

9. NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 16



What Is It?

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are independent state institutions established by law to promote and protect human rights and to hold governments into account for their human rights obligations.²¹⁸ Among other tasks, NHRIs undertake systematic analysis of the human rights situation in their countries, issue reports and recommendations and advise governments and parliament on human rights compliance. Some NHRIs also have a mandate to handle complaints from citizens, facilitating access to justice, redress and remedy.

As of November 2019, there were 80 NHRIs across the globe in fully compliance with the Paris Principles,²¹⁹ i.e., in accordance with the international minimum standards for effective, credible, and independent NHRIs. Those are known as “A-status NHRIs”. In addition, 34 NHRIs are partially compliant with these standards (B-status).²²⁰ The existence of an independent NHRI in compliance with the Paris Principles is an indicator for strong institutions under SDG 16.a, but the current pace of establishment of A-status NHRIs is significantly slow and, if not accelerated, countries will not achieve this target before 2067.²²¹

Why Is It Important?

NHRIs are crucial elements of the institutional architecture necessary for the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Acknowledging that more than 90 percent of the SDG targets are related to international human rights norms and standards,²²² NHRIs and its networks have stepped up and leveraged their role to support SDG implementation, monitoring and review. NHRIs are guided by the Merida Declaration,²²³ which is agreed under the auspices of the

Global Alliance of NHRIs

(GANHRI)

www

in 2015 and elaborates the role of NHRIs in implementing the 2030 Agenda. As a follow-up, the Network of African NHRIs (NANHRI) adopted in²²⁴

2017 the Kigali Declaration

and Plan of Action

www

to guide NHRIs in the region in their engagement with the 2030 Agenda and the African Agenda 2063.²²⁵ More recently NHRIs in Europe are responding to COVID-19 –

²¹⁸ Learn more about [NHRIs](#).

²¹⁹ UN General Assembly (1993). [A/RES/48/134](#), Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions (The Paris Principles) (1993). <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/b38121/pdf/>

²²⁰ GANHRI (2019). [Chart of the Status of Accreditation](#). [https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/GANHRIAccreditation/Documents/Status%20Accreditation%20-%20Chart%20\(%2027%20November%202019\).pdf](https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/GANHRIAccreditation/Documents/Status%20Accreditation%20-%20Chart%20(%2027%20November%202019).pdf)

²²¹ Danish Institute for Human Rights (2019). [National Human Rights Institutions: Accelerators, Guarantors and Indicators of Sustainable Development](#), pp. 5-6.

²²² According to study from the Danish Institute for Human Rights (2018). [Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Lessons Learned and Next Steps](#). p. 4. The links between each SDG target and the human rights instrument can be easily identified using a free online tool developed by the Danish Institute for Human Rights, ‘The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs’, available at <http://sdg.humanrights.dk>

²²³ [The Mérida Declaration: The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (2015).

²²⁴ [Kigali Declaration and Plan of Action on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Agenda 2063 and the role of National Human Rights Institutions](#) (2017).

²²⁵ [Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.](#), African Union (2013).

UNESCO listed that 36 NHRIs

in the region made recommendations

related to the pandemic



with regards to access/right to information, access for persons with disabilities and multilingualism.

How Can This Be Used?

NHRIs have contributed to national, regional and global SDG review processes by, for example, convening stakeholders and facilitating dialogue, providing data on human rights-related indicators and supporting the direct implementation of certain SDG targets related to their

mandates. NHRIs have also fostered a human-rights-based approach to the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs as a means to leave no one behind, using data and information from the human rights systems²²⁶ to guide the development of national indicators, policies and programmes.²²⁷ For example, the NHRIs of Palestine, Kenya and Uganda have established Memoranda of Understanding²²⁸ (MoU) with National Statistics Offices in their countries to collaborate on a human-rights-based approach to data collection and data disaggregation, including on issues related to access to justice, violence, fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as for the identification of vulnerable population groups to expand on national census.

The Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights: Promoting a Human-Rights-Based Approach to SDG Implementation and Monitoring

As a follow-up to its first VNR presented in 2018, the Palestinian Government established National SDG Teams composed by representatives from different stakeholders groups. Each SDG Team coordinates with relevant actors in the field to, for example, conduct monitoring and reporting, provide recommendations and policy proposals and prepare interventions to promote the implementation of its respective Goal. It is a unique process, designed to pull together the capacities and expertise of all relevant actors in the country.

The Palestinian NHRI, namely the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR),²²⁹ engages in the national SDG processes promoting a human rights-based approach to the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. Among other things, the ICHR has developed a criterion to define marginalized areas in the country from a human rights perspective, contributing to the identification of groups that are being left behind. ICHR is also an active contributor to the National SDG Teams and engages as a permanent member of the National Team for SDG 16²³⁰ (peace, justice and strong institutions), led by the Ministry of Justice, since its launch in July 2018. In addition, ICHR is an observer in the Teams for Goals 1 (no poverty), 3 (good health and well-being), 8 (decent work) and 10 (reduced inequalities).

226 For an overview of the international human rights system see [link](#). In addition, for the regional overview see “[A Rough Guide to the Regional Human Rights Systems](#)”, Universal Rights Group.

227 [National human rights institutions as a driving force for sustainable development: good practices for SDG programing and monitoring](#), Danish Institute for Human Rights (2019).

228 The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is promoting MoU between NHRIs and NSOs as part of its effort to promote a human-rights-based approach to data collection. Implementation has also been supported by the Danish Institute for Human Rights with capacity-building and trainings.

229 Learn more about the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights: <https://ichr.ps/en/1>

230 See Terms of Reference of the SDG 16 Team:

<https://www.sdg16hub.org/system/files/2019-09/SDG%2016%20National%20Team%20Terms%20of%20Reference.pdf>

The Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights: Promoting a Human-Rights-Based Approach to SDG Implementation and Monitoring, cont.

The SDG 16 team is formed by the Ministry of Justice, as well as the Ministries of Finance, Women's Affairs, Social Development, Interior and Local Government; the police; eight human rights institutions including the NHRI; civil society organizations; academia; the General Personnel Council (civil servants); the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics; one media representative; and oversight bodies such as transparency, accountability and anti-corruption institutions. After reviewing the data collection capacities of its members, the Team agreed on compiling data and information for 75 indicators in total (including global and national indicators) to provide for a comprehensive review of the SDG 16 targets. Based on the data provided by its members, the SDG 16 Team will prepare a report to the Prime Minister's Office to assist in the preparation of future VNRs and provide evidence for policymaking to advance SDG 16 implementation in the country.

As a member of the SDG 16 Team and due to its unique mandate to monitor the human rights situation in the country, the ICHR is able to contribute data for 25 of the agreed indicators that are relevant to monitor SDG 16. Those include issues related to violence, access to justice and human rights defenders. The ICHR is also engaged in a MoU with the Palestinian Central Bureau for Statistics in which the institutions cooperate on, among other things, conducting a survey to monitor fundamental rights and freedoms, relevant for SDG 16.10.

NHRIs have also been a leading voice for increased inclusion, participation and accountability for the SDG follow-up and review processes. They are leveraging experiences from the UN human rights monitoring bodies such as the Universal Periodic Review and Treaty Bodies and proposing structural changes that would benefit from increased coordination between national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up on human rights obligations (NMRFs) and national SDG coordination mechanisms.²³¹

NHRIs continued engagement post-VNR is crucial to ensure that countries uphold the human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, transparency, participation and accountability in the SDG follow-up processes. In fact, there is optimism that countries are increasingly recognizing NHRIs' role and systematically including them in official SDG coordinating structures.

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice of Ghana: An Accountability Actor

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ or the Commission) is the Ghanaian NHRI. CHRAJ is a member of the multi-sectoral SDGs Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC) of Ghana, which comprises representatives of key ministries, public agencies and civil society organizations. The mandate of the ICC includes strengthening cross-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships in SDG implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. For the preparation of Ghana 2019 VNR, the CHRAJ was formally requested by the SDG coordinating secretariat to provide information on its activities contributing to the SDGs, including on Goal 16. The Commission was also part of the Ghana official delegation to the HLPF that year.

²³¹ Feiring, Birgitte and König-Reis, Saionara. [Leveraging Human Rights Mechanisms to Improve SDG Follow-up and Review, Making the HLPF More Inclusive](#), no.2 2020, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (2020).

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice of Ghana: An Accountability Actor, cont.

In the follow-up to the VNR, the CHRAJ is playing a central role in improving accountability in the country, particularly in its capacity as the coordinating body for the National Anti-Corruption Plan. In this role, the Commission is convening a number of thematic international and national dialogues with relevance to advance issues related to SDG 16, such as promoting the relevance of linking human rights in anti-corruption efforts to, for example, strengthen institutions, ensure rule of law and access to justice, and design adequate policies for asset recovery and return.

Among other initiatives, the CHRAJ organized a national Conference on Anti-Corruption and Transparency, which gathered high-level officials (including Ghana's Vice-President), key representatives from the governance and justice sectors, civil society, the UN and the private sector. Participants reviewed existing policies and strategies and agreed on measures to strengthen institutions involved in fighting corruption and ensuring transparency and accountability.

Further, in January 2020, the Commission organized a national forum involving key accountability institutions including the offices of the Attorney-General, Auditor-General and Special Prosecutor, as well as the Economic and Organized Crime Office, Narcotics Control Board, Police Service and others. The forum was meant to strengthen inter-institutional collaboration and information-sharing and led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among these actors to fulfil this purpose.

Finally, on a project funded by the World Bank and expected to start in the second half of 2020, the CHRAJ was selected as one of 16 public sector institutions to promote good governance and access to a redress or remedy through internal complaint or grievance handling mechanism within the public services. The CHRAJ, in exercising its constitutional mandate as Ghana's Ombudsman, will provide capacity-training for public officials on Client Service Charters and effective complaint handling to strengthen public services in contribution to the government's public sector reform strategy.

Interview: Saionara König-Reis, Danish Institute for Human Rights.

Key Resources:

- [National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up: a practical guide to effective state engagement with international human rights mechanisms](#), OHCHR, 2016;
- [SDG Toolbox for NHRIs](#), GANHRI: 2020;
- [A Human Rights Based Approach to Data – Leaving no one behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), OHCHR: 2018;
- [National Human Rights Institutions as Accelerators, Guarantors and Indicators of Sustainable Development](#), DIHR: 2019;
- [National human rights institutions as a driving force for sustainable development](#), DIHR: 2019
- [Applying a HRBA to Poverty Reduction and Measurement](#), ENNHRI: 2019;
- [Contributions of the national human rights institutions to the 2030 agenda](#) (Argentina, Costa Rica and Mexico), DIHR: 2019;
- [African National Human Rights Institutions and Sustainable Development](#), DIHR: 2019;
- [National Human Rights Institutions: Engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), GANHRI: 2018;
- [Leveraging Human Rights Mechanisms to Improve SDG Follow-up and Review](#), Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation: 2020;
- [Integrated review and reporting on SDGs and Human Rights](#), DIHR: 2019.