



SDG 16: Progress, gaps and recommendations for the UK

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The 2030 Agenda makes an unprecedented commitment to address conflict, violence, injustice and exclusion through a comprehensive approach to sustainable development. It affirms peaceful, just and inclusive societies as one of five cross-cutting priorities for global development.

Beyond **Goal 16**, targets under other SDGs including, for example, **Goal 4** (education), **Goal 5** (gender equality), **Goal 8** (decent work) and **Goal 10** (reduced inequalities), are also critical for peaceful and inclusive societies. Achieving the transformative ambitions of the SDGs globally requires a major focus on conflict-affected and fragile states, which are currently home to 43% of the population living in absolute poverty. The OECD anticipates that by 2030 some 80% of the world's poor will live in fragile contexts.¹ Reflecting this, there have been increasing global commitments to align the development and security agendas in a more coherent way, such as connecting longer-term empowerment and development with short-term responses to conflict and crisis.

The UK played a crucial role in the adoption of Goal 16, ensuring the final agreement of Agenda 2030 learnt from the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals. In particular, it played an instrumental role in ensuring the United Nations' High Level Panel (HLP) went beyond the "absence of conflict", in recognising that positive peace – including respect for human rights, participatory politics, accountability, and transparency – contributes to development and poverty eradication.² Goal 16 plays a particularly important role in the opening up of space for dialogue on contested issues such as peacebuilding, gender, justice, and human rights.³ However, since the adoption of the Agenda, the UK's leadership in championing Goal 16 has

waned somewhat and other countries have taken the lead on the actual implementation. For example, some countries such as the Netherlands, Switzerland and Sierra Leone have taken the lead in supporting the establishment of international coalitions and initiatives for achieving the Goal.⁴

The UK has historically been a leader on conflict and governance issues, through an ongoing commitment to work in conflict- and fragile-affected states, including an intention to spend 50% of DFID's budget in conflict-affected states in every year from 2016 to 2020. It has also committed to champion global efforts to end modern slavery and protect children overseas from violence, abuse and exploitation. DFID's Single Departmental Plan (2015-2020) includes an objective on strengthening global peace, security and governance, while the FCO Single Departmental Plan emphasises many **Goal 16** themes.⁵

The UK government continues to frame itself as global leader on gender equality with Goal 16 referenced in both the UK's fourth National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP) ranging from 2018 to 2022, the Strategic Vision for Gender Equality launched in 2018, and the recognition in DFID's 2017 Humanitarian Reform Policy of the need for a new approach to protracted crises.⁶ Additionally, the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative led by the FCO links closely to **Goal 16** and **Goal 5**.⁷

4. For example: <https://cic.nyu.edu/programs/sdg16plus>; https://cic.nyu.edu/PressRelease/Task_Force_On_Justice_February2018; <https://www.wfuna.org/sixteenplusforum>

5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-single-departmental-plan-2015-to-2020/single-departmental-plan-2015-to-2020#strengthening-global-peace-security-and-governance>; and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-and-commonwealth-office-single-departmental-plan/foreign-and-commonwealth-office-single-departmental-plan-may-2018>

6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-governments-humanitarian-reform-policy> p. 16.

7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-strategic-vision-for-gender-equality-her-potential-our-future>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-2018-to-2022>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/preventing-sexual-violence-initiative>

1. <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/whats-the-role-of-aid-in-fragile-states-my-piece-for-oecd/>

2. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/management/beyond2015.shtml>

3. <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1129-peaceful-just-and-inclusive-societies-what-role-for-the-2030-agenda-in-the-horn-of-africa>

While these acknowledgements are welcomed, it is unclear to what extent this is being coherently applied in practice. In addition, funding and resources have waned over the past year, and as discussed further under **Goal 5**, there are some critical gaps in the UK's gender equality work that also relate to issues covered by **Goal 16**.

Many positive steps by the UK government remain undermined by internally contradictory policies. This includes, for instance, the continual supply of arms and ammunition to conflict parties, while simultaneously investing in development programs and humanitarian aid for those affected by the conflict. This approach is notably relevant in Yemen, where the UK government is selling weapons to a conflict party responsible for many abuses of international humanitarian law.⁸ Contradictory policies such as these require urgent remedy in favour of approaches towards sustainable peace.

According to the World Bank: "Fragility, conflict, and violence is a critical development challenge that threatens efforts to end extreme poverty."⁹ Indeed, it estimates that by 2030, the deadline for the Goals, the majority of people living in extreme poverty will be living in conflict-affected countries.¹⁰ The OECD estimates this could increase to 62% (or half a billion people), with women disproportionately and overwhelmingly affected by both poverty and conflict.¹¹

In this context, the SDGs provided an important opportunity for the UK government to greater align policy and practice around conflict, security and development. For example, **Goal 5** on gender equality and **Goal 16** both reinforce many existing women, peace and security protections to which the international community is already committed. Focusing efforts on reducing conflict is directly linked to efforts to reduce poverty (see also **Goal 1**). However, DFID's EDS does not, at present, sufficiently address the specific barriers to achieving inclusive economic development in fragile, and conflict-affected states. "Do no harm" analysis is critical in designing interventions and partnerships that improve crisis affected groups and support the creation of decent jobs (see **Goal 8**).

While often neglected when considering the SDGs or international development cooperation, the delivery of human rights at the international and national levels is critical to their implementation and should be placed higher up the agenda. DFID and FCO have worked together closely on specific focal areas, some of which are relevant to "Leave No One Behind" like the intersection of poverty alleviation and religion.¹²

In its human rights influencing work, both bilaterally and through multilateral systems, the visibility given to the SDGs

by FCO and its use through its efforts to promote and protect human rights appears sparse. While the UK engages actively with UN human rights mechanisms, plays an active role at the UN Human Rights Council and participates in almost all Universal Periodic Reviews, it hasn't made systematic or even regular use of the SDG Framework. For example, it has only once mentioned a goal in its recommendations at the Universal Periodic Reviews since 2015, in the 2017 review of Ecuador.¹³ The FCO should support the UK's work on the SDGs by substantially increasing its use of the SDGs (and particularly of the "Leave No One Behind" principle) in its multilateral work on human rights.

Target 16.1:

Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

Violent conflict, whether political, economic or intercommunal, is the leading cause of suffering and extreme poverty today, and the largest single driver of fragility and of humanitarian need. Furthermore, exposure to violence increases support for violence, fuelling a dangerous cycle.

Countries in the Global South often lack effective protection mechanisms for minorities and indigenous peoples, who have limited access to justice and commonly face social, economic and political exclusion and are therefore particularly at risk in situations of conflict and violence. However, currently only around 1.4% of all international ODA is spent on civilian peacebuilding, women's equality organisations and institutions, ending violence against women and girls and prevention and disarmament of child soldiers.¹⁴ In the UK, the figure is closer to 4%.

The UK should do more to leverage similar support for pro-inclusion and pro-justice violence reduction efforts by other international actors, while in turn increasing its own political and financial investment to conflict prevention efforts.

A law enforcement approach to counter the drug trade has fuelled militarisation, as some states have significantly scaled up resources for drug law enforcement efforts, frequently channelled through the military. This militarisation has in turn fuelled violence as the drug cartels mobilise to fight state security forces. As a result, in many contexts there is a corresponding level of violence that many communities living on the front lines of the war on drugs experience in their daily lives. This includes violent deaths,

8. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/yemen/11500518/UK-will-support-Saudi-led-assault-on-Yemeni-rebels-but-not-engaging-in-combat.html>; <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=23479&LangID=E>
 9. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview>
 10. Ibid.
 11. <http://www.oecd.org/publications/states-of-fragility-2015-9789264227699-en.htm>
 12. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-commits-12-million-to-champion-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-worldwide>

13. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/universal-periodic-review-27-uk-statement-ecuador>
 14. Figure taken from joint NGO communique to the Canadian G7 2018, available upon request. Data pulled from OECD DAC Query Wizard for International Development database using 2016 data, disbursed funding for Common Reporting Standard categories: women's equality organisations and institutions; ending violence against women and girls; civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution; and child soldiers (prevention and demobilization). Additional references: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12340.doc.htm>; and <https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org/>

extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and the use of extreme violence by security services.¹⁵ For example, in Thailand, the war on drugs has resulted in the extrajudicial killings of approximately 2,800 people and arbitrary arrests of thousands since 2003.¹⁶

Marginalised groups often face an expensive, risky and inaccessible process when reporting instances of violence, in which they may not be taken seriously. Access to justice is a special challenge for indigenous people in the Global North and South, though it is indigenous women in particular who are “disproportionately at risk of experiencing all forms of violence” and are at higher risk of being murdered or sexually assaulted.¹⁷

The same is true in many contexts for sexual and gender minorities, as for example trans and gender diverse people can be at heightened risk of physical violence and murder.¹⁸ The UK’s work on violence reduction should take particular efforts to target and engage those communities who are most at risk of violence, depending on context.



Target 16.2:

End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

According to the latest statistics, 357 million children (nearly one in six children in the world) are living in areas affected by armed conflict.¹⁹ A systematic review in 2016 found that up to 1 billion children experienced violence or neglect in the previous year.²⁰ Children with disabilities are at disproportionate risk of experiencing violence compared to their peers without disabilities.²¹

The UK’s commitments to prioritise ending modern slavery and child exploitation around the world in 2016 have been instrumental in the development of the Call to Action on Modern Slavery. The UK is also a Board Member of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (GPEVAC), which is a great opportunity to advance the UK’s work on this issue. At the moment, the GPEVAC does not address the particular increased risks that children with disabilities face in experiencing violence. As a Board Member, it is recommended that the UK shows leadership by supporting GPEVAC to become more disability inclusive in their approaches and methods.

DFID has been instrumental on the violence against children agenda, including a new campaign with UNICEF, Safe to Learn, to end violence in schools. It established the Protecting Children Hub to promote the mainstreaming of children’s rights and wellbeing across the Department. More than £55m in funding has been allocated to child-focused work over the next four years, for the GPEVAC, a UNICEF-led Children on the Move programme in the Horn of Africa, and programming to address child labour in Asia and Africa. Through this work, DFID has prioritised protection for the most vulnerable and prevention of forms of violence that continue to undermine children’s rights and wellbeing globally. The UK’s leadership in addressing online violence with the WeProtect Global Alliance is also welcome.²²

However, the UK could do more to galvanise implementation of **Target 16.2**. The lack of a cross-government strategy on protecting children overseas prevents mainstreaming the protection of children across policy and practice and thus prevents the government from realising the Target. While there have been significant ODA funding increases in the past two years, DFID cannot currently track the amount of funding for preventing violence against children.

The UK government’s endorsement of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) strengthens its programmatic work in this area. The GCM serves as a recognition of the protection needs of children on the move, including their vulnerability to trafficking and other forms of violence.²³ However, coherence between the SDGs and the GCM process should be further promoted.

The UK continues to use administrative detention as a means to manage immigration, with children held indefinitely in institutions ill-equipped to ensure their rights or wellbeing. This is again contrary to the government’s own commitment, made at the 2018 Disability Summit, to promote deinstitutionalisation of children and disinvest from institutions in its overseas aid and GCM.

The government’s emphasis on safeguarding is a welcome development. However, children, some of the most vulnerable, have been omitted from these discussions, most notably at DFID’s Safeguarding Summit. DFID’s focus on sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment must be expanded to include children’s specific needs. DFID could also increase its programmatic impact on violence against girls specifically as it implements its Strategic Vision for Gender Equality.

15. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/jan/14/mexico-drug-war-murders-map#data>

16. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/thailand0704/4.htm>

17. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/JusticeForIndigenousPeoples.aspx>; and <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/EMRIP/Pages/Followupstudyonaccesstojustice.aspx>

18. <https://transrespect.org/en/research/trans-murder-monitoring/>

19. <https://www.savethechildren.net/waronchildren/pdf/waronchildren.pdf>

20. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/137/3/e20154079.full.pdf>

21. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22795511>

22. <https://www.weprotect.org/our-mission-and-strategy/>

23. <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact>

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 organised crime.

The UK has long been a safe haven for corrupt funds, in many cases stolen from Southern nations around the world. The National Crime Agency estimates that an excess of £90bn in illicit wealth flows through the UK every year.²⁴ Illicit financial flows are a major drain on national resources in the Global South and a barrier to achievement of human rights and delivery of the SDGs. Global Financial Integrity estimated the losses to countries in the Global South at \$1.1tn in 2013.²⁵ This has a disproportionate impact on women and marginalised groups and on countries in the Global South that need to deliver essential services and social protection for all citizens living in poverty (see more under **Goal 1** and **Goal 8**).

Investigations into “grand corruption” show that the UK enables illicit financial flows into the country because it has a weak anti-money laundering system, a system that corrupt individuals can easily bypass using “professional enablers” to buy UK property anonymously through foreign companies. Transparency International UK has identified 176 properties worth £4.4bn in the UK that have been bought with suspicious wealth.²⁶

The UK government has made some welcome moves on asset recovery: most notably introducing new powers to act on corrupt assets in the 2017 Criminal Finances Act, convening the Global Forum on Asset Recovery in December 2017, and setting up the National Economic Crime Centre in 2018.²⁷ However, there are currently no agreed and public principles on repatriating assets in a transparent, consistent and accountable way. The UK demonstrated global leadership when it created the world’s first public register of company beneficial ownership in 2016. However, the data submitted is currently unverified.

After changes to the law in May 2018, the UK is now legally bound to ensure that the Overseas Territories implement public beneficial ownership registers. More should be done, however, to combat illicit financial flows, including to analyse and address the spillover effects of the UK’s tax policies to ensure they do not do harm, and taking action to address money laundering (see also **Goal 1**).²⁸

24. <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/807-national-strategic-assessment-of-serious-and-organised-crime-2017/file>

25. <https://www.gfintegrity.org/issue/illicit-financial-flows/>

26. <http://www.transparency.org.uk/publications/faulty-towers-understanding-the-impact-of-overseas-corruption-on-the-london-property-market>

27. <https://www.transparency.org.uk/unexplained-wealth-orders-a-brief-guide/>; <https://www.transparency.org.uk/publications/accountable-asset-return-uk-country-level-civil-society-report-by-corruption-watch-and-transparency-international-uk/>; and <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/national-economic-crime-centre/international-anti-corruption-coordination-centre>

28. <https://financialtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/>

Target 16.7:

Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

A decision by DFID to move towards larger grants has made support to organisations working on **Target 16.7** more prohibitive. Funds are not available for small organisations working to open up decision-making processes in local contexts in the Global South. Such work is usually a longer-term endeavour, so the additional focus on short-term results in DFID has limited opportunities significantly. DFID should also be doing more to support an enabling environment, including respect for freedom of association, to ensure civil society organisations and other representative bodies, such as trade unions, have a voice in decision-making.

The UK has made strides, particularly through the NAP, to increase women’s participation in militaries, politics and peacebuilding.²⁹ However, much more needs to be done to reach the critical mass for impacting change, which is 30% according to the Beijing Platform for Action.³⁰ For example, there are only 180 (6%) trained women in the Afghan National Army Officer Academy out of 3,000.

Commitments enshrined in the UN CRC ensure children should be able to express a view and have it taken into account on all matters which affect them in line with their evolving capacities. This is particularly important for adolescents, who are typically at the frontline of social problems, for example the war on drugs, which often triggers youth violence. Not taking the perspectives of these children into account means that policies formulated to respond to these issues are unlikely to be successful.

DFID has previously shown admirable leadership on youth engagement and participation in some key areas, including eliminating FGM. However, in order to deliver on the SDGs, much more needs to be done in order to ensure that young people can hold their governments to account for their Agenda 2030 commitments. This includes ensuring that VNR processes are open to the participation of young people which will “promote[s] effective decisions, by giving groups affected by those decisions the opportunity to communicate their needs and interests.”³¹

Globally, young people are leading delivery on the SDGs. Their insight into the resulting successes and challenges are therefore crucial to both the national and global-level understanding of the extent to which the goals are being attained, as well as to informing SDG policy-making. The UK government could model this by delivering on

Kathmandu-Declaration.pdf

29. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-2018-to-2022>

30. <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf177/aconf177-20en.htm>

31. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR_hanbook_2019_Edition_v4.pdf

their commitments to “put young people at the heart of development” through the full implementation of the DFID Youth Agenda.³²

DFID has made commendable steps in supporting people with disabilities to advocate for their rights and promoting participation through the Disability Catalyst Fund. The UK government, including departments outside of DFID, should now ensure that meaningful support to organisations of people with disabilities is provided across their country portfolio and is not limited to a small number of countries.

32. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfids-youth-agenda-putting-young-people-at-the-heart-of-development>

Commitments made to consulting with people with disabilities in the new Disability Strategy are welcome. However, steps should be taken to ensure that country offices are working in partnership with organisations of people with disabilities and with governments to promote inclusive institutions and decision-making. The UK government should ensure that all capacity-building support to government bodies, such as human rights institutions, takes into account the rights and needs of people with disabilities and promotes inclusion.

To achieve Goal 16, the UK government should:

- Reaffirm the UK’s commitment to Goal 16 on the global stage. Play a greater role in championing the Goal internationally through increased diplomatic support and the protection of Goal 16+ commitments at the multilateral level.
- Better ensure that commitments to women’s empowerment (see **Goals 1 and 5**) are more consistently integrated into economic, humanitarian and conflict approaches.
- Through the National Security Council, produce a detailed plan and guidance for how a long-term approach to stability and conflict prevention will be maintained and mainstreamed in practice across departments. Reference the 2030 Agenda and Goal 16 in particular.
- Support the UK’s work on the SDGs by substantially increasing the FCO’s use of the SDGs (and particularly of the “Leave No One Behind” principle) in its multilateral work on human rights.
- Support individuals and organisations that work at national and local levels to act as **Goal 16** champions (in both government and civil society). Support multi-sectoral consultation to identify national priorities and build on or reinforce existing initiatives for peace, justice and inclusion. Promote participation of women, children and young people at all levels in work on peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
- Develop a coordinated cross-governmental strategy for protecting children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture. Mainstream children’s wellbeing and rights across the various policy portfolios. Lead the way on tracking ODA that goes to ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children, including through a policy marker. Strengthen coherence between the implementation of different policy frameworks, including the GCM. Use the levers of humanitarian and developmental assistance, trade measures and diplomatic relations to ensure accountability and eliminate impunity.
- Support inclusive societies by building the capacities of and enabling the removal of barriers for civil society organisations and other representative organisations to engage in decision-making at all levels, including in development processes. Develop a robust implementation plan for DFID’s Youth Agenda that ensures mainstreaming and supports young people to engage with implementation, follow up and review of the SDGs. Engage directly through country offices with civil society organisations representing women and other marginalised groups, including people with disabilities.
- Ensure the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies receive technical assistance to implement public registers of beneficial ownership, in a way that also supports sustainable development in these territories.
- Improve transparency and accountability in the international asset return process by publishing clear data about corrupt assets that have been frozen, seized or confiscated in the UK.

This chapter is part of Bond’s report, **The UK’s global contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals**. Access the rest of the report at bond.org.uk/UK-global-contribution-SDGs
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