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Working with National Human Rights Institutions

National Human Rights Institutions can play a key role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies through their core functions and other actions that support the SDGs
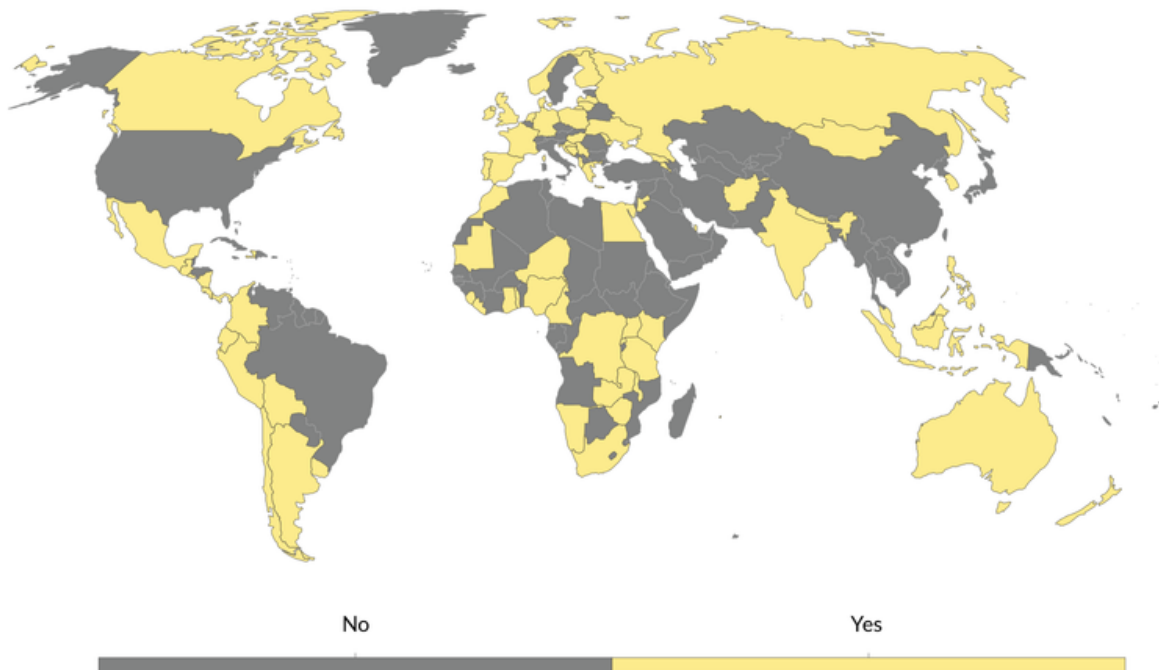
Overview

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)[220] are independent State bodies with a constitutional or legislative mandate to protect and promote human rights. They have a wide range of functions including undertaking systematic analysis of the human rights situation in their respective country, issuing reports and recommendations, advising government and parliament, promoting human rights education and cooperating with national, regional, international and intergovernmental organizations. Some NHRIs also have the authority to handle complaints from citizens, facilitating access to justice, redress and remedy for human rights violations.[221]

Countries with National Human Rights Institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles, 2018

Our World in Data

Compliance of existing national human rights institutions with the Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions (The Paris Principles) based on the rules of procedure of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).

No   Yes

Source: UN Statistics Division

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220 National Human Rights Institutions include human rights commissions, human rights institutes, ombudspersons and *defensorías*.
221 The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2019). *National Human Rights Institutions as a driving force for sustainable development: Good practices for SDG programing and monitoring*, p. 5. Available at: https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/migrated/good_practices.pdf

The global indicator framework for the SDGs recognizes the existence of independent NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles[222] as the indicator to measure progress on SDG target 16.a.[223] As of May 2021, 117 NHRIs were accredited by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), with 84 in full compliance with the Paris Principles ("A" status) and 33 in partial compliance ("B" status).[224] Through their core functions, NHRIs also directly contribute to the realization of other SDG16+ targets including SDG target 4.7 (human rights education) and SDG targets 5.c, 10.3 and 16.b (elimination of discriminatory legislation).[225]

NHRIs are a critical part of the institutional architecture necessary for the realization of the 2030 Agenda[226] and can play a key role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies. In line with the Mérida Declaration on the Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,[227] NHRIs can take the following actions in support of SDG16+:[228]

- Provide advice to national and local governments, rights-holders and others to promote a human-rights based approach to implementing and measuring SDG16+;[229]
- Promote transparent and inclusive processes for participation and consultation with rights-holders and civil society in SDG16+ implementation, monitoring and follow-up and review processes, including reaching out to those who are furthest behind;
- Engage with stakeholders to raise awareness, build trust and promote dialogue and efforts for a human rights-based approach to SDG16+ implementation and monitoring, and safeguard space for the engagement of rights-holders and civil society;
- Assist in shaping national indicators and data collection systems for SDG16+;

- Monitor SDG16+ progress at all levels to identify inequality and discrimination, including through innovative and participatory approaches to data-collection and monitoring;
- Engage with governments and hold them to account for poor or uneven progress in SDG16+ implementation, including by reporting on SDG16+ progress and obstacles to parliaments, the general public, and national, regional and international mechanisms;[230]
- Respond to, conduct inquiries into, and investigate allegations of rights violations in the context of development and SDG16+ implementation; and
- Facilitate access to justice, redress and remedy for those who experience abuse and violation of their rights in the process of development, including by receiving and processing complaints, where NHRIs have such functions.

222   The Paris Principles relate to the status and functioning of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). They set out the following six main criteria that NHRIs are required to meet: 1. Mandate and competence: a broad mandate, based on universal human rights norms and standards; 2. Autonomy from Government; 3. Independence guaranteed by statute or Constitution; 4. Pluralism; 5. Adequate resources; and 6. Adequate powers of investigation. Available at: https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/PRINCI~5.PDF

223   *16.a: Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime*

224   Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). 'Accreditation'. Available at: https://ganhri.org/accreditation/

225   Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) (2017). *National Human Rights Institutions engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, p. 4. Available at: https://www.humanrights.dk/publications/national-human-rights-institutions-engaging-sustainable-development-goals

226   Danish Institute for Human Rights (2019). *National human rights institutions as a driving force for sustainable development: good practices for SDG programing and monitoring*. Available at: https://www.humanrights.dk/publications/national-human-rights-institutions-driving-force-sustainable-development

227   The *Mérida Declaration – The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* – was adopted by the International Coordinating Committee of NHRIs, now the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in 2015. It outlines the functions and activities that NHRIs can undertake in order to contribute to a human-rights based approach to the 2030 Agenda. Available at: https://www.theioi.org/ioi-news/current-news/merida-declaration-on-nhris-role-in-implementing-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development

228   Adapted from: *The Mérida Declaration – The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), para. 17. Available at: https://www.theioi.org/ioi-news/current-news/merida-declaration-on-nhris-role-in-implementing-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development

229   Such advice includes assessing the impact of laws, policies, programmes, national development plans, administrative practices and budgets.

230   Such mechanisms include the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Special Procedures, treaty bodies, the International Labour Organization's supervisory bodies, UN regional commissions and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

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Putting it into practice[231]

The Paris Principles mandate NHRIs to work closely with civil society, promoting cooperation and coordination to enhance the protection and promotion of human rights. In line with the Mérida Declaration, there are a number of ways that you can engage with NHRIs in order to advance peaceful, just and inclusive societies, including the following:

1. **Determine whether your country has a NHRI** – You should first determine whether there is an accredited NHRI and review its status in terms of compliance with the Paris Principles.[232] Where there is no NHRI or it is not fully compliant with the Paris Principles, you can advocate to your government for an independent NHRI in line with SDG target 16.a.

2. **Work with your NHRI to secure or safeguard space for civil society to advance peaceful, just and inclusive societies** – In addition to supporting SDG target 16.10, civil society space is essential in order to engage in SDG16+ implementation and accountability processes. You can contact your NHRI to determine what kind of support, if any, it can provide.[233]

3. **Consider partnering with your NHRI to raise awareness of SDG16+** – You can investigate what actions your NHRI is taking to raise awareness of SDG16+ and explore potential partnerships to maximize resources, reach and impact to increase SDG16+ awareness.

4. **Encourage your NHRI to facilitate transparent, inclusive and participatory national review processes for SDG16+** – You can encourage your NHRI to act as an advisor and convener of national review processes – including for VNRs – and to ensure that these processes are inclusive, participatory and engage vulnerable and marginalized groups.

5. **Urge your NHRI to provide independent reports on the national human rights situation in relation to SDG16+** – You can urge your NHRI to use its mandate to report on SDG16+ progress both to human rights bodies and to SDG-specific forums such as the HLPF. Reports should include information on the human rights situation in relation to SDG16+ targets, unequal progress and the situation of those furthest behind, and the procedural aspects of national consultations, including transparency and stakeholder participation.[234]

6. **Partner with your NHRI to support participatory approaches to SDG16+ indicator selection, data collection and monitoring** – In addition to being able to collect independent data on SDG16+ targets,[235] NHRIs can be a strategic partner for civil society in supporting people's participation in SDG16+ indicator selection, data collection and monitoring processes.

7. **Encourage NHRIs to conduct independent research and publish reports on SDG16+ implementation** – Research and reports should document and assess the impact of laws, policies, programs, national development plans and budgets in relation to SDG16+ implementation, including for vulnerable and marginalized groups. You can encourage NHRIs to produce reports individually or jointly with your CSO or civil society coalition.

8. **Urge NHRIs to investigate and respond to individual human rights complaints or pursue legal action for human rights violations that occur in the context of SDG implementation** – Where it is within the mandate of your NHRI, you can also bring individual human rights cases to its attention, in order to support access to justice (SDG target 16.3).

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231   Adapted from: Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network (2018). *SDG Accountability Handbook: A Practical Guide for Civil Society*, pp. 55-58. Available at: https://sdgaccountability.org/

232   To determine your country's NHRI's existence or status, see: Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). 'Members'. Available at: https://ganhri.org/membership/

233   The ability of a NHRI to secure or safeguard space for civil society actors will, of course, depend upon its own independence and autonomy from the government.

234   Feiring, Birgitte and König-Reis, Saionara (2020). *Leveraging Human Rights Mechanisms to Improve SDG Follow-up and Review*, p. 9. Available at: https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/hlpf_2_birgitte_saionara.pdf

235   For example, as the national preventative mechanism for the Convention Against Torture, NHRIs have unlimited access to prisons and other places of detention and can help provide a more complete picture of the situation faced by detainees (SDG target 16.3). The Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies (2019). *Enabling the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through SDG 16+: Anchoring peace, justice and inclusion*, p. 68. Available at: https://www.un-globalalliance.org/sdg16-report

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CASE STUDY:

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice of Ghana: An Accountability Actor

Mainstreaming SDG16

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ or the Commission) is Ghana's National Human Rights Institution. CHRAJ is a member of the multi-sectoral SDGs Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC) of Ghana, which comprises representatives of key ministries, public agencies and civil society organizations. The mandate of the ICC includes strengthening cross-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships in SDG implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. For the preparation of Ghana's 2019 VNR, the CHRAJ was formally requested by the SDG coordinating secretariat to provide information on its activities contributing to the SDGs, including on Goal 16. The Commission was also part of Ghana's official delegation to the HLPF that year. In the follow-up to the VNR, the CHRAJ is playing a central role in improving accountability in the country, particularly in its capacity as the coordinating body for the National Anti-Corruption Plan.

To read the full-length version of this case study, visit www.sdg16toolkit.org/case-studies

Key TAP Network resources:

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 'National Human Rights Institutions in the Implementation of SDG 16.' **Available at: https://www.sdg16hub.org/topic/mainstreaming-sdg-16-using-voluntary-national-review-advance-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 'Engaging with National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI).' **Available at: https://sdgaccountability.org/**	

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Key resources:

Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI)	The international association of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) that seeks to promote and strengthen NHRIs and provide leadership in the promotion and protection of human rights. **Available at: https://ganhri.org/**
SDGs and Human Rights Toolbox (GANHRI, 2020)	This toolbox seeks to enhance the capacity of NHRIs to contribute to the implementation, monitoring and review of the SDGs. It compiles resources from relevant organizations, covering a wide range of thematic areas and issues pertinent to specific regions and stakeholders. **Available at: https://ganhri.org/sdgs-toolbox/**
National human rights institutions as a driving force for sustainable development: good practices for SDG programing and monitoring (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2019)	This compilation of good practices for SDG monitoring and programming showcases the contributions from a range of different NHRIs to achieve the SDGs. Good practices are highlighted in relation to the following topics: monitoring and advisory; alliances and participation; data; and the practical application of a human rights-based approach to specific SDGs (including Goals 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 16). **Available at: https://www.humanrights.dk/publications/national-human-rights-institutions-driving-force-sustainable-development**
National Human Rights Institutions - Accelerators, Guarantors and Indicators of Sustainable Development (GANHRI and Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2019)	This short paper – prepared in connection with a Human Rights Council session in March 2019 to collect and share NHRI expertise and experiences – discusses the role of NHRIs in the good governance and institutional accountability architecture necessary to achieve the SDGs. **Available at: https://www.humanrights.dk/publications/national-human-rights-institutions-accelerators-guarantors-indicators-sustainable**
National Human Rights Institutions engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (GANHRI, 2017)	This study outlines how NHRIs support the implementation of the SDGs at the country level. **Available at: https://www.humanrights.dk/publications/national-human-rights-institutions-engaging-sustainable-development-goals**
The Mérida Declaration – The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)	This declaration – the outcome of the 12th International Conference of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC) held in 2015 – outlines the role of NHRIs in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. **Available at: https://www.theioi.org/ioi-news/current-news/merida-declaration-on-nhris-role-in-implementing-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development**