Peace, justice and strong institutions

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Prepared by involve
At the core of SDG16 are key democratic principles including respect for the rule of law and access to justice, principles which have underpinned the historical development of parliamentary democracy in the United Kingdom. SDG16 aspires to protect fundamental freedoms, access to justice, a peaceful society, reduced corruption and bribery, as well as increased transparency and participatory decision-making.

So, at face value, implementation of SDG16 in the UK may appear to be an easy task – the UK is a long-established western democracy with statistical trends over the last ten years or so showing decreasing violence and crime. However, contemporary challenges – such as disruptive technologies, populism, terrorism, high-level corruption, social media, the impact of austerity, the removal of legal aid, and leaving the European Union – mean the UK Government cannot be complacent about recent backsliding that threatens implementation of SDG16.

As Scotland (in its National Performance Framework) and Wales (in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act) take measures to report and track progress on the SDGs, further UK-wide measures to ensure effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, provide justice for all and maintain a peaceful and inclusive society for sustainable development by 2030 and beyond are needed.

### Performance rating

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<tr>
<th>Sustainable Development Goal Target</th>
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<tr>
<td>16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere</td>
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<td>16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children</td>
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<td>16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all</td>
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<td>16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime</td>
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<td>16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms</td>
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<td>16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels</td>
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<td>16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels</td>
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<td>16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance</td>
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<td>16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration</td>
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<td>16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements</td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
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<td>16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development</td>
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Key findings

1. There has been an overall long-term reduction in the rates of violence and crime in the UK, but in the last few years there has been a sharp increase particularly in the rates of reported harassment and hate crimes (on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity).

2. Although the conflict in Northern Ireland ended following the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the UK is still under the threat of ‘international terrorism’ – there were attacks in London and Manchester in 2017.

3. While corruption isn’t endemic in the UK, there are concerns in sectors such as construction and prisons. Investigations into ‘grand corruption’ show limited efforts to halt illicit financial flows into the country.

4. The UK has established independent human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles, but continued threats and actions from the UK Government may restrict fundamental freedoms.

Performance and progress

The devolved nature of justice and policing means there are various policies dealing with crime in each of the UK’s home nations. Nevertheless, they have all experienced an overall decrease in the number of reported homicides (Target 16.1), cases of sexual or physical violence (Target 16.1), and crimes related to discrimination (commonly referred to as ‘hate crimes’) in the last ten years (Target 16.b). Only Scotland has seen a reduction in firearms offences (Target 16.4).

Since 2015 however, the number of reported sexual or physical violence and homicides in the UK has begun to rise, as illustrated by the headlines about the spike in knife crime and murder in London, although in Northern Ireland the rate of homicide has continued to fall. Yet despite the recent rise in some kinds of violence, it appears the majority of the UK population – men more so than women, and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland more than in England – report feeling increasingly safe walking the streets after dark year-on-year since 2012/13 (Target 16.1). Hate crime has also started to rise again in recent years – and while race-related hate crimes remain the most commonly reported type, sexual orientation or disability-related hate crimes have risen more sharply since 2012. As reports of human trafficking increases, it is notable that women and girls are more likely to be exploited for sexual exploitation and men and boys for labour exploitation (Target 16.2).

The pre-trial detention rate in England and Wales has been relatively consistent but is considered high, at around 11% of the prison population, because many people are either acquitted following a period on remand or are released from court. The Lammy Review has highlighted potential problems in the way black and ethnic minority defendants are treated. They are over 20% more likely to be on remand in prison awaiting trial in Crown Courts than white defendants (Target 16.3). Violence in prisons has also risen sharply in recent years. Cuts to legal aid in the UK since 2013 have decimated access to justice according to Amnesty International, leaving thousands of the most vulnerable without essential legal advice and support.
Concerning protection of children (Target 16.2), the 2014 UN Universal Periodic Review recommended the UK provide better protection from sexual abuse and exploitation. Clauses in UK and Scottish law that allow “reasonable chastisement” of children (Children Act 2004 (Section 54)) and “justifiable assault” (Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 (Section 51)) have been labelled inadequate, particularly given UK obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the other hand, the Goddard Inquiry on child sexual abuse has led to increased spending on support for sexual abuse services as well as a Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse to help tackle child sexual exploitation.

Recent studies show an increase in the percentage of 16-to-24-year olds reporting having experienced psychological abuse (8.2% in 2017) and sexual assault (3% in 2017) (Target 16.2). Also of concern is the rise in online abuse, and trafficking and exploitation by ‘county lines’ criminal networks selling drugs.

While the 1998 Good Friday Agreement signalled the end to the longstanding conflict in Northern Ireland, the threat of conflict and violence there is still considered possible but unlikely (Target 16.1). The biggest change to conflict-related deaths in the UK has been the rise of terrorist incidents inspired by overseas terrorist organisations, such as the attacks in London and Manchester in 2017 that killed over 30 people.

Corruption (Target 16.5) is not endemic in the UK but there are concerns to be addressed. Bribery is not recognised as a widespread problem: 5% of UK citizens said they had paid a bribe in the past year when polled by Transparency International in 2013. However, higher instances are noted in certain sectors such as construction where over a third of respondents to a survey in 2013 stated that they had been offered a bribe or incentive at least once.

Other investigations by journalists and civil society organisations have highlighted corrupt activity in local government, prisons, and politics. Transparency International UK found some 40 examples of loopholes across UK political institutions where rules allow behaviour that can open the door to corrupt activity and lobbying abuses.

The UK is a top destination for money laundering. The National Crime Agency estimates at least £90 billion in illicit wealth flows through the UK every year. Investigations into ‘grand corruption’ show that the UK has a weak anti-money laundering system which corrupt individuals can bypass using ‘professional enablers’ to buy UK property anonymously through foreign companies. Transparency International UK has identified 76 properties worth £4.4 billion in the UK bought with suspicious wealth (Target 16.4).

As a long-established democracy, a member of the Council of Europe, OSCE and other international organisations, the UK has long been seen to guarantee fundamental freedoms. The UK’s human rights institutions comply with the Paris Principles with the UN-recognised ‘A’ status accreditation (the highest) renewed in 2015 for both the Equalities Commission and Northern Ireland Human Rights Institution (Target 16a).

Even though the UK Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 guarantees the public’s right of access to information with limited exceptions, and the Scottish FOI Act offers a slightly more transparent regime, both laws offer a narrower interpretation of that right compared to some European countries (Target 16.10). Legislative changes attempting to weaken the UK FOI Act have failed but government has still become less transparent in practice since 2010. Recently, unpublished Brexit impact assessments in Westminster,
Northern Ireland’s Renewable Heating Initiative scandal and concerns around the lack of minute-taking in Scottish government have highlighted these concerns.30

While the provision of some form of legal identity is not a problem for the majority of the UK population, recent events around the treatment of post-war Commonwealth migrants have put the issue under the spotlight and raised concerns about treatment of EU migrants once the UK leaves the EU (Target 16.9).31

The UK is one of the lowest-ranked Western European countries in the World Press Freedom Index. While there are high-profile cases like the extensive online abuse and threats to BBC political editor Laura Kuenssberg, there are significant concerns related to implementation of the Investigatory Powers Act, threats to restrict encryption tools such as WhatsApp, and insufficient protection mechanisms for whistleblowers, journalists, and their sources (Target 16.10).

**Synergies and coherence**

SDG16 is essential for successfully and sustainably implementing all other SDGs. Targets related to institutions and good governance also appear in SDGs 1, 5, 10, 11, and 17, while SDG10 supports the full participation of all people in society. The rule of law and access to justice aspects of SDG16 are supported by targets of other SDGs related to discrimination and equality (SDGs 4, 5 and 10), and for employment and labour rights (SDG8).

SDG16 supports promoting a culture of peace (SDG4) by providing safe environments of various kinds (SDG4, 8 and 11) as well as through preventing and ending violence, including gender-based violence (SDG5) and harmful and abusive practices (SDGs 5, 8 and 10).

**Local to international dimension**

The Open Government Partnership (OGP), of which the UK is a member, channels the global open government movement by requiring national government reform to be more transparent, participatory and accountable. SDG16 and open government principles are also increasingly relevant to local government around the world, as the global OGP initiative pushes open government reforms locally via its OGP Local Programme, of which Scotland is a participant. As part of becoming a more open government, Scotland aims to improve on all the SDG indicators, and has incorporated measurement against the specific targets in its National Performance Framework.
Recommended actions

1. Develop and implement measures that will reduce crime and violence including hate crime

2. To tackle increasing prison violence and self-harm, the UK Government must urgently increase the staff-prisoner ratio

3. Identify key actions that the UK Government and devolved administrations will take to ensure all children have a good childhood and the best possible start in life, following recommendations from the UN Committee and Universal Periodic Review

4. Accelerate introducing a public register of the real owners of overseas companies being used to buy UK property and bid for UK government contracts

5. Build a better picture of corruption in the UK and work up a plan to tackle the problem

6. To break the cycle of continuing overspends in public service provision the UK Government should budget to spend more money on these services up-front

7. The UK Government should aim to ensure those in senior civil service positions come from more diverse backgrounds

8. The UK Government, Parliament and devolved administrations should work towards improving public participation and deliberation in decision making-processes, particularly to address complex challenges that the UK collectively faces

9. Monitoring and reporting progress on SDG16 targets should be on a UK-wide basis
Case study

Grassroots

SDG TARGETS: 16.1, 16.3

Grassroots is a faith-based organisation in Luton, working at the sharp edge of engagement between faiths and society. Grassroots collaborates on issues such as community cohesion, peace-building, injustice and inequalities. It works in partnership with the local authority, police service, faith communities and religious leaders, foodbanks, environmental organisations, schools, businesses, and women’s groups. Extremism has been a concern within Luton’s multi-ethnic communities and Grassroots has been strategic in pulling together key actors to prevent community destabilisation. They have worked with partners to nurture a content, secure, and vibrant community.

Grassroots has been responsible for providing community education in schools, delivered accredited multi-faith, multicultural awareness training to young people through the Catalyst programme, and been a key provider for local theological social justice training for churches and other faith organisations. Through its advocacy for and promotion of Fairtrade products and goods, the establishment of community peace gardens, sport programmes, and support for mental health, Grassroots has demonstrated a deep-seated commitment to fostering all-round health and well-being in Luton.

From its inception, Grassroots has worked collaboratively with faith organisations and been grounded within the communities, working together to fulfil their needs as well as support ambitions for a better future.

www.grassrootsluton.org.uk
Case study

Open Government Partnership

SDG TARGETS: 16.6

In 2011, the UK co-founded the Open Government Partnership (OGP), an international initiative to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.

At the core of the OGP process are National Action Plans, developed and implemented in two-year cycles. They contain commitments to open government reform developed jointly in a participatory process between civil society and government. Good open government reforms transform the way government works, ensuring it is properly responsive to citizens while improving efficiency and effectiveness, and preventing abuses of state power.

In 2018, the UK started the cycle for its fourth national action plan. Previous action plans have included ambitious reforms such as the creation of a public register of beneficial owners of companies, a cross-government anti-corruption plan, and increasing the transparency of payments received by extractive companies as well as government spending on international aid and development. Scotland is also developing its second open government action plan. One of the commitments made in the first - to introduce participatory budgeting - is a UK first. Other commitments in Scotland's first action plan included reforms on financial transparency, measuring Scotland's progress, delivering a Fairer Scotland and increasing participation.

www.opengovpartnership.org
Endnotes


2 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

3 ONS Sustainable Development Goals. Indicator 16.1.1. [Release 4 Apr 2018]


5 ONS Sustainable Development Goals. Indicator 16.1.3. [Release 4 Apr 2018]


7 ONS Sustainable Development Goals. Indicator 16.b.1. [Release 27 Apr 2018]


22 Holmes, R. (2016). The secret prison corruption epidemic the Government doesn't want you to know about. BuzzFeed News. 6 Dec 2016


