POLICY BRIEFS IN SUPPORT OF THE UN HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2026

Interlinkages Between SDG7 and SDG16

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This document is part of a series of policy briefs compiled by the multistakeholder SDG7 Technical Advisory Group (SDG7 TAG) in support of the review of SDG7 at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) 2026. Convened by UN DESA, the SDG7 TAG is composed of over 40 experts from governments, UN organizations, international organizations and other stakeholders. The HLPF is the central United Nations platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level. More information on the SDG7 TAG, including previous editions of the annual SDG7 Policy Briefs, is available here.

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KEY MESSAGES

Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all is the aim of Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG7). This goal is therefore a driving force in human development and well being, strengthening institutional trust and peacebuilding. At the same time, energy poverty is closely linked to fragility, instability, marginalization and weakened political systems. SDG16 aims to combat all these while also strengthening institutional trust and peacebuilding.

The synergies between SDG7 and SDG16 are therefore clear, with the Global Platform for Action (GPA) on Sustainable Energy in Displacement Settings a good example of this common interest.

The GPA was launched in 2018 and is steered by its 15 members. These include both United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). By building partnerships to scale renewable energy in humanitarian and displacement contexts, the GPA also improves livelihoods, reduces emissions and strengthens institutional trust.

This policy brief sets out the linkages between SDG7 and SDG16 further, while presenting the following recommendations to strengthen their synergies and achievements.

Those recommendations are:

- **Integrate energy into humanitarian, development and peacebuilding frameworks.** Energy access for displaced and conflict-affected communities should be included in national development plans, refugee response strategies and voluntary national reviews (VNRs). Energy access should be considered a peace dividend that enhances institutional legitimacy and social cohesion.

- **Mainstream gender equality and social inclusion in humanitarian energy policies and programmes.** The meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups in energy planning should be supported in order to promote inclusive and non-discriminatory decision-making.

- **Strengthen data and coordination.** Investment in harmonized humanitarian data systems, locally sourced insights and cross-sectoral platforms should take place, in order to fill information gaps, improve accountability and align energy provision with peace and justice outcomes.

- **Mobilize innovative finance.** Blended finance, concessional loans, guarantees and mechanisms such as peace renewable energy credits (P-RECs) should be used to de-risk investment in fragile markets and incentivize private actors. This should be done while ensuring projects deliver social and equity dividends that build institutional trust.

- **Prioritize decentralized renewables.** Off-grid and community-owned renewable energy should be scaled up to bypass fragile infrastructure and ensure sustainable access for displaced, conflict-affected and marginalized populations.

1. The Interlinkages Between SDG7 and SDG16

Energy underpins economic development and human wellbeing. It can also deliver social, environmental and political dividends that promote peaceful, inclusive societies and effective, accountable institutions – goals which are also the focus of SDG16.

The 2024 SDG7 report of the United Nations General Assembly underscored that access to clean, affordable energy was foundational in poverty eradication, food security, prosperity and the empowerment of women and young people.[1] Conversely, energy poverty was linked to fragility, marginalization, weakened political systems and insecurity.[2] Without reliable energy, institutions struggle to deliver services, justice systems falter and communities face exclusion and instability[3].

Yet, at the same time, the *Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report, 2025* from the International Energy Agency (IEA) noted that in 2023, approximately 666 million people lacked access to electricity, worldwide, while 2.1 billion lacked access to clean cooking.[4] In addition, among 6.3 billion people in 109 countries, 1.1 billion lived in acute, multidimensional poverty.[5] These deficits amplified hardship, widened inequalities and heightened fuel conflicts – especially in displacement settings. Over 90 per cent of households in refugee camps lacked electricity access and over 80 per cent lacked modern cooking solutions.[6] Vulnerable groups, particularly women, children and the elderly, bore the brunt of these deficits, undermining the humanitarian, development and peace nexus.

Actions under SDG7 can therefore yield synergistic benefits for SDG16. Uninterrupted access to electricity and modern cooking solutions, for example, can protect communities from violence and conflict (the goal of SDG16.1). This can help reduce sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) linked to firewood collection, which also helps fulfil the goal of combatting SGBV stated in SDG16.1.3. Uninterrupted access to electricity can also improve safety in communal spaces (SDG16.1.4), while modern, clean cooking solutions can reduce the negative health impacts of traditional cooking methods, helping fulfil SDG16.1. In addition, reliable energy in schools, healthcare centres and police stations improves services and strengthens institutions' capacity to uphold peace and justice (SDG16.3 and SDG16.9).

Community-led Energy Builds Stronger Institutions

In 2024, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) installed over 20 000 solar streetlights and solarised clinics and water pumps in refugee camps, worldwide. This improved services for refugees and host communities while also strengthening public trust.[7] Displaced and conflict-affected communities often lack participation in such initiatives, however. Without inclusive governance, progress towards SDG7.1 (access to energy services) and SDG16.7 (inclusive decision making) will remain limited.

2. At the Crossroads of SDG7 and SDG16: The Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus

Fragile institutions and siloed approaches weaken both SDG7 and SDG16. Strong governance and policy alignment are critical to expand energy access and sustain peace. Yet institutions are often undermined by corruption, instability and limited capacity.[8] While VNRs recognize governance-development synergies, very few countries explicitly include energy access as a peacebuilding element in policy.[9]

In addition, humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors often operate in silos. Humanitarian organizations focus on short-term energy fixes, while development plans often overlook displaced people, or prioritise grid expansion in cities. Peacebuilding also typically centres on mediation rather than energy. This results in limited joint interventions for SDG7 and SDG16.

At the same time, while energy policies usually prioritise economic growth, they often neglect conflict-prone areas and undermine cross-sectoral synergies. National electrification plans commonly focus on urban and industrial centres, leaving marginalized and/or conflict-affected regions behind.[10] Meanwhile, humanitarian energy standards aim for "basic access" (Tier 1–2 services)[11] only. These meet statistical SDG7 targets, but fall short of higher-tier access to power schools, clinics or agricultural activities, such as refrigeration and irrigation services. These are, however, essential for justice, protection and institutional legitimacy.[12]

Humanitarian and political budget cycles are short, impeding long-term investments in sustainable energy. Many refugee camps that have existed for over 20 years still rely on temporary energy solutions.[13] Short-term government and donor cycles discourage long-term institutional reform and focus instead on quick, visible projects that risk undermining trust without community engagement.[14] Persistent conflict compounds these challenges, as recovery from energy poverty often takes years after conflicts end.[15]

Decentralized Renewables as Peace Dividends

Decentralized renewable energy (DRE) can deliver both energy access (SDG7) and governance benefits (SDG16) in fragile and displacement settings. Unlike centralized grids, they are faster to deploy and less vulnerable to capture or disruption. Below are some recent examples of successful DRE deployment:

- **Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo:** Solar streetlights reduced violence and improved confidence in the authorities. This demonstrated how energy services can reinforce social stability when delivered strategically.[16]
- **South Sudan:** Shifting from diesel-fired generators, which were often controlled by armed groups, to solar-hybrid mini-grids cut fuel-route conflicts and improved access for marginalized communities.[17]
- **Kenya:** A solar mini-grid in Kalobeyei settlement was expanded from 60 kilowatts (kW) in 2019 to 541 kW in 2022, powering 2 276 households, 404 enterprises and 36 institutions. This reliable electricity enhanced health and education services, reduced food waste through refrigeration, piloted electric cooking, and involved refugees in operations.[18]
- **Ethiopia:** In Dollo Ado, energy cooperatives composed of refugee and host community members received training to manage solar streetlights, in-home systems and mini-grids powering five health centres. This boosted safety and accountability through shared governance.[19,20]

At the same time, conflicts can include the deliberate targeting of energy infrastructure (power plants, grids or fuel supplies), as they are strategic assets and their destruction adds pressure on populations. This demonstrates how energy is weaponized in war, with the destruction of energy infrastructure also eroding essential institutions[21,22] while raising multidimensional energy poverty.[23,24]

Widening inequalities and geopolitical confrontations also make joint advances in SDG7 and SDG16 more difficult.[25] These challenges are compounded by climate change and competition over scarce resources.[26]

That competition – often over oil, gas, and hydropower – has historically instigated violence, while inequitable electricity distribution has exacerbated inequalities.[27] In displacement contexts, energy scarcity can intensify tensions between refugees and host communities. For example, competition over firewood can worsen environmental degradation and heighten the risk of SGBV.[28]

Recent Conflicts and Their Energy Impacts

- **Ukraine (2024-2025):** Coordinated strikes on energy facilities left millions without heat or power, crippling hospitals and schools.[29]
- **Sudan (since April 2023):** Two years of conflict have devastated refining capacity, forcing households and hospitals to rely on costly diesel.[30]
- **Gaza (March 2025-July 2025):** Fuel blockades shut down desalination plants, sewage networks and health facilities, exacerbating risks for water and health services and escalating humanitarian crises.[31,32]

Meanwhile, financing gaps weaken both energy access and institutional resilience. Chronic underinvestment in fragile and conflict-affected contexts undermines the delivery of both SDG7 and SDG16. In terms of United States dollars (US$), achieving universal energy access requires US$ 45 billion annually for 120 million people, yet the current investment level falls short by more than half.[33] Displacement settings alone require over US$ 10 billion by 2030. Governance reforms and peacebuilding also remain chronically under-resourced.[34]

At the same time, humanitarian budgets have shrunk: UNHCR had only 23 per cent of its required funds by mid-2025, following a 52 per cent gap in 2024.[35] Energy projects rarely feature in humanitarian appeals and, as agencies focus on “life-saving minimums”, solar lighting and clean cooking programmes have been reduced. Additionally, fragile contexts deter private investors due to weak or complex legal and administrative processes, corruption and security risks. Many fragile states remain locked in fossil fuel dependence and informal energy systems, undermining equity and institutional legitimacy.[36]

In addition, exclusionary governance weakens sustainability and fuels inequality. Many energy projects remain top-down with limited local participation. Women, youth, indigenous groups and displaced populations are frequently excluded from decision-making, contrary to SDG16.7 (inclusive decision-making) and SDG16.b (non-discriminatory laws and policies). This often results in ill-suited and unaffordable solutions, such as stoves that do not align with local cooking practices. This leads to low-uptake, poor maintenance and a lack of ownership.

SDG7 lacks gender-specific indicators and disaggregated data, masking intersectional inequalities in access and outcomes.[37] Women remain underrepresented in governance, but shoulder disproportionate burdens of energy poverty through unpaid fuel collection, health risks and SGBV exposure.[38] This perpetuates inequalities and undermines social cohesion.[39] Embedding gender-responsive and inclusive policies is not only a matter of equity, but also essential for achieving both SDG7 and SDG16.

3. Policy Recommendations

- **Embed energy access in development, governance and peacebuilding.** Energy should be integrated into national development, refugee response plans and the VNRs of SDG16. This integration should also be undertaken according to the principles of justice, gender equality and inclusion to ensure energy provision is fair, responsive to diverse needs and gives affected communities a voice in decision-making.[40] Utilize participatory "peace engineering" approaches[41] to use energy access to strengthen governance capacity and institutional legitimacy.

- **Leverage international cooperation and multilateralism.** Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) should be aligned so that they include energy access for displaced and conflict-affected communities.[42] Platforms such as the Energy Compacts (US$ 1.4 trillion pledged) and the Global Refugee Forum (US$ 2.2 billion pledged) should be used to mobilize funding.[43] Global energy initiatives should support peace and justice frameworks in order to ensure that solutions are adaptive to diverse political and institutional realities.

- **Improve data, monitoring and coordination.** Investment should be made in national statistical systems. These should be complemented by local data collection in order to properly assess how energy access impacts the outcomes of peace, resilience and justice. Cross-sectoral platforms such as UN Energy, GPA and ESMAP should harmonize indicators and disseminate results across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus.

- **Prioritize decentralized renewable energy in fragile and displacement contexts.** Decentralized and community-based renewable energy should be scaled-up through market based delivery models that reduce reliance on volatile diesel or biomass supply chains and enhance local development and social cohesion. Renewables should be deployed in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations to provide energy in camps, bases and logistics hubs. This will deliver immediate cost, security and climate dividends while laying the foundations of long-term energy infrastructure.

- **Safeguard the continuity of clean cooking as a protection measure.** Clean cooking access should be acknowledged as a core protection and justice intervention that can reduce SGBV risks, environmental degradation and tensions between communities over firewood collection.[44] Multi year, ring-fenced funding and market-based clean fuel solutions (including electricity and liquefied petroleum gas [LPG]) should be provided in conflict and displacement settings to reduce SGBV and deforestation while reinforcing peace and security.

- **Mobilize blended finance for energy and governance outcomes.** Climate finance, concessional loans, blended finance and innovative mechanisms – such as P-RECs and energy peace bonds – should be scaled up in order to de-risk investments in fragile markets. Link energy projects to social outcomes. Solar electrification or clean cooking solutions in schools, for example, can improve the delivery of education, as well as enhance institutional legitimacy.

- **Mainstream gender equality, social inclusion and meaningful participation.** Socially inclusive approaches in energy governance should be embedded as enablers of peace and security. Women's entrepreneurship, leadership and participation in energy planning should be promoted. Participatory consultation processes that include displaced people, host communities and marginalized groups (such as women, youth, indigenous people and people with disabilities) should be ensured. This will enhance community ownership of energy projects and strengthen both institutional trust and social cohesion.

Endnotes

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[11] Tier 1. This is the lowest level, and provides energy for an average annual consumption of 22 kWh per household. In concrete terms, this is barely enough to switch on a few lightbulbs, charge a phone or turn on a radio; Tier 2. This covers ten times the consumption of level 1, providing for an annual use of 224 kWh per household. It enables the operation of general lighting, air circulation systems and even a television. Source: https://www.enelgreenpower.com/learning-hub/gigawhat/search-articles/articles/2023/01/energy-access-tiers

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