

The Law Societies' Compact & Forum for SDG 16

Context

Today the rule of law is at risk. With a decline observed globally over the last three years,¹ establishing and maintaining the rule of law is now more than ever a fundamental imperative to promote social and economic development, human security, and access to justice for all.

At the core of the 2030 Agenda lies a clear understanding that human rights, peace and security, and development are deeply interlinked and mutually reinforcing. The United Nations Sustainable Goal 16 of *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions* focuses on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels.

As defenders of the rule of law and access to justice, lawyers play a critical role in protecting and upholding SDG Goal 16. In jurisdictions where lawyers and legal professionals are unable to carry out their duties, the rule of law and access to justice are weakened and effaced.

In this light, the World Bank Legal Vice Presidency is hosting and coordinating a new forum—the *Law Societies' Compact and Forum for SDG 16*—to amplify the voices of lawyers everywhere by connecting law societies across the globe. This Forum will coordinate, augment, and support rather than duplicate the efforts made by existing groups promoting the rule of law and access to justice at local, national, intergovernmental, and international levels.

¹ According to the Rule of Law Index 2020 of the World Justice Project.



Why the Law Societies' Compact and Forum for SDG 16?

Lawyers play a critical role in promoting access to justice for the least advantaged members of society. They provide legal representation and legal aid, and hold governments to account for failures to defend the rule of law. World Bank funded projects for improving access to justice, such as ones for developing mobile courts, legal clinics, alternative dispute resolution and mediation, depend heavily on the community of lawyers in places where these projects are run. This work is not without hurdles and requires cross-collaboration from existing networks such as NGOs and civil society groups. In addition, there is a growing need for support from fellow legal professionals for more effective outcomes.

What will the Law Societies' Compact and Forum for SDG 16 do?

- Harness the collective perspective, purpose and power of the global legal profession towards the advancement of the rule of law and access to justice as a tool for sustainable development.
- Connect law societies and their member lawyers in every country of the world and provide them with access to the knowledge and resources they need to build a robust and independent legal profession.
- Raise awareness of the challenges faced by legal practitioners across the globe, creating a safe space for discussion.
- Co-ordinate the existing work of lawyer collectives across the world in implementing tangible ideas to help countries achieve the rule of law and access to justice in support of sustainable development.
- This initiative has been developed by The Legal Vice-presidency of World Bank Group and The Law Society of England & Wales with additional input from the French National Bar Council and the Paris Bar.
- The Compact and Forum is structured as a sister organization to the World Bank-hosted Global Forum on Law, Justice and Development (GFLJD). It will share the GFLJD Secretariat.

Targets of SDG Goal 16

- Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.
- End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.
- Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.
- By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organised crime.
- Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.
- Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
- Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.
- Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.
- By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.
- Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.
- Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.
- Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

How will it Work?

To build the capacity of its members, the Compact and Forum could potentially offer the following deliverables:

- A bespoke training component to support the members with training through dialogue, as well as the transfer of skills and expertise.
- A research component to generate learning, documentation and systems that could contribute to the improvement of the rule of law and access to justice in the jurisdictions of members.
- A partnership component to work collaboratively with a wide variety of stakeholders, which may include experts with specialist knowledge in relevant areas for the benefit of the initiative.
- Working groups composed of members on a voluntary basis, to draw action plans for thematic priorities selected by the Board among members' suggestions.

How Can my Law Society Join?

Membership to the Law Societies' Compact and Forum for SDG 16 is open to:

- law societies, bar associations and similar collectives/professional societies of lawyers ("law societies"); and
- societies of lawyers such as the IBA and UIA

that are prepared to commit to the Compact.

Please note that the membership criteria above are subject to change. Further, the Law Societies' Compact and Forum for SDG 16 will adopt integrity-vetting mechanisms before accepting membership applications from law societies to ensure it admits only those members whose commitment towards the overall goals will be beyond doubt.

Interested in joining?

Contact us at globalforumljd@worldbank.org

Website (Coming soon)

