SDG 16+
CIVIL SOCIETY
TOOLKIT

TAP
NETWORK
Transparency, Accountability &
Participation for 2030 Agenda

# Using international human rights and labour standards mechanisms

*International monitoring mechanisms play a key role in monitoring, reviewing and making recommendations on the implementation of human rights and labour standards that are essential to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies*



## Overview

The international human rights and labour standards monitoring systems can play an important role in ensuring accountability for SDG16+ commitments. International human rights monitoring is undertaken through several mechanisms including:

- **UN Treaty Bodies** – Committees of independent experts that monitor and provide guidance on the implementation of the core human rights treaties – many of which address specific SDG16+ issues – by State parties;[206]

- **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** – A peer review mechanism under the UN Human Rights Council, which examines the human rights record and performance of all UN Member States in a recurring cycle of four-and-a-half years;[207] and
- **Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council** – Independent experts, special rapporteurs or working groups with a mandate to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective.[208]

Similar to the human rights system, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) supervisory system also monitors the implementation of ILO Conventions by State parties, many of which address SDG16+ issues (e.g. forced labour, child labour, and equal pay for work of equal value).[209]

206 There are ten such treaty bodies, including the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Committee against Torture (CAT), the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW), the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) and the Subcommittee on prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT). These bodies review reports submitted periodically by State parties on the steps taken to implement the treaty in question, as well as information submitted by other stakeholders including civil society. Based on the information received and dialogue with the State delegation at a dedicated session, a committee then issues "concluding observations" or recommendations to the relevant State on its implementation of the treaty. Some committees can also receive and consider individual complaints, while others can conduct inquiries. For more information, see: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). 'Human rights treaty bodies'. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/Overview.aspx

207 Under the UPR, reviews are based on three main sources of information: a national report prepared by the State under review; a compilation of UN information prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); and a summary of stakeholders' submissions – including from NGOs – prepared by the OHCHR. The review itself is conducted as an interactive dialogue between the State under review and other UN Member States, who can pose questions, make comments and/or offer recommendations, which are either 'accepted' or simply 'noted' by the State under review. There are also opportunities for participation by other stakeholders – including civil society – at the review. Following the review, an outcome document is adopted which provides a summary of the discussion with recommendations to and responses from the State under review. During subsequent reviews, the State is expected to report on the implementation of the recommendations received during earlier reviews. For more information, see: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). 'Universal Periodic Review'. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx

208 As of September 2020, there were 44 thematic and 11 country mandates, many of which address SDG16+ issues (e.g. arbitrary detention, freedom of opinion and expression, violence against women, torture, human trafficking, etc.). Special procedures undertake a range of activities including: country visits; acting on individual cases of reported violations and concerns of a broader, structural nature by sending communications to States and others; conducting annual thematic studies, seeking information from calls for input and convening expert consultations; contributing to the development of international human rights standards; engaging in advocacy; raising public awareness; and providing advice for technical cooperation. These independent experts report at least once a year to the Human Rights Council on their findings and recommendations, as well as to the UN General Assembly. For more information, see: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). 'Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council'. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx

209 States that have ratified ILO Conventions are required to report on their implementation at intervals of three or six years. ILO supervisory bodies such as the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) analyze State reports and present Observations and Direct Requests to States, including recommendations on the implementation of the convention in question. The CEACR will often highlight issues raised previously and identify whether the issue has been addressed or not. For more information, see: International Labour Organization (ILO). 'Applying and promoting International Labour Standards.' Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/applying-and-promoting-international-labour-standards/lang--en/index.htm

Despite having distinct mandates, these mechanisms all play a key role in monitoring, reviewing and making recommendations on the implementation of human rights and/or labour standards that are essential to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies. More than 90%of the 169 SDG targets directly reflect elements of international human rights and labour standards,[210] and there are over 36,000 recommendations from international human rights mechanisms linked to SDG 16 alone.[211] Given this significant overlap, as well as the legally binding nature of international human rights and labour standards, international monitoring mechanisms can be a critical tool to advance SDG16+ accountability.

In reviewing the human rights or labour record of countries, international monitoring mechanisms can be used to raise specific SDG16+ issues, resulting in recommendations that further SDG16+ implementation. The wealth of analysis, data, information and recommendations produced by these mechanisms can also be used to report on issues related to peace, justice and inclusion in SDG accountability processes, including VNRs.[212] Furthermore, there is significant potential to align international human rights and labour standards monitoring mechanisms with SDG-related follow-up and review processes, given the strong links between human rights, labour standards and the SDGs. Aligning these mechanisms could help to promote policy coherence, facilitate the sharing of qualitative analysis and data, maximize efficiency and effectiveness, and reduce the overall reporting burden on countries,[213] thereby strengthening accountability for SDG commitments including SDG16+.

## Putting it into practice[214]

There are a number of ways that you can use international human rights and labour standards mechanisms to support SDG16+ accountability, including the following:

1. **Refer to country-specific recommendations from international human rights and labour standards monitoring bodies in engaging in SDG16+ advocacy with your government** – While the SDGs are not legally binding, your government may be obligat-

ed to fulfill specific SDG16+ targets based on their ratification of human rights or ILO conventions.[215] See the key resources in this section for guidance in identifying relevant recommendations.

> **TIP:**
>
> Confirm that your country has ratified an international convention or agreement and, if so, identify any reservations made in relation to your SDG16+ issue.

2. **Engage with international human rights and labour standards mechanisms to advance your SDG16+ issue(s)** – In particular, you should consider pursuing the following actions:

   a. **Determine which mechanism to engage with** by analyzing the links between SDG16+ targets, human rights and labour standards, and your country's ratification of relevant international agreements. See the key resources in this section for further guidance;

   b. **Familiarize yourself with the specific rules, modalities and timelines for civil society interaction** with the monitoring body or process with which you wish to engage;

   c. **Participate in any consultations held by governments** to prepare their national report on the human rights or labour standards situation in your country, as well as any consultations held under the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council;

   d. **Prepare written submissions on the human rights or labour standards situation in your country in relation to your SDG16+ issue(s)** for consideration by monitoring bodies. Many of these bodies accept written information, materials and reports from civil society;

210  The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2019). *Integrated review and reporting on SDGs and Human Rights*, p. 3.  Available at: https://www.humanrights.dk/publications/integrated-review-reporting-sdgs-human-rights

211  As of May 14, 2021, there were 36,596 recommendations linked to SDG 16 from the UN treaty bodies, the UPR and the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.  For more information, see: The Danish Institute for Human Rights.  'SDG – Human Rights Data Explorer'.  Available at: https://sdgdata.humanrights.dk/en

212  This is in line with the 2030 Agenda, which states: "Data and information from existing reporting mechanisms should be used where possible."  United Nations (2015).  *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, para. 48.  General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1.  Available at: https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

213  The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2019).  *Integrated review and reporting on SDGs and Human Rights*, pp. 4-5.  Available at: https://www.humanrights.dk/publications/integrated-review-reporting-sdgs-human-rights

214  Adapted from: Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network (2018).  *SDG Accountability Handbook: A Practical Guide for Civil Society*, pp. 41-42.  Available at: https://sdgaccountability.org/

215  For an overview of your country's status of ratification of international human rights and ILO agreements, see: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).  'Status of Ratification: Interactive Dashboard'.  Available at: https://indicators.ohchr.org/; and International Labour Organization (ILO).  'Ratifications by country'.  Available at: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11001:0::NO:::

e. **Produce independent civil society shadow reports on the human rights or labour standards situation your country in relation to your SDG16+ issue(s);**

f. **Participate in review sessions as observers and/or through oral submissions** at review sessions or pre-sessional working groups held by monitoring bodies; and

g. **Follow-up on the outcomes of reviews** by engaging in dialogue with your government to help them meet their joint human rights, labour standards and SDG16+ obligations.

3. **Use information from international monitoring mechanisms in SDG follow-up and review processes** – You can use information, recommendations and reports from international human rights and labour standards mechanisms to inform SDG follow-up and review processes such as VNRs.[216] This information can be used in preparing civil society shadow reports, written or oral statements, and policy or advocacy briefings on SDG16+ implementation for a range of stakeholders including government actors.

4. **Encourage collaboration between National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRF) and national SDG coordination bodies responsible for SDG follow-up and review** – A NMRF is a government coordination body or structure that is mandated to coordinate and prepare reports for and engage with international and regional human rights mechanisms.[218] Aligning the work of these bodies with the national bodies responsible for SDG reporting – including for SDG16+ – is essential to increase coherence between human rights, labour standards and sustainable development monitoring processes.[219]

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### TIP: *Preparing written submissions to monitoring bodies on SDG16+*

- Familiarize yourself with the technical guidelines to provide written submissions to a particular human rights or ILO body or process.[217]

- Know and adhere to the deadlines for written submissions.

- Work with other civil society actors to prepare joint submissions or reports.

- Review your country's prior reports and recommendations in relation to SDG16+.

- Be explicit in identifying the links between specific SDG16+ targets and human rights or labour standards. Don't assume that monitoring bodies know the SDGs.

- Provide credible and reliable information on your country's situation.

- Highlight problems in SDG16+ implementation that overlap with or impact human rights and offer concrete recommendations to improve the situation.
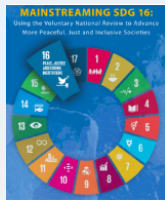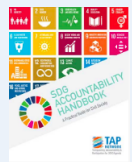
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216  This is in line with the *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews*, which encourages countries to draw on existing reports – including reports submitted to human rights mechanisms – when drafting VNR reports.  See: UN DESA (2021).  *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews – the 2021 Edition*, p. 10.  Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27024Handbook_2021_EN.pdf.  The Danish Institute for Human Rights has also prepared a helpful step-by-step guide on how to use human rights reporting and monitoring in VNRs.  See: The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2018).  *Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Lessons learned and next steps*, pp. 30-31.  Available at: https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/sdg/hr_and_2030_agenda-web_2018.pdf

217  For more information on producing written submissions for human rights-related processes, see: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).  'Human rights treaty bodies'.  Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/Overview.aspx; and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2008).  *Working with the United Nations Human Rights Programme: A Handbook for Civil Society*.  Available at: http://www.ohchr.org/civilsocietyhandbook/

218  The Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies and Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network (2020).  *Mainstreaming SDG 16: Using the Voluntary National Review to Advance More Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies*, p. 14.  Available at: https://www.sdg16hub.org/topic/mainstreaming-sdg-16-using-voluntary-national-review-advance-more-peaceful-just-and-inclusive

219  Feiring, Birgitte and König-Reis, Saionara (2020).  *Leveraging Human Rights Mechanisms to Improve SDG Follow-up and Review*, p. 8.  Available at: https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/hlpf_2_birgitte_saionara.pdf

## Key TAP Network resource:

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| **Mainstreaming SDG 16: Using the Voluntary National Review to Advance More Peaceful, Just and Inclusive societies** (Global Alliance and TAP Network, 2020) | This resource provides policy guidance, case studies and good practices on advancing SDG 16 implementation at national and subnational levels by more effectively leveraging the Voluntary National Review (VNR) and post-VNR processes. It contains a chapter on 'Aligning VNRs with other Reporting and Review Mechanisms.'<br><br>**Available at: https://www.sdg16hub.org/topic/main-streaming-sdg-16-using-voluntary-national-review-ad-vance-more-peaceful-just-and-inclusive** | |
| **SDG Accountability Handbook: A Practical Guide for Civil Society** (TAP Network, 2018) | This handbook provides guidance on the different approaches and steps that can be taken by civil society to ensure national government accountability for the SDGs. It includes a chapter on 'Utilizing International Human Rights Mechanisms.'<br><br>**Available at: https://sdgaccountability.org/** | |

## Key resources:

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| **Human Rights Bodies** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) | This section of OHCHR's website provides information and documentation on the different human rights monitoring mechanisms in the UN system including the treaty-based bodies and charter-based bodies.<br><br>**Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx** |
| **Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI)** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) | This online database allows users to search the observations and recommendations of the UN treaty bodies, Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), by country, region, mechanism, human rights theme, concerned persons/groups and SDG target. Available in the six official UN languages.<br><br>**Available at: http://uhri.ohchr.org/en** |
| **UN Treaty Database** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) | This online database allows users to search all public documents adopted or received by the UN human rights treaty bodies. It is searchable by state/entity or geographic region, committee, document type and symbol/dates.<br><br>**Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/TB-Search.aspx** |
| **Universal Periodic Review** (UN Human Rights Council) | This website provides detailed information on the UPR including cycles, sessions, documentation by country and civil society engagement.<br><br>**Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/upr/pages/uprmain.aspx** |
| **NORMLEX** (International Labour Organization) | The ILO's information system on International Labour Standards, which brings together information on International Labour Standards (such as ratification information, reporting requirements, and comments of the ILO's supervisory bodies) as well as national labour and social security laws.<br><br>**Available at: www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/** |

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| **The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs** (The Danish Institute for Human Rights) | This online database allows users to identify the links between the SDGs or SDG targets and international and regional human rights instruments, labour standards and key environmental instruments (some of which have human rights dimensions). Available in seven languages.<br><br>**Available at: http://sdg.humanrights.dk** |
| **The SDG – Human Rights Data Explorer** (The Danish Institute for Human Rights) | This online database links recommendations and observations issued by international human rights monitoring mechanisms with the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. Users can search for data by country, human rights mechanism, SDG or SDG target, and specific rights-holder groups. Available in the six official UN languages.<br><br>**Available at: https://sdgdata.humanrights.dk/en/** |
| **Integrated review and reporting on SDGs and Human Rights** (The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2019) | This guidance note explores different ways in which human rights recommendations can be used in different processes and at different levels in order to pursue a human rights-based approach to sustainable development.<br><br>**Available at: https://www.humanrights.dk/publications/integrated-review-reporting-sdgs-human-rights** |
| **Leveraging Human Rights Mechanisms to Improve SDG Follow-up and Review** (Birgitte Feiring and Saionara König-Reis, 2020) | This paper explains how human rights principles underpin the 2030 Agenda, why a human rights-based approach is necessary in its implementation, and how global and national human rights mechanisms could be leveraged to strengthen SDG monitoring and review at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF).<br><br>**Available at: https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/hlpf_2_birgitte_saionara.pdf** |
| **Working with the United Nations Human Rights Programme: A Handbook for Civil Society** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2008) | This practical handbook – aimed at civil society actors – is a user-friendly and authoritative resource on the UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. It explains how these bodies and mechanisms work and explores the many important ways that civil society actors can engage with and contribute to their work. Available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Georgian, Nepali, Persian, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese.<br><br>**Available at: http://www.ohchr.org/civilsocietyhandbook/** |