

THE DANISH  
INSTITUTE FOR  
HUMAN RIGHTS

LINKING THE  
UNIVERSAL  
PERIODIC  
REVIEW TO  
THE SDGs



## HUMAN RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A MUTUALLY REINFORCING CONNECTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is explicitly grounded in international human rights. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek to realise the human rights of all – and **more than 90%** of the targets directly reflect elements of international human rights and labour standards. The pledge to “**leave no one behind**” mirrors the fundamental human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality.

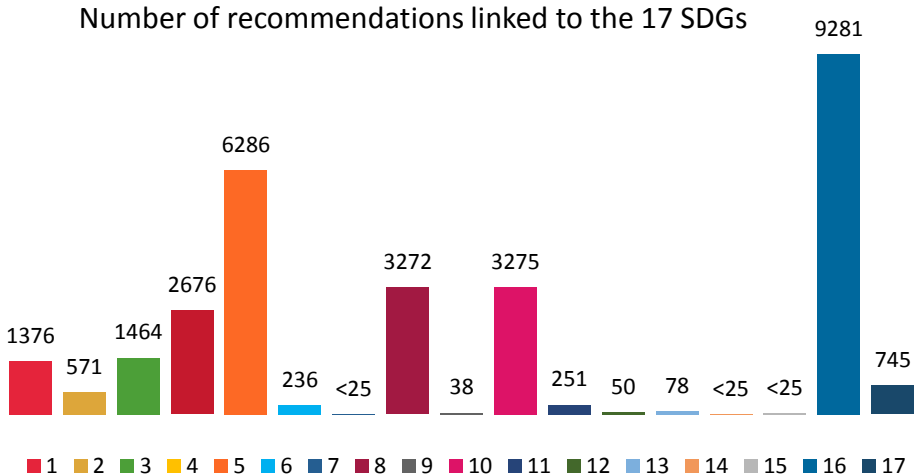
The 2030 Agenda and human rights are thereby **tied together in a mutually reinforcing way**. Human rights offer guidance for the implementation of the SDGs, while the SDGs contribute to the realization of human rights.



### A human rights-based approach to the SDGs:

- ✓ strengthens accountability through **legally binding human rights standards**
- ✓ provides for integrated implementation that enhances **efficiency and policy coherence**
- ✓ is guided by human rights mechanisms to **assess implementation progress** and ensure that **no one is left behind**

## LINKING UPR RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SDGS



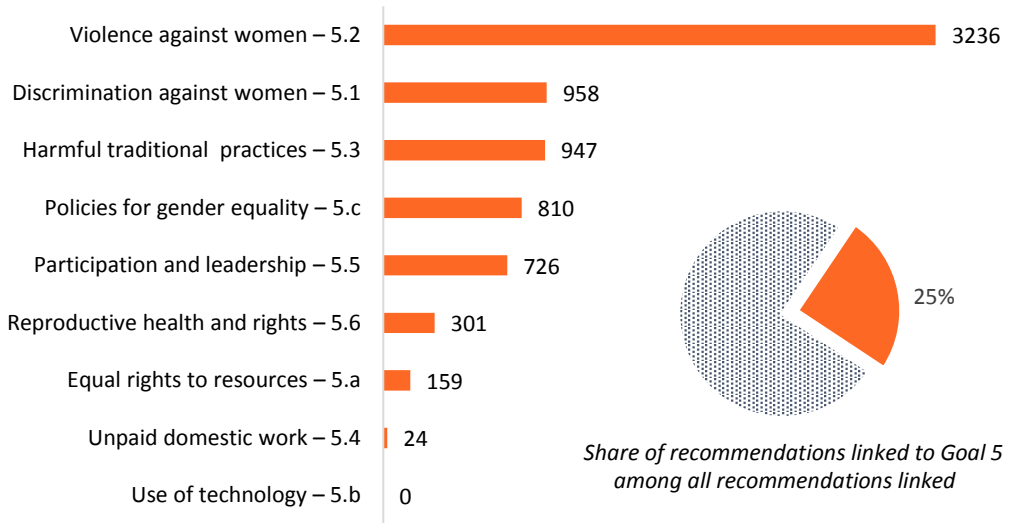
Over the two cycles of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), **more than 50,000 recommendations** have been issued by States. Using an innovative and experimental **data mining procedure**, it has so far been possible to link **more than 50%** of these to specific SDG targets. The above chart illustrates how recommendations are linked across the 17 Goals. The data shows that:

- In principle, UPR recommendations relate to the **full range of Goals under the 2030 Agenda**.
- A **majority** of recommendations address **equality** (SDG 5 and 10) and **peace, justice and accountable institutions** (SDG 16).
- Thousands of recommendations are centred on **economic and social rights** (Goals 1-4 and 6), **labour rights and conditions** (SDG 8), and **international cooperation** (SDG 17).
- Emerging human rights frontiers such as **affordable and clean energy** (Goal 7), **sustainable consumption and production** (Goal 12) and **climate change** (Goal 13) may merit more attention in future UPR processes.



## GENDER EQUALITY & WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

### UPR recommendations linked to Goal 5



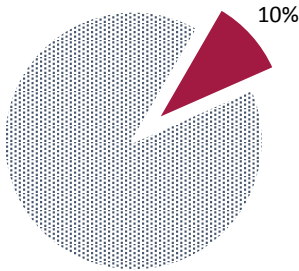
**Gender equality** is an issue that enjoys significant attention in the UPR.

More than a quarter of all UPR recommendations relate to women’s rights and gender equality, and over 6,000 recommendations can be linked directly to one of the targets under SDG 5. Almost half of these recommendations link to SDG target 5.2 to **eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls**. Another 13% of the recommendations deal with **harmful traditional practices** such as FGM or **child, early and forced marriages**. Other focus areas include women’s reproductive health and rights (target 5.6) and women’s participation in decision-making (target 5.5).

Women’s rights are not confined to Goal 5, but reflected in a cross-cutting manner. This includes issues such as women’s equal access to education (4.5) and the labour market (8.5), and the challenge of maternal mortality (3.1).



## DECENT WORK AND HUMAN RIGHTS: TARGET 8.7



*"Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms."*

Violations of fundamental labour standards, such as the worst forms of child labour, slavery and human trafficking, are regularly addressed in the UPR. Consequently, 10% of UPR recommendations linked to the SDGs address target 8.7 on **core labour standards**. The UPR recommendations hold a range of concrete proposals to protect the victims and vulnerable populations, close gaps in legislation, and eliminate root causes for these phenomena.



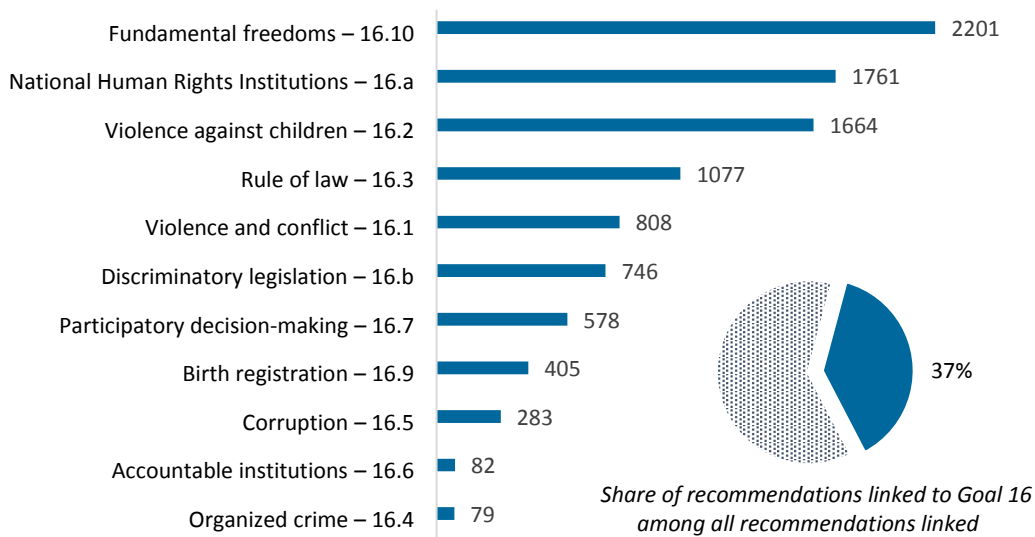
## ON SECOND SIGHT: HUMAN RIGHTS AND DATA

Some of the links between the UPR and the SDGs are rather intuitive, as exemplified by target 8.7 above. However, a systematic linking of the entire 2030 Agenda also yields some more surprising connections. For example, **172 recommendations** can be linked to target 17.18, which calls on States to increase the availability of high-quality and timely disaggregated data. In the UPR, States have recommended systematic data collection of data on specific issues such as domestic violence and on vulnerable population groups, including minorities and indigenous peoples. Finally, privacy and data protection are matters that are increasingly reflected in recommendations.



## STRONG INSTITUTIONS – PEACEFUL SOCIETIES

### UPR recommendations linked to Goal 16



SDG 16 encompasses a number of fundamental freedoms and civil and political rights. Not surprisingly, this is the Goal with the strongest links to the UPR: more than **one third** of all linked recommendations are connected to the Goal of achieving Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Exploring the links at target level provides additional insights.

Target 16.10 covers “**fundamental freedoms**” including the right to freedom of assembly and association and freedom of expression. States have addressed the situation of journalists, trade union members and human rights defenders in their recommendations, as well as citizen’s access to information. UPR recommendations can therefore serve as a valuable source of data for monitoring these two issues, which are equally the focus of the corresponding indicators of the SDG monitoring framework.

In the UPR, States urge the establishment of **National Human Rights Institutions** (NHRIs) and provide guidance on their mandate and independent work. Target 16.a is connected to a high number of recommendations through the associated indicator, which measures the “existence of a **National Human Rights Institution** in accordance with the Paris Principles”. This represents a critical structural indicator to deliver on the central promise of the SDGs: realizing the human rights of all.

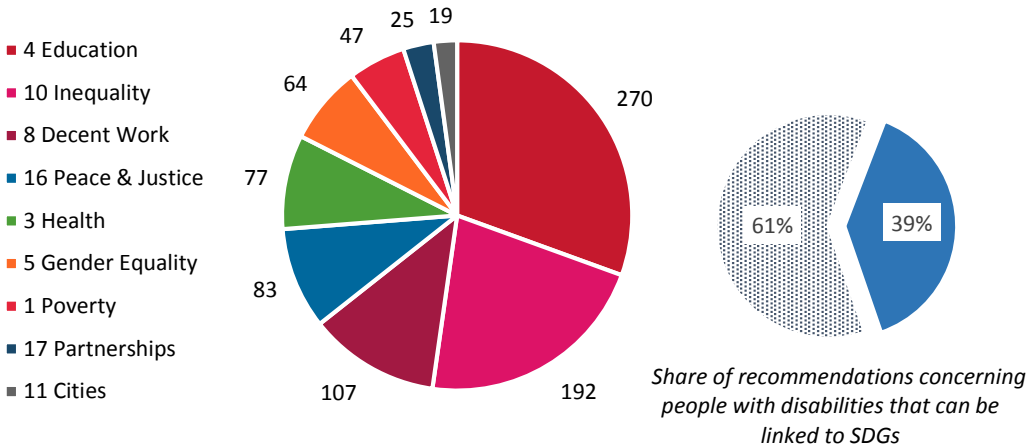


Target 16.2 calls for the **protection of children from violence and exploitation**, including through trafficking. It therefore links to an issue that enjoys significant attention in the UPR process: children’s rights. In their recommendations, states have highlighted the persistence of corporal punishment at home and in schools, the ill treatment of children in detention, and other forms of violence and cruel treatment.

Encompassing **the rule of law and access to justice**, target 16.3 captures a key issues that are regularly addressed in UPR recommendations. States have pointed out the right to a fair trial as well as the impunity of law enforcement officers and other state agents for human rights violations. UPR recommendations provide valuable guidance by pointing to particular vulnerable groups whose access to justice is limited, such as victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse, ethnic minorities, or LGBTI persons.

Finally, the **abolishment of discriminatory legislation**, captured in SDG target 16.b, concerns an area where the human rights system can make a significant contribution to guiding and monitoring the implementation of the SDGs. UPR recommendations can help identify specific legal provisions and policies that require reform and therefore generate a positive impact at a structural level.

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



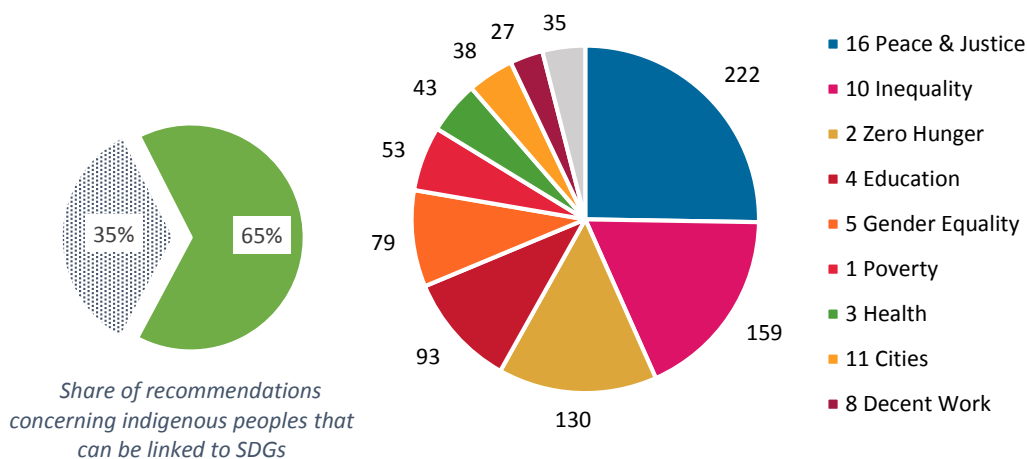
**Persons with disabilities** are specifically mentioned in just a handful of SDG targets. However, their equal rights and access to services are relevant throughout the Agenda. In total, 3% of all UPR recommendations deal with the rights of persons with disabilities. 39% of these recommendations can be directly linked to the SDGs, whereas the rest is human rights-specific.

Almost a quarter (22%) of recommendations linked to the SDGs is centred on **inequality and discrimination**, as reflected in Goal 10. Beyond that, recommendations deal with specific sectoral issues, with **education** (31%) being the most salient area. This includes equal access to education (target 4.5) and an inclusive learning environment (4.a) as well as combating stigma and prejudice towards people with disabilities (4.7).

Strong links are also found to equal access to **employment opportunities** (12%) and **healthcare** (8%). Under **Goal 16**, recommendations address their participation in decision-making (16.7), access to information, and the protection of children with disabilities (16.2). The physical accessibility of public spaces and transport system, an issue addressed specifically in **SDG 11**, is only mentioned in 2% of the recommendations in concern.



## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



The situation of **indigenous peoples** is addressed in about 1,000 UPR recommendations. More than a quarter of those linked to the SDGs are connected to **Goal 16**. The main issue addressed is **participation and consultation in decision-making** (16.7), while others **concern human rights defenders** (16.10), **access to justice** (16.3), and **birth registration** (16.9). Another 19% address the **elimination of discriminatory laws and practices** and call for “closing the gap” in opportunities and life outcomes (10.3).

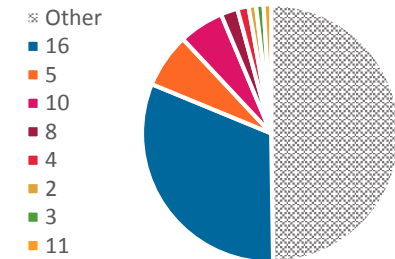
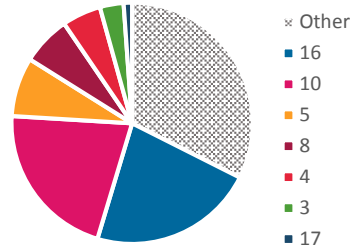
Another key matters of concern for indigenous peoples is their **collective rights to lands and territories** (2.3). Numerous recommendations call for the protection of indigenous peoples from **forced eviction** and **environmental pollution**, particularly in the context of **extractive industries** (12.4).

Finally, **education** is the subject of 11% of linked recommendations, with a majority among them calling for equal access to all levels of education (4.5). Beyond this, the analysis points to two other targets of particular importance for indigenous peoples: a **learning environment** that is safe and inclusive, including through education in indigenous languages (4.a), and a **curriculum** that promotes appreciation for cultural diversity (4.7).



## UPR AND SDGS IN DENMARK

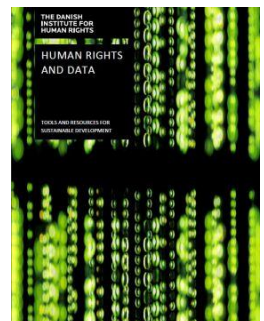
An evaluation of Denmark's UPR recommendations shows that Denmark's primary challenges for a rights-based approach to the SDGs are to find in the areas of **institutions** (Goal 16) and **inequality and discrimination** (Goal 10). One issue brought forward by numerous States, which connects to both Goals 10 and 16, is the lack of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law.



With a view to the recommendations Denmark has issued to other States, there is a strong focus on Goal 16. A large number of recommendations addresses **torture and other forms of ill treatment** (16.1), followed by issues pertaining to **rule of law** (16.3) and **freedom of expression** (16.10).

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND DATA

The Danish Institute for Human Rights has issued a publication on human rights and data in the context of the 2030 Agenda, advocating the creation of a **pluralistic ecosystem of data** for monitoring SDG implementation. The report contains an extensive analysis of the SDG indicator framework from a human rights perspective, as well as guidance on the use of human rights recommendations and participatory data collection.



## THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process to review the human rights records of all UN Member States. It provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and fulfil their obligations. Reviews take place through an interactive discussion between the State under review and other Member States, during which States can raise questions or comments and make recommendations. The ultimate aim is to improve the human rights situation globally, addressing violations wherever they occur. The UPR process equally provides assistance to build the capacity of States to address human rights challenges and share best practices. The UPR just concluded its second cycle, which focused on the implementation of previously accepted recommendations.



## THE DATA MINING METHOD

This analysis is the result of a collaboration between the Danish Institute for Human Rights and the social innovator company [Specialisterne](#). It draws on a combined dataset of UPR recommendations stored in the [Universal Human Rights Index](#) of the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**, and the **UPR Info Database of Recommendations**. More than 50,000 UPR recommendations (including “noted” recommendations) have been “mined” by using supervised machine learning. This implies training a classification algorithm to detect recommendations similar to a representative sample with confirmed links (the “ground truth”), based on expressions in the text and existing meta-tags from both databases. Recommendations were linked to a human rights-relevant set of 70 out of the 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda. So far, at least one SDG link has been identified for more than 50% of all recommendations. Among the recommendations linked, 15% are connected to more than one Goal.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND WAYS FORWARD

The present analysis has **confirmed the potential** for pursuing **integrated approaches** to human rights and SDG implementation. Although not all UPR recommendations can be linked to specific SDG targets, it has been shown that there is **ample potential** for **using human rights monitoring to assess progress and gaps** in SDG implementation:

- Human rights monitoring mechanisms can clearly and to a very large extent guide and assess SDG implementation, including by identifying salient issues and vulnerable groups, and by suggesting concrete measures to overcome gaps.
- States can enhance efficiency, coherence and accountability by linking their human rights reporting to the SDG follow-up and review.
- There is a clear potential for extracting data from the human rights system, using innovative methods and technology.

The analysis equally holds important information for those involved with the UPR. For example, UPR recommendations give limited attention to issues such as climate change, access to water and energy, and regulation of private sector, despite their important human rights implications. Moreover, the more general and broad UPR recommendations have proven difficult to link to specific SDGs. This may reflect a broader challenge of operationalising and monitoring implementation of such recommendations. Implementation could potentially be strengthened by issuing more specific recommendations and, where relevant, point to linkages with the SDGs from the outset.

Overall, the linking of UPR recommendations to the SDGs has reaffirmed the synergies between human rights and sustainable development. Realizing these synergies in practice will require robust and effective national implementation processes, built on human rights principles such as transparency, accountability and participation.