



SIDS & UN DESA

Partners for a prosperous,
sustainable and resilient future for
small island developing States

2025



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

SIDS and UN DESA: Advancing the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda together

Introduction by UN Under-Secretary-General Li Junhua

Small island developing States (SIDS) are on the frontlines of today's most pressing global challenges, from climate change and food insecurity to economic shocks, debt burden, and rising inequalities. Yet time and again, the people of these island nations have shown themselves to be resilient, innovative, and determined leaders in the global push for sustainable development. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) is proud to stand with SIDS as a steadfast partner working to build a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future.

The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS)—A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity, provides a renewed blueprint for action. This agenda, agreed to by Member States at the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) in 2024, is a bold 10-year plan of action that will deliver meaningful change for these vulnerable island countries.

UN DESA is committed to helping SIDS bring this vision to life, including through key global processes such as the Second World Summit for Social Development, the annual High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and the UN Ocean Conferences. We will also continue to support SIDS at national



and regional levels through meaningful and dedicated capacity-development programmes and projects, the SIDS Partnership Framework, and new analytical tools to shape sustainable development pathways based on evidence and equity. Furthermore, through our flagship publications and extensive databases related to sustainable financing, good governance, energy, climate, and ocean action, we are fully equipped to provide SIDS with state-of-the-art knowledge and policy insights that can be tailored to regional and national contexts.

Our work with and for SIDS spans six priority action areas: advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and multilateralism, ensuring sustainable

financing; putting data and science to work for SDG progress; addressing poverty, inequality, and leaving no one behind; protecting our planet through fostering climate and SDG synergies; and strengthening the Department's work on projection and frontier issues, including through strategic foresight and digital transformation.

Throughout these action pillars, we center the voices of those often left behind—women and girls, youth, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples—ensuring no one is excluded

from progress. Our commitment is to walk alongside SIDS in translating global agreements into local solutions.

As we turn the promise of ABAS into tangible progress, UN DESA remains deeply committed to supporting SIDS at every step. Our shared objective is clear: to create resilient economies, inclusive societies and a healthy planet for future generations of island communities. Together, let us drive a lasting transformation, anchored in solidarity, partnership, and sustainable development.



UN DESA is supporting SIDS to diversify their economies. Cook Islands 2024. | PHOTO D. MCFADZIEN

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) supports and works together with Small Island Developing States (SIDS) through a range of initiatives tailored to their unique sustainable development challenges, spanning the Department's six action areas.

1

Accelerating action on the SDGs and strengthening multilateralism

UN DESA facilitates the consideration of issues that are important to SIDS speakers in major events on the world stage—including the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the UN Ocean Conferences and the UN Water Conferences—to ensure their unique concerns and priorities are heard in discussions on implementing the 2030 Agenda, the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), and other frameworks relevant to SIDS. In the 2025 HLPF session devoted to SIDS, for instance, speakers underscored the need for more affordable financing and immediate debt relief to create fiscal space for investments in essential areas. There was also broad support for the **SIDS Center of Excellence** and the **Global Data Hub**, two key action areas that resulted from the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4), held in Antigua and Barbuda in May 2024.



UN DESA hosts the discussion “Taking Off for 100% Renewables: The Importance of Early Finance for Islands’ Leadership” in the SDG Pavilion at the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference in Baku, Azerbaijan (COP29). | PHOTO ARIEL ALEXOVICH

Since 2018, the Department has hosted the **SDG Pavilion** on the sidelines of the annual UN Climate Change Conference, aiming to highlight the connections between climate action and the other 16 SDGs—and their effect on small islands.

Advancing digital transformation and gender equality in SIDS

At the 2025 United Nations Public Service Forum (UNPSF) in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, representatives from SIDS voiced challenges they face in digital transformation and digital inclusion in public service delivery. By leading the *UN E-Government Survey*, UN DESA helps SIDS with data on e-government development trends and offers analytical insight for prioritizing government efforts in digital transformation. Exploiting digitalization has far-reaching potential for SIDS, not just in improving processes and workflows for greater efficacy and effectiveness of public service delivery, but also in ensuring inclusion, participation, and accountability to fulfil the motto of leaving no one behind. Digital solutions can help mitigate the unique vulnerabilities in SIDS, such as building resilience to climate change, and bringing distant learning and mobile health to remote island pockets, among other innovative applications.

In 2024, UN DESA supported a national review, online training, and capacity-development workshop in Mauritius to identify structural barriers and develop

a national action plan to advance gender equality in public administration, particularly at decision-making levels. The action plan was peer-reviewed by Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, which were also sensitized on integrating gender equality into their own public administration systems.


Strengthening partnerships among SIDS and between SIDS and other countries

to achieve the SDGs is also a priority for UN DESA. The SIDS Partnership Framework and SIDS Partnership Toolbox, developed by the Department in consultation with SIDS representatives, aim to enhance capacity in designing meaningful partnerships and assist in their review and monitoring.


Through a series of capacity-building initiatives, UN DESA collaborates with SIDS policymakers to ensure the SDGs are well-integrated into national agendas, hosting workshops that showcase cohesive approaches to SDG implementation.

Following up on SIDS4, UN DESA and the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) convened an interagency task team to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for the ABAS. The framework, completed in June 2025, includes clear targets and indicators selected in close collaboration with statistical experts from across the UN system and with extensive input from the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).


The SIDS Action Platform is the main online resource for SIDS partnerships.
It includes options to:



Register a new partnership for SIDS



Provide a progress report of a previously registered partnerships



Browse and learn from existing partnerships



UN DESA sponsors a peer review of action plans on gender equality in public administration by SIDS in Mauritius in 2024. | PHOTO UNDP MAURITIUS

2

Ensuring sustainable financing for recovering from the pandemic and realizing the SDGs

UN DESA's work with SIDS **prioritizes sustainable financing strategies**. Through initiatives like “Financing for SIDS (FINS)”, spanning the Dominican Republic, Seychelles, Fiji, and Vanuatu, the focus is on integrating national financing frameworks to bolster planning and coordination. FINS is applying the framework, Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), to assess financing needs and sources, identify policy and institutional reforms, and strengthen coordination between domestic efforts and external support. For example, in the Dominican Republic, the focus is on guiding donor support and exploring innovative financing to achieve national priorities. Technical guidance

supports SIDS in crafting strategic investment projects aligned with the SDGs, promoting resilience and sustainability. FINS also has a peer learning component, with a Peer Exchange on Debt Sustainability Strategies in Pacific SIDS planned for the fall of 2025.

In Seychelles and the Dominican Republic, UN DESA is also supporting efforts to enhance collaboration across institutions and strengthen the link between planning and financing by applying systems thinking and long-term scenario-based approaches—fostering more integrated and forward-looking national financing strategies.



UN DESA colleagues work with government counterparts in Fiji on an integrated national financing framework. | PHOTO UN DESA

Spotlight on the development prospects of SIDS

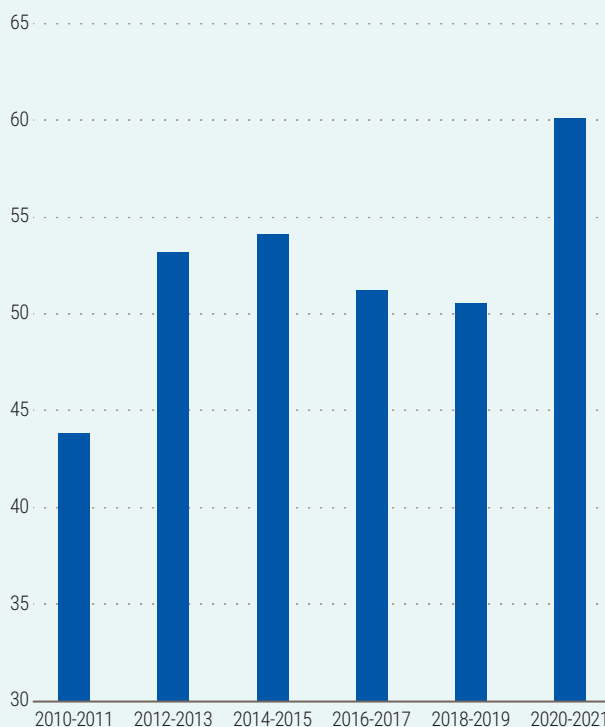
The economic challenges faced by SIDS feature prominently in the *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025 (WESP)* and the *WESP 2025 Mid-year Update*. The reports highlight that economic projections for SIDS remain subdued. The *WESP 2025* notes that SIDS' economic growth forecasts continue to lag behind the average growth recorded during the decade prior to the pandemic. Furthermore, this already modest outlook has been revised downward in the *WESP 2025 Mid-Year Update*, which accounts for the intensification of global headwinds. Economic growth in SIDS is projected to decline from 4.6% in 2024 to 3.1% in 2025, and further to 2.8% in 2026, significantly below the 2010–2019 average of 3.9%. The reports underscore how trade tensions, geopolitical developments, and climate change impact SIDS. The *World Social Report 2024* assessed SIDS' vulnerabilities in an era of cascading global shocks, indicating the national and international collaborative actions necessary for ensuring their resilience and inclusive prosperity. A recent **Frontier Technology Issues (FTI)** report highlights how innovation and circular economy strategies can support an inclusive recovery and mitigate structural vulnerabilities in developing countries. The analysis—including ten SIDS—focused on the potential of recycling energy transition critical minerals from waste and scrap as a means to reduce import dependency, strengthen local value chains, and create green jobs. With the rising volume of scrap imports to many SIDS, realizing such potential can present new opportunities for economic diversification and technological innovation within an overall framework of sustainable development.

The most recent policy briefs by the **United Nations Economist Network**, convened by UN DESA, consistently highlight the unique challenges and strategic importance of SIDS. Drawing on contributions from economists across the UN system, including economists based in UN Resident Coordinator Offices across many SIDS, these briefs

emphasize the need for tailored policy approaches for countries in special situations. The **“Future and Foresight” series** underscores the importance of forward-looking governance, digital transformation, and the future of work in these contexts. One brief informed a foresight exercise in Jamaica, exploring how the country's future economy will hinge on understanding the pace and nature of technological change and its impact on labor markets. Another brief, focusing on industrial policy, examines the case of Madagascar, illustrating how well-designed industrial strategies can overcome connectivity constraints and enhance SIDS' participation in global markets.

UN DESA analysis shows that SIDS' external debt stock has grown by more than 50 per cent, relative to their income

Percentage of GNI



Source: UN DESA, based on the World Bank World Development Indicators database.

Note: Seventeen SIDS are included in this analysis based on data availability.

At the 2023 Development Cooperation Forum high-level meeting, UN DESA heard from SIDS representatives on **the need for increased concessional finance and for reforms of the international financial architecture** to better support long-term resilience efforts. Additionally, peer-learning workshops on sustainable finance, green taxonomies and policy development have fostered collaboration and knowledge-sharing, enabling collective action toward the SDGs.

The **establishment of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI)** represents a significant acknowledgment by the international community that vulnerability is a serious obstacle to sustainable development, due to the damage caused by exogenous shocks and stressors to which countries are increasingly being exposed. The MVI quantifies structural vulnerability and (lack of) structural resilience of all developing countries, and it can also be used as a diagnostic tool to drive coordinated action, improve development decision-making and allocate resources. The Sevilla Commitment—the outcome of the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2025—also complements the advances made in the MVI resolution by noting the growing political momentum for measuring progress in sustainable

development using metrics that complement or go beyond gross domestic product (GDP). These include multidimensional vulnerability and a commitment to improving development cooperation and access to development finance, including concessional finance and inviting international financial institutions, multinational development banks, and international organizations to consider using MVI as a complement to their existing practices and policies to inform their development cooperation policies and practices.

UN DESA has been working with the UN Sustainable Development Group on MVI and will encourage widescale pilot testing of the tool. Within UN DESA, efforts are being made to determine the best way to integrate the MVI into the Department's workstreams.

The Department has also been lending its support and thought leadership to the operationalization of the **Debt Sustainability Support Service (DSSS)**, a key outcome of the SIDS4 Conference which will be a mechanism for supporting SIDS to develop appropriate debt sustainability strategies and engage in conversations with credit rating organizations and other bilateral and multilateral lenders around debt.



UN DESA colleagues meet with SIDS representatives and other stakeholders at the second session of the SIDS4 Conference Preparatory Committee. | PHOTO PREDRAG VASIĆ

3

Putting data and science to work for SDG progress

UN DESA is dedicated to **empowering SIDS with the statistical tools and expertise needed to navigate their complex development challenges**. For example, UN DESA has developed a dedicated initiative for SIDS called Data for SIDS, or DATAS, which aims to strengthen national statistical systems in SIDS in order to produce better data, track progress, and make more informed policy decisions. This kind of work is especially timely, given the critical role data plays in the development of the MVI advocated by SIDS.

With support from the government of Ireland, DATAS is currently being implemented in Fiji, Jamaica, and Comoros. In each country, UN DESA works in close partnership with national authorities and UN agencies to improve the availability and use of quality data aligned

with national priorities, whether by improving crime and health statistics in Fiji, developing migration data systems and address registers in Jamaica, or using administrative data for statistics production in Comoros. High-level events and workshops have been organized to engage senior government officials and key stakeholders to promote the importance of collaboration and data sharing across institutions, increase ownership, raise user awareness, and ensure sustainability in data use for decision-making. At the regional level, the initiative is supporting the development of a Caribbean platform for SIDS-SIDS cooperation and a best practice exchange on data solutions and tools for nature. Some of the early results were shared at the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP16) in Cali, Colombia, in 2024, alongside CARICOM.



Participants gather at a workshop on collaboration and data sharing for improved data and statistics as part of the DATAS Initiative in Fiji. | PHOTO FIJI BUREAU OF STATISTICS



Representatives of 14 Caribbean SIDS gathered in Belize in 2024 to explore the development of a practical regional SIDS-SIDS cooperation scheme and a skills transfer roadmap on data solutions for nature. | PHOTO GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE

Starting in 2026, UN DESA will begin monitoring progress on the ABAS using its newly formulated monitoring and evaluation framework, and the Department will lead the production of an annual report which will monitor progress.

SIDS and AI

Furthermore, UN DESA, in partnership with UNCTAD, ECLAC, UNEP, CARICOM, IMO, and UN RCOs, recently launched the DA Tranche 17 project on “Evidence-based Climate Action through Artificial Intelligence and Data Innovation for Caribbean SIDS,” which is focused on using AI and data to enhance climate action in the Caribbean. Specifically, it

aims to improve the ability of four Caribbean SIDS— Barbados, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Dominican Republic—to monitor and analyze maritime transport, trade, fisheries, and their greenhouse gas emissions. The project also seeks to strengthen the statistical, data science, and analytical capabilities of these four countries.

The project aims to build skills in data science, econometrics, and data wrangling, enabling these SIDS to better utilize data from sources like Automatic Identification System (AIS) data and national fishing vessel registers. This project responds directly to the priorities set out in the **Nice Declaration**, adopted at the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference.



UN DESA team briefs the Prime Minister of Aruba after training sessions on principles of official statistics. | PHOTO GABRIEL GAMEZ

Innovative capacity-building

UN DESA supports SIDS through workshops, advisory missions and projects to enhance statistical capabilities crucial for policymaking and sustainable development.

Regional workshops have focused on environmental statistics, sustainable forest management, climate finance, and SDG indicators, and tailoring **strategies to the needs of SIDS**. Advisory missions strengthen legal frameworks and governance structures for statistical systems, ensuring data reliability. For example, an advisory mission to Aruba in February 2023 focused on developing a draft statistical act and included training sessions on the principles of official statistics and the structure of national statistical systems.

Capacity-building initiatives also foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing among SIDS, addressing common challenges. Long-term projects, including the Programme on Statistics and Data, and Resilient and Agile National Statistical Systems, and initiatives such as DATAS, demonstrate UN DESA's commitment to building sustainable statistical capacities for SIDS and **promoting data-driven decision-making**.

Another example is the Data for Now initiative, under which UN DESA is collaborating with the

UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to help the Dominican Republic in operationalizing the UNODC statistical framework for measuring corruption. The country has shown a strong willingness to advance the framework, proposing a roadmap that begins with identifying focal points across key institutions and priority indicators. Under the same initiative, UN DESA is also supporting the Maldives in using innovative data sources and methods to measure migration statistics, a key priority for the Maldives to inform its decision-making.

Additionally, in collaboration with UNITAR and ECLAC, UN DESA supported the Central Statistical Office of Grenada in organizing and conducting a national workshop in June 2025 on the use of administrative data for producing official statistics on migration and environment/climate change. Through UN DESA training materials and practical tools developed in the context of the Collaborative on Administrative Data, the workshop strengthened the capacity of the National Statistical System to integrate and improve the quality of administrative data, aligning with international guidelines. The activity also facilitated the identification of priority data needs and the establishment of working groups and action plans for their implementation.

4

Protecting our planet through fostering synergy between implementing the 2030 Agenda and advancing climate action

UN DESA is actively involved in capacity-building, policymaking and resource mobilization for **sustainable forest management and climate finance**. In Fiji, our initiatives aim to integrate National Forest and Landscape Restoration into the National Development Plan (NDP), develop a forest financing strategy, and provide an E-learning course. In Guinea-Bissau, our focus is on establishing a National Forest Programme, integrating financing strategies into the NDP and

preparing concept notes for accessing climate finance. Meanwhile, in Mauritius, UN DESA's support is geared towards aligning the National Forest Programme and Forest Financing strategy with the NDP (see spotlight). In Suriname, UN DESA is assisting in aligning the National Forest financing strategy within the NDP and preparing a project proposal for a multilateral funding source, focusing on sustainable forest management and climate finance.



UN DESA is building capacity among SIDS partners to access climate finance. Tuvalu 2024. | PHOTO L. REUPENA

Spotlight on Mauritius

UN DESA's recent work in Mauritius highlights a tailored approach to enhance the island's sustainable development capabilities, particularly in climate finance and forest management. The deployment of the National Forest Programme, alongside a strategy to integrate forest management with national development plans, underscores a tailored support mechanism. Additionally, workshops conducted by UN DESA have provided Mauritius with valuable insights into improving statistical systems for informed policymaking and better SDG reporting. Other work includes strengthening national capacities to develop national forest financing strategies and measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on forest cover, enhance livelihoods, improve trade, increase financial flows, and encourage forest certification. These initiatives reflect a dedicated push towards empowering Mauritius and other SIDS to achieve sustainable growth and resilience against climate challenges.

Furthermore, UN DESA is actively supporting **Supreme Audit Institutions** (SAIs) in SIDS

in capacity building for auditing sustainable development and climate change, organizing events at major UN and industry conferences to share SIDS' experiences and practices related to auditing climate change, climate finance, sustainable debt management, and digital transformation.

Additionally, UN DESA has been supporting the establishment and coordination of the **SIDS Coalition for Nature**, aiming to catalyze SIDS strategic partnerships to support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The Coalition, launched at the 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15), is co-led by Belize, Cabo Verde and Samoa with UN DESA support. As of July 2025, the Coalition includes 35 governments (20 SIDS members across the three SIDS regions and 15 others) and has launched seven nature action initiatives and partnership proposals, five of which are already funded or in the process of being funded through friends and partners. Recently, at the **third UN Ocean Conference** in Nice, France, the Coalition announced a new UN DESA-UNCTAD project "Evidence-Based Climate Action through AI & Data Innovation for Caribbean SIDS" that was registered as a Voluntary Ocean Commitment.



Participants in the SIDS Coalition for Nature pose during a high-level event at the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France, in June 2025. | PHOTO UN DESA

5

Addressing poverty, inequality and leaving no one behind

UN DESA's research and analysis describes **pathways for all countries to accelerate social progress, by promoting equity, reducing inequalities and enhancing well-being**, with a specific focus on the needs of vulnerable populations, including those in SIDS. UN DESA actively monitors national and global socio-economic trends, identifying emerging issues, and assessing their implications for leaving no one behind at both national and international levels, mainstreaming gender throughout.

We are dedicated to **advocating for social inclusion**, ensuring that policies and programmes consider the specific needs of countries in special situations, including SIDS. This includes digital inclusion, and through the *UN E-Government Survey*, UN DESA highlights strategies for SIDS to overcome persistent digital divides. Capacity-building efforts in digital transformation in SIDS address the gaps in digital data management and cooperation (Samoa and Vanuatu), promote digital inclusion in public services delivery (Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Solomon Islands,

and Suriname), and policy experimentation with regulatory sandboxes for frontier technology adoption (the Maldives).

We also actively promote greater awareness and increased involvement by civil society in the United Nations' work on sustainable development. By engaging with civil society, we amplify the voices of different communities in SIDS, including women and girls, youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and older persons and ensure that their concerns are heard and that their priorities shape collective action for social progress. For example, the Department has been taking the lead in mainstreaming Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities and engaging their representative organizations in global policy debate at key global forums. This has involved working closely with Indigenous Peoples in SIDS. Recent capacity-building projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of policymakers to ensure that the digital transformation of the creative economy leaves no one behind have benefited SIDS and Least Developed Countries, including Timor-Leste.

6

Working with SIDS on projection and frontier issues

UN DESA is working to develop **forecasting and modeling capacities in SIDS**. With tailored modeling tools and support through other mechanisms, we empower informed decision-making in SIDS.

As the Secretariat of the UN Committee for Development Policy (CDP), UN DESA implements the Enhanced Monitoring Mechanism (EMM) for countries graduating or recently graduated from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category, which currently includes five SIDS beneficiaries: Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Sao Tome and Principe, and Solomon Islands. At the request of the government of Solomon Islands, the EMM was activated and the resulting readiness assessment carried out by UN DESA, ESCAP, and the UN RCO supported the CDP's recommendations for additional support and an extended preparatory period. For SIDS such as Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, UN DESA has supported the development of national smooth transition strategies to help secure their transition from the LDC category. In Vanuatu, DESA has helped initiate implementation, including through leadership dialogues as well as complementary ePing training that helps micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) exporters adapt to changes in product requirements in export markets.

UN DESA also supports SIDS in preparing for **graduation from LDC status** and smooth transition strategies covering critical areas like small-to-medium enterprise (SME) development, trade, and climate finance. Our capacity-building

initiatives in Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, the Maldives, and Jamaica include training in population forecasting and National Transfer Accounts (NTAs) to assess and predict the economic impacts of population change.

UN DESA also strives to raise awareness among SIDS about **innovation in public**



UN DESA helps SIDS predict the economic impacts of population change via training workshops such as this one in Jamaica on estimation of National Transfer Accounts, 4-8 December 2023. | PHOTO TIMOTHY MILLER

Spotlight on strengthening national capacity for sustainable development planning in SIDS

UN DESA supports developing countries—including SIDS—in strengthening national capacity for sustainable development planning through the Climate, Land, Energy, and Water Systems (CLEWS) model. This integrated tool helps policymakers better understand cross-sectoral linkages and facilitates decision-making processes, which is critical for SIDS facing climate change impacts, economic vulnerabilities, and financing challenges. In Mauritius, the CLEWS analysis is aligned with broader national strategies and regional partnerships, such as the renewable energy roadmap supported by the SDG Fund and ocean energy initiatives under the Indian Ocean Commission. Through these collaborations, UN DESA aims to strengthen evidence-based policy coherence and resilience-building in Mauritius

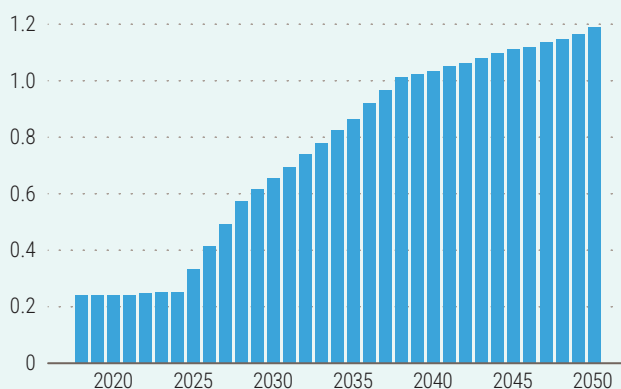
throughout 2025 by delivering comprehensive online and onsite training programs tailored for government officials.

In the Dominican Republic, CLEWS has been used to help address pressing challenges related to water management, land use, and climate adaptation, which are essential for food security and sustainable growth. Following workshops and capacity building, government agencies, academia, and stakeholders prepared recommendations to institutionalize CLEWS within national planning frameworks, improve regional agricultural data, modernize irrigation for key crops such as rice and banana, and reduce high water losses through infrastructure improvements and governance reforms. Support for both countries is ongoing.

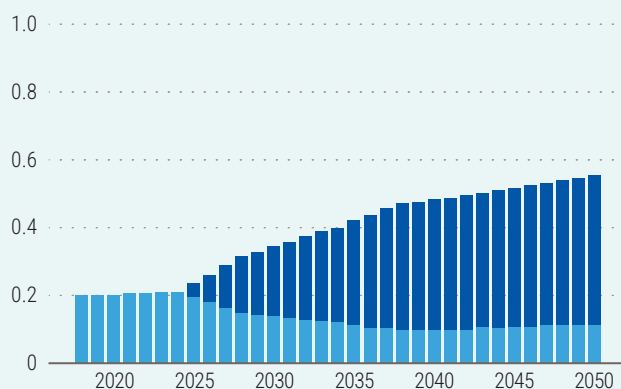
Projection of water use and traditional irrigation for rice cultivation vs. technified irrigation in Yaque del Sur, Dominican Republic (2020-2025)

■ Traditional irrigation ■ Technified irrigation

Projection of water use and traditional irrigation for rice cultivation in Yaque del Sur



Projection of water use and technified irrigation for rice cultivation in Yaque del Sur



service delivery to achieve the SDGs. This has resulted in, for instance, the proposal of a Regional Innovation Lab for digital government in the Caribbean. High-level briefings and capacity-building activities in the Maldives, Dominican Republic and Guyana have focused on enhancing digital

government understanding and public sector transformation. This support aims to foster social inclusion, climate resilience, and **overall digital transformation** in SIDS, addressing key dimensions such as governance, leadership, strategy, legal frameworks, technology and workforce development.

Spotlight on promoting understanding of demographic realities and policy responses in SIDS

UN DESA's report **Population Prospects of Countries in Special Situations** provides a snapshot of the population dynamics of SIDS, covering levels and trends in total population, fertility, mortality and international migration.

SIDS are a demographically diverse group of 57 island and coastal countries and territories with a combined population of 73.5 million as of mid-2024. While most have populations under 1 million people, four countries—Papua New Guinea, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti—have over 10 million each and together account for about 60 per cent of the total SIDS population.

Population growth in SIDS is expected to continue, though at a slower pace than in recent years, reaching 85.4 million by 2050. This growth will be driven largely by SIDS of the Pacific region, where fertility rates remain high in many countries, exceeding four births per woman in some, including the Solomon Islands and Samoa. In 2024, among women of reproductive age who did not want to become pregnant, the proportion using modern contraception (SDG 3.7.1) was moderate to high in SIDS of the Caribbean region (73 per cent) and of the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea region (67 per cent). Although this proportion was considerably lower in SIDS of the Pacific region (52 per cent), its increase was substantial over the past two decades and is projected to continue through 2030. In all SIDS regions, further improvements in access to modern contraception would help to ensure that all parents can control the number and spacing of births.

Life expectancy also varies across the three SIDS regions. In 2024, the average level for all SIDS was 73 years, with the highest in the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea region (76 years) due in part to Singapore, followed by the Caribbean region (73 years), and with the lowest in the Pacific region (68 years). The lower life expectancy in SIDS of the Pacific region reflects high rates of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and related risk factors. Thirteen of the 15 countries and territories with the highest prevalence

of adult obesity worldwide are Pacific SIDS. Nine SIDS, mostly in the Pacific region, are among 20 locations with the highest mortality rates attributed to NCDs, which include cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease. As SIDS populations continue to age, the burden of these chronic diseases is likely to rise further unless concrete steps are taken.

Migration has also significantly shaped SIDS demographics. As of 2020, around 11.5 million people from SIDS were living abroad. Their origin countries are heavily concentrated in the Caribbean region, which accounted for 86 per cent of all international migrants from SIDS. For nearly half of the Caribbean SIDS, the size of the diaspora population exceeded 30 per cent of the resident population, underscoring the region's long-standing migration patterns.

Although international migration can support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including those related to poverty, health, education and gender equality, it can also have negative impacts on SIDS. Many small island economies, for instance, are heavily dependent on remittances from overseas workers. However, mass emigration of skilled workers can result in a "brain drain" from critical sectors, with various negative implications for development in countries of origin. It is important to adopt comprehensive policy approaches that maximize the overall benefits of migration, while also addressing the associated risks and challenges.

Migration can also serve as an adaptive strategy to cope with environmental degradation and climate change. Rising sea levels and increased intensity of storms linked to climate change could provide additional motivation to migrate across international borders. It is crucial to uphold the commitment of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States (ABAS) to support and strengthen contingency planning and provisions for disaster preparedness and response, emergency relief, and population evacuation.

Spotlight on promoting understanding of demographic realities and policy responses in SIDS (*continued*)

Over the next decades, most SIDS are projected to experience a rapid increase in the size of the population over age 65. The number of persons in this age group residing in SIDS, which stood at 6.9 million in 2024, is projected to reach 10 million in the mid-2030s and could climb to 15 million by the late 2050s. In half of all SIDS, the size of the older population is expected to double between now and 2055. For most SIDS, population projections published by DESA anticipate a decline in population size and an upward shift in population distribution, as illustrated in the figure for Jamaica. Policies with a multifaceted, life-course approach will be essential for meeting the needs of an ageing society across multiple domains, including healthcare, food security, social protection, skills development, job creation, and investment.

References

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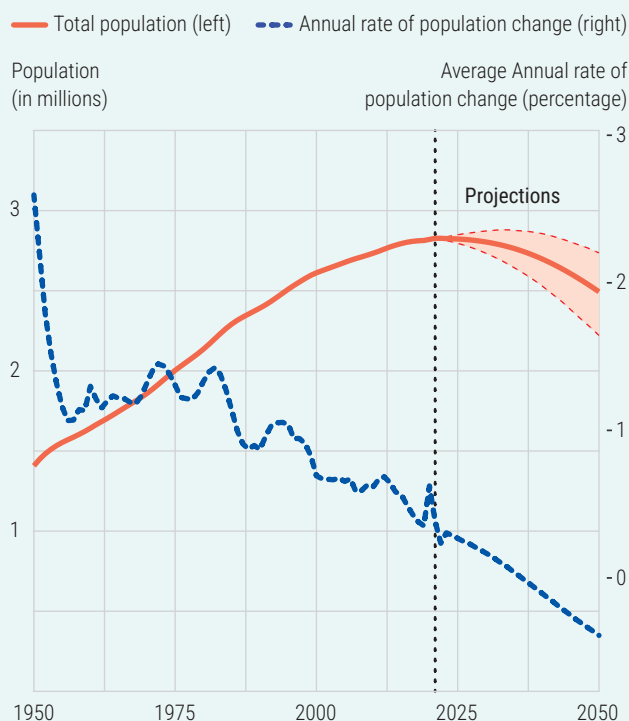
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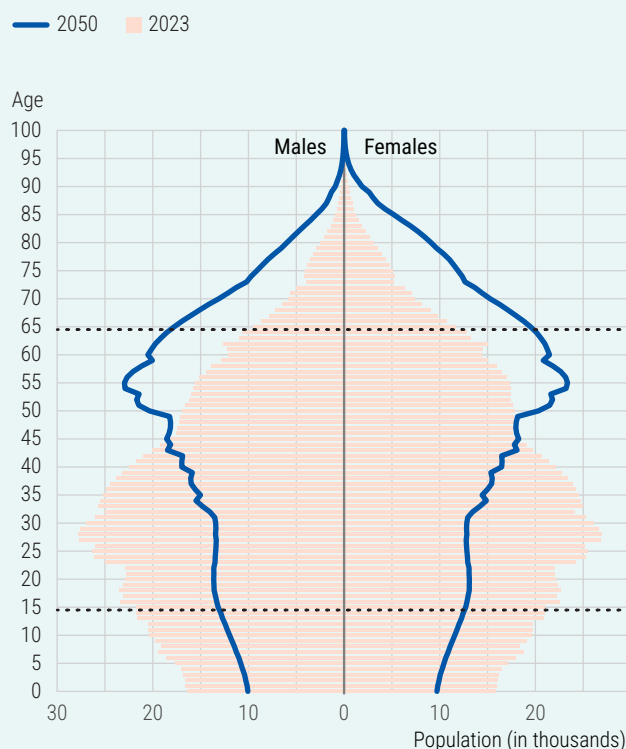
Population Prospects of Countries in Special Situations, UN DESA (2023).

UN DESA projects Jamaica's total population to peak in 2025 and be much older by 2050

a. Total population and population growth rate



b. Population by age and sex



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2023). *Population Prospects of Countries in Special Situations: Tracking demographic change among the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States*. UN DESA/POP/2023/TR/NO. 6. Figure 4.5, page 51.



UN DESA supports SIDS with foresight and systems thinking at this workshop in Seychelles on “Strategic Planning and Financing for Sustainable Development Goals”. | PHOTO VERONIQUE VERBRUGGEN

The Department is also expanding its capacity-building support on strategic foresight in several SIDS. This includes deeper engagement in countries such as Mauritius, Seychelles, the Dominican Republic, and St. Lucia, with upcoming efforts focused on strengthening foresight capacities in Pacific SIDS to support climate resilience and disaster risk reduction.

In 2023–2024, UN DESA supported foresight and systems thinking workshops in Mauritius, Seychelles, and the Dominican Republic to strengthen SDG-aligned planning. The Dominican Republic’s virtual training introduced basic systems thinking, foresight, and tools. In Mauritius, workshops applied tools like Causal Loop Diagrams to promote integrated planning across government and academia, with plans to build on this work through Maurice Stratégie, a new public think tank under the Ministry of Finance focused on long-term planning and policy coherence. In Seychelles, officials

applied systems thinking to map key drivers of socioeconomic change using tools like Causal Loop Diagrams. The process identified leverage points for more coherent, long-term planning aligned with Vision 2033.

UN DESA is providing capacity development, in collaboration with CARICAD and ECLAC, to the Bahamas, Barbados, and St. Lucia for the strengthening of institutional arrangements, structures, mechanisms, and approaches to promote innovation and digital governance transformation to improve public service delivery, leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first. Through capacity development workshops and focus groups, it has contributed to an enhanced understanding by government officials of the importance of changing mindsets to support an environment conducive to innovation and digital transformation in the public sector, thus contributing to improved service delivery.



UN DESA provides capacity-development digital governance support in collaboration with CARICAD and ECLAC in the Bahamas, Barbados and St. Lucia. | PHOTO CRISTINA A. RODRÍGUEZ-ACOSTA

In May 2025, an interregional capacity development workshop on “The Future of Governance in the Public Sector: Changing Mindsets for Innovation and Public Sector Transformation” was held, where participants from 16 Caribbean SIDS discussed the current state of governance in the Caribbean based on emerging drivers of change, as well as the desired governance future. As a follow-up, a

regional ministerial workshop will be organized in December 2025 to increase awareness and highlight the importance of futures thinking and changing mindsets, including innovation and foresight mindsets, in the public sector to enhance public service delivery. In support of peer-to-peer learning and sharing, several regional innovative practices in public sector transformation will be discussed and presented.

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