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Item 8 (d) of the provisional agenda*
Parallel meetings for an in-depth review of progress made, peer learning and acceleration actions regarding the sub-themes of the Regional Forum: peace, justice and strong institutions

Background report on the sub-theme of peace, justice and strong institutions

I. Introduction

1. The present paper was prepared by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) with input from various partners,¹ the work of which contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16² – the fundamental Goal for the inclusive achievement of all the Goals. Indeed, good governance constitutes the foundation upon which all the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are built.

2. Peaceful, just and inclusive societies are necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. People everywhere need to be free from fear of all forms of violence and to feel safe regardless of their ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation. Inclusive public institutions are needed to deliver high-quality services, including education and health care, fair economic policies and environmental protection, so as to reach the other Goals. At its core, Goal 16 is cross-cutting, advocating an efficient institutional framework to address the challenges associated with achieving the Goals. In the absence of peace, justice through the observation of human rights and effective democratic governance based on the rule of law, sustainable development is threatened, limiting prosperity for people and the planet.

3. Therefore, the attainment of all the Goals is inextricably linked with the maintenance of peace, and development cannot take place without inclusive societies. While the inclusion of Goal 16 in the set of global developmental imperatives was a major achievement for the international community, challenges remain in the effort to attain it.

4. Goal 16 is evidently aligned with the long-term development aspirations of the African Union as set out in Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African

* ECA/RFSD/2024/1/Rev.3.

¹ African Peer Review Mechanism of the African Union, Development Coordination Office, International Organization for Migration, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

² Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.



Union. Specifically, Goal 16 is linked with the following goals of Agenda 2063: (a) goal 11, in which reference is made to democratic values, universal principles of human rights and the rule of law; (b) goal 12, which is focused on capable institutions and transformative leadership at all levels; (c) goals 13 and 14, in which reference is made to the preservation of peace, security and stability; and (d) goal 15, which is aimed at achieving a functional and operational African peace and security architecture. Moreover, inclusivity under Goal 16 has strong linkages with goal 17 of Agenda 2063, which is aimed at achieving full gender equality, and goal 18, which is aimed at empowering young people. Therefore, from a policy standpoint, the integrated nature of the international and regional development goals calls for coordinated and coherent efforts to achieve them in order to maximize the benefits of achieving one goal and to transfer those benefits to efforts to achieve the others.

II. Status of implementation of Goal 16: progress towards set targets, including early results and promising approaches and practices

5. Overall, governance in Africa has flatlined since 2019, following a slight upward trend that had been observed since 2012. A crucial driver of this outcome is the deterioration in both security and the rule of law. Moreover, since 2017, even the good governance categories of participation, rights and inclusion have been eroded and continue to be negatively affected by the ongoing triple crisis.³ While the continent's overall average governance score was still better in 2021 than in 2012, much of Africa felt less safe, secure and democratic in 2021 than in 2012.⁴ Furthermore, while 34 out of 54 African countries have experienced improvement in overall governance since 2012, only 15 managed to speed up improvement from 2017 to 2021, while scores deteriorated over that period in 22 countries.⁵

6. The flatlining of the governance score of Africa from 2019 to 2021 was greatly exacerbated by the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020 and the increase in political unrest, which resulted in eight successful coups d'état⁶ between 2019 and 2023.⁷ The pandemic further laid bare the weaknesses of African health and education systems and the discrimination within policies and practices.

7. Conflict, an enduring scourge in Africa, continues to afflict about 1 country in 3 on the continent, with 14 countries categorized as being affected by medium-intensity or high-intensity conflict. About 72 per cent of African countries are either affected by conflict or neighbour at least one conflict-affected country. Consequently, over 1.43 billion people either reside in or share land borders with conflict-affected countries, making them vulnerable to spillover effects.⁸ Conflict-affected countries with high levels of poverty have consistently recorded lower levels of progress across the Sustainable Development Goals than other African countries and the rest of the

³ The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020, the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2021 and the ongoing climate change crisis and its various impacts.

⁴ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance: Index Report*, 2023, available at <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2023-01/2022-index-report.pdf>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ This includes the coups d'état in Mali in August 2020, in Chad in April 2021, in Guinea in September 2021, in the Sudan in October 2021, in Burkina Faso in January 2022 and again in September 2022, in the Niger in July 2023 and in Gabon in August 2023.

⁷ AJLabs, "Mapping Africa's coups d'état across the years", Al Jazeera, 30 August 2023.

⁸ African Development Bank, "Security, investment and development: a diagnostic assessment", 26 October 2022.

world, demonstrating the significant challenges posed by conflicts to the attainment of the Goals.⁹

8. Although data availability has improved significantly since 2015, major gaps remain, and data continue to be insufficient for accurately assessing the progress made towards the achievement of all targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16. On average, only 40 per cent of countries have reported data for at least one year since 2015,¹⁰ limiting the availability of the information required to support evidence-based policymaking. Without sound data, Governments are driving blind, and there can be neither sustained improvement nor effective policymaking.¹¹ There is an urgent need for action to reverse these trends; otherwise the ability of Africa to achieve the Goals and to implement Agenda 2063 will be negatively affected.

A. Target 16.1: significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

9. Negative trends have been seen in several areas relating to Goal 16, such as the failure to implement human rights obligations, increases in violence, the evolution of conflicts, and the persistence of inequality and corruption, which erode the social contract.¹²

10. Although terrorism deaths have decreased by one third globally since 2015, Africa has experienced a troubling surge in such deaths, notably in sub-Saharan Africa, which, in 2022, recorded the largest increase in terrorism deaths in the world, rising by 8 per cent and accounting for 60 per cent of all terrorism deaths globally. The Sahel alone accounted for 43 per cent of global terrorism deaths in 2022, surpassing the combined figures for South Asia and the Middle East and marking a significant spike from just 1 per cent in 2007.¹³ Furthermore, terrorism has recently reached new countries, including Benin, Mozambique and Togo, and is having an impact on areas away from the capital cities.

11. The scourge of violence has continued to shape the lives and livelihoods of people, even beyond areas experiencing armed conflict.¹⁴ Globally, homicide deaths outnumber conflict-related and terrorist killings, with 440,000 deaths resulting from homicide, compared with 94,000 conflict-related and 22,000 terrorism deaths. In Africa, the trend regarding the homicide rate is very uncertain, owing to the limited availability of time series data. In 2021, Africa recorded the highest number of intentional homicides of all global regions, with an estimated 176,000 victims.¹⁵ The 2021 homicide rate could be attributed to occurrences in Kenya and South Africa linked with such pandemic-related stressors as unemployment. Sadly, the homicide rate is not falling, and Africa will remain vulnerable, owing to its increasingly

⁹ [A/78/234-S/2023/553](#).

¹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), OHCHR and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators: a wake-up call for action on peace, justice and inclusion”, 21 September 2023, available at www.undp.org/publications/global-progress-report-sustainable-development-goal-16-indicators-wake-call-action-peace-justice-and-inclusion.

¹¹ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance*.

¹² UNODC, OHCHR and UNDP, “Global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators”.

¹³ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2023: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney, 2023).

¹⁴ United Nations, “Our Common Agenda policy brief 9: a new agenda for peace”, July 2023.

¹⁵ UNODC, “Executive summary”, in *Global Study on Homicide*, 2023, available at www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/2023/GSH23_ExSum.pdf.

youthful population, the fact that it has the highest number of hot days of any global region, and its persistent inequality gaps.

12. Gender and age serve as reliable indicators of the potential risk of homicide, with young males showing a higher risk compared with other demographic groups in countries with high homicide rates, such as Nigeria, where male victims significantly outnumber female victims. On the other hand, women are disproportionately affected by murderous violence perpetrated by their families. Although this happens in all regions of the world, in regions with lower homicide rates, such as Europe and Asia, the percentage of male murders linked with family violence is close to 20 per cent, while in regions with very high levels of murderous violence, such as Africa, the percentage falls below 10 per cent. Intentional killings of young children are predominantly committed by family members motivated by gender stereotypes and gender violence.

B. Target 16.2: end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

13. Globally, children continue to experience high levels of physical, sexual and psychological violence in different settings. More than half of the children implicated are victimized in the domestic sphere, where the violence is carried out by individuals whom they know and trust.¹⁶

14. In Africa, especially in East and Southern Africa, it is estimated that more than 50 per cent of children suffer some form of violence, including physical punishment as a violent form of discipline. This statistic worsens in conflict situations, however, where children experience such human rights violations as slavery and recruitment as soldiers.¹⁷ Children are also the most trafficked group in Africa.¹⁸ Although decreasing trends are seen in this regard, the reduction is probably attributable to the inability of the authorities to identify victims. Usually, girls are detected as victims of sexual exploitation, while boys are trafficked for the purpose of criminal activity. Moreover, the percentage of young women and men who experience sexual violence by 18 years of age remains high,¹⁹ with peaks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (13 per cent), Ghana (10 per cent) and Rwanda (9 per cent). It has also been estimated that more than one in four children in sub-Saharan Africa are engaged in child labour. Girls continue to be excluded from school if pregnant,²⁰ with 20 per cent of girls in Africa married before 18 years of age.²¹ This figure rises to 32 per cent in sub-Saharan African countries. In places where the practice of female genital mutilation continues, a broad range of girls and women have been subjected to it.²²

15. Significant efforts have been made in Africa to end violence against children. Alongside international objectives, Agenda 2063 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child are also in place. Overall progress has been modest,

¹⁶ UNODC, OHCHR and UNDP, “Global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators”.

¹⁷ African Partnership to end Violence against Children and African Child Policy Forum, *Violence against Children in Africa. A Report on Progress and Challenges* (Addis Ababa, 2019), available at: https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/2021/violence_against_children_in_africa_a_report_on_progress_and_challenges.pdf.

¹⁸ Referring to indicator 16.2.2, which is aimed at measuring the number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation.

¹⁹ Referring to indicator 16.2.3, which is aimed at measuring the proportion of young women and men aged 18–29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18.

²⁰ Amnesty International, “Africa regional overview”. See the information on cases in Equatorial Guinea and the United Republic of Tanzania, available at www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/report-africa/.

²¹ All data are taken from UNICEF databases, available at www.unicef.org/child-protection.

²² The evaluation is of the female population 15–49 years of age. Most cases occur in Ethiopia, Guinea, Somalia and the Sudan.

however, and the African Union should act with national Governments and regional bodies on the basis of a comprehensive plan. Indeed, despite the new International Classification of Violence against Children, which provides harmonized standard definitions for the measurement of such violence, the harmonization of legal standards and proactive political commitments are lacking. Scarce economic investments, insufficient fiscal space and critical ongoing national situations negatively affect protection systems and leave children at greater risk of violence.

C. Target 16.3: promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

16. The rule of law and equal access to justice are crucial in building societies and promoting growth. They facilitate legal empowerment enabling justice for all. When they are absent, the potential for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals is compromised through an adverse impact on inclusive economic growth and on the reduction of poverty and exclusion. The creation of a robust architecture of good governance to ensure the rule of law and equal access to justice for all, including a child-friendly justice system, is an area that requires improvement in all regions, and Africa is no exception. A vicious cycle of weak institutions leading to a lack of rule of law and justice is prevalent, compromising the potential for inclusive and sustainable development.

17. Limited data are available for target 16.3. Globally, however, the indicator has exhibited a downward trend.²³ In a recent report,²⁴ a continuing overall distrust of criminal justice institutions, which could be a critical impediment to the creation of an equitable society, was highlighted. Nevertheless, as reflected at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit held in 2023, without ensuring just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice, the effective rule of law and good governance at all levels, the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 cannot be attained.

18. The data challenges faced, and the critical roles of ensuring the rule of law and strong institutions, should be recognized at the upcoming Summit of the Future, to be held in 2024.

D. Target 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

19. While significant improvement has been made in the understanding and conceptualization of illicit financial flows, underpinned by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC),²⁵ the scarcity of data remains a significant challenge. Since 2021, more than 12 countries in Africa have embarked on an exercise to estimate illicit financial flows prevalent in their jurisdictions, with the support of ECA and UNCTAD. This process has enabled these countries to establish inter-institutional technical working groups in order to assess their vulnerability to illicit financial flows and their institutional capacities to address them, and to provide preliminary estimates.

²³ *Times of Crisis, Times of Change: Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development* (United Nations publication, 2023).

²⁴ UNODC, OHCHR and UNDP, “Global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators”.

²⁵ See, for example, UNCTAD, “Methodological guidelines to measure tax and commercial illicit financial flows”, Updated draft for pilot testing, available at <https://unctad.org/publication/methodological-guidelines-measure-tax-and-commercial-illicit-financial-flows-methods>.

20. A significant number of stakeholders are involved in supporting African States in their efforts to curb illicit financial flows, including: civil society organizations, such as the Tax Justice Network Africa; organs of the African Union, such as the African Peer Review Mechanism and departments of the African Union Commission; the German Agency for International Cooperation, through a project supported by the Government of Finland; and the European Union, in coordination with the African Union Commission supporting organizations, such as the African Tax Administration Forum, the Coalition for Dialogue on Africa and the Thabo Mbeki Foundation.²⁶

21. With agreement reached on the definition and conceptual framework of, and methodologies for measuring, illicit financial flows in the tax and commercial sector, guidelines have been developed by UNCTAD to support members of ECA in their efforts to estimate the prevalence of illicit financial flows and inform relevant policy responses. In its recent work analysing trade anomalies, ECA highlighted potential losses through illicit financial flows of \$440 billion in 2019, underscoring the need for greater efforts to address the scourge of such flows.²⁷ This magnitude of resources, if curbed, would hasten the pace of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and implementing Agenda 2063.

22. Efforts to reduce and monitor illicit arms flows remain limited, exacerbating the data availability challenge of monitoring Goal 16 performance. Tracing the origin of weapons seized is challenging for many countries, owing to the lack of resources and capacity – so much so that an average of only one third of potentially traceable weapons were seized between 2016 and 2021.²⁸ Therefore, performance with regard to reaching this target is mixed. Despite some progress made in measurement, the reduction and monitoring of illicit arms flows remain a significant challenge on the continent.

E. Target 16.5: substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

23. Corruption and bribery pose significant development challenges in Africa, undermining institutions and entrenching poverty.²⁹ They contribute to increasing inequality, with a concomitant adverse effect on the fair distribution of resources and development opportunities.³⁰ Moreover, corrupt practices erode the legitimacy and capacity of Governments to fulfil their responsibility to provide essential public services.³¹ In Africa, overall governance improved between 2012 and 2021, despite a decline in security and the rule of law.³²

24. The prevalence of corruption and bribery is related to income levels, with low-income countries having a higher prevalence than their higher-income peers. In a recent study, it was shown that the average prevalence of bribery in low-income and lower-middle-income countries was almost double that in upper-middle-income countries. Compared with high-income countries, the prevalence was almost four times higher. Significant variations were found within the same income group,

²⁶ See African Union, “Assembly special declaration on illicit financial flows”, available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29831-doc-assembly_declaration_on_illicit_financial_flow_-_english.pdf.

²⁷ ECA policy brief on illicit financial flows, 2024 (forthcoming).

²⁸ UNODC, OHCHR and UNDP, “Global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators”.

²⁹ ECA, *Economic Governance Report I: Institutional Architecture to Address Illicit Financial Flows* (Addis Ababa, 2021).

³⁰ UNODC, OHCHR and UNDP, “Global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators”.

³¹ United Nations Global Compact, “Target 16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms”, SDG 16 Business Framework, available at <https://sdg16.unglobalcompact.org/target-16-5>.

³² Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance*.

showing that income was not the only determinant of the prevalence of corruption and bribery.³³

25. Given the prevalence of corrupt practices in low-income and middle-income countries, Africa is particularly vulnerable to these developmental challenges. According to the 2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, one third of the African population had been asked to pay a bribe in order to gain access to public services, which was three times higher than the corresponding figure in Europe and North America.³⁴ Indicator 16.5.1 also has a gendered impact, with men being more likely than women to engage in bribery. Almost one fifth of businesses in the region had been asked to pay a bribe to gain access to public services.³⁵ However, the scarcity of data remains a challenge for monitoring the progress towards attaining this target on the continent.

F. Target 16.6: develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

26. Institutions are enablers for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The lack of a robust institutional architecture could constrain development by compromising the rule of law and access to justice. Moreover, institutions play a critical role during times of uncertainty and crisis. Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic was undermined in some cases by corruption in the allocation of resources and health services through weak institutional set-ups.³⁶

27. The state of institutions in Africa has weakened in various subregions, primarily owing to the increase in unconstitutional powers. The absence of stable governance structures and the weakening of the State have created an environment conducive to political instability, exacerbating governance challenges and providing fertile ground for unconstitutional changes of power, which threaten both national and subregional security, as recently highlighted by the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger from the Economic Community of West African States. Addressing governance issues is essential to promoting stability, resilience and sustainable development. Both institutional frameworks at the national level and regional mechanisms need to be revisited to address the capacity to respond to these governance challenges.

28. Institutions are also interlinked with the prevalence of illicit financial flows, which constitutes one of the main governance and financial impediments in Africa. Weak institutions harbour a perverse incentive to continue corruption and illicit financial flows. This being the case, weak institutions and illicit financial flows can create a vicious cycle of corruption.³⁷

29. Data scarcity remains a challenge to the monitoring of progress towards achieving this target. An evidence-based approach to monitoring public expenditure and satisfaction with public services is warranted to ensure accountability and stronger institutions. High-quality, regular and disaggregated data are critical for improving the understanding of representation and participation in decision-making processes.³⁸

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Calculated on the basis of data for 2021 or the latest year available since 2015.

³⁶ *Times of Crisis, Times of Change: Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development*.

³⁷ ECA, *Economic Governance Report I*.

³⁸ UNODC, OHCHR and UNDP, “Global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators”.

G. Target 16.7: ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

30. Despite global improvements, many steps are still needed to reach target 16.7. Overall, women are overrepresented at lower levels of decision-making in the public sector, while they are underrepresented at higher levels in national institutions. The same trend is observed in the judicial system.³⁹ While broad representation is crucial for inclusion, the participation of women, young people, persons with disabilities and specific population groups in decision-making process remains low.⁴⁰ Consequently, the percentage of the population who believe that decision-making is inclusive and responsive is relatively low.⁴¹

31. Inequality and the lack of inclusion strengthen divisions, heighten tensions and worsen grievances among groups, thereby provoking instability and forms of inter-ethnic violence. Inequality along geographical divisions has increasingly fuelled conflict, in particular in border areas, where extremist and other non-State armed groups exploit governance vacuums and mobilize grievances through compelling narratives focused on State neglect and marginalization.

32. Current widespread popular protests in Africa highlight the fact that ever greater numbers of people feel forgotten by their political system.⁴² A large share of the population feels dissatisfied⁴³ and considers that Governments are not incorporating the views of many groups. In this regard, an estimated 54 per cent of people express more trust in informal institutions, such as religious and traditional leaders, than in the formal executive agencies of the State.⁴⁴ On a more positive note, in about 42 African countries, an improvement has been observed in women's participation in the public sector.

33. Since equitable representation in public service is still far from having been achieved, and given its positive effects leading to consensus and stability, among other things, there is a need for investments to address barriers to participation in decision-making. In addition, there is a need for an evidence-based approach to the monitoring of satisfaction with and the responsiveness of public services.

H. Targets 16.8: broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance

34. The global South continues to be underrepresented in institutions of global governance, such as the Bretton Woods institutions, the International Finance Corporation, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Group of 20. This lack of representation implies a lack of inclusivity of the collective voice of the global South. This situation is most clearly reflected in the bias against the developing South in the structure of the current financial architecture.

35. Despite the historical lack of representation, recent global developments have paved the way for an inclusive platform. The historical adoption by the General

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Referring to indicator 16.7.1, which is aimed at measuring proportions of positions in national and local institutions, including legislatures, public service and the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups.

⁴¹ Referring to indicator 16.7.2, which is aimed at measuring the proportion of the population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group.

⁴² UNDP, "Indicator 16.7.1 – key issues for consideration by the Working Group", 2019, available at www.undp.org/policy-centre/oslo/publications/indicator-1671-key-issues-consideration-working-group.

⁴³ Afrobarometer SDG scorecards, available at www.afrobarometer.org/sdg-scorecards/.

⁴⁴ Economic and Social Council, "Background paper on peace: transformative actions for peace, justice and strong institutions towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063", 2020.

Assembly of its resolution 78/230 on the promotion of inclusive and effective international tax cooperation at the United Nations heralds a great opportunity for all States Members of the United Nations to ensure an inclusive tax framework, leading to the reform of the global financial architecture. The United Nations intergovernmental process for shaping tax norms and setting rules is expected to leverage strengths and bridge the gaps of the current international tax cooperation arrangements to create a more inclusive framework.

36. Notably, African leadership, through the initiative of the Group of African States in New York, led to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 77/244, in which the Assembly decided to begin discussions on ways to strengthen the inclusiveness and effectiveness of international tax cooperation, including the possibility of developing an international tax cooperation framework. That resolution resulted in the aforementioned adoption of resolution 78/230,⁴⁵ which could also lead to a scaling up of domestic resource mobilization in Member States, which would be crucial for countries in Africa and the global South. Another breakthrough came about when the African Union was made a permanent member of the Group of 20, which could contribute to giving Africa a voice and making the positions of the global South heard on issues of global importance.⁴⁶

I. Targets 16.9: by 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

37. Legal identity provides individuals with essential legal documents required to secure their identity, nationality and civil rights and to gain access to social services. A birth certificate as proof of legal identity is critical to ensuring that children can enjoy their rights from birth. Well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics systems, including universal birth registration, are critical for ensuring legal identity for all. Identity is also critical for ensuring inclusive societies and realizing human rights. Of the 164 million unregistered children worldwide, 91 million live in Africa.⁴⁷ This situation undermines the opportunities to ensure that all children can gain access to public and private services.⁴⁸

38. There is a wide variation in the civil registration and vital statistics systems among African countries, with differing levels of registration coverage and completeness. Most of the countries in Africa do not use registration records to compile vital statistics.

39. A collaboration gap among national stakeholders has been observed. Legal identity, however, requires a multisectoral and whole-of-government approach. Solutions should encompass strengthening coordination, enhancing capacity and establishing interoperability among civil registration systems, vital statistics systems and national identification systems.

40. Progress has been made in the implementation of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda, in particular in the development of standard operating procedures for vital event registration and the conferral of legal identity to migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and other categories of persons on the move. Such legal

⁴⁵ United Nations, “Second Committee approves nine draft resolutions, including texts on international tax cooperation, external debt, global climate, poverty eradication”, 22 November 2023, available at <https://press.un.org/en/2023/gaef3597.doc.htm>.

⁴⁶ World Economic Forum, “The African Union has been made a permanent member of the G20 – what does it mean for the continent?”, 14 September 2023.

⁴⁷ UNICEF, “A statistical update on birth registration in Africa”, 2022, available at <https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-statistical-update-on-birth-registration-in-africa/>.

⁴⁸ A/78/80-E/2023/64.

identity is the enabler to ensure their rights and their access to justice and social services.

J. Target 16.10: ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

41. Access to information has improved, as the number of countries that have adopted laws guaranteeing public access to information has increased by almost one third since 2015.⁴⁹ However, given that 1.2 human rights defenders, journalists or trade unionists are killed each day worldwide,⁵⁰ it is becoming more dangerous and deadly for them to conduct their activities.⁵¹ Indeed, in 2022, the global number of killings and enforced disappearances of journalists and human rights defenders increased significantly. At least 448 human rights defenders were killed in 36 countries worldwide, constituting an increase of 40 per cent in the number of such killings.⁵²

42. In Africa, this trend is no different. In 2021, a noticeable increase in the number of enforced disappearances was observed, in particular in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia.⁵³ In the first months of 2023, four prominent human rights defenders were killed on the continent. The phenomenon of enforced disappearance has been prevalent on the continent since colonial times and strongly persists today, in particular with regard to human rights defenders, journalists, political opponents and minority groups.⁵⁴ The available United Nations data do not accurately reflect the scale of the problem, as the figures are significantly lower than the actual numbers. This discrepancy can be attributed to various factors, such as a poor judicial system, a lack of awareness and an absence of official data.

43. The African Union has made efforts to tackle the long-standing problem of enforced disappearances. In 2022, it adopted guidelines on the subject, which represent the first African regional instrument aimed at combating and preventing enforced disappearances.⁵⁵ In this regard, the International Committee of the Red Cross collaborates with Africa to provide support to victims and families. Despite these initiatives, there is still a need to reach consensus regarding international conventions and the improvement of African legal frameworks and of the documentation of cases.

⁴⁹ Referring to indicator 16.10.2, which is aimed at measuring the number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information. Data are available on the UNESCO website at www.unesco.org/en/right-access-information.

⁵⁰ UNODC, OHCHR and UNDP, “Global progress report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators”.

⁵¹ Referring to indicator 16.10.1, which is aimed at measuring the number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months.

⁵² Sarah Rattray and Marion Volkmann-Brandau, “Protecting those who protect human rights”, UNDP, 29 June 2023, available at www.undp.org/blog/protecting-those-who-protect-human-rights.

⁵³ Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights, “Submission regarding the visit of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances to the African Union’s judicial and human rights organs and other bodies”, available at www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/development/session24/subm-preparation-visit-cso-maat-peace-development-human-ri.docx.

⁵⁴ Amnesty International, “Freedom of expression”, available at www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/freedom-of-expression.

⁵⁵ Redress, “The African Commission launches the first regional instrument to fight enforced disappearances in Africa”, 25 October 2022.

III. Challenges and emerging issues and opportunities to accelerate implementation

44. The multiplicity of crises in the region is having a significant impact on social protection, education, health, violence and exploitation, with the most damage inflicted on vulnerable population groups, including girls, boys and women.

45. Such megatrends as increasing life expectancy, declining fertility rates, shifting urbanization patterns and evolving socioeconomic dynamics are likely to significantly influence the future landscape of homicide, affecting different regions of the world in different ways, and more acutely affecting such regions as Africa that are undergoing major transitions. Furthermore, the impact of accelerating technological transformation, social media exposure, job automation and climate shocks on homicidal violence is hard to predict.

46. In a UNODC analysis of the potential effects of climate change, change in age structure and inequality on homicide rates until the year 2100, Africa was projected to be the most vulnerable region, owing to an increasing proportion of young people 15–29 years of age in its population until 2035, slower reductions in inequality, and the concentration of climate-related shocks and stresses combined with weaker response capacities.⁵⁶

IV. Recommendations for the integrated and accelerated achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of Agenda 2063

47. Members of ECA should consider taking steps to strengthen and promote:

(a) Systems for monitoring illicit markets and collecting data related to illicit financial flows;

(b) Protective regulations, policies and accountability mechanisms, including independent national human rights mechanisms, in favour of human rights defenders and professionals who help to ensure access to information, in order to enhance the protection of fundamental freedoms for all citizens worldwide;

(c) Preparations for addressing pandemics and other crises, including the climate crisis and future financial crises;

(d) Strategies for combating conflict, for instance by promoting the New Agenda for Peace and seeking to reinvigorate the multilateral system in the context of the Summit of the Future, or considering ways to enhance the efficiency of the Security Council;

(e) Consolidation of the relationship between economic policy and human rights, so as to help Governments avoid policies in times of austerity that invest little in rights and that feed inequalities, while strengthening social protection systems;

(f) National capacities for producing disaggregated data to better respond to the needs of disadvantaged groups and hold duty bearers accountable;

(g) High-quality education, conflict resolution and democratic principles in order to foster a culture of peace, raising awareness among individuals, communities and institutions about the importance of Goal 16 and its link with sustainable development, while prioritizing conflict prevention efforts by addressing root causes, such as inequality, social exclusion and political grievances;

(h) Rights-based policy and institutional frameworks for universal access to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems for all vital

⁵⁶ UNODC, “Executive summary”.

events from birth to death and increased financial investments supporting national civil registration and identity management systems.

48. The voice and participation of the global South in international economic decision-making, norm-setting and global economic governance need to be broadened and strengthened.

V. Main messages

49. In the present analysis, progress made towards attaining Goal 16 is highlighted along with significant gaps in such progress. In order to address these gaps, there is a need to strengthen:

(a) Political leadership and stakeholder participation, which are crucial for establishing ownership, securing commitment, galvanizing support, mobilizing resources and ensuring accountability;

(b) Governance institutions and the rule of law, in order to protect human rights, ensure equal access to justice, including for children, and foster transparency and accountability, as well as wider stakeholder participation in decision-making and governance with a view to achieving Goal 16, through multi-stakeholder actions at all levels of government;

(c) Data systems in relation to Goal 16, by providing legal mandates to government institutions to collect, process and avail themselves of relevant data to support the monitoring of progress on Goal 16;

(d) Government strategies and institutional structures in Africa for combating illicit financial flows, in order to curb the haemorrhaging of resources and improve prospects for meeting Goal 16 and other Goals;

(e) Human rights approaches in economic policymaking, as well as strategies for combating and preventing conflict, addressing its effects on the most vulnerable.
