



A Renewed Call for Strengthening Commitments, Partnerships, and Accelerated Action for SDG16+ *2021 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+*

Preamble

The COVID-19 pandemic is an inflection point for humanity. Unfortunately, the main issues that were brought to the fore in the broadly supported [2019 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+](#) have remained valid and in some cases been exacerbated, while those same structural injustices and inequalities that impacted the lives of people living in vulnerable situations before the crisis now determine who suffers most from it. The trickle-down effect of the pandemic means that it has been especially devastating for women, people of color, the LGBTQI+ community, and the world's poorest - globally, not only health is impacted, but also peace, justice and accountability.

COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns, alongside crackdowns on civil society and civic space, have led to declines in trust in institutions. Tensions have risen, both at home, as well as in regions of conflict and fragility, leaving the already vulnerable in the most destitute of situations. Overall, the explosion of rights violations, conflict, and inequitable pandemic response has put the world further behind to achieving sustainable development.

This 2021 Addendum to the original Rome Declaration therefore serves as a firm and urgent reminder for the global community that peaceful, just and inclusive societies are at the core of not only sustainable development, but also sustainable recovery, especially at a time like this.

A Renewed Call to Action

The world will not recover better from the COVID-19 pandemic, unless we are able to empower individuals and ensure a “people-centered” recovery. Fortunately, the Sustainable Development Goals offer a ready-made roadmap to resilient recovery from COVID-19, already agreed to by 193 governments. We now simply - but urgently - need to adhere to it.

In particular the delivery of the targets of SDG16+ are vital for a just and equitable COVID-19 response and recovery, as well as to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. SDG16+ can reduce structural inequalities and rebuild trust between governments and people, making societies more resilient to future shocks and crises.

Throughout the pandemic, civil society groups around the world have continued to localize SDG16+ and work toward peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Civil society groups have put themselves at risk to provide vital support to communities, to spread public health messaging and ensure last mile health care delivery, to improve public services, to promote social cohesion by countering misinformation and to stand up for fundamental freedoms and the rights of all people facing injustices.

We, as civil society, have retained our collective commitment to SDG16+ implementation. Alluding to the [**“Amplified Commitments and Partnerships for Accelerated Action: Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+” issued in 2019**](#), we now reiterate our call upon all actors - especially Member States and international agencies - to step up their actions and investments for peaceful, just and inclusive societies worldwide. Actors should use the 2021 UN HLPF, and subsequent HLPFs, to announce and deliver upon ambitious commitments that localize SDG16+, including by harnessing the role of civil society in advancing these efforts. Undoubtedly, achieving SDG16+ underpins the possible achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals.

Key Recommendations

COVID-19 Response, Recovery and Resilience through an SDG16+ Lens

While progress to push back the COVID-19 pandemic has seen positive developments in recent months for many countries, significant challenges still remain for the vast majority of countries and the world’s population. The discrepancy between responses, resources and vaccine access to-date has shown the vast and dramatic inequalities that exist between countries. For the world to overcome this COVID-19 crisis, the international community must take the approach that “no one is safe until everyone is safe”, and double-down on investments in developing countries.

- 1) We urge governments to actively partner and collaborate closely with and support civil society and other non-state actors, for only an integrated and holistic approach can achieve sustainable peace, development and recovery from this multifaceted, COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2) In this effort, public-private partnerships are key. Strong multi-stakeholder and multi-sector partnerships do require leadership from governments, but often still lack crucial on-the-ground knowledge as well as access to and engagement of local grassroots organisations and movements.
- 3) Governments must ensure that existing inequalities between countries are not exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, including in regards to equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. Equitable vaccine distribution provides a critical litmus test for the international community around efforts to “Leave No One Behind.”
- 4) Governments must also ensure that COVID-19 response and recovery is people-centered, and make special efforts to reach communities that have historically been left behind, including but not limited to women, young people, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, people of color, the LGBTQI+ community, the world's poorest and others.
- 5) Governments and corporations developing COVID-19 vaccines must scale up access for vaccines for developing countries, and provide them at-cost or for no-cost to countries, striving to reach those furthest behind first. Cost of vaccines or COVID-19 treatment should never influence which countries or which individuals receive access to these life-saving resources.
- 6) Governments should agree on a temporary TRIPS waiver through the WTO to enable certified companies in developing countries to produce COVID-19 vaccines in local factories. Furthermore, know-how and technology transfer via WHO's C-TAP (COVID-19 Technology Access Pool) needs to be stimulated by governments in order to enable companies to share rights, knowledge and technology behind the currently available vaccines.

Pursue integrated approaches and interlinkages for inclusive results

With SDG16+ underpinning progress towards the entire 2030 Agenda, as it interlinks with all other SDGs, it is critical for the international community to utilize SDG16+ as a lever for implementing the entirety of the 2030 Agenda. Governments must take an SDG16+-centric approach to the response, recovery and resilience from the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure that these efforts are people-centered.

- 1) All national development plans and international development support should integrate and prioritise all relevant SDG16+ targets.
- 2) Specifically, we call on all actors to:
 - a) Act responsibly and reduce structural inequalities, socially, economically and environmentally.
 - b) Promote and implement effective international and national policy which optimises the coordinated Triple Nexus approach to humanitarian aid, development and peace.
 - c) In the same manner, include the interlinkages between the health challenges of COVID-19 and other sectors, such as peace and conflict, social and economic development, governance, humanitarian needs etc. in a holistic COVID-19 response, as well as in the implementation approach to the 2030 Agenda.

Mobilize and scale up commitments and investments

With SDG16+ progress backsliding on many fronts today, intensified by the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever for governments and all stakeholders to reinvigorate commitments - both political and financial - in implementing SDG16+ at all levels. This includes commitments by governments to advance SDG16+ at the national and local levels, as well as supporting civil society and all stakeholders to contribute in their own contexts.

- 1) We call on governments to make additional ambitious commitments to mainstream SDG16+ into all government efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, and in particular as it relates to the response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2) We call on donors to scale up investments to support civil society organizations, grassroots communities and social movements, in a time where independent civil society will be critical to building resilience from the COVID-19 pandemic and any future crises. This support should be scaled up and made increasingly accessible and flexible, to ensure equitable access to grassroots communities and groups in fragile contexts that need this support most.

Increase capacity strengthening for implementation

Capacity strengthening needs and gaps among civil society continue to represent one of the primary barriers to accelerating action around implementing and monitoring SDG16, especially at grassroots and local levels. Without strong and independent civil society at all levels, any efforts to implement SDG16+ will undoubtedly fall short.

- 1) We call on all actors to improve capacity strengthening for civil society to respond to a variety of crises and conflicts, and to address gaps in evidence-based data collection and how to use this for effectively engaging policymakers and decision-makers.
- 2) We call on all actors to engage local and grassroots civil society that otherwise are difficult to reach and mobilize, buttressing existing civil society resources and tools to enable these local actors to support SDG16+ implementation at local levels.

Strengthen data, monitoring, and accountability

Reliable and independent data is critical to examine where progress is lagging behind in implementing SDG16+. With the rising tide of disinformation and “fake news”, governments and all stakeholders must double-down to support robust monitoring and accountability for SDG16+. Additionally, civil society must be empowered to lead the way in holding governments accountable.

- 1) In addition to scaling up investments in official statistical systems, we urge all member states and the UN system to utilise non-official data in tracking progress towards SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda, as well as strengthening and supporting non-official data providers at all levels.
- 2) Stimulate and empower independent organizations and think tanks to share and fortify research that validates or invalidates official statistical systems and political biases that occur.
- 3) In order to ensure the needs of groups in the most vulnerable situations are effectively reached, a Human Rights-based approach that sets clear standards and principles for collecting and analysing data, and that ensures there is no bias against minorities and traditionally excluded groups on the basis of gender, age, migratory status, race, or sexual orientation and gender identity, is crucial.
- 4) We urge that where commitments and policies to improve peace, justice, and inclusion are made, they include budgets for data collection and monitoring and evaluation to inform/monitor these policies and commitments. This should include not only the gathering of civil society data, but also investments in strengthening the capacities of NSOs through funding, partnerships, and learning exchanges.

Protect civil society and expand civic space

The COVID-19 pandemic has had dramatic effects on civic space throughout many countries and societies, with lockdowns and restrictions impacting basic fundamental political and civic freedoms. Using SDG16+ as a guide, Governments must fulfill their commitment to Leaving No One Behind by significantly expanding civic space and providing opportunities for civil society to engage in the planning, implementation and monitoring of SDG16+ and the 2030 Agenda.

- 1) We call on all governments to not only stem the tide of shrinking civic space within many countries and societies, but to actively promote and expand civic space and fundamental freedoms at all levels, and for all people, making a special effort to reach those traditionally marginalized within communities, and those furthest behind first.
- 2) We call on all actors to:
 - a) Hold states accountable for human rights violations and attacks on civil society, especially in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictive measures used as justification for reducing civic space.
 - b) Address issues related to the systematic deterioration of access to information and the protection of journalists, particularly in the context of “fake news” and the spread of misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic - this also benefits national and social cohesion as a whole.