaths of children and women, 2015–2024 (number of deaths), with the percentage change from the previous biennium above the data bars

Source: *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).*

Innovation highlights
Data science for counting conflict-related deaths: innovating for Human Rights accountability

In contexts of armed conflict, timely and reliable data on violent deaths is often scarce—particularly while hostilities are ongoing. This poses a significant challenge for monitoring SDG Target 16.1, which seeks to reduce all forms of violence and related death rates.

Casualty recording—the rigorous documentation of patterns of harm to civilians—plays a vital role in monitoring human rights violations. It involves granular data collection, including victim and perpetrator identities, dates, locations, and weapons of violence. However, this essential work is often impeded by information blackouts, population displacement, infrastructure collapse, surveillance, and security risks to data collectors.

Despite these barriers, OHCHR remains mandated to protect civilians and uphold their rights. In response, methodological innovations rooted in data science have been integrated into human rights monitoring to enhance both data completeness and accuracy.

In many conflict zones, multiple independent sources—civil society records, hospital and morgue data, government and prison registries, and OHCHR's own documentation—often contain overlapping but incomplete information. Some victims appear in several datasets; others in none. This is where data science becomes indispensable.

Advanced statistical methods, including deduplication algorithms, statistical imputation, and Multiple Systems Estimation (MSE), have been employed to reconcile these disparate sources. These techniques allow for more efficient verification, as well as robust estimation of undocumented direct deaths, enhancing the integrity and utility of casualty data.

One prominent example is the application of these methods in the Syrian context, where OHCHR estimated that 306,887 civilians were killed as a direct result of the conflict between 1 March 2011 and 31 March 2021. This figure—outlined in Human Rights Council report A/HRC/50/68— demonstrates the analytical power of combining human rights documentation with statistical modelling.

It is essential to note that such figures only refer to deaths that are directly due to hostilities. Indirect mortality—resulting from disrupted access to healthcare, food, clean water, and other rights—is not reflected, despite its profound human cost.

Ultimately, the integration of statistical innovation into human rights monitoring is not just a technical upgrade—it is a victim-centred approach. By improving the accuracy and completeness of casualty records, these approaches ensure that individuals are not forgotten, their stories are acknowledged, and the data can serve as a foundation for accountability, justice, and reparations.

Violence and the threat of violence

- **Violence against human rights defenders** (16.10.1 Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months)

In 2024, attacks against journalists, trade unionists and human rights defenders continued at deeply concerning levels: at least one defender was killed or disappeared every 14 hours. There were 502 verified cases of killings and 123 verified cases of disappearances recorded globally. Despite 13 and 7 per cent declines, respectively, compared to 2023, the figures remain alarmingly high and fall short of the target to protect fundamental freedoms, requiring zero killings and other attacks against those who seek to defend human rights, access to information, justice, or peace.

Only a small number of countries (14 States) confirmed zero killings, disappearances, or detentions of human rights defenders, journalists, or trade unionists in 2024 (see Figure 6). These 14 States are found in all regions of the world except for Latin America and the Caribbean. More than half are located in Europe and Northern America. But even in these countries, defenders may still be subjected to other forms of attacks, such as physical attacks, judicial harassment, and smear campaigns, that are not currently reflected in available data.

Conflicts continue to be a key driver of these attacks. Killings increased by 24 per cent in Western Asia and Northern Africa, and disappearances rose by 32 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa. The risk to journalists has reached a new high. In 2024, 82 journalists and media workers were killed—an increase of 11 per cent from the previous year. Over 60 per cent of those killings took place in countries experiencing conflict, marking the largest such proportion in over a decade. This confirms a dangerous pattern: more journalists have died in conflict in the past two years than in any two-year span since 2016–2017. Western Asia and Northern Africa remain the most fatal region for journalists.

In 2024, Latin America and the Caribbean was the region with the highest proportion of countries (80 per cent of countries in the region) where killings of human rights defenders were recorded. Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia had the highest proportion of countries (60 per cent of countries in the region) in which disappearances were recorded. In 2023, at least one killing was a direct reprisal for engagement with the United Nations.

Short-term disappearances, defined as those limited in duration, whether a few hours or months, have risen sharply in recent years. Although temporary in nature, they nonetheless inflict serious harm on victims and their families. The share of such cases among all recorded enforced disappearances increased from 38 per cent in 2023 to 63 per cent in 2024.

Recorded cases of disappearance between 2023 and 2024 reveal that human rights defenders were frequently apprehended by individuals in plain clothes, without an official arrest warrant, and subsequently held in undisclosed locations for periods ranging from hours to months before being brought before a court. Though less common, other deeply concerning practices included forced placement in medical facilities and forced military conscription.

Detention remains a widespread and growing threat. In 2024, at least 31 countries—more than one in ten of the world's countries—each recorded 10 or more new detentions of journalists, human rights defenders or trade unionists. This marks an upward trend, with the proportion of countries with high detention rates rising from 13 per cent in 2023 to 16 per cent in 2024.

A notable concentration of detentions is observed in certain regions. In Central and Southern Asia, as well as in Western Asia and Northern Africa, around 4 in 10 countries had 10 or more new detentions—43 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively.

A troubling trend is emerging in detention practices, according to available data. Defenders were increasingly targeted and arrested while actively engaged in human rights advocacy. These public and deliberate arrests send a clear message that a number of States are punishing individuals for legitimate human rights work. The share of such targeted detentions rose from 9 per cent in 2023 to 21 per cent in 2024.

Judicial harassment often follows release from detention. In 86 per cent of examined cases, individuals continued to face legal intimidation after their release—suggesting that detention is often just the beginning of sustained repression. Due process violations remain frequent, with 8 per cent of detainees released without ever being formally charged.

In 2023 and 2024, 10 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, of detained human rights defenders were sentenced to five years or more, including life imprisonment and, in some cases, the death penalty. Torture and other forms of inhumane treatment in detention affected 5 per cent of individuals in 2023 and 8 per cent in 2024. These patterns reflect a system that continues to subject defenders to extreme punitive measures, underscoring the urgent need for legal safeguards and accountability in line with international human rights standards.

Available data show that transnational repression also remains a global concern, with human rights defenders forcibly disappeared in countries of exile or asylum, later reappearing in foreign courts and facing detention or imprisonment. Other defenders were arrested and transferred to another country through deportation, denial of asylum, revocation of residency, or extradition, in violation of the non-refoulement principle.

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Location matters for female defenders, as seen in Figure 7. In 2024, one in ten of the human rights defenders, journalist, or trade unionists killed worldwide were women. The proportion was notably higher in Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia, Western Asia and Northern Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Women also accounted for two in ten cases of disappearance, with rates more than twice the global average in Northern America and Europe, as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Available data show that transnational repression also remains a global concern, with human rights defenders forcibly disappeared in countries of exile or asylum, later reappearing in foreign courts and facing detention or imprisonment. Other defenders were arrested and transferred to another country through deportation, denial of asylum, revocation of residency, or extradition, in violation of the non-refoulement principle.
Taken together, these findings reveal that violence against defenders is not only persisting but is intensifying. Without immediate and decisive action, the global aspiration for just, peaceful, and inclusive societies will remain unattainable.

Serious attacks on defenders occur globally, but each type is regionally concentrated. Safety remains rare and uneven.
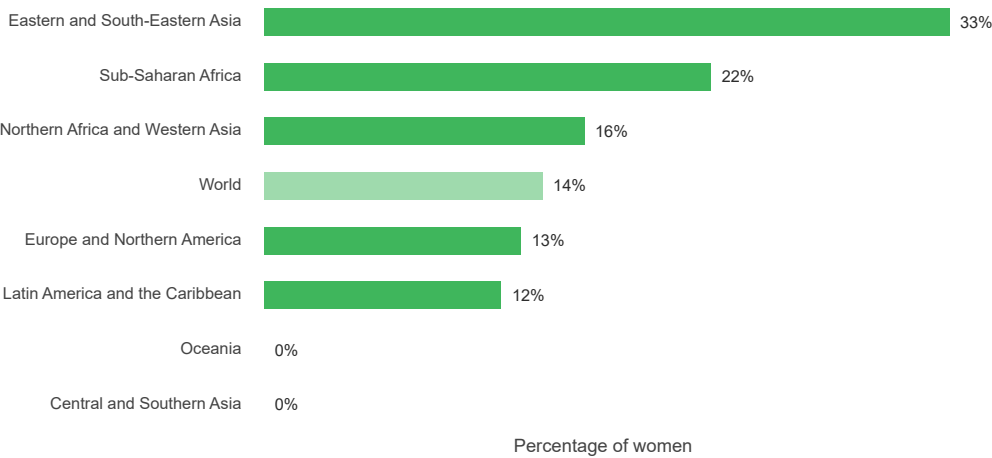
Figure 6: Number of verified cases of attacks on human rights defenders in 2024, by type of attack, country, and region
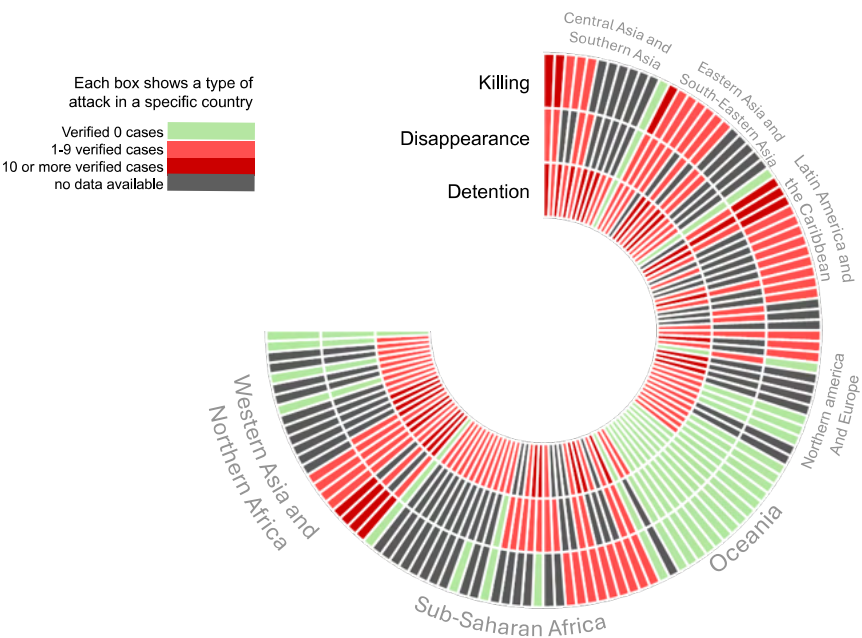
Source: *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).*

While women accounted for 14 per cent of defenders killed globally in 2024, the data reveal stark regional disparities in the fatal risks they face

Figure 7: Percentage of killed human rights defenders who were women in 2024, by region

Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	33%
Sub-Saharan Africa	22%
Northern Africa and Western Asia	16%
World	14%
Europe and Northern America	13%
Latin America and the Caribbean	12%
Oceania	0%
Central and Southern Asia	0%

Percentage of women

Source: *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).*

- **Physical, psychological and sexual violence** (16.1.3 Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months)

Data on experiences of violence, which are collected through household surveys, remain limited outside of Europe, Northern America and Latin America and the Caribbean. Available data shows women and men are not impacted by the same type of violence. The median prevalence of sexual violence in countries with data is 3.0 per cent for women compared to just 0.4 per cent for men. However, the median prevalence of physical violence is 4.1 per cent for men as compared to 3.2 per cent for women. An important form of physical violence is robbery. The median prevalence rate of robbery in the 18 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, at 4.5 per cent, is significantly higher than in the other regions. Trend data on the prevalence of physical assault, another form of physical violence, shows a decrease in 19 out of the 29 countries with at least one data point for the period 2010-2016 and one data point for the period 2017-2024.

Even when it doesn't kill, violence has many negative impacts. It can lead to poor health outcomes among victims, poor educational outcomes and the inability to work, resulting in loss of income. Violence puts a broad array of human rights at risk, from the right to life to rights to health and education to mention just a few. Measuring the prevalence of this non-lethal violence is challenging because victims of such violence do not always report their experience to the authorities, with clear implications for access to justice and redress. For example, the median proportion of victims of sexual assault that reported their experience to the authorities was 15 per cent in countries with data in the period 2010-2024. To accurately measure the prevalence of physical, sexual, and psychological violence in the population, it is therefore necessary to conduct surveys or survey modules that are specifically designed to collect this kind of sensitive information. However, even surveys suffer from underreporting, especially for violent events that might

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lead to stigma, such as rape or sexual assault. Since 2010, 101 countries have reported at least one data point on the proportion of the population subjected to any form of non-lethal violence (that is, physical [4], psychological, or sexual violence).

Available data show differences in the violence experienced by women and men. Looking at countries with data for at least one year between 2010 and 2024, the median proportion of men experiencing physical violence in the 12 months prior to the survey is somewhat higher than for women, at 4.1 per cent for men as compared to 3.2 per cent for women. By contrast, the median proportion of women subjected to sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the survey is higher than that for men, at 3.0 per cent and 0.4 per cent respectively. Just eight countries have data on the prevalence of psychological violence, making it difficult to draw conclusions at the global level. In this sample of countries, the median prevalence rate for psychological violence among women and men is higher than for other types of violence.

Men and women experience different patterns of violence

Figure 8: Proportion of the population subjected to violence in the previous twelve months, by sex, selected countries, latest available (2010-2024)
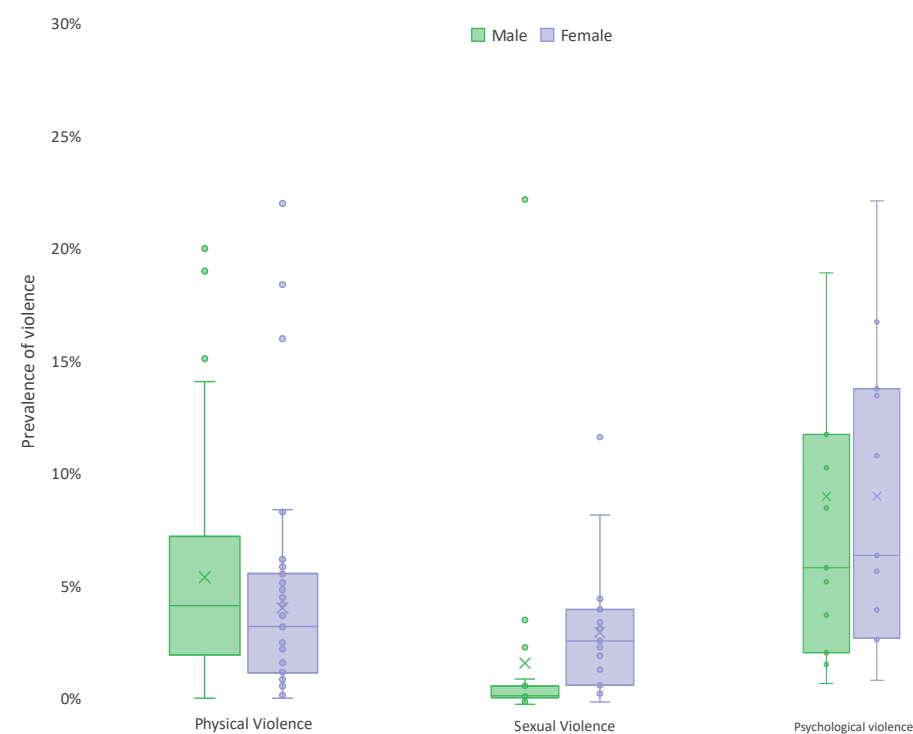
Source: UNODC based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and data from other sources reviewed by Member States. Data based on the latest available year of survey data between 2010 and 2024 for 50 countries (physical violence male and female), 18 countries (sexual violence male and female), 8 countries (psychological violence male and female).
Note: The boxes show the middle half of the data (interquartile range). Data points above and below the whiskers are considered outliers: they exceed a distance of 1.5 times the interquartile range above the third quartile and below the first quartile. The median (meaning half of the countries have a value above and half a value below) is represented by the horizontal bar in the middle.

The concept of physical violence corresponds largely to robbery and physical assault. Data on robbery are more widely available globally, with 54 countries reporting data for 2024 or the most recent year available since 2010. The median prevalence rate of robbery in the 18 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean with available data, at 4.5 per cent, was much higher than in the other regions, with the corresponding value being 0.6 per cent, both in Europe and Northern America and in other regions.

The prevalence of robbery is much higher in Latin American and the Caribbean than in other regions, according to available data

Figure 9: Proportion of population subjected to robbery in the previous twelve months, by region, latest available year since 2010

Source: UNODC based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and data from other sources reviewed by Member States. Data based on the latest available year of survey data between 2010 and 2024 for 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, 21 countries in Europe and Northern America, and 15 countries in other regions.
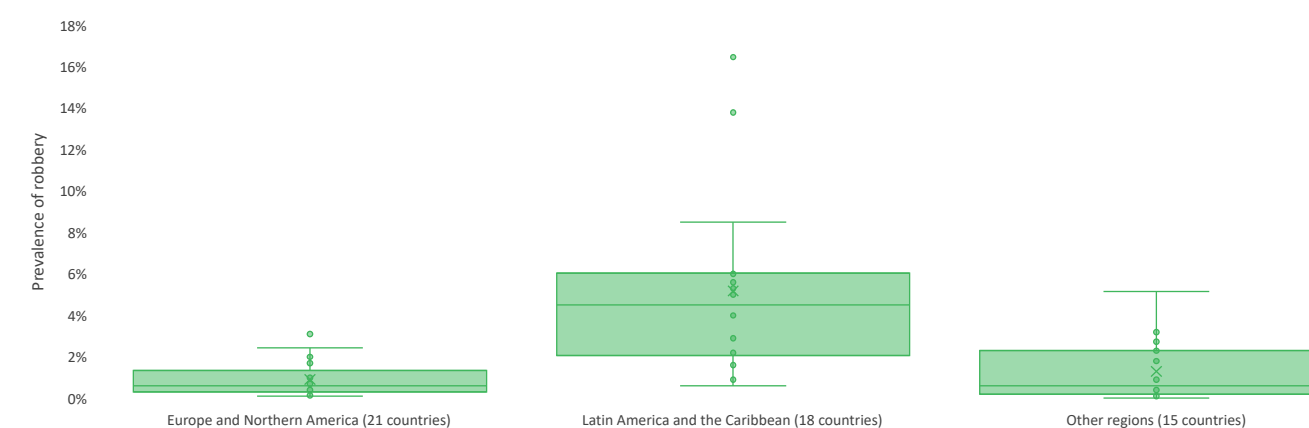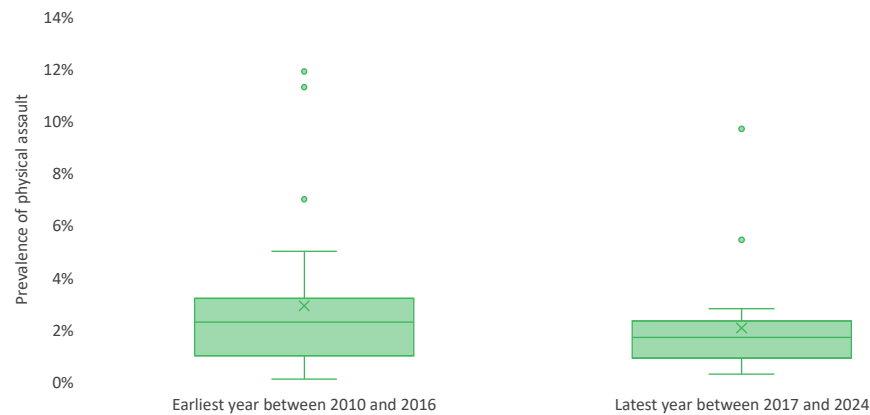*Note: The boxes show the middle half of the data (interquartile range). Data points above and below the whiskers are considered outliers: they exceed a distance of 1.5 times the interquartile range above the third quartile and below the first quartile. The median (meaning half of the countries have a value above and half a value below) is represented by the horizontal bar in the middle.*

Trend data on the proportion of the population subjected to physical assault in the 12 months before the survey with at least one observation for both the periods 2010–2016 and 2017–2024 is available in 29 countries. They show a decrease in the prevalence of physical assault going from a median annual prevalence rate of 2.3 per cent for 2010-2016 to 1.7 per cent for 2017-2024. Of those 29 countries, 19 had a lower proportion of population subjected to physical assault in the period 2017–2024. While the data available for a small number of countries show some progress, they are not sufficient to draw conclusions on progress towards target 16.1 on reducing violence.

[4] Physical violence includes physical assault and robbery.

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> **The prevalence of physical violence has declined in the small number of countries with available data**

> **Figure 10: Proportion of the population subjected to physical assault in the previous twelve months, 29 countries with available data for 2010 (or earliest year before 2016) and 2024 (or latest year after 2017)**

Source: *UNODC based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and data from other sources reviewed by Member States. Data based on the earliest available year between 2010 and 2016 and latest available year between 2017 and 2024 for 29 countries.*
Note: *The boxes show the middle half of the data (interquartile range). Data points above and below the whiskers are considered outliers: they exceed a distance of 1.5 times the interquartile range above the third quartile and below the first quartile. The median (meaning half of the countries have a value above and half a value below) is represented by the horizontal bar in the middle.*

- **Feeling safe** (16.1.4 Proportion of the population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live)

> Around 70 per cent of people globally report feeling safe walking alone in their area after dark, a figure that remained relatively stable from 2017 to 2024. However, regional differences are visible. Between 2021 and 2024, in countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, an average of 44 per cent of the population felt safe walking alone after dark. By contrast, in Western Asia and Northern Africa, the corresponding percentage was at 80 per cent. Women generally feel less safe than men across all regions. Among the 79 countries surveyed from 2021 to 2024, the proportion of women reporting feeling safe walking alone in their area at night was, on average, 12 percentage points lower (at 60 per cent) compared to men (at 72 per cent). This pattern is evident across all regions.

Feeling unsafe in public can have significant implications both for individual well-being and for community development. While reducing violence and related deaths is a key focus of Target 16.1, these statistics alone provide an incomplete picture of insecurity in daily life. Indicator 16.1.4, which measures perceptions of safety, offers a more comprehensive view of safety experiences, acknowledging that perceptions can be influenced by various factors beyond direct experiences of violence. Factors like media coverage and public discourse on crime also shape these perceptions. Consequently, feeling unsafe in public not only impacts personal well-being by reducing social interactions and trust but also presents a barrier to community engagement and development.

On a global scale, around 70 per cent of people across different world regions report feeling safe walking alone in their area after dark. This worldwide average has remained relatively stable from 2017 to 2024. However, some differences in perceptions of safety are evident between regions. For instance, between 2021 and 2022, in countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Sub-Saharan Africa, only around 44 per cent and 51 per cent of the population respectively felt safe walking alone after dark, on average. By contrast, in Western Asia and Northern Africa, the corresponding percentage was notably higher at 80 per cent.

> **Around 70 per cent of people around the world report feeling safe walking alone in their area after dark, but perceptions of safety differ across world regions, with the lowest level in Latin America and the Caribbean**

> **Figure 11: Proportion of the population that feel safe walking alone at night around the area in which they live, by region and period, 2017–2020 and 2021-2024**
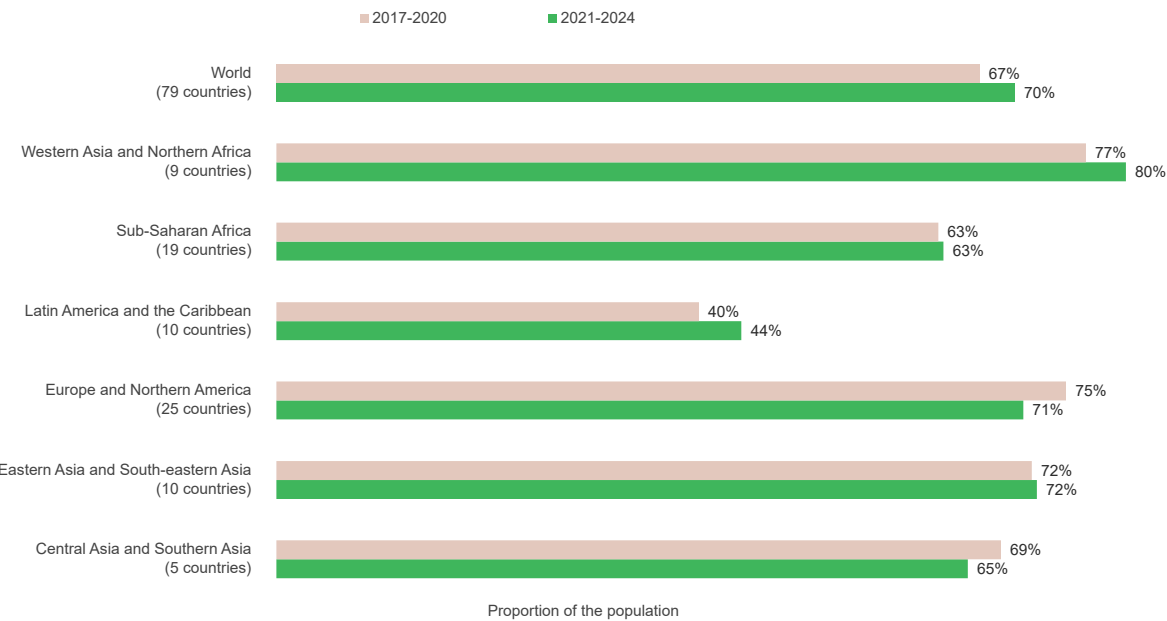
Source: *UNODC based on response to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems or data from other sources such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and the Gallup World Poll reviewed by Member States.*
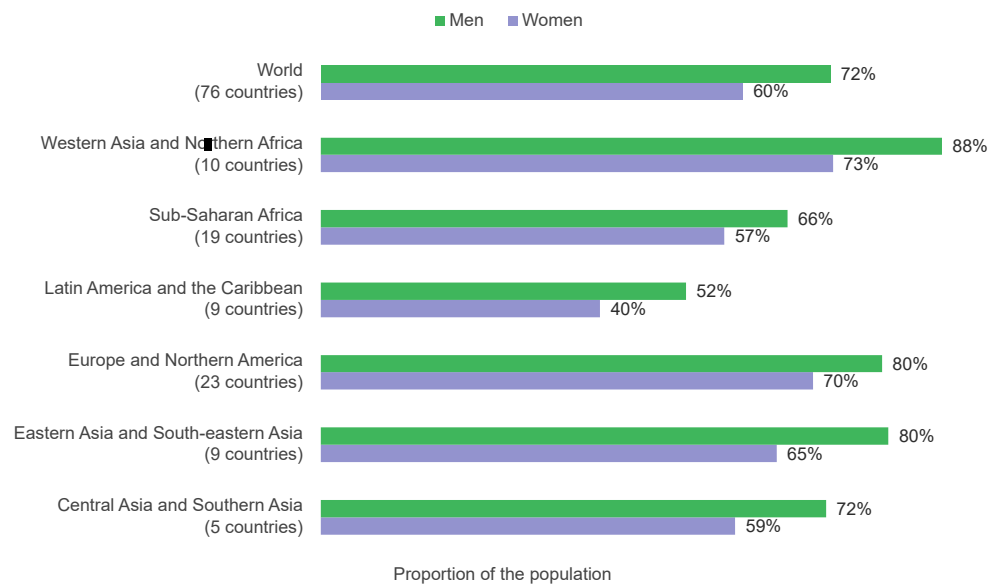*Note:* *Regional aggregates refer to 3-year averages weighted by countries' population size. Most surveys include the qualifications "after dark" or "at night" in the question wording. Data coverage: Averages for Oceania were removed, as only data for one country was available.*

Women generally feel less safe than men across all regions. Globally, among the 76 countries with sex-disaggregated data[5] from 2021 to 2024, the proportion of women reporting feeling safe walking alone in their area at night was, on average, 12 percentage points lower (at 60 per cent) than that for men (at 72 per cent). This gender difference is evident across all regions, with particularly notable disparities in Western Asia and Northern Africa (Figure 12). This indicates that, despite women being less likely to experience lethal violence compared to men, factors such as non-lethal violence (e.g., rape, robbery, harassment) and sociocultural influences contribute to shaping women's perceptions of safety.

[5] The sample of countries with sex-disaggregated data on perception of safety is different to the sample of countries with data on the overall perception of safety in the population.

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Women generally feel less safe than men across all world regions

Figure 12: Proportion of the population that feel safe walking alone at night around the area in which they live, by region and sex, 2021-2024

Proportion of the population

Source: *UNODC based on response to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of criminal Justice Systems or data from other sources such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and the Gallup World Poll reviewed by Member States.*
Note: *Regional aggregates refer to 3-year averages weighted by countries' population size. Most surveys include the qualifications "after dark" or "at night" in the question wording. Data coverage: Averages for Oceania were removed, as only data for one country was available.*

Violence against children[6]

- **Violence against children by their caregivers** (16.2.1 Proportion of children aged 1–17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month) and
- **Sexual violence against children** (16.2.3 Proportion of young women and men aged 18–29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18)

Around the world, 1.6 billion children – or 2 in 3 – regularly endure violent punishment by caregivers at home.[7] Levels of violent discipline at home, which can take the form of psychological aggression and/or physical punishment, exceed 50 per cent in the majority of the 84 (mostly low- and middle-income) countries with available data from 2016 to 2024.[8]

Globally, more than 370 million (or 1 in 8) girls and women alive today have experienced rape or sexual assault as children. Among boys and men, between 240 and 310 million (or around 1 in 11) are estimated to have experienced contact sexual violence (i.e., rape or sexual assault) in childhood. In fragile settings, girls face an even greater risk, with the prevalence of rape and sexual assault experienced in childhood standing at slightly more than 1 in 4.[9]

The protection of children from all forms of violence is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its protocols, other international human rights treaties and standards. Yet violence remains an all-too-real part of life for children around the globe – cutting across geographical, cultural and economic boundaries. Violence occurs in many settings, including the home, school, community and over the Internet. Similarly, a wide range of perpetrators commit violence against children, such as family members, intimate partners, teachers, neighbours, strangers and other children[10].

Although the inclusion of a dedicated SDG target on ending violence against children draws much needed attention to the importance of preventing and responding to the issue as essential to ensuring just and peaceful societies, many countries still lack basic data on violence against children. The issue has rarely received the same priority as other issues on which statistics are regularly produced by governments.

[6] Individuals under the age of 18 years, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

[7] United Nations Children's Fund, *Ten facts about violence against children*, UNICEF, New York, 2024.

[8] Reference: UNICEF global databases, 2025

[9] United Nations Children's Fund, *When Numbers Demand Action: Confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children*, UNICEF, New York, 2024

[10] Extracted from https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence

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Violent discipline at home is the most common and widespread form of violence against children. While teaching children self-regulation is an integral part of parenting in all countries and cultures, many caregivers rely on the use of violent methods, both physical and psychological, to punish unwanted behaviours and encourage desired ones[11]. A large body of evidence confirms that violent discipline is both ineffective and can have negative consequences ranging from immediate impacts to long-term harm.

Around the world, 1.6 billion children – or two in three – regularly endure violent punishment by caregivers at home[12]. Levels of violent discipline at home, which can take the form of psychological aggression and/ or physical punishment, exceed 50 per cent in the majority of the 84 (mostly low- and middle-income) countries with available data from 2016 to 2024[13]. In most countries, boys and girls are equally likely to experience violent discipline at home[14].

Sexual violence is a human rights abuse. The scale of sexual violence against children has long been difficult to quantify, due to stigma, measurement challenges and limited investments in data collection. In October 2024, UNICEF released its first-ever global and regional estimates on sexual violence against children. Globally, more than 370 million (or 1 in 8) girls and women alive today have experienced rape or sexual assault as children. Among boys and men, between 240 and 310 million (or around 1 in 11) are estimated to have experienced contact sexual violence (i.e., rape or sexual assault) in childhood. In fragile settings, girls face an even greater risk, with the prevalence of rape and sexual assault experienced in childhood standing at slightly more than 1 in 4 [15].

> **Worldwide, 12 per cent of women report experiences of rape and sexual assault in childhood, with the share reaching one in three in Oceania**

Figure 13: Percentage of women aged 18 and older who experienced contact sexual violence before age 18, by region
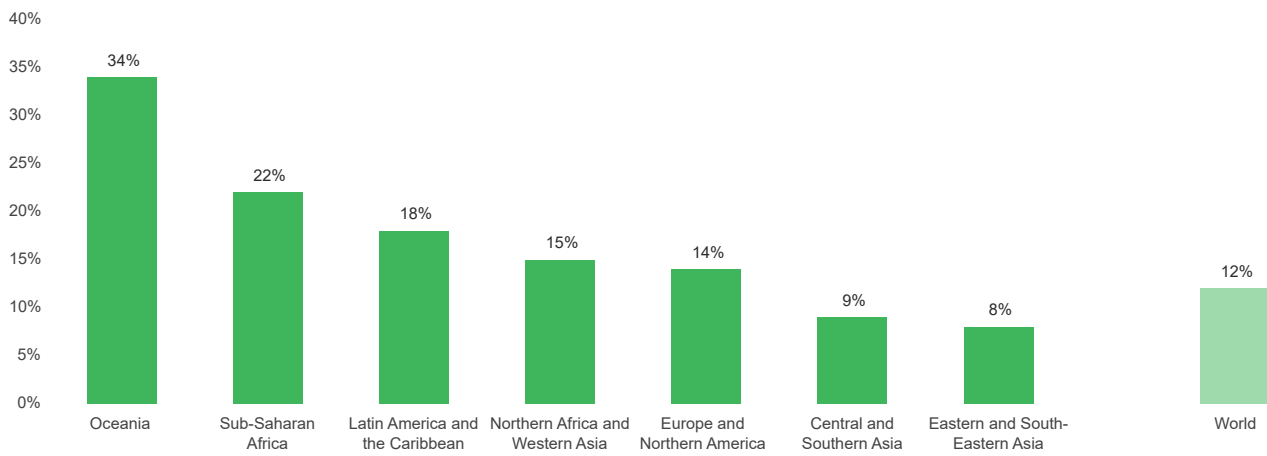
Source: United Nations Children's Fund, When Numbers Demand Action: Confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children, UNICEF, New York, 2024.
Note: These estimates are based on data collected between 2010 and 2022 for a subset of 120 countries and areas, representing 81 per cent of the global female population. Population coverage is above 70 per cent for all SDG regions, except Northern Africa and Western Asia, where coverage was below 50 per cent. While coverage is high globally and in most regions, it is important to note that the quality of data is not uniform. The data sources used to derive the estimates include two categories. Tier 1 data sources are nationally representative household surveys with broadly comparable data that are included in the official global database for SDG indicator 16.2.3. Tier 1 data sources for the majority of countries are either DHS or MICS, both of which are multi-topic household surveys implemented as part of a standardized international survey programme. To complement this, available data from other nationally representative surveys were used (that is, tier 2 sources). These included domestic violence surveys, school-based surveys, surveys on child maltreatment and violence, and regional surveys on violence against women, which also met some predefined criteria.

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[11] United Nations Children's Fund, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*, UNICEF, New York, 2017.

[12] United Nations Children's Fund, *Ten facts about violence against children*, UNICEF, New York, 2024.

[13] UNICEF global databases, 2025.

[14] United Nations Children's Fund, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*, UNICEF, New York, 2017.

[15] All estimates from United Nations Children's Fund, *When Numbers Demand Action: Confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children*, UNICEF, New York, 2024.

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Abuse, exploitation and human trafficking

- **Human trafficking** (16.2.2 Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation)

Globally, 38 per cent of all victims of trafficking detected in 2022 were children. This is a significantly larger share of child victims than the 13 per cent detected in 2004, when global data collection began. Distinct patterns of exploitation are evident for boys and girls. The majority of girl victims detected (60 per cent) are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. By contrast, some 45 per cent of boys detected are trafficked for forced labour and another 47 per cent are exploited for other purposes, including forced criminality and forced begging.

Target 16.2 calls on Member States to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. In addition, SDG Targets 5.2 and 8.7 also commit Members States to eliminate trafficking in persons[16]. This aligns with children's rights to safety, dignity, and freedom from torture and exploitation, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Although trafficking in persons occurs in every country and every world region, it largely remains a hidden crime, with many perpetrators operating in the dark corners of the internet and the global economy, entrapping victims for sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude and other forms of exploitation[17].

After a brief reduction in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), the total number of victims of trafficking detected globally has been increasing steadily. Globally, 25 per cent more victims of trafficking were recorded in 2022 than in the pre-pandemic period, and 43 per cent more victims were recorded than in 2020.

This upward trend can partly be attributed to a marked increase in detected child victims. Since 2019, there has been an increase of approximately 31 per cent in recorded child victims. The upward trend is the result of: (1) a larger share of girls among female victims trafficked for sexual exploitation identified in many regions, (2) an increase in trafficked boys detected in Europe and, to a lesser extent, in North America, and (3) a large increase of detected victims in Africa where generally more child than adult victims are detected.

[16]Target 5.2: "Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation"; Target 8.7: "Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its form."

[17] UNODC. 2024. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024.
Available at: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/glotip.html

There has been a marked increase in shares of detected child victims of trafficking

Figure 14: Percentage distribution of detected victims of trafficking in persons, by age group and sex, 2004-2022
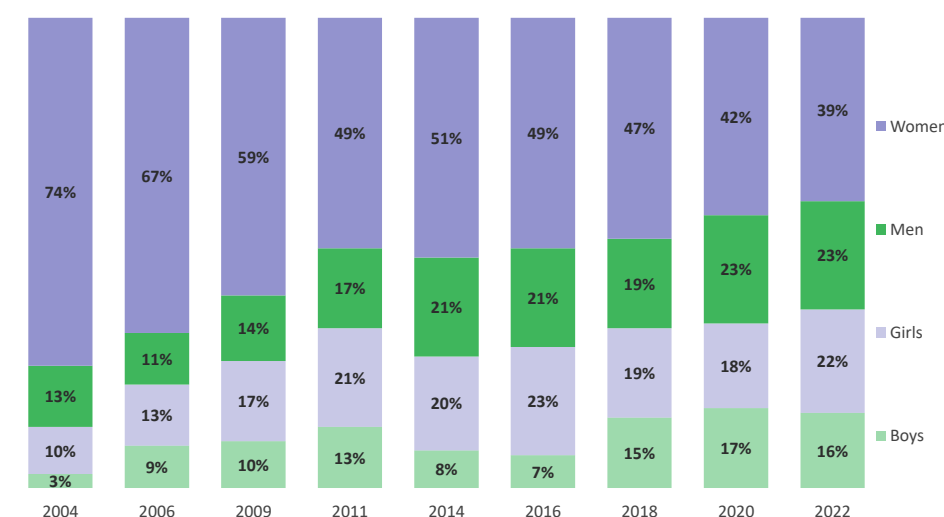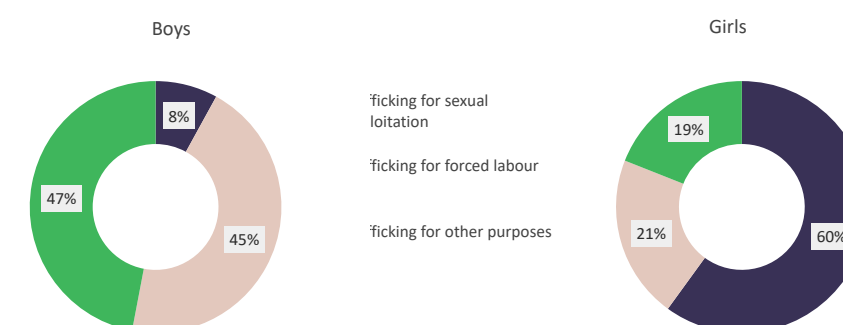

Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

The available data reveal distinct patterns of exploitation among boys and girls. While the majority of girl victims detected (60 per cent) are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, some 45 per cent of boys detected are trafficked for forced labour and another 47 per cent are exploited for other purposes, including forced criminality and forced begging.[18]

The available data reveal distinct patterns of exploitation among boys and girls, with most girl victims trafficked for sexual exploitation and most boy victims trafficked for forced labour, forced criminality and forced begging

Figure 15: Share of detected child victims of trafficking, by form of exploitation, 2022 or most recent

Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.
*Note: Based on a total of 8,749 boy and 9,323 girl victims detected in 81 countries and territories in 2022 (or most recent).*

[18] It is important to recognize that when children are forced into criminal activities, these cases are not uniformly recorded as trafficking. The classification often depends on the jurisdiction and the way in which domestic legal frameworks are applied.

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There are also significant regional differences in the age and sex distributions of trafficking victims. While increasing numbers of child victims of trafficking are recorded in Europe and North America, these regions are still detecting more adult than child victims. By contrast, Central America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa recorded the highest share of children out of total detected victims, around 60 per cent, followed by East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia.

> **Children make up more than half of total detected victims of trafficking in Central America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and North Africa**

Figure 16: Share of detected victims of trafficking in persons, by age group and sex, by region 2022 (or most recent)

Girls ■ Boys ■ Adults
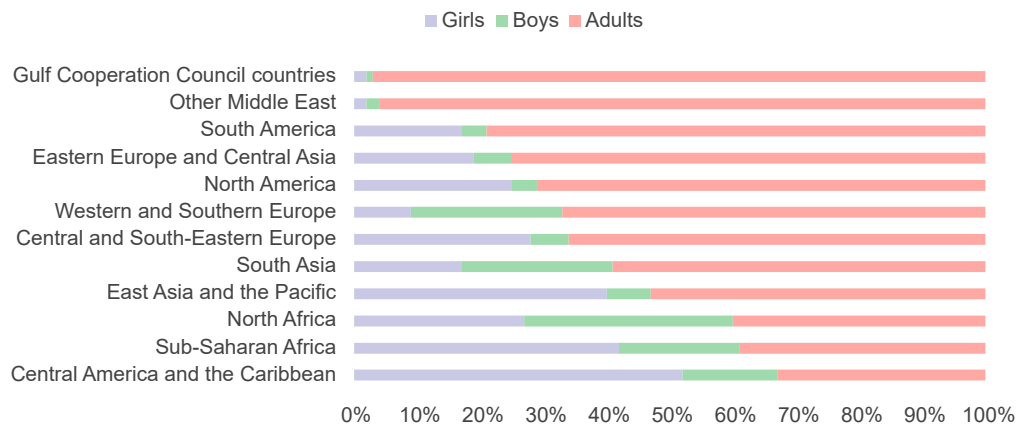
Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

Human trafficking has special relevance for refugees and forcibly displaced people, who often face social isolation, lack of legal status, and limited access to resources, making them especially vulnerable to exploitation[19]. These conditions, combined with the need to move irregularly and rely on smugglers, increase their risk of falling victim to trafficking and serious human rights violations[20].

[19] UNODC. 2024. The Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024 (GLOTIP). p 74

[20] *Ibid.*

Where do we go from here?

Intentional homicides and deaths during conflicts

All efforts must be made to prevent, de-escalate and resolve conflicts peacefully. To avert violence and protect civilians, governments must invest in proactive peacebuilding strategies that address the root causes of instability and exclusion. This should go beyond military responses and military escalation and foster inclusive, whole-of-society approaches that engage civil society, faith leaders, and local communities to strengthen social cohesion, promote dialogue, and counter hate speech and polarisation.

National and international actors must uphold international humanitarian and human rights law and hold all parties to conflict accountable for civilian harm. Governments and international organizations must step up the systems in place to protect those who defend human rights, from legal frameworks to the accountability mechanisms to ensure these frameworks are upheld. Legal protections must be matched with effective enforcement and accountability mechanisms to ensure the rights violations do not go unaddressed.

Targeted gender-specific strategies must be at the centre of violence prevention. This includes addressing domestic violence and accelerating the reduction in female homicide rates. Regional cooperation should be stepped up for tailored interventions to combat organized crime and gang violence, as well as to address its root causes such as inequality, unemployment, and exclusion.

Violence and the threat of violence

Governments and statistical offices should expand and improve the collection of disaggregated data on all forms of violence—including non-lethal and gender-based violence—by conducting regular, standardized victimization surveys in all regions. Particular focus is needed in regions where data are scarce or underreported. Awareness-raising campaigns are critical to reduce stigma and increase reporting especially among survivors of sexual and domestic violence.

Policymakers must prioritize reducing all forms of violence, with a particular focus on domestic and gender-based violence, to improve safety perceptions and well-being, especially among women. These efforts require multi-sectoral coordination across the justice, health, education, and social service systems, and must be guided by sustained efforts to measure progress. Political will and commitment must be mobilized to ensure the effective monitoring and evaluation of interventions in this regard.

Violence against children

The widespread prevalence of violence against children around the world reveals a profound failure to uphold children's rights and protect their wellbeing. A crucial first step towards ending all forms of violence against children is documenting its scope through high-quality, regular, and reliable data collection. Governments and international partners must work to document the prevalence of violence in all its forms as well as the social and structural factors that perpetuate it.

Efforts should be gender- and age-responsive, recognizing the distinct forms of risk, exploitation, and harm. This includes developing and implementing strategies against trafficking tailored to the realities children face in different regions and contexts. Standardized definitions and methods to ensure comparability across countries and regions are critical for effective policy making.

Abuse, exploitation and human trafficking

Governments must strengthen prevention and protection systems against human trafficking, especially for children and for persons who face heightened vulnerability. Targeted responses should address the

root causes of violence and trafficking such as poverty, statelessness, and displacement, and strengthen legal protections. Child protection systems must be expanded and better resourced with trained personnel, safe referral pathways, and coordination among law enforcement, education and health systems/services. National authorities should enhance reception services and mechanisms to provide immediate assistance to unaccompanied and separated children at borders in order to reduce the risk of being exploited in destination countries. [21] In light of the growing trend of trafficking for forced labour, national authorities should also provide labour inspectors and social workers with the tools and indicators to integrate trafficking as a serious threat to workers and refer suspicious cases to the appropriate services. [22] Monitoring and evaluation systems must be integrated into national development plans to ensure accountability and progress. The specific vulnerabilities of displaced persons to human trafficking must be addressed with targeted policies.

The latest state of data on peaceful societies

The first and second editions of this SDG 16 progress report detailed issues and challenges in collecting and compiling data and producing indicators on progress towards peaceful societies. What has changed since then?

Data challenges are particularly pervasive when it comes to collecting information in conflict situations—especially when that information concerns casualties. Determining whether a victim was a civilian or combatant can be challenging, if not impossible, especially if the hostilities are very intense and access is limited, as is currently the case in Gaza. To be considered verified, each death is recorded with primary source information (e.g. testimonies, pictures, obituaries). To answer the questions of who did what, to whom, when, where, and why, OHCHR's efforts are intensifying to strengthen data collection and partner with other data providers.

The number of conflict situations covered by OHCHR data for SDG indicator 16.1.2 (conflict-related deaths) has increased over recent years and now extends to 16 armed conflicts. In 2024 the coverage expanded to include two additional situations of conflict (Lebanon and the Philippines). Yet there is a continuous need to keep improving the counting of civilian deaths and to cover other conflict situations in which there is a large number of fatalities.

Producing statistics on the killing and disappearance of HRDs (indicator 16.10.1) requires meticulous, collaborative work to record, validate and analyse cases. It involves parsing data from publicly available sources, merging and eliminating duplication across several datasets, and verifying details with competent entities, including national and international human rights mechanisms. Significant progress was made to improve data availability in 2024, including expanding the scope of the data recorded to include cases of detention and torture; and doubling the country-level coverage. The participation of NHRIs in producing the data needed for this indicator rose by 40 per cent. Work continues to build on this progress in the coming years, by expanding coverage to other kinds of attacks, and improving the timeliness and efficiency of data exchange.

While global data coverage on intentional homicide is relatively good compared to other indicators under Goal 16, data on key homicide disaggregations such as those required to measure femicide (also referred

to as gender-related killings of women and girls) are still unavailable in many countries, especially in Africa and parts of Asia. Since the endorsement of the Statistical Framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls[23] by the UN Statistical Commission in 2022, countries across all regions have begun implementing the framework. UNODC and UN Women are currently supporting pilot initiatives in ten countries spanning Asia-Pacific, Africa, and the Americas. In addition, countries such as France and Italy have also applied the framework to produce national estimates on gender-related killings.

The availability of data continues to pose challenges for understanding the prevalence of violence. Since 2010, 101 countries have reported at least one data point on the proportion of the population subjected to any form of non-lethal violence (that is, physical, psychological, or sexual violence). Just eight countries have data on the prevalence of psychological violence, making it difficult to draw conclusions at the global level. Data on robbery are more widely available globally, with 54 countries reporting data for 2024 or the most recent year available since 2010.

Measuring trends over time requires, at a minimum, two comparable data points from different periods. Just 29 countries have available data on the proportion of the population subjected to physical assault in the 12 months before the survey with at least one observation for both the periods 2010–2016 and 2017–2024.

While the data available for a small number of countries show some progress, they are not sufficient to draw robust conclusions on progress towards target 16.1 on reducing violence.

Many countries still lack basic data on violence against children. The scale of sexual violence against children, in particular, has long been difficult to quantify, due to stigma, measurement challenges and limited investments in data collection. Systematic investments in robust data generation on the issue have rarely received the same priority as other issues on which statistics are produced regularly by governments.

While the last two decades have seen a proliferation of measurement activities aimed to fill existing data gaps on violence against children, these efforts have often remained sporadic and limited in scope. And while more data on the issue are available, they are often not comparable, largely due to differences in the definitions used to classify acts as violence and variations in implementation and data collection protocols. Underreporting of experiences of violence against children is common and can be attributed to a variety of reasons, including the existence of social norms and stigma, discomfort during the interview process, and concerns over safety. And all too often when victims do denounce an abuse, the legal system fails to respond, or child protection services are unavailable or inadequate.

In a positive development in the face of these challenges, UNICEF developed the International Classification of Violence against Children (ICVAC) to address the absence of standard operational definitions of violence against children. It is the first statistical standard ever developed on violence against children.[24] Following on this, UNICEF released its first-ever global and regional estimates on sexual violence against children in October 2024 aligned with the new standards for defining sexual violence against children outlined in the ICVAC.

[21] UNODC. 2024. The Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024 (GLOTIP). p 30

[22] Ibid.

[23] https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-andanalysis/statistics/Statistical_framework_femicide_2022.pdf

[24] United Nations Children's Fund, International Classification of Violence against Children, UNICEF, New York, 2023, https://data.unicef.org/resources/international-classification-of-violence-against-children.

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Just Societies

To achieve lasting peace, security and sustainable development we need systems in place that we can all depend upon: stable, accountable and rights-respecting. We should be able to trust that life around us is governed by fair and inclusive laws; that these laws will be developed, enforced and assessed in a way that ensures the protection and fulfilment of human rights for all; and that they will be upheld reliably and equitably, without discrimination or favour.

Access to justice and the rule of law are not just ideals; they are essential safeguards for human rights, enabling societies to function fairly and allowing individuals to claim their entitlements and seek redress when those rights are violated. Access to justice is a fundamental human right affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights though several articles that emphasize equality before the law, the right to effective remedy, and the right to a fair trial. While there is no single definition of access to justice, it is broadly concerned with the ability of people to defend and enforce their rights and obtain just resolution of their legal problems[25].

When justice systems fray—when survivors of violence are reluctant to report abuse because they fear retaliation or inaction, when they lose trust that their complaints will be handled appropriately through legal channels, or when they see laws being circumvented in favour of personal and political interests— the collective drive towards progress can falter. The very foundations of social trust and democratic governance can begin to erode. In the face of unjust and unequal application of rules, fear of detention and risk of retribution, the ability and motivation to strive for a better world can be diminished.

Corruption and organized crime further weaken the social contract by diverting resources away from legitimate activities that promote development. Justice, therefore, is not a mere technical component of governance: it is a cornerstone of human rights protection and a driver of sustainable development.

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) have a crucial role to play in safeguarding just societies. When properly resourced, independent from government, and empowered with a suitable breadth and strength of mandate, they can act as a vital bridge between state institutions and the communities they serve, promoting and protecting human rights, seeking justice and working to counter behaviours and attitudes that impede the achievement of just societies.

This chapter examines how we are doing in the quest for justice across all areas of life. It drills down to see what the data show us about the rule of law and access to justice, the illegal movement of arms and finances across borders, and the extent of corruption in public life. It also considers the presence and strength of NHRIs as critical actors in promoting fair, inclusive and rights-based societies.

Just Societies
Provide access to justice for all

Photograph by: Clay Banks

[25] See Praia Handbook on Governance Statistics. 2020. p.100

Topics and SDG indicators covered in this chapter are:

Topics	SDG Indicators
Rule of law and access to justice	• 16.3.1 (Reporting of violence) • 16.3.2 (Unsentenced prisoners) • 16.3.3 (Access to dispute resolution)
Illicit financial and arms flows	• 16.4.1 (Illicit financial flows) • 16.4.2 (Illicit arms flows)
Corruption	• 16.5.1 (Bribery prevalence among the population) • 16.5.2 (Bribery prevalence among businesses)
Protective institutions	• 16.a.1 (Independent Human Rights institutions)

Progress towards just societies: what the data tell us

Rule of law and access to justice

• **Reporting of violence** (16.3.1 Proportion of victims of (a) physical, (b) psychological and/or (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms)

On average, a smaller share of victims of sexual assault reports their experience to authorities than do victims of physical assault and robbery, suggesting that for certain types of offences such as sexual assault, there is less trust among victims in the criminal justice system and that access to justice remains out of reach for a large majority of victims. Available data for the period 2010-2024 in countries with data show that the median proportions of victims of physical assault and robbery in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities were 35 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively. The median proportion of victims of sexual assault who reported their victimization was 15 per cent in a different set of countries with data[26]. Sex-disaggregated data on the reporting of physical assault also shows that countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have a higher proportion of female victims than male victims reporting their victimization to competent authorities, while countries in other regions do not exhibit this consistent gap in reporting rates between men and women.

Target 16.3 calls on Member States to promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice for all. Until 2020, target 16.3 included just two global indicators focused only on access to criminal justice: reporting of victimization (SDG 16.3.1) and pretrial detention (SDG indicator 16.3.2). Recognizing the critical importance of civil justice, Member States introduced a new indicator, SDG 16.3.3 on access to civil justice to provide a more holistic picture of people's ability to access justice mechanisms across a wide range of disputes.

[26] Note that the sets of countries with data on each of these forms of violence differ.

Reporting to competent authorities is the first step for crime victims to seek justice. Without knowledge of the crime, authorities will not conduct investigations and administer justice. In addition to reflecting the confidence of crime victims in the ability of the police or other authorities to provide effective redress, and the safety of doing so, reporting rates also provide a measure of the "hidden figure" of crime, meaning the proportion of crimes that are not reported to the police.

As of early 2025, 92 countries have at least one data point on the reporting of any type of violence covered by indicator 16.3.1 since 2010[27]. Indicator 16.3.1 focuses on the reporting of physical, sexual and psychological violence. Physical violence includes physical assault and robbery, while sexual violence includes, among others, sexual assault. Data availability in the period 2010–2024, though limited, is higher for reporting of physical assault (40 countries) and robbery (45 countries) than for reporting of sexual assault (22 countries).

The proportion of victims of physical assault and robbery that reported their victimization to the police or other authorities, with a median proportion in countries with data of respectively 35 per cent and 45 per cent, is higher than for sexual assault, for which the median in countries with available data was 15 per cent. The nature of the crime, especially stigmatized forms of violence such as rape or sexual assault, and previous experiences victims had in interacting with the authorities, may impact how willing they are to report their victimization.

> A majority of victims of violent crimes do not report their experience to authorities, especially when they are victims of sexual assault

Figure 17: Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms, by type of crime, selected countries, latest available (2010-2024)
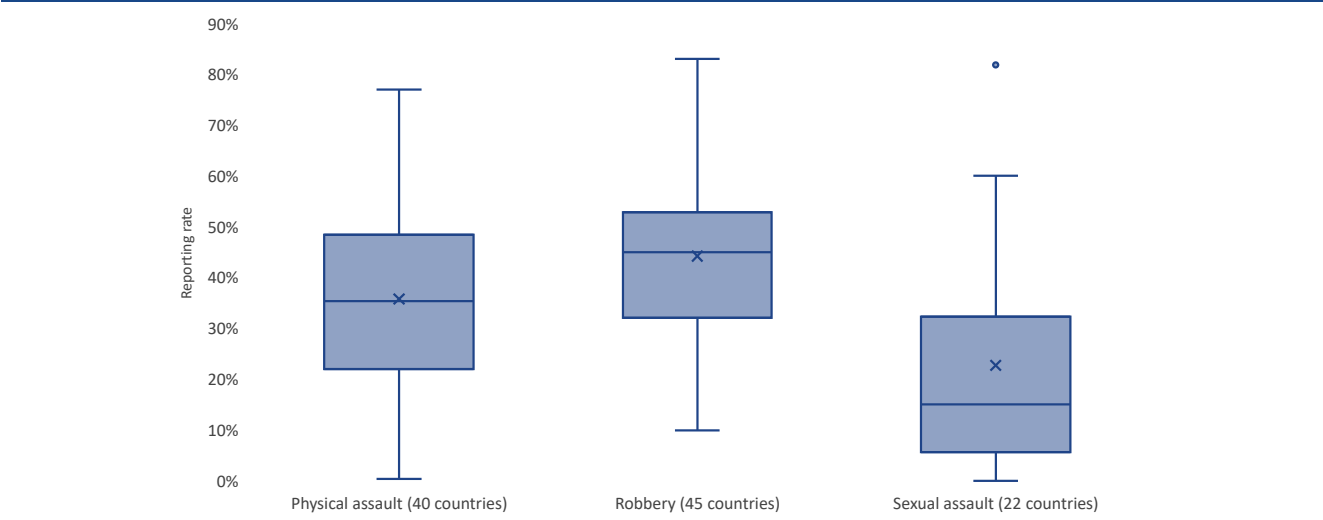
Source: UNODC based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and data from other sources reviewed by Member States. Data based on the latest available year of survey data between 2010 and 2024.
Note: The boxes show the middle half of the data (interquartile range). Data points above and below the whiskers are considered outliers: they exceed a distance of 1.5 times the interquartile range above the third quartile and below the first quartile. The median (meaning half of the countries have a value above and half a value below) is represented by the horizontal bar in the middle.

[27] This includes male and female reporting rates for physical violence, physical assault (a specific type of physical violence), physical or sexual violence (measured together), rape, robbery, sexual violence, sexual assault rape (a specific type of sexual violence).

Sex-disaggregated data on the reporting of violence remain limited. Physical assault is the form of violence with the highest number of countries having sex-disaggregated data on the proportion of victims in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities. These data for the period 2014–2023[28] suggest some region specific patterns: In all 11 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean with data, a greater proportion of female victims of physical assault reported their victimization compared to male victims. By contrast, such a gap in the reporting rate between the sexes is not evident in the other regions.

> **Sex-disaggregated data on the reporting of violence are limited, and only reveal a clear pattern in Latin America and the Caribbean, where women are more likely to report their experiences of physical assault than men**

Figure 18: Proportion of victims of physical assault in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities, selected countries, latest available year, by sex and region
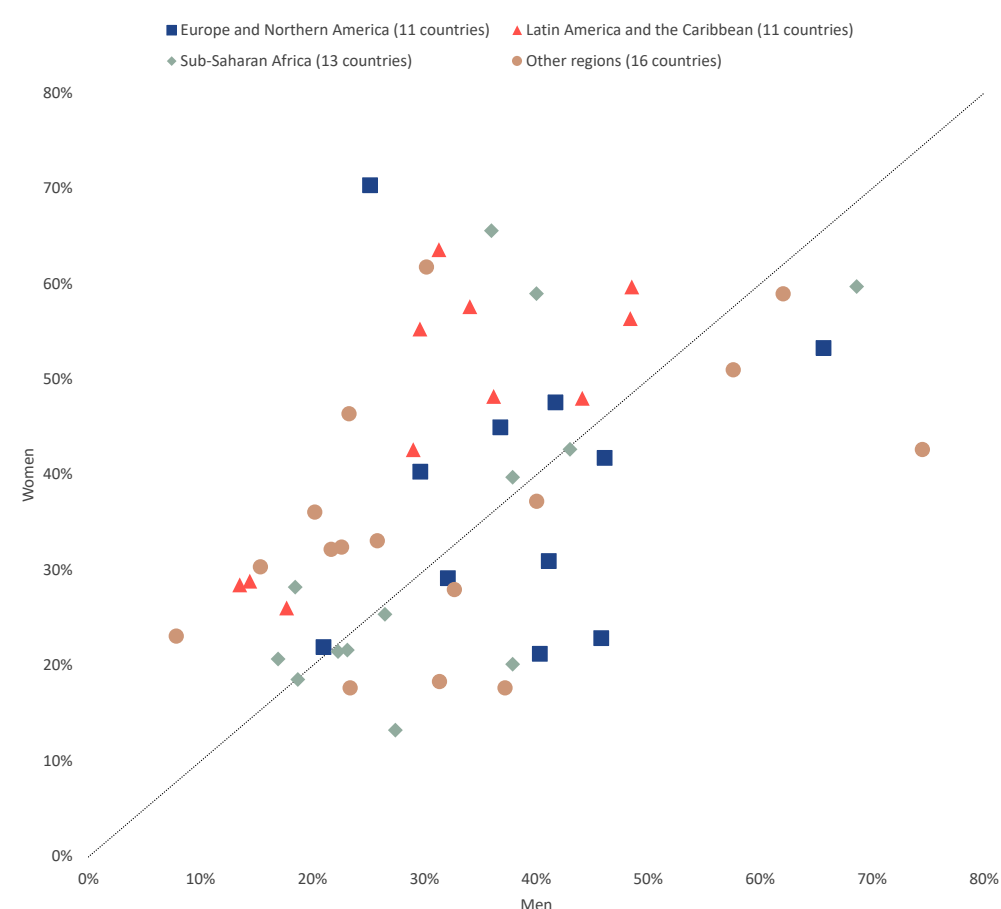

Source: UNODC based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and data from other sources reviewed by Member States. Data based on the latest available year of survey data between 2014 and 2023.
Note: The Y-axis represents the proportion of female victims of physical assault in the previous 12 months who reported their victimisation to competent authorities (or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms), while the X-axis represents the proportion of male victims of physical assault in the previous 12 months who reported their victimisation to competent authorities (or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms). Countries that are located on or close to the dotted diagonal line have an equal proportion of male and female victims of physical assault who reported their victimisation.

[28] No data on male and female reporting rates for physical assault are available for the year 2024.

- **Unsentenced prisoners** (16.3.2 Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population)

> The resort to prolonged pre-trial detention is often an indicator of limited access to legal aid and justice. The global prison population was estimated at 11.7 million individuals in 2023, representing a global prison-population rate of 145 prisoners per 100,000 population. A third (3.7 million) of the global prison population was held in pre-trial detention, a share that has remained stable between 2015 and 2023.

While no single indicator can precisely capture the complex and multifaceted nature of rule of law and access to justice, the percentage of pre-trial ('unsentenced') detainees within the prison population can serve as a proxy indicator for measuring access to legal aid, the efficiency of the criminal justice system and captures one of the many dimensions of access to justice[29]. This measure signifies overall respect for the principle that persons awaiting trial should not be detained in custody unnecessarily, which, in turn, is premised on aspects of the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty[30] and the rights to due process and freedom from arbitrary detention. It also often reflects the (lack of) access to a lawyer and/or legal aid which is an essential tool to ensure that pre-trial detention is only used where appropriate and that delays in the criminal justice system are reduced.

In 2023, an estimated 11.7 million people were held in detention worldwide, five per cent more than a decade ago. While the global prison population has grown over recent decades, the rate of increase has been slower than the growth of the world's population. As a result, between 2015 and 2023 the global prisoner-to-population ratio has fallen from 149 to 145 prisoners per 100,000 population.

The prisoner-to-population ratio varies across regions and, in 2023, the lowest level of 54 prisoners per 100,000 population was observed in Central Asia and Southern Asia, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (82 prisoners per 100,000 population). The highest ratio of 305 prisoners per 100,000 population was observed in the Latin America and the Caribbean followed by Europe and Northern America (257 prisoners per 100,000 population).

Between 2015 and 2023, in some regions, imprisonment rates increased significantly, from 259 to 305 prisoners per 100,000 population in Latin America and the Caribbean and from 137 to 160 per 100,000 population in Northern Africa and Western Asia. The opposite trend was observed in Europe and Northern America, where the prisoner-to-population rate decreased from 326 to 257 prisoners per 100,000 population over the same period, still remaining much higher than the global average.

Men make up over 94 per cent of the prison population, or 11.0 million prisoners in 2023, while less than a million (760,000) women were held in prison. The share of women among all prisoners has remained relatively stable between 2015 and 2023, staying below 7 per cent during the entire period. However, the share of female prisoners shows some regional variations, ranging from 3.3 per cent in Northern Africa and Western Asia to 8.3 per cent in Europe and Northern America, in 2023.

[29] United Nations System Common Position on Incarceration, p.3

[30] See United Nations Standards Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures (the Tokyo Rules), rule 6.1

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Worldwide, the number of prisoners as a share of the population has fallen from 149 prisoners per 100,000 population in 2015, to 145 per 100,000 in 2023: but this level varies widely among world regions

Figure 19: Number of persons held in detention per 100,000 population (2015 and 2023)
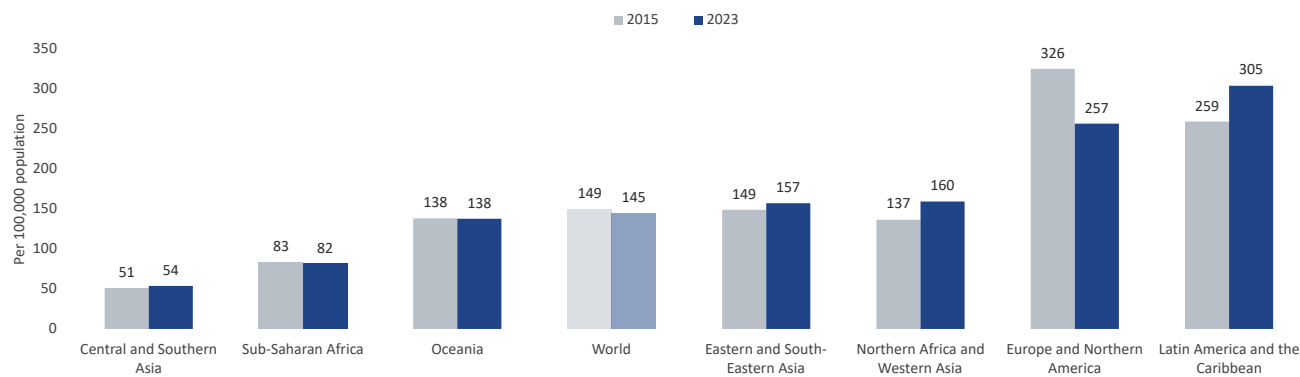
Source: UNODC estimates based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, data from the World Prison Brief (Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research) and national sources reviewed by Member States.
Note: Regions are ranked in ascending order of the rate of detainees per 100,000 population in 2023. Note: Regions are ranked in ascending order of the rate of detainees per 100,000 population in 2023. of Criminal Justice Systems, data from the World Prison Brief (Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research) and national sources reviewed by Member States.

Monitoring progress towards reducing the number of unsentenced detainees remains critical and little progress has been made in recent years. In 2023, nearly a third (3.7 million) of the global prison population was being held in pre-trial detention and their share increased slightly between 2015 and 2023 (from 29 to 31 per cent). Nevertheless, in some regions significant progress can be observed. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the proportion of incarcerated individuals awaiting trial or sentencing decreased from 41 per cent in 2015 to 30 per cent in 2023. However, in many other regions the opposite trend was observed. For instance, in Oceania, the share of unsentenced increased from 27 to 37 per cent between 2015 and 2023. Central and Southern Asia half of prisoners were unsentenced in 2015 and the situation has deteriorated further during recent years: In 2023, some 60 per cent of prisoners were unsentenced.

Nearly a third of the global prison population in 2023 was being held in pre-trial detention, with reductions since 2015 in some world regions but increases in others

Figure 20: Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population (2015 and 2023)
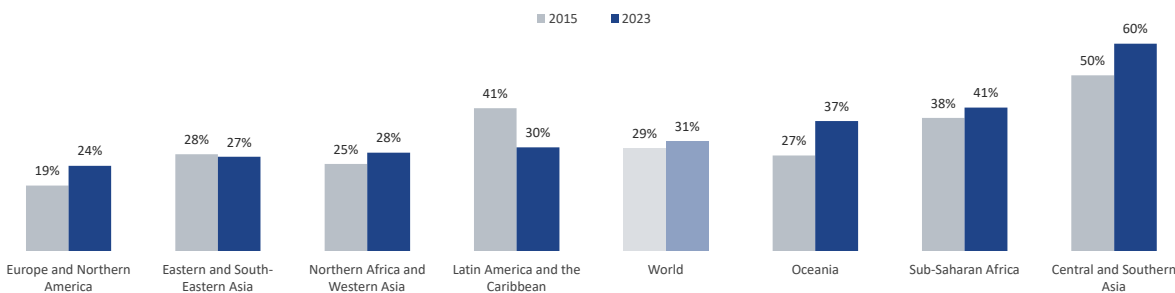

Source: UNODC estimates based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, data from the World Prison Brief (Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research) and national sources reviewed by Member States.
Note: Regions are ranked in ascending order of the proportion of unsentenced detainees of the overall prison population in 2023.

In 2023, a total of 3.5 million men and 0.2 million women were held in pre-trial detention worldwide. The proportions of men and women held in prison without a sentence are very similar and amount to 30 per cent of women, and 32 of men held in prison (Figure 3). Although there is no significant global gap between men and women in unsentenced detention rates, in some regions, such as in Northern Africa and Western Asia, Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa, higher percentages of women in pre-trial detention. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest gap between men and women, with 50 per cent of women compared to 41 per cent of men held without a sentence.

The shares of men and women held in prison without a sentence are very similar, amounting to 30 per cent of female and 32 of male detainees

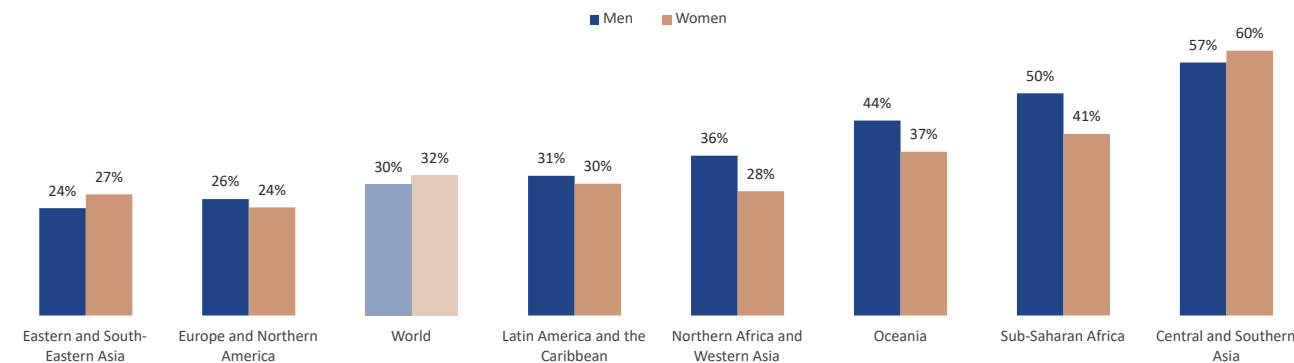Figure 21: Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population, by sex (2023)

Source: UNODC estimates based on responses to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, data from the World Prison Brief (Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research) and national sources reviewed by Member States.
Note: Regions are ranked in ascending order of the proportion of female unsentenced detainees of the overall prison population in 2023.

- **Access to dispute resolution** (16.3.3 Proportion of the population who have experienced a dispute in the past two years and who accessed a formal or informal dispute resolution mechanism, by type of mechanism)

Among countries with available data, there are significant differences in the proportion of the population that reports experiencing a dispute and accessing a dispute resolution mechanism—an indicator of civil justice introduced by Member States in 2020. In some countries, less than half of people experiencing a dispute (46 per cent) sought resolution through formal or informal channels, while in others, almost everyone (94 per cent) accessed a dispute resolution mechanism. In countries where sex-disaggregated data are available, findings reveal that the gender gap in access to justice varies in some contexts, men and women access justice at similar rates; in others, women face significantly greater barriers, while in a few, men do.

Every day, people around the world face civil justice problems, ranging from disputes over land, title deeds, and housing to unfair job terminations, debt collections, or family related matters such as divorce, child custody, etc. These are not rare or isolated events, but common problems that affect people from all socio-economic backgrounds and can have a profound impact on individuals and communities. While most countries have legal frameworks to guarantee the right to access justice, for many people who face such
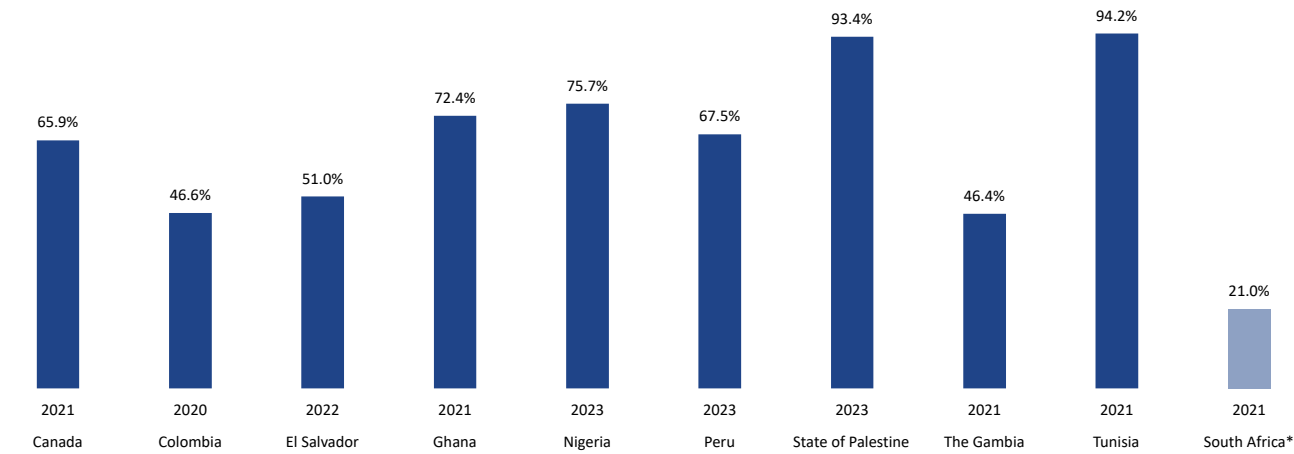
problems, this promise remains unfulfilled. In 2023, an estimated 1.4 billion people worldwide had civil and administrative justice needs unmet[31].

SDG indicator 16.3.3 focuses on the actual experiences of the population when they face civil justice problems, the steps they take to resolve them and whether they were ultimately successful. The indicator includes both formal dispute resolution mechanisms (such as courts, tribunals, lawyers, solicitors, etc.) and informal ones (such as community and/or religious leaders, village elders, Indigenous justice systems, community collaborative dispute resolution systems, etc.). It provides essential data on the overall accessibility of civil justice institutions and processes, and it highlights barriers, as well as reasons for exclusion of certain groups thus offering valuable information for achieving inclusivity and fairness in the justice system.

Despite its importance, few countries have so far implemented surveys to measure indicator 16.3.3.

> **Among countries with data, there is wide variation in access to dispute resolution mechanisms**

Figure 22: Proportion of population who have experienced a civil dispute in the past two years and who accessed a formal or informal dispute resolution mechanism, total in the population, 2023 or latest data available since 2015

	2021	2020	2022	2021	2023	2023	2023	2021	2021	2021
	Canada	Colombia	El Salvador	Ghana	Nigeria	Peru	State of Palestine	The Gambia	Tunisia	South Africa*
%	65.9%	46.6%	51.0%	72.4%	75.7%	67.5%	93.4%	46.4%	94.2%	21.0%

Source: UNDP and UNODC
Note: Data for South Africa refers to the proportion of the population who has experienced a dispute in the past two years. Data on access to dispute resolution mechanism, by type of dispute and type of dispute resolution mechanism, are published in Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey, 2021/2022 Results. 2021/2022 survey results showed that 28.9% of the population sought help from family or friends, 13.4% from community organization, 9.2% from the police, 8.1% from court or tribunals, 5.6% from traditional authorities, 3.2% Mediation, Conciliation, or Arbitration Authority and 1.5% from religious authority. No aggregate indicator on the share of people who experienced a dispute and accessed a formal or informal dispute resolution mechanism was published.
Data for Nigeria refers to the proportion of the population who has experienced a dispute in the past five years and who accessed a formal or informal dispute resolution mechanisms.

[31] *Measuring the Justice Gap: A People-Centered Assessment of Unmet Justice Needs Around the World,* World Justice Project, 2023. The paper defines unmet justice needs as unmet needs that arise when people cannot defend or enforce their rights, or obtain a just resolution of their justiciable problems: 1) people who cannot obtain justice for everyday civil, administrative, or criminal justice problems; 2) people who are excluded from the opportunities the law provides; and 3) people who live in extreme conditions of injustice. Estimates were produced using legal needs survey data collected by the World Justice Project in 102 countries and territories (representing 90.6 per cent of the world's population), data gathered by the Hague Institute for Innovation of Law in two countries, and extrapolations for 114 countries and territories without legal needs survey data. For these countries and territories, the proportion of the population with unmet legal needs was imputed based on the average of countries in the same region and income group.
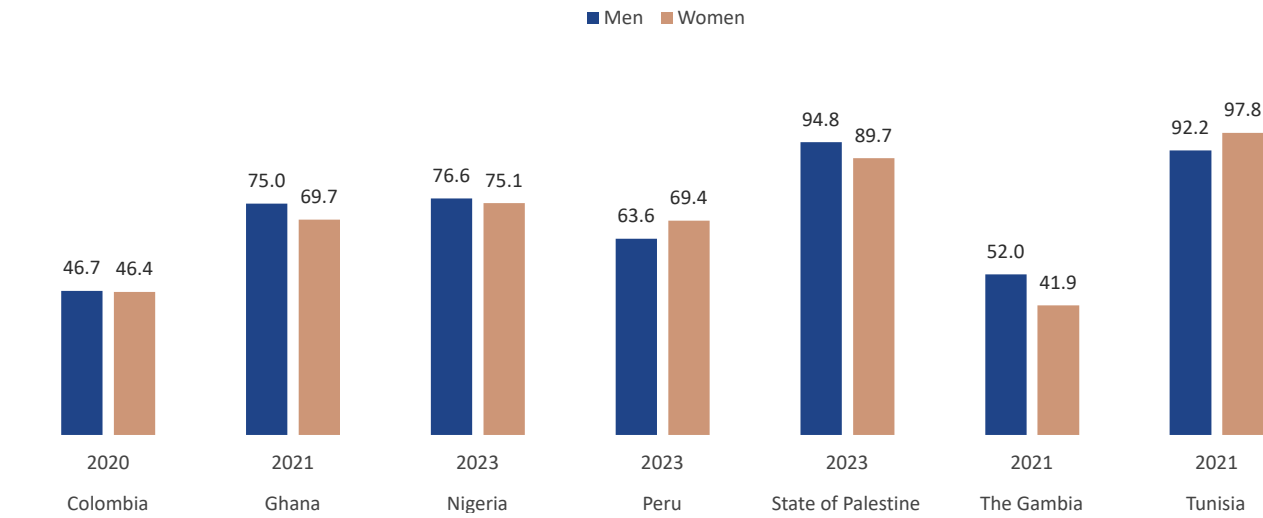
Among countries with available data, there are significant differences in the proportion of the population that reports experiencing a dispute and accessing a dispute resolution mechanism. In some countries, less than half of people experiencing a dispute (46 per cent) sought resolution through formal or informal channels, while in others, almost everyone (94 per cent) accessed a dispute resolution mechanism.

Sex disaggregated data are crucial to shed light on the gender disparities in access to justice and can inform the formulation of gender-responsive and culturally appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms. In countries where sex-disaggregated data are available, findings reveal that the gender gap in access to justice varies by context: in some countries, men and women access justice at similar rates; in others, women face significantly greater barriers, while in a few, men encounter greater barriers than women in accessing justice.

Data from more countries are urgently needed to assess the global state of access to civil justice. Moreover, disaggregated data by types of dispute experienced by the population, as well as the specific disputes experienced by men and women are essential to design impactful, evidence-based policies. Further disaggregation by various population groups, such as persons with disabilities, income levels, and individuals from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds, is essential to identify and address the specific needs of the most vulnerable segments of society. There is an urgent need for investment in regular legal needs surveys and access-to-justice data collection, disaggregated by sex, age, disability, and other relevant characteristics. Integrating SDG Indicator 16.3.3 into national SDG monitoring frameworks can help track progress and inform evidence-based justice reforms.

> **Gender gaps in access to dispute resolution mechanisms vary in both size and direction**

Figure 23: Proportion of population who have experienced a civil dispute in the past two years and who accessed a formal or informal dispute resolution mechanism, by sex, 2023 or latest data available since 2015

■ Men ■ Women

	2020	2021	2023	2023	2023	2021	2021
	Colombia	Ghana	Nigeria	Peru	State of Palestine	The Gambia	Tunisia
Men	46.7	75.0	76.6	63.6	94.8	52.0	92.2
Women	46.4	69.7	75.1	69.4	89.7	41.9	97.8

Source: UNDP and UNODC

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Illicit financial and arms flows

- **Illicit financial flows** (16.4.1 Total value of inward and outward illicit financial flows (in current United States dollars)

The first official country-level estimates of illicit financial flows (IFFs) have shown alarming cross-border amounts related to criminal activities[32] . Results from the first experimental estimates of tax and commercial IFFs also highlight their significance. For example, in Namibia they may have exceeded more than 8 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022[33]. If redirected to the formal economy, illicit flows could serve as a vital source of funding for sustainable development initiatives and help bridge the financing gap[34].

IFFs are flows that are illicit in origin, transfer or use, that reflect an exchange of value and that cross country borders[35]. The achievement of the SDGs is hindered by IFFs, which continue to drain national resources that could otherwise be used to bolster institutions, uphold human rights obligations and pursue sustainable development for all. IFFs deplete critical development resources both when they exit a country (outflows) and when they enter (inflows), as they can foster corruption and feed illegal economies that benefit organized crime and terrorism at the expense of community development and human rights, especially in areas exposed to political instability and a weak rule of law.

SDG indicator 16.4.1 measures the total value of IFFs moving in and out of countries (in current United States dollars). Reducing these flows is crucial for sustainable development and helps ensure that scarce resources are available for public good rather than lost to corruption and crime.

National data on illicit financial flows remain scarce, yet anecdotal evidence suggests that they can be substantial. For example, drug trafficking generates significant illicit income for traffickers, some of which may be further moved abroad to purchase goods and services or invest in assets. Work on crime-related illicit financial flows to date has resulted in the production of estimates for nine countries, which are summarized in the UNODC publication Crime-related illicit financial flows: latest progress[36] . Estimates suggest significant IFF values, ranging from several hundreds of millions to billions of dollars.

The latest estimates from Myanmar showed that the opiates economy generated potential inwards IFFs of between US$0.5 billion and US$1.3 billion in 2023 – equivalent to 0.8 to 2.0 per cent of Gross Domestic Product in the same year[37]. A 2025 UNODC study examined the illicit income generated from trafficking

opiates and methamphetamine along the Balkan route – stretching from Afghanistan through Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Türkiye before leading into Europe – revealing that this activity potentially generates IFFs related to the management of drug trafficking profits of between US$3.4 billion to US$6.9 billion annually between 2019 and 2022[38].

On the tax and commercial side, experimental estimates show tax and trade IFFs reaching from 5 to 30 per cent of official goods trade value in Africa. In Zambia, IFF risks were most pronounced in mineral exports and high-value imports. In Ghana, trade-based IFFs are prevalent in the exports of raw minerals (gold, manganese, crude oil) and agricultural produce, alongside imports of processed goods. In Namibia IFFs may have exceeded more than 8 per cent of GDP in 2022[39].

- **Illicit arms flows** (16.4.2 Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments)

Tracing of seized firearms is a key measure in the process of investigating and disclosing the origins of illicit firearms. But countries still face significant challenges in establishing this information. On average, among Member States with available data the origin of 42 per cent of seized firearms was successfully traced between 2016 and 2023.

Target 16.4 calls on Member States to significantly reduce illicit arms flows and combat all forms of organized crime. The establishment of the illicit nature of weapons seized, found and surrendered in the context of crime or armed conflict constitutes a key step towards this target. Proper investigations to identify the point of diversion of seized firearms into the illicit market (the so-called 'tracing' of seized weapons) is an important step to dismantle organized criminal groups and the illicit flows they manage. SDG Indicator 16.4.2 monitors the efficiency of tracing efforts undertaken by countries[40].

Public safety and accountability demand robust systems that prevent illegal armament and uphold the right to live free from violence. National authorities undertake tracing of these weapons to identify their origin as well as their point of diversion to the illicit market. However, tracing remains a challenge for many countries due to the lack of resources and capacity, and of effective international cooperation.

Based on data from 55 countries, on average around three quarters of seized firearms are potentially traceable[41], consisting mainly of firearms that have unique markings that can be used for identifying their illicit origin. Levels of successful tracing vary widely between and within regions and are partly influenced by the volume of arms seized. In countries where the yearly average number of firearm seizures exceed 10,000 - the majority of which are in Latin America and the Caribbean – the share successfully traced falls below the global average of 42 per cent, potentially highlighting the burden of establishing the illicit

[32] United Nations, "Indicator 16.4.1: Total value of inward and outward illicit financial flows (in current United States dollars)", SDG Global Database. Available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal

[33] United Nations, UN Trade and Development, "Joint Measurement and Policy Workshop on Illicit Financial Flows", meeting report. Available at https://unctad.org/system/files/information-document/20250203-07_measurementpolicyworkshop_finalreport.pdf

[34] Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2021, Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development (United Nations publication, 2021).

[35] UNCTAD and UNODC (2020). Conceptual Framework for the Statistical Measurement of Illicit Financial Flows. Available at: https://unctad.org/system/files/officialdocument/IFF_Conceptual_Framework_EN.pdf

[36] UNODC, Crime-related illicit financial flows: latest progress (United Nations publication, 2023). Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/IFF/2023/IFFs_Estimates_Report_2023-final-11dec2023.pdf

[37] UNODC, Myanmar Opium Survey 2024: Cultivation, Production and Implications (United Nations publication, 2024). Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Myanmar/Myanmar_Opium_Survey_2024.pdf

[38] UNODC, Opiates and Methamphetamine Trafficking on the Balkan Route: Drug Flows, Illicit Incomes and Illicit Financial Flows (United Nations Publication, 2025).

[39] United Nations, UN Trade and Development, "Joint Measurement and Policy Workshop on Illicit Financial Flows", meeting report. Available at https://unctad.org/system/files/information-document/20250203-07_measurementpolicyworkshop_finalreport.pdf

[40] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-16-04-02.pdf

[41] Potentially traceable firearms exclude firearms seized from their legitimate owners. Firearms whose marking status was not recorded are also included and considered as "unsuccessful" instances of the efforts to identify the illicit origin. Based on data for 2016 to 2023 reported through the Illicit Arms Flow Questionnaire (UN-IAFQ).

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context of seized arms. By contrast, countries with low levels of arms seized exhibit great variability in the proportion of their successful tracing. In Northern America and Europe, a relatively low success rate[42] of firearms tracing was reported for seven out of thirteen countries.

> **Worldwide, an average of 42 per cent of seized firearms are successfully raced, with low success rates in many countries including those with large numbers seized**

Figure 24: Average value (2016-2023) of SDG indicator 16.4.2, in comparison with average number of arms seized (2016 – 2023), by country
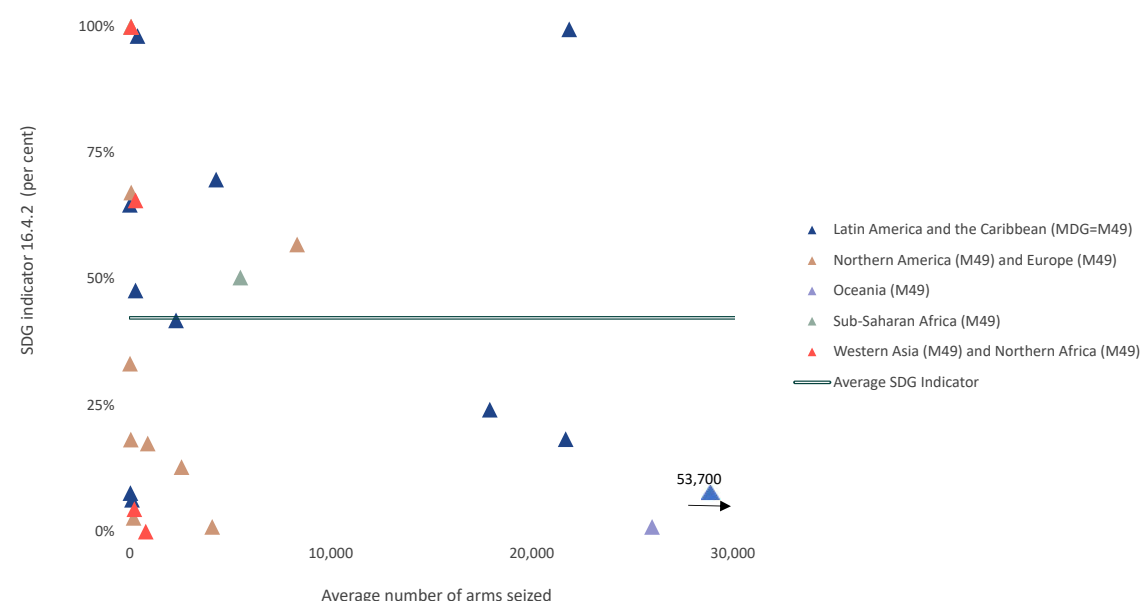
Source: Illicit Arms Flow Questionnaire (IAFQ).
Note: Simple averages calculated based on data submitted by 33 Member States between 2016 and 2024.

In the majority of successful tracing cases, firearms are traced domestically to a national registry (24 out of 42 per cent) but a significant share are traced internationally to a foreign registry (9 out of 42 per cent), meaning that cooperative practices at the international level are very important, although improvements in this area are still needed.

While the destruction of weapons[43] constitutes an effective method of reducing the number of small arms on the illicit market (more than 1.7 million weapons destroyed between 2018 and 2023[44]), States can implement several actions to prevent potential diversion of weapons to the illicit market. Marking and record keeping are the prerequisites for effective tracing operations. As such, efforts taken by States to mark and record the weapons collected constitute key measures to reducing illicit arms flows in accordance with SDG target 16.4. In 2022-2023, national authorities collected[45] 860,598 weapons, of which 50 per cent were subsequently marked, 66 per cent were recorded, 65 per cent were destroyed and 42 per cent were traced[46], highlighting significant increases in the percentage of subsequently destroyed and traced weapons, compared to 2020-2021[47].

> **Of the 860,598 weapons seized in 2022-2023, almost two thirds were destroyed, helping to reduce the number of small arms on the illicit market**

Figure 25: Follow-up actions with respect to weapons seized, found and surrendered as a share of all weapons, 2022-2023
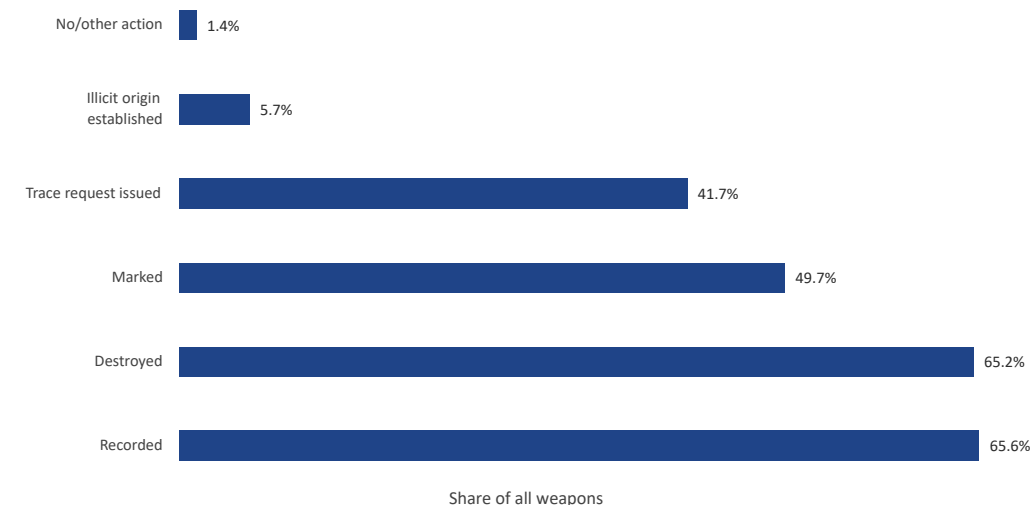
Source: 2024 national reports of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (PoA).
Note: Simple averages calculated based on data submitted by 35 Member States for the period 2022-2023.

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[43] The terms "arms" and "weapons" refer to small arms and light weapons and can be used interchangeably.

[44] Overall, considering also weapons collected in previous years and obsolete weapons from national stockpiles, more than 1,763,000 weapons were destroyed between 2018 and 2023. Based on data from 96 countries for the 2020 national reports, 90 countries for the 2022 national reports and 100 countries for the 2024 national reports on the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons.

[45] Weapons collected include those seized, surrendered or found and brought under the control or custody of relevant public authorities.

[46] Average based on data from 67 Member States reported through the 2024 national reports on the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons.

[47] In 2020-2021, national authorities marked on average 63% of the weapons collected, recorded 75% of the weapons collected, destr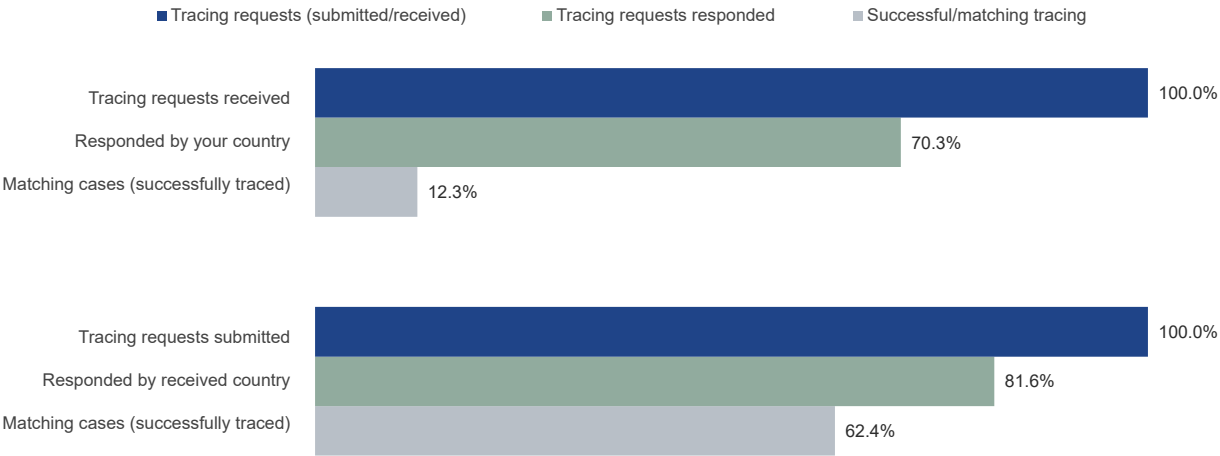oyed 45% of weapons collected and traced 9% of weapons. Simple average based on data from 29 Member States reported through the 2020 national reports on the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons.

[42] Below the average of 42 per cent.

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In order to reduce illicit arms flows, information on specific cases and incidents in which weapons are diverted to illicit markets also needs to be collected and shared by national authorities. The two main sources of weapon diversion are 'diversion during international transfers' and 'diversion from national stockpile'. In 2022-2023, 36 countries reported relevant information on incidents of weapons diversion through international transfers or from national stockpiles, including the details on 6 incidents[48]. Also in 2022-2023, among the 100 national reports that were submitted, 21 countries reported the number of tracing requests submitted or received. Where such tracing requests were submitted to another country, 81 per cent of the requests were responded to by the receiving countries (counterparts) and 62 per cent of matching (successfully traced) cases were found. Where such tracing requests were received from another country, 70 per cent of the requests were responded to by the receiving countries (themselves) and 12 per cent of matching (successfully traced) cases were found[49].

> Sharing information across national borders is key to reducing illicit arms flows, with countries needing to both respond to information requests and trace the illicit weapons flows

Figure 26: International firearms tracing requests (2022-2023)

Legend: ■ Tracing requests (submitted/received) ■ Tracing requests responded ■ Successful/matching tracing

Tracing requests received — 100.0%
Responded by your country — 70.3%
Matching cases (successfully traced) — 12.3%

Tracing requests submitted — 100.0%
Responded by received country — 81.6%
Matching cases (successfully traced) — 62.4%

Source: 2024 national reports of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (PoA).

Corruption

- **Bribery prevalence among the population** (16.5.1 Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months)
and
- **Bribery prevalence among businesses** (16.5.2 Proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and that paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials during the previous 12 months)

> Available survey data from 142 countries and territories suggest that, on average, roughly one in every five citizens was asked to pay a bribe when interacting with a public official in the past year. The prevalence of bribery among the population varies considerably within regions. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, Mauritius recorded a population bribery prevalence of 5 per cent in 2017, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo recorded a rate of 80 per cent in 2018: 16 times higher. In the period 2010-2016, the median population bribery prevalence at the global level stood at 12.2 per cent, while the corresponding figure was 16.0 per cent in the period 2017-2024, suggesting relative stability in global trends.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identifies corruption as a key impediment to sustainable development and calls on Members States to "substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms" (Target 16.5). Two indicators are used to monitor progress towards Target 16.5. First, the prevalence of bribery among the population (SDG indicator 16.5.1) and second, the prevalence of bribery among businesses (SDG indicator 16.5.2)[50]. Both indicators require experience-based sample surveys to be conducted.

Experience-based surveys can avoid the pitfalls of both administrative data on corruption (namely the pervasive undercounting of undetected and unreported cases) and the shortcomings of perception-based corruption studies, which by definition capture only opinions rather than the actual phenomenon. When well-designed and implemented according to international standards, experienced-based surveys on corruption can measure both levels of and trends in bribery and other forms of corruption. They can also help to identify specific institutions, businesses and population groups that are most exposed to corruption[51]. As a result, these surveys have direct policy implications: they can guide national authorities on where to focus their anti-corruption efforts. However, it is also important to note that experience-based corruption surveys cannot capture cases of "grand corruption" among political and business elites. Instead, they capture the everyday experiences of ordinary citizens and businesses when accessing public services.

Globally, 142 countries and territories have data on population bribery prevalence for 2024 or the latest year available since 2010. These data indicate that bribery prevalence varies significantly between regions. For example, in countries with data in Central and Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the median bribery prevalence in the population is at 24.0 per cent. By contrast, this figure falls to 15.7 per cent in Eastern and SouthEastern Asia and 9.0 in Europe and Northern America.

[48] Among 100 States which submitted national reports for the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons International Tracing Instrument (PoA/ITI) in 2024, 36 States provided information on diversion incidents related to international transfers or national stockpile management, including details on 6 incidents.

[49] The total of tracing requests submitted and received are 673 and 4,489 respectively in 2022, whereas 4,483 and 6,409 respectively in 2023, according to the 2024 PoA national reports.

[50] The former is henceforth referred to as "population bribery prevalence" and the latter is referred to as "business bribery prevalence".

[51] For more information, see: UNODC, *Manual on Corruption Surveys* (Vienna, 2018); UNODC, *Statistical framework to measure corruption (Vienna, 2023)*

The prevalence of bribery varies significantly between regions

Figure 27: Proportion of population that experienced bribery when in contact with public officials during the previous 12 months, by region, 2024 or latest year since 2010
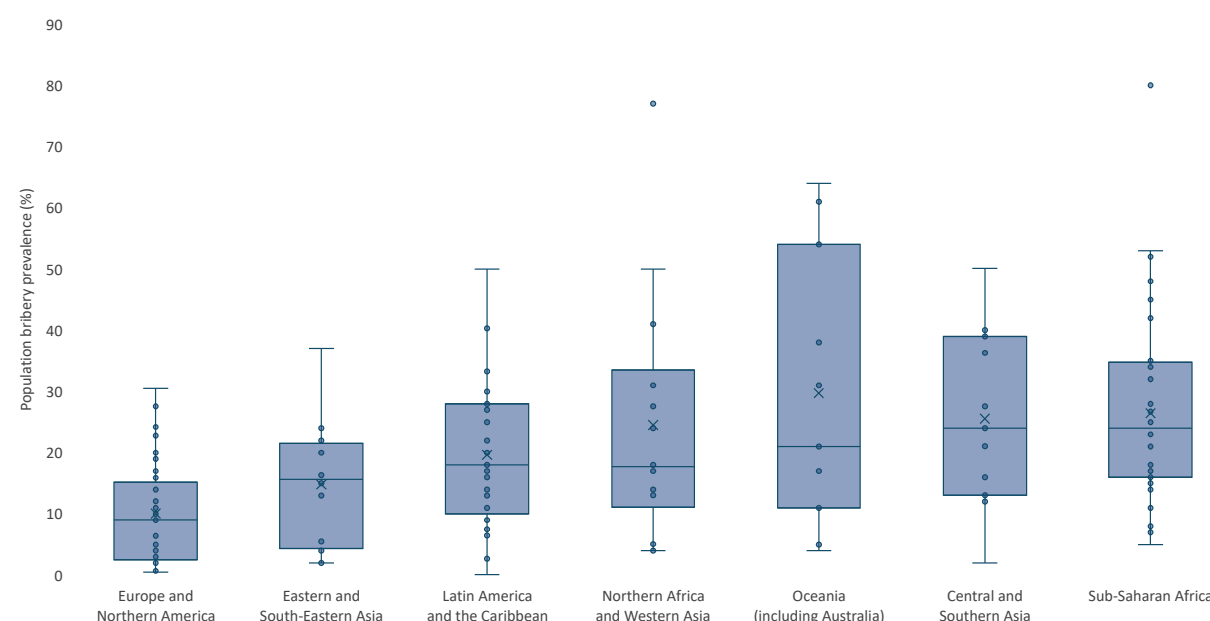
Source: UNODC, based on responses to the UNODC United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS) and other sources reviewed by Member States.
Note: Boxes represent interquartile ranges. Whiskers represent the minimum and maximum value of the data set that falls within a distance of 1.5 times the interquartile range. Points beyond the whiskers represent outliers. The horizontal line indicates the median and the x represents the average.

As regional bribery prevalence estimates are effectively a combination of the bribery prevalence rates in all countries with data located in a specific region, they inevitably mask considerable variability within regions, sub-regions and between countries. The variability within regions is most pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa, where Mauritius recorded a population bribery prevalence of 5 per cent in 2017, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo recorded a rate of 80 per cent in 2018: 16 times higher.

Experience-based corruption surveys, when implemented according to international standards and with sufficient sample size, allow for policy-relevant disaggregations. In Nigeria, three successive nation-wide corruption surveys, each covering more than 30,000 households, have revealed the specific types of public officials that are most at risk of engaging in bribery when interacting with ordinary citizens. For example, in 2023, police and public utilities officers were identified not only as some of the most frequently contacted types of public officials in Nigeria, but also as those most at risk of engaging in bribery when in contact with citizens. Anti-corruption efforts targeting these officials are most likely to have a positive impact on how ordinary Nigerians experience corruption in their everyday lives.

A comparison of the earliest available data point in the period 2010–2016 with the latest available data point in the period 2017–2024 among the 76 countries with data from both periods, reveals a relatively

stable global trend in the prevalence of bribery among the general population. In the 2010-2016 period, the median population bribery prevalence at global level stood at 12.2 per cent, while the median stood at 16.0 in the period 2017-2024[52] . Overall, 28 countries with data from both periods experienced a decrease in population bribery prevalence and 48 countries experienced no change or an increase across the two periods. The global trend hides diverging trajectories at regional levels. For example, while Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as Northern Africa and Western Asia recorded increases in the median population bribery prevalence across the periods 2010-2016 to 2017-2024, Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Asia recorded reductions.

A relatively stable global trend in the prevalence of bribery over time hides diverging trajectories at regional levels

Figure 28: Proportion of population that experienced bribery when in contact with public officials during the previous 12 months, by region, 2010–2016 and 2017–2024
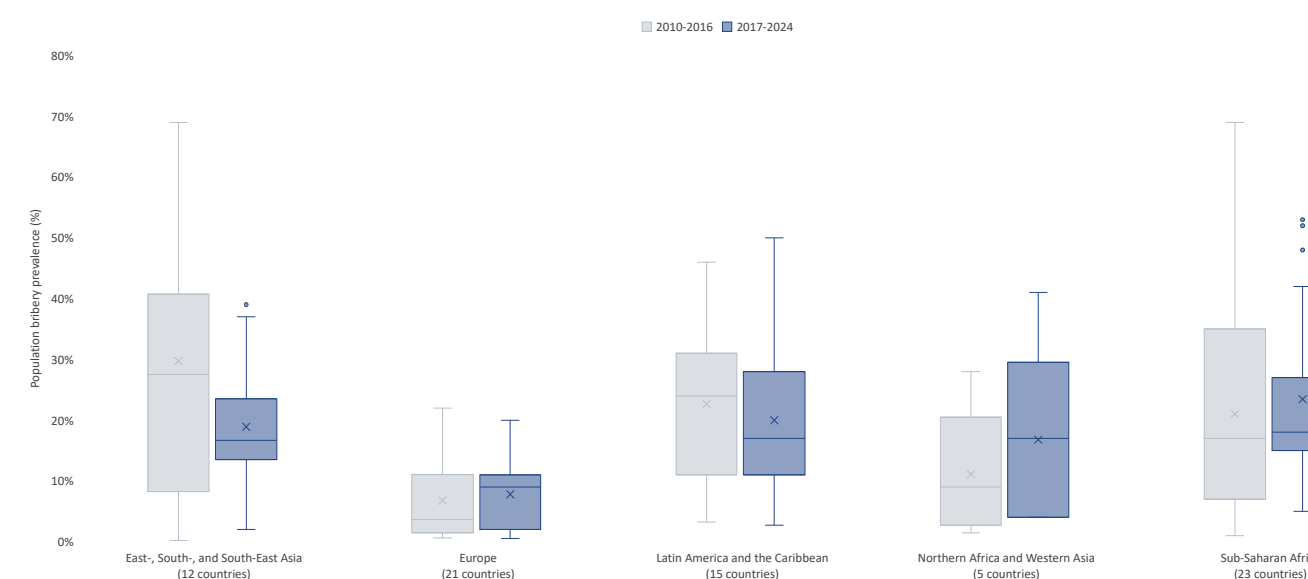
Source: UNODC, based on responses to the UNODC United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS) and other sources reviewed by Member States.
Note: Data for Northern America are not available. Boxes represent interquartile ranges. Whiskers represent the minimum and maximum value of the data set that falls within a distance of 1.5 times the interquartile range. Points beyond the whiskers represent outliers. The horizontal line indicates the median and the x represents the average.

When analysing bribery experienced by the population and bribery experienced by businesses together, a clear correlation can be established between the two[53]. This suggests that the two indicators related to SDG target 16.5, although collected separately from population and business surveys, effectively measure a common pattern of corruption.

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[52] The mean is more susceptible to being influenced by outliers compared to the median, so is less preferable as a measure of central tendency in relatively skewed distributions. The mean population bribery prevalence at global level stood at 18.1 per cent in the 2010-2016 period, while the mean stood at 17.3 in the 2017-2024 period.

[53] In the sample of 126 countries and territories with at least one data point on population bribery prevalence and one data point on business bribery incidence in the period 2010-2014, the correlation is 0.65 and statistically significant (p < 0.001).

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Countries with high rates of population bribery also record high rates of business bribery, suggesting a shared underlying pattern of corruption

Figure 29: Population bribery prevalence and business bribery incidence, 2024 or latest year since 2010
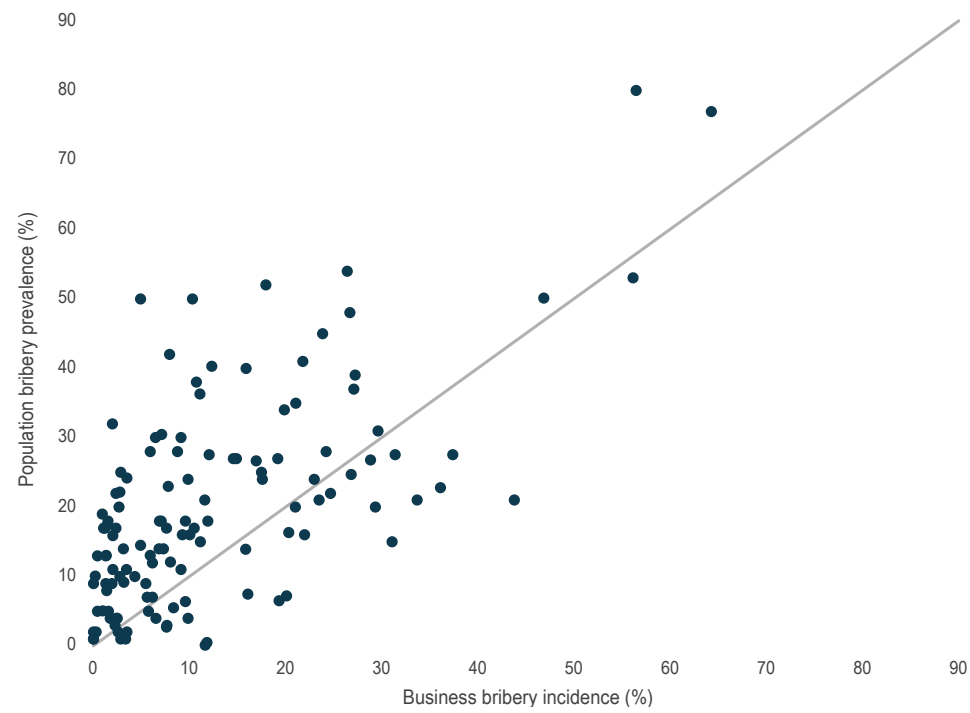
Source: UNODC, based on responses to the UNODC United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS) and World Bank Enterprise Surveys. The sample comprises 126 countries and territories with at least one data point on population bribery prevalence and one data point on business bribery incidence in the period 2010-2024.
Note: Population bribery prevalence refers to the proportion of the population that experienced at least one bribe payment request when in contact with public officials during the previous 12 months. Business bribery incidence refers to the share of businesses who experienced at least one bribe payment request in the previous 12 months. The denominator of the population bribery prevalence rate only includes those who had at least one contact with a public official in the previous 12 months, while the denominator of the business bribery incidence rate includes all businesses, regardless of whether they had contact with a public official or not.

Protective institutions

- **Independent Human Rights institutions** (16.a.1 Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles)

Independent National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are crucial for advancing sustainable development in line with human rights standards. Since 2015, the number of countries with NHRIs that comply fully (A status) with the Paris Principles, the internationally agreed minimum standards of accreditation for NHRIs, has grown from 70 to 89, covering 46 per cent of UN Member States and observers. This means that 55 per cent of the world's population now lives in a country with an independent NHRI.

The establishment of independent NHRIs is a cornerstone of human rights promotion and protection and is crucial for supporting SDG progress in line with human rights standards. All Member States are strongly encouraged to establish and empower NHRIs, with resolutions of the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly giving weight to these calls.

The Paris Principles[54] are a set of globally agreed minimum standards that NHRIs must meet to be considered legitimate and credible and to be able to carry out their role effectively. The three pillars of the Paris Principles – pluralism, independence and effectiveness—underpin requirements related to, among other things, the breadth of the NHRI's mandate, its legal and actual independence from government, the adequacy of its resourcing, and the powers it has to act. Crucially, accreditation of NHRIs, i.e. the determination of whether or not and how far they meet these principles, is undertaken not by any external or supranational body but by a peer review process.

Following the recent additions of Sweden, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Uruguay to the ranks of those with A-status, by 2024, 89 countries worldwide had an NHRI that is fully compliant with the Paris Principles. 54 per cent of the world's population now lives in a country with a fully compliant NHRI - a significant milestone in progress towards this SDG 16 target.

The growth in fully compliant NHRIs has been remarkable over the past two decades. In 2000, only 32 such institutions existed, but the number has nearly tripled since then.

In 2024, there were also 25 countries with NHRIs holding B-status accreditation, signifying partial compliance with the Paris Principles. This brings the total number of countries with accredited NHRIs to 114, representing 58 per cent of Member States and observers, and covering 61 per cent of the world's population.

However, despite this steady growth, the current pace remains insufficient to meet the call of the 2030 Agenda. The decline in B-status institutions over time has not translated systematically into A-status gains, indicating that some NHRIs have lost accreditation rather than achieving full compliance. Acceleration in new accreditations and higher status accreditations is essential to achieve the global target.

[54] See https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/principles-relating-status-national-institutions-paris

> **The number of countries with accredited human rights bodies is growing, but many countries remain unprotected**

Figure 30: Number of countries with fully and partially compliant NHRIs (A and B status), 2015-2024
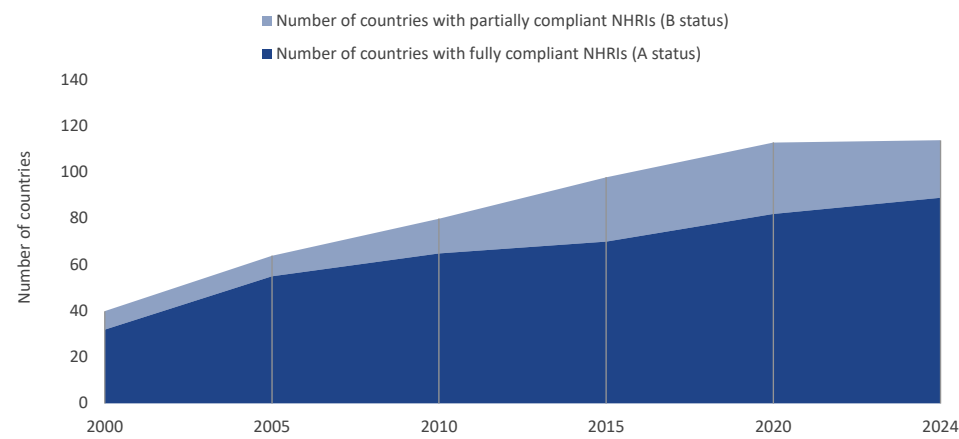
Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in collaboration with Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).

Northern America and Europe continue to lead in NHRI compliance, with 27 countries with A-status institutions as of 2024, representing the highest proportion globally, at 59 per cent. Five additional countries of the region, Belgium, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Slovakia, have NHRIs in partial compliance with the Paris Principles (B status), bringing the total of countries with accredited NHRI institutions in the region to 32.

Sub-Saharan Africa has made the most notable progress since 2015, with countries with fully compliant NHRIs increasing from 16 accredited institutions in 2015 (33 per cent of the region) to 25 in 2024 (52 per cent of the region). Two other countries, Congo and Senegal, remain at B status, indicating the need for further reforms to ensure full compliance.

Latin America and the Caribbean, a region which once showed steady gains, has stagnated at 14 countries with fully compliant NHRIs (42 per cent) for nearly a decade, showing no progress since 2015. NHRIs in three other countries, Nicaragua, Panama and Venezuela, remain at B status, all having deteriorated from having A status earlier.

Central Asia and Southern Asia continue to have the lowest compliance rates, with only four countries having NHRIs fully in line with the international standard in 2024. However, seven additional countries hold B status, demonstrating a potential for growth. With 11 out of 14 countries having an accredited NHRI, this region has the highest proportion of countries with an accredited NHRI (78 per cent), covering 94 per cent of the region's population.

Meanwhile, Western Asia and Northern Africa have seen sluggish improvements, growing from 8 accredited NHRIs in 2015 to only 9 in 2024 (37.5 per cent of countries of the region). Seven additional countries in this region continue to hold B status.

Similarly, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia have experienced modest growth, with fully compliant NHRIs increasing from six (37.5 per cent) in 2015 to seven (44 per cent) in 2024. This is the only region with no partially compliant institutions, after Myanmar faced suspension last year.

Oceania remains stagnant, with only three fully compliant NHRIs in Australia, New Zealand, and Samoa (21 per cent). NHRI of one additional country, Fiji, maintains B status. No new institutions have been accredited since 2020.

> **Growth in NHRI coverage and compliance is uneven across regions, with stagnation and persistent compliance challenges in some regions**

Figure 31: Proportion of countries with fully and partially compliant NHRIs, by region, 2024
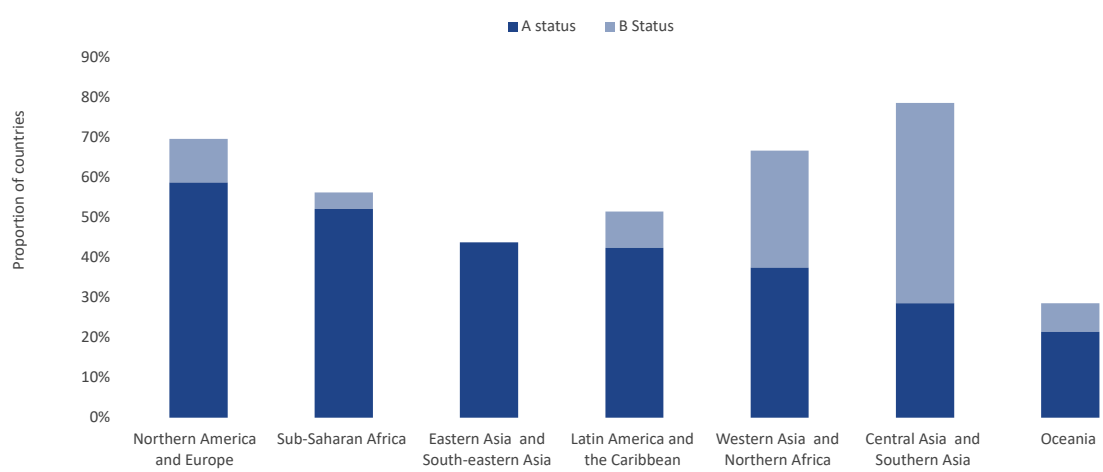
Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in collaboration with Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).

The past year has witnessed both progress and setbacks in NHRI accreditation. Several countries have strengthened their human rights institutions over the past year. Pakistan achieved A-status for the first time, marking a significant milestone. Turkmenistan received B status, indicating early steps toward full compliance. Institutions in Paraguay, Sri Lanka, and Sweden upgraded from B to A status, strengthening their institutional mandates and independence. At the same time, setbacks have occurred. NHRIs in Niger, Myanmar, and Chad lost their accreditations.

Global NHRI compliance has grown at an annual growth rate of less than 3 per cent since 2015, a pace that is inadequate to achieve the 2030 target. If the current trend continues, no region is expected to reach full compliance by 2030. An annual growth rate of at least 12 per cent would be required for full compliance by the deadline, emphasizing the urgency of further action.

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Where do we go from here?

Rule of law and access to justice

Rule of law and access to justice are foundational to sustainable development as they underpin inclusivity, trust in institutions and the prevention of conflict. They are enablers of structural reforms, equality and peace.

Regular, disaggregated data collection should inform all measures taken to expand and strengthen the rule of law and access to justice for all, helping to ensure that civil justice systems respond to the needs of diverse groups, including women and marginalized communities. Inclusive technological solutions –such as virtual legal services or mobile justice platforms– can also improve transparency, efficiency and access. When used to bridge access gaps, they must be grounded in human rights principles, with safeguards to prevent surveillance, exclusion, or the widening of existing inequalities.

To ensure equal and meaningful access to justice for all, governments and policymakers should implement people-centred reforms that remove barriers such as lack of information, high costs, physical distance to services, and unequal treatment. This includes strengthening legal aid, investing in public legal education, and supporting community-based justice services. These measures are particularly critical in underserved areas and among vulnerable populations. They should be implemented in partnership with local community organizations and trusted intermediaries to ensure they are inclusive and well-targeted.

Governments should take measures to increase the trust of the population in the criminal justice system and develop accessible, trauma-informed, victim-centred one-stop approaches to increase reporting of crimes to competent authorities. Measures must also be taken to ensure comprehensive, integrated and multi-stakeholder victim support, assistance and protection systems that prevent secondary victimization. Policies to ensure prioritization of cases, better case management, investment in restorative justice and measures to increase accessibility of police, courts and other criminal justice institutions should also be adopted.

Governments must prioritize reducing pre-trial detention, especially for women, youth, and in regions where unsentenced detention is rising. This requires improving access to legal aid, accelerating case processing, and ensuring that all detainees are treated with fairness and dignity. Displaced populations, stateless persons, and people living in fragile contexts must be given particular attention to ensure their access to legal identity and redress mechanisms.

Pre-trial detention should be limited to cases where there is a clear risk that an alleged offender may abscond, commit further offences, or interfere with the course of justice. Its use and duration should not be excessive, as this undermines the principle of proportionality and the right to a fair trial. Without adequate safeguards, pre-trial detention can increase the risk of coercion and prevent suspects — particularly those who are poor and lack legal counsel — from mounting a proper defence. [55]

The disproportionate use of pre-trial detention is also a major contributor to prison overcrowding. The resulting deterioration of prison conditions has significant social and economic costs — for detainees, their families and communities, and for the state itself. [56]

Illicit financial and arms flows

Curbing illicit financial flows (IFFs) is key to strengthening domestic resource mobilization, supporting sustainable development and reducing the influence of organized crime. Governments, in cooperation with regional and international bodies, should strengthen national and cross-border cooperation to track and reduce IFFs, by investing in data systems, inter-agency coordination, and regular monitoring and evaluation of policy effectiveness. There must be greater investment in law enforcement responses that are tailored towards the specific aims and structures of criminal groups who launder their profits through real estate, luxury assets, shell companies and informal systems that are especially difficult to trace.

To reduce illicit movement of firearms, national authorities should improve the marking, registration, and tracing of weapons, sharing data on diversion incidents, and enhancing international collaboration, especially in regions with high seizure volumes or low tracing success.

Corruption

Tackling corruption is a prerequisite for restoring public trust, improving service delivery, and unlocking/recovering resources for sustainable development. Working with international organizations and with their National Statistical Offices, governments should regularly conduct experience-based surveys to identify which public institutions and population groups are most affected by bribery and other forms of corruption. These surveys generate actionable insights that can support the design of targeted, evidence based anti-corruption strategies.

Efforts to combat corruption should prioritize the sectors and services most frequently implicated in everyday abuses, as identified through survey data. Targeted reforms such as transparent budgeting, digital service delivery, or whistle-blower protection, can improve institutional accountability, restore public trust and reduce everyday corruption more effectively.

Protective institutions

Independent and well-functioning National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are cornerstones of effective, transparent and accountable governance. They ensure that public policies respect human rights and that grievances are addressed without fear of reprisal. Governments should accelerate the establishment and strengthening of NHRIs that comply fully with the Paris Principles, especially in regions where institutional coverage remains low or underdeveloped. Governments with existing NHRIs should provide them with adequate mandates, legal protections, and sustainable funding to perform their oversight, investigatory, and advisory roles independently. Particular attention should be given to supporting B-status institutions in achieving full compliance, preventing backsliding in accreditation.

A fourfold increase in the current rate of progress is needed to achieve universal coverage by 2030. Meeting this target will require that national and international actors increase support for NHRI development through legal reforms, capacity-building and sustained political commitment.

[55] UNODC. 2025. Prison Matters 2025. Global prison population and trends. A focus on rehabilitative environments. July 2025, p.57. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/prison/Prison_brief_2025.pdf

[56] *Ibid.* p. 58

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The latest state of data on just societies

Measuring progress towards the SDGs has not been a simple matter of selecting a static set of indicators at the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The statistical and development communities continue to examine where there are still gaps in our knowledge and how they can be filled. This is why Member States adopted a new indicator (16.3.3) on access to civil justice. The new indicator was adopted in March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic was unfolding. The pandemic severely hampered statistical systems' capacity to conduct population surveys and compile data for this new indicator, making it difficult to assess global progress. However, despite these initial setbacks and constraints in data collection, there has been an encouraging increase in the number of countries that have begun to collect data and report on this indicator or that are planning data collection activities and reporting. Some countries are already making significant advances by conducting legal needs surveys that include the required questions to compute SDG 16.3.3, or by integrating access to justice survey modules in broader governance surveys. Currently, data for the new indicator are available for ten countries.

In early 2025, UNODC, in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and national partners, has started the implementation of the Statistical Framework to Measure Corruption[57] in Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Kenya. The aim of this initiative is to foster collaboration between national statistical offices and anti-corruption agencies and to improve the availability of policy-relevant statistics on corruption based on national anti-corruption priorities, including disaggregated data on SDG indicator 16.5.1 (bribery prevalence).

A 2023 survey among Member States revealed that poor data availability and lack of institutional collaboration represent major obstacles for reporting on indicator 16.4.1 on illicit financial flows. Thanks to co-custodian support, UNCTAD and UNODC, in 2023 countries started reporting the first official estimates of crime-related IFFs (drug trafficking, smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons) in the Global SDG Indicator Database. At least two countries are expected to report their first estimates of tax and commercial IFFs in 2025. Pilot activities carried out by UNCTAD, UNODC and UN Regional Commissions underline the need for significant investments in digital and data capacities to speed up tracking and reporting on IFFs.

[57] Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/corruption/UNODC_Statistical_Framework_to_ measure_corruption.pdf

Inclusive Societies
Build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Photograph by: Giulia Bertelli

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Inclusive Societies

Inclusion is an end in itself: the 2030 Agenda is explicitly an agenda for all, grounded in the well-known collective commitment to leave no one behind. Inclusion is also instrumental, a prerequisite and enabler for peace, justice, as well as for all the other SDGs. When everyone's views are heard, regardless of background or status, and all of society is empowered without discrimination, trust in institutions grows, social cohesion strengthens, and those institutions are better equipped to serve all people.

Inclusion, at its core, reflects the realization of key human rights, including equality before the law, freedom from discrimination, and the right to participate in public affairs. Faced with daily news and social media stories that highlight inequalities, polarization and exclusion, it could be easy to reach a conclusion that our societies are less inclusive than ever before. But what's the reality? Are we living up to our collective promise to leave no one behind? Or are structural barriers still preventing full participation for those furthest behind?

In this chapter we look to the statistics to paint a picture of the inclusiveness of the institutions that structure our societies, asking how effective they are, how well they represent the people they serve, and how people feel about them.

The chapter examines what the data show us about how effectively governments fulfil their plans, and how satisfied people are with the services those governments provide. It looks at whether people are adequately represented in the bodies that make decisions, and whether people feel that their voices are heard.

Inclusion is also about visibility and recognition. Indicators such as birth registration and public access to information speak to the ability of individuals to claim rights and engage with institutions. Similarly, representation of developing countries in international bodies reflects the global dimension of inclusive governance and the right of all peoples to take part in shaping decisions that affect them.

Finally, the chapter asks what the figures tell us about people's experience of discrimination—do they feel that the goal of inclusive societies, free from discrimination, is being realised in their daily lives? Ultimately, inclusion must be assessed not only through institutional design or policy commitments, but also through people's lived experiences.

By examining these dimensions, the chapter sheds light on the extent to which societies are inclusive and rights-respecting—and where further efforts are needed to fulfil the vision of the 2030 Agenda.

Topics and SDG indicators covered in this chapter are:

Topics	SDG Indicators
Effective, accountable institutions	• 16.6.1 (Government expenditures) • 16.6.2 (Satisfaction with public services)
Inclusive decision-making	• 16.7.1a (Composition of legislatures) • 16.7.1b (Composition of public service) • 16.7.1c (Composition of the judiciary) • 16.7.2 (Political voice)
Participation in global decision-making	• 16.8.1 (Representation in international organizations)
Legal identity for all	• 16.9.1 (Birth registration)
Legal protections for access to information	• 16.10.2 (Public access to information)
Preventing discrimination	• 10.3.1 / 16.b.1 (Experience of discrimination)

Progress towards inclusive societies: what the data tell us

Effective, accountable institutions

• **Government expenditures** (16.6.1 Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector (or by budget codes or similar))

Budget reliability is a measure of how far countries stick to their plans when it comes to spending. Significant deviation between budgets and actual spending can be an indication of corruption, mismanagement or weak oversight, which can undermine public trust and stifle economic activity and civic engagement. Citizens are more likely to trust institutions that deliver on their promises. Conversely, when governments spend as planned, this suggests transparent and accountable governance.

Worldwide, aside from the period of shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, budget reliability has been improving. The deviations (whether over- or under-spending compared to approved budgets) are higher in lower-income countries than in wealthier countries.

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- **Satisfaction with public services** (16.6.2 Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services)

> Globally, the majority of people express satisfaction with education, healthcare and government services, with only minor differences observed between men and women. Government services such as obtaining a passport, a national identification document, marriage, birth or death certificates, receive a high satisfaction rate with an average of 67 per cent. Education services score less well on average, with more than 58 per cent of people expressing satisfaction with their country's educational system. Healthcare services have a global satisfaction rate of 57 per cent, but with great variation across countries ranging from as low as 9 per cent to as high as 93 per cent. Despite these broadly positive findings, a considerable share of the population remains dissatisfied with public services.

Delivering public services is a core responsibility of governments and often represents the primary point of interaction between people and public institutions. As such, the quality of public service delivery plays a crucial role in shaping public trust and influencing perceptions of government performance[58], as well as in States' fulfilment of their human rights obligations. It is also central to a country's broader economic and social development.

Access to high-quality public services, such as education and health, is fundamental for individuals to develop capabilities, acquire skills, and achieve economic and social advancement. The Praia Group's Handbook on Governance Statistics synthesizes key research highlighting the importance of people's satisfaction with public services[59] . Public institutions derive their legitimacy from the expectation that they act to secure entitlements of those they serve, regardless of the mode of service delivery (e.g., direct provision or regulation of private providers)[60]. Satisfaction with public services also plays a critical role in shaping political attitudes and behaviours toward policies[61]. When people are dissatisfied with public services, they may express this discontent by speaking out, filing complaints, protesting, or opting out, particularly when private alternatives exist[62]. Enhancing the quality of public services can increase user satisfaction, which may, in turn, foster greater trust in government institutions. Understanding people's experiences is essential for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, ensuring responsiveness to public needs, and strengthening trust in local and national institutions. Satisfaction

with public services is also a key benchmark indicator of global progress toward achieving sustainable development, as captured under SDG indicator 16.6.2. which focuses on three essential services: education, healthcare, and government services[63].

The latest available data show that, globally, the majority of people express satisfaction with these services, with little difference observed between men and women. Government services such as obtaining a passport, a national identification document, marriage, birth or death certificates, receive a high satisfaction rate with an average of 67 per cent. Education services score less well on average, with more than 58 per cent of people expressing satisfaction with their country's educational system. Healthcare services have a global satisfaction rate of 57 per cent, but with great variation across countries ranging from as low as 9 per cent to as high as 93 per cent. Despite these broadly positive findings, it is worth noting that a considerable share of the population remains dissatisfied with public services, highlighting the need for targeted improvements across sectors and among the different population groups.

> **Globally, the majority of people are satisfied with public services**

Figure 32: Proportion of population who say that overall they are satisfied with the quality of healthcare services, primary education services, secondary education services, government services, (2024 or latest data available)
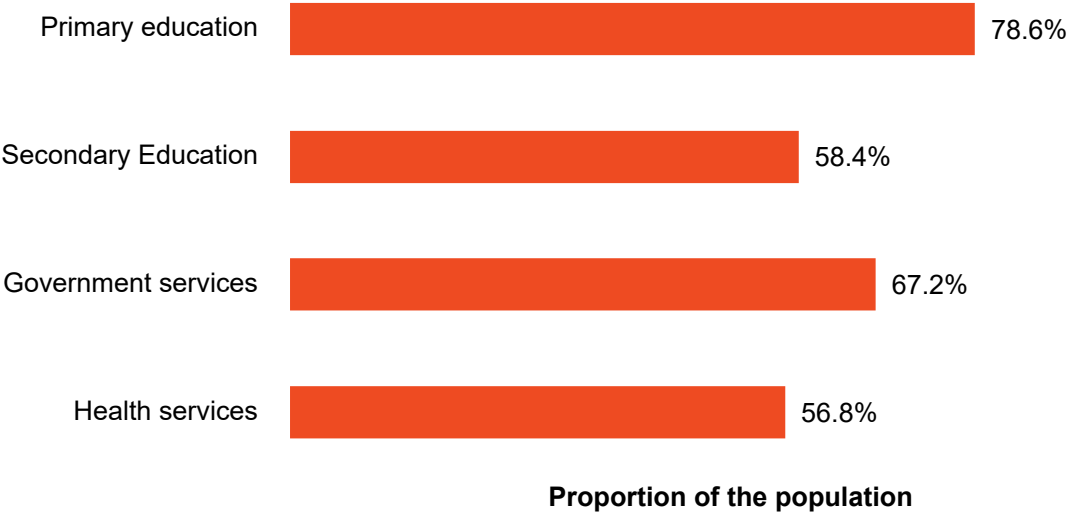
Proportion of the population

Source: UNDP, Gallup World Poll .
Note: Estimates are based on the latest available year of survey data between 2015 and 2024 for 148 countries (health services), 11 countries (primary education services), 43 countries (secondary education services) and 44 countries (government services). Education and government services are primarily based on data from high and middle-income countries.

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[58] OECD (2017), Trust and Public Policy: How Better Governance Can Help Rebuild Public Trust, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264268920-en

[59] Praia City Group. (2020). *Praia Handbook on Governance Statistics*. United Nations Statistical Commission.

[60] Nussbaum, Martha C. Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach. Harvard University Press, 2011.
https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2jbt31.

[61] Mok JY, James O, Van Ryzin GG. Expectations of and Satisfaction with Public Services. In: James O, Jilke SR, Van Ryzin GG, eds. Experiments in Public Management Research: Challenges and Contributions. Cambridge University Press; 2017:345-360.

[62] Steven Van de Walle. (2018). "Explaining citizen satisfaction and dissatisfaction with public services." In The Palgrave Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe (pp. 227–241). Palgrave Macmillan.

[63] Government services include services to obtain government-issued identification documents (such as national identity cards, passports, driver's licenses and voter's cards) and services for the civil registration of life events such as births, marriages and deaths. This particular focus on these two types of services arises from the high frequency of use of these services. For more information on the indicator, visit the metadata page: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-16-06-02.pdf

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Data on satisfaction with the availability of quality healthcare services from over 140 countries allows for a deeper analysis of regional patterns and trends over time. In Asia, Northern Africa, along with Northern America and Europe, reported satisfaction exceeds the global average. In contrast, Oceania, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean fall below the global average. People in high-income countries report the highest levels of satisfaction with the availability of quality healthcare, with satisfaction generally declining as a country's income level decreases.

Satisfaction with healthcare varies widely by world region, with a global average of 57 per cent

Figure 33: Proportion of the population who say that they are satisfied with the availability of quality healthcare (2024 or latest data available)
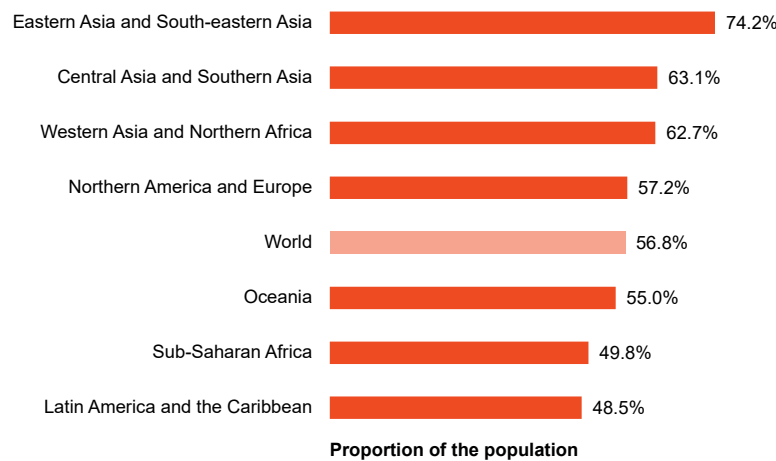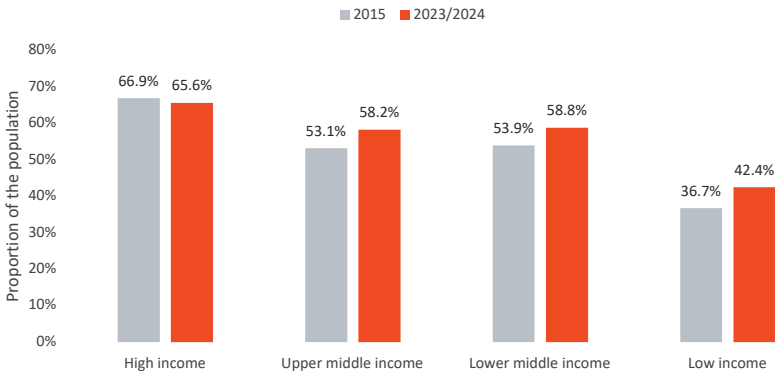

Region	Value
Eastern Asia and South-eastern Asia	74.2%
Central Asia and Southern Asia	63.1%
Western Asia and Northern Africa	62.7%
Northern America and Europe	57.2%
World	56.8%
Oceania	55.0%
Sub-Saharan Africa	49.8%
Latin America and the Caribbean	48.5%

Proportion of the population

Source: UNDP, Gallup World Poll .
Note: Estimates are based on the latest available year of survey data between 2015 and 2024 for 148 countries (health services). Regional estimates for 16.6.2 are based on the following number of countries respectively: Northern America and Europe (40), Latin America and the Caribbean (21), Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia (13), Sub-Saharan Africa (38), Oceania (2), Western Asia and Northern Africa (21), Central Asia and Southern Asia (13). Gallup World Poll asks the question: "In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of quality healthcare?".

A comparison of data from 2015 to 2023/24 reveals a modest but consistent increase in satisfaction with the availability of quality healthcare services. This upward trend is observed across all income groups except for high-income countries, where satisfaction has remained stable or slightly decreased (from 66.9 per cent to 65.6 per cent). While low-income countries continue to report the lowest satisfaction levels overall, they have shown the largest increase, rising from 36.7 per cent in 2015 to 42.4 per cent in 2023/24.

Satisfaction with the availability of quality healthcare is highest in high-income countries, and declines with decreasing income level

Figure 34: Proportion of the population who say that they are satisfied with the availability of quality healthcare by income, changes between 2015 and 2023/2024

Income	2015	2023/2024
High income	66.9%	65.6%
Upper middle income	53.1%	58.2%
Lower middle income	53.9%	58.8%
Low income	36.7%	42.4%

Source: UNDP, Gallup World Poll .
Note: Estimates are based on the earliest available year of survey data between 2015 and 2019 and latest available year of survey data between 2020 and 2024 for 99 countries (health services). Estimates for indicator 16.6.2 are based on the following number of countries respectively: High income (22), Upper middle income (27), Lower middle income (34), Low income (15). There are 8 countries for which earliest available data is for 2016 (2 countries), 2017 (4 countries) and 2018 (2 countries). There are also 3 countries for which latest available data are for 2022. Gallup World Poll asks the question: "In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of quality healthcare?".

Innovation highlights
Using Citizen Data to Measure Satisfaction with Public Services (SDG 16.6.2): Insights from Ghana

Digital innovation is transforming how people access and experience public services. With the right investments, governments can use technology to improve service delivery and ensure no one is left behind. Accessible digital tools help close service gaps, give people a voice, and make governments more responsive.

In Ghana, the UNDP Global Policy Centre for Governance (GPCG) partnered with the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) to pilot a new approach for measuring satisfaction with public services. The initiative used citizen data: information generated through initiatives that engage citizens across the various stages of the data value chain.

Launched in the Ga East and Suhum districts, the pilot explored how citizen data could complement official statistics and existing statistical methodologies for measuring satisfaction with public services and asked how such data can add value to governance efforts and SDG 16 monitoring, particularly by capturing the experiences of hard-to-reach populations.

A multilingual mobile app was developed, designed for accessibility, with features such as a text reader, sign language interpreter, and dark/light modes to ensure accessibility for users with disabilities. To overcome literacy barriers, the app included a voice recording option in local languages. A special text-message-like feature allowed participation without smartphones or

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internet access, ensuring even those with limited connectivity could take part. Strong community outreach and inclusive design, with dedicated communication at both national and local levels, helped boost participation from underserved and often underrepresented groups. The participation in the pilot of persons with disabilities, for example, was significantly higher than in traditional data sources, illustrating the approach's potential to shed light on the experiences of marginalized and often excluded communities.

The results mirrored national data but also captured shifts in people's experiences, and, although not fully conclusive, indicate points for further research. For example, more people in 2024 said they needed but couldn't afford healthcare compared to 2019 (rising from 18 per cent in 2019 to 34 per cent in 2024). Conversely, the percentage of the population who were very satisfied decreased from 22 per cent to 16 per cent. Satisfaction with public education also showed mixed trends. The proportion of the population very satisfied with public education showed a marginal increase, reaching 18 per cent. However, a larger decline was observed among those who were simply satisfied, with a decrease from 75 per cent to 56 per cent.

Crucially, the pilot showed that innovative, inclusive data tools can reach more people and deliver timely, cost-effective insights. When combined with traditional surveys, citizen data can help governments to build a clearer picture of what's working—and what needs to improve.

For more information, see Fraisl, D., Neves, M., Seidu, O., Darpoh, C.K., Basnyat, A., Usheva, F., Tungbani, B., Ankamah, D., See, L. and Gadgil, A. (2025), Leveraging Citizen Data to Improve Public Services and Measure Progress Toward Sustainable Development Goal 16. Sustainable Development. https://doi.

Inclusive decision-making

Target 16.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels is necessary to achieve more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. SDG Indicator 16.7.1 on inclusive decision-making, through its three sub-indicators, aims to measure progress toward this target by assessing the extent to which different population groups are represented in three main branches of government – legislative (16.7.1a), administrative or public service (16.7.1b), and judicial (16.7.1c).

While the descriptive representation[64] of various demographic groups, including women, provides a basic measure of inclusion, the concept of representation extends beyond this. Representation matters not only from a normative perspective, as a question of fairness and equal rights, but also from a substantive perspective as it shapes policy priorities and outcomes, public trust in institutions, and institutional legitimacy. Institutions that truly reflect the diverse populations they serve enhance public trust and promote equitable decision-making. They signal a fair distribution of power, and decision-making processes that are participatory and representative, ensuring that all voices in society – especially those of marginalized groups - are included[65]. Indicator 16.7.1 puts numbers to the principle of inclusive decision-making, showing who is – or is not – at the table where power is exercised. Gaps in these figures can shine a

spotlight on long-standing inequalities.

The representation of women in legislatures, public service and the judiciary is measured though the concept of parity – the share of women working in these institutions divided by the share of women in the working age population. A value of 1 indicates parity – showing that women are equally represented - whereas a value of above or below 1 indicates that women are over or under-represented respectively, compared to their share in the population as a whole.

- **Composition of legislatures** (16.7.1a Proportions of positions in legislatures compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups)

From gender to generation, the story is the same: women and young people remain sidelined in leadership roles and as chairs of powerful parliamentary committees — finance, defence and foreign affairs — with progress from 2020 to 2025 slow, uneven and showing signs of stalling. The same goes for young and female parliamentarians: between 2020 and 2025, progress towards gender parity and more proportionate representation by age group remained incremental and uneven, with some signs of deceleration.

There is one bright spot: among younger members of parliament, gender gaps narrow — with a male-to-female ratio of 57:43 for those aged 30 and under, and 63:37 for those aged 40 and under — suggesting that younger parliaments are more gender-balanced.

The legislative part of SDG indicator 16.7.1 aims to measure how well the general population is represented in key decision-making positions in national parliaments, focusing on women and youth. Specifically, it looks at representation in three roles: MPs, Speakers of parliament, and chairs of permanent committees on foreign affairs, defence, finance, human rights and gender equality.

Parliaments are where laws are debated, where budgets are allocated and where the executive branch of government is held to account. Parliaments actively shape the laws, policies, budgets and institutions that impact every other SDG – on health, education, environment or equality. Who sits in these seats determines which voices are heard, which issues are prioritized, and how solutions are funded and designed. The ultimate objective is not only that parliaments reflect the diversity of the people they serve, but also that the laws, policies and decisions they create are inclusive, just and responsive to all.

Representation builds trust. When decision makers do not reflect the people they serve, there is a risk of policies ignoring the needs of large parts of society, creating a disconnect that can erode trust in government. Certain policy areas are particularly important to women and young people, who may feel that issues vital to their lives are ignored – or are insufficiently addressed – by older or male politicians. Both groups feel the effects of some policies disproportionately, such as those on reproductive rights, employment and new technologies. Young people also tend to have more progressive attitudes on equality issues such as racial justice and LGBTQI+[66] rights. And by virtue of their age, younger generations will live the longest with the consequences of legislation passed today.

Women and youth are persistently underrepresented in parliaments relative to their share of eligible national populations.

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[64] Descriptive representation describes the extent to which public officials reflect the demographic composition of the constituents they serve.

[65] OECD (2022), Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy: Preparing the Ground for Government Action, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/76972a4a-en.

[66] McDonald, Jared, and Melissa Deckman. 2023. "New Voters, New Attitudes: How Gen Z Americans Rate Candidates with Respect to Generation, Gender, and Race". Politics, Groups, and Identities 11(2): 345–365.

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> **Despite slight gains, women and younger members of parliament remain underrepresented in parliaments relative to their share in national populations, especially in upper chambers**

Figure 35: Parliamentary seats held by women and youth relative to their population share, 2021–2025
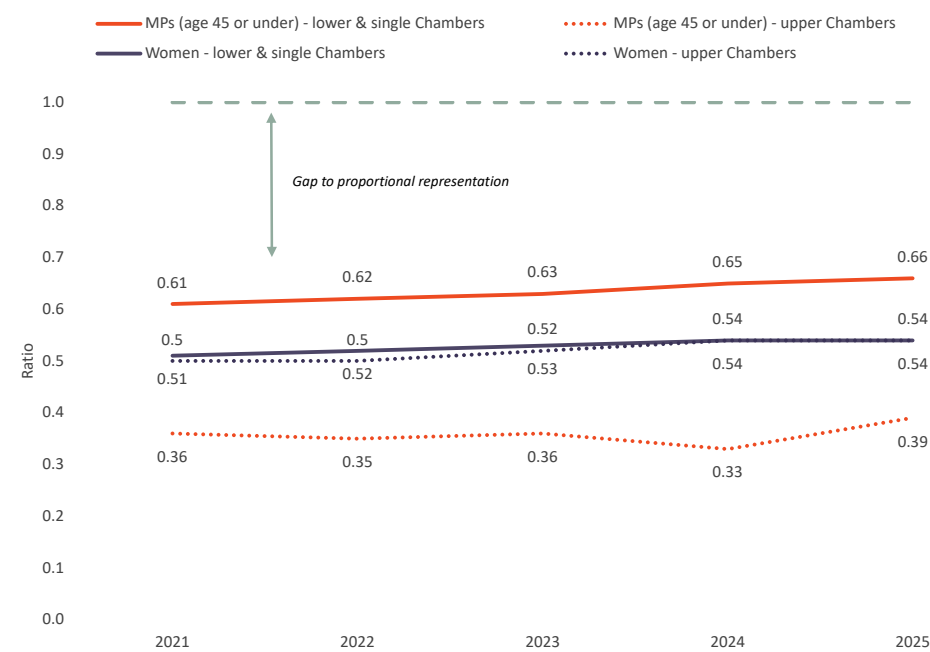
Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).
Note: A representation ratio of 1 indicates proportional representation—meaning the share of women or youth in parliament is equal to their share in the national population. However, the chart shows persistent underrepresentation of both women and young MPs[1] in parliaments relative to their share of national populations. Despite slight gains, the ratios for women remain at around half of parity, while young MPs are also behind, especially in upper chambers.
[1] Following an amendment to the Statutes and Rules of the IPU, a "young parliamentarian" is now defined as a parliamentarian below the age of 40 years. This metric will be tracked in future reporting as those aged 40 or under, at the time of election.

2025 marks 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and 25 years since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. In 2024, Member States also adopted General Recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Each of these landmark instruments reaffirms that women's rights are human rights and underscores the critical role of women in peacebuilding, security and conflict resolution.
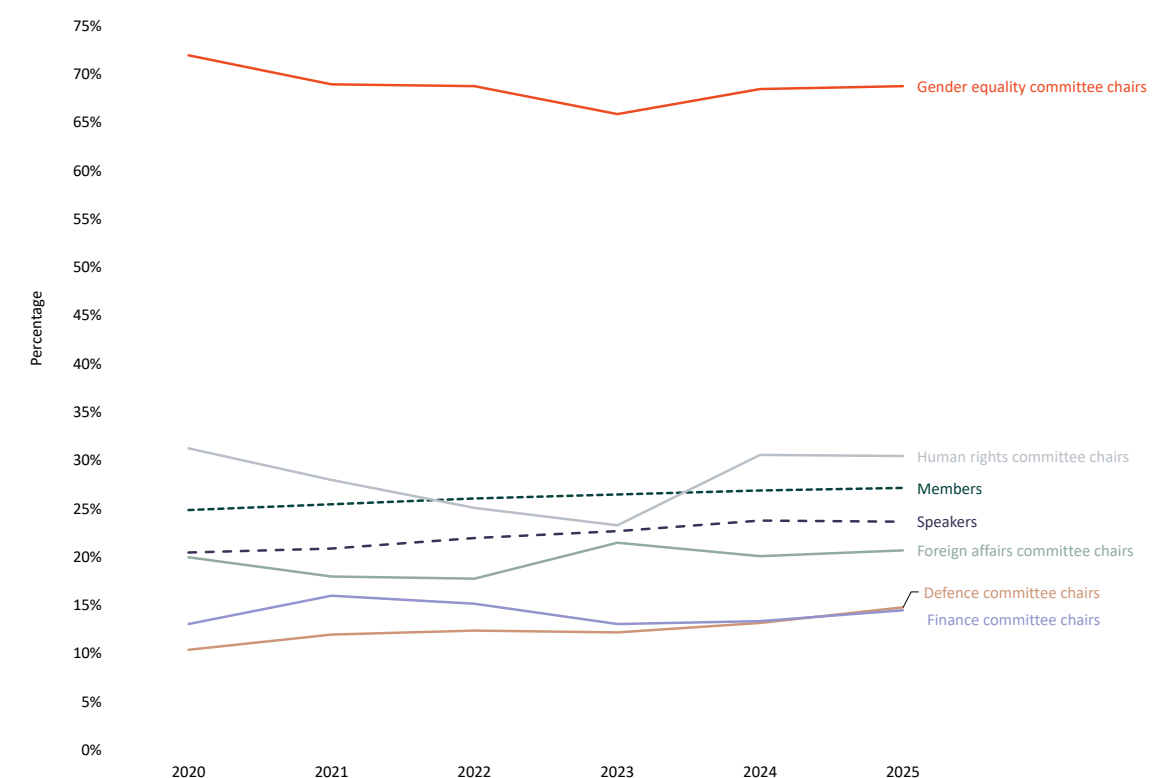
However, progress stalled during the "super year" of elections in 2024, with women's parliamentary representation inching up from 26.9 per cent to just 27.2 per cent — the slowest increase since 2017.

Women's representation in leadership positions lags even further behind their share of seats. As of 1 January 2025, women hold 27.2 per cent of parliamentary seats globally, yet occupy only 23.7 per cent of Speaker posts and chair just 14.5–20.7 per cent of committees on foreign affairs, defence and finance – areas critical to shaping security, economic policy, global diplomacy and, more broadly, peace, justice and inclusion. Women chair a higher percentage of human rights committees, with the figure fluctuating between 23.3 per cent and 30.6 per cent between 2020 and 2025. Conversely, 68.8 per cent of gender

equality committees are chaired by women, reflecting a pattern of gendered leadership roles.

> **Women's representation lags in areas critical to shaping policies for peace, justice and inclusion**

Figure 36: Women's representation in parliament and leadership roles, 2020-2025

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

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Between 2020 and 2025, progress towards gender parity and more proportionate representation by age group has remained incremental and uneven, with some signs of deceleration

Figure 37: Representation of parliamentarians aged 45 years or under in parliament and in leadership roles, 2020–2025
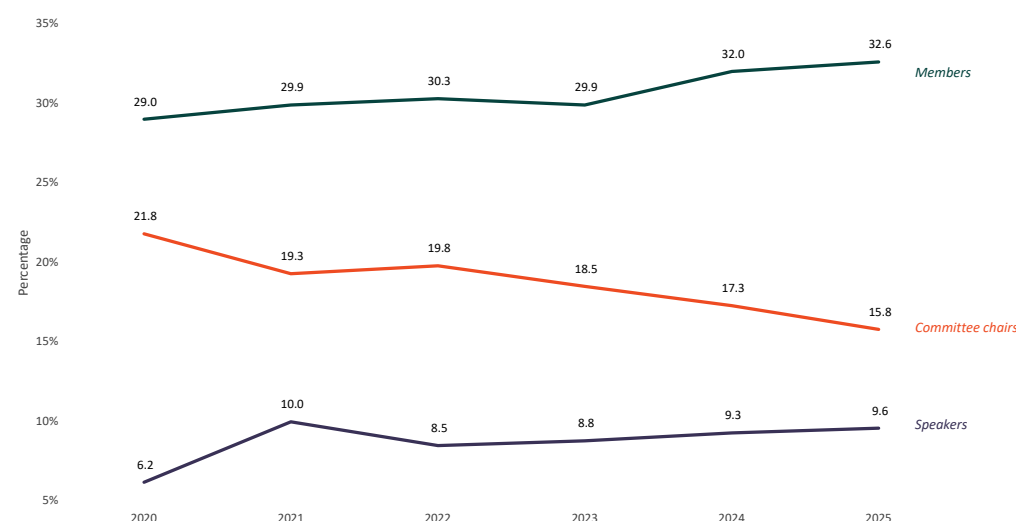
Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Between 2020 and 2025, progress towards gender parity and more proportionate representation by age group has remained incremental and uneven, with some signs of deceleration. MPs aged 30 or under still make up less than 3 per cent of all parliamentarians – a figure that has not changed in five years – while those aged 40 or under account for just 19.1 per cent of MPs, up slightly from 16.5 per cent in 2020. This is in contrast to legal and demographic realities. The voting age is 18 years in nearly all countries[67] and the average age to be eligible to run for, or serve in, parliament is 23 years[68]. And while one in five people globally are aged 18–30 years, and over one third are aged 40 or under[69] , the presence of these younger age groups in parliaments remains disproportionately low.

However, there is one bright spot: among younger MPs, gender gaps narrow — with a male-to-female ratio of 57:43 for those aged 30 and under, and 63:37 for those aged 40 and under — suggesting that younger parliaments are more gender-balanced. There is therefore reason for hope: bold, intentional reforms to increase youth representation could accelerate progress towards gender parity in politics.
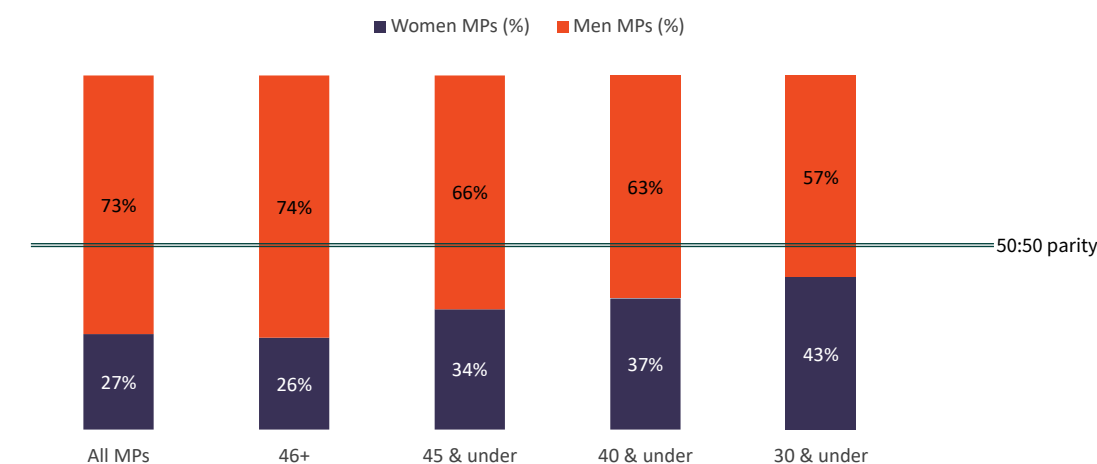
The future of politics? Gender balance is greater among younger parliamentarians

Figure 38: Gender balance among parliamentarians, by age group

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Nevertheless, these persistent and clear disparities have underlying causes, and data for indicator 16.7 provide countries with the evidence needed to identify gaps, justify reform and track progress towards truly inclusive institutions.

Political parties often play a salient role as gatekeepers to candidacy and leadership, giving them the power to determine who rises to top positions. Thus, proactive measures to enhance leadership opportunities for women and youth can be a game-changer. Such measures can include amending internal parliamentary and party rules to put in place quotas for women and youth in leadership positions, rotating positions between men and women, introducing dual leadership structures, and promoting proportional and equitable distribution of parliamentarians across all committee subject areas. Well designed quotas have repeatedly proven effective, sometimes nearly doubling women's representation over an election cycle when duly implemented. Greater diversity can also be achieved by shifting decisions about leadership roles from parties to the full parliamentary membership (creating open competition) and by holding secret ballots for leadership roles (reducing pressure to toe the party line). Accelerating diversity in parliamentary leadership hinges on bold, deliberate action.

[67] IPU, Parline database on national parliaments, "Minimum age for voting in parliamentary elections": https://data.ipu.org/compare/?field=min_age_vote_elect

[68] IPU, "Minimum age of eligibility", Parline database on national parliaments, https://data.ipu.org/compare/?field=min_age_member_parl

[69] Figures calculated using the "World Population Prospects 2023: Population by Single Age – Both Sexes (Standard Projections)" dataset from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, https://population.un.org/wpp/downloads/.

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Innovation highlights
Can AI help paint an accurate picture of the world's politicians?

Maintaining up-to-date data on more than 47,000 individual parliamentarians across 277 chambers is a complex and resource-intensive undertaking. To balance accuracy with feasibility, the IPU has adapted its methodology: sex and age data for members and committee chairs is typically updated once – after elections – for each legislature, while data on Speakers and the number of women in parliament is collected at least annually or whenever changes occur. Still, with between 60 and 80 parliaments holding elections in any given year, frequent monitoring remains essential.

AI tools can provide some assistance, but they need to be used carefully. Data collection processes need to distinguish between current and former members of parliament (MPs), as well as filter out unreliable sources of information or individuals with similar names – all of which highlights the continued need for human quality control. The now-defunct Every Politician project – which attempted to build a data set on every national-level politician worldwide – demonstrated the challenges of maintaining a data set of this type and on this scale.

Nevertheless, with adequate resources and collaboration between academia and the IPU, and as AI tools become more precise, there is potential to build a centralized, dynamically updating database on MPs. Such a database could use a hybrid model combining individual and aggregate data, drawing from various existing initiatives and technologies to improve coverage and consistency.

For more information see https://www.everypolitician.org/.

- **Composition of public service** (16.7.1b Proportions of positions in public service compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) and
- **Composition of the judiciary** (16.7.1c Proportions of positions in the judiciary compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups)

Globally, the latest available data show that women remain underrepresented across public service, the judiciary, and national legislatures. Current gender representation ratios stand at just 0.80, 0.90, and 0.54 respectively, falling short of reaching parity (which would be represented by a value of 1.0). Regions such as Central, Southern and Western Asia, Northern Africa, and Oceania (not including Australia and New Zealand), have very low representation of women. In contrast, Europe and North America have achieved parity, or even a slight overrepresentation of women in the public service or judiciary. Gender parity in these roles has so far primarily been achieved in high-income countries, while middle and low-income countries continue to struggle with unequal representation. Women are disproportionately concentrated in clerical and administrative positions in public service and in low-level courts within the judiciary, while they remain notably underrepresented in senior government positions and in high-level, constitutional and supreme courts.

Gender is the only demographic characteristic for which global data on representation in public service and the judiciary are available. Data for other groups such as youth or persons with disabilities are available for a few countries only and do not allow conclusions to be drawn at the global level.

Globally, the latest available data show that women remain underrepresented across public service and the judiciary. Current gender representation (parity) ratios stand at just 0.80 and 0.90, respectively, both falling short of reaching parity (a ratio of 1.0). This gap is especially pronounced in some regions of the world. Regions such as Central, Southern and Western Asia and Northern Africa have very low representation of women. In contrast, Europe and North America have achieved parity, or even a slight overrepresentation.

Women remain underrepresented in public service and the judiciary on average across the world, and in most world regions

Figure 39: Ratio of women's representation in public service and the judiciary relative to their share of the working age population, by region (2024 or latest data available)
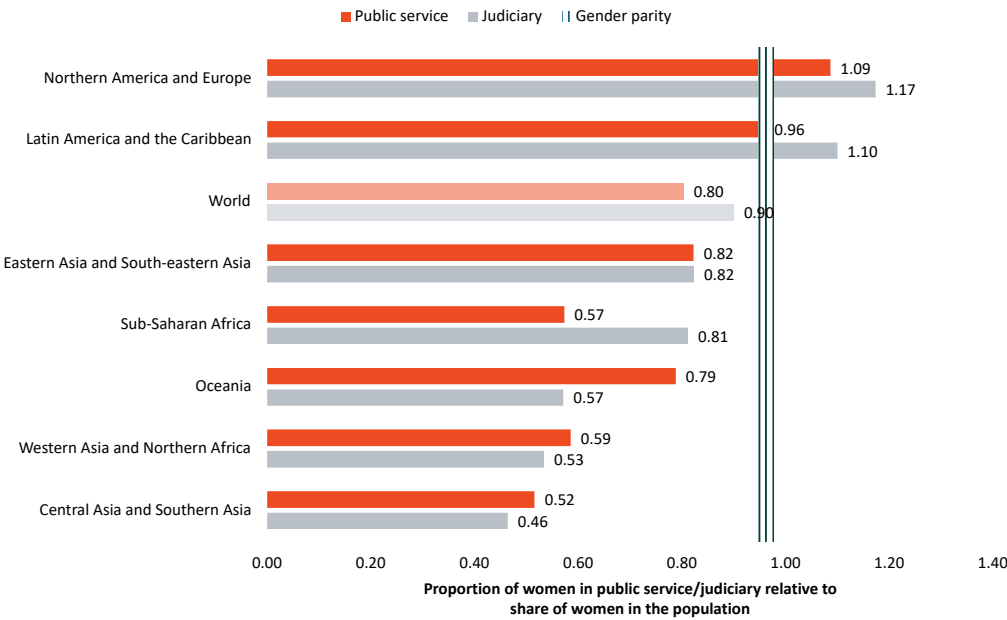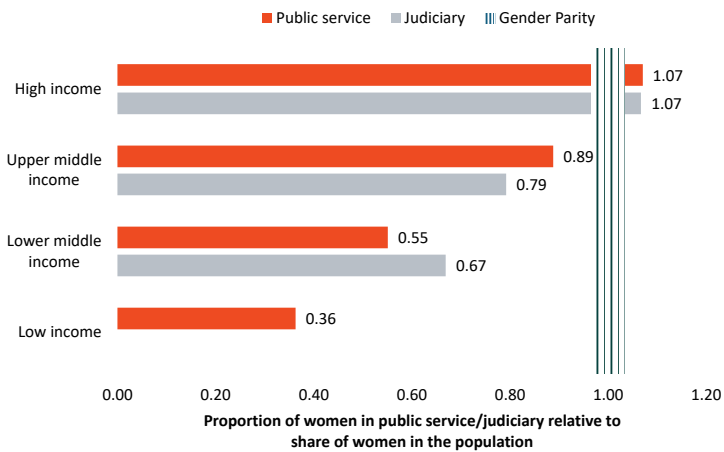

Source: UNDP.
Note: SDG indicator 16.7.1 is based on the ratio between the share of a specific population group in parliament (a), public service (b), and judiciary (c), and the share of the same group in the population. A value of 1 indicates parity, while a value under 1 indicates underrepresentation and over 1 indicates overrepresentation. Estimates are derived based on 155 countries for the public service institutions and 105 countries for the judiciary using the latest available data in the period 2015-2024. Previously published estimates were based on 126 countries for public service and 78 countries for the judiciary. Regional estimates for 16.7.1b and 16.7.1c are based on the following number of countries respectively: Northern America and Europe (43 and 45), Latin America and the Caribbean (19 and 9), Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia (15 and 6), Sub-Saharan Africa (36 and 12), Oceania (14 and 10), Western Asia and Northern Africa (16 and 17), Central Asia and Southern Asia (12 and 7).

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Analysis by income level reveals that gender parity is primarily achieved in high-income countries while middle and low-income countries continue to struggle with unequal representation[70]. Despite a significant increase in available data since 2015, monitoring time trends remains limited to specific regions or countries within certain income groups. Available data from 57 high- and upper middle-income countries[71] shows an increase in women's representation in the judiciary from 0.98 in 2015 (or earliest available before 2020) to 1.06 in 2024 (or most recent year available since 2020). Similarly, data from 83 countries for the public service indicate an increase in women's representation from 0.74 to 0.78 since 2015[72].

> **High-income countries have reached or exceeded gender parity in public services and the judiciary, while representation remains less equal in middle and lower-income countries**

> Figure 40: Ratio of women's representation in public service and the judiciary relative to their share of the working age population, by income (2024 or latest data available)
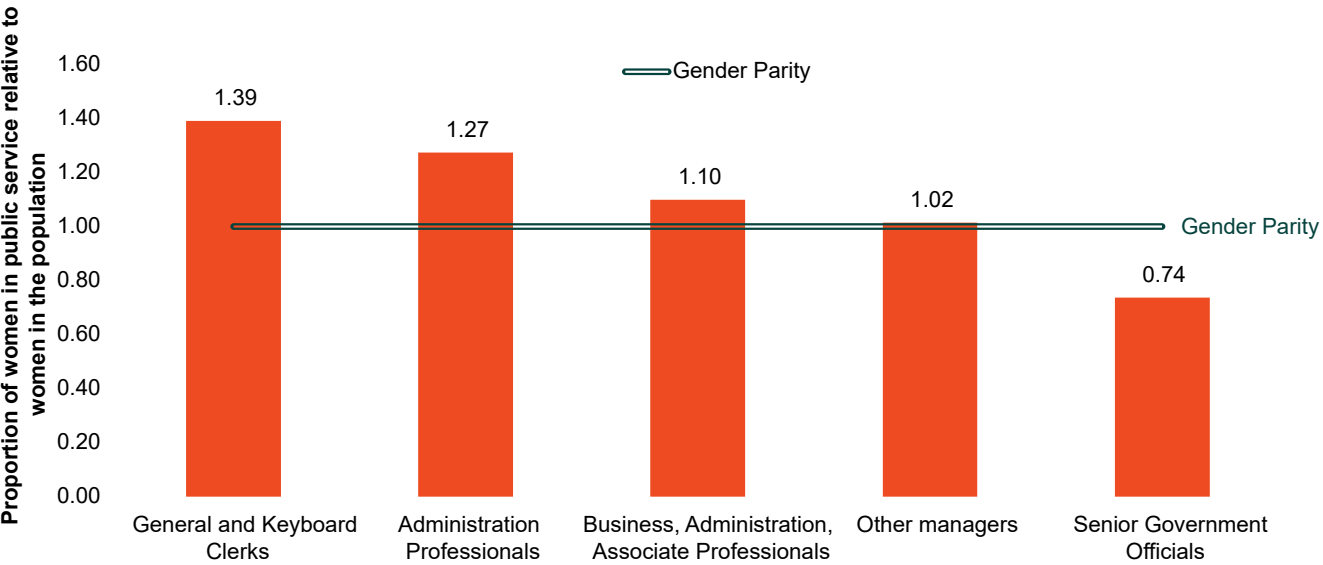

Source: UNDP.
Note: SDG indicator 16.7.1 is based on the ratio between the share of a specific population group in parliament (a), public service (b), and judiciary (c), and the share of the same group in the population. A value of 1 indicates parity, while a value under 1 indicates underrepresentation and over 1 indicates overrepresentation. Estimates are derived based on 155 countries for the public service institutions and 105 countries for the judiciary using the latest available data in the period 2015-2024. Previously published estimates were based on 126 countries for public service and 78 countries for the judiciary. Data for the judiciary from low-income countries are not sufficient to produce an estimate. Estimates by country's income level for 16.7.1b and 16.7.1c are based on the following number of countries respectively: High income (53 and 55), Upper middle income (39 and 31), Lower middle income (40 and 19), Low income (26 and no estimate was produced for the judiciary).

[70] There are only a few countries with available data for the judiciary from low-income countries and an estimate was not produced.

[71] The majority of countries are from North America and Europe (40 countries) and Western Asia and Northern Africa (8 countries).

[72] These estimates are based on data from 83 countries with comparable data with at least one data point before and after 2020, which is why they differ from the global estimate on women's representation that includes a broader set of 155 countries.

The mere presence of women in public institutions, whether in the parliament, public service or the judiciary does not necessarily translate into influence over decision-making. For representation to be meaningful, women must hold decision-making positions, participate actively and shape the political agenda and public life, i.e. act in the interest of those represented - known as substantive representation. Disaggregated data by level of court and public service positions from selected countries with available data provide invaluable insights and understanding into the career advancement challenges and leadership roadblocks women may face within these institutions. Women are disproportionately concentrated in clerical and administrative positions in public service and in low-level courts within the judiciary.

> **Worldwide, women are overrepresented in clerical and administrative positions but remain underrepresented in senior public service and judiciary roles**

> Figure 41: Ratio of women's representation in public service and the judiciary relative to their share of the working age population, by occupation (2024 or latest data available)
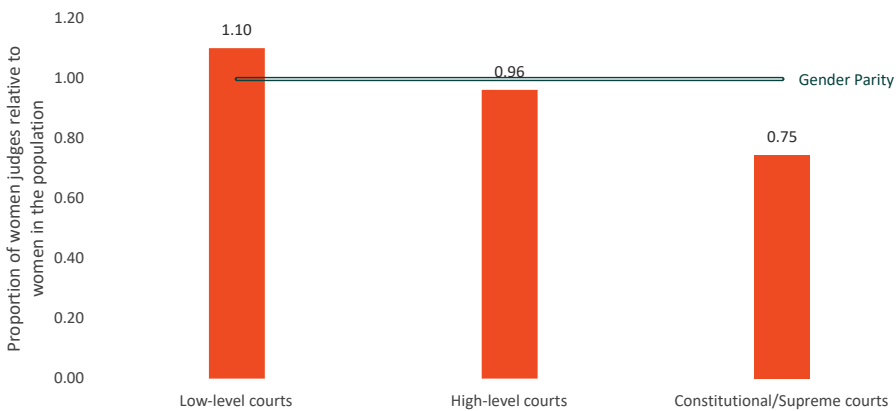

Source: UNDP.
Note: SDG indicator 16.7.1 is based on the ratio between the share of a specific population group in parliament (a), public service (b), and judiciary (c), and the share of the same group in the population. A value of 1 indicates parity, while a value under 1 indicates underrepresentation and over 1 indicates overrepresentation. Estimates are derived based on General and Keyboard Clerks (30 countries), Administration Professionals (30 countries), Business, Administration, Associate Professionals (29 countries), Other Managers (33 countries), Senior Government Officials (36 countries) using the latest available data in the period 2015-2024. Data are mainly from high and upper-middle income countries.

Women remain notably underrepresented in senior government positions and in high-level, constitutional and supreme courts. This trend suggests the possible presence of a persistent glass ceiling that prevents career advancement for women. Addressing these disparities is critical. It requires targeted, evidence-based policy interventions designed to dismantle these barriers and pave the way for more inclusive policies and decision making.

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Women's underrepresentation in higher judicial positions reveals a persistent glass ceiling

Figure 42: Ratio of women's representation in public service and the judiciary relative to their share of the working age population, by level of court (2024 or latest data available)

Source: UNDP.
Note: SDG indicator 16.7.1 is based on the ratio between the share of a specific population group in parliament (a), public service (b), and judiciary (c), and the share of the same group in the population. A value of 1 indicates parity, while a value under 1 indicates underrepresentation and over 1 indicates overrepresentation. Global estimates are based on 80 countries for constitutional/Supreme courts and 70 countries for high-level and low-level courts using the latest available data in the period 2015-2025. Data are mainly from high and upper-middle income countries.

SDG target 16.7 calls for a transformation in public institutions, from top-down systems to ones that are truly inclusive, representative, and responsive to the needs of all segments of society. This has far-reaching implications for how governments design institutions and engage citizens. The underrepresentation of women, young people, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups in leadership roles, revealed by these indicators and other available data, must be tackled.

Aligning political and administrative incentives is also necessary. Civil service systems should emphasize merit-based recruitment while also promoting diversity and inclusion. Legal and policy frameworks can encourage political leaders and public administrators to adopt inclusive governance practices, for example, by linking performance metrics to inclusion outcomes.

Gender-responsive public administration reforms must address workplace culture, challenge stereotypes, and implement inclusive human resource practices, such as equal pay, flexible work arrangements, gender-sensitive recruitment, promotion and retention strategies, and childcare policies.

Innovation highlights
Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions

The Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions* is a global pioneering initiative that drives deep institutional reform to make public administrations more inclusive, accountable, and gender-responsive. Designed as a voluntary certification programme, the Seal provides a structured framework for public institutions to assess their internal practices, identify gaps, and implement transformative changes that embed gender equality across all areas of work, from leadership and staffing to budgeting and service delivery.

At the heart of the Seal is the principle that institutional change must be evidence-based. Participating institutions begin the process by conducting a comprehensive self-assessment using a set of rigorous standards and indicators. This data-driven approach allows them to map the current state of gender equality within the organization, looking at who holds power, how resources are allocated, whether services meet the needs of all groups, and whether internal systems are fair and inclusive. The insights gained from this diagnostic phase form the foundation for action plans and reform strategies that are tailored to the institution's specific context and challenges.

The Seal has been rolled out in a diverse range of countries, each offering powerful examples of how data and institutional commitment can drive lasting change. For example, in El Salvador, the Ministry of Environment used the Seal to mainstream gender across climate and environmental policy, while the Ministry of Culture created gender units and new accountability mechanisms. Tunisia has incorporated the Seal into its broader public administration reform efforts, using it to address representation gaps and enhance gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion practices.

What makes the Gender Equality Seal especially innovative is that it turns abstract goals into tangible institutional commitments, supported by clear benchmarks, capacity-building, and regular monitoring.

* For more information see www.gendersealpublicinstitutions.org

- **Political voice** (16.7.2 Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group)

On average, based on data from high- and middle-income countries, less than half of the population believes their political system allows them to have a say in government decisions or that their voices influence policy outcomes. At the regional level, North America and Europe report the lowest level of political efficacy, with fewer than 30 per cent of people believing they have a say in decision-making. Similar patterns are observed in Oceania, Western Asia and Northern Africa, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean, where fewer than half of respondents feel their voices matter. However, the lack of data from low-income countries limits the understanding of global perceptions of political efficacy and the extent to which governments are seen as responsive to their populations.

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2024 presented an unprecedented opportunity to (re)build and strengthen inclusive governance systems. Known as the "Super Year" of elections, approximately 3.7 billion people – representing half of the world's population across 72 countries - had the opportunity to shape the global political, social and economic landscape through voting, many for the first time[73].

While voting is a fundamental right and an expression of political participation, meaningful and equal participation extends well beyond the ballot box. Research has shown that political attitudes strongly influence whether people participate in political processes[74] . One of the most relevant and widely studied attitudes is the concept of political efficacy - the "feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change"[75].

Political efficacy is closely related to people's level of political participation. People must feel confident in their own abilities to participate (internal political efficacy)[76] but also believe that their participation is meaningful, and they are able to influence government decisions (external political efficacy)[77]. People's feeling of political agency has also been closely linked to trust in government and public institutions[78].

Measuring political efficacy is crucial because it provides insight into how empowered people feel to influence political decisions, helps identify where and why individuals or groups may feel disconnected or powerless and reveal underlying trust deficits in public institutions. These insights are essential for designing targeted interventions to strengthen engagement, especially among underrepresented or marginalized populations. Without this data, efforts to improve participation risk overlooking the very barriers that prevent people from feeling that their voices matter.

SDG indicator 16.7.2 focuses on external political efficacy measured by the question: "How much would you

say the political system in your country allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?" The latest available data from high and middle-income countries show that, on average, less than half of the population believes their political system allows them to have a say in government decisions or that their voices influence policy outcomes. At the regional level, North America and Europe report the lowest level of political efficacy, with fewer than 30 per cent of people believing they have a say in decision-making. Similar patterns are observed in Oceania, Western Asia and Northern Africa, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean, where fewer than half of respondents feel their voices matter. However, the lack of data from low-income countries limits the understanding of global perceptions of political efficacy and the extent to which governments are seen as responsive to their populations.

> **Worldwide, less than half of people feel they have a say in government decisions or that their voices influence policy outcomes**

Figure 43: Proportion of the population who believe decision-making is responsive, by region (2024 or latest data available)

Region	Proportion
World	44.1%
Central Asia and Southern Asia	70.0%
Eastern Asia and South-eastern Asia	64.0%
Sub-Saharan Africa	50.1%
Latin America and the Caribbean	45.8%
Western Asia and Northern Africa	45.3%
Oceania	45.1%
Northern America and Europe	29.5%

Proportion of the population

Source: UNDP.
Note: These estimates are derived from data covering 83 countries, using the latest available information from 2015 to 2024.

Sex disaggregated data also reveal a consistent gender gap. In countries with available data women consistently report lower perceptions of political efficacy than men. On average, only 26.5 per cent of women feel they have a say in what the government does, compared with 31.8 per cent of men.

[73] https://www.undp.org/super-year-elections

[74] Prats, M. and A. Meunier (2021), "Political efficacy and participation: An empirical analysis in European countries", OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 46, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/4548cad8-en

[75] Campbell, A., Gurin, G., & Miller, W. E. (1954). The voter decides. Row, Peterson, and Co. For more information, see *Manual to Support National Data Collection on SDG Indicator 16.7.2, UNDP Global Policy Centre for Governance.*
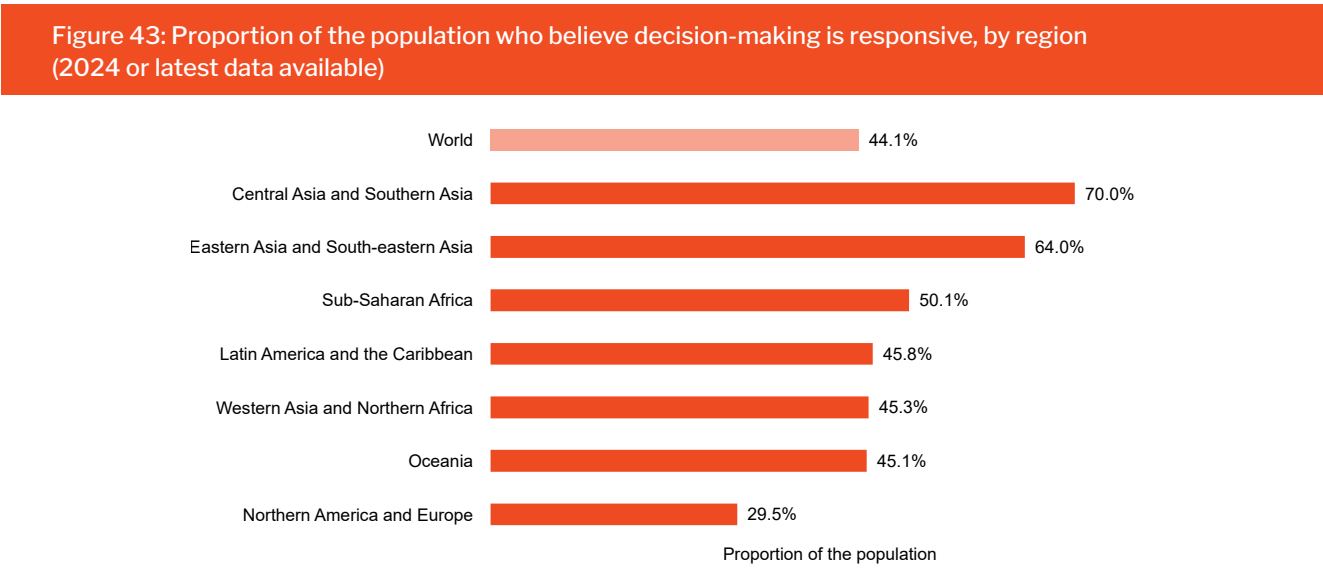
[76] This is known as "internal political efficacy" which refers to confidence of the individual in his or her own abilities to understand politics and to act politically.

[77] "External political efficacy" refers to people's feeling of having a say in what their government does. This concept is used to measure beliefs regarding system's inclusiveness to people's demands.

[78] Prats, M., S. Smid and M. Ferrin (2024), "Lack of trust in institutions and political engagement: An analysis based on the 2021 OECD Trust Survey", OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 75, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/83351a47-en.

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Where data are available, women are less likely than men to feel they have a say in political decision-making

Figure 44: Proportion of the population who believe that decision-making is responsive, by sex (2024 or latest data available). Selected countries with available sex-disaggregated data
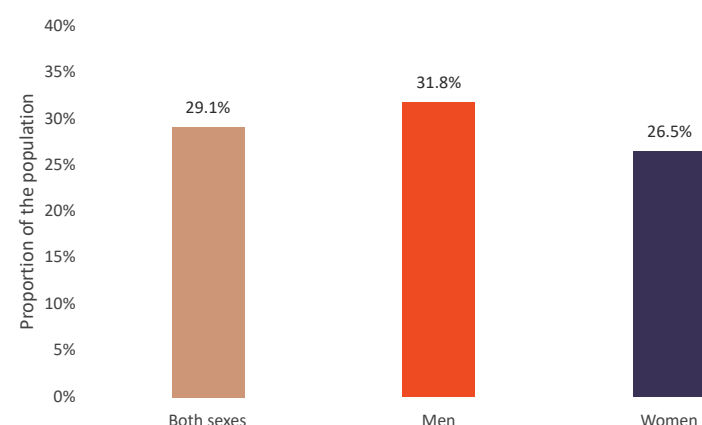
Source: UNDP.
Note: These estimates are derived from data covering 46 countries, using the latest available information from 2015 to 2024.

Development Report showed that human development progress is experiencing an unprecedented slowdown[79]. One contributing factor is the widening agency gaps - the growing disparity between people's aspirations or potential to act and their actual ability to influence decisions and outcomes in their lives or societies[80]. These gaps are evident from the fact that only half of the global population feels in control of their lives[81] and less than half of the population feel they have influence over the decisions of their governments. Closing these gaps requires that institutions and governments become more inclusive and responsive. Focusing on high-income countries only, where data coverage is strongest, reveals a positive correlation between people's perceptions of their ability to influence government decisions and the overall level of human development of a country as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI). People living in countries with higher HDI perceive institutions to be more inclusive and responsive to their needs.

[79] UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2025. Human Development Report 2025: A matter of choice: People and possibilities in the age of AI. New York.

[80] UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2024. Human Development Report 2023-24: Breaking the gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world. New York.

[81] *Ibid.*

Where human development is higher, people feel that institutions are more inclusive and responsive

Figure 45: Correlation between the proportion of the population who believe decisionmaking is responsive and the Human Development Index, high-income countries, (2024 or latest data available)
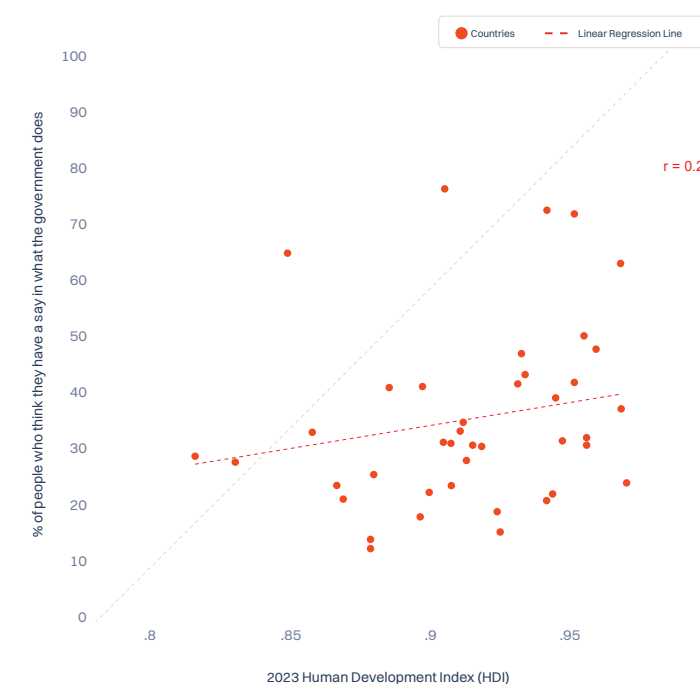
Source: UNDP.
Note: The question asked is: "How much would you say the political system in your country allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?". The chart presents data from 42 high-income countries, based on the most recent data available between 2015 and 2024. 2023 Human Development Index data has been downloaded from https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI. Correlation does not imply causation.

To address low perceptions of political efficacy, governments need to adopt a comprehensive approach that enhances civic capacity by improving people's knowledge, skills, and tools to engage in politics and public life while ensuring inclusive governance so that women, youth, minorities, and marginalized groups see themselves reflected in decision-making. Engagement must move beyond symbolism and create real opportunities for people to influence policies and decisions. Mechanisms such as public consultations, participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies, youth councils and community forums should carry real influence.

Legal and policy reforms are essential to enable the full participation of all groups in society. This means eliminating discriminatory laws and practices and enacting frameworks that actively promote inclusion such as gender quotas or parity laws to increase women's representation, legislation that guarantees political participation for persons with disabilities through accessible voting and candidacy procedures, recognizing the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making bodies, and anti-discrimination laws that protect LGBTIQ+ communities in political and public life.

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Equally critical are enforcement mechanisms: independent electoral commissions, equality bodies, and judicial remedies are needed to monitor compliance, provide accountability, and impose sanctions where rights are denied. Reforms must not only remove barriers but also create enabling conditions that empower historically excluded groups to have their voices heard and rights upheld.

Transparency and accountability are key to improving perceptions of efficacy. Governments should adopt and enforce access-to-information laws, require proactive disclosure of budgets, procurement contracts, and parliamentary proceedings, and make data publicly available through open data portals. Feedback mechanisms such as citizen report cards, grievance redress systems, and participatory audits, can give people clear channels to influence service delivery and policy decisions. When people can trace how decisions are made, monitor the use of public resources, and hold officials legally accountable for misconduct, they are more likely to believe their participation matters. Strengthening civil society organizations is also essential. This can be done by safeguarding freedoms of association and expression, providing funding and capacity-building support, and institutionalizing civil society participation in policymaking, ensuring they can mobilize citizens, advocate for reforms, and represent diverse interests in public debate.

Participation in global decision-making

- **Representation in international organizations** (16.8.1 Proportion of members and voting rights of developing countries in international organizations)

> Despite repeated commitments to meaningfully adapting the institutions governing the global monetary and financial systems, and even though there were some improvements between 2005 and 2015, the representation of developing countries in international financial institutions, regional development banks and standard-setting bodies has remained largely unchanged in recent years. Voting rights reforms were last adopted at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2015 and at the World Bank's main lending arm in 2018. Developing countries retain 37 per cent of the voting rights at the IMF and 39 per cent at the World Bank, short of the 75 per cent they represent in the membership of these institutions.

SDG target 16.8 calls for broadening and strengthening the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance. The international financial architecture refers to the governance arrangements that safeguard the stability and function of the global monetary and financial systems. It includes the governance of public international financial institutions: the multilateral development banks and the IMF, as well as other international public development banks and global funds e.g. the Financial Stability Board. The international financial institutions were created almost 80 years ago at a United Nations conference, with only 44 delegations present (compared with the 190 members of IMF and the World Bank today). Developing countries now represent a substantially larger share of the world's population and global GDP compared to their position in 1944. Global economic governance has not kept pace with these changes in the global economy, the rise of the global South and other geopolitical changes (including the end of colonialism and the recognition of the human right to self-determination). Despite repeated commitments to meaningfully adapting the system, and notwithstanding some improvement between 2005 and 2015, the representation of developing countries in international financial institutions, regional development banks and standard-setting bodies has remained largely unchanged in recent years. The Governments of the largest developed countries continue to hold veto powers in the decision-making bodies of these institutions, and changes to voting rights at the international financial institutions are some of the most contested reforms in global governance.
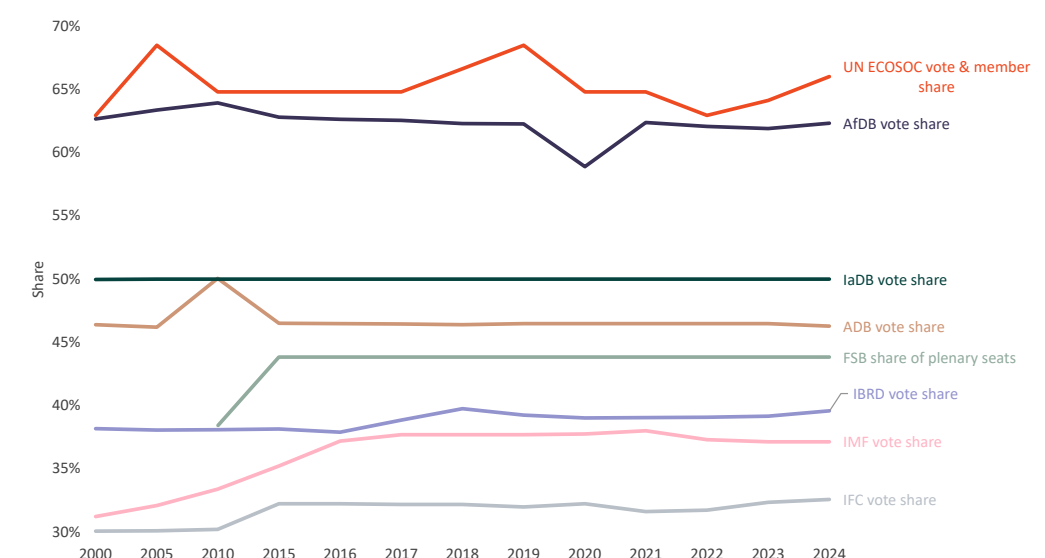
Member States intensified the discussion of increased participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making after the Monterrey Consensus in 2002, and some progress was achieved across several institutions. The realignment of voting rights at the IMF was achieved based on agreements adopted in 2005 and 2010. Change at the World Bank Group was accomplished through a selective capital increase agreement in 2017. There was a major revision of voting rights at the World Bank's concessional arm, the International Development Association (IDA), in 2021, its first in over 50 years. Yet, the largest developed countries continue to hold de facto veto powers in the decision-making bodies of international financial institutions. The recently concluded IMF Sixteenth General Review of Quotas was closed without any agreement to realign voting rights. A World Bank shareholding review is set to take place in 2025.

After gains in the period following the 2008 world financial and economic crisis, the Financial Stability Board increased the number of plenary seats allocated to developing countries. Several international standard-setting bodies have experienced stagnant or declining representation of developing countries on their principal decision-making organs in recent years.

Complementary reforms to increase the voice and improve the participation of developing countries in international economic and financial institutions have been adopted, but significant change on voting rights reform remains out of reach. The pace and scale of change have left many countries dissatisfied.

> **Despite some improvement between 2005 and 2015, the representation of developing countries in international financial institutions, regional development banks and standard-setting bodies has remained largely unchanged in recent years**

Figure 46: Vote shares of developing countries in some of the main international financial and economic institutions, 2000-2024

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Legal identity

- **Birth registration** (16.9.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age)

Birth registration levels worldwide have been rising steadily, and the progress achieved should be celebrated. Over 500 million children under 5 have had their births registered in the last five years. But there are still 150 million children around the world who remain unregistered and therefore 'invisible'[82].

Society first acknowledges a child's existence and identity through birth registration. Birth registration is an essential prerequisite for legal identity and the fulfilment of children's rights. By registering children at birth and providing a birth certificate – a passport to lifelong protection – their exposure to rights violations is reduced and their access to essential services is enabled.

The adoption of the SDGs placed birth registration firmly on the international development agenda with the inclusion of a dedicated target (16.9) under Goal 16 – namely, to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030. Complementing this is target 17.9, which calls for support in building the statistical capacity needed for strong national civil registration systems. Functioning civil registration systems produce vital statistics, including those on birth registration, which are foundational for achieving sustained human and economic development.

Today, the births of close to 8 in 10 children under five (over 500 million) have been registered worldwide. While birth registration levels have risen steadily and the progress achieved should be celebrated, there are still 150 million unregistered children around the world and global progress has slowed over the last decade. Sub-Saharan Africa continues to lag significantly behind at 51 per cent, accounting for half of the world's unregistered children (90 million), but progress and levels vary widely across countries within the region[83]. No region shows significant differences between boys and girls in the prevalence of birth registration. Gender parity in birth registration has been achieved in practically all countries with available data, but gender inequality might still impact birth registration in other ways.

Of all unregistered children worldwide, more than half (90 million) live in sub-Saharan Africa

Figure 47: Number of children under age five whose births are not registered, by region
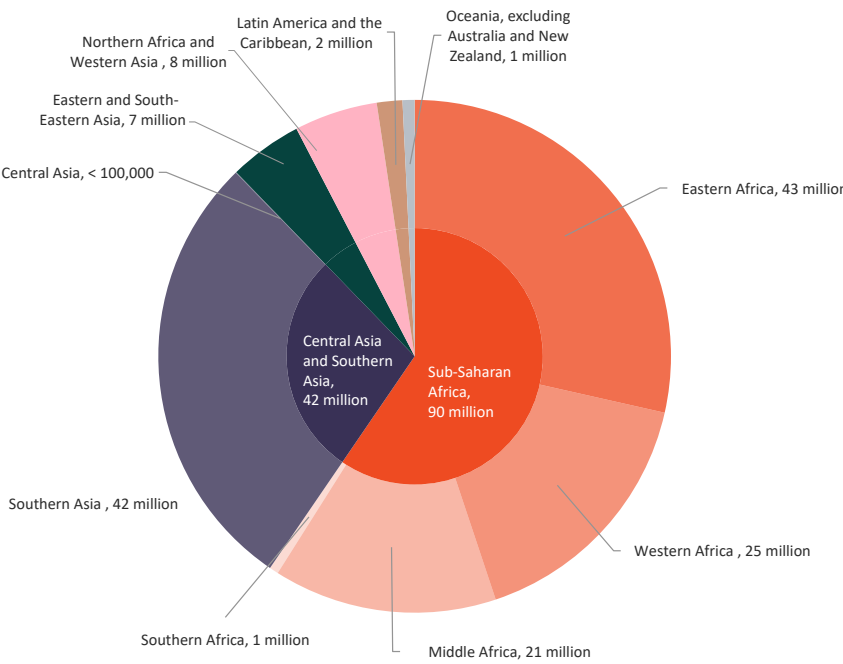
Source: United Nations Children's Fund, The Right Start in Life: Global levels and trends in birth registration. 2024 update, UNICEF, New York, 2024.
Note: These estimates are based on data collected between 2014 and 2023 for a subset of 173 countries and areas, representing 98 per cent of the global population of children under age 5. Population coverage is above 70 per cent for all SDG regions. In the regions of Europe and Northern America and Australia and New Zealand, 100 per cent of children are estimated to be registered on the basis of civil registration coverage. Data are drawn from the UNICEF global databases, 2024, based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and Demographic and Health Surveys, vital statistics from civil registration systems, censuses and other nationally representative surveys that use a comparable methodology. These national data are also included in the official global database for SDG indicator 16.9.1.

Despite significant global progress in birth registration, registering children born to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless persons and migrants remains complex. Initiatives to remove the legal and practical barriers to birth registration for displaced populations include mobile registration units, community outreach, and policy reforms to increase accessibility of registration. Strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems for displaced persons is crucial for protecting their rights, accessing essential services, and promoting inclusive development.

[82] United Nations Children's Fund, *The Right Start in Life: Global levels and trends in birth registration. 2024 update*, UNICEF, New York, 2024.

[83] All estimates from United Nations Children's Fund, *The Right Start in Life: Global levels and trends in birth registration. 2024 update*, UNICEF, New York, 2024.

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Legal protections for access to information

- **Public access to information** (16.10.2 Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information)

In 2025, the right to information is legally guaranteed in 139 countries, a remarkable increase from just 14 countries in 1990. This global progress highlights a growing international commitment to transparency, accountability, and the role of access to information in supporting the SDGs.

Access to information (ATI) has been recognized as a key element of sustainable development since the adoption of the Rio Declaration in 1992. Beyond legal frameworks, access to information empowers Member States with essential tools to tackle key challenges, including advancing public health and gender equality, strengthening institutions, and combating corruption. UNESCO monitors the number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information. This extends beyond legal recognition, to evaluating institutional mechanisms, enforcement practices, and the extent to which individuals can meaningfully exercise their right to access information held by public bodies.

UNESCO's recommendations and support for Member States are grounded in data from its annual survey, which provides a comprehensive global assessment of access to information. These data enable governments and stakeholders to develop informed policies that strengthen the right to information through a holistic approach, integrating legal guarantees, independent oversight, innovative digital solutions, and inclusive strategies.

The survey asks countries about a range of areas detailing the existence and implementation of ATI guarantees. It asks whether access guarantees exist; whether an oversight body is mandated; and if so, what roles it serves; whether these agencies are mandated to appoint public information officers; and whether exemptions to the law are well-defined. On implementation of ATI guarantees, the survey asks about record-keeping and statistics, reporting and training. Results are combined into a score out of 9. At the regional level, average scores were: Africa 6.2; Arab States 6.2; Asia and the Pacific 6.8; Eastern Europe 7.0; Latin America and the Caribbean 6.8; Western Europe and North America 6.6.

A growing international commitment to transparency and accountability is reflected in increasing legal guarantees for access to information

Figure 48: Jurisdictions with legal guarantees for access to public information, as a share of jurisdictions responding to UNESCO survey, 2020-2024
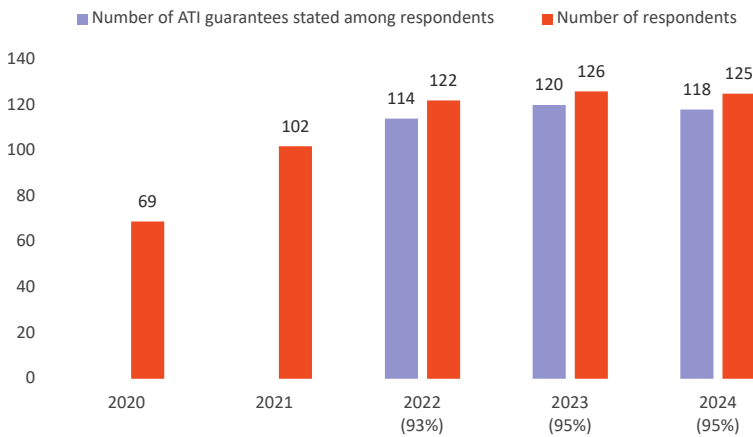
Source: UNESCO.
Note: Access to information (ATI).

The 2024 round of the survey revealed four main findings:

1. Countries with specialized oversight bodies perform better than those without

2. Record-keeping remains one of the major areas for improvement. It is essential to ensure adequate and reliable records of the requests for information and the appeals received—since only by tracking this information can processes be improved.

3. Regional networks are important. Networks of oversight institutions are crucial for SDG monitoring and reporting, as well as for mobilizing their members to take part in global activities related to the SDGs.

4. Access to public information is a cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda. The annual UNESCO survey for monitoring indicator 16.10.2 has proven useful in offering countries a standardized approach for measuring and reporting on progress at the national level, including in their voluntary national reviews.

Out of 125 participating countries and territories responding to the 2024 survey, 95 per cent (118) confirmed the existence of a legal guarantee for access to information as a fundamental right in their country. Survey results revealed ongoing regional efforts to improve ATI systems, particularly in public awareness campaigns, tracking of requests and appeals and institutional transparency and reporting.

While more countries and territories are increasingly disclosing statistics on requests for information and how they are handled, the proportion of requests granted has remained relatively consistent with previous years (around 75 per cent). Countries must intensify their efforts to maintain accurate statistics, as meaningful progress can only be achieved through effective monitoring and evaluation.

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To date, information commissions or commissioners remain the most common type of oversight bodies among the responding countries and territories. The data show that countries and territories with legal guarantees for access to information, which include provisions for an oversight body, have an average score of 7.5 out of 9. In contrast, those with legal guarantees but lacking an oversight institution have an average score of only 3.7 out of 9.

> **Oversight institutions have a range of roles in monitoring the implementation of legal guarantees for access to information**

Figure 49: Mandated roles and functions of oversight institutions to fulfil their responsibilities concerning access to information, 2022-2024
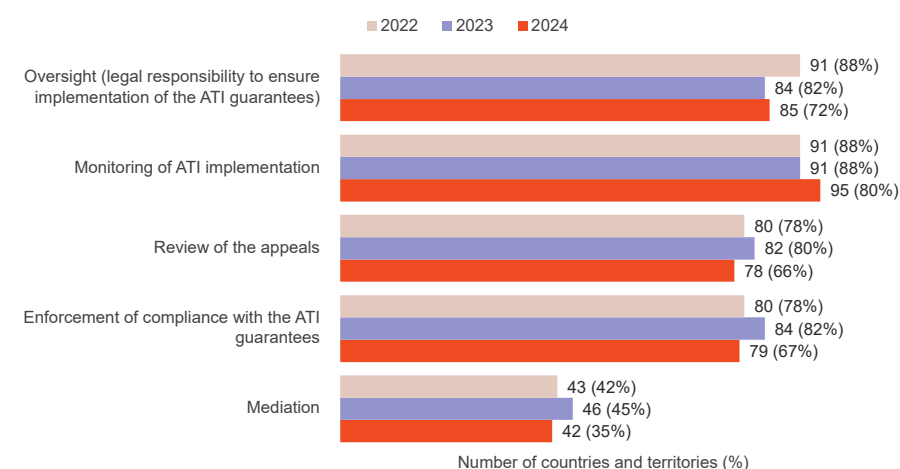
Source: UNESCO.
Note: Access to information (ATI).

Preventing discrimination

- **Experience of discrimination** (16.b.1 Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law

New evidence from 119 countries reveals population groups most discriminated against – and a clear upward trend in global experience of discrimination. On average, one in five individuals globally report having been discriminated against on at least one ground prohibited by international law in the past 12 months, with most countries reporting prevalence rates between 13 and 26 per cent. Least developed countries report significantly higher discrimination rates on average (24.3 per cent) compared to other country groupings.

The most recent evidence from 119 countries reveals population groups most discriminated against and show an upward trend in global experience of discrimination. The data for the indicator come from nationally representative household surveys, implemented by national statistical offices, and designed with a Human Rights-Based Approach to Data[84] integrated throughout its methodology[85].

The experiences reflected in this indicator are based on individuals who feel or believe that they have personally experienced discrimination; rather than those formally reported to or verified as such by official institutions or filed as legal complaints[86].
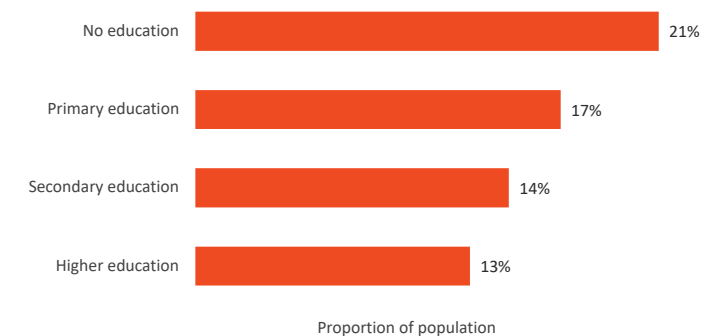
Reasons for discrimination vary by region, shaped by demographic characteristics and by and legal frameworks. In countries with repeated survey rounds, average prevalence of discrimination on any ground rose from 14.8 per cent to 17.1 per cent. Thus, on average, one in five individuals globally report having been discriminated against on at least one ground prohibited by international law in the past 12 months, with most countries reporting prevalence rates between 13 and 26 per cent. Backsliding nations (averaging +4 percentage points) are outnumbering success stories (-2 points) by two-to-one. Discrimination is widespread and systematic, rooted in identity and status.

Urban residents report higher rates of discrimination than their rural counterparts: for every rural resident who experienced discrimination, nearly two urban residents did.

Gender disparities remain pronounced. Women are more than twice as likely to experience gender-based discrimination, and they face higher rates on grounds such as marital or family status.

> **There's an inverse relationship between education level and experiences of discrimination.**

Figure 50: Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months, by education level

Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

[84] See
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/GuidanceNoteonApproachtoData.pdf

[85] See Guidance Note for Implementation of Survey Module on SDG Indicator 16.b.1 & 10.3.1 (Discrimination)

[86] Reported cases represent only a fraction of the actual experiences due to low reporting rates.

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Income and wealth correlate strongly with discrimination. In all countries where data on income or wealth quintiles are available, discrimination rates are highest among those in the poorest quintile (17.3 per cent), and decrease consistently with each higher quintile, down to 10.3 per cent in the richest quintile.

Discrimination decreases as education levels increase. There is a strong and consistent inverse relationship between education level and reported experiences of discrimination. Individuals with no formal education report an average discrimination rate of 21.4 per cent, nearly double (nine percentage points higher) than those with higher education (12.7 per cent). This pattern holds across nearly all grounds, especially in relation to age, religion, and socio-economic status.

Age influences the grounds — not just the frequency — of discrimination. The reasons people report being discriminated against shift markedly with age. Migration status, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation or gender identity are more often cited among younger respondents (aged 15-29 years). In contrast, among older adults (aged 60 years and older), discrimination is more commonly reported on grounds of age, and disability and health status.

Persons with disabilities face persistently higher rates of discrimination. On average, almost 1 in three (28 per cent) of persons with disabilities report experiencing discrimination — compared with 17 per cent among persons without disabilities. Persons with disabilities face persistently higher rates of discrimination on every single ground tracked by the data, not only on the grounds of their disability status. This is a clear indication that grounds of discrimination do not exist in isolation. People with multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities often face compounded risks of discrimination.

> **Persons with disabilities consistently face higher rates of discrimination across all measured grounds**

Figure 51: Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months, by disability status
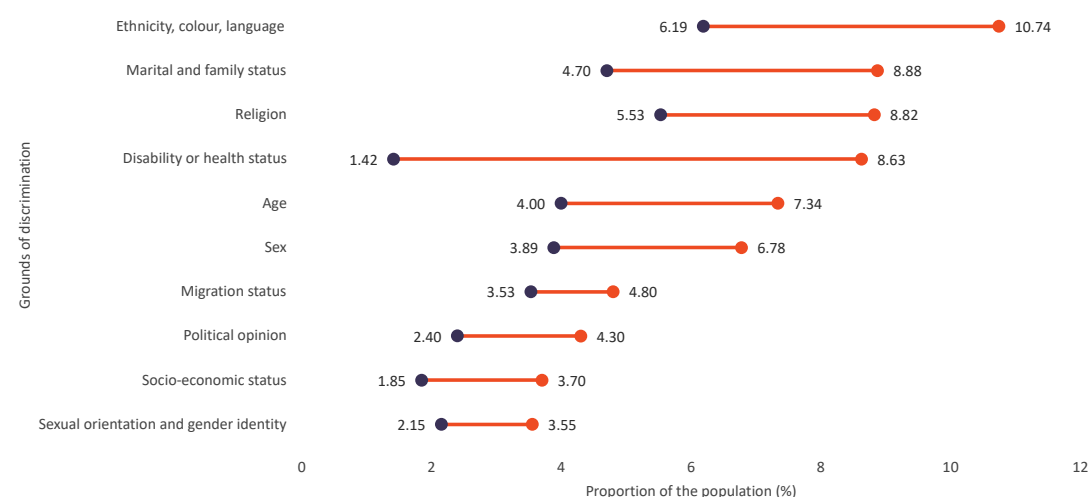
Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The prevalence of discrimination and the principal grounds of that discrimination vary across world regions. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, discrimination is often linked to socio-economic status, ethnicity, language, and religion. In Northern America and Europe, age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status are commonly cited. But overall, skin colour, ethnicity, and socio-economic status emerge as the most commonly reported reasons for discrimination.

Data collection is expanding, but gaps remain. Fewer than half of all countries provide data disaggregated by income, education, or migration status. Only one in five countries conduct repeated surveys, further limiting the ability to assess progress or trends over time.

Where do we go from here?

Effective, accountable institutions

Governments must commit to and invest in using data effectively to inform decision-making and adjust services at both national and local levels, based on evidence and real-time feedback.

Governments should take steps to align public spending with national development plans, and ensure that financial management is transparent, equitable and responsive to the people. This includes enacting strong internal controls, independent external audits, and transparent procurement systems to ensure predictability and public confidence in institutions. Financial management plans should harness data to allow gender-responsive and inclusive budgeting and expenditure frameworks.

Governments must commit to tracking and improving service delivery not just nationally but also at the local level. Accountability mechanisms should be established that require institutions to regularly report on service quality and user satisfaction. This may also require increased investments in funding, staffing, and service standards. Furthermore, better coordination across and within sectors is essential. Partnerships with the private sector and civil society can help make services more inclusive, efficient, and responsive to people's needs.

Digital technologies offer new opportunities to transform public service delivery, both in accessing public services and improving people's overall experience with them. Governments should invest in accessible digital platforms and tools that can address service delivery gaps while ensuring equal access for all.

Inclusive decision-making

Representative institutions are more resilient and effective when they reflect the diversity of the societies they serve. Governments, parliaments and political parties should pursue bold reforms to increase the meaningful representation of women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups in leadership roles—across legislatures, public service, and the judiciary.

This includes implementing quotas, inclusive recruitment and promotion practices, and removing structural, legal and cultural barriers to running for office.

Civil service systems must emphasize merit-based recruitment, while also promoting diversity and inclusion. It is also essential to address workplace cultures and practices in order to challenge stereotypes.

To support inclusive governance, authorities must invest in civic engagement platforms, transparency initiatives, and the systematic collection of disaggregated data to inform policy. These efforts should be anchored in legal frameworks and supported by partnerships with civil society and independent media to ensure that decision making is participatory and accountable.

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Participation in global decision-making

International governance structures must be reformed to reflect current global realities and ensure equitable representation. Following the momentum generated by the 2025 Financing for Development Conference, countries should prioritize reforms that strengthen the voting power and representation of developing countries in international financial institutions and standard-setting bodies. This includes revisiting shareholding and quota systems to reflect current global economic realities.

Developed countries must demonstrate political will to support equitable governance reforms, including reducing veto powers and enabling more inclusive decision-making structures. Without such changes, global institutions risk losing legitimacy and effectiveness in addressing shared challenges.

Legal identity for all

Legal identity is a foundation for enjoying rights, services and protections. Governments must prioritize universal birth registration by integrating civil registration into health, education, and social protection systems. This is especially urgent in regions with low coverage, such as sub-Saharan Africa. This requires simplifying registration procedures and ensuring that services are accessible and inclusive. The rights of refugees, stateless persons, and internally displaced populations to a legal identity must receive focused attention.

To close the birth registration gap by 2030, national authorities must invest in legal reforms, digital systems, and community outreach to strengthen civil registration systems and empower families to claim registration as a right.

Legal protections for access to information

Access to information is a cornerstone of democratic governance, enabling oversight, participation and institutional accountability. To improve transparency and accountability, national authorities must enhance data collection and public reporting on access to information. International partners can support these efforts through technical assistance and knowledge sharing.

Governments should establish or strengthen independent oversight bodies, guarantee legal protections for information access, and ensure institutional capacity to process and respond to requests in a timely, transparent and non-discriminatory manner.

Preventing discrimination

Tackling discrimination requires targeted policies, informed by solid and detailed data, and backed by legal accountability. Governments must urgently adopt and enforce targeted anti-discrimination policies informed by disaggregated data across race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, migration status, and other grounds. These policies should be backed by accountability mechanisms to ensure effective implementation and redress.

To measure progress and design effective interventions, countries should invest in regular, nationally representative surveys that measure discrimination across different population groups and grounds of discrimination—and establish accountability mechanisms that provide redress and guide institutional reform. A Human rights-based approach to data – informed by participation, and data privacy standards should be adopted in all data collection activities and must be central to data collection on discrimination.

Including displaced populations in efforts to achieve peace, just and inclusive societies

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)[87], which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018 and serves as the blueprint for transforming the way the world responds to refugee situations, has proven effective in promoting cross-sectoral partnerships that integrate refugees into national systems. Its pledging framework translates political commitments into action through policy reform, technical assistance, and funding for both host and origin countries.

To build on this progress, further investment in the GCR process is needed, particularly in the lead-up to the Global Refugee Forum Progress Review in December 2025. Governments and stakeholders should scale up successful practices and remove barriers to implementing pledges related to peacebuilding, legal aid, and long-term solutions for refugees.

The latest state of data on inclusive societies

Earlier editions of this report highlighted significant data challenges when it comes to monitoring the state of progress towards inclusive societies. Are we doing any better now? Where are data issues still holding us back from a complete assessment?

Despite important progress by many countries in measuring satisfaction with public services (indicator 16.6.2), significant data gaps remain. As of 2024, the availability of high-quality, comparable and disaggregated data on people's experiences and satisfaction with a wide range of public services remains limited and fragmented across countries and sectors. Moreover, limited time series data hampers efforts to track trends over time and evaluate the progress toward the achievement of SDG target 16.6.

The IPU's data-collection practice for indicator 16.7.1a (composition of legislatures) is unique in that the Organization sources information directly from national parliaments rather than from national statistical offices. With more than six decades of experience in gathering data on women's representation in parliaments and an almost universal membership base, the IPU has established dedicated focal points within each member parliament. This trusted relationship enables timely and direct access to information.

Combined with standardized questionnaires, consistent outreach and a methodology tailored to the realities of parliamentary data, this approach allows for generally predictable updates and limits data gaps. Even so, data updating is not without its challenges for this indicator. Parliamentary compositions shift frequently owing to elections, appointments or resignations, and age data may be protected due to privacy laws or simply unavailable, particularly in some regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. A high coverage threshold (typically 80 per cent) is required when reporting on MPs' age data in order to avoid skewed averages.

While SDG indicator 16.7.1 (compositions of legislatures, public service and the judiciary) calls for information "by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups", producing such breakdowns continues to be challenging or impossible in the current data environment. The IPU does not currently report data on parliamentarians living with disabilities for SDG indicator 16.7.1(a), as past efforts have shown that most parliaments do not record this information systematically, that doing so raises legal and confidentiality concerns, and that self-reporting of such information can be unreliable. Looking ahead, the IPU will explore and potentially pilot new approaches for gathering data on parliamentarians based on their disability and minority status.

[87] See https://globalcompactrefugees.org/about/high-level-officials-meetings/global-refugee-forum-progress-review-2025

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Similarly, for indicators 16.7.1(b) and (c) (composition of public service and the judiciary), gender is the only demographic characteristic for which global data are available. Data for other groups such as youth[88] or persons with disabilities[89] are available for a few countries only and do not allow conclusions to be drawn at the global level.

Nevertheless, there has been a significant improvement in data availability for these indicators. Data availability has increased from 145 to 157 countries for 16.7.1b and from 79 to 115 countries for 16.7.1c.[90]. Challenges remain in compiling these indicators. Beyond data comparability between institutions in a country and how they compile and disseminate data on representation in public institutions and the judiciary, there is also the challenge of comparability across countries. Different countries often apply inconsistent practices when recording sex information of employees, which hinders comparability across time and countries. Additionally, the lack of adoption of harmonized definitions for "decision-making positions" complicates data aggregation, particularly within diverse public service structures. Some countries do not use the International Standard Classification of Occupations of 2008, resulting in reduced comparability[91]. Moreover, the production of disaggregated data remains uneven: some countries only produce sex-disaggregated figures for either the lowest or the highest levels of decision-making, skewing the overall understanding of representation.

Countries need to invest in better harnessing administrative data, as well as conducting surveys that are disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and other characteristics to allow for much more accurate tracking of representation and inclusion in decision-making. Without this level of detail in the data, reforms risk being superficial, failing to uncover intersecting disadvantages that create structural barriers such as "glass ceilings" and "glass walls" Countries should therefore expand data collection efforts to cover key sectors (e.g., health, education, law enforcement, infrastructure) and leadership levels, to better inform targeted policy responses.

Data coverage for indicator 16.9.1 (birth registration) has improved over time. This has largely been the result of investment in data collection on birth registration in low- and middle-income countries through household surveys. This said, it is important to note that estimates obtained through surveys are highly sensitive to the way in which questions are formulated. This is especially true of questions about the civil authorities in charge of recording births, as survey respondents may not always be clear about who these authorities are. Similarly, questions about the possession of a birth certificate might also be misinterpreted, since respondents may confuse a birth certificate with a health or vaccination card or other document. For these reasons, the data on registration and possession of birth certificates obtained via caregiver reports need to be interpreted with a degree of caution. And even for those countries with mechanisms in place for registering births through civil registration systems, the systematic recording of births remains a serious challenge, highlighting the continuing urgent need to improve and strengthen civil registration and vital statistics.

The data for indicator 16.b.1 (experience of discrimination) come from surveys that ask people about their personal experiences of discrimination or harassment. There has been encouraging progress in the collection of data from these surveys, with 119 countries now reporting data for the SDG indicator, double the number that provided data the previous year. Just ten years ago, only 15 countries were collecting this kind of data—so this is a major step forward in making discrimination visible. The depth of the data is also improving, with significant improvements in the number of dimensions along which data can be disaggregated.

Including refugees, IDPs and stateless persons in statistics to measure SDG 16 – both counting such individuals and identifying their status to permit policy-relevant disaggregation – remains a major challenge, but one that it is essential to tackle. If societies are to be inclusive, the data that underpin decision-making must also be inclusive and representative of the populations they are designed to reflect and to serve. Forcibly displaced and stateless persons are often excluded from national data systems, making it challenging to design inclusive policies and deliver essential services. Integrating these populations into national statistics, through censuses, surveys, and civil registration systems, is critical for ensuring their needs are recognized and addressed. Disaggregated and accurate data not only support evidence-based policymaking but also help counter misinformation and promote social inclusion.

Recent advances have been made, including through statistical recommendations and methodological guidance issued by the UNSC-mandated Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics and UNHCR's Forced Displacement Survey (FDS)[92] and as a result of new methodological guidance. The FDS is a comprehensive survey programme designed to collect nationally representative data on refugees and IDPs across multiple thematic areas, aligning with many SDG indicators including indicators 16.1.5 (perceptions of safety) and 16.9.1 (birth registration), and helping to monitor the inclusion of displaced populations in development efforts. By integrating these indicators, the FDS ensures that forcibly displaced people are represented in national and international statistics and global policy planning. integrating these indicators, the FDS ensures that forcibly displaced people are represented in national and international statistics and global policy planning.

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[88] Data are available for 40 countries for 16.7.1b and 16.7.1c.

[89] Data are available for 11 countries for SDG 16.7.1b and 6 countries for 16.7.1c.

[90] These statistics reflect the number of countries with at least one data point available in the period 2015-2025. A significantly smaller number of countries have two or more data points that can allow for time trend analysis.

[91] Constraints have been identified with countries that have national adaptations of ISCO 08, that are still using the classification of 1988 of have their own national classifications.

[92] See https://egrisstats.org/wp-content/uploads/EGRISS-Methodological-Paper-3.pdf and https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/reports-and-publications/data-and-statistics/forced-displacement-survey.

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Shifting Course:
Advancing SDG 16 to tackle the drivers of forced displacement

At the end of 2024, 123.2 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced because of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and events seriously disturbing public order, 42.7 million of whom were refugees.

SDG Indicator 10.7.4 identifies the proportion of a country's population who become refugees[93]. Since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015 and over the last decade, the number of refugees has increased, reaching 450 refugees per 100,000 people by end of 2024. The majority of these refugees are fleeing war or conflict.

Forced displacement happens when peace, justice, and strong institutions break down. Advancing SDG 16 is critical for effectively addressing the root causes and impacts of forced displacement. Without meaningful progress in this area, strategies to reduce and resolve displacement will remain fragmented, limiting their long-term effectiveness and sustainability.

The frequency of conflicts, their widespread impact on people or areas, their duration and intensity are strong predictors of the number of people forced to flee each year. The data on SDG 16.1.2, which documents civilian deaths resulting from the world's deadliest armed conflicts, as reported by the United Nations from 2015 to 2024, is strongly correlated with displacement outflows (new asylum seekers, refugees, and people in a refugee-like situation)[94]. A 1 per cent increase in civilian deaths is statistically associated with a 0.44 per cent increase in displacement outflows. As conflict-related civilian deaths have increased, more people are forced to flee (see Figure 52).

When parties to the conflict do not abide strictly by their international humanitarian law and human rights obligations, and ensure the protection of civilians in their military operations, including by avoiding the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA)[95], the impact is devastating, including on the magnitude of displacement. Figure 53 shows that when the fighting becomes more indiscriminate –for example, when heavy weapons and explosives are used– the displacement outflow tends to increase. Furthermore, the effect lingers even when fighting has stopped, thereby hampering reconstruction efforts and creating barriers to return.
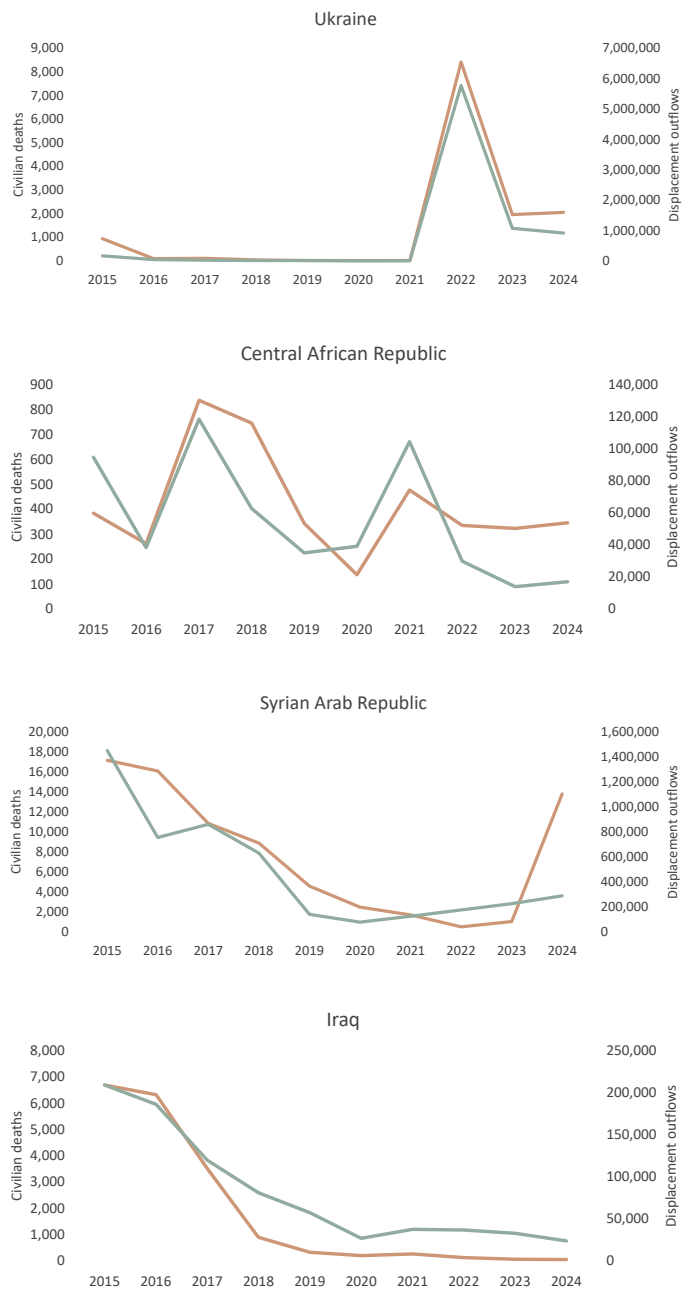
[93] See the metadata of SDG Indicator 10.7.4. The indicator is computed as follows: [Number of refugees by country of origin at end-year / (End-year population in country of origin + number of refugees by country of origin at end-year)] * 100,000. For this report, refugees, people in a refugee-like situation and other people in need of international protection have been included. The indicator excludes Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate.

[94] This analysis employed a log-log regression using data on conflict (SDG 16.1.2), s trong institutions (SDG 16.a.1), ac counting for the size of the population, the gross domestic product per capita, food insecurity, civil liberty, and political rights as covariates. Additionally, the analysis also accounts for the year and the country as fixed effects. The analysis covers 15 conflicts in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, and Yemen from 2015 to 2024. For some countries, data on conflict-related deaths were not available for the entire period. There is a positive association between the indicator on conflict-related deaths and the number of newly displaced individuals (R-squared: 0.86; estimated coefficient:0.44; p-value < 2.2e-16). Corr esponding flow data (new asylum seekers, refugees and people in a refugee-like situation) for these countries were used, when conflict-related deaths were available, from UNHCR's Forced Displacement flow dataset. This analysis does not include the State of Palestine due to a lack of data availability for many of the variables used in the regression model. It also does not capture other countries with high numbers of new displaced individuals, such as Sudan and Colombia.

[95] See https://ewipa.org/

* This Chapter was contributed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), upon invitation from the lead authors (OHCHR, UNODC, UNDP) of the Global SDG 16 progress report.

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Where conflicts cause many civilian casualties, people flee

Figure 52: Comparing conflict-related civilian deaths and displacement outflows in Ukraine, Central African Republic, Syrian Arab Republic, and Iraq, 2015-2024[96]

Indiscriminate fighting drives displacement

Figure 53: Comparing conflict-related deaths caused by heavy weapons and explosives with displacement outflows, 2015-2024[97]
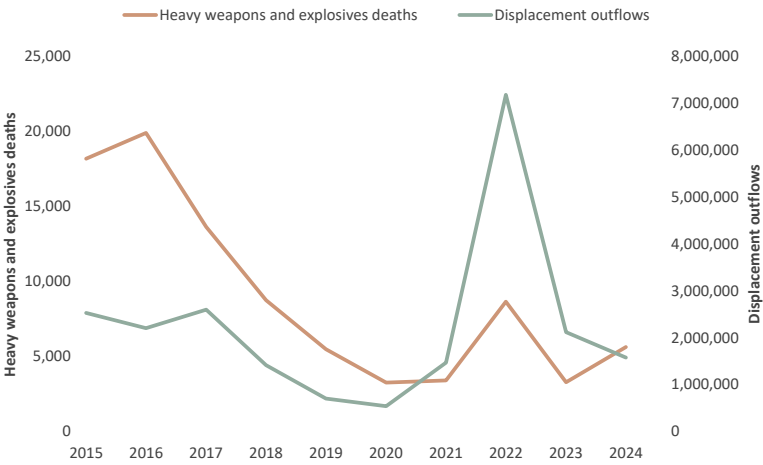

Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The Global Compact on Refugees has advanced SDG 16 through the mobilization and implementation of pledges aligned to the Goal's targets and indicators. Out of the almost 3,500 pledges[98], 15 per cent relate to SDG 16, underscoring its importance in ensuring that strategies to reduce and resolve displacement are cohesive, effective, and sustainable. To support these efforts, advancing statistical inclusion[99] is crucial, particularly by integrating displaced and stateless populations into national statistical and civil registration systems. This ensures their legal identity and that their needs are visible and meaningfully addressed in the pursuit of peace, justice, and inclusive institutions.

Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

[96] This analysis compares the number of conflict-related civilian deaths (SDG 16.1.2) with the number of displacement outflows (new asylum seekers, refugees and people in refugee-like situation) in selected countries. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the number of conflict-related deaths increased in 2024, while displacement outflows remained steady. This is because displacement was largely internal, with 770,000 new displaced individuals within the country in 2024 (source: the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre).

[97] The analysis used the same countries as in footnote 96, with the addition of the State of Palestine. The data for conflict-related deaths include the total of civilian and non-civilian deaths caused by heavy weapons and explosives. The data for displacement outflows include new asylum seekers, refugees and people in refugee-like situations.

[98] See https://globalcompactrefugees.org/pledges-contributions

[99] See https://www.unhcr.org/blogs/inclusion-of-forcibly-displaced-and-stateless-persons-in-national-statistics/

With contributions from

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