



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

FUTURE IN FOCUS

UN DESA Preparedness and Foresight Review

**PREPARING FOR
WHAT LIES AHEAD**



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Future in Focus: Preparing for What Lies Ahead, UN DESA Preparedness and Foresight Review

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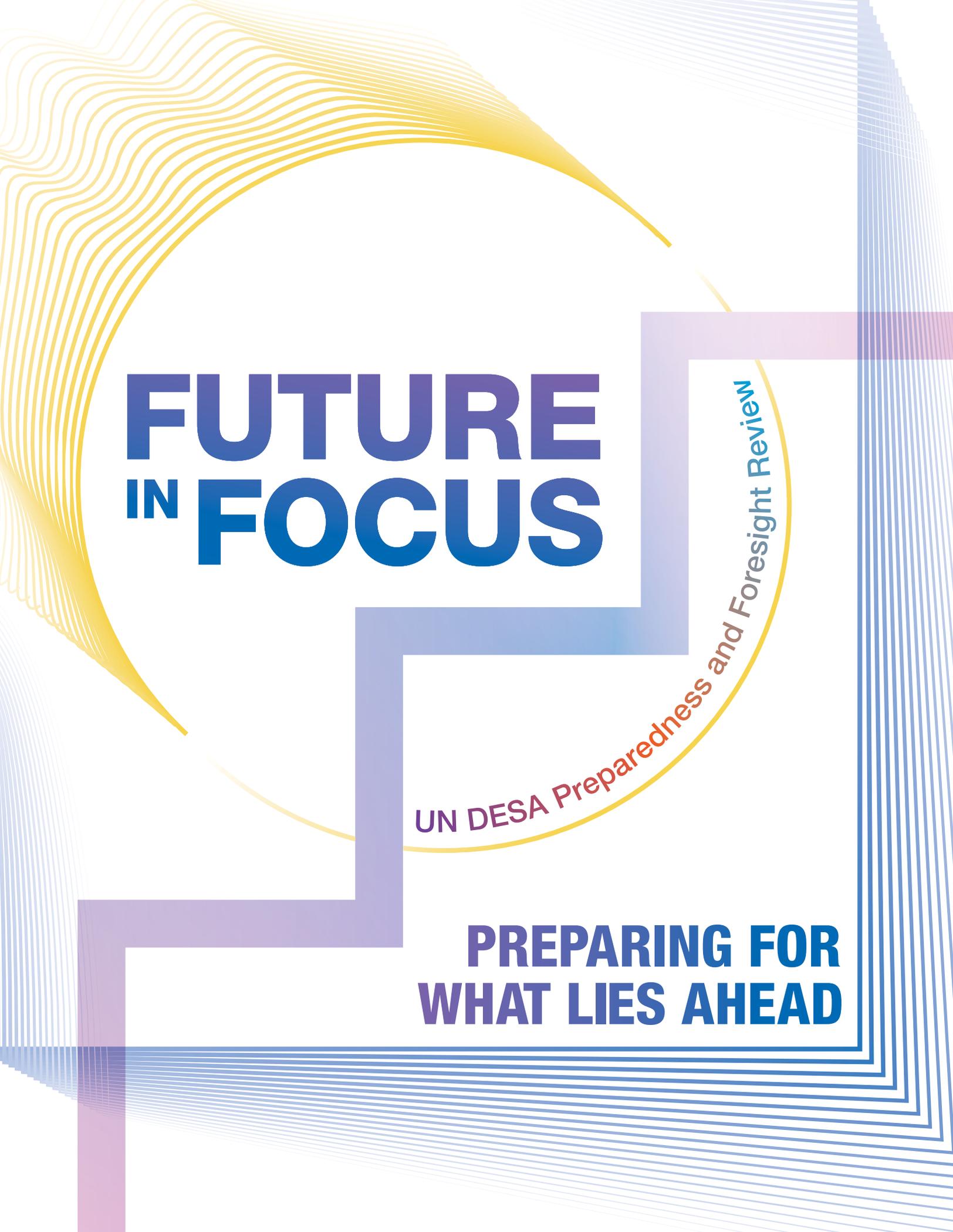
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FUTURE IN FOCUS

UN DESA Preparedness and Foresight Review

PREPARING FOR WHAT LIES AHEAD

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“

We need to build a global system that deals with problems before they turn into catastrophes.

”

FRAMING THE FUTURE: FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS WITH UN DESA



*UN Under-Secretary-General
for Economic and Social Affairs
Li Junhua. UN Photo*

In an era marked by complex and interwoven crises, the role of the United Nations in preparing for the future has never been more critical. Just this year, at the Summit of the Future, the international community emphasized the increasing importance of strategic foresight and preparedness in shaping a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable world.

Foresight helps governments and people make strategic choices to shape and prepare for the future they want. It requires partnerships to translate vision into action, to understand emerging trends, and leverage new opportunities.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) uses foresight to help Member States plan for a future that leaves no one behind. Through our three functional pillars – intergovernmental support, analysis, and capacity-development – UN DESA supports Member States to respond to multidimensional, systemic and interconnected risks shaping our world today.

The foresight efforts of UN DESA yield vital information, resources and analysis that help Member States to craft long-term, evidence-based strategies and solutions to benefit all sectors of society.

Our economic forecasting and modelling are essential for governments to craft policies that address both immediate economic concerns while preparing for longer-term challenges. Our support for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in their journey toward sustainable development and graduation from LDC status applies foresight to assist these countries in identifying pathways to navigate future obstacles related to poverty, infrastructure, and economic diversification.

Our frontier issues analysis looks ahead to the impacts of rapidly evolving technologies. By identifying the potential consequences of these innovations, we help Member States prepare for the transformations that will fundamentally reshape industries, workforces, and societies.

By strengthening institutional capacities, we assist countries in assessing and addressing the needs of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, older persons and persons with disabilities, ensuring that all members of society are considered in future planning.

At UN DESA, we work closely with public institutions to strengthen institutional foresight capacities. By helping to equip Member States with the tools they need to foresee future risks and anticipate long-term challenges, we enable them to take preemptive action and better protect the most vulnerable members of society. We foster resilient institutions capable of steering development in a sustainable, inclusive direction and agile organizations that can adapt as the future evolves.

We help Member States address demographic changes, such as population growth, ageing societies, and urbanization. These changes alter societies, affecting their labour force, economic productivity, demand for education and health services and migration patterns. Through robust population forecasts and foresight, UN DESA provides Member States with the data and analysis they need to plan for these shifts.

UN DESA plays a key role in advancing global consensus on financing for sustainable development. In the lead up to the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in 2025, we are promoting financial resilience, supporting Member States to future-proof financing and debt strategies, and providing countries with tools to diversify revenue streams, manage debt responsibly, and ensure long-term financial stability.

We are also driving action towards a clean energy future, leveraging partnerships across Governments, the private sector, and international organizations. These partnerships are critical in accelerating the transition to a clean energy economy, especially in developing countries, where access to reliable energy is vital for achieving the SDGs.

Recognizing that sustainable development and climate action must go hand in hand, we emphasize the synergies between climate change and the SDGs. By helping countries – especially those in special situations, such as small island developing States – integrate climate considerations into their development strategies, we ensure that progress on one front does not undermine the other.

UN DESA is committed to building national capacities to accelerate and inclusive and just transition towards a greener global economy by providing technical support to ensure that the benefits of green growth are shared equitably. We are working with Member States to prepare for a digital future, supporting the development of digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and data governance. By anticipating the impacts of digital transformation, the Department helps countries navigate the complexities of the digital era, ensuring that technological advancements contribute to sustainable development.

UN DESA works to ensure that countries have the statistical capacities needed to prepare for the future. Accurate data is essential for effective decision-making, and our efforts to build national statistical capacities help governments collect, analyze, and use data to anticipate future trends. By fostering data-driven decision-making, we enable countries to better prepare for the uncertainties of tomorrow and promote a shared vision of resilience and foresight.

Our work in UN DESA helps countries develop policies that are adaptable and resilient in the face of uncertainty. By embracing the principles of *UN 2.0*, UN DESA is committed to helping countries not only respond to crises but also proactively shape a better future for all, where no one is left behind. Our goal is to foster a culture of preparedness and long-term thinking that can guide countries through the challenges of this century and prepare for the next. The future is not predetermined; it is something we can shape through collaboration, foresight, and decisive action.

It is with great pride that I present this review of UN DESA's strategic foresight and preparedness work, highlighting the progress we have made and the path forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized Chinese characters '李军华' (Li Junhua).

Under-Secretary-General for
Economic and Social Affairs
Li Junhua

FORECASTING AND FRAMING THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

No country is left unscathed by global shocks and economic crises, but what is crucial is the ability to anticipate, prepare and build future resilience. A shared understanding of the global economic outlook is essential to shape solutions that can help us achieve the SDGs. UN DESA is attempting to fill this critical role by forecasting the global and regional economic outlook, building capacities, and putting forward policy solutions to steer the world towards a more sustainable economic future. UN DESA brings experience across several foresight related areas, including macroeconomic modelling and forecasts; megatrend analysis; technological foresight; big data and metrics. Publications address both short-term macroeconomic forecasts and longer-term development trends based on different modelling tools and continuous monitoring of the implications of digital and frontier technologies for sustainable development.

KEY FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

1

Economic forecasting and modelling

2

Frontier issues analysis

3

Identifying pathways for LDC graduation

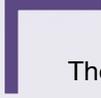
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The current global economic outlook presents an immediate challenge to delivering on the SDGs. The global community must urgently address the growing shortages of funding faced by many developing countries, strengthening their capacities to make critical investments in sustainable development and helping them transform their economies to achieve inclusive and sustained long-term growth.

”

UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Li Junhua
on the publication of the *World Economic Situation and Prospects* report, May 2023

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES



The world economy struggles to recover from the pandemic and is forecast to continue to face low growth rates over the next few years. While rich economies have largely bounced back from the COVID-19 pandemic, developing economies have lost ground. Ever-worsening climate shocks continue to pose additional challenges to the global economic outlook, threatening decades of development gains, especially for least developed countries (LDC) and small island developing States.

LDCs, which already face several developmental challenges, continue to face spiralling challenges of access to finance and high indebtedness. At the same time, a significant number of LDCs have experienced successful development progress and are on track to graduate from this category. Graduation brings both opportunities of investment and growth, as well as risks to sustaining efforts as access to preferential terms of trade and international financing end when countries graduate. Unforeseen shocks are likely to bring more uncertainty, which may throw graduating and graduated countries off-course in their transition to higher development and growth, increase their vulnerabilities, and set back progress on the SDGs. Without adequate knowledge, information, analysis, and capacity-building, developing countries will face significantly greater challenges in achieving sustainable development.

FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS

1

Economic forecasting and modelling

UN DESA's flagship *World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP)* report provides economic forecasts and analysis on economic trends and emerging policy challenges, with in-depth focus on developing economies and emerging markets. This robust analysis and projections, based on solid evidence, is incredibly useful in helping policymakers to plan for uncertain futures and to design more agile and impactful approaches to achieve the SDGs.

WESP monthly briefings based on ongoing monitoring of the global economy complement the main *WESP* report to identify anticipated and contemporary macroeconomic policy issues and challenges worldwide. The policy papers cover a range of foreseeable challenges, recently addressing issues such as inflation, food and energy price shocks, disruptions in trade and supply chains, financial market distress, and labour market challenges. These briefs also provide knowledge and reflections on policy measures undertaken by governments and the effect that has on the economy. For instance, recent briefs have investigated how monetary and fiscal policy measures following the COVID-19 pandemic are impacting interest rates, kickstarting the economy or impacting levels of indebtedness of countries, and reflect on structural impediments, global uncertainties or external shocks that can derail an economy.

The Department also delivers modelling capacity for forecasting and scenario analysis, and provides capacity development and policy advisory activities on economy-wide issues and on methodologies to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Activities focus on training and advising policymakers in developing countries to enhance their analytical capacities in designing coherent and integrated macroeconomic, social and environmental policies. This aims to strengthen the capacity of Government agencies to better utilize data and analytical techniques to inform decision-making processes on sustainable development through the use of quantitative modelling tools. The successful adoption of these tools is expected to improve analytic capacity for decision-making and national planning processes.

2

Frontier issues analysis

UN DESA delivers [policy briefs](#) that explore frontier issues and resilience building for future crises. Frontier technology issue briefs cover topical issues ranging from the impact of the technological revolution on labour markets and income distribution, harnessing economic dividends from demographic change, and issues from the frontiers of science such as lithium-ion batteries as a pillar for a fossil fuel-free economy, and genetic technologies as a game changer for food production, crop yields, disaster risk management, and health. These materials help country-level policy makers make informed decisions on appropriate risk management strategies and policies.

The Department continues to fill critical knowledge gaps in times of crises. For example, the dynamic heatmap model pioneered by UN DESA shortly after the start of the war in Ukraine is an innovative tool that monitors vulnerability and coping capacity to the crises. The [“Impact of the War in Ukraine on LDCs” heatmap](#) monitors the vulnerability of LDCs to the impacts of the war on food, energy and finance and presents a ‘heatmap’ that shows data for all developing countries, including LDCs, against various indicators. The monitoring complements and contributes to the work of the Global Crisis Response Group of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to analytical and monitoring work of UN entities and international organizations. The model could be used more widely in foresight and preparedness work for other future crises.

UN DESA also addresses foresight and mega-trend analysis as coordinator of the UN Economist Network. The Network currently connects more than 500 colleagues at global, regional and country levels, serving as a platform to strengthen UN thought leadership, knowledge sharing and capacity building. For example, its report [Shaping the Trends of Our Time](#), examined five megatrends: climate change; demographic shifts, particularly population ageing; urbanization; the emergence of digital technologies; and inequalities –that are affecting economic, social and environmental outcomes. The Network has also provided new forward-looking paradigms for economic thinking in the [policy brief series](#) on *New Economics for Sustainable Development*, as well as on specific topics such as digital economic transformation, innovative finance, migration, informal economy and taxation.

3

Identifying graduation pathways for LDCs

With UN DESA as its secretariat, the Committee for Development Policy (CDP), advises on graduation pathways for countries in the least developed country (LDC) category. Many LDCs are benefitting from UN DESA's support to help them achieve a smooth transition out of the category and anticipate upcoming challenges that LDCs might face in their graduation journey. This includes through collecting and disseminating information on LDCs and countries that have recently graduated from the category and by maintaining the [Committee for Development Policy \(CDP\) knowledge platform](#).

The platform includes the [LDC portal](#) which provides information on international support measures for LDCs, which is critical to help them prepare for a smooth transition. With the platform, an innovative Gradjet provides information on the graduation process to prepare for a smooth transition. The [ePing](#) notification toolkit, developed by UN DESA, lets LDCs submit and track key information from trading partners regarding new export product requirements and, in the process, strengthens coordination between government agencies and the private sector. Finally, UN DESA's [Handbook on the Least Developed Country Category](#) is regarded as the single most authoritative global resource on LDCs and their graduation. Updated every few years, the handbook provides comprehensive up-to-date information that explains the LDC category and what procedures and methodologies are used to include countries in this category and to graduate from it.

Early indication of how future crises or external shocks might disrupt their economic and social development efforts is critical so LDCs can develop and integrate crisis response measures into their national development strategies and strategies for a smooth graduation. The Department's policy notes on the potential impacts of LDC graduation for several countries are also helping countries to plan their strategies accordingly. For instance, countries to understand how the withdrawal of international support measures could impact them in the short and medium term implications of losing access to special provisions for LDCs on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND IN FORESIGHT EFFORTS

World leaders are committed to leave no one behind as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite progress on social development over the last few decades, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep inequalities between countries of the world, vulnerabilities of certain socio-economic groups, setbacks in the progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and fragilities in terms of their ability to cope with multiple crises and to recover from them. Negative impacts of crises are most harshly experienced by people living in vulnerable situations including persons with disabilities, older persons, youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, and by poorer rural populations and people living in areas that are affected by conflict and fragility or that are hard to reach. By identifying emerging trends and through its foresight and preparedness work, UN DESA is helping Member States to consider and act on effective policy options for addressing inequalities. Capacity building and knowledge resources are providing much-needed direction to help Member States, particularly countries in special situations, to build effective, inclusive and accountable public institutions and to improve the policies for, and participation of all members of society in preparedness efforts, so that no one is left behind.

KEY FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

1

Ensuring all members of society are considered in planning for the future

2

Strengthening the foresight capacities of public institutions to leave no one behind

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES



Crises continue to show that many countries are unprepared and those already living in the deepest deprivation are most negatively impacted. Leaving no one behind requires a ‘whole-of-society’ approach to ensure the visibility and inclusion of social groups that are most at risk of being excluded. It also requires a ‘whole-of-government’ approach to promote inclusive institutions and participatory decision-making processes at all levels of policy formulation, as well as available and accurate data on these social groups. There is increasing realization that strengthening governance and capacities of public institutions to promote sound policymaking, especially evidence-based strategic planning and foresight, and the capacity for adaptive management, is vital to address present and future challenges.

UN DESA’s foresight and preparedness work is grounded in promoting inclusion and human rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of society to reduce inequalities and ensure equal opportunities for all. The Department recognizes that the costs of unpreparedness are most likely to be borne by those who can least afford them. UN DESA also highlights preparedness in the context of countries being able to leverage future opportunities – for instance, from innovations – and to bring development towards a socially sustainable path. This requires strengthening leadership, institutional development and public service delivery systems that can withstand crises and support inclusive and innovative approaches to tackling challenges.

FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS

1

Ensuring all members of society are considered in planning for the future

Recognizing that societies that are not inclusive will not be sustainable, UN DESA focuses its analytical work and intergovernmental support to ensure the voices and needs of all individuals and groups are represented. This enables Member States, international organisations and civil society to understand and react to emerging trends as well as future risks. *The World Social Report 2023* for example, examines challenges and opportunities presented by global population ageing, an inevitable result of the demographic transition towards longer lives and smaller families. It brings new insights on how governments can apply appropriate foresight and planning to tackle the challenges and leverage the opportunities from population ageing while ensuring social and economic inclusion for all. Countries with robust and inclusive social protection policies and programmes are better at coping with crises, with overall positive effects on health, education, labour market outcomes, income inequality, and social cohesion. Previous editions of the *World Social Report* have also highlighted the current state of social protection policies globally. This has helped draw attention to gaps that need to be addressed to prepare for future challenges and risks, in particular building countries' capacity to build robust, sustainable, gender-sensitive, and crisis-responsive social protection policies and programmes.

UN DESA emphasizes that forward thinking requires Member States to embrace the potential of population ageing and extended longevity as a cornerstone for future development. As the focal point on ageing in the United Nations system, the [UN DESA programme on ageing](#) facilitates and promotes the [Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing \(MIPAA\)](#) including designing guidelines for policy development and implementation; advocating means to mainstream ageing issues into development agendas; engaging in dialogue with civil society and the private sector; and information exchange. UN DESA also coordinates the review and appraisal of the implementation of MIPAA, which is essential for its success in improving the lives of older persons. UN DESA generates a wide range of resources to inform and advise governments as they take stock of trends and consider policy options to respond to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing and to promote the development of a society for all ages. For instance, UN DESA has developed a [Multiple Indicator Survey on Ageing \(MISA\)](#) in Africa that helps to produce, analyze and deliver a database of harmonized indicators about older persons in the continent. A [briefing series on ageing](#) highlights a comprehensive range of ageing-related topics, from policy priorities and health inequalities to the economic, social, and humanitarian challenges faced by older persons.

The Department's resources on youth recognise that the young generation is the future and crises can impact education, jobs, rights and mental well-being. The UN DESA Training Module on Promoting Sustainable Peace through National Youth Policies supports policymakers in designing (inclusive) national youth policies that integrate youth participation, development, peace, and security in national development processes. [The World Programme of Action for Youth](#) and its fifteen fields of priority action serve as the main thrust of UN DESA's support. Through international forums, UN DESA is building an awareness of the global situation of young people, promoting their rights and aspirations, and working towards greater participation of young people in decision-making as a means of achieving peace and development.

UN DESA works to ensure persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples are central to foresight and preparedness effort. It has developed resources on disability, such as the [Toolkit on Disability for Africa for Social Policy and Development \(DSPD\)](#) which provides practical tools on disability-related issues to government officials, members of the parliament, civil and public servants at all levels, disabled people organizations (DPOs), and all others interested in the inclusion of people with disabilities in society. In supporting the Conference of States Parties to the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN DESA works to advance the rights of persons with disabilities in society and development efforts.

A series of publications on the [State of the World's Indigenous Peoples](#) fill critical analytical gaps about Indigenous Peoples that are particularly important, for example in the context of the negative impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on their ways of life, well-being, peace and security. The publications demonstrate the unique identity, knowledge and traditions of Indigenous Peoples as contributors and preservers of the world's bio-cultural diversity. UN DESA's website hosts a rich repository of resources on Indigenous Peoples including Guidelines for implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a [Handbook for Parliamentarians](#), and [policy briefs](#). UN DESA also supports the [United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#), an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.



Strategic foresight is defined as an organized, systematic way of looking beyond the expected to engage with uncertainty and complexity. It also includes the capacity to think systematically about the future to inform decision-making today.

It is a cognitive capacity that we need to develop as individuals, as organizations and as a society. In individuals, it is usually an unconscious capacity and needs to be surfaced to be used in any meaningful way to inform decision-making.



2

Strengthening the foresight capacities of public institutions to leave no one behind

The Department's analytical work promotes foresight and resilience in volatile and fast-moving environments. The voluntary Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development provide expert guidance to interested countries in a broad range of governance challenges. Sound policymaking is one of the eleven Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development, which were developed by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) and endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2018. One of the commonly used strategies to implement sound policymaking is strategic foresight. UN DESA's strategic planning and foresight guidance note, developed to operationalize strategic foresight, provides the foundation for capacity development work undertaken by the Department to support pragmatic improvements in national and local governance capabilities to reach the SDGs. *The World Public Sector Report 2023* also featured an expert contribution focused on "Operationalizing strategic foresight to better support Governments in managing Sustainable Development Goal trade-offs and synergies in the post-COVID context." It explores recent progress in strategic foresight practice and how it can support policy coherence and integration, outlining ideas to accelerate its adoption to unlock SDG progress.

UN DESA's "[Policy Brief No. 139: Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience for Climate Action through Risk-informed Governance](#)" contributes to SDGs 13, 15, 16 and 17 as it examines how to strengthen disaster risk reduction and resilience for climate action through risk-informed governance. The Policy Brief analyses the global trends in disasters and its consequences on society. It examines the concept of risk-informed governance and why it is critical for DRR and resilience.

UN DESA provides Member States knowledge sharing platforms, technical advisory services, and online and in-person capacity development training on a broad range of governance and public administration foresight and preparedness strategies and implementation modalities. Strengthening institutional, organizational and individual capacities for strategic foresight is critical for proactively addressing events rather than merely reacting to them. Establishing frameworks for inter-ministerial cooperation and multi-level governance is vital for improving effective policymaking. Effective strategic planning and foresight are key to ensuring that organizations are equipped to tackle complex future challenges and crises. Although predicting the future is not possible, strategic foresight provides the tools necessary for successful policy development amid uncertainty. This involves examining and preparing for various potential scenarios to future-proof strategies, uncover new opportunities and challenges, and devise innovative approaches to improving well-being as conditions change. It allows governments to make strategic decisions to shape a collectively desired future—a vision that supports sound, coherent, and evidence-based policymaking, manages risks, and fosters adaptable, future-ready organizations. Building the capacity for a foresight mindset is also critical. A foresight mindset includes short and long-term planning to develop clear goals that are consistent with agreed strategies; a belief in the importance of focusing on forward looking strategies to ensure anticipatory, flexible, and action-oriented behaviours.

The Department recognizes the urgent need to strengthen local institutions to cope with an increasingly complex social environment affected by multiple crises, including COVID-19, fiscal restrictions, climate change, energy challenges, and other concurrent crises that disproportionately impact those left behind. UN DESA is implementing projects with Member States, in collaboration with other UN agencies and regional economic commissions, to build capacities in responding to poverty and inequality risks based on multidimensional causes. UN DESA works with countries to develop

tools and institutional arrangements that enhance SDG progress through more effective and [inclusive social protection systems](#), including the promotion of data-driven policy making. Recognizing the importance of integrated social protection schemes, UN DESA has developed capacity building tools to support countries' efforts in adopting sustainable, whole-of-government practices. These efforts aim to address the dynamics of vulnerability faced by individuals, households, and communities throughout their life cycle.

UN DESA leverages its knowledge resources and products on strategic foresight to support governments by partnering with UN Resident Coordinators, UN country teams, schools of public administration, academia, civil society organizations, among others.

UN DESA frames preparedness, resilience, and foresight within a 'whole-of-government approach' to ensure inclusiveness and leaving no one behind. By supporting regional and national capacity development activities guided by the UN Resident Coordinator System and its capacity building tools, it fosters a holistic understanding of resilience and takes concrete actions to promote equity and inclusion for marginalized groups and people in vulnerable situations. This approach aligns with the principle of leaving no one behind in the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for DRR.

The Department provides tools and resources aimed at strengthening a whole-of-government approach to foresight and risks to sustainable development. For instance, the [Reconstructing Public Administration after Conflict Guidance Toolkit](#) focuses on reconstructing public administration after conflict, which is the fundamental prerequisite for development in any post-conflict situation. The [World Public Sector Report](#) documents key trends in the institutional arrangements adopted by countries to implement the 2030 Agenda and assesses some of the strengths and weaknesses of those arrangements regarding the performance of key functions of the policy process. The voluntary [Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development](#) provide expert guidance to interested countries in a broad range of governance challenges. The [Institutional Readiness Assessment for Policy Coherence](#) supports government agencies in assessing their institutional readiness to support policy coherence. It is meant to diagnose the extent to which the current public sector priorities and strategies, rules and regulations, processes and structures, competencies, and the mindsets in government enable the implementation of integrated policies at central and local levels.

UN DESA's resources are also available to support governance capacities to tackle risk and build resilience for future eventualities. The Department works with Member States in assessing the state of global e-governance and offering best practices for improving the ways people interact with different parts of their government, incorporating new tools and innovations. UN DESA and UN University (UNU) have designed, maintain, and apply [Local Online Service Index \(LOSI\)](#) methodology to assess local government portals. So far UN DESA and UNU have applied the LOSI methodology to the most populous cities in 193 UN Member States. There is a strong interest in applying the LOSI methodology to more cities in a single country. UN DESA and UNU are inviting interested institutions, which have self-sustained resources and capacities to support the process, to partner and apply LOSI methodology within a single country. The Effective National to Local Public Governance for SDG Implementation Training of Trainers Toolkit is designed around the often-expressed challenges of strengthening national to local government coordination and institutional effectiveness for the SDGs. Therefore, this toolkit aims to break these barriers for more effective achievement of the SDGs and highlights the role of local government.

The Department produces several accessible resources helping to build leaders as future agents of change. For instance, the Online Course on Transformational Leadership Capacities in Africa's Public Sector Institutions to Implement the 2030 Agenda and Achieve the SDGs is particularly tailored for public servants in Africa or anyone interested in learning about transformational leadership in Africa. The Public Servants' Mindsets to Implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Training of Trainers Toolkit provides a set of methodologies and tools that can contribute to a change in the environment, culture, and mindset of public servants in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the context of the 2030 Agenda. The Publication on Changing Mindsets to Realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides key recommendations on promoting public servants' mindsets, competencies, and behaviours to foster effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness in the public sector. Finally, the [Global Network of Schools of Public Administration](#) aims to strengthen the advocacy of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs among all stakeholders and to create, expand and exchange knowledge on the 2030 Agenda and develop individual, organizational and institutional capabilities.

UN DESA supports national efforts to improve their responsiveness to public needs and engagement of people in the foresight and preparedness efforts. It promotes e-participation and the use of open government data to improve public accountability, combat corruption, and enhance the delivery of public services. For instance, the Government Innovation for Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups Training of Trainers Toolkit builds capacities to promote government innovation for the social inclusion of vulnerable group by introducing approaches, strategies, and experiences at the national level. The Risk-informed Governance and Innovative Technology for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience, Training of Trainers Toolkit seeks to build national capacities to spearhead innovations and utilize Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and key frontier technologies in government to drive DRR and resilience. A handbook on [Strengthening Resilience in Cities and Local Communities through Innovation and Digital Government](#) contributes to developing the capacities and skills of local government officials, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders in strengthening resilience in cities and local communities to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sendai Framework for DRR.

UN DESA delivers workshops aimed at strengthening strategic planning and foresight for sound policy making, raising awareness and communication of future risks, and improving governance responses. Its capacity development activities are oriented to build competencies of public institutions and leaders and to facilitate networks of public servants to enable knowledge exchange and prepare them for future risks and opportunities. For instance, in partnership with the African Peer Mechanism and Resident Coordinators, the Department organized regional webinars on promoting resilience and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa from November 2021 to January 2022 on sound policymaking, strategic planning and foresight. UN DESA provided an overview of the state of play on strategic planning and foresight in these countries as well as some suggestions on how capacities could be enhanced. Participants stated that strategic planning and foresight associated with the principle of sound policymaking is relevant and can contribute to strengthening the effectiveness of institutions.



Member State testimonials about UN DESA risk-informed governance workshops

“

This course is excellent. I believe there is a need to capacitate participants to become Ambassadors for change or Trainer of Trainers on these concepts. This is a highly scalable project.

LDRRMO | CDRRMO, Maasin City, The Philippines

”

“

I'll work towards making Boma, South Sudan, a different place with the knowledge gained from this workshop.

Peer Educator, Sea Partners, South Sudan

”

“

I am very much happier by participating in this invaluable capacity building. I believe the training will have ground-breaking impacts worldwide in combatting risks and making the world safer and more productive for living.

Ph.D. student, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, China

”

“

I commend UN DESA/DPIDG/UNPOG for organizing workshops like this. Poor municipalities like ours could have access and will gain knowledge on DRRM. Our learnings are very vital to make our leaders, DRRM advocates and the people proactive in battling the hazards in our locality.

Local Disaster Reduction and Management Officer,
Municipality of Mabuhay, The Philippines

”

Capacity building on strategic foresight and resilience

At the global level, UN DESA's 2024 webinar series on "Effective Governance and the Quintet of Change for the Implementation of the SDGs" features a webinar on "Strengthening Capacities for Strategic Foresight in Support of Sound Policymaking."

In the Dominican Republic, UN DESA held a workshop on "Foresight and Systems Thinking for Strategic Planning for Sustainable Development Goals." It aimed at promoting a more coherent, participatory, and evidence-based governance approach in support of the planning and policy prioritization of Dominican Republic's Multi-Annual National Plan for the Public Sector.

Dominican Republic

In Sierra Leone, using the CEPA principles as a guide and as a follow-up to the 2023 workshop, the Minister of Public Administration and Political Affairs convened multi-stakeholder consultations under the theme "Towards an Efficient, Effective and Inclusive Public Service in Sierra Leone." The consultations resulted in recommendations relating to revamping civil service in Sierra Leone and enhancing effectiveness and competencies of civil servants.

Sierra Leone

Guyana

In Guyana, UN DESA facilitated the establishment of an Inter-ministerial Steering Committee for public sector transformation, trained officials on changing mindsets, data governance, digital government, systems thinking, strategic foresight and innovation.

In Namibia, UN DESA's work played a pivotal role in the adoption of a national roadmap for the institutionalization of evidence-based decision-making on Climate, Land Use, Energy, and Water Systems (CLEWS). This facilitated peer learning and the exchange of best practices, assisting countries in enhancing their ability to design innovative solutions, formulate short- and long-term plans, and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances.

Namibia

Brazil

UN DESA organized a capacity development workshop in collaboration with the Government of Brazil. The workshop, entitled "Empowering Futures: Cooperatives at the Forefront of Inclusivity, Resilience and Environmental Stewardship," was attended by about 30 participants from 16 countries of Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America. At the workshop, UN DESA informed and encouraged participants to prepare for the observation of the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives in 2025. Participants also had the opportunity to attend sessions of the triannual Conference of Brazilian Cooperatives, which was attended by around 3,000 members of cooperative societies in Brazil. The main speaker in the workshop was H.E. Geraldo Alckmin, Vice President of the Republic of Brazil.

Uruguay

UN DESA developed a training workshop in Uruguay, focusing on the analysis of longitudinal data from the Nutrition, Child Development, and Health Survey (ENDIS) using "R" statistical software, for public officers' working in social protection policies to strengthen their technical skills for conducting complex longitudinal analyses. As a result of this project, it is anticipated a significant enhancement in the capacity of public officers to interpret, analyze, and effectively utilize data derived from the ENDIS survey for monitoring the implementation of Uruguay's early childhood development social protection programme. Officers acquired comprehensive skills in data analysis and interpretation, enabling them to derive valuable insights from the ENDIS dataset.

In the **Latin American and Caribbean region**, a webinar was organized with the Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) on "Effective governance for transformational change: Strengthening capacities, mindsets and competencies of public institutions to build the next generation of public servants in Latin America and the Caribbean."

For **Africa**, an online workshop was organized by UN DESA and APRM on "Strategic Planning and Foresight in Africa in Response to COVID-19." The workshops aimed at developing the capacities of national governments to promote sound policymaking, with a particular focus on policy coherence, strategic planning and foresight and risk management.

In Pakistan, working together with the National School of Public Policy, UN DESA trained future public servants on the mindsets and behavioral changes required for SDG achievement, integrating UN DESA's innovative mindsets toolkit into the school's curriculum.

Pakistan

In Mongolia, a workshop for media officials was organised in collaboration with government partners on "Promoting Risk-informed Communication for Reporting on Emergencies and DRR to Achieve the SDGs." The event promoted a critical understanding of sustainable development issues, disaster risk resilience, enhanced governance capacity, and strengthened public servants' awareness of their active role in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs and other global frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for DRR and Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Mongolia

Republic of Korea

In the Republic of Korea, a capacity development workshop on Changing Mindsets: Cultivating Systems Thinking, Foresight and Innovation in Public Sector Leadership was held in the framework of the 2024 UN Public Service Forum. It equipped leaders with enhanced skills in systems thinking and foresight methodologies for more effective decision-making.

In Ethiopia, UN DESA organized a capacity development workshop on reinforcing national and regional emergency centers (NDRMC) by leveraging virtual platforms, web portals and a custom digital library exclusively designed for NDRMC's needs. The practical application of knowledge gained from the workshop played a vital role in driving the development of an advanced ICT network and infrastructure ultimately bolstering disaster management capabilities across the region.

Ethiopia

In Seychelles, UN DESA has trained 20 government officials, CEOs, and financial analysts on the tools necessary to forecast future scenarios and develop strategic responses that are both sustainable and inclusive. UN DESA's support has led to enhanced coordination among ministries paving the way to more coherent and aligned strategies for SDG achievement, directly impacting SDG 16 and SDG 17.

Seychelles

Kenya

A retreat with Kenyan government officials and youth participants was held in Nairobi to explore the intersection of the peace and security agenda (SDG 16) with local youth-led efforts to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Issues such as better policy coordination and cohesion amongst different levels of governments were discussed. The need to build trust and dialogue between young people and public authorities at all levels was acknowledged by the youth participants and by members of Kenya's National Steering Committee. Participants agreed that the conversation needs to continue and could benefit from the participation of other regional partners. There was interest in organizing a capacity-building workshop to bring together diverse stakeholders working to support local youth actions around the SDGs.

Mauritius

In Mauritius, UN DESA has facilitated an increase in its capacity for strategic foresight, aiding the government in envisioning the future and developing scenarios on critical topics such as climate change.

Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia

UN DESA is developing capacity-building workshops with several governments in Africa and Asia-Pacific on the digitalization of social protection systems. The aim of the national workshops is to strengthen the country's social protection system and enhance the capacity of programmes to identify, reach out to, and expand adequate coverage for those left behind. The workshop seeks to build robust, sustainable, inclusive, and crisis-responsive policies and programmes by training policymakers on the use of various tools, including the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). The MPI will be used as an analytical tool to identify the most vulnerable people, highlight the specific deprivations they face, and consequently, target resources and design policies more effectively to address the impacts of economic impacts, conflicts and climate change.

In the **Arab region**, a Webinar on "Effective Governance for Transformational Change: Strengthening capacities, mindsets, and competencies of public institutions to build the next generation of public servants in the Arab Region" was organized in 2022 by UN DESA in collaboration with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

For the **Asia-Pacific region**, a 3-day online workshop on "Risk-informed Governance, Climate Action and Finance Mechanisms for Local Resilience" was attended by nearly 1,000 stakeholders interested in or supporting disaster risk management, climate change adaptation, building resilience, innovative finance mechanism for climate action and sustainable development.

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION

Population growth, population ageing and global migration flows are defining trends of our time. UN DESA produces data and provides methodological and policy guidance to help countries plan for a sustainable future in the context of population change. Looking to the future, UN DESA projects that between now and 2050, the global population will rise from 8.2 to 9.7 billion; the number of persons aged 65 years or older will reach more than 1.6 billion; and the fraction of the global population living in cities will increase to over two thirds, with around 2 billion people being added to urban areas.

Detailed and reliable population data and projections, which are often lacking, expensive and difficult to collect or generate, are critical so that planners and policy makers can anticipate trends and challenges and put in place policies to meet the needs of both current and future generations. UN DESA's population estimates and projections help to inform planners and policy makers about expected demographic trends concerning the number of births, the size of the labour force, the number of older persons, and more, helping them plan for the provision of services such as social protection, education, health care, affordable housing, skills training and job creation.

KEY FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

1

Delivering robust population foresight

2

Helping Member States to anticipate trends in urbanization and migration

3

Building national capacities to estimate and project population changes

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES



To prepare for the future, it is essential for policy makers to understand the current demographic situation and how it may change in the next 5, 10 or 15 years and beyond. With appropriate planning, least developed countries could reap a “demographic dividend,” consisting of faster economic growth per capita thanks to a working-age population that is growing in size relative to the population of children and older persons. However, as the population distribution continues shifting towards older ages, financial pressures rise due to the high costs of providing pensions and especially health care for the burgeoning older population.

Urban population increase, driven in part by migration flows from rural to urban areas, is helping to make cities the engine of growth in developing countries. Meanwhile, it is expected that international migration will be the main driver of population growth in high-income countries over the next few decades. And while the issue of migration remains politically sensitive, there is greater recognition that migrants make a positive contribution to inclusive growth and sustainable development in countries of origin and destination.

The need for reliable population data has increased in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. With rising uncertainty around future trends amidst multiple global crises, reliable and timely data and internationally coordinated action are needed now more than ever to set the world back on track, to build resilience, and to make sustainable choices that can benefit both people and the planet.

FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS

1

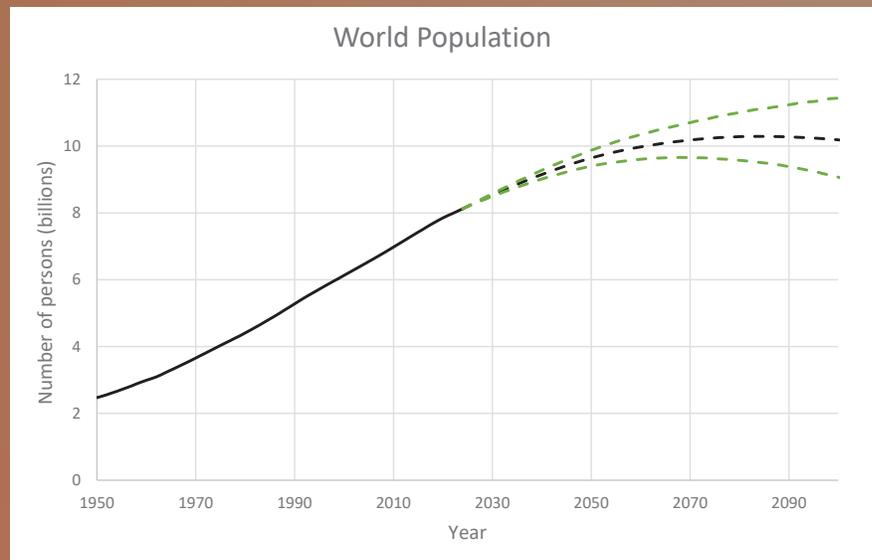
Delivering robust population foresight

UN DESA produces comprehensive and internationally comparable population data and analysis to inform future-oriented policy making. The Department provides global population estimates and projections, including fertility and mortality rates, disaggregated by age and sex and looking ahead as far as 2100. *World Population Prospects 2024*, the twenty-eighth edition of the United Nations estimates and projections of global population, concluded that the global population would reach 8.2 billion people in 2024, 8.5 billion in 2030, 9.6 billion in 2050 and 10.2 billion in 2100, according to the “medium” projection scenario and taking into account the impact of the pandemic on all three components of population change (fertility, mortality and international migration). The dataset also provides 80 and 95 per cent prediction intervals, which illustrate the increasing uncertainty of these projections as a function of time (figure 1). It includes 12 additional scenarios to illustrate the sensitivity of the projections to changes in the underlying assumptions.

Figure 1.

World population, estimates, 1950–2023, and projections (medium scenario), 2024–2100, with 95 per cent prediction intervals.

Source: *World Population Prospects 2024*.



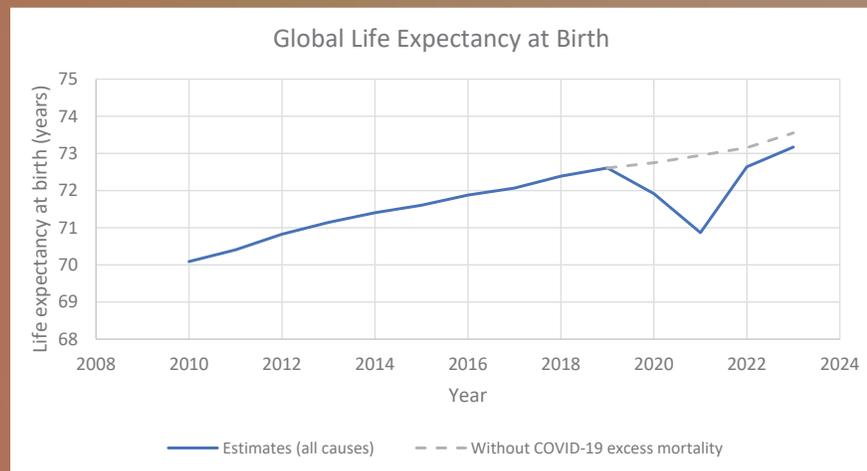
NOTES: Prediction intervals represented by coloured lines around central projection; for a given year, the future trend is expected to lie in the predicted range with a probability of 95 per cent.

Collaboration with the UN system on mortality indicators

The Department promotes coordination across national statistical systems and produces estimates of mortality and life expectancy at the global, regional and national levels. WHO provides a breakdown of total mortality in terms of causes of death. Similarly, the Statistics Division of UN DESA has worked with WHO to encourage closer cooperation between health ministries and national statistical offices and to support the development of comprehensive international standards for the regular production of complete and reliable vital statistics. A technical advisory group convened by WHO and UN DESA and comprising over 30 global experts provided expertise and technical resources to support estimation of the excess mortality associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (figure 2). UN DESA also collaborates on estimation of child mortality and maternal mortality indicators with partners including UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank and UNFPA.

Figure 2.

Global life expectancy at birth (as observed) and counterfactual scenario without COVID-19 excess mortality, 2010-2023.



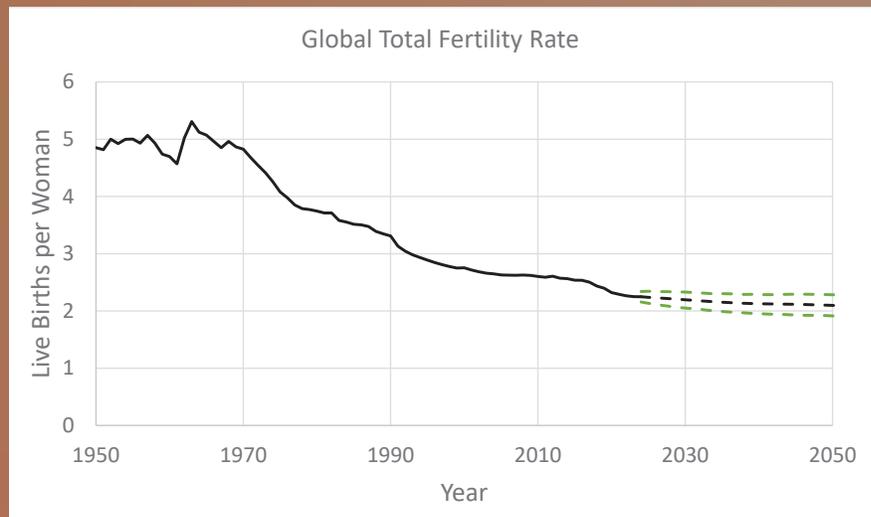
Source: *World Population Prospects 2024*.

UN DESA provides reliable estimates and projections of trends in fertility rates and patterns of marriage and union formation and dissolution for all countries of the world. Fertility levels and trends are a key predictor of population growth or decline and the principal determinant of changes in the population age distribution. In the *World Population Prospects* advanced statistical methods are used to project fertility trends (figure 3). The Department's work on fertility extends beyond the reproductive behaviour of individuals and provides insights into wider social and economic changes such as increases in women's educational attainment and labour force participation.

Figure 3.

Global total fertility rate (live births per woman), estimates, 1950-2023, and projections (medium scenario), 2024--2050, with 95 per cent prediction intervals.

Source: *World Population Prospects 2024*.



NOTES: Prediction intervals represented by coloured lines around central projection; for a given year, the future trend is expected to lie in the predicted range with a probability of 95 per cent.

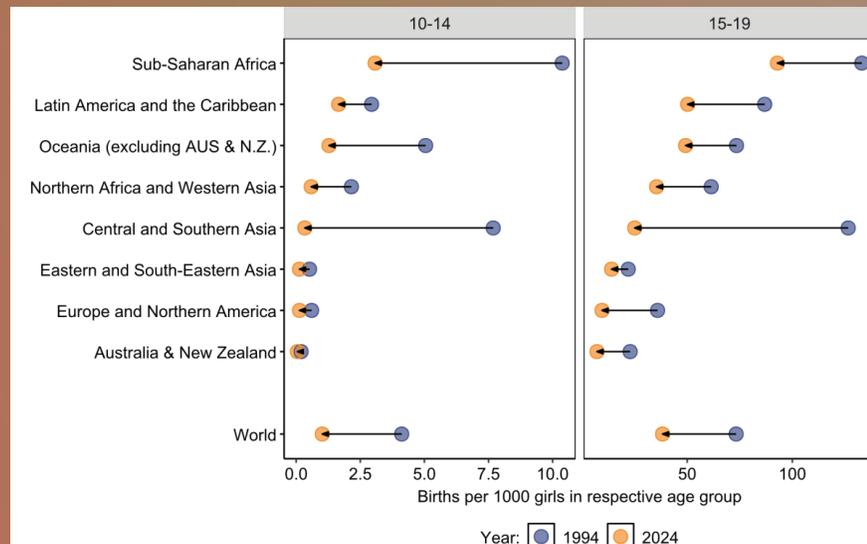
Data on early childbearing

Early childbearing affects social and economic outcomes for girls, women and their families, while complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls. The Population Division of UN DESA is the custodian agency of SDG indicator 3.7.2, the adolescent birth rate for ages 10-14 and 15-19 years, which is used for the global monitoring of progress towards achieving SDG target 3.7 on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services. Every two years, the Division updates a global data set that includes information for over 200 countries and areas on birth rates among women aged 15-19 years and, since 2022, also for girls aged 10-14 years. Estimates and projections of adolescent birth rates at the global, regional and national levels are available from the *World Population Prospects*, providing information on the progress made in reducing early childbearing (see Figure 4). In the 2024 edition, the *World Population Prospects* included, together with the projections of adolescent birth rates based on historical trends, three additional scenarios of an accelerated reduction of adolescent birth rates, showing the impact on future numbers of births and population growth.

Figure 4.

Adolescent birth rates, world and SDG regions, 1994 and 2024.

Source: *World Population Prospects 2024*.



The most recent edition of the *World Population Policies* in 2021 draws attention to the fact that population growth driven by high fertility remains a concern for some countries, while others are faced with population ageing and, in extreme cases, population decline driven by low fertility. The report also provides a review of trends in global fertility levels from the early 1960s and details the evolution of national fertility policies – thus providing an important historical record as well as lessons for future policy making. Since 2020, reports assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on fertility patterns and trends and offer policy options for governments to consider strengthening sexual and reproductive health care and services.

UN DESA's tools and analytics deliver trusted resources on family planning. Publications and data sets on family planning produced with support from the *Making Family Planning Count* initiative bring methodological and technical rigour to improving the availability and quality of key family planning indicators and related population data. The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development affirmed the basic right of couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so. Global data sets and analyses of contraceptive use and family planning fill critical data gaps, providing information to help governments and other stakeholders with the design, implementation and monitoring of national health and family planning policies and programmes and with assessing progress towards the national and global commitments of the Programme of Action and the SDGs. A comprehensive data set of key family planning indicators, *World Contraceptive Use*, contains empirical data on the prevalence of contraceptive use and on the unmet need for family planning among women of reproductive age (15-49 years), drawn from more than 1,600 surveys. Such data are used to generate annual estimates and projections of family planning indicators from 1970 to 2030, published biennially as *Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators*, and for the global monitoring of SDG indicator 3.7.1 and of the family planning component of SDG indicator 3.8.1 on universal health coverage.

The report *World Family Planning 2022* presents the latest information about family planning at the global, regional and national levels. The report assesses levels and trends in contraceptive use and the demand for family planning among women of reproductive age between 1990 and 2021, including the proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods of contraception (SDG indicator 3.7.1). The report also presents trends in contraceptive use by type of method, including regional variations in the use of specific methods, and examines how contraceptive use and needs vary by age, highlighting gaps in meeting the need for family planning among adolescents and young women.

2

Helping Member States to anticipate trends in urbanization and migration

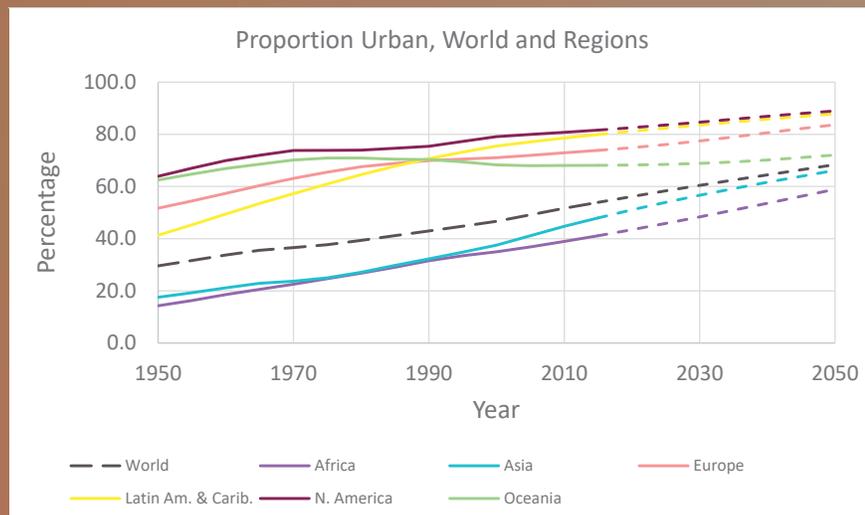
The Department prepares estimates and projections of the size of the urban population at the global, regional and national levels. According to *World Urbanization Prospects 2018*, by 2050 more than two thirds of the global population may be living in cities (figure 5). Urban population growth, driven in part by migration from rural to urban areas, will increase pressure on cities to provide basic services for their residents and will increase their exposure and vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change. Achievement of the SDGs requires the effective management of urban growth and the creation of sustainable cities in both developed and developing countries.

As global levels of migration intensify, UN DESA's publications and data sets capture credible data at scale, deepen understanding on the plight of people on the move, share lessons, and offer policy recommendations. The *International Migrant Stock* dataset provides disaggregated estimates on the number (or "stock") of international migrants at global, regional and national levels. It includes information for 232 countries and areas, obtained primarily from national population censuses. The dataset provides the latest estimates of the number of international migrants by age, sex, country of origin and country of destination. The latest report on the topic, *International Migration 2020 Highlights*, shows how the pandemic impacted millions of migrants and undermined progress on the SDGs. These products are useful not only for analytical purposes but also to raise awareness about various issues, including the challenges of comparing statistics across countries due to differences in concepts and definitions.

Figure 5.

Proportion urban, world and regions, 1950-2050.

Source: *World Urbanization Prospects 2018*.



3

Building national capacities to estimate and project population changes

UN DESA helps to build national capacities to estimate and analyse population levels and trends. Various handbooks provide expert guidance on methodological issues, while regional and in-country workshops and field missions empower participants through practical training and experience. For example, UN DESA produced the *Handbook for Improving the Production and Use of Migration Data for Development*, developed e-Learning modules for SDG indicators 3.7.1 and 3.7.2, provided open-source software libraries for demographic estimation and projection, and published a manual to support the measurement and analysis of national transfer accounts. These activities provide valuable resources to countries as they formulate and implement policies and programmes related to population and development.

The Department provides expert knowledge and toolkits and hosts workshops to expand national capacities for population foresight. Since 2015, the Department has hosted over 21 workshops on topics that include collecting and using migration-related data for development, estimating population size and other demographic indicators, and measuring population ageing and assessing its economic and fiscal consequences.

ENSURING SUSTAINABLE FINANCING

Access to affordable financing is critical for countries to be able to plan and build forward, particularly as they face difficult economic policy trade-offs and aim to recover from recent shocks. The UN has called for international and domestic action to expand access to financing for the SDGs and climate action, address debt risks, and achieve a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient recovery, particularly for the most vulnerable countries. The financing landscape is also fast evolving with new forms of digital finance that offer opportunities and come with risks, but developing countries are unable to keep pace. Future risks are likely to create a bigger financing gap and new strategies are required to address these. UN DESA is helping Member States to close the financing gap for sustainable development through timely, evidence-based, policy advice, and well-targeted capacity-building efforts. UN DESA offers practical advice for preventing the global financing gap from widening and advises on more resilient and responsive financing systems as a whole.

KEY FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

1

Advancing global consensus on financing for development that considers future risks

2

Future-proofing financing and debt

3

Building national capacities to expand future access to finance

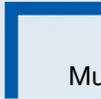


The international community will need to mobilize the resources developing countries need to achieve the SDGs. ... Reforms of the international financial architecture are also urgently needed to ensure that the voice of developing countries is fairly represented.



Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,
High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, New York, 10 July 2023

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES



Multiple crises have continued to exacerbate the development challenge, threatening to further reverse progress on the SDGs. Impacts are most severely felt by vulnerable countries, including many least developed countries (LDCs), African countries and small island developing States (SIDS). A slowdown in the global economy, the war in Ukraine, rising energy and food prices, tightening financial conditions, rapidly rising indebtedness, declining overseas aid, and the devastating impacts of conflict and climate change continue to remain pressing challenges – all of which are competing for scarce public resources. This is giving rise to uneven economic growth, unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and rising inequality. Without urgent action the poorest and most vulnerable will be left even further behind. Recovery from the pandemic also poses challenges for developing countries that are on the path to graduate from LDC status. Once these countries graduate, they would lose access to concessional finance and to LDC-specific trade preferences.

Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) is not keeping pace with growing need for assistance from poorer countries, and donors often fail collectively to meet ODA commitments of 0.7 per cent of GNI. Borrowing costs for developing countries is high, and tax structures have not kept pace with a changing world. Financial markets and capital flows are volatile, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), an important contributor to growth in productive capacity, has fallen following the pandemic. Recovery plans need to be sustainable with its benefits extending to all. However, the distribution of global investment funds is uneven with the bulk likely to go to developed economies and a few large emerging markets. Developing countries may have limited fiscal space and poor policy coherence in channelling finance and investment towards sustainable development, inadequate institutional and absorptive capacity to formulate a pipeline of bankable SDG investment projects, and weak financial, governance and regulatory systems to be able to direct and implement recovery strategies and projects at pace and scale.

FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS

1

Advancing global consensus on financing for development that considers future risks

UN DESA supports high-level forums advancing global consensus on financing for development outcomes that consider future risks and challenges. The development landscape is changing and, as the secretariat for the biennial ECOSOC [Development Cooperation Forum \(DCF\)](#), the Department is working to strengthen the foundation for collective action. UN DESA produces reviews of trends, research and analytical work that informs global actors in balanced and inclusive debates on emerging issues in international development cooperation. Notably, drawing on the work of the Department, [the eighth high-level meeting of the DCF in 2023](#) resulted in a reimagined understanding of development cooperation for the decade of action – informed by risk, designed to build resilience and strongly linked with climate action.

The Department advances policy and action by providing thought leadership and agenda-shaping, promoting multi-stakeholder dialogue, identifying policy options and best practices, and offering strategic advice and support for capacity development. The Under-Secretary-General of UN DESA chairs the Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development (IATF), which is comprised of over 60 United Nations entities and other international institutions. The Department also supports the annual ECOSOC [Forum on Financing for Development \(FfD Forum\)](#), an intergovernmental process established under the Addis Agenda, for inclusive, multi-stakeholder dialogue to address current global challenges and advance policies for financing long-term sustainable development priorities. The outcome of the recent FfD Forums in 2023 and 2024 take a foresight approach by calling for an SDG stimulus to address high costs borrowing and rising risks of debt distress, to find urgent solutions to scale up affordable long-term financing for development and to expand contingency financing to countries in need. In 2023 Member States also agreed to hold the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in 2025, in recognition of the need to adapt and evolve international norms on financing for ongoing changes to technology, industry and the global economy.

In a dynamic global financing landscape, UN DESA helps to shape the conversation on social and economic issues through its cutting-edge analytical products and policy advice. The annual flagship [Financing for Sustainable Development Report \(FSDR\)](#)¹ plays an important role in advising the intergovernmental process on progress, implementation gaps and recommendations for corrective action. It serves as an important input to the intergovernmental negotiations from the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development and the quadrennial General Assembly High Level Dialogue on Financing for Development, as well as to the HLPF. The reports are widely read by government, private sector, civil society, multilaterals, and UN agencies and entities. The 2024 *FSDR* included new data dashboards to help illustrate progress and prepare Member States for needed actions. It also laid the substantive groundwork for upcoming negotiations at the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development.

1. The report is a product of the UN Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development and is coordinated and edited by UN DESA.

UN DESA continues to support the Secretary-General's vision for reform of the international financial architecture to support new and emerging global needs. The Department's "[Policy brief no. 98: Risk-informed Finance](#)" sheds new light on the inter-linkages between risk and resilience and advocates for a risk-informed approach to financing for development which will be critical for the future. "[Policy Brief No. 138: Improving the Criteria to Access Aid for Countries That Need It the Most](#)" draws attention to donors failing to meet ODA commitments. It envisions the use of 'multi-dimensional vulnerability criteria' in donor resource allocation decision particularly in the context of escalating risks and future crises

“

I encourage the G-24 finance ministers and central bank governors to make use of the analysis and recommendations of the 2023 Financing for Sustainable Development Report. It is my hope that this analytical work, which is supported by the entire international system, can help to bolster the evidence base for your decision making.

”

UN Under-Secretary-General Li Junhua at the Ministerial Meeting of the Group of 24, Washington, DC, 11 April 2023

UN DESA's series of policy briefs continue to amplify the key recommendations from the *FSDR* and cover wide ranging frontier issues including on the cost of borrowing, crypto currencies, and complementary measures to GDP for access to concessional finance. For instance, UN DESA's "[Policy Brief No. 134: The Great Finance Divide](#)" highlights the need to increase access to long-term, affordable and stable financing, and to use proceeds productively so that public policy goals are achieved, and fiscal capacity is enhanced, while addressing debt distress when necessary. UN DESA's "[Policy Brief No. 135: Cryptoassets and So-called “Stablecoins”: Where Do We Go From Here?](#)" pointed to both the high risks and potential of cryptoassets, and provides four policy solutions for strengthening regulation, harnessing technology, strengthening cooperation across sectors and jurisdictions, and addressing underlying domestic macroeconomic and structural challenges.

2

Future-proofing financing and debt

The annual *Financing for Sustainable Development Report* provides early warning to countries on rising and unsustainable debt – which remains a key risk to progress on the SDGs particularly in the context of global shocks, contracting economies and widening fiscal deficits. The report's also go a step further by providing policy solutions and recommendations such as highlighting the need for effective public management and debt management strategies, shared responsibilities between creditors and borrowers, the use of innovative financing instruments such as debt for climate swaps, and stronger mechanisms for debt crisis resolution.

UN DESA's convening efforts and analysis have highlighted the important role of credit ratings on debt sustainability and stability, particularly in relation to international capital markets. Credit ratings provide creditors with assessments of a debtor's relative risk of default and inaccurate ratings can impact the cost of borrowing and the stability of the international financial system, as demonstrated during the 2008 global financial crisis. In a response to a call from Member States, UN DESA organized a High-level Meeting in March 2022, to discuss how credit ratings and other sources of improved information could better contribute to financing for sustainable development and the stability of the international financial system. UN DESA will continue to support Member States and engage all relevant stakeholders to advance these recommendations in relevant platforms.

The Department is using multiple routes to engage private finance and investment to meet future financing needs for the SDGs. The Global Investors for Sustainable Development (GISD) Alliance, comprising representative members from among the world's largest investors and financial institutions, was convened by the UN Secretary-General in October 2019 to leverage the insights of private sector leaders and advocate for and scale up resources for sustainable finance to achieve the SDGs. UN DESA assists the GISD Alliance in implementing four priority areas: catalyse finance and investment; align finance and investment; promote long-terminism; develop instruments and platforms. Investors find it useful to have a common definition of Sustainable Development Investing (SDI) and standardized sector-specific metrics for measuring the degree of SDG-alignment of investments and draw on the GISD Navigator toolbox to rethink their business model towards the SDGs.

UN DESA's support to the SDG Investment Fair is helping to mobilize private finance by connecting the private sector with impactful and responsible sustainable development investment opportunities in emerging and frontier markets. High demand for the Fair has led to its transition from an annual event to a year-round program. Since 2018, seven SDG Investment Fairs have been held, showcasing 22 countries, and with over US \$11 billion worth of project investments.

SDG Investment Fairs link countries and investors



The SDG Investment Fairs provide the opportunity for countries to pitch their SDG investment opportunities, supports investor networking and peer learning. Consequently, over 19 countries have been showcased as SDG investment destinations. Member States are also building critical knowledge and skills to prepare bankable SDG investments.

In 2021, Kenya, Jamaica, Ghana, Pakistan, Rwanda, Dominican Republic, Namibia, and Ukraine presented over \$10 billion in investment opportunities to financial institutions and companies. In 2022, Colombia, Equatorial Guinea, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nigeria, and Malawi presented opportunities in a range of sectors including sustainable infrastructure, healthcare, manufacturing, green energy, and agri-business. In April 2022, a special investor matchmaking event at the Permanent Mission of Namibia to the United Nations successfully facilitated interactions between new investors and technology partners to support Namibia’s strategic SDG investments. In April 2023, the Fair took place alongside the ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum and showcased a range of SDG-aligned sustainable investment opportunities in diverse sectors.

The Department’s policy and knowledge resources emphasize the importance of increasing future domestic tax resources for countries to finance sustainable development. While it is widely known that tax systems and public spending are powerful instruments to incentivize and support sustainable development, countries face several challenges in developing and implementing policies that are suited to their local contexts. UN DESA outlines policy options including through aligning budgets and tax policies with sustainable development priorities and policy coherence and through the use of integrated national financing frameworks (INFFs).

UN expert guidance on tax matters: offering countries practical tools and solutions to strengthen domestic tax systems amid the evolving international tax and sustainable development landscape



A Handbook on Carbon Taxation for Developing Countries (October 2021) outlines policy options for curbing carbon-based emissions responsible for climate change, in line with commitments under the Paris Agreement.



The UN Model Double Taxation Convention between Developed and Developing Countries (September 2021) brings to the fore issues on double taxation rights and reflects on differences between UN Model Taxation Convention which developing countries rely upon more and OECD Model Tax Convention on Income and on Capital.



The Handbook on Dispute Avoidance and Resolution (May 2021) focuses on the application of income tax laws in achieving the right balance between raising domestic revenues and attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).



A Practical Manual on Transfer Pricing (May 2021) focuses on the transfer of goods, services and intangibles between enterprises of the multinational groups and highlights the need for adhering to the internationally agreed arm's length principle, so that profits are appropriately taxed.



UN Guidelines on the Tax Treatment of Government-to-Government Aid Projects (April 2021) reflects on the proliferation of special tax exemptions as an obstacle to developing country efforts to broaden their tax base. *The UN Manual for the Negotiation of Bilateral Tax Treaties between Developed and Developing Countries* (June 2019) is a compact training tool that provides practical guidance to developing country officials. It focuses on the unique realities and stages of capacity development in these countries, providing essential insights into negotiating tax treaties effectively.

UN DESA supports the new intergovernmental process on tax and delivers policy and knowledge products to enhance intergovernmental deliberations on emerging issues and future directions on international and domestic tax policies. For instance, the Department provided the Secretariat to the ad hoc intergovernmental committee established by GA resolution 78/230 to draft terms of reference for a United Nations framework convention on international tax cooperation by August 2024. The ToR outline a plan for a new UN framework convention aimed at creating a more adaptable and inclusive international tax system. Emphasis is on building a flexible and resilient approach to international tax cooperation that can evolve alongside rapid changes in technology, business models and global economic landscapes. By establishing principles that prioritize inclusivity, agility and adaptability, while balancing economic, social, and environmental concerns, the framework convention and early protocols to be negotiated over the next few years aim to help all countries better prepare for and respond to current and future tax-related challenges in an increasingly digitalized and globalized world.

UN DESA delivers the [UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters \(UN Tax Committee\)](#), which promotes international tax cooperation and makes practical recommendations on domestic and international tax matters and on actions to strengthen capacity building and provision of technical expertise to developing countries. UN DESA is helping to broaden discussions to include taxing the digitalized and globalized economy, tax treaties, environmental taxes, health taxes, wealth taxes, extractive industries taxation, and transfer pricing, among others.

UN DESA also supports the annual ECOSOC Special Meeting on International Cooperation in Tax Matters which offers opportunities to advance intergovernmental cooperation on international tax for example, by setting tax norms, by reducing tax avoidance and abuse, tackling tax-related illicit financial flows and harmful global tax competition, as well as supporting the use of tax policies by countries to achieve the SDGs. The Special Meeting in March 2024 provided a platform for multistakeholder discussions on promoting inclusive and effective international tax cooperation at the United Nations, pursuant to GA resolution 78/230, and exploring the role of net wealth taxes in fostering equality and financing the SDGs.

Since 2016, UN DESA represents the UN in the Platform for Collaboration on Tax (PCT), which brings together international organisations to work collaboratively on tax issues. This includes matters related to the design and implementation of standards for international tax matters, identifying capacity-building support to developing countries, and helping to deliver capacity-building tools. For example, the PCT's [Toolkit on the Taxation of Offshore Indirect Transfers \(OIT\)](#), launched in 2020, navigates the tricky ground between international and domestic tax law, and has the potential to plug loopholes, which deprive developing countries of billions of dollars each year. PCT is currently working on updating its toolkit on tax incentives to ensure continued relevance in helping developing countries address tax and domestic resource mobilization challenges, including the design and administration of tax incentives.

3

Building national capacities to expand future access to finance

UN DESA has taken a regional approach to capacity development for developing countries future financing needs. It has worked to design risk-informed and data driven development cooperation strategies and policies to address short-term crises and build long-term resilience. In 2022 and 2023, three regional peer learning events were held in the Asia-Pacific and African and Latin American and Caribbean regions respectively. In Africa and Latin America, the events focused on leveraging enablers of effective development cooperation to enhance support by development partners for climate adaptation needs. In the Asia-Pacific, the workshop provided hands-on training and guidance on the collection and effective use of accurate, relevant, comprehensive, and timely data for more effective development cooperation. In response to growing demand from countries, a DCF Digital Knowledge Centre was launched in 2023. This serves as a digital knowledge-management portal that collects good practices in designing, implementing and updating national development cooperation policies and strategies, as well as facilitating interactive online discussion among development cooperation focal points for peer learning and networking.

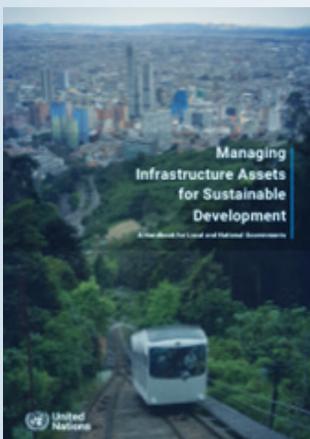
UN DESA is working with Member States to build capacity in dealing with complex tax issues and build the domestic resource base essential for future SDG progress. UN DESA's integrated capacity development programme in tax and domestic resource mobilization strengthens the capacities of developing country tax officials to address complex tax issues that pose revenue leakage risks. The programme supports the adoption and effective use of practical guidance developed by the UN Tax Committee on key tax policy and administration issues for sustainable development. It also assists countries in addressing tax avoidance, tax-related illicit financial flows, and the complex taxation of services, dispute avoidance and resolution, among other key topics. UN DESA is currently implementing a four-year project under the Development Account tranche 16, aimed at creating a risk assessment tool to help countries identify and address their vulnerabilities to aggressive tax avoidance.

The programme offers workshops at regional and global levels, online courses, and technical assistance a country level, all tailored to developing countries, including LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS. Practical guidance from the UN Tax Committee is freely available on the UN DESA website. An example of one of UN DESA's in-person workshops on tax in 2024 is provided below.

UN DESA supports developing country officials in enhancing their tax treaty negotiation skills

The Department, in collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), successfully delivered the 7th Practical Workshop on Negotiation of Tax Treaties at the OECD Multilateral Tax Center in Vienna, Austria, from 22 to 26 July 2024. This five-day event featured a comprehensive simulated negotiation exercise, where participants engaged in negotiating all provisions of a tax treaty between a developed and a developing country. This hands-on experience not only enhanced participants' practical skills in treaty negotiation but also deepened their understanding of the substantive differences between the United Nations and OECD Models Tax Conventions.

The workshop brought together thirty-two participants from twenty-seven countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean, with a balanced representation of eighteen women and fourteen men. This diverse group benefited from the collaborative and interactive format, which reinforced the critical aspects of international tax cooperation and treaty negotiation.



UN DESA is highlighting the importance of a systematic approach to managing public infrastructure investments – as a backbone of sustainable development – so that these are not wasted and that they adequately serve communities for generations to come. The growing number of risks and challenges stemming from climate change, public health crises and advances in digital technology reinforce the case for effective asset management and provide options to leverage these to finance sustainable development for future generations. UN DESA and the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) launched the [Managing Infrastructure Assets for Sustainable Development](#) handbook, which represents a significant contribution to the Financing for Sustainable Development agenda. The handbook provides national and local governments with concrete guidance and tools on how to ensure the resilience, sustainability and accessibility of existing and planned infrastructure investments. Recommendations provide guidance on how infrastructure assets can be adapted to emerging socio-economic and environmental challenges, including climate change and public health emergencies.

Capacity building on infrastructure asset management

UN DESA organized several capacity building workshops on infrastructure asset management (IAM) for local and central government officials in developing countries in support of the SDGs. The IAM programme draws on the 2021 UN DESA publication *Managing Infrastructure Assets for Sustainable Development: A Handbook for Local and National Governments* and its corresponding toolkits. The initiative supports public sector officials in shaping future strategies, policies and actions that maximize the financial and service performance of publicly owned and/or managed infrastructure assets, such as roads, water and sanitation, waste management facilities and natural assets and also strengthens their sustainability, resilience and accessibility for present and future generations.

Over 4,500 public sector officials were reached, and subsequently 220 multi-year Asset Management Action Plans were designed by local governments around the world. Ten beneficiary countries are now receiving direct technical assistance on IAM. An online Repository of Asset Management Action Plans (AMAPs) is enabling asset management practitioners to learn from each other's good practices, reflect them in their own processes and policies, and feel encouraged by the fact that infrastructure asset management can yield substantial short- and long-term benefits even through small actions. An online course on "Infrastructure Asset Management for Sustainable Development" is also available.

UN DESA is helping Member States articulate how national development strategies will be financed and implemented. The Department launched the Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFF) Facility in collaboration with UNDP, OECD, the European Union and the Governments of Italy and Sweden, in the margins of the ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum in April 2022. The Facility is intended to support implementation of INFFs in more than 80 countries. Countries are benefitting from UN DESA support in implementing concrete INFFs, including through access to guidance, and participation in regional training workshops in collaboration with other UN agencies and regional commissions.

ENABLING THE GREEN TRANSITION

Although accelerated and ambitious climate action is critical to the achievement of the SDGs, it is vital that no one is pushed out or left behind as countries take action to transition to low-carbon and environmentally sustainable economies and societies. Countries need to calibrate national action that recognises the realities of their societies and ensures that the needs of the poorest are safeguarded – for instance, in ensuring social protection measures, job transitions, and inclusion of voices from impacted economic sectors. At the global level all countries need to take account of their historical responsibilities for meeting their climate change commitment and in determining their transition pathways to green energy. This means that developing countries need international cooperation on financing and clean technology development, as well as trade and economic opportunities.

As the Secretariat for UN-Energy, UN DESA plays a leading role in the UN's efforts towards a net-zero future. The Department also supports the Organization's climate and SDG synergy efforts, attempting to break down the silos between the two workstreams to avoid duplication and streamline this important work going forward. This work is done in partnership with other UN agencies and is represented at the highest level in intergovernmental forums and other international meetings. Analytical work and capacity-building are also helping countries in advancing green transition pathways that are best suited to their national contexts.

KEY FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

1

Supporting collaborative partnerships and action towards a clean energy future

2

Promoting synergies between the SDGs and climate action for people and the planet

3

Building national capacities to accelerate a just and inclusive transition

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES



The rapidly worsening impacts of climate change are prompting countries to take action to decarbonize and green their economies. Countries need to transition to low carbon economies and to reduce carbon emissions which are contributing to global warming. Global primary energy demand is projected to increase by 50 to 70 per cent by 2050.¹ Unless this demand is met from a significant step up in renewable sources of energy, it is likely to contribute further to greenhouse gas emissions which are detrimental to the planet. This requires a transformation of energy systems to move towards greener and renewable sources of energy. It also requires shifts in the transport sector, a major contributor to emissions, and changes in infrastructure investment, production, and consumption choices of individuals, societies and economies.

Access to clean and affordable energy (SDG 7) is critical. Around 685 million people currently lack access to electricity and 2.1 billion people cook with dirty and unhealthy fuels. Any measures to reduce emissions should therefore ensure that the energy needs of people living in poverty are addressed. An inclusive and fair approach is also needed as countries transition away from fossil fuels towards clean energy and low carbon pathways. This comes with both opportunities and risks – for example, as green jobs may be created while more traditional ones are lost, or parts of society may be excluded from the benefits arising from the transition.

The impacts are likely to be felt most by developing countries who will face challenges as they are dependent on fossil fuels, and may have limited capacities, resources, and social safety nets to enable a smooth transition. Developing countries may have less historic responsibility for emissions, yet they need to take urgent action which may place undue stress on them. They also lack technical resources, data and guidance to inform policy making. Furthermore, synergies across sectors will be critical to give impetus to coordinated national action. Member States must raise global ambition on climate change, energy poverty and the SDGs. This requires coordinated and collaborative intergovernmental action on policies, financing, and emerging green technologies. It also requires multi-stakeholder partnerships, capacity building, capital, and quality data.

UN DESA's unique contributions are adding value to the UN's overall push on climate and development, occupying a niche role in supporting synergies between climate change ambition and the 2030 Agenda. It is also helping developing countries raise their ambitions and take forward bold and transformative ideas in policies, plans, actions and investments, while also promoting green transition pathways. The Department is well-positioned to facilitate transformative partnerships for accelerated action towards a fair and inclusive green transition.

1. <https://www.unido.org/news/international-vienna-energy-and-climate-forum-delivering-solutions-sustainable-and-climate-resilient-development-worldwide>

FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS

1

Supporting collaborative partnerships and action towards a clean energy future

Through its support to influential intergovernmental discussions, such as the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and the High-level Dialogue on Energy in 2021, UN DESA is supporting partnerships and action towards a clean energy transition. UN DESA plays a vital role in advancing intergovernmental discussions on energy, including by conducting and facilitating relevant policy analysis, engaging in knowledge sharing and capacity-building, supporting the mobilization of partnerships, and strengthening advocacy and communications. In its capacity as Secretariat for UN-Energy², UN DESA facilitates UN system-wide coordination on energy issues. As secretariat to the HLPF, UN DESA facilitates stocktaking of progress and technical preparation of the review of SDG 7 and its interlinkages with other SDGs – which is essential to drive forward action on SDG 7. UN DESA convenes a multi-stakeholder [SDG 7 Technical Advisory Group](#) (SDG 7 TAG) that is elevating the discussion on the need to address universal access and clean energy transitions, and its interlinkages with other SDGs. The SDG 7 TAG issues annually a set of SDG 7 Policy Briefs in support of the HLPF.

The Department gives voice and lends support to a just, inclusive, and equitable energy transition. The High-level Dialogue which was convened by the Secretary-General in 2021, supported by UN DESA, resulted in the first-ever [Global Roadmap for Accelerated SDG 7 Action](#) which provides an invaluable guide for collective action on energy across sectors that transcends individual and piecemeal approaches and delivers scaled-up and broad impact. It calls for action in five key areas: closing the energy access gap; rapidly transitioning to decarbonized energy systems; mobilizing adequate and predictable finance; leaving no one behind on the path to a net-zero future; and harnessing innovation, technology and data. Importantly, the roadmap also includes two sets of milestones for 2025 and 2030.

2. UN-Energy is the United Nations' mechanism for inter-agency collaboration in the field of energy and supports countries in achieving SDG 7 and the interrelated goals of the Paris Agreement and the broader SDG agenda. Working with over 190 countries on programmes and services at the global, regional and national levels, UN-Energy brings together more than 30 UN System entities and key partners for collaboration in the field of energy.

Energy Compacts making a difference



Photo: UN DESA helped to organize the first High-level Dialogue on Energy in New York in September 2021.

UN-Energy facilitates Energy Compacts, which are voluntary commitments by all stakeholders in support of SDG7 and net-zero emissions, backed by clear sets of actions and deliverables. Since their initiation at the High-level Dialogue on Energy in September 2021, more than \$1.4 trillion of financial commitments have been mobilised through the Energy Compacts.

More than 200 Energy Compacts from governments, businesses and other organizations were submitted, reflecting voluntary actions and finance commitments through 2030. These include, for example, commitments towards enabling the use of solar systems and mini-grids to power homes, schools, hospitals and public utilities in Nigeria, while creating 250,000 new jobs, concrete plans to increase the end-use of electricity from renewable sources for transport and heating in Chile, a plan for a Gender and Energy Coalition in Kenya, and the development of green hydrogen as a renewable energy source in Namibia.

Since 2021, Energy Compact proponents have enhanced electricity access for 177 million people and clean cooking access for 23 million people. Some 43.3 TWh of energy were saved through energy efficiency improvements since 2021 and installed renewable energy capacity more than doubled from 89GW to 245GW across 2021-2024. Also, US\$ 201 billion in finance was mobilized or deployed for Energy Compact actions since 2021.

2

Promoting synergies between the SDGs and climate action for people and the planet

UN DESA is working in collaboration with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat to enhance synergies in implementation of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Annual Climate and SDG Synergy Conferences and multi-stakeholder dialogues are providing a dedicated platform on this critical topic at the global level and informing intergovernmental processes related to the SDGs and climate. The work of the Expert Group on Climate and SDG Synergy, co-convened by UN DESA and UNFCCC, also is deepening the evidence-base and making the case for why synergistic action matters. For instance, during the 2024 High Level Political Forum in July 2024, UN DESA in collaboration with the UNFCCC Secretariat co-organized a special event “Bridging the Ambition Gap for the Future We Want through Climate and SDG Synergy,” marking the launch of the [2024 Global Report on Climate and SDG Synergy](#). Developed by the [Expert Group on Climate and SDG Synergy](#), the report aims to address the need to break down fragmentation and silos globally and domestically.

In September 2024, Brazil hosted the fifth Global Conference on Climate and SDG Synergies, which successfully assessed progress on key recommendations from previous conferences, including the need to include principles of just transition and equity at the centre of integrated planning. The recommendations from the conference are particularly timely as governments are currently devising their new national climate plans – the Nationally Determined Contributions – due in early 2025.

The Department’s analytical work is building awareness and political momentum for the green transition. For instance, following a recommendation of the third Climate and SDG Synergy Conference, UN DESA and UNFCCC co-convened an international expert group to deepen the evidence-base for how action tackling both the climate emergency and sustainable development challenges synergistically can be a win-win solution, maximizing impact. The initial report was launched in September 2023 on the margins of the UN SDG Summit, marking the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Climate Action Summit being convened by the UN Secretary-General in support of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. To date, two global reports and four thematic reports have been developed by the group.

UN DESA is bringing clarity on the definitional interpretation of a green transition by drawing on research and experience across different and multiple contexts. Policy briefs provide foresight for countries to carefully consider their green pathways so that the outcomes are not detrimental to societies and economies in the long run. For instance, the [“Policy Brief No. 141: A Just Green Transition: Concepts and Practice So Far,”](#) brings insights and clarifications for countries that are pursuing transition to an environmentally sustainable and climate-safe future. It highlights an important issue: the need to consider the social and environmental impacts of alternative activities that are being pursued as part of the green transition. It illustrates this by citing the risks of deforestation as countries pursue other greenhouse-gas-generating practices, while transitioning away from fossil fuels. UN DESA also convenes the SDG 7 Technical Advisory Group (SDG7 TAG) which each year issues a compilation of SDG 7 Policy Briefs in support of the UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF).

3

Building national capacities to accelerate a just and inclusive transition

The Department is helping stakeholders at national and global levels to build preparedness and capacity by addressing key knowledge gaps, developing integrated solutions to overcome barriers, and harnessing opportunities. The climate and SDG agendas have traditionally been approached in silos, with limited synergies and integration of actions on the ground. UN DESA and UNFCCC regularly co-convene dialogues at the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies, which typically take place every year in June, to highlight the importance of SDG integration in UNFCCC processes. For instance, UN DESA in collaboration with the Rio Conventions convened at the UNFCCC sixtieth session of the Subsidiary Body (SB60) in June 2024, a side event on “Seeking Synergies Across Rio Conventions and the SDGs: Unlocking Transformative Strategies for a Multi-crisis World.” The event also featured four thematic reports, spearheaded by the Expert Group on Climate and SDG Synergy, addressing fragmentation in policy, financing instruments, knowledge and data, and cities.

Similarly, UN DESA hosts the SDG Pavilion annually at the UN Climate Change Conferences (COPs) to highlight interlinkages between the global climate and sustainable development agendas. More than 100 events were organized by UN DESA and its partners during the fifth iteration of the SDG Pavilion in 2023 at COP28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and again at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, where the SDG Pavilion featured a special Forest Pavilion as part of its programming.

Photo: A session at the UN DESA-organized SDG Pavilion at COP27 in Egypt in November 2022.



UN DESA delivers future-focused webinars and e-courses on the benefits of integrated climate and SDG action. These cover wide-ranging issues on policy options and synergistic approaches across sectors and provide options to overcome implementation constraints such as those related to capacity development, financing strategies, data collection, and monitoring and reporting. UN DESA, jointly in collaboration with UNFCCC and UNITAR, has convened a series of virtual e-learning courses and webinars that are available online. The webinar series make the case for integrated action, cover information on tools and evidence policy makers may use to advocate climate and SDG synergies at national levels. It also explores practical issues on maximizing climate and SDG benefits, while navigating trade-offs and overcoming constraints in implementation. The e-learning course on “[Harnessing Climate and SDGs Synergies](#)” provides more in-depth learning for policymakers and provides them with tools and evidence to advocate for climate and synergies in related inter-governmental fora and in their local context.

UN DESA is helping to make headway in pushing for integrated climate and SDG action to accelerate a just and inclusive transition. It organized the first global conference on climate and SDG synergies in April 2019 in partnership with UNFCCC and hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Energy, Utilities, and Climate of Denmark. The annual conferences continue to grow in size and impact. Denmark will host the sixth Global Conference, which provides an opportunity to take stock of progress on synergistic action since the first one in 2019

Fifth Global Conference on Strengthening Synergies between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda

On 5-6 September 2024, UN DESA and the UNFCCC Secretariat co-organized the fifth Global Conference on “Strengthening Synergies between the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Building a Just World and a Sustainable Planet,” hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil at the Museum of Tomorrow (Museu do Amanhã) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. During the high-level segment, Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, and Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of UNFCCC, provided welcoming remarks, followed by special messages from Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, and Dennis Francis, President of the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. The Conference brought together around 80 speakers from 30 countries, including high-level representatives from member states, as well as heads of UN agencies, youth and civil society leaders. The Conference was attended by close to 300 in-person and around 3,000 virtual participants. Building on the 2024 report on climate and SDG synergy, the Conference highlighted empirical evidence and case studies on climate action and SDG co-benefits, addressed climate finance, risk mitigation, and adaptation strategies, and emphasized public participation.

The conference focused on delivering a just transition through climate and SDG synergies. An outcomes summary identified several actions to support the integration of the climate and SDG agendas and to accelerate critical action, as follows:

- » **Renew leadership and political commitment to speed up action on both the SDGs and Paris Agreement goals;**
- » **Continue deepening the evidence base and analytical work related to synergies and trade-offs across sectors, building on the reports by the Expert Group, launched in September 2023;**
- » **Ensure integration of just transitions in countries’ national climate plans and development strategies;**
- » **Take into account social equity and the empowerment of vulnerable groups in prioritizing financial and technical support to enable just transitions;**
- » **Strengthen multi-stakeholder cooperation and dialogue at all levels, including through this annual conference on synergies as well as UNFCCC Regional Climate Weeks; and**
- » **Leverage the full range of intergovernmental processes on SDGs and climate to enhance integrated approaches and synergistic action.**

Forests and the green transition

The inaugural special Forest Pavilion within the SDG Pavilion at the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) provided a platform to strengthen capacities, commitment, and action for forests by all stakeholders. As an important step to move towards a just and inclusive green transition, member States during the 19th session of the UN Forum on Forests agreed to advance sustainable forest management and sustainable forest-based bioeconomy approaches and restoration of ecosystems with a more holistic, multisectoral, livelihoods-oriented approach. UN DESA is also working with the Government of Austria to organize a meeting on this topic in February 2026.

PREPARING FOR AN OPEN, FREE AND SECURE DIGITAL FUTURE FOR ALL

Technological advances, innovation, and digital interconnectedness provide tremendous opportunities to fast-track progress towards the SDGs. Many countries are making progressive headway in their digital transition and in providing improved e-government services for their citizens. Digital transformation can enable countries to leapfrog ahead in their development and growth, but progress towards digitalization remains uneven.

UN DESA has established itself as the trusted partner to facilitate this forward-looking transition through international multi-stakeholder platforms and processes. It highlights risks of a growing digital divide and the spread of disinformation and considers ways of leveraging future opportunities for Member States. UN DESA's support at the international, regional, national, sub-national and local levels help Member States to reimagine the future through leveraging the power of digital technologies and e-government. It also helps to strengthen capacity of governments to respond effectively to future unanticipated crises, build accountability mechanisms of public institutions to safeguard and promote resilient societies, and build societal trust in government's ability to tackle future crises.

KEY FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

1

Shaping a shared vision of resilience and foresight

2

Supporting Member States to prepare for a digital future

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES



Information communication technology (ICT) and digital government can accelerate progress towards the SDGs and building resilience and preparedness against future crises. The internet, mobile phones, new digital technologies, and ICT have fast become integral to a globally interconnected world. The flow of information and knowledge are powerful drivers of growth, security, and development. Mobile technologies and broadband connectivity have also impacted the way in which people interact with each other and with governments.

However, while the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transition, it also exposed inequalities of access caused by digital divides. It also showed that, during times of crises, misinformation and disinformation are key risks which fuel uncertainty, impact public behavior, increase public discontent or even spark violence¹. Furthermore, a growing digital divide within societies risks excluding certain groups of people, particularly those from marginalised, vulnerable groups or under-served communities as they lack the means to participate in decisions that affect their lives. This erodes trust in public institutions and can affect resilience and preparedness efforts of countries and impact governments' ability to implement effective policies in a timely manner.

UN DESA is a globally trusted partner helping countries navigate the complexities of a rapidly digitalised world, alongside evolving technologies, and multiple information flows. Through its support to intergovernmental forums, development and dissemination of focused policy analysis, and targeted capacity building, the Department is helping to shape and to progress towards a digital future for the world and so that those unconnected are not left behind. Its support to governments to strengthen accountability mechanisms of public institutions can forestall address potential sources of social instability and build the trust that is a foundation for a resilient society, while its work on e-government prepares governments to respond quicker to the next crisis.

1. UN DESA Policy Brief #108: Trust in public institutions: Trends and implications for economic security | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS

1

Shaping a shared vision of resilience and foresight

UN DESA provides a unique global platform that brings government and non-government stakeholders together to harness the power of accelerated digitalisation, technology and data for sustainable development. UN DESA shapes dialogue on forward-looking resilience and preparedness issues in key global policy areas. The Department is the institutional home for the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), a multi-stakeholder policy forum, that is actively promoting discussion on information and good practices to inform public policy related to the governance of the internet. The multi-stakeholder Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) engages thousands of members from the scientific and technological communities, to facilitate sharing of best practices, experience and policy advice for Member States.

Through its support to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA), the Department helps countries to leverage opportunities to leapfrog development, combat corruption, reduce inequalities and improve state-citizen relations. UN DESA recognises that information in the digital age remains a boon and could be harnessed for good during crises, but also signposts the dangers of digital and information technologies which could impact our common future. In August 2022, responding to a request from the General Assembly in its resolution of December 2021, the Secretary-General released his *Countering Disinformation* report². The report paves the way for continued support by UN DESA to its Member States on building their capacities and preparedness for more robust digital government.

UN DESA works with Member States to assess the state of global e-governance and offer best practices for improving the ways people interact with different parts of their government, incorporating new tools and innovation. As countries build forward from the pandemic, governments are faced with policy trade-offs in how they choose to progress e-government and digital transformation for the benefit of their citizens. The biennial *UN E-Government Survey* – the only global report of its kind - has firmly established itself as a leading benchmarking reference on e-government, and as a policy tool for decision makers. The publicly available survey results present comparative ranking of e-government performance across 193 United Nations Member States measured by an e-government development index (EGDI) which includes assessment of the provision of online services, telecommunication connectivity, and human capacity. Policy makers particularly value the survey results as it provides information that enables them to identify areas of strengths and challenges in e-government, as well as suggested options for future policy action in a rapidly changing digital world. Member States consider the survey as a useful resource to learn from experiences and best practices of other countries.

UN DESA's analytical work provide messages for policy makers to build a resilient future and continue to serve as references for future unanticipated crises. “*Policy Brief No. 92: Leveraging Digital Technologies for Social Inclusion*” brings new insights into the impact of COVID-19 on digital transformation by emphasizing the need to leave no one offline as a vital element of leaving no one behind. “*Policy Brief No. 113: Digitally Enabled New Forms of Work and Policy Implications for Labour Regulation Frameworks and Social Protection Systems*” highlights how digital transformation is enabling new forms of work and new ways of organizing work – such as e-commerce and virtual transactions - and the risks that this brings for many workers.

2. N2245924.pdf (un.org)

Alongside other analysis work, the briefs continue to serve as inputs to policy discussions at international and national levels. In determining their digital transition growth pathways, countries need to consider a balanced approach to public service delivery and communication that serves both the digitally connected and those that are unable to access e-government services. This will help to ensure a just, inclusive, people-centred and rights-based digital transformation.

The Department considers future threats to public administration, including the threat of cybercrime, data leaks and unregulated information, and cyberattacks – malicious manipulation of data systems. UN DESA's policy briefs highlight these concerns and offer policy options. For example, "[Policy Brief No. 89: Strengthening Data Governance for Effective Use of Open Data and Big Data Analytics for Combating COVID-19](#)" recognizes the increasing concerns in data privacy and security that could jeopardize public trust in data collection, use and dissemination. It recommends the need for strengthening all aspects of data governance including data collection, data partnership, data analysis, data dissemination, and protection of data privacy and data security. It also calls for a holistic, whole-of government approach to data governance to build public trust, support institutional coordination, and streamline government operations as a whole.

UN DESA, as a member of the [Partnership on Measuring Information and Communication Technology for Development](#), has contributed to developing a core list of ICT indicators to help countries track ICT infrastructure, access, and measure ICTs across various sectors. This list, regularly revised and endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission, includes e-government indicators collected by UN DESA based on the [United Nations E-Government Survey](#) methodology. In 2021, three new indicators were added to the core list: the presence of a national e-government strategy, digital identity for online services, and a public procurement portal. Additionally, UN DESA constructs an e-participation index and a local online service index, using features from the [E-Government Survey](#), to assess online services provided by local governments and cities. These efforts contribute to a comprehensive understanding of e-government development at both national and local levels.

The Department has played a crucial role in the [World Summit on the Information Society \(WSIS\)](#) process since 2005, co-facilitating the annual WSIS Forum alongside other UN agencies. This platform promotes multi-stakeholder implementation of action lines and cross-cutting commitments, addressing ICT's role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. UN DESA, through its Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG), serves as a facilitator for the implementation of and follow-up to the action lines: C1 - [The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development](#), C7 - [ICT Applications: E-government](#) and C11 - [International and regional cooperation](#)

2

Supporting Member States to prepare for a digital future

UN DESA's technical assistance helps small island developing States (SIDS) and least-developed countries (LDCs), particularly those in Africa, build long-term institutional capacities to govern data and implement e-government policies and strategies. The project "Developing institutional capacities for digital data management and cooperation to advance progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals" (March 2022 – February 2025) supports 17 countries including African countries, SIDS, and LDCs to address existing challenges and gaps in digital data management and cooperation, focusing on enhancing the institutional capacities of countries to utilize, manage and govern data in a comprehensive, objective and evidence-based manner, through regional and global cooperation. The project "Building institutional capacity for evidence- and data-based e-government policies in support of the Sustainable Development Goals" in Bangladesh and Ethiopia (1 July 2016 – 31 December 2019) supported decision making for the 2030 Agenda by building institutional capacity in both countries to collect, analyse, and use data on e-government. It also focused on strengthening institutional capacity, frameworks and approaches in both countries to implement e-government policies and strategies in support of selected SDGs and targets.

UN DESA helps Member States understand the potential of frontier technologies, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, big data, the Internet of Things (IoT) and other automation technologies to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. The Department has broken new ground with the development of an innovative tool that uses artificial intelligence to help countries quantify and model for the future, nature's contributions to their economic prosperity and well-being. Since the launch of the tool in 2021, countries are increasingly using the Artificial Intelligence for Environment and Sustainability (ARIES) platform in applying a new international standard for natural capital accounting – the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Ecosystem Accounting. The ecosystem accounts will help countries to track the extent, condition and services provided by their national ecosystems – such as forests and wetlands – in the form of physical and monetary accounts and indicators.

The Department assists Member States to leverage new technologies to tackle future risks. Its "Policy Brief No. 123: Sandboxing and Experimenting Digital Technologies for Sustainable Development" highlights the value of regulatory sandboxes for governments to safely experiment with newer digital technologies and innovation outside their existing policy space and regulatory framework. Sandboxes could therefore lower the costs of innovation and allow policymakers to gain important foresight, before any decision-making. UN DESA, in partnership with United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), is implementing the *Frontier Technology Policy Experimentation and Regulatory Sandboxes project* from January 2021 - December 2024 in three focus countries of Bangladesh (LDC), Kazakhstan (LLDC) and the Maldives (SIDS). Its main objective is to enhance the institutional capacity of selected countries in special situations and to conceptualize, develop and implement policy experimentation and/or regulatory sandboxes on new technologies, as an innovative and catalytic approach to increase resilience and accelerate the progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The project is also working towards enhanced global and regional cooperation on policy experimentation and regulatory sandboxes in new technologies, for possible scale-up and replication in other countries.

UN DESA is helping to build trust in public institutions by facilitating development, access to and use of quality data. Mandated by the UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (UN-CEBD), the Department has developed the United Nations Global Platform³, which facilitates an ecosystem that supports international collaboration and harnesses the strength of data scientists across the world in the development of Official Statistics using new data sources and innovative methods. Demand for access to the tools, data and methods has dramatically increased for use at local, national and global levels. To facilitate ease of access, the UN Global Platform has established four physical regional hubs in China, Rwanda, Brazil, and the United Arab Emirates, which work together to educate, collaborate and develop new technologies to work with new Big Data sources and methodologies. Through international collaboration, the Platform is building a library of trusted statistical methods and algorithms, and the Cloud services enable members of any international organisation to share and utilise the same algorithms. Over time, as this common platform of collaborative and trusted work by data scientists grows, it is expected to reduce additional effort to develop new methodologies elsewhere in the world.

The Department is using the digital revolution to strengthen global capacity to harness, access and use global data as an important aspect in monitoring the SDGs and as an input into decision making. Digitalisation has given impetus to the data revolution, particularly in speed of accessing data, increasing availability of big data, open data and real-time data that are bringing new insights, and the availability of predictive modelling and presentational tools. The Department is valued for the wide range of digital capacity and skills strengthening resources in the public sector workforce and for political leaders. Notably resources from UN DESA's Digital Learning Centre (DLC) are widely accessed by government and non-government actors. This curated repository of the Department's digital capacity-building work is valued by stakeholders as it offers self-paced courses and microlearning through an e-learning platform that is publicly accessible, focused on the latest knowledge for implementing the SDGs. As the only internet-based network of its type in the world, the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN) promotes the global sharing of knowledge and innovative practices on governance and public administration issues, especially focused on helping countries in special situations to implement the 2030 Agenda.

UN DESA's training and capacity building initiatives are contributing to positive change. The emphasis on often overlooked aspects of capacity building, namely building e-government leadership, promoting a whole-of-government approach, are bringing immediate dividends and helping countries to invest in building future talent pools. In Bangladesh, UN DESA technical assistance to the "Digital Bangladesh" national strategy focuses on areas of capacity development, market access and financial access of the cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises, which form the backbone of the economy. Kazakhstan is in the process of developing an international technopark of IT startups, and UN DESA's support to a regulatory sandbox for autonomous vehicles in public transport is helping Kazakhstan in achieving three broader goals of decentralization, digitalization, and decarbonization in the energy sector.

3. UN Global Platform is a cloud-service environment supporting international collaboration among all countries in the world by sharing scientific knowledge, data, methods and technology.

Across all training, participant feedback is positive. One participant noted that:

“

Training brings added value in helping to raise awareness of key concepts such as design thinking and innovation labs for public service delivery, broadening dimensions for digital government transformation related to governance, leadership, strategy, legal framework, technology, professional and workforce development, and is resulting in interest and concrete follow up action in regional cooperation, with UN support.

”

Following a capacity-building workshop on “Adopting New Approaches to E-Government for SDG Implementation,” organized by UN DESA, the participants from D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, comprising Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey, agreed to create an e-government network or working group to be supported by the D-8 Secretariat. The Training of Trainers (ToT) on the UN DESA Curriculum on Governance for the SDGs Toolkit on Innovation and Digital Government for Public Service Delivery built a pool of competent trainers from public administration schools and institutes of training from countries of the Asia and the Pacific region, including from Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The institutions are now equipped to train their civil servants and build the knowledge and skills of future generations on these topics.

UN DESA deploys online e-government tools to improve public service delivery through two institutional levels: national and local e-government toolkits. The [National E-government Toolkit](#) guides central authorities on country-wide frameworks, technology, and citizen participation, while the [Local E-government Toolkit](#) focuses on municipal service provision, community engagement, and city-level digital transformation. Both include guides, case studies, and practical instruments to enhance policymakers’ skills in delivering efficient, inclusive online services. They emphasize e-government literacy and link digital governance to the SDGs. This dual-level approach ensures wide e-government benefits, with the national toolkit setting overarching policies and the local toolkit aiding implementation, promoting cohesive digital transformation from federal to local levels.

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION THROUGH DATA AND STATISTICS

Data is vital for enhancing global preparedness and responding to future crises. Integrated data and statistics across various sectors – from economic, social and demographic trends to environmental and climate changes – empower policy-makers to make informed, long-term decisions that advance sustainable development objectives. The emergence of new data actors, citizen-generated data, artificial intelligence, big data, and data from the private sector means that the way in which we produce, consume, and share data is rapidly transforming. The combination of comprehensive data spaces in relevant sectors of society, such as health, energy or migration, and state-of-the-art data science methods and applications will enable statistical offices and their partners to provide the relevant information to decision makers at the moment when they need it.

UN DESA works to strengthen the generation and use of reliable and inclusive data and statistics that are core to sustainable development, are readily available for emerging issues and ensure that no one is left behind. The department plays a key role in setting international statistical governance standards and norms, providing capacity-building support to strengthen national statistical systems, making available databases and analysis of key global trends, supporting collaborative partnerships and knowledge exchanges, and shaping international discussions on statistics and data across domains. These activities will aid preparedness efforts and help to forecast what will be needed in future years.

KEY FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

1

Leveraging political support and action for statistical foresight and preparedness

2

Ensuring data is an enabler for transformation

3

Building statistical capacities of Member States to prepare for the future

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES



Data has become a fundamental facet of our daily lives, driving our actions and decisions. It is increasingly being generated and used through numerous applications by both the public and private sector, and by citizens. Data and statistics provide information on past trends and current situations and can be used to derive future scenarios to help economies and societies plan for different eventualities. In policy making, data and statistics have prime importance in improving decision making, tackling inequality, strengthening public accountability, and improving lives. The 2030 Agenda emphasises the importance of quality, accessible, timely and disaggregated data for decision-making, measurement of progress towards the SDGs, and to ensure that no one is left behind. SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) reflects this urgency and calls for increased availability and quality of data (target 17.18) and statistical capacity building for improved measurement of progress (target 17.19).

Data is highly relevant to understanding global policy challenges arising from various crises related to pandemics, food and energy security, climate change, and economic and financial uncertainties. At the global level, data constraints include lack of integrated statistical information across domains and across countries, diverse and not well-documented methodologies, limited and varied capacities of national statistical offices, and various legal and technical challenges of international cooperation in sharing of key data.

Countries need strong national statistical systems to meet the data demands of the 2030 Agenda, but many still lack the capacity to fulfil the monitoring requirements of the SDG indicator framework. Challenges are related to low capacity for implementing methodologies and tools, lack of financial resources, declining response rates to their traditional data collection undertakings such as household surveys, limited capacities to generate and analyse complex data and to use this information meaningfully, and limited coordination across government agencies.

Traditional statistical operations cannot handle an increasing demand for real-time data. However, citizens and governments alike are increasingly turning to various alternative data sources using innovative and modern data science techniques. The world is gripped by a data revolution and new technologies, such as Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), Large Language Models, data science, Big Data or the internet of things, which are driving new data applications and are transforming the data landscape. But there are risks that those unable to leverage these data opportunities may be left behind. There is also risk from poor regulation, misinformation, data privacy and data manipulation for fraudulent or illegal activities. Across the UN, all entities are working to strengthen quality of data and statistical reporting. UN DESA engages with UN-wide processes to ensure responsible data governance and consistent approaches to data quality, accessibility and ethical use.

FORESIGHT AND PREPAREDNESS FUNCTIONS

1

Leveraging political support and action for statistical foresight and preparedness



UN DESA supports the formulation of data governance principles. UN DESA serves as the secretariat of the Committee of Chief Statisticians of the UN System (CCS-UN) that in 2023 prepared a report on [international data governance](#) for the UN Chief Executive Board, which was subsequently used as a contribution to the Global Data Compact. The report aimed at strengthening policy coherence for international data governance that protects the privacy of persons and human rights and leverages opportunities for data to be used for the global public good. Being able to access, process, use and reuse data is essential for dealing with global challenges, such as managing and protecting the environment, intervening in the event of a pandemic or responding to a disaster or crisis. Data is also at the centre of innovation in all social and economic sectors and are increasingly used by firms and businesses as inputs in their production processes.

In the lead up to the Summit of the Future, negotiations were ongoing to agree on the final wording of the Global Digital Compact. One of the five objectives of this compact is to advance responsible, equitable and interoperable data governance approaches. Within this context the Statistical Commission is asked to play an important role in the formulation of the principles of data governance, while UN DESA is actively involved in the discussions to shape the data governance framework. UN DESA supports innovative thinking and prepares stakeholders for a new data ecosystem through the Working Group on Data Stewardship, which released a background document to the 2024 Statistical Commission regarding a new data stewardship approach for Governments based on the views of national statistical offices (NSOs).

UN DESA monitors global progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to help Member States plan for SDG acceleration. Its annual publication *The Sustainable Development Goals Report* is the only UN official report that draws on the latest available data and estimates to provide a global overview of progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. UN DESA also supports countries in their reporting on progress towards the SDGs through the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which are submitted to the HLPF. This focus on evidence for SDG reporting can help governments use the VNR process to also identify strengths and weaknesses of the statistical systems and areas for which statistical capacity building is needed. The VNR process requires countries to have monitoring frameworks, backed by evidence and data to provide credible reporting. The country-level VNRs are also an opportunity for countries to consider forward plans to tackle future crises and to ensure that no one is left behind. Recent VNRs reflect on the challenges stemming from emerging issues and other crises, including lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as challenges related to reliable and timely data. Additionally, UN DESA supports the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators in its preparation for the 2025 Comprehensive Review of the SDG indicator framework.

UN DESA is an advocate for standards, and for access to quality data and statistics as an important aspect of decision making by Member States and the UN system. It is taking action to bridge existing gaps by promoting data that is internationally accessible and that allows for comparison between countries. It makes available materials on standard methodologies, toolkits and training to national statistical agencies to build their critical skills and competencies, and to foster collaborative partnerships so that countries can get the most out of their broader data ecosystem.

As the secretariat to the **United Nations Statistical Commission**, UN DESA supports the global governance of statistics and data. In particular, the Statistical Commission provides directions on the use of statistics and data for foresight and preparedness and recently discussed topics like Data Stewardship, Data Science, Climate Change and the integration of statistical and geospatial information.

UN DESA also serves as secretariat of the **Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM)**. At its annual meeting in August 2024, the Committee discussed – among others – the issues of the future of the geospatial information ecosystem, geospatial information for climate and resilience, and the integration of geospatial, statistical and related information.

2

Ensuring data is an enabler for transformation



UN Data integrates authoritative data and insights from across the UN system to enable more awareness and data-driven decisions on the SDGs and sustainable development. UN DESA plays a crucial role in consolidating official statistics from various international agencies and national statistical systems. In alignment with the Secretary-General's "Data Strategy for Action by Everyone, Everywhere" and recommendations from the UN Statistical Commission, UN DESA is spearheading the modernisation of its UN Data platform. This platform, including [UN Data Commons for the SDGs](#), integrates authoritative data and insights from across the UN System into a public repository with advanced search functionality and an innovative, user-friendly interface. Built by UN DESA, in collaboration with Google's Data Commons, the UN Data site harnesses open, high-quality data from across the UN System, as well as cutting-edge AI technologies to make key SDG and development data and insights available to a diverse global audience. At its core, the new UN Data platform represents a paradigm shift in how data is utilized to address complex development issues. By consolidating diverse datasets across the UN System into a unified platform, UN Data enables stakeholders with access to timely, reliable, and actionable data.

UN DESA promotes data innovation, partnerships and increased resources for data through the [UN World Data Forum](#), established by the Statistical Commission, to spur data innovation, nurture partnerships, mobilize high-level political and financial support for data, and build a pathway to better data for sustainable development. The UN World Data Forums have evolved to appeal to a wider data community while maintaining the official statistics community at its core. It is more than 7 years since the launch of the [Cape Town Global Action Plan for sustainable development data \(CTGAP\)](#) at the first Forum, which helped usher in the age of SDG indicators and pushed for a data revolution under the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The fifth Forum in Colombia will launch the follow-up to the CTGAP. Taking inspiration from the [UN 2.0 initiative](#), this document is given a current working title of CTGAP 2.0 and will serve the growing data community as a renewed action plan through the remainder of the 2030 Agenda.

UN DESA supports countries in improving their integrated data systems, essential to measure progress beyond GDP and ensuring inclusive and sustainable development. The Department, in collaboration with UNCTAD and UNDP, co-leads the *Core Group on Beyond GDP*, established in December 2021 by CEB. The Group in 2022 released the paper [Valuing What Counts: United Nations System-wide Contribution on Beyond Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#), which includes a proposed framework and recommendations on the topic intended for the UN system, Member States, and other stakeholders.

A central element of this initiative is the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA), an international statistical standard adopted by the UN Statistical Commission, that accounts for individual environmental assets (i.e., water resources, energy resources, forests, fisheries, etc.) and their use in the economy, and also enables countries to measure their natural capital and understand the contributions of ecosystem services to their prosperity and well-being. Wide adoption of the SEEA will radically redefine how countries measure progress beyond GDP and [link the economy and the environment](#) in their decision making, which is essential to informing the climate change, nature and development nexus and actions that enhance synergies ensuring that growth is sustainable.

UN DESA also advises countries on the production and use of data on people's time-use to measure unpaid work, non-market production, well-being, and gender equality and has developed statistical standards to that end. Additionally, UN DESA is leading the [development of a conceptual framework to strengthen social and demographic statistics](#) to produce data that better reflect society and its connections with the environment and the economy. This initiative is overseen by the *Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics*, established by the Statistical Commission in 2023.

Finally, UN DESA's [Network of Economic Statisticians](#) is also fostering collaboration on beyond GDP data initiatives, promoting an overarching framework for inclusive and sustainable wellbeing, building on SEEA, the ongoing revision of the System of National Accounts (SNA) and [its extended accounts](#), to be adopted by the Statistical Commission in 2025. Once developed, the framework will provide decision-makers with improved visibility of multi-dimensional trade-offs in the context of measuring inclusive and sustainable wellbeing and progress beyond GDP, in full alignment with the SDGs indicators and the central promise of leaving no one behind.

UN DESA assists Member States in modernizing their population data systems to enhance data quality, improve cost efficiency and policy relevance. The Department plays a crucial role in supporting countries in establishing and maintaining comprehensive population data systems. These systems integrate a variety of data sources, including censuses, surveys, administrative records, geospatial information, and non-traditional sources to provide accurate and up-to-date information that guide integrated policy and decision-making processes. Specifically, UN DESA is overseeing the implementation of [the 2020 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses](#). This includes providing guidance on conducting register-based censuses and moving towards a register-based approach as well as helping countries evaluate the quality of their census data, especially in light of significant undercounts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, UN DESA is leading the review of statistical standards and recommendations in preparation for the upcoming 2030 census round, during which countries are expected to significantly transform their data collection and processing systems, including through the adoption of digital-first, multi-mode methods, increased utilization of geospatial information and administrative data sources, and the development of strategies to address and adapt to potential shocks and disruptions.

UN DESA supports climate change and disaster preparedness in countries via its work programme on climate change statistics. Official statistics are needed to support independent, transparent and timely information to monitor climate change and evaluate climate actions including mitigation and adaptation success. The [Global Set of Climate Change Statistics and Indicators](#) was adopted by the UN Statistical Commission in 2022 to assist countries in their efforts to meet climate change data needs. This effort has contributed to enhancing preparedness for producing climate change statistics in many countries, via the setup of national units and programmes, selecting and defining suitable indicators and increasingly developing new data collection instruments. Examples of such instruments include specialized surveys to fill the data gaps on the way individuals, households and business perceive climate impacts and modify their choices and behaviours towards climate resilience. The Global Set is also contributing to streamlining the use of available statistical guidance and frameworks relevant to climate change, such as the SEEA, the Sendai Framework, and several SDG indicators. It also contributes to steering methodology development in very critical areas such as climate change impacts on human health and integration of gender into processes related to climate change.

UN DESA supports foresight and preparedness through its new centres on global geospatial information and its hubs on Big Data and data science for official statistics. In 2023, UN DESA with support from the Chinese government opened the United Nations Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre (UN-GGKIC) in Deqing, China to provide opportunities to develop and expand global geospatial capacity, competence and capabilities, and strengthen geospatial information management arrangements, especially in developing countries. In 2015, the General Assembly adopted resolution 69/266 on “A Global Geodetic Reference Frame for Sustainable Development,” which underpins global navigation satellite systems technology and provides the framework for all geospatial activity, as a key enabler of geospatial data interoperability and data integration. Bringing the resolution into practice, UN DESA with support from the Germany opened, also in 2023, the Global Geodetic Centre of Excellence (UN-GGCE) at the United Nations Campus in Bonn, Germany to strengthen and advance: global geodetic cooperation and coordination; worldwide geodetic infrastructure, standards and policies; education, training and capacity development; and communication and awareness.

Since 2014, the UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and data science for official statistics (UNCEBD), which reports to the Statistical Commission, explored the use of new data sources and new technologies to improve the services of national statistical offices, especially in the delivery of timely data on emerging issues. A major challenge was developing the necessary data science skills and capabilities. To have visible impact, UN DESA engaged in individual MOUs (signed in the period 2020-2023) with Brazil, Indonesia, Rwanda and UAE establishing Regional Hubs with the objectives of sharing knowledge on newly developed methods, algorithms and tools, and providing training in the use of Big Data and data science. Similarly, UN DESA agreed with China on hosting of a Global Hub on the same issue in Hangzhou, and with Spain on hosting of a Global Hub on the use of AI for environmental sustainability in Bilbao. The Department’s UN Global Platform is used by the various hubs for international collaboration on relevant projects. The hubs prepare statistical offices to use alternative data sources and new indicators for emerging issues such as climate change, or ecosystem services.

3

Building statistical capacities of Member States to prepare for the future

As part of wider statistical networks, UN DESA leverages the power of partnerships. The Department serves as the secretariat for the Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training (GIST) in which international and regional training institutions work together to deliver training across various statistical topics. GIST collaboration has led to the establishment of an online hub of statistical training courses from different agencies and partners hosted on the [UN SDG: Learn](#) statistics platform. GIST has also developed the Statistical Training needs Assessment Tool (STAT) to allow NSOs to better understand their training needs and develop training plans based on priorities. UN DESA further supports the Data Science Leaders Network, which aims to progress strategic discussions on applying data science in NSOs and accelerate collaboration on technical matters within the statistical community.

UN DESA supports increased use of non-traditional data sources. Many low resource countries are still mainly relying on surveys and censuses for official statistics production. While remaining a key data source, national statistical systems increasingly need to also make use of alternative data sources to fill the local, national, regional and global information gaps. In this context, UN DESA is co-convening several initiatives to help support progress. For example, the [Collaborative on administrative data](#) shares experiences between countries and partners and fills knowledge gaps through development of practical [guidance materials and tools](#). The training task teams under the UNCEBD and under the Expert Group on Integration of Statistical and Geospatial information provide guidance on self-assessment maturity tools and course curricula for the use of big data, geospatial information and data science. Several e-learning courses on these topics are available in the [learning management system of UN DESA's UN Global Platform](#). The [Collaborative on citizen data](#) is bringing together NSOs, civil society and international partners to discuss how data collected by citizens can complement other data sources for official statistics production. Linked to the above, UN DESA is supporting several countries directly through the [Data for Now](#) initiative (see box) and [UN DESA Development Accounts](#).

“Data for Now” through collaborative partnerships

UN DESA is co-leading the innovative Data for Now initiative, supporting national statistical systems in participating countries to identify data solutions to meet sustainable development policy priorities as defined by countries. By promoting a collaborative approach with local, national and global partners, the initiative is helping to leverage innovative technologies and methods for improved data. Guiding principles of the Data for Now initiative embody the leveraging of partnerships across national statistical systems, government agencies, donors and solution providers.

Several concrete results have been achieved:

- » **SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities has been prioritized by many countries as they are lacking data for several indicators. UN DESA collaborates with UN Habitat to help fill the gaps, primarily by integrating geospatial information.**
- » **Viet Nam’s statistical office has been trained in using small-area estimation to provide more geographically disaggregated estimates of food insecurity and child poverty.**
- » **In Kyrgyzstan, UN DESA is supporting the national statistics office and civil society organizations in assessing which citizen data sources can be used to complement information for the Voluntary National Review and help fill gaps in national and global indicator frameworks.**
- » **Several countries are receiving support in updating their IT architecture and infrastructure to be able to handle receipt of alternative, often less structured, data sources. The modular system is based on open sources tools and has already successfully been set up in Colombia, Namibia, Senegal and Viet Nam with Jordan and Sierra Leone being in process**

For more results, see the **data stories** pages of Data for Now.

UN DESA helps strengthen the data and statistical ecosystems in countries. The shift towards increased engagement with users and use of alternative data sources requires a new set of skills, both technical and practical. Many NSOs need to learn how to become data stewards, how to engage with data holders and users, how to formalize data sharing and how to advocate for investments in statistics. UN DESA provides capacity development support and technical assistance, for example in the development of national statistical legal frameworks. The Department has supported this in more than a dozen Member States in the last few years with many now having new legal frameworks in place allowing them to access more data and thus produce more relevant indicators and statistics for increased preparedness and foresight.

UN DESA responds to global priorities and development goals. Supporting small island developing States (SIDS) is one of many priorities of UN DESA. Linked to the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS and the SIDS Coalition for Nature, the Department leads several projects aimed at improving data and statistical infrastructure (see box).

“Data for Nature” project for small island developing States

Caribbean SIDS are facing the brunt of global environmental change yet are limited in their capabilities to respond to these hazards due to lack of human, technological, and financial resources. These issues triggered the launch of the SIDS Coalition for Nature and the “Data for Nature” project. This project brought together in May 2024 environmental agencies and NSOs from 14 different Caribbean SIDS to share best practices for data solutions on environmental information systems, data sharing protocols, use of non-traditional data sources, innovative data presentation methods, and others. The next phase of this UN DESA project will establish a community of practice and a match-making SIDS-SIDS cooperation platform on data solutions for nature with functional and technical skills transfer on identified priority themes. This online platform will be publicly accessible for outreach purposes and to guide financial partners (including Friends of the SIDS Coalition for Nature) to further support SIDS in the frame of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS.

CONCLUSION



The world is at a critical juncture with less than six years to deliver the SDGs and the promises of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The situation is further complicated by a series of multiple global crises that not only complicate recovery efforts from the pandemic but threaten the very existence of humankind and healthy ecosystems.

The SDGs need urgent rescue and will require more dedicated action from everyone. Financial resources are urgently required for sustainable development, countries need to intensify efforts to strengthen good governance and to action policies that address the needs of their vulnerable populations so that no one is left behind, and international collaboration is paramount to tackling global risks.

The world is facing continuous change and disruption. To build global resilience for a sustainable and inclusive future, we must consider both present and future risks and their impacts on people and the planet to be able to develop long-term solutions. However, the nature of risks is fast changing and bringing new vulnerabilities. The risk landscape is increasingly complex, new risks are global and multi-dimensional in nature, and the interlinkages between risks means that they cannot be tackled in isolation and require international cooperation to be addressed at scale.

Emerging issues such as artificial intelligence and evolving migration patterns come with risks of illegal or fraudulent activity, and conflict and cooperation between countries is creating geopolitical flux and shifting global power dynamics.

The world needs to stay ahead of the curve by better anticipating risks, increasing understanding and knowledge-sharing, and moving beyond short-term reactions to more long-term sustainable action. Fast-changing environments and emerging risks require different policy outcomes that can ensure a more resilient future. This is where foresight approaches, knowledge and tools can help to strengthen policy making processes and outcomes so that they are fit for the future. Strategic foresight enables multiple possible future scenarios to be considered which can help to inform policy choices.

A foresight-based approach should also ensure that future strategies are inclusive and that they incorporate diverse voices so that policy changes do not widen economic and social inequalities. This will require foresight and cooperative action at international levels so that developing countries are not left behind. At national levels, it will also require strategies to address existing and newer forms of vulnerability to move towards more equal societies.

The Pact for the Future outlines solutions to pressing challenges and calls for effective global cooperation. The SDG Stimulus urged by the Secretary-General

will mobilise investments and finance for developing countries in growing sectors such as renewable energy, universal social protection, decent jobs, quality healthcare and education, sustainable food systems, urban infrastructure, and digital transformation.

UN DESA's work is contributing towards realising this vision and remains fundamental to supporting the wider processes within the UN system. The Department's work is complementary to the work of other UN agencies, and its analytical work and policy advice are often taken up by other agencies to deliver action on the ground. Its analytical work is a key input to strategic planning and foresight as it explores draws on reliable data to project future and emergent trends, consider unanticipated shocks and changes, rather than only projecting from the past or addressing current challenges. Capacity building helps public sector officials to develop strategic leadership and become agents of change, and knowledge and tools are equipping institutions to reduce systemic risks and become better prepared for emerging risks and opportunities to build a more resilient future.

Foresight and preparedness work needs to be grounded in inclusion so that no one is left behind. By giving voice to vulnerable groups in international forums, developing topical policy guides and providing toolkits and guidance, UN DESA is helping to make inclusion a reality.

The UN is universally recognized as a trusted platform for collaboration. Through supporting intergovernmental processes UN DESA is giving momentum to urgent issues that need to be addressed by the global community. By convening and fostering partnerships at international and national levels UN DESA is promoting collaboration between governments, civil society and the private sector, and promoting a science-policy interface. These measures are helping to surface critical information on early warning, facilitating the exchange of ideas, information and best practice on managing risk, and promoting collaborative action.

We have an opportunity to reimagine the future together – one that enables every citizen of this world to have equal access to opportunities for a better life. This will require global commitment and action, stronger leadership, contemporary approaches to policy making that makes provision for uncertainty, stronger governance and systems, and transparent and inclusive decision making. The Pact for the Future sets out necessary action to put the world back on track to a fair, inclusive, and sustainable future for all. Only by committing together to our common future, can we hope to not only reap the benefits today, but also leave a positive legacy for future generations.





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FUTURE IN FOCUS: PREPARING FOR WHAT LIES AHEAD

**UN DESA Preparedness and
Foresight Review**

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