

# THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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This chapter provides an overview of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and discusses the link between the SDGs and criminal justice systems. We utilise the 2016 Stockholm Resilience Centre classification of SDGs into three categories: 1) biosphere SDGs, 2) economy SDGs, and 3) society SDGs, to discuss the SDGs and provide examples of criminology and criminal justice research that fit each SDG. The main topics covered in this chapter relate to the understanding of deviance and crime (e.g., juvenile delinquency, sexual harassment, hate crimes, rural crime, organised crime, illegal production of drugs, white collar crimes, illegal construction, war and environmental crime) and social reaction to crimes (e.g., tolerance of sexual harassment, acceptance of illegal building), as well as the exploration of law enforcement and discussion of various policing models (e.g., community policing, proactive policing, gender perspectives in policing).

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# CILJI TRAJNOSTNEGA RAZVOJA ZDRUŽENIH NARODOV, KRIMINALITETA, KRIMINOLOGIJA IN KAZENSKO PRAVOSODJE

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Poglavje predstavlja pregled ciljev trajnostnega razvoja Združenih narodov in obravnava povezavo med cilji trajnostnega razvoja in sistemi kazenskega pravosodja. Uporabili smo delitev 2016 Stockholm Resilience Centre, ki je cilje trajnostnega razvoja razvrstil v tri kategorije: 1) cilje trajnostnega razvoja biosfere, 2) cilje trajnostnega razvoja gospodarstva in 3) cilje trajnostnega razvoja družbe. To klasifikacijo uporabljamo za pregled ciljev trajnostnega razvoja in primere raziskav kriminologije in kazenskega pravosodja v povezavi s cilji trajnostnega razvoja. Glavne obravnavane teme so povezane tako z razumevanjem odklonskosti in kriminalitete (npr. mladoletniško prestopništvo, spolno nadlegovanje, zločini iz sovraštva, kriminaliteta na podeželju, organizirana kriminaliteta, nezakonita proizvodnja drog, kriminaliteta belih ovratnikov, nezakonita gradnja, vojna in ekološka kriminaliteta) kot tudi z raziskovanjem organov pregona in razpravo o različnih modelih policijske dejavnosti (npr. policijsko delo v skupnosti, proaktivno policijsko delo, vidik spola v policijskem delu).



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## **1 Introduction**

On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 70/1, entitled “Transforming the World: The Agenda for Sustainable Development”. This resolution consists of 17 sustainable goals and 169 targets (see Appendix) that provide a universal framework for the realisation of human rights and environmental sustainability across a range of issue areas. In the introduction, the United Nations outlines its ambitious aim: “This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace and greater freedom” (United Nations, n.d.b.; United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Reducing crime and enhancing professionalism within the criminal justice system significantly contribute to the quality of people's lives (Blaustein et al., 2018). Furthermore, the United Nations promised to address several critical issues for humanity: “We resolve, between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. We also resolve to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive, and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity, and decent work for all, considering different levels of national development and capacities.” As the United Nations astutely notes in the Agenda, “Never before have world leaders pledged common action and endeavour across such a broad and universal policy agenda.”

At the core of the ambition to make the world a better and more sustainable place are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 subgoals or targets. The SDGs focus on enhancing people's quality of life, protecting planet Earth from degradation, ensuring general prosperity and peace, and building partnerships. These SDGs are based on established instruments of international law such as the Charter of the United Nations (United Nations, 1945), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948), international human rights treaties (e.g., Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948; Geneva Conventions, 1949; International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2010), and the Millennium Declaration (United Nations General Assembly, 2000).

The agenda is based on a global analysis of many aspects of people's lives and societies. It includes a future vision of global development, aiming for a better and more sustainable future. The agenda addresses crucial topics such as building strong economic foundations for all countries, promoting humane migration, fostering community cohesion and personal security, establishing resilient local communities, protecting the environment and living beings, creating sustainable production and consumption, reducing pollution, and protecting natural resources. However, fully implementing the SDGs is possible only in peaceful and secure societies. Thus, the United Nations Agenda includes fostering anti-war efforts, building peaceful and inclusive societies with equal access to justice based on human rights, establishing effective rules of law and good governance at all levels, and creating transparent, effective, and accountable institutions. Multicultural understanding is crucial for achieving several goals. Therefore, tolerance, mutual respect, an ethic of global citizenship, and shared responsibility are vital (United Nations, n.d.b.).

Implementing such an extensive and ambitious global reform in just 15 years (between 2015 and 2030) requires significant political will, public awareness, and coordinated action at the global, continental, national, regional, and local levels. While local social, political, economic, and cultural contexts matter for development, the United Nations SDGs – common to all countries regardless of their geographic location or economic development – serve as a common denominator for global development and a better future. Member states are responsible for respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction based on race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth, disability, or other status. Therefore, governments worldwide must follow up and review their national, regional, and local developments.

The United Nations Agenda includes not only the 17 SDGs but also 169 targets and 231 unique indicators (e.g., United Nations, n.d.a.). These indicators should be used to help measure the progress in achieving the SDGs and targets, as well as identify potential problems with the achievements. For example, within SDG 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions (“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels”; United Nations, n.d.a.), target 16.5 seeks to “substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.” The

two indicators listed for this target, 16.5.1 (“proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months”) and 16.5.2 (“proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and that paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials during the previous 12 months”), could be successfully measured through scholarly research in the field of criminology and criminal justice. Similarly, target 16.6 strives to “develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels” and one of its indicators, 16.6.2 (“proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services”), is quite suitable for exploration using the approaches developed by criminology and criminal justice scholars.

This book explores the latest criminology and criminal justice research that focuses on the SDGs and related targets. In this chapter, we first introduce the SDGs. To illustrate how criminology and criminal justice research can help with the measurement of SDG targets and indicators, we provide a brief outline of examples of existing research on the topic. We then describe the book’s structure and include a quick overview of each chapter. The chapters in the book present cutting-edge criminology and criminal justice research aimed at directly addressing the SDGs. While this book primarily focuses on SDG 16, the chapters cover a variety of targets and indicators associated with this SDG. We conclude this chapter by discussing recommendations for, and challenges of, future SDG-related research in criminology and criminal justice.

## **2 Overview of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Related Criminology and Criminal Justice Research**

A detailed description of the United Nations SDGs can be accessed on the United Nations webpage (United Nations, n.d.b.). We also provide an outline of SDGs and targets in the Appendix. In the following brief overview of the SDGs, we include selected references from the criminology and criminal justice literature to illustrate how research in these fields can contribute to the discussion about SDGs and related targets and indicators (Blaustein et al., 2018; Iturralde, 2020; Redo, 2015, 2017, 2021; Rodriguez-Spahia & Barberet, 2020). Our presentation includes a discussion of SDGs, related research, and key policy documents.

Based on their focus, the Stockholm Resilience Centre (2016) classified SDGs into three categories: 1) biosphere SDGs, 2) economy SDGs, and 3) society SDGs. We use this classification to provide a brief overview of the SDGs and examples of criminology and criminal justice research.

## 2.1 Biosphere Sustainable Development Goals

The category of biosphere SDGs includes four SDGs. SDG 6 (“Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”) emphasises that achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water is vital for the survival of all beings. The United Nations points out that it is necessary to improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping, and minimising the release of hazardous chemicals and materials in the water, soil, and air; halving the proportion of untreated wastewater, and increasing recycling and safe reuse. Additionally, increasing water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensuring sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity are crucial to substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity (United Nations, n.d.b.). Eman et al. (2020) studied water governance and water crimes in Europe. Their study comprises criminological perspectives on water crimes, focusing on green criminology, environmental and organised crime, the politics of water rights, and policing water crimes. It also includes case studies of water protection and water crimes in the Canary Islands, Cyprus, Slovenia, Spain, and South Africa. Although the protection of these resources is critical for survival, green crimes are usually perceived as less serious than traditional crimes. In a study on Estonian police views of environmental or green crimes, Vallmüür (2019) discovered that police officers were much more likely to perceive green police misconduct as less serious, less likely to assess it as a violation of official rules, and less likely to view it as deserving discipline compared to traditional police misconduct.

SDGs 13, 14, and 15 can be viewed within the larger perspective of living environment protection. At a time when the world community is “standing at the brink of climate calamity” (United Nations, n.d.a., n.d.b.), it is critical to address the climate change crisis. Thus, SDG 13 (“Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”) emphasises the need to take urgent action to combat climate change. With increasing issues such as coastal eutrophication, ocean acidification, ocean warming, plastic pollution, and overfishing creating an “ocean emergency,”

the United Nations developed SDG 14 (“Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development”). This goal requires countries worldwide to take urgent actions to safeguard and protect the Earth’s largest ecosystem. As the world faces the largest species extinction event since the age of the dinosaurs, the United Nations established SDG 15 (“Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”) to prompt a fundamental shift in humanity’s relationship with nature (United Nations, n.d.a., n.d.b.).

To address these three SDGs, existing criminological research on green criminology, rural criminology, and environmental security provides examples of how violations of basic rules regarding the proper use and treatment of soil, air, and water can harm living species. Ideas from green criminology research in Global North countries (Ceccato, 2024) have also expanded to different regions of the world, leading to recent efforts to raise public and professional awareness about the sustainability of our planet. These studies suggest that more attention needs to be paid to illicit abuse of natural resources, deforestation, new-era colonisation, and the use of countries in the Global South as dumping grounds for e-waste and other dangerous organised criminal activities that generate substantial profits while posing significant health and environmental risks (e.g., Blaustein et al., 2020; Ceccato, 2024; Eman & Meško, 2014; Eman et al., 2013; Iturralde, 2020). In this context, rural perspectives deserve special attention because many environmental threats occur in rural settings (Bowden & Meško, 2025; Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014).

## **2.2 Economy Sustainable Development Goals**

Four SDGs focus on the economy. The first SDG in the group, SDG 8 (“Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”), emphasises economic growth within national contexts, particularly in Global South countries. It promotes development-oriented policies that support productive activities, create decent jobs, foster entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including access to financial services (Kowalski, 2021). The United Nations underscores the importance of reducing the proportion of youth who are not in employment, education or training,

and taking immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and ensure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers (United Nations, n.d.b.). Studies by scholars such as Zhang (2007, 2008) explore the nature of human trafficking, the structures of networks used by traffickers, and the severity of victim suffering.

SDG 9 (“Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation”) promotes the development of quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on ensuring affordable and equitable access for all (United Nations, n.d.b.). Promoting innovation within the police force is crucial in their efforts against crime. Crime mapping using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) provides an excellent example of integrating policing with modern technology (Meško et al., 2023). This technology enables the police to better understand crime patterns and distribute their resources efficiently to ensure safety and security for all individuals (Eman & Hacin, 2021). Similarly, recent studies on the use of drones by police demonstrate how innovative technology can enhance police capabilities (e.g., Liu et al., 2023).

SDG 10 (“Reduce inequality within and among countries”) emphasises reducing income inequality within and among countries. The United Nations argues that it is necessary to progressively achieve and sustain income growth for the bottom population (United Nations, n.d.b.) and continue income convergence, despite the COVID-19 pandemic triggering the largest income inequality in recent times (United Nations, n.d.a., n.d.b.). Meško (2018) presented results from a regional study on comparative criminology, focusing on crime and indicators such as wealth, social processes, migration, and quality of governance in Southeastern Europe. His research indicated that, alongside poverty, many other crime-related, security, and other threats were prevalent in nine of the ten poorest European countries. However, the situation has not substantially changed since 2018; international studies show that the military conflict in Ukraine has even deepened poverty in Southeast and Eastern Europe (Meško, 2018; The World Bank, n.d.).

SDG 12 (“Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”) emphasises the need for countries to adopt sustainable consumption and production practices.



The UN highlights that high-income countries have a material footprint per capita that is ten times greater than that of low-income countries (Lynch, 2020; United Nations, n.d.a., n.d.b.) and despite previous calls to minimise fossil fuel consumption, they have increased consumption in response to recent global crises. In a scholarly examination of the ecological impact of the wealthy, Lynch et al. (2019) found that the consumption of “luxury commodities” (e.g., super yachts, super homes, luxury vehicles, private jets) by a selected few in the United States results in a CO<sub>2</sub> footprint larger than that of entire smaller nations.

### **2.3 Society Sustainable Development Goals**

The largest number of SDGs, eight in total, deal with society (Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2016). These SDGs are, at the same time, the most suitable to be explored in criminology and criminal justice research.

SDG 1 (“End poverty in all its forms everywhere”) emphasises the importance of reducing the proportion of men, women, and children of all ages living in poverty. This goal requires the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems to achieve substantial coverage of people with low incomes and ensure that everyone, regardless of gender or age, has equal rights to economic resources. It also emphasises access to essential services, ownership, and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology, and financial services. Furthermore, these systems should reduce the exposure of people with low incomes vulnerability from climate-related extreme events and other economic, social, and environmental shocks and disasters (United Nations, n.d.b.). Challenges related to this goal are explored in the work of Hebberecht and Baillergeau (2012), who studied European perspectives on social crime prevention based on the activities of the welfare state and people’s constitutional rights to safety, security, and psychological and physical integrity. They observed that social crime prevention was losing effectiveness due to neoliberal policies, social differentiation, cultural conflicts, and the marginalised position of immigrants and lower social classes. Conversely, there has been a rise in deterrent situational prevention measures. Therefore, their findings underscore the significance of SDG 1, establishing it as a top priority for governments worldwide.

SDG 2 (“End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”) emphasises the importance of eradicating hunger and ensuring access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food for all, particularly those experiencing poverty and vulnerability. This goal underscores the need to strengthen national agricultural systems, enhance food production, and ensure healthy, high-quality nutrition for everyone. It is crucial to maintain ecosystems that enhance resilience to climate change, including extreme weather events, drought, floods, and other disasters, while also progressively improving land and soil quality to reduce hunger and improve nutrition (United Nations, n.d.b.). Research in green criminology has addressed this goal by focusing on sustainable practices and ensuring crime-free activities in nature related to the proper use and treatment of water, soil, and air (Eman et al., 2009, 2013; Meško et al., 2012). Ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture are crucial aspects of sustainability discussed in criminological literature, particularly in green criminology and victimology. This literature highlights “invisible” victimisations in social science debates, such as threats to food safety and consumer protection challenges (Mičović et al., 2011a, 2011b).

SDG 3 (“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”) addresses various aspects of quality of life, including improving medical services for pregnant women, reducing the global maternal mortality ratio, preventing deaths of newborns and children under five years old, and combating epidemics such as AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases, hepatitis, water-borne diseases, and other infectious diseases. Targets also focus on reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment, promoting mental health and well-being, and strengthening prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful alcohol use. Another priority is reducing deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents. The SDGs emphasise universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including family planning, information and education, and integrating reproductive health into national strategies and programmes. Achieving universal health coverage, ensuring financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all are also critical (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.). It’s crucial to significantly reduce deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals, air, water, and soil pollution and contamination (United Nations, n.d.b.). Research in criminology and criminal justice can contribute to

addressing these challenges. For example, while research on the direct effect of pollution on human health is still emerging (Wu et al., 2021), extensive research exists on drug trafficking, drug-related crimes, and the relationship between drug addiction and involvement in crime (Anderson et al., 2002; French et al., 2000; Strang et al., 2009).

SDG 4 (“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”) emphasises that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education. It also stresses the importance of ensuring that all children complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education, leading to effective learning outcomes. Additionally, the goal highlights the necessity for equal access to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university, to increase the number of youth and adults equipped with relevant skills for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship (United Nations, n.d.b.). The right to education is recognised as a fundamental human right (UNESCO, n.d.), and ensuring the quality of schooling, a supportive school climate, non-violent environments, and motivated teachers are critical. However, recent incidents of school violence and rampage killings among school children and personnel are concerning (Gec & Stojanovic, 2023; R. R., 2024). Studies such as the International Self-Reported Delinquency Study (n.d.) provide insights into the prevalence and patterns of school-related delinquency and victimisation globally, offering opportunities for evidence-based policy approaches.

SDG 5 (“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”) emphasises the importance of ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls worldwide, as well as eliminating violence against them in both public and private spheres, including trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of exploitation. The United Nations stresses the urgency of eliminating harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation, and other severe forms of violence (United Nations, n.d.b.). Recent studies on violence against women and children highlight the prevalence of attitudes that support domestic violence across cultures, underscoring the need for increased awareness campaigns and the promotion of a culture of non-violence. Research also reveals that femicide manifests differently in various cultures, requiring tailored social responses and sensitivity (Hacin & Meško, 2024; Johnson et al., 2008; Molnar & Aebi, 2024).

SDG 7 (“Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”) emphasises governments’ responsibility to ensure universal access to energy by significantly increasing the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix and doubling the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency. Energy plays a crucial role in all aspects of human life, necessitating sustainable and clean energy sources to support various activities and developmental needs (United Nations, n.d.b.). Fetzer (2023) examined the implementation of energy price guarantees in the UK, highlighting that this policy disproportionately affected residents in low-energy efficiency properties. The study also linked areas experiencing energy price shocks with increased incidents of traditional crimes like burglaries (Fetzer, 2023). In a study focusing on rural Colorado, criminologists Opsal and O’Connor Shelley (2014) investigated crimes associated with energy extraction, particularly in the oil and natural gas sectors, emphasising the environmental and social consequences of exploitative industry practices within the framework of green criminology. Additionally, threats to energy infrastructure, combined with water resources, from potential terrorist and cyber attacks, such as those targeting river power plants, are highlighted (Eman et al., 2020).

SDG 11 (“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”) focuses on building resilient communities by ensuring access to adequate, secure, and affordable housing and essential services for all. It also emphasises the need for safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, and improvement of road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with particular attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons (United Nations, n.d.b.). A notable example of a national initiative addressing this SDG is the research (2015–2018 and 2018–2024) conducted by the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, on local safety and security. This research has organised international conferences on local safety and security (Meško & Lobnikar, 2016) and influenced policy-making in regional safety and security (Meško & Hacin, 2023a; Meško et al., 2018, 2021) to promote quality of life, safety, and security. Meško and Eman (2024) summarise that while all SDGs are essential for setting local priorities in Slovenia's sustainable development, activities related to SDG 16 are crucial for establishing strong institutions, good governance, and inclusive partnerships involving businesses and civil society in policy development and implementation. They advocate for raising awareness among local municipalities

about the significance of research in their activities. The project led to nine national conferences supported by the Slovenian Association of Municipalities, fostering collaboration between researchers, local governments, and residents.

The primary focus of the book is on SDG 16 (“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”), which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions globally. The United Nations emphasises the reduction of all forms of violence and related death rates worldwide, the eradication of abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence against children, and the promotion of the rule of law at national and international levels, ensuring equal access to justice for all (United Nations, n.d.b.). Legitimacy is a fundamental element of inclusive and efficient criminal justice institutions that provide equal justice and fair treatment to all individuals (Hacin & Meško, 2020). To achieve sustainable peace, safety, and security, criminal justice institutions (but especially the police) must enforce the legal rules in a predictable and just manner, including the individuals in the process of addressing and resolving security threats (Meško & Hacin, 2023b, 2024; Kutnjak Ivković & Habersfeld, 2015, 2019; Kutnjak Ivković et al., 2022; Long et al., 2013). Studies indicate that procedural justice – how individuals perceive they are treated by authorities – is crucial both externally and in interactions between the police and the public (e.g., Meško & Tankebe, 2015; Peacock et al., 2021; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003) and internally, within police organisations (e.g., Peacock et al., 2023; Reisig et al., 2012; Wolfe & Lawson, 2020). The legitimacy of policing is also vital. Meško et al. (2024) examined residents' perceptions of police legitimacy and its impact on their support for community policing, cooperation with police officers, and correlations between police officers' self-legitimacy and their endorsement of community policing practices.

## **2.4 SDG on building and maintaining partnerships**

SDG 17 (“Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”) emphasises the importance of building and maintaining partnerships for the SDGs across all three categories (e.g., Pereira et al., 2022). This goal underscores the need for policy and institutional coherence and multi-stakeholder partnerships at all levels of social organisation, from local to

international. Partnerships are essential for connecting stakeholders, fostering engagement, and assigning responsibilities (United Nations, n.d.b.). The SDGs have been integrated into European Union policy documents, influencing national and local policies across most Member States. Reviews of these policies indicate that the SDGs significantly shape priorities at national, regional, and local levels (Meško & Hacin, in print). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), along with criminological and criminal justice research, play pivotal roles in understanding the causes, patterns, and responses to crime and other threats to safety, security, and quality of life. They contribute significantly to local safety and security, crime prevention, and building resilient communities. The following section outlines the book's structure and briefly describes each chapter.

### **3 Overview of the Book**

This book primarily focuses on the exploration of SDG 16, which requires countries to build peace, justice and strong institutions (United Nations, n.d.a., n.d.b.). Based on the specific target within this SDG, the chapters in the book are organised into three sections. The first section of the book – Understanding and Responding to Violence and Other Crimes, primarily focuses on target 16.1, which requires countries to reduce all forms of violence and related deaths. The second section of the book, Reducing Illicit Financial Gains and Combatting Organised Crime, includes four chapters related to target 16.4, which calls for countries to significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets, and combat all forms of organised crime. Finally, the last five chapters in the book's third section, Developing Effective and Accountable Criminal Justice Institutions, address target 16.6, prompting governments to establish effective, accountable, and transparent criminal justice institutions.

While some chapters address multiple SDGs/targets, we categorised them into book sections based on the primary SDG/target they explore. The chapters in this book utilise various research methods, from literature reviews to surveys, interviews, focus-group interviews, legal analysis, and analysis of official statistical data using GIS and hot spot analysis. Their breadth and depth enhance the value of these individual contributions.

### **3.1 Understanding and Responding to Violence and Other Crimes**

The four chapters in this section illustrate how criminology and criminal justice research could be applied to help ascertain the building of peace, justice, accountable institutions, and related targets. All chapters are centred around target 16.1 and explore the nature and extent of and responses to violence and other forms of crime in Italy, North Macedonia and Slovenia.

The section opens with Chapter 2, in which Tinkara Bulovec and Katja Eman present the results of a study on sexual violence prevention in nightlife venues in Ljubljana, Slovenia. This chapter contributes to the growing body of research on bystander intervention in cases of sexual harassment (e.g., Katz et al., 2015). The study involved a total of 135 respondents, including stakeholders, nightlife personnel, and nightclub patrons, surveyed in 2022. The respondents mostly perceive inappropriate verbal comments related to sexuality as the prevalent form of sexual violence in nightlife. Additionally, nightlife personnel identified unwanted physical contact, while patrons reported unwanted advances as the most common form of harassment. The most observed preventive measures in nightlife venues by stakeholders and patrons were security guards. Stakeholders also emphasised awareness-raising and youth engagement, while personnel noted patrons' caution and self-protective behaviour.

In Chapter 3, Cinzia Broccolo, Rūta Grigaliūnaitė, Cloé Saint-Nom and Guido Savasta analyse the root causes of under-reporting from victims and witnesses of hate crimes against Muslim women in Italy. At a time when anti-Muslim sentiments in the USA and Europe appear to be high (e.g., Human Rights Council, 2021), this chapter offers valuable insider perspectives on extreme forms of anti-Muslim sentiments. Based on interviews conducted in 2022 with 60 stakeholders and victims, the authors demonstrate that multiple factors contribute to the low reporting rate, which, in turn, results in a lack of recognition of discriminatory crimes by the public and limited response from formal law enforcement agencies. The study also identifies potential flaws in recording episodes of hate speech and hate crimes targeting Muslim women. A lack of trust in the police and related confidence issues in other components of the criminal justice system significantly predict the victim's decision not to report crimes to the police, thus tacitly accepting discriminatory behaviour by offenders.

The theme of hate crimes continues in Chapter 4, where Olga Kosevaliska, Zhaneta Poposka and Elena Maksimova discuss the potential relationship between specific types of hate crimes and their occurrence in various municipalities throughout the Republic of North Macedonia between 2015 and 2020. The authors employ geovisualisation techniques to map these hate crimes and analyse their characteristics. The results showed that hate crimes are a critical issue affecting various regions in the country. Understanding the geographic distribution of hate crimes highlights the need for targeted responses in different areas of North Macedonia. The authors' findings indicate a high rate of ethnic-based hate crimes in municipalities with significant ethnic representation and politically-based hate crimes during election periods, suggesting the necessity for proactive measures in these contexts. This study contributes to the existing literature (e.g., Boeckmann & Turping-Petrosino, 2002) by providing insights into how effective strategies for preventing hate crimes should be tailored based on the contextual knowledge of a specific municipality.

In the last chapter of this section, Chapter 5, Iza Kokoravec, Gorazd Meško, and Ineke Haen Marshall report the results of a study on juvenile delinquency and victimisation in Ljubljana, Slovenia, using data from the International Self-Reported Delinquency (ISR4) (n.d.) survey collected in 2022 and 2023. Based on a sample of students from the capital city, Ljubljana ( $n = 873$ ), the chapter focuses on understanding factors related to juvenile delinquency and victimisation, particularly concerning gender, school grade, and immigration status. The chapter contributes to the existing literature exploring the link between juvenile delinquency and victimisation (e.g., Cuevas et al., 2007; Turanovic & Young, 2016). The results indicate that girls report experiencing more parental violence than boys, while boys report higher rates of delinquency. Disparities exist between native respondents and first- and second-generation immigrant respondents: immigrant respondents reported more incidents of hate crimes and social media hate, as well as higher overall delinquency rates. There are no apparent age or grade trends for victimisation, whereas reported delinquency generally increases with grade or age, particularly in drug dealing.



### **3.2 Reducing Illicit Financial Gains and Combatting Organised Crime**

While SDG 16 promotes peace, justice, and accountable institutions, specific targets break down these broad goals into manageable tasks. Target 16.4, the focal point of this section of the book, instructs countries to significantly reduce illicit financial flows and combat all forms of organised crime. The analyses presented in these chapters are based on data exploration from Czechia, Italy, Montenegro, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

This section of the book opens with Chapter 6, in which David Čep writes about illegal drug production and drug trafficking in Czechia, highlighting one of the challenges facing modern society and sustainable development. The issue is particularly pertinent today, given the availability of a wider range of potent drugs on the European market (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2023). The chapter contributes to the existing literature by identifying issues related to drug-related criminality from global and national perspectives, offering general recommendations for combating illegal activities, and discussing the cross-border impacts of illicit methamphetamine production on urban and rural environments. Furthermore, the chapter explores new synthetic drugs, particularly the semisynthetic cannabinoid HHC, and examines those associated with Czech anti-drug legislation and law enforcement practice.

The theme of organised crime continues in Chapter 7, where Kreseda Smith argues that the escalating victimisation of farmers globally by organised criminal groups affects a range of SDGs, significantly impacting farmers and the broader population. Using UK farmers as an example, Smith demonstrates that organised criminals targeting critical equipment such as tractors, tools, and machinery cause extensive damage and exploit illegal business opportunities, such as counterfeiting agrochemicals, disrupting food chain security, and exploiting forced labour for agricultural work. Organised criminals also infiltrate rural areas, exacerbating issues related to poverty, zero hunger, health, well-being, decent working conditions, and peace and justice. This chapter provides an exploratory commentary on how organised crime impacts agriculture and contributes to the underexplored field of rural criminology and criminal justice (e.g., Bowden & Meško, 2025). Governments are expected to respond more actively to prevent such activities, as global farming and food security significantly contribute to quality of life.

The following two chapters in this section focus on the illegal flow of finances. In Chapter 8, Roberta De Paolis argues that white-collar criminality epitomises modern-era criminality, affecting several sustainable development goals of the United Nations. These goals include promoting access to justice, combating organised crime, providing essential services, and reducing economic inequalities and vulnerabilities. De Paolis examines a crime with significantly underreported incidence (Benson et al., 2016), resulting in substantial monetary losses (National White Collar Crime Center, 2010). Using examples from Italy and the United States, De Paolis contributes to the existing literature by proposing that the United States, De Paolis contributes to the existing literature by suggesting that the enforcement of laws for white-collar crimes should rely on a customised punishment system combining traditional prison sentences with community service related to the context of the white-collar crime. Such an approach would have beneficial effects: deterring individuals from repeating offences, preventing peers from committing similar crimes, and allowing the community to benefit from the proper use of skills that were misused by white-collar criminals.

In the last chapter of this section, Chapter 9, Velimir Rakočević and Aleksandra Rakočević point out the harmful consequences of irrational consumption of natural resources driven by the over-dimensioning of construction areas. The authors explore a rarely studied issue and contribute to the growing body of literature on green or environmental criminology (e.g., Bierne & South, 2007; South et al., 2012; White & Heckenberg, 2014). The chapter reveals that Montenegro has struggled for over thirty years to combat the problem of illegal construction and the legalisation of illegally erected buildings. The state has introduced three new criminal offences to protect the environment: construction of an object without registration and construction documentation, construction of a complex engineering object without a construction permit, and illegal connection to the infrastructure. The chapter demonstrates that neither the local Law on the Regulation of Informal Buildings nor the Criminal Code is effectively implemented. Furthermore, the penal policy fails to deter environmental degradation while it worsens.

### **3.3 Developing Effective, Accountable and Transparent Criminal Justice Institutions**

At the heart of SDG 16 is the idea that countries should build and maintain governmental institutions, including criminal justice institutions, that are effective, accountable, and transparent. Target 16.6 directly requires countries to “develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions” (United Nations, n.d.a., n.d.b.). The four chapters in this section of the book explore governmental efforts related to Croatia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and the United States.

This section opens with Chapter 10, where Irena Cajner Mraović, Ivana Radić, Kaja Prislán Mihelič, and Branko Lobnikar present public assessments of the effectiveness of four primary models of police work: the military-bureaucratic model, the lawful policing model, the community-oriented policing model, and the public-private divide policing model. The authors adopt Ponsaers’ (2001) taxonomy of police models and study the public evaluations of these policing models in an East-European country, thus contributing toward scarce literature on public views of policing models (e.g., Lobnikar & Prislán, 2021; Maskály et al., 2023; Prislán & Lobnikar, 2019). Data collection was based on an online survey of 254 Croatian citizens conducted in the summer and fall of 2022. The results indicate that participants strongly preferred the community policing model because it emphasises discretion, cooperation with the community, adherence to the law, professionalisation, legitimacy, prevention, and proactiveness. In contrast, the military-bureaucratic model was least preferred and ranked as the least desirable policing model.

The next chapter, Chapter 11, continues the exploration of policing with Robin Markwitz discussing proactive policing methods crucial for ensuring safety and security in alignment with the SDGs. The author examines aoristic crime data, where events occur within known time interval but at an unknown time, and connects this data with proactive policing strategies, thus contributing to the existing literature on proactive policing and its potential benefits (e.g., Koper et al., 2020; National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Markwitz employs a Bayesian likelihood-based approach to estimate the occurrence times of property crimes within known time intervals, modelling victim and offender behaviour as stochastic processes. The results demonstrate that the model, tested on an open-

source aoristic crime dataset from the United States, accurately predicts the most likely occurrence times through parameter estimation methods, identifies potential hot spots, and enables police to tailor proactive policing strategies accordingly. This approach aligns with SDG 16, which aims to strengthen institutions, foster safe and secure societies, and promote evidence-based policy and policing practices.

The theme of policing is further explored in Chapter 12, where Iva Balgač, Irena Cajner Mraović and Krunoslav Borovec delve into SDGs 5 and 16 by examining gender equality within law enforcement. Despite gender equality being a critical SDG, previous scholarly investigations reveal that equality remains elusive, with women still constituting a minority among police ranks (e.g., Holt & Lewis, 2011; Martin, 2008; O'Connor Shelley et al., 2011; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). This study contributes to the existing literature by analysing attitudes toward gender equality among 706 Croatian male and female police recruits before and after their basic police training (2020-2021). The research focuses on perceptions of women's role in policing, attitudes toward violence against women, and general views on gender equality. The chapter documents that while women consistently hold more positive views on gender equality before and after training, the gender gap in attitudes toward gender equality widens post-training. This suggests that the socialisation process within police culture during training may negatively influence recruits' perspectives on gender issues.

In Chapter 13, Bojan Tičar and Andreja Primec assess how security elements at the municipal level can be placed in the context of SDGs. The authors explore the role of municipalities in building safer and stronger communities and adopting and implementing sustainable development policies. This study follows a growing body of research examining the implantation of SDGs in local communities worldwide, including countries such as Brazil (e.g., Teixeira et al., 2022), Germany (e.g., Jossin & Peters, 2022), Russia (e.g., Ilina & Plisetskiy, 2023), Spain (e.g., Benito et al., 2023) and Sweden (e.g., Gustafsson & Ivner, 2017). The study is based on the legal regulations of the Republic of Slovenia, international and legal conventions of the UNODC, and selected European Union regulations and directives regarding current and future regulations of sustainable development. The authors also explore the application of various legal rules in the context of municipalities in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

In the final chapter of this section, Chapter 14, Mykhaylo Shepitko and Valeriy Shepitko reviewed the SDGs in connection with the aggressive war against Ukraine launched by Russia in 2022. This war, waging in the heart of Europe, affects global and national security and rural and urban security in Ukraine and worldwide. The threat to security is apparent not only due to the potential expansion of the war to NATO countries but also because of the disruption of trade routes that provide regions of the world with food and clean water. This chapter expands the scarce literature on the implications of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the achievement of sustainable development goals globally and raises serious concerns about the effects of the war-induced disruption of the global supply chain (e.g., Bin-Nashawan et al., 2024; Masys, 2023; Mhlanga & Ndhlovu, 2023; Pereira et al., 2022). Pereira et al. (2022) argue about the extent of the war's effects on the regional and global SDGs and economic SDGs at the global level. However, in its totality, "the conflict in Ukraine is severely threatening the achievement of the SDGs" (Bin-Nashwan et al., 2024, p. 1).

#### **4 Conclusion**

A combination of the United Nations SDGs and the topics presented in chapters of this book follow the basic ideas of the 2030 United Nations Agenda and its Goals, offering a comprehensive vision for sustainable development. This vision is based on several key elements: 1) it is a global issue, not limited to "developing" countries as was the case with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 2) it is founded on core values of equity and respect for human rights, 3) it relies on sustainable financing, scientific research and innovation, and monitoring and evaluation, 4) it necessitates a new way of working that involves intersectoral action by multiple stakeholders, and 5) it aims to strengthen criminal justice systems, and making them fair and accountable. The chapters in this book are centred around SDGs and cover topics critical to understanding contemporary crime, deviance, and criminality, as well as safety and security risks and efforts to reduce risks and prevent crime.

While the chapter topics range from juvenile justice and gendered issues in policing to tolerance of anti-Muslim sentiments and the environmental harms caused by long-term illegal building and drug manufacturing, they all fit well within the larger paradigm of the goal of building more inclusive, accountable, and transparent criminal justice institutions – namely, achieving SDG 16. However, as the last

chapter on the consequences of the war in Ukraine demonstrates, it is quite challenging, bordering on the impossible, to achieve this in a war-torn country. As Bin-Nashawan et al. (2024, p. 1) astutely note, “SDG16 (i.e. peace and justice) is an absolute pre-requisite to sustaining other goals.” Once peace is achieved, the implementation of other SDG goals can commence.

The chapters in the book demonstrate how scientific research and innovation can make valuable contributions to the exploration of crime, the causes of crime, crime patterns, and responses to crime, as well as the police and other criminal justice institutions. Over time, monitoring and evaluation will require new technologies to manage volumes of crime and security data necessary to improve the world, provide healthy environments, and ensure a good quality of life and unbiased, effective governmental services. Scholars are well-positioned to contribute significantly toward building such a world. Blaustein et al. (2018, p. 767) argued that criminology and criminal justice scholars have a valuable contribution to make by “Supporting this agenda means assisting with the design, implementation, and evaluation of projects that contribute to safe, just and sustainable societies.” As this book demonstrates, criminology and criminal justice research can play a crucial role in our effort to achieve this better world.

The topics covered in this book also open new avenues of research, policy debates, and practical dimensions of research from the perspectives of the public (Loader & Sparks, 2011) and translational (Telep, 2024) criminologies. These perspectives emphasise the importance of making criminal justice and criminology research understandable and applicable to policymakers, practitioners, and other audiences, be they the media, civil society, or the public. After all, achieving the SDGs and making the world a better place is our joint responsibility. This book provides insight into what criminologists and criminal justice scholars can do now. As Antonio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General, insightfully noted, “Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been.” (United Nations, 2023).

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