

Target 16: People

Scope of the target

The current scope of the target seeks to transfer the responsibility for making ‘responsible choices’ to people. This is unacceptable, as people do not have access to the information, nor do they have the power to make the necessary changes. Also, many poor people do not have the financial resources to make “responsible choices”.

It is the responsibility of governments to ensure that what companies consider environmental externalities are addressed in policies regarding production and consumption in ways that ensure fairness and equity. This target should be oriented towards governmental regulatory frameworks so that activities, consumerism and corporations which destroy biodiversity through promoting unregulated consumption choices are reduced to within planetary boundaries. This must include incentives and price policies and ensure that the use of resources for consumption is sustainable and equitable.

Elements that should be part of the target

- Policies regarding consumption products,

Governments must ensure that consumers don't buy products that damage the environment or human health and that the information about products is accurate and verifiable. This has to be done by establishing and adopting supportive policies and legislative or regulatory frameworks. Consumption reduction has to apply to all sectors.

- Prices that reflect the impact on biodiversity

There should be higher prices for products which are more harmful to the environment. Conscious consumption can't be the sole prerogative of the (higher) middle classes. Taxes and subsidies should get the balance right and ensure environmentally friendly products and healthy food, particularly healthy plant-based food, is accessible and affordable for all. The consumption of environmentally unfriendly and unhealthy products and food must be discouraged.

- Identify and monitor all processes of waste and consumption

States must identify and monitor all processes and activities related to waste and consumption that adversely impact the world's biodiversity and regulate and manage them. The CBD has to coordinate the efforts by states. Sustainable, primarily plant-based diets are necessary to avoid protein waste.

- In accordance with fairness and equity, taking into account historical patterns of production and consumption

The responsibility for taking action has to first lie with those most responsible for unsustainable production and consumption.

Elements that should NOT be part of the target

- “Where relevant” when talking about overconsumption

Wherever overconsumption happens, it is relevant and needs to stop. In a world with limited resources, overconsumption by some population groups implies an overly significant impact on the planet and an unfair reduction of resources for other population groups.

- Cultural preferences

Cultural preferences can be important, but a country with a considerable impact on biodiversity through its consumption must address this and should not cite “culture” to avoid acting. If included, this element should be clearly indicated.

- Sustainable consumption choices

Individual consumers cannot be expected to make sustainable consumption choices on the basis of highly deficient information. Furthermore, sustainably labelled products are only available to the middle classes in the global north. Poorer people lack the economic means to make sustainable choices or would not be able to pay for products that include the environmental cost of production. Therefore, sustainable consumption choices cannot be the basis for global policies.