



## **BOOSTING PARTNERSHIPS AND MULTISTAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**



# **UN DESA HIGHLIGHTS 2025**



## Reviewing a decade of progress on the SDGs

Marking the 10th anniversary of the 2030 Agenda, UN DESA led the organization of the July 2025 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), welcoming two Heads of Government and more than 100 ministers and other high-level officials, along with many other stakeholders, to UN Headquarters in New York to review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, with a focus on SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 14 (life below water), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). The 2025 HLPF and High-level Segment of ECOSOC culminated in the adoption of a focused Ministerial Declaration that outlines key actions to accelerate SDG implementation, builds on recent summits and conferences, and reaffirms international political will to deliver the 2030 Agenda. The HLPF and the High-level Segment of ECOSOC featured 91 high-level presenters, global experts, and UN system representatives who shared their experiences and showcased sustainable, inclusive, science-driven, and evidence-based solutions to advance the SDGs.

On the margins of the 2025 HLPF, in addition to 187 side events, UN DESA also curated a series of 12 high-profile Special Events in collaboration with key partners. These events featured the launch of flagship reports and dynamic thematic discussions, fostering broad



Under-Secretary-General Li Junhua speaks at the opening of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, July 2025, New York. | UN DESA

engagement and strengthening multi-stakeholder ownership of the SDGs across diverse constituencies—from higher education institutions and the private sector to local governments, parliamentarians, and scientific communities—demonstrating the power of inclusive dialogue in advancing sustainable development.

To support the in-depth review of the SDGs in focus ahead of the HLPF, UN DESA convened a series of Expert Group Meetings (EGMs) in the spring 2025, in close collaboration with UN entities and subject matter experts. These meetings mobilized a wide range of expertise and perspectives—from governments, the UN system, civil society, academia, and the private sector—fostering rich dialogue and an exchange of cutting-edge research, practical solutions, and policy insights.



## Accelerating localization of the SDGs

UN DESA continued to join efforts with partners to accelerate the localization of the SDGs. In July 2025, the Department supported the 2025 Local and Regional Governments Forum (LRGF) held as a Special Event during the HLPF, which showcased successful localization policies and high-impact coalitions, with special attention to the SDGs under in-depth review in 2025. Participants highlighted advances in reporting and monitoring mechanisms, such as Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs), in alignment with national-level reviews. The LRGF strengthened multilevel governance by promoting collaboration across all levels of government and stakeholders, helping to close persistent implementation gaps.

UN DESA also advanced SDG localization across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean by strengthening local capacities and promoting integrated, multilevel approaches to the implementation of the SDGs. In Eswatini, UN DESA played a central role in developing a nationally anchored approach to SDG monitoring and reporting, enhancing coordination across sectors and between national and local governments. In partnership with national authorities, UN DESA organized a series of webinars and national capacity-building workshops to equip municipal planners, national government officials,



Local government and youth representatives participate in a VLR exercise on 16 October 2024 in Eswatini. | Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Eswatini

and stakeholder representatives with the tools and knowledge to align local development planning with the SDGs. These efforts helped bridge coordination gaps and fostered cross-sectoral collaboration, engaging institutions responsible for planning, statistics, urban development, housing, and gender equality. As a direct outcome, Eswatini used the insights gained from its first VLRs to inform its VNR, which was presented at the 2025 HLPF. Seven municipalities have participated in their first VLRs, marking a first-of-its-kind synchronized review process in the country. This innovative, multilevel effort contributed to a more cohesive and inclusive approach to SDG implementation, reinforcing both horizontal and vertical coordination and setting a model for transformative, whole-of-government engagement.



In 2024–2025, UN DESA intensified its efforts to foster inclusive, results-driven collaboration in support of the SDGs. A standout moment was its role as the substantive secretariat of the 2025 ECOSOC Partnership Forum, which brought together a diverse array of stakeholders to explore how multistakeholder partnerships can accelerate progress on the SDGs under review.

The Forum itself was the product of a highly collaborative process—shaped by a Global Online Stakeholder Consultation and guided by the ECOSOC President’s informal Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group, which helped define its scope and agenda. It featured four dynamic

SDG Action Segments and a multistakeholder panel titled “*Investing in Partnerships: Catalyzing Action for SDG 17,*” co-organized with key UN entities and stakeholder networks. In addition, 19 side events enriched the dialogue and exchange of ideas.

To spotlight real-world impact, UN DESA also launched a Partnership Snapshot, showcasing inspiring examples of partnerships that are making a tangible difference in SDG implementation around the world.

UN DESA continued to strengthen transparency and accountability in SDG implementation by managing the global repository of registered multistakeholder partnerships and SDG actions. Through the SDG Acceleration Actions Platform and the SDG Actions Platform, governments and stakeholders are encouraged to register their initiatives year-round—helping to track progress and uphold commitments made in support of one or more SDGs. These platforms serve as vital tools for promoting shared responsibility and showcasing concrete efforts to advance sustainable development.

In 2025, UN DESA further expanded its impact by stewarding the SDG Summit Acceleration and Accountability Platform, which welcomed six new commitments from Member States and one from an Observer State—bringing the total to over 40 national commitments. The Department also reviewed and published progress updates from five countries, reinforcing the importance of transparency in driving meaningful change. Building on this momentum, UN DESA analysed the national commitments made during and after the 2023 SDG Summit to identify emerging policy trends and practical strategies

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Each of us is different. Each of us is small. But when we come together to take small steps, we can make a big difference.”

**Dayana Blanco Quiroga**

Keynote speaker for the 2025 ECOSOC Partnership Forum, 2023 Future Rising Fellow from Bolivia, and founder of the Uru Uru Team, an initiative focused on saving Uru Uru Lake from harmful pollution through Indigenous traditional knowledge



for achieving the goal of leaving no one behind. These findings were captured in a dedicated UN DESA policy brief, offering real-world examples of inclusive policies and approaches that can help ensure sustainable development reaches everyone, everywhere.



The ECOSOC Youth Forum—UN DESA’s premier platform for youth involvement in global policymaking—reached a milestone in April 2025, welcoming nearly 1,000 youth leaders and activists in person, alongside almost 100 ministers and senior government officials from around the world.

Organized in collaboration with the Major Group for Children and Youth, the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations, and the UN Youth Office, the Forum provided a dynamic space for young people to voice their ideas, influence policy debates, and offer actionable recommendations to advance the SDGs under review at the 2025 HLPF.

Throughout the Forum and over 120 side events, youth participants addressed urgent global challenges—from

armed conflicts and the digital divide to gender inequality and regional disparities. Their insights not only highlighted critical issues but also helped shape innovative solutions and reinforce youth ownership of the 2030 Agenda.



UN DESA continued to strengthen collaboration with leading private sector umbrella organizations, creating meaningful opportunities for business-driven solutions to be integrated into global policy discussions. A noteworthy example was the 2025 SDG Global Business Forum, co-hosted with the UN Global Compact, the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), held alongside the HLPF in July 2025 as a Special Event.

The Forum convened government officials and business leaders for a focused dialogue on how more innovative policies and stronger partnerships can fast-track progress toward the SDGs as the 2030 deadline approaches. Discussions explored the enabling policy environments and institutional capacities needed to scale up sustainable private sector action, particularly in support of the Pact for the Future.



Youth delegates interact with the President of ECOSOC at its 2025 session, H.E. Mr. Bob Rae (Canada), at the 2025 ECOSOC Youth Forum in April 2025 in New York. | UN DESA

Participants highlighted innovative, locally grounded solutions that are already making measurable impacts on the SDGs. These real-world examples demonstrated how demand-driven, scalable innovations—when supported by the right policy frameworks—can unlock transformative change.

Insights from the Forum will feed into the follow-up process of the Pact for the Future and inform key upcoming intergovernmental milestones, including the Second World Summit for Social Development and beyond.



### Strengthening higher education's alignment with sustainable development

UN DESA continued to lead efforts to mobilize higher education institutions around the SDGs through its co-chairmanship of the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI). This open partnership between the United Nations and the academic community fosters collaboration, innovation, and action to strengthen the role of universities in advancing sustainable development.

In May 2025, the inaugural HESI Networking Forum was held virtually, bringing together over 140 participants

from universities, student organizations, UN agencies, and regional networks. The Forum laid the groundwork for more coordinated and collaborative engagement across the sector.

These efforts culminate annually at the HESI Global Forum, a special event of the HLPF, which showcases the transformative potential of higher education to deliver inclusive, science-based solutions for the SDGs. Through these platforms, UN DESA and its HESI partners are working to elevate the visibility of academia in global policy discussions, strengthen multi-stakeholder engagement, and support institutions in equipping learners with the knowledge and skills needed to build a more sustainable future.



### Enabling broader NGO and civil society engagement at the United Nations

UN DESA continued to play a essential role in supporting the growing involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society in UN processes. As the substantive secretariat to ECOSOC's 19-member Committee on NGOs, the Department facilitated Member States' review and approval of applications



UN Under-Secretary-General Li Junhua participates in the SIDS Civil Society Engagement Forum at UN Headquarters in New York on 5 February 2025. | UN DESA/ Predrag Vasic



for ECOSOC consultative status—a key gateway for NGOs to participate meaningfully in UN decision-making. In 2025, UN DESA received over 1,100 new applications, marking a 34% increase from the previous cycle and underscoring a surge in global civil society engagement.

In a targeted effort to strengthen civil society participation from SIDS, UN DESA convened the SIDS Civil Society Engagement Forum in New York on 12–13 May 2025. Supported by the Governments of Maldives and Latvia, and funded by Ireland, the Forum brought together 26 representatives from the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea (AIS), Caribbean, and Pacific regions. Participants developed practical proposals to advance the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), adopted at SIDS4 in 2024. These included recommendations to raise awareness of ABAS, reform funding mechanisms, build institutional capacity, establish regional coordination structures, and enhance collaboration with governments and the private sector.

The proposals generated at the Forum played a key role in shaping the final recommendations for Member States, ensuring that civil society voices from across

SIDS were meaningfully reflected in the implementation of ABAS commitments.



### Fostering social inclusion and cohesion

UN DESA supported Member States to advance structural reforms and inclusive policies, reinforcing its commitment to building resilient societies and equitable opportunities for all. At the 63rd session of the Commission for Social Development, held from 10 to 14 February 2025, Member States reaffirmed the importance of addressing the root causes of inequality as a foundation for lasting social transformation. The Commission underscored the need to empower individuals and foster inclusive environments where every voice is heard and valued. The session brought together senior government officials and ministers, UN entities, and over 500 civil society organizations, creating a vibrant platform for dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and collective action. It reaffirmed the global commitment to advancing social inclusion and cohesion as key drivers of sustainable development.



Opening session of the 63rd Session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD), February 2025, New York | UN DESA



UN DESA co-hosted a flagship screening of the PBS documentary *Caregiving*, executive produced by Bradley Cooper (right), to spotlight caregiving as a vital social and economic issue. | Corey Sopkin for Craig Warga



### Recognizing caregiving as central to sustainable development

UN DESA helped elevate caregiving as a pressing global social and economic issue. In collaboration with US public television station WETA, healthcare company Otsuka, the National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation, and the Global Coalition on Aging, the Department co-hosted one of three flagship screenings of the new PBS documentary *Caregiving*, executive produced by Oscar-nominated actor Bradley Cooper. The event featured a high-level panel discussion and drew a diverse and influential audience, including ambassadors, philanthropic and private sector leaders, civil society advocates, and major media representatives. It served as a powerful platform to raise awareness and foster dialogue on the critical role of caregiving in shaping inclusive and resilient societies.



### Unlocking private finance and investment for sustainable development

UN DESA promoted private sector engagement at FFD4 to explore concrete actions that can enhance private

capital mobilization and align the investment ecosystem with sustainable development, through the International Business Forum. Held in parallel with the Conference, the Forum gathered Heads of State and Government, ministers, leaders of multilateral development banks and standard-setting bodies, alongside top private sector leaders. Developing countries also utilized the platform provided by the SDG Investment Fair to pitch investment opportunities and projects worth over \$5 billion to investors and development finance actors.

UN DESA also established the FFD4 Business Steering Committee and coordinated its work, bringing together leaders across the private sector. The Committee launched the Business Sector Communiqué at the International Business Forum, laying out priority areas to mobilize additional private investment for sustainable development. Co-chaired by the Global Investors for Sustainable Development (GISD) Alliance and the International Chamber of Commerce, the Committee brought together all major relevant business organizations, as well as UN system-related initiatives for the first time. During the FFD4 preparatory process, the Business Steering Committee shared recommendations for scaling private investment for sustainable development, many of which were incorporated into the Sevilla Commitment.





Panelists at the FFD4 International Business Forum | UN Photo/Manuel Elías



## Advancing inclusive policymaking through stronger global migration data

The Fourth International Forum on Migration Statistics, held from 16 to 18 June 2025 in Malmö, Sweden, marked a major step forward in strengthening global migration data for inclusive and evidence-based

policymaking. Co-organized by UN DESA, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and hosted by the University of Malmö, the Forum convened more than 230 speakers from diverse regions and disciplines, showcasing innovative approaches to enhance migration data and strengthen evidence-based policymaking. UN DESA offered practical



Speakers at the Fourth International Forum on Migration Statistics in June 2025 in Malmö, Sweden | UN DESA

guidance on implementing the revised UN Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration. The Forum also explored how data innovations can support regular migration pathways, strengthen national capacities for data use in decision-making, foster partnerships, and advancing migration forecasting tools.



### **Accelerating effective governance for sustainable development in Africa**

Through a series of new strategy guidance notes, UN DESA helped accelerate the implementation of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development across Africa by equipping countries with practical tools and peer learning platforms that directly support the achievement of the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063. The Department offered concrete guidance addressing key dimensions of effective governance, such as beneficial ownership registries, lobby registers, open government data, equitable fiscal and monetary policies, and public workforce diversity. The Department also developed a practical toolkit to ensure the guidance remains relevant in African contexts.

The Fifth Annual Continental Workshop on Strengthening Institutional Capacities in Africa brought together UN entities and African partners in a vibrant setting that fostered peer learning, the exchange of best practices, and strengthened regional cooperation. Held in October 2024 in South Africa, the workshop once again showcased the power of collaboration across divisions and institutions, including with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). It served as a vital platform for advancing shared goals under both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, reinforcing the collective commitment to sustainable development across the continent.



### **Calling for global multistakeholder action towards inclusive internet governance**

The 19th Internet Governance Forum (IGF), held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 15 to 19 December 2024, marked a milestone in global digital cooperation,

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**“The Global Digital Compact also recognizes the Internet Governance Forum as the primary multistakeholder platform for discussing internet governance issues. As the world implements the Compact, the work and voice of your Forum will be critical. Together, let’s keep building an open, free, and safe Internet for all people.”**

**António Guterres**  
UN Secretary-General

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drawing a record 11,000 participants and 200 high-level delegates, including ministers, tech CEOs, digital experts, international legislators, and youth. It laid the critical foundation for the implementation of

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**Beyond WSIS+20, the IGF should remain the primary global arena for the multistakeholder dialogue and open inclusive and informed discussions on internet governance challenges and opportunities. The IGF should continue to develop policies and practices that ensure that the Internet remains a force for positive change, innovation and global connectivity.**

**Torgeir Micaelsen**  
State Secretary of the Ministry of Digitalization and Public Governance, Government of Norway

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Secretary-General António Guterres addresses the Internet Governance Forum in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in 2024. | IGF Secretariat

the Global Digital Compact, adopted at the Summit of the Future in September 2024, and the 20-year review of the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20), thereby reinforcing the IGF's role as the primary multi-stakeholder platform for inclusive internet governance. The 2024 Forum culminated in a strong call for global cooperation and governance to ensure that the internet remains open, free, and secure for all.

The Forum also commemorated a landmark session at the 20th IGF, held in Lillestrøm, Norway, from 23 to 27 June 2025. IGF celebrated two decades of advancing open, inclusive, and secure digital development by convening more than 9,000 participants—on-site and online—from across the world and various sectors, including policymakers, civil society, academia, youth, and business leaders. The gathering took place at a pivotal time for the SDGs and global

digital governance, as countries deliberated on implementing the Global Digital Compact and took stock of the 20 years since WSIS+20, which will be reviewed at a high-level event in December 2025. The Forum concluded with an emphasis on addressing the rising challenges in the digital landscape, including the erosion of digital trust, misinformation and disinformation, and the emergence of generative AI, while advocating for an internet that is open, secure, inclusive, and centred on human dignity and rights.



### Advancing climate and SDG synergies on the road to COP30

Demonstrating global leadership in aligning climate action and the 2030 Agenda, UN DESA, together with UNFCCC, co-convened the fifth Global Conference on





Participants discuss the role of bioeconomy as a key economic paradigm for tackling climate change, promoting sustainable development, and restoring forests during a thematic discussion on regenerating nature at the fifth Global Climate and SDG Synergies Conference in September 2024 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. | IISD

Climate and SDG Synergies, 5–6 September 2024, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Building on the 2024 Global Report on Climate and SDG Synergies, the conference showcased evidence-based and forward-looking solutions to bridge climate and development goals, setting the stage for COP29 and the Summit of the Future. The fifth conference brought together high-level representatives from more than 30 countries, with strong participation from youth, civil society, and UN leadership. At COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, the Department also organized the SDG Pavilion in collaboration with UNFCCC and DGC, engaging more than 120 partners across more than 100 events to spotlight integrated solutions and transformative partnerships that drive both climate and sustainable development progress.

The momentum continued with the sixth Global Conference on Climate and SDG Synergies, hosted by

Denmark, 27–28 May 2025. The sixth conference further advanced this agenda by promoting concrete pathways toward equitable transitions and nature-based resilience, helping to shape the global conversation in the lead up to COP30 and beyond. Together, these efforts underscored the urgency of integrated, inclusive, and ambitious action to tackle climate change while advancing all 17 SDGs.



### Harmonizing global forest and biodiversity goals into national policies and strategies

Responding to Member States' call for stronger collaboration among the Rio Conventions on forest-related issues, UN DESA and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) launched a joint initiative under the CPF to promote the integrated implementation



Speakers at a Forest Day event during CBD COP16 present a new joint initiative by the UNFF and CBD secretariats under the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, promoting integrated implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. | UN DESA

of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030 and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF). Over the past year, the initiative focused on regional analyses in Latin America and Africa, identifying both opportunities and challenges for advancing the GFGs and the KM-GBF in a coherent, synergistic manner. Two publications—[Towards a Coherent Forest Agenda](#) and [The Forest Factor](#)—were launched during Forest Day at CBD COP16, underscoring the central role of forests in achieving global biodiversity and sustainability targets.



### Catalysing forest-based climate actions through multistakeholder partnerships

At COP29 in November 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan, UN DESA organized the Forest Pavilion within the SDG Pavilion, marking an important milestone in elevating

the role of forests in global climate discussions. This multistakeholder Forest Pavilion—the first of its kind at any climate COP—brought together more than 500 participants to showcase forest-based climate action and partnerships at national, regional, and international levels by governments, organizations, science and research communities, the private sector, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth. The Forest Pavilion partners launched a communiqué, *From Baku to Belém: Forests for Climate, People, and the Planet*, underscoring forests as the bedrock of the global journey towards a net-zero, climate-resilient, and equitable future for all. It highlights key outcomes and renewed commitments to advancing forest-based climate actions to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030 and introduces the “Roadmap to Belém” that sets the stage for accelerated forest-based climate action leading up to COP30 in November 2025 in Belém, Brazil.





Juliette Biao (left), Director of the UN Forum on Forests secretariat, and Thomas Clark (centre), General Counsel for the Asian Development Bank, participate in an interview at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. | UN DESA



## Advancing collaborative foresight through the UN Economist Network

By fostering cross-system collaboration and leveraging the collective intelligence of the United Nations, the UN Economist Network (UNEN) contributed to a growing culture of anticipatory thinking and long-term policy-making. Convened by UN DESA, the Network deepened foresight capabilities across the UN system through a new series of forward-looking policy briefs. Topics included the future of work, digital transformation,

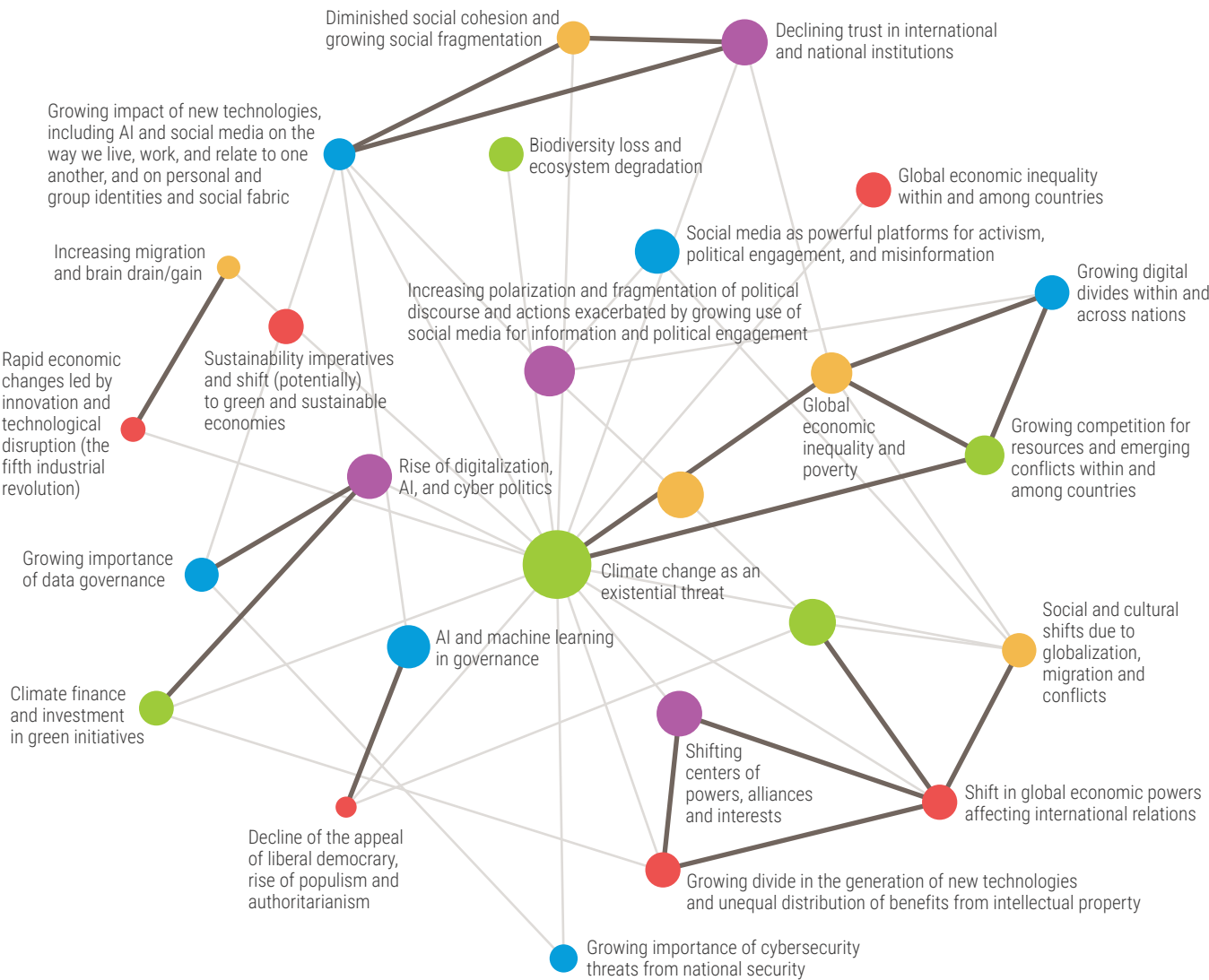
climate, energy, biodiversity, and governance. Co-authored by economists from UN entities and Resident Coordinator Offices, the briefs applied strategic foresight approaches to explore alternative development models and policy pathways for Member States. Each brief concluded with actionable policy options and implications for capacity development.

For example, a UNEN Futures and Foresight Policy Brief on Governance Futures was launched in March 2025 to guide UN efforts in integrating foresight into governance reforms, providing insights for transformational change, and helping policymakers design forward-looking,

adaptive, and inclusive governance strategies. To support this work, UN DESA, in collaboration with the UN Futures Lab/Global Hub, organized a Foresight Webinar Series on Governance Futures. Participants from 21 UN entities engaged in scenario development, explored

interlinked drivers of change, and identified implications for governance reform. The series helped build foresight capacity across the UN system and fostered a shared understanding of how to navigate uncertainty and shape desirable governance futures.

### Drivers of Change Network Diagram



Interlinkages among the drivers of change for designing flexible, adaptive governance systems capable of managing future uncertainties and interconnected issues | UNEN policy brief on "Governance Futures: Key Insights and Policy Implications"