

## Concept Note



### People-centred governance in a post-pandemic world

21-22 April 2022

Rome, Italy

Co-organized by UN DESA, IDLO and the Government of Italy

#### Introduction

Over the past 24 months, COVID-19 has threatened and, in some instances, reversed five years of development gains since the 2030 Agenda was adopted and continues to threaten and reverse decades more of hard-won progress. Millions have died and millions more have been pushed into poverty and insecurity, with the impact falling most severely on those already living in conditions of vulnerability, exclusion and fragility.

Governance has been identified as “an essential lever of the systematic transformations needed to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).” The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically emphasized the importance of the three pillars of Goal 16 – peaceful, inclusive societies, access to justice and effective, accountable institutions – for successful national responses, promoting an equitable, just and sustainable recovery and building resilience to future shocks and crises.

Discussions at the 2021 SDG 16 Conference and in many other forums, as well as the United Nations Secretary General’s Our Common Agenda Report, have indicated the overwhelming need for renewed social contracts between people and their governments, anchored in human rights, which help to build trust in governance and reinforce its legitimacy.

#### Objectives and approach of the Conference

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and the Government of Italy are organizing the SDG 16 Conference 2022, to be held from 21 to 22 April in a hybrid format.

Building on the outcome of the 2019 and 2021 editions, the Conference will explore how a people-centred approach to governance can help rebuild trust, accelerate progress towards sustainable development and tackle the challenges facing a post-COVID world.

The Conference will examine how COVID-19 has contributed to the root causes and drivers of conflict and instability, challenged the delivery of public services, threatened the rule of law and increased inequality

and exclusion. It will highlight innovations made in response to the pandemic, including approaches to build and sustain development in conflict-affected contexts, strengthen institutional resilience, promote people-centred justice, and address inequalities while leaving no one behind. The Conference will build on the growing body of evidence and evaluations of government responses and performance since the pandemic began.

In keeping with the “whole of society” approaches required to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the Conference will adopt a multistakeholder format, drawing on insights and experiences from governments, civil society, women and girls, youth and other key stakeholders working at the frontlines of pandemic response and recovery efforts around the world. It will place a particular emphasis on the challenges and perspective of people and groups that have been disproportionately affected and are most at risk of being left behind.

Participants will be invited to share experiences, challenges, good practices, and success stories of governance innovations that have emerged during the pandemic and will advance policies and partnerships that interlink goals and targets across the Sustainable Development Agenda.

The Conference will inform the 2022 High Level Political Forum on the theme of “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The HLPF will review some of the SDGs that have been most severely impacted by the pandemic, including SDG 4 on quality education, and SDG 5 on gender equality.

**Conference themes**

The Conference will address the following themes:

**Theme 1: Preventing conflict and sustaining peace in an increasingly fragile world.** Over the past year, we have seen growing violence and conflict as the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated tensions within and between countries. While the biggest impact has been in contexts of state fragility, the crisis has also decreased civic space, increased polarization and generated grievances across the development spectrum. Women and girls, youth and other groups living in conditions of marginalization have borne the brunt of conflict while often being unable to participate in decision-making during peacebuilding processes.

This theme will focus on identifying how COVID-19 is contributing to the root causes and drivers of conflict and instability and seek to identify solutions and preventive measures. It will examine approaches to build and sustain development in conflict affected contexts, counter growing polarization, and tackle disinformation and misinformation. Given the importance of gender equality for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, a particular emphasis will be placed on advancing the women, peace and security agenda.

**Theme 2: Building institutional resilience and enhancing the effectiveness, accountability and responsiveness of institutions.** The past year has seen the pandemic remain at the forefront of national and international agendas, rather than receding as was hoped for. What began as a massive shock on societies and institutions has turned into a factor of continuing, long-duration stress for institutions at all levels, creating new challenges and sometimes bringing public services to the brink of collapse. This has been observed in countries at all levels of development. In this context, this sub-theme will focus on the



identification of critical issues having emerged within the past 12 months, and on ways to improve the resilience and effectiveness of institutions in times of prolonged stress.

Discussions under this sub-theme will look at the following aspects: challenges, changes and innovations made in the delivery of public services in response to the pandemic (e.g. health, education, Internet, childcare), including e-services; lessons learned and ways forward to increase institutional preparedness and resilience to future crises and risks; advances made to increase collaboration and coordination across levels of government; solutions to enhance transparency and accountability in the public sector during the pandemic and beyond; and how the pandemic has spurred national reflections on how to bolster the capacity, professionalism and effectiveness of public servants, who have been central to pandemic responses.

**Theme 3: A new vision for the rule of law to address global challenges.** Even before COVID-19, more than 1.5-billion people had a justice problem they could not resolve. For many, barriers include lack of their awareness of rights, not being able to physically access a court, or pay for legal services. The justice gap continued to widen as the need for legal protection and services increased even as the ability to access justice and claim rights came under pressure from public health restrictions. COVID-19 aggravated the scale and impact of corruption, contributing to a crisis of confidence in governance.

Through the approach of a “new vision” for the rule of law, this theme will explore approaches to people-centred justice based on evidence and a better understanding of justice seeker’s needs including the particular justice challenges faced by women and girls. It will look at ways in which the rule of law can combat corruption and empower the less powerful to claim their human rights. It will also look at the importance of applying a justice lens to current and emerging issues such as climate change.

**Theme 4: Leaving no one behind: Ensuring inclusion, protection and participation.** Developments in the past 12 months have highlighted the dire human and social impacts of inequalities and exclusion in multiple dimensions – often exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic – and the risk they pose for social stability and sustainable development. It is more urgent than ever to address inequality in a structural, multi-pronged way.

The discussions in this segment will consider the progress made during the past two years and policy innovation in the following dimensions: establishing universal social protection systems; providing legal identity to all; enhancing access to education, housing and decent work opportunities, and addressing unpaid care work; increasing digital inclusivity; accelerating gender equality through the repeal of gender-discriminatory laws, changing damaging social norms, promoting gender parity and greater engagement of women in all spheres of decision-making, and eradicating violence against women and girls; sustaining and promoting stakeholder engagement through participatory decision-making (including e-participation and digital space), mechanisms to address grievances, and inclusive dialogues to chart pathways for the future; realizing commitments to young people and future generations.

### Outcomes of the Conference

As was the case for the 2019 and 2021 editions, the Conference’s main messages and key recommendations will be synthesized in an outcome document, which will be posted on the website of the Conference and submitted as an input to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

The theme for the 2022 HLPF, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), is " Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

While SDG 16 is not one of the goals being reviewed this year at HLPF, it remains an essential enabler for the SDGs being discussed, including SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 5 on gender equality. The Conference will bring together a cross-section of expertise from a diverse range of countries and regions to help:

- Provide substantive assessments and inputs into HLPF thematic reviews;
- Highlight the relevance of key dimensions of governance highlighted in SDG 16 to effectively respond to the pandemic and enable a more peaceful, just and inclusive recovery.

The main messages from the deliberations will be conveyed to the HLPF and will help to inform policy and programmes at the global, regional and national levels going forward.

### **Format**

The Conference will be held in a hybrid format and will be structured around plenary sessions over two-days. The plenary sessions will take place during the afternoon in local time, in order to enable participation from online speakers from all continents. In addition, activities will be planned in the morning of the two days for on-site participants.

Along with live events, pre-recorded products will be made available to attendees through the website before, during and after the Conference.

### **Participation and organization**

Experts from governments, the UN system and other international organizations, think tanks, academia, civil society organizations, and the private sector and other relevant stakeholders will be invited by the organizers. All participants will need to register through the Conference virtual platform.

### **Languages and documentation**

Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in English, French, Italian and Spanish for all sessions.

The documentation for the Conference will be available in English, French, Italian and Spanish. Presentations/papers/remarks will be made available online through the Conference website. The conclusions and recommendations of the Conference will also be translated and posted on the Conference website after the event.