SDG 16: Promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies in Latin America and the Caribbean[1]

Key regional statistics on SDG 16

- The homicide rate is 22.1 persons per 100,000 inhabitants, the assault rate is 229.5 per 100,000 inhabitants and the sexual violence rate is 60.6 per 100,000 inhabitants in the region.

- A total of 2,559 women were victims of femicide in 2017 in 19 countries of the region.

- On average, 29.8% of representatives in legislative bodies in Latin America and the Caribbean were women, the highest figure worldwide, in May 2018. The average rates of female participation in the highest courts of justice in Latin America was 29.2% in 2017.

- The proportion of elected women mayors is below 15% in most (20) of the Latin American and Caribbean countries, and the Latin American average for 2017 was just 14.6%.

- Of the young people consulted in the Latin American and Caribbean Youth 2030 Forum (held in the framework of the third meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development), 65% considered that their right to access to justice was limited in some way, 56% considered themselves victims of impunity in their country's justice system, 74% had witnessed acts of corruption in their close circles, 95% believed that acts of corruption went unpunished and 100% considered corruption a latent problem that was limiting development. 65% of the young people surveyed did not think that existing mechanisms for citizen participation were inclusive and representative and 81% did not feel that young people were represented in the decision-making process.

- One country has ratified the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement), and 16 have signed it.

- In the Caribbean, young people are both the primary victims and perpetrators of crime. Persons aged 17–29 commit 80% of prosecuted crimes and many victims of violent crime belong to the same age group. Both victims and perpetrators are more likely to belong to lower socioeconomic groups.

- None of the Caribbean countries have legislation that totally prohibits corporal punishment of boys, girls and adolescents.

[1] The analysis of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presented here is the outcome of the discussions held within the framework of the third meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and Caribbean on Sustainable Development, convened under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago, from 24 to 26 April 2019.

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Key messages from the region on the issues addressed by SDG 16 and its targets

- The Escazú Agreement —the first regional environmental treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean— is key to achieving the 2030 Agenda as a whole, and in particular SDG 16 and its targets. It is a key tool for empowering people and ensuring inclusion and equality. The Agreement focuses on people in vulnerable situations and on environmental human rights defenders, who have been threatened and killed for defending the territory and the environment in Latin America and the Caribbean, which has been catalogued as the most dangerous region in this respect.

- The Escazú Agreement has a clear link to the global commitments on climate change (the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement.

- Access to public information and open government (and an open State) are key for transparency, democracy and good governance, and a prerequisite for significant participation by the public in decision-making on sustainable development.

- Access rights give legitimacy to decision-making and contribute to achieving peace and security and preventing conflict.

- The rule of law is a catalyst for sustainable development, with access to justice as a determinant of the justiciability and the enforceability of human rights.

- The achievement of SDG 16 depends on a whole-of-society approach. Civil society includes advocates of marginalized or traditionally excluded persons and groups and it is essential to actively engage specific groups (women, youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, migrants, among others) to achieve sustainable development with equality and a rights-based approach. Local governments, parliamentarians and academia are critical stakeholders in the implementation of SDG 16.

- National human rights institutions should be actively involved in follow-up to the 2030 Agenda; it is essential to reflect human rights standards in public policies related to SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

- Violence in its various forms erodes the social fabric in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and is a cross-cutting problem impeding sustainable development. High levels of violence directly affect young people. Gender-based violence, femicide, harassment and human trafficking are regional issues that have emerged as requiring urgent attention.

- The private sector can also make an important contribution to efforts to consolidate peace, inclusiveness, the advancement of the rule of law and the elimination of corruption in order to create an enabling environment for sustainable development where companies can flourish.

- Volunteerism is a powerful accelerator of SDG 16, especially for including underrepresented groups and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Challenges and opportunities for the implementation, follow-up and review of SDG 16 and its targets

Challenges

- Obtaining financing and economic, material and human resources to implement SDG 16.

- Engaging all sectors of the population, reaching those furthest behind and those traditionally marginalized or excluded, and supporting people and groups in situations of vulnerability.

- There are difficulties in measuring progress regarding SDG 16, as indicators are not available or are not comparable between countries.

- Discrimination and inequalities in all their forms and manifestations, as well as all forms of violence, such as cultural, social, structural and institutionalized violence, and especially gender violence.

- The narrowing of the democratic space in the region and very low levels of trust in the State and in democracy.

- The corruption entrenched at all levels and in all spaces in the region.

- Gender gaps, inequality in all its forms, lack of opportunities and limited access to justice.

- The criminalization of protest, of freedom of expression and of participation and of fundamental freedoms; discrimination and diverse forms of exploitation; and arbitrary arrests by elements of the public security forces.

- In the region, youth participation mechanisms are ineffective, which reduces the opportunities for active participation in decision-making, and does not allow genuine representativity in the system.

Opportunities

- 23 countries in the region have a law on access to public information.

- 17 countries are members of the Open Government Partnership, there are 38 action plans already implemented and 10 at the implementation stage, and 1,060 action commitments have been made for the period 2011–2020.

- 14 national human rights institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean have status A under the principles relating to the status of national human rights institutions (the Paris Principles).

- Early entry into force and implementation of the Escazú Agreement would promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the multilateral environmental agreements.

Lessons learned and good practices with respect to SDG 16 and its targets

- The negotiation of the Escazú Agreement was an open, inclusive and convocative process that generated partnerships between governments and the public, academia and the private sector, promoting South-South cooperation and multilateralism for sustainable development.

- In Argentina, in the case of the pollution of the Matanza river (Riachuelo), the justice system has been paving the way to making environmental law more operational and to the active participation of the community, which contributes to environmental oversight and the enforcement of environmental rulings.

- In Peru, progress has been made towards the implementation of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, as part of the regulatory process of the Ministry of the Environment including civil society recommendations; the updating of pollutant release and transfer registers; and the Madre de Dios Compact for Environmental Justice, which includes 10 commitments to promote environmental justice in the country (one of these is the observatory on environmental justice, which has been joined by over 20 institutions).

- Internal processes for the signature and ratification of the Escazú Agreement, with the participation of the various branches of government, civil society and other stakeholders, are under way in Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Mexico, Peru, Saint Lucia and Uruguay.

- The implementation of the Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environemental matters (Aarhus Convention) of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) constitutes a benchmark and provides opportunities for interregional collaboration.

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- The Latin American and Caribbean Youth 2030 Forum involved a series of online conferences where young people learned about the SDGs, with a preparatory phase that included an online consultation and the holding of local youth 50 panels, engaging hundreds of young people from 16 countries of the region.

Recommendations from Latin America and the Caribbean to achieve SDG 16 and its targets

- The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean that have yet to do so are invited to sign and ratify as the Escazú Agreement soon as possible, with a view to its early entry into force and implementation.
- The United Nations system, international and subregional organizations, development banks, donors and other relevant stakeholders are invited to contribute to the achievement of SDG 16 and, particularly, to support the early entry into force and implementation of the Escazú Agreement.
- The countries need to make progress in adopting and implementing laws and regulations fostering access to public information and data accessibility, particularly for individuals and groups in vulnerable situations.
- Institutions and the rule of law must be strengthened by restructuring public powers, strengthening their authority with trained personnel, and respecting the separation of powers.
- It is necessary to develop open government mechanisms and establish ways to expedite administrative procedures.
- Youth participation needs to be followed up, encouraging youth to develop their own channels of participation.
- The adoption of a participatory, collaborative and inclusive approach is encouraged, creating synergies between governments and civil society and other stakeholders.
- There is a need for education campaigns, awareness-raising and dissemination of the SDGs, to encourage society to implement the Goals, taking peace as a cross-cutting theme of the 2030 Agenda.
- The potential of volunteerism and its contribution to the 2030 Agenda should be leveraged through a shift in focus to generate data and measure its impact, as well as its integration into development strategies.
- Women need to be empowered to close gender gaps, for example, through training programmes; microcredits; social protection; remuneration of domestic work; and flexible working hours.
- Sexism must be combated in the region via workshops on cultural changes, involving women and men; communications campaigns for development and workshops with journalists.
- In order to implement the goal of social justice for all, new contracts could be generated between the State, the market and citizens to combat inequalities at multiple levels, be they geographical, political, gender-based, ethical, religious, social, economic, cultural or environmental.