



## FRAMING THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT

Children Visit UN Headquarters on UN Kids Day - UN Photo/Loey Felipe

### ... to build greater resilience and preparedness.

UN DESA continued to enhance its strategic foresight in addressing long-term socioeconomic challenges and risks that are emerging on the horizon towards 2030 and beyond. The Department also helped policymakers strengthen their strategic planning efforts through provision of capacity-development programmes and tools globally.

### UN DESA ...

- Advocated for developing countries' enhanced and strategically directed support from the global community to stimulate economic recovery and protect the most vulnerable.
- Strengthened national capacities in achieving sustainable, resilient and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and other shocks, to build back better towards achieving the SDGs.
- Implemented a digital learning hub to deliver client-centered, agile, and effective e-Learning activities for Member States and other stakeholders and continued to offer engaging, flexible, and highly effective programmes that drive transformative change and support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- Continued to enhance policymakers' capacity to use innovative modelling tools to analyze macroeconomic and demographic challenges.
- Continued to provide definitive global population estimates and projections, which are indispensable to planning for future demographic changes and ensuring progress towards the SDGs.

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## FRAMING THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT

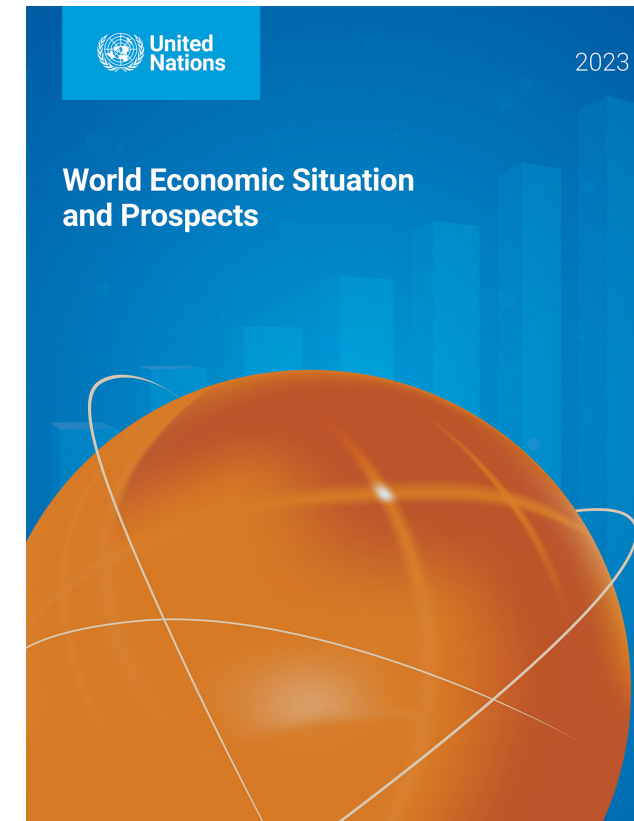
*Recurring and overlapping crises continue to strain the capacity of countries to respond, introducing uncertainty and undermining longer-term investments in development priorities. Faced with this reality, UN DESA has – through its analytical work and capacity development activities – supported countries to frame the future of development by offering policy options for countries to address present and future challenges, identify new and innovative opportunities to enhance resilience through capacity building and put forward fresh ideas to strengthen the multilateral cooperation needed to solve our global problems.*

### Continuous monitoring and assessment of the world economic situation

Understanding the current global economic picture is crucial for Member States to adopt the right policies and to inform intergovernmental processes. UN DESA's flagship *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2023 (WESP)*, and its mid-year update, presented a nuanced outlook for the global economy. On the one hand, relatively positive growth prospects for some of the major economies fed into a modestly favourable outlook for the global economy, albeit still below recent averages. On the other hand, grimmer expectations of economic growth in many developing countries, coupled with the erosion of real incomes by persistently high inflation, pose challenges for achieving the SDGs.

The report stressed that developing countries require enhanced and strategically directed support from the global community to stimulate economic recovery and protect the most vulnerable. With shrinking fiscal space, the report warned that many developing countries were at risk of entering a vicious cycle of weak investment, slow growth, and rising debt-servicing burdens amid an increasingly challenging macroeconomic and financial environment.

At the same time, the new crisis landscape has put the capacity of countries and individuals to respond and recover under severe stress, while creating greater vulnerability to future shocks. The sooner the international community begins to understand the impact of such crises, the easier it will be to address



and build resilience against them. To anticipate global challenges beyond the immediate macroeconomic situation, this year UN DESA launched a special research and analytical effort, with support from leading experts, to examine the longer-run implications of the new recurrent crisis landscape. The findings of this initiative will be presented in the forthcoming World Social Report 2024.

### Strengthening integrated planning and decision-making capacities of policymakers and stakeholders in Caribbean SIDS

UN DESA supported SIDS in the Caribbean region to strengthen national capacities for a sustainable, resilient and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to respond to other shocks and build back better towards achieving the SDGs. In cooperation with UN ECLAC and other UN partners, UN DESA conducted national consultations in



Participants at a workshop on sustainable and green growth opportunities, held in April 2023 in Trinidad and Tobago – Photo credit: Ministry of Planning and Development, Trinidad and Tobago

Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, and Trinidad and Tobago, and provided capacity-building support to Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago that included technical advisory assistance and training workshops. The joint initiative assessed the social and economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic and other global crisis setbacks for SIDS in the Caribbean region and developed methodologies for future analysis and forecasts. It also made policy recommendations and practical measures for sustainable, green and resilient recovery and transition that have multiplier effects and can accelerate achieving the SDGs.

### Building coherent strategic planning capacities in Mauritius to achieve the SDGs

UN DESA helped the Government of Mauritius enhance its long-term strategic planning and resilience by introducing qualitative systems thinking approaches in policy formulation and decision making towards integrated policy-making. This approach fostered improved collaboration between ministries towards a more coherent implementation of the SDGs and the implementation of their national development plan, which was a challenge identified during their VNR. It also provided a better understanding of the country's vulnerabilities, such as the intensifying impact of climate change, as well as the heightening risks of food security, inequality, and energy dependency, which became more imminent during and after the pandemic. It further led to the establishment of an informal working group, led by senior academics in the country, to provide support to evidence-based policymaking by government officials. Through online and in-person workshops, participants from various ministries, including the Ministry of Finance and its Planning

Division, the Prime Minister's Office, as well as the Ministries of Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Industrial Development, Agro-Industry, Finance, and others, actively participated in this policymaking process. A similar workshop was held for senior academics to enhance the science-policy interface.

### Strengthening digital capacity development programmes

In 2022-2023, UN DESA implemented a digital learning hub to deliver client-centered, agile, and effective e-Learning activities for Member States and other stakeholders. This initiative aligns with the commitment outlined in the Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies to enhance UN system support to government capacity development. The digital learning hub modernizes UN DESA's learning methods and platforms, recognizing the growing importance of technology as a strategic tool for capacity development activities. The success of various e-Learning programmes – developed to complement in-person capacity development activities – has led to the establishment of a central support structure to monitor best practices, scale innovations and create a more user-centered approach.

UN DESA now offers engaging, flexible, and highly effective digital capacity development programmes that drive transformative change and support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. So far, more than 2,100 individuals from 141 Member States have benefited from learning opportunities on DESA's digital learning hub, earning more than 1,100 certifications across 44 learning offerings.

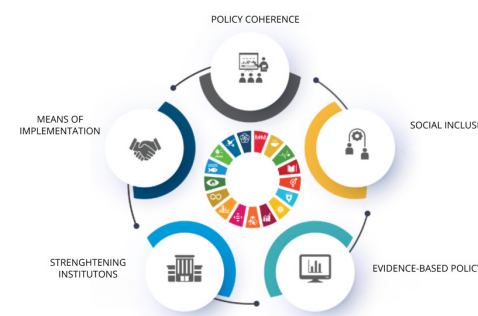


Image credit: UN DESA

### Promoting new economics for sustainable development

The Secretary-General has highlighted the need to correct glaring blind spots in how we measure economic prosperity and progress in Our Common Agenda. UN DESA is at the forefront of this push to expand the conceptual, analytical and policy frontiers of mainstream economics.

For example, as the secretariat of the United Nations Economist Network, the Department supported the launch of a series of policy briefs on the “New Economics for Sustainable Development” to address shortcomings of mainstream economic theory and practice. The policy briefs cover key concepts, including the circular economy, creative economy, care economy, social and solidarity economy, and attention economy, and discuss policy options for countries. They identify key examples of how countries are moving the concepts forward and realizing the synergy of the three sustainable development dimensions: social, economic and environmental.

By bringing more than 400 economists from across the UN system together in a peer-to-peer collaboration platform, the Network encourages dialogue and joint work that brings together global,

regional and national experiences to advance our economic thinking.

### Pioneering innovative tools for policy design in developing countries

In February 2023, UN DESA introduced the Overlapping Generations Model for South Africa (OG-ZAF). It demonstrates how to adapt the open-source “OG-Core” macroeconomic model to countries with more limited data. OG-ZAF is a sophisticated economic model that incorporates comprehensive demographic data for analysis. This initiative showcased UN DESA's capability to support policymakers analyze policy changes on macroeconomics and population.

The success of OG-ZAF opens the door to adapt the innovative model for other developing countries, leveraging flexibility, accessibility, and compatibility with data from sources like the UN, World Bank, and IMF— crucial in countries where data is scarce.

### Future-proofing sustainable development strategies for SIDS

UN DESA, working with UNITAR, has helped to reinvigorate the Resident Coordinator system by providing substantive guidance and advice on strategic planning and systems thinking for SIDS. This capacity development support led to greater focus on risk and foresight analysis, seeking to “future-proof” sustainable development strategies for SIDS. It has also helped the United Nations Sustainable Cooperation Frameworks to identify interventions that will allow the UN to best define its comparative advantage and policy and programme interventions that can accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.

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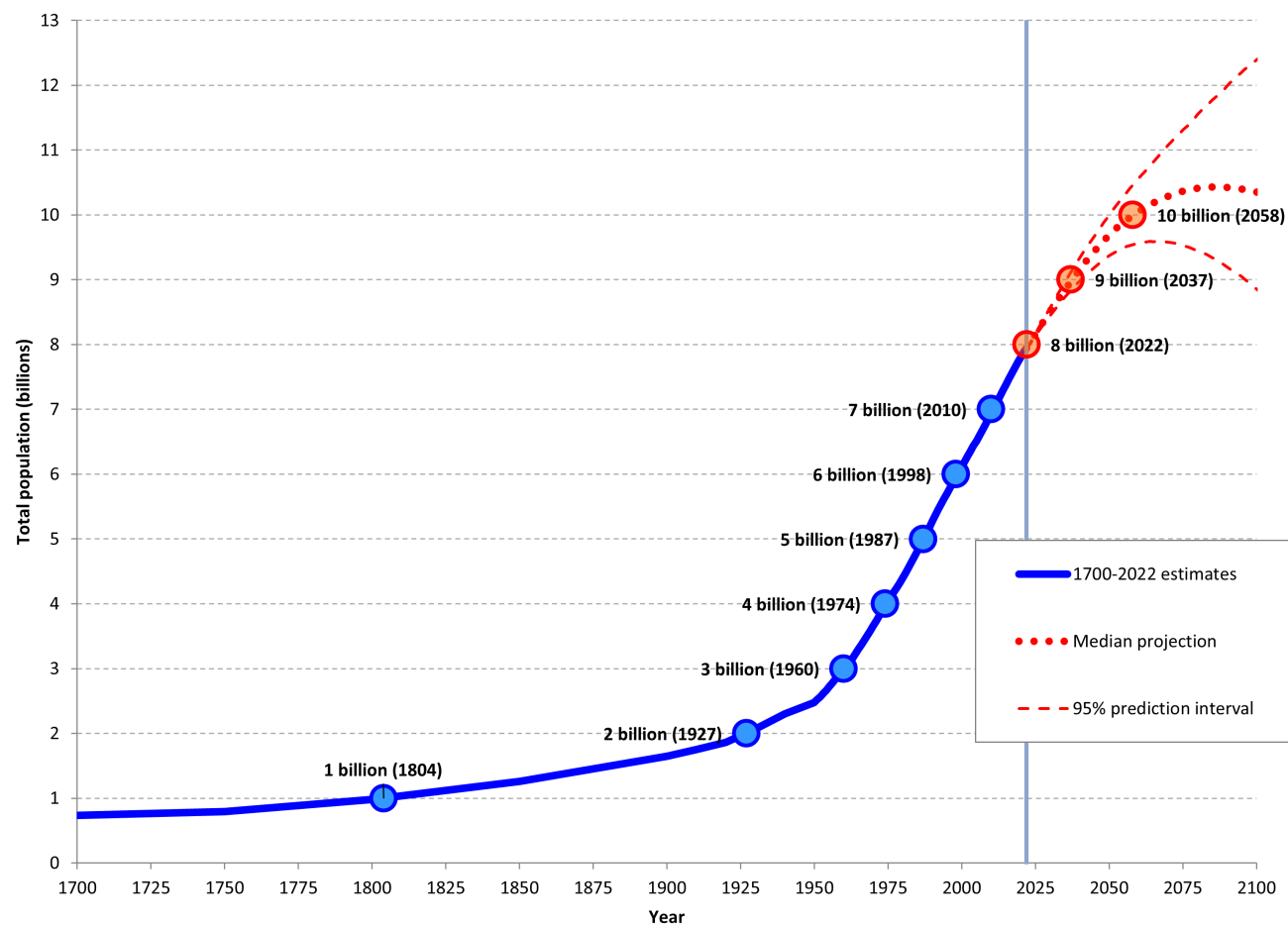
**UN DESA's (and UNITAR's) capacity building approach in the field of coherent strategic planning is a "best practice case" which should be replicated in other SIDS to help with the implementation of the SDGs at the UN country level.**

by **Christine N. Umutoni**  
former UN Resident Coordinator  
in Mauritius and Seychelles

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### Providing new population data as the world passes 8 billion people

UN DESA reaffirmed its place as the definitive source of global population figures through its *World Population Prospects 2022* report. As projected in the report, the global population surpassed 8 billion people in November 2022, due to longer life expectancy and high levels of fertility in some countries. The report's analysis also indicated that rapid population growth poses challenges to progress in social and economic development, requiring increased resources to meet growing needs. It highlights the need for sustainable



Global population size surpassed 8 billion in 2022 and is projected to reach 10 billion in 2058 - Image credit: UN DESA

economic development, while also protecting the environment. At the same time, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production in countries where population growth is slow or even negative continue to contribute to environmental degradation and climate change. Understanding and planning for future demographic changes is essential to achieving continued progress towards the SDGs.

Another major trend revealed by UN DESA's population projections is that India surpassed China in April 2023, becoming the world's most populous country. India's continued population growth presents significant socioeconomic implications, while China faces an ageing population due to a sharp decline in fertility. A UN DESA Policy Brief showed how managing these demographic changes is crucial for achieving the SDGs globally, especially in areas of poverty, food security, health, education, gender equality, decent work, inequality, urbanization and the environment.

### Adapting national statistical systems to prepare for population ageing

UN DESA strengthened the capacity of Malaysian policymakers through a training on National Transfer Accounts (NTA) – an economic-demographic accounting system designed to measure how people at different ages consume, produce, and share economic resources. The basis for this training was the manual *National Transfer Accounts: Measuring and Analysing the Generational Economy* published by UN DESA in 2013 and still relevant today.

Responding to a request from Malaysia's Ministry of Finance, UN DESA held a week-long virtual

workshop on NTA in March 2022 attended by more than 90 government officials from multiple ministries. This was followed by an in-person training workshop on NTA at the request of Malaysia's Department of Statistics in March 2023. Together, these events strengthened the technical capacities of Malaysian officials to integrate population dynamics into their economic planning.

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**The pooling of renowned speakers from all over the world to selflessly share their knowledge, is something that we may not be able to do ourselves. I believe all participants had benefited enormously from the training programme**

by **V. Sivabalasingam**  
Chief Economist, Fiscal and Economics Division,  
Ministry of Finance, Malaysia

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### Using technology to harness the economic dividends from demographic change

Developing countries with a growing, young workforce have an opportunity for economic growth, but it requires investments in technology, skills, and education. UN DESA published a Frontier Technology Issues paper on *Harnessing the Economic Dividends from Demographic Change*. This new analysis emphasizes the need for skill development and productivity enhancement among youth to fully benefit from this demographic transition. It provides policy pathways for countries in bridging

the digital gap, ensuring access to ICTs, investing in future-oriented education, and fostering innovation. The paper shows how strategic investments in these areas can enable countries to leverage their demographic advantage for sustainable economic growth in the face of population ageing.

### Strengthening UN DESA's thought leadership through linkages with socioeconomic policy research community

Throughout the year, UN DESA continued to work closely with the United Nations High-level Advisory Board (HLAB) on Economic and Social Affairs, funded by the United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund (UNPDF) and convened by Under-Secretary-General Li Junhua of UN DESA, to enhance the Department's strategic foresight capacity in responding to the multifaceted crisis

and identify emerging megatrends that will shape the development landscape into 2030 and beyond. Consisting of 21 prominent thought leaders from across the world, as well as the principals of UNCTAD and the UN Regional Commissions as the ex-officio members, the Board gathered in April 2023 for the fourth round of Advisory Board meetings and provided UN DESA with innovative insights and actionable guidance on how the Department and the UN system could address key global challenges, including the urgent need for reforms to the international financial architecture and ensuring sustainable development in an ageing world. The Board has also been instrumental in helping to shape the overall analytical direction of UN DESA's flagship reports, through its members' participation at the Advisory Board meetings and Expert Group Meetings held during 2022-2023.

Additionally, the UN DESA Global Policy Dialogue Series, also funded by UNPDF, continued to engage global thought leaders and stakeholders to showcase new ideas and solutions for making the SDGs a reality. Throughout the year, the series served as a platform to convene a global conversation on critical issues, such as financing for sustainable and inclusive industrial transition, indigenous and youth solutions for clean water and leaving no one behind in an ageing world. Furthermore, in June 2023, two hybrid sessions were held to accelerate SDG implementation and took a deeper look at the goals under review at the 2023 HLPF.

Members of the HLAB have been closely engaged in the Policy Dialogue series. For example, Ms. Izabella Teixeira, a former Environment Minister of Brazil, participated in a Global Policy Dialogue Fireside Chat, "Building a Sustainable World for 8 Billion People," at the DESA-organized SDG Pavilion at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, along with speakers from UN DESA, UNFCCC and UNFPA. As the world population surpassed 8 billion people, the event marked the milestone with a discussion on how to ensure a sustainable future for this growing population.



UN Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs Maria Francesca Spatalisano speaks at the UN DESA Global Policy Dialogues to Turbocharge SDG Implementation, in June 2023 – Photo credit: UN DESA



Ms. Izabella Teixeira, member of the United Nations High-level Advisory Board on Economic and Social Affairs participates at the UN DESA Global Policy Dialogue Fireside Chat, held at the SDG Pavilion during COP27 in November 2022 in Egypt – Photo credit: UN DESA