



SDG 16 CONFERENCE

Peace, Justice & Inclusive Societies



TRANSFORMING GOVERNANCE FOR A MORE PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE FUTURE

SDG 16 AS THE ROADMAP TO RESPOND TO COVID-19 AND BUILD BACK BETTER

28-30 April 2021

Virtual conference

Co-organized by UN DESA, IDLO and the Government of Italy

INTRODUCTION

Governance has been identified as “an essential lever of the systematic transformations needed to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).” The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically emphasized the importance of the three pillars of Goal 16 – peaceful, inclusive societies, access to justice and effective, accountable institutions – for successful national responses, promoting an equitable, just and sustainable recovery and building resilience to future shocks and crises.

The pandemic threatens to derail progress on key dimensions of SDG 16. Despite the enormous challenges it has posed, the crisis is also an opportunity to reimagine the role of institutions and policymaking, promote new governance norms and shift to transformative pathways that strengthen resilience and accelerate action to achieve the SDGs.

OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH OF THE CONFERENCE

Building on the outcomes of the first SDG 16 Conference held in Rome, Italy, in May 2019, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and the Government of Italy are organizing a second SDG 16 Conference. The 2021 Rome Conference will consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SDG 16 as well as the transformative contribution SDG 16 can make in helping

to safeguard and accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It will contribute to the deliberations of the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), while aligning itself to the vision for the United Nations System and the wider international system in the years to come as mandated by the Declaration on the 75th Anniversary of the Organization.

The Conference will help to generate a preliminary assessment of how progress towards SDG 16 has been affected by COVID-19 and the pandemic's wider implications for the realization of the 2030 Agenda. It will highlight the importance of policy orientations embodied in SDG 16 to efforts to build resilience to shocks and provide a roadmap for a more just, inclusive and equitable recovery required to sustain peace and development and deliver on Decade of Action to deliver the Global Goals.

The Conference will explore how the principles of equity, equality, non-discrimination and participation at the core of SDG 16 can serve as a guide to renew the social contract and help rebuild the trust between people and government.

In keeping with the "whole of society" approaches required to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the Conference will adopt a multistakeholder format, drawing on insights and experiences from governments, civil society, women and girls, youth and other key stakeholders working at the frontlines of pandemic response and recovery efforts around the world. It will place a particular emphasis on the challenges and perspective of people and groups that have been disproportionately affected and are most at risk of being left behind.

The Conference will also promote exchanges on governance innovations that have emerged during the pandemic. The Conference will share knowledge, success stories and good practices, and identify areas of concern and opportunities for transformation. It will suggest ways forward in terms of policies, partnerships and coordinated actions at all levels as well as recommendations to leverage the interlinkages between SDG 16 and the other Goals during and after the pandemic.

CONFERENCE THEMES

The Conference will address the following themes:

Theme 1: Our shared fragility: The impact of COVID-19 on SDG 16

This theme will generate a preliminary multi-stakeholder assessment of the pandemic's impact on SDG 16 with a focus on those most at risk of being left behind including women and girls, youth, people with disabilities and those who might be in marginalized and vulnerable situations. It will examine ways in which issues of peace, justice and inclusion have been both exacerbated and magnified by the impact of the pandemic. The session will explore how challenges related to transparency, accountability and institutional capacity have hampered effective crisis response at both national and international levels. The discussions will also examine how aspects of SDG 16 have been drawn upon by governments, national stakeholders as well as international institutions to orient response and recovery actions, focusing on measures to address inequality and vulnerability in societies and increase the resilience of national institutions.

Theme 2: Renewing the social contract to build trust between people and state:

Rebuilding peoples' confidence in government was highlighted as a major challenge by global leaders in the UN 75th Anniversary Declaration. Discussions under this theme will address some of the root causes of lack of trust in public institutions. They will encompass policies and measures at the national level, sustained by international cooperation, to ensure equity in distribution of public goods and delivery of services, with a focus on those most at risk of being left behind; to strengthen transparency, accountability and oversight; to open space for participation and stakeholder engagement; to support adherence to constitutional frameworks and the independence of judicial institutions; and to reinforce action to fight corruption.

Theme 3: Turning challenges into opportunities: rethinking governance with SDG16 at its center:

This workstream will build on discussions under Themes 1 and 2 and will address the governance, institutional and policy innovations at local, national, regional and international levels that can accelerate the implementation of SDG 16 and promote integrated, "whole of society, whole of government" approaches needed to tackle complex, interrelated challenges such as entrenched conflict, increasing inequalities, gender inequality, social and economic insecurity, climate change and rapid technological disruption. Framing this discussion will be the transformative actions at all levels, rooted in multilateralism and global solidarity, that the COVID-19 crisis is compelling governments to take, and the opportunities they offer to bring about renewed, sustained progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

CONTRIBUTION TO HLPF 2021

The theme for the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), is "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development."

This year, for the second time, the HLPF will carry out an in-depth review of progress towards SDG 16, along with other Goals. The Conference will serve to bring together a cross-section of expertise from a diversity of countries and regions to help:

Provide substantive assessments and inputs into HLPF thematic reviews and help inform background analyses and outcomes;

Identify good practices on SDG 16's implementation, monitoring and evaluation during the pandemic;

Highlight the relevance of key dimensions of governance highlighted in SDG 16 to successfully limit the spread of the pandemic and enable recovery from regions and specific countries;

Build on and influence collaborations and programs of work going forward from 2021.

Arrangements will be made to brief Member States on the Conference's outcomes prior to the HLPF, based on a document to be prepared following the event.

FORMAT

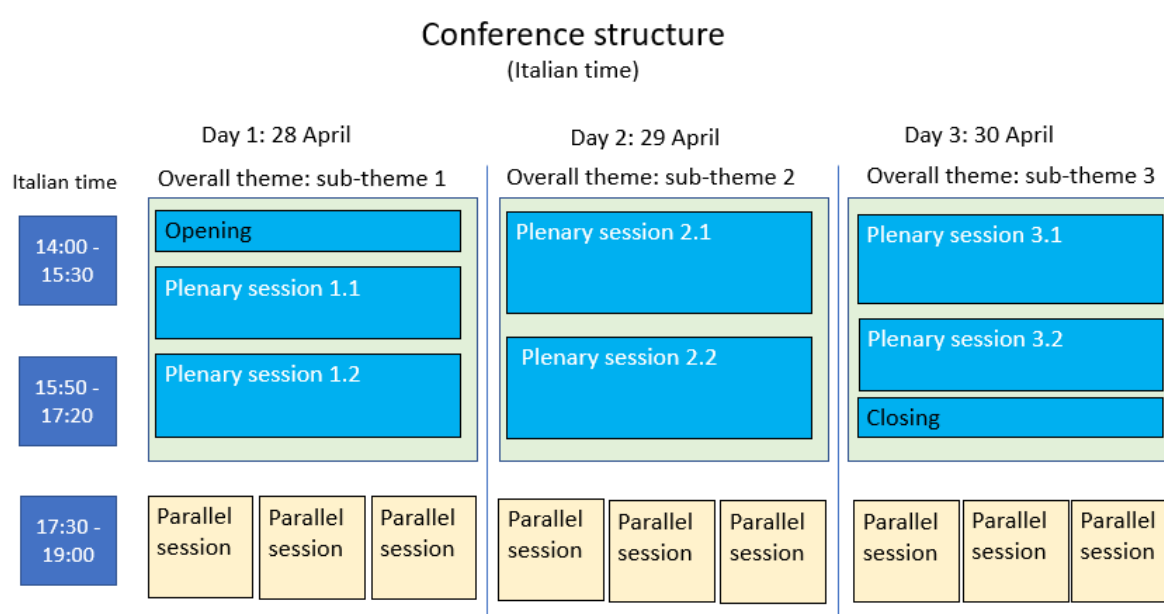
The Conference will be a three-day virtual meeting consisting of:

Plenary sessions, with interventions from high-level panelists followed by a moderated discussion.

Parallel sessions, with interventions from panelists followed by moderated discussion.

Knowledge exchange pitches.

Along with live-format events, pre-recorded products will be made available to attendees through the website before, during and after the Conference. Different custodian agencies of SDG 16 indicators could provide a short video (or recorded statement) outlining data and progress.



PLENARY SESSIONS

The contemplated plenary sessions of the Conference (leaving aside opening and closing) will cover the following topics.

THEME 1 Our shared fragility: The impact of COVID-19 on SDG 16

Session 1.1 Peaceful, just and inclusive societies in the time of COVID-19 and beyond

Despite consensus that the symbiotic relationship between peace, justice and good governance embodied in SDG 16 is essential for achieving sustainable development, progress across SDG 16's various dimensions has been uneven since the 2030 Agenda was adopted. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated many of these negative trends and represents a profound challenge to humanity's shared aspirations for a better future expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals. This session will attempt to provide a preliminary multi-stakeholder assessment of the pandemic's impact on progress on the three dimensions of SDG 16: peace and conflict, access to justice, and effective, accountable and transparent institutions. It will

highlight the disproportionate impacts on those most at risk of being left behind who have borne the brunt of the crisis and will explore the implications of these trends for global progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Session 1.2 Enhancing resilience to shocks and crises: lessons learned from the pandemic

The pandemic has exposed structural weaknesses including lack of government preparedness to handle such society-wide shocks; it has also revealed fault lines and entrenched inequalities that have wider implications for the realization of the 2030 Agenda. The response to the crisis has illustrated how key principles of SDG 16 such as transparency, accountability, participation and engagement can strengthen the capacity of communities and societies to withstand shocks and recover. The session will explore how challenges related to good governance and institutional capacity have hampered effective crisis response at both national and international levels. The discussion will aim to distill lessons from innovative governance processes that have emerged during the pandemic in this regard, in order to inform reflections on how to address societal inequalities and vulnerabilities and enhance the resilience of societies to various shocks, as a key component of building back better and delivering the Sustainable Development Goals.

THEME 2: Renewing the social contract to build trust between people and state

Session 2.1 Implications of the pandemic for the relationship between citizens and States

Rebuilding peoples' confidence in government was highlighted as a major challenge by global leaders in the UN 75th Anniversary Declaration. Discussions in this session will address some of the root causes of lack of trust in public institutions. They will encompass policies and measures at the national level, sustained by international cooperation, to ensure equity in distribution of public goods and delivery of services, with a focus on those most at risk of being left behind; to open space for participation and stakeholder engagement; to support adherence to constitutional frameworks and independence of judicial institutions; and to reinforce action to fight corruption.

Session 2.2 Strengthening transparency, accountability and engagement during and beyond the pandemic

Restrictions on movement and assembly around the world have limited access to the political space, working methods and processes of institutions such as parliaments and courts, potentially undermining legislative oversight and law-making. Public institutions have experimented with innovative methods to overcome these challenges. Research found that COVID-19 response plans have paid "little attention to governance- and corruption-related matters." However, oversight bodies such as supreme audit institutions have innovated in order to increase the transparency and accountability of governmental emergency responses as well as of rescue and recovery packages, which can pose risks to integrity and create opportunities for fraud and corruption. Transparency at all levels, from the local to the national, has emerged as a critical condition for successful responses to the pandemic. The session will examine how national accountability systems in a post-pandemic world can benefit from insights gained during the pandemic in terms of changing dynamics among stakeholders and the opening of new opportunities for collaboration.

THEME 3: Turning challenges into opportunities: rethinking governance with SDG16 at its center

Session 3.1 Transforming governance through inclusive processes and whole of society approaches

This session will address how innovations in governance can be supported by “whole of government” and “whole of society” approaches. The discussion will review governance innovations that emerged during the pandemic that have the potential to support longer-term transformations. It will review strategies to ensure the preservation and expansion of civic space and to create an enabling environment for civil society to participate freely and safely in public governance and decision-making. It will highlight the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships at local, national and international levels in enabling transformative governance to address complex, interrelated challenges such as entrenched conflict, increasing inequalities, gender inequality, social and economic insecurity, climate change and rapid technological disruption.

Session 3.2: SDG 16 as a framework for moving the 2030 Agenda forward: key national and international actions needed to tackle global challenges

This session will build on previous sessions and will aim to identify key areas for action in coming years to ensure progress on SDG 16, while using SDG 16 as a lever to speed up recovery from the pandemic and move the 2030 Agenda forward. With regard to the national level, the discussion will address the need for inclusive social protection schemes that are key to leaving no one behind. It will examine how digital governance, which has been critical during the pandemic, can be further put at the service of inclusive societies. The discussion will also address key areas for multilateral action on issues including public health law, conflict prevention and digital cooperation, to transform governance in support of sustainable development.

PARTICIPATION AND ORGANIZATION

Experts from governments, the UN system and other international organizations, think tanks, academia, civil society organizations, and the private sector and other relevant stakeholders will be invited by the organizers. All participants will need to register through the Conference virtual platform. An online pre-registration process will be in place for those wishing to indicate their interest in attending and submitting questions ahead of the Conference.

LANGUAGES AND DOCUMENTATION

Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in English, French, Italian and Spanish for plenary and parallel sessions.

The documentation for the Conference will be available in English, French, Italian and Spanish. Presentations/papers/remarks will be made available online through the Conference website.