What is SDG 16+?

From access to justice and the rule of law, to inclusion and participatory decision-making, the reduction of violence and the promotion of peace, Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) resonates across societies universally and the 2030 Agenda as an indivisible whole. SDG 16+, which includes Sustainable Development Goal 16, its related 2030 Agenda targets for peaceful, just and inclusive societies and links to other UN agendas, such as Sustaining Peace, offers a catalytic opportunity to fully realize the promise of societies which are free from fear and violence. It embodies a transformative and catalytic shift towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies well into 2030 and beyond.

In September 2016, the 16+ Forum announced the Annual Showcase, an opportunity to channel and direct attention generated at UNHQ into action – what implementation looks like, how to go about it, and lessons learned to take forward. Held on a yearly basis, the Annual Showcase takes place in a 16+ Forum member country.

What is the 16+ Forum Annual Showcase?

In September 2016, the 16+ Forum announced the Annual Showcase, a collective undertaking to showcase SDG 16+ in action – what implementation looks like, how to go about it, and lessons learned to take forward. Held on a yearly basis, the Annual Showcase takes place in a 16+ Forum member country.

With the first Annual Showcase in Tbilisi, Georgia, the second in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the third in Díli, Timor-Leste, and now the fourth in San José, Costa Rica, each opens with a focus on the host country and a flagship theme, while broadening the lens to include a variety of country and regional contexts. The inaugural Annual Showcase was held in the fall of 2017 in Tbilisi, Georgia, bringing together representatives of governments, civil society, the UN, academia and the private sector.

The second 16+ Forum Annual Showcase was held in Freetown, Sierra Leone from 7-10 October 2018, and featured a regional-level focus through the participation of regional and sub-regional organizations such as the Mano River Union, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding and ECOWAS.

What is the 16+ Forum?

Launched in April 2016, the 16+ Forum is a multi-stakeholder platform and partnership of 12 member states, the g7+ and WFUNA, designed to share and amplify best practices in SDG 16+ implementation at regional, national and local levels, and across a wide community of stakeholders – governments, civil society, the UN, regional and international organizations, academia and the private sector. The 16+ Forum’s partner member states include Australia, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Georgia, Guatemala, Peru, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Timor-Leste and Tunisia.

With wide-ranging participation of governments, local and international civil society organizations, members of the UN system, regional and international organizations, the private sector and academia, the Annual Showcase provides a yearly opportunity to highlight steps taken at regional, national and local levels towards SDG 16+ implementation, inclusive of challenges, successes and solutions, from field visits to panel discussions, this four-day, innovative and interactive conference brings together a diverse group of stakeholders and champions.

Holding the Showcase at the country-level, whether in Georgia, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste or Costa Rica, points towards implementation, sustainable impact and continued efforts to advance peaceful, just and inclusive societies well into 2030 and beyond.
Why Costa Rica?

More than 70 years ago, Costa Rica emerged from a civil war to become one of the only nations to abolish its military and redirect national resources toward universal education and health, social welfare and environmental protection. Today, Costa Rica is ranked high on the Global Peace Index, very high on the Positive Peace Index, and number 12 (of 156 nations) in the 2019 World Happiness Report.

The respect attached to the rule of law, as well as to peace, recognized by their Constitutional Court as a human right, has allowed Costa Rica to be within some of the most consolidated liberal democracies, and one of top five countries with the highest levels of Representative Government in the world. As a reflection of its national policies, including the 1997 law on peaceful conflict resolution which institutes the right of every person to an adequate education for peace, Costa Rica has established such practices in areas of its foreign affairs.

Host country of the University for Peace since 1980 after the proposal of a former president, Costa Rica has been a long-standing promoter of dialogue, mediation and peacebuilding in international conflicts. The Declaration of Perpetual, Active and Unarmed Neutrality of 1983 has informed Costa Rica’s international relations policy to promote peace, justice, solidarity and collaboration among its members.

Costa Rica’s democracy and social fabric are not yet immune to challenges, including political polarization, a fragmented party system and the infusion of religion into politics. Additional challenges relate to changing demographics, persistent levels of unemployment, poverty and income inequality.

The deterioration of social cohesion and trust in political institutions create social, political and economic tensions which may ultimately lead to democratic setbacks. Democracy is under strong pressure around the world, as increasing socio-economic disparities have fueled citizen unrest and a lack of trust in the ability of democratic institutions to cope with people’s demands. In addition, the spread of misinformation and hate speech coupled with these challenges make for the perfect breeding ground for populism.

In this context, the 2030 Agenda remains the roadmap to further sustainable development and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and, in light of the current COVID-19 health and socio-economic crisis, it is critical to be able to “recover better”. Building peaceful, just and inclusive societies and achieving SDG 16 in particular is needed more than ever in order to ensure a democratic whole-of-society response to the pandemic, and to maintain and sustain social cohesion and trust in institutions.

With Costa Rica as host, this year’s Showcase will open under the theme of Building Peace through the Rule of Law, Inclusion and Good Governance to address these challenges under the SDG16+ framework, broadening also the scope across countries to discuss how to build political cultures based on compromise, public trust, social welfare and a strong regard for the rule of law, for the achievement of sustained peace.

The 16+ Forum Annual Showcase should give Costa Rica the opportunity to become the best “testing ground” or “high quality laboratory” on advancing innovative ways to implement SDG 16 at the international, regional and national levels. It will be an opportunity for the country to show leadership, receive support and advance solutions domestically to issues of great concern to the population.

The Overarching Landscape and What We Will Achieve

Amidst a sea of dynamic multilateral agendas, UN General Assemblies and High-level Political Forums, and the 2020 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture, the 16+ Forum offers continued and complementary focus on SDG16+ implementation at the country level.

With the 4th Annual Showcase taking place in Costa Rica in 2021, governments, civil society organizations, the UN, academia, think tanks and the private sector will be able to both take stock of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on peaceful, just and inclusive societies around the world, while again returning to a focus on commitment to national level implementation. The pandemic has highlighted the fact that all countries, even the most developed, have work to do in achieving peaceful, just and inclusive societies characterized by strong and accountable institutions.

While the High-level Political Forum and the General Assembly have been impacted by the pandemic, Costa Rica presented its second VNR in July. Costa Rica’s commitment to advancing SDG 16+ implementation at all levels, and the nation’s impressive experiences in fostering a strong culture of peace will further serve to build upon the momentum generated throughout 2019 by the first quadrennial review of the SDGs, as well as the first official review of Goal 16 specifically. Hosting the 4th 16+ Forum Annual Showcase in Costa Rica shortly afterwards falls perfectly within this sequence, reinforcing the importance of national-level implementation and tying in the Voluntary National Reviews.

With the decision to have SDG 16 reviewed again during HLPF in July 2021, it is evident that it is very much an overarching Goal, and one that everyone must work toward achieving. Within this context, it is imperative for the SDG 16+ community to come together in order to build upon the momentum around SDG 16 and further the progress being made in terms of implementation.

Moreover, Costa Rica is about to celebrate the bicentennial of its independence in 2021. This commemoration provides a very timely opportunity to be the first country in Latin America and the Caribbean to host the 16+ Forum Annual Showcase, as well as to help further the implementation of SDG 16+ across countries and contexts, and at all levels.

By bringing together various communities and stakeholders working on SDG 16+, the 16+ Forum, particularly through the Annual Showcase, is building the community of practice and strengthening our collective efforts to ensure that no one is left behind.
Conference Outcomes

The Annual Showcase aims to highlight the how, what, when and who of SDG 16+ implementation, thereby encouraging its implementation across a greater number of contexts while bringing best, multi-stakeholder practices to the fore. Specifically, the Costa Rica Showcase will:

- Engage political actors, civil society, academia and the private sector in SDG 16+ advocacy and implementation, drawing out interlinkages across the 2030 Agenda.
- Drive home the importance of impact and locally-led processes through government and non-government field visits.
- Link the global conversation with national, subnational and increasingly regional partnerships and implementation.
- Continue to build a movement for SDG 16+ at the national, regional and international level, beyond 2020 and for the duration of the 2030 Agenda.
- Deliver an Outcome Document, to be submitted as official input to HLPF 2021, to complement follow-up and review efforts. The Outcome Document aims to capture the most salient best practices and lessons learned, as well as key policy take-aways across countries and contexts. Links to the Georgia, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste Outcome Documents can be found here, here and here, respectively.
- Present the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Agenda, and its links to Sustaining Peace. In addition to the Conference Outcomes, the Annual Showcase will also feature a Private Sector Workshop, which will run parallel to the Civil Society Workshop.

Field Visits to government institutions and civil society organizations are subsequently conducted to further demonstrate SDG 16+ in practice.

The Main Conference consists of Plenary and Breakout Sessions, highlighting the host country’s experiences in advancing SDG 16+, as well as those of other countries present. Through each component of the Annual Showcase, the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships, inclusion, and local and national ownership is emphasized.

Conference Themes

Previous Annual Showcases have featured one flagship theme, with two secondary themes, to ensure that the full breadth of Peacful, Just and Inclusive Societies is addressed throughout the discussions.

Within each theme, interlinkages across SDG 16+ issues will be drawn out, as well as the university of SDG 16, its related targets for peaceful, just and inclusive societies across the 2030 Agenda, and its links to Sustaining Peace. In addition to the themes, independent case studies, research and frameworks will be presented, again focusing on practical steps and inclusive processes needed to reach meaningful and sustainable implementation.

The Showcase will open with a focus on Costa Rica and the flagship theme mentioned above: Building Peace through the Rule of Law, Inclusion and Good Governance. SDG targets 16.3 (Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels), 16.6 (Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels), and 16.7 (Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels) among other SDGs will provide the technical background for discussions.

Other cross-cutting issues such as gender and youth, environmental protection, education and innovation will be addressed throughout the Showcase. As was the case during past Showcases, additional sessions will focus on topics such as the importance of collecting robust data, the need to bridge the gap between formal and informal systems and processes, the benefits of investing in local solutions and locally-led development processes, and the utility of framing politically contentious issues such as human rights violations through the prism of SDG 16+.

Throughout discussions, the issue of sequencing, policy prioritization, inter-governmental coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships will also feature. For all plenary and breakout sessions, a variety of country, regional and global contexts will be discussed. As these themes are linked in practice, overlap will be present in interventions and experiences shared.

Conference Participants

With 250+ participants from over forty-five countries, the Annual Showcase highlights how global rhetoric can, and has, translated into implementation across contexts.

Government: governments will be requested to propose one representative from capital (or otherwise relevant location in-country) and one representative from the diplomatic mission to the UN. The aim is to have government participants that are knowledgeable about what is being done on SDG 16+ in her or his country, able to share and build upon such experiences, and return better equipped for future related policies and implementation. Members of the 16+ Forum will be core participants along with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Costa Rica and a number of other key Ministries.

Civil Society: civil society representatives form a critical component of the Showcase. Outreach efforts will ensure that local, national, regional and international civil society representatives are able to attend and contribute throughout the Showcase. While the majority will be from Costa Rica, the Showcase provides a useful platform to bring the larger SDG 16+ CSO community together, from grassroots to global organizations. Principal international civil society organizations will include the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, the TAP Network, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict and the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, among others.

United Nations System: the UN Resident Coordinator and members of the Country Team, as well as representatives from the Global Alliance Secretariat and UNDP from UNHQ in New York are anticipated to participate. Other UN representatives from a more regional level or NGO may also participate, lending various levels of expertise to discussions.

Intergovernmental/Regional Organizations: with the inclusion of a regional angle to the Annual Showcase, the number of representatives from intergovernmental organizations such as the g7+ and the Open Government Partnership has increased in recent years, and is expected to grow again this year, with the anticipated participation of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights and the Inter-American Institute of Cooperation for Agriculture.

Private Sector: national representatives from the private sector, including from local businesses and the entrepreneurship community, will be invited and are anticipated to attend. Given Costa Rica’s particular focus on creating more inclusive corporations to address the increasing income inequality throughout the country, and the role of such corporations in Costa Rica’s sustainable development more generally, the engagement of both small and medium enterprises, as well as multi-national and international corporates and businesses is anticipated, possibly in coordination with the UN’s Global Compact.

Academia: representatives from national academic institutions have participated in all three previous Annual Showcases, featuring most prominently in Timor-Leste given the nation’s large youth population. In 2020, professors and students from the University for Peace are expected to participate, thereby highlighting the link between education, development and sustaining peace.
Inclusivity — bringing together governments and civil society from local, national and international levels, the UN, regional and international organizations, the private sector and others, we promote learning, exchange and partnership through inclusivity. Any Member State is welcome to join the 16+ Forum. Civil society and other stakeholders are integral, with equal opportunity to present their contributions alongside Member States.

Solutions-oriented — action and implementation at all levels has to match the ambition of the SDGs. Recognizing that one size does not fit all, the project will seek to foster mutual learning between different national and regional contexts, in a view to support global implementation.

Complementarity — the 16+ Forum is intended to complement and support the follow-up and review framework of the 2030 Agenda, as well as other SDG 16+ initiatives and partners within the UN Community. The 16+ Forum promotes a whole-of-society approach and so further welcomes collaboration with all stakeholders.

National Ownership and Awareness Raising — recognizing the broad scope of issues covered under SDG 16+ and the wider 2030 Agenda, the Annual Showcase and other 16+ Forum activity will be grounded in national ownership. This fits closely with the principles underpinning implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

Universality - mirroring the universality of the 2030 Agenda, participation in the 16+ Forum will be balanced with representation from around the globe. Each year, the Annual Showcase will aim to rotate to a different region, ensuring participation of diverse stakeholders, multilateral cooperation and highlighting SDG 16+ implementation within varied contexts.

In sum, the 16+ Forum, through its Annual and complementary initiatives, contributes to the SDG 16+ community of practice, while strengthening and building the movement for peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Our Principles

The 16+ Forum is comprised of 12 member states, the g7+, and WFUNA, as the Forum’s Secretariat: