



UN PHOTO/LOEY FELIPE

...to advance sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In 2024–2025, UN DESA continued to advance SDG implementation and safeguard multilateralism through its support to Member States and its engagement with UN system partners and other stakeholders in intergovernmental and multistakeholder platforms.

UN DESA...

- Continued to serve as the central hub for the UN system's intergovernmental support to Member States for its development pillar, including to the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).
- Delivered data, analysis, policy recommendations, and expert guidance to ensure a successful Summit of the Future and HLPF, including supporting intergovernmental consultations on the Ministerial Declaration of the HLPF and the in-depth reviews of the five SDGs in focus in 2025.

- Supported implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through the ECOSOC forums on youth, financing, science, technology, and innovation (STI), and partnerships.
- Enhanced UN system-wide coordination, coherence, and accountability in support of the SDGs through the convening of ECOSOC segments on coordination, operational activities, management, and others.
- Facilitated the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with ECOSOC in intergovernmental deliberations and provided guidance and support to those seeking consultative status.
- Supported Member States undertaking Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of their sustainable development

efforts through preparatory workshops, webinars, and peer-learning exchanges such as VNR Labs.

- Scaled up efforts to advance SDG localization, working closely with local networks and providing on-demand support for Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs).
- Fostered inclusive stakeholder engagement and expanded partnerships with the private sector, local authorities, and higher education institutions, among others, to promote SDG awareness and ownership.
- Applied UN DESA's analytical and technical expertise to support Member States and other actors in enhancing evidence-based policymaking and accelerating SDG implementation.

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ACCELERATING ACTION FOR THE SDGs

Amidst converging global challenges, including poverty, hunger, inequality, climate change, and conflicts—coupled with escalating geopolitical tensions and policy uncertainties—progress towards achieving the SDGs has come under increasing strain. Developing countries and vulnerable groups need special attention and support from the international community to ensure that no one is left behind. Throughout 2024–2025, UN DESA continued to serve as the intergovernmental hub for the development pillar of the UN system, driving multilateral engagement through the Summit of the Future, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the various forums and segments of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and other relevant intergovernmental processes. Building on these efforts, the Department supported Member States in advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Delivering the commitments of the Pact for the Future

The landmark Pact for the Future declaration—adopted by consensus at the Summit of the Future in September 2024—marked a pivotal step toward revitalizing global cooperation and accelerating efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since its adoption, UN DESA has actively supported the implementation of numerous Pact commitments by providing logistical, analytical, and technical expertise. This includes work in key areas such as accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs; facilitating the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, reforming the international financial architecture and ensuring sustainable finance for the SDGs; strengthening international cooperation on science, technology, and innovation (STI); promoting social development, universal social protection and the well-being of youth and future generations; and developing metrics that

go beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to more holistically reflect sustainable development progress.

Ahead of the Summit of the Future, UN DESA played a crucial role in co-organizing the Summit of the Future Action Days on 20 and 21 September 2024 in collaboration with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, bringing together nearly 10,000 participants from across sectors and regions and building a solid support foundation for the Pact for the Future. Unprecedented youth participation, with more than one-third of participants under the age of 30 and over 200 under the age of 18, signals a powerful generational commitment to shaping the future. Leveraging its convening power, UN DESA led the end-to-end coordination of the event—managing registration, orchestrating more than 150 in-person and virtual side events, and serving as the central liaison with organizers. More than 50 events were held at UN Headquarters, with 45 broadcast live via UN WebTV, significantly expanding global reach and engagement.

HLPF IN NUMBERS

2025 HLPF and High-level Segment of ECOSOC

Theme: Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind

9

Days

5

SDGs under review

35

Countries presented VNRs

Who was there?

About 100

Heads of State and Government, Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers, Vice Ministers and Ministerial-level Officials

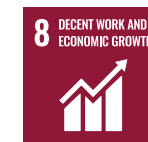
91

High-level speakers

189

Statements delivered in general debate

to talk about



Approximately

6,000

participants attended the Forum and its related events, comprising 800 representatives from MGoS and NGOs, as well as 300 children and youth.

12

Special Events

13

VNR Labs

187

Side Events
66 in person
and 121 virtual

15

Exhibitions



From left: José Antonio Ocampo, Advisor of Club de Madrid; Mary Robinson, Chair of The Elders and former President of Ireland; Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator; John Kerry, former U.S. Secretary of State, and Rania A. Al-Mashat, Minister of Planning and Economic Development of Egypt, engage in a panel discussion at the Sustainable Future for All event of the Summit of the Future Action Days. | UN DESA/PREDRAG VASIC

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



Participants wait outside the General Assembly Hall at UN Headquarters during the first Summit of the Future Action Day. | UN PHOTO/MANUEL ELÍAS

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 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.



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

Facilitating peer-learning to share good practices for SDG implementation

The year 2025 marks the 10th anniversary of Member States' Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of national implementation of SDGs at the HLPF. All 35 countries that presented VNRs this year had done so at least once before, with half submitting their third report, reflecting maturing institutional frameworks, improved



Speakers for the interactive panel focused on the theme “unlocking means of implementation: mobilizing financing and science, technology, and innovation, for the SDGs. | IISD/ENB-KIARA WORTH

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)



190

countries plus EU have presented at least one VNR



402 VNRs will have been presented by July 2025



148 countries have presented two VNRs or more



~2 VNRs global average per country

monitoring systems, and deeper stakeholder engagement. As of July 2025, a total of 402 reviews have been conducted, with close to 150 countries having conducted two or more reviews.

An inter-divisional team of UN DESA colleagues worked collaboratively to strengthen Member States' capacities to conduct inclusive, evidence-based reviews of their SDG progress at the national level. To support the 2025 VNR countries, UN DESA organized workshops in Incheon, Republic of Korea, Berlin, Germany, and New York, USA that featured sessions on institutions, stakeholder engagement, data and statistics, financing and means of implementation, among other topics.

Additionally, 13 VNR Labs were convened during the 2025 HLPF, covering selected aspects of the reviews in more granular detail as an informal platform for experience-sharing and reflection on the VNR process.

Furthermore, in collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), UN DESA

co-convened [SDGs in Practice](#), a series of 12 virtual and in-person capacity-building and knowledge-sharing training sessions as one of the Special Events held at the margins of the 2025 HLPF.



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



Local government and youth representatives participate in a VLR exercise on 16 October 2024 in Eswatini. | MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, ESWATINI

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, 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.



Leveraging science, technology, and innovation to accelerate SDG implementation

As global challenges grow more complex, science, technology, and innovation (STI) have become essential drivers of progress towards the SDGs. In 2024–2025, UN DESA intensified efforts to harness STI for SDG acceleration and inclusive development, contributing not only to the 2025 HLPF, but also to key global processes including the follow-ups to the Summit of the Future, the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) in 2024, the third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3), as well as the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) in 2025.

Through its leadership of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM), UN DESA, working with the Inter-agency Task Team on STI for SDGs (IATT) and other partners, led the organization of the 10th annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology, and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum) on 7 and 8 May 2025. The Forum highlighted the transformative potential of science, technology, and innovation (STI) in advancing the SDGs. It also explored pathways for follow-up to the Pact for the Future, with a focus on bridging digital and technological divides in emerging areas such as artificial intelligence (AI). A key feature of the Forum was the presentation of innovative solutions by 10



Vladimir Crnojević, Professor of Computer Science at the University of Novi Sad, Serbia, and members of the Secretary-General's 10-Member Group, present during the 2025 STI Forum in the ECOSOC Chamber at UN Headquarters in New York in May 2025. | UN EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

entrepreneurs from least developed countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and middle-income countries (MICs)—many of whom were women leaders or co-leaders. These solutions addressed SDGs under review at the 2025 HLPF, including:

- **ECOBANA (Kenya):** Biodegradable sanitary pads promoting menstrual health and environmental sustainability.
- **Elzian (Sri Lanka):** Precision aquaponics systems enhancing food security and resource efficiency.
- **Laboratoria (Latin America):** Inclusive tech training programs empowering women in the digital economy.

UN DESA played a key role in supporting the ECOSOC Special Meeting on Artificial Intelligence (AI), held on 6 May 2025—the day before the STI Forum. During the meeting, Member States expressed a shared sense of urgency to close the digital divide, establish robust governance frameworks, and address the ethical implications of AI development. The discussions underscored AI’s immense potential to drive progress across the SDGs, while also spotlighting the need for strategic investments, inclusive partnerships, and global co-operation—especially to strengthen capacities in the Global South. Crucially, the meeting did not shy away from the risks and challenges posed by AI. Ethical concerns, governance gaps, and uneven access were at

the forefront, underscoring the international community’s responsibility to guide this technological transformation in a manner that is equitable, inclusive, and beneficial to all.

Beyond the STI Forum, UN DESA continued to advance global collaboration on science, technology, and innovation by co-organizing the Addis Ababa Workshop on STI for SDG Roadmaps. The workshop introduced a proposal for a Global STI Partnership aimed at closing research and development gaps and fostering mission-driven cooperation across borders.

Regional priorities took center stage—ranging from digital connectivity and climate resilience to youth-led innovation. These themes were further supported through ongoing updates to the [STI for SDGs Roadmaps Guidebook](#), which provides practical and adaptable tools to help countries implement their national STI strategies more effectively.

Advancing science-driven, evidence-based solutions through the science-policy interface

UN DESA continued to champion a science-driven, evidence-based approach to accelerate SDG progress, notably through its support to the [Global Sustainable Development Report \(GSDR\)](#). Published every four years by the Secretary-General’s Independent Group of

Scientists (IGS), the GSDR serves as a vital tool to inform global decision-making at the SDG Summits.

As part of the global outreach for the latest GSDR from 2023, UN DESA hosted a regional launch and hands-on workshop for Asia and the Pacific in October 2024, in New Delhi, India. The event brought together more than 70 participants, including members of the 2023 IGS, government officials preparing VNRs for the 2025 HLPF, and representatives from civil society, academia, and the private sector.

Through interactive sessions, participants explored the GSDR’s transformation framework and learned how to apply it in national and local SDG strategies. Participants explored how to apply the framework in real-world planning, identified key areas for capacity building, and shared experiences and lessons learned from their contexts. The workshop fostered peer learning and cross-sector collaboration, helping stakeholders identify capacity-building needs, share real-world experiences, and strengthen their planning processes. Insights and recommendations from the event will help shape UN DESA’s support to the next group of scientists tasked with developing the 2027 GSDR ahead of that year’s SDG Summit.

Boosting multistakeholder partnerships and accountability in support of the SDGs

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

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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

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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



Participants at the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2023 Regional Launch and Operationalization Workshop for Asia and the Pacific, gather in New Delhi, India, in October 2024. | DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR INTERNATIONALE ZUSAMMENARBEIT (GIZ) GMBH.

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 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.

Enhancing coordination and coherence across the ECOSOC system to advance the SDGs

As the substantive secretariat of the Economic and Social Council, UN DESA continued to play a key role in supporting the 2025 ECOSOC Coordination Segment. This high-level gathering brought together representatives from ECOSOC subsidiary bodies, UN entities, Member States, civil society, and other stakeholders to

promote integrated, inclusive, and evidence-based approaches to SDG implementation.

The segment featured seven dynamic panel discussions and a record number of Ambassadors serving as lead discussants—many in their roles as chairs of country groups or facilitators of key intergovernmental processes. These discussions broke down silos, fostered institutional collaboration, and generated forward-looking, science-based recommendations to advance the 2030 Agenda and the Pact for the Future.

Civil society voices added depth and diversity to the dialogue, reinforcing the importance of inclusive engagement. The event highlighted the need for enhanced coordination across the UN system to address urgent priorities, including scaling up climate action and sustainable ocean governance, improving data quality and digital literacy, and investing in equitable and resilient health systems.



UN DESA Assistant Secretary-General Bjørge Sandkjær (left), Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed (centre), and Secretary-General António Guterres (right) at the 2025 Operational Activities for Development Segment in May 2025 in New York. | UN DESA



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 also called for reform of the global financial architecture, the promotion of digital innovation, and the integration of strategic foresight to better anticipate future crises. The importance of data-driven policymaking, inclusive partnerships, and whole-of-society engagement was repeatedly emphasized—reaffirming ECOSOC’s central role in driving policy coherence and translating global commitments into tangible action.

Strengthening the UN development system’s support for sustainable development

UN DESA played a central role in shaping the future of the UN development system through its evidence-based support to the negotiations of the General Assembly resolution on the Quadrennial

Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR). This resolution, set to guide the system through 2028, aims to boost the efficiency of operational activities, enhance policy expertise at the country level, and address pressing global challenges such as internal displacement, digital divides, and the integration of humanitarian, development, and peace efforts.

To support Member States in these negotiations, UN DESA organized a series of informal briefings that covered key topics, including the UN development system’s country-level operations, operational efficiencies, regional collaboration, and SDG implementation in complex settings. These sessions, complemented by online resources, provided a comprehensive snapshot of the current landscape, enabling Member States to make informed, forward-looking decisions.

In partnership with UNITAR and the Government of Switzerland, UN DESA also co-organized a QCPR training series, providing timely updates to Member States on ongoing reforms and aligning discussions with core QCPR priorities. To further ground these efforts in real-world insights, the Department conducted global surveys in 2024 targeting programme country governments, UN entities, resident coordinators, donors, and UN country teams. The findings provided valuable insights into how effectively the system supports SDG implementation, coordination, and alignment with national priorities.

UN DESA also led the organization of the 2025 ECOSOC Operational Activities for Development Segment (OAS), held in May 2025. As the first OAS following the adoption of the new QCPR resolution, it marked a key milestone in strengthening the UN development system's effectiveness. Over three days, Member States engaged in high-level dialogues with the Secretary-General and UN leadership, focusing on strategic priorities for delivering the 2030 Agenda.

Key discussions explored how to scale up SDG financing at the country level, support countries grappling with internal displacement, and better connect development and peacebuilding in fragile contexts. The segment also spotlighted the critical role of Resident Coordinators in frontline development work and reviewed recent UN evaluations and accountability measures—including efforts to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment.



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.

Prioritizing youth agency for SDG acceleration

On International Youth Day (IYD), 12 August 2025, UN DESA brought the world's attention to the agency of young people in translating the SDGs into local realities. Together with UN-HABITAT, UN DESA hosted the global commemoration of International Youth Day 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya, under the theme, "Local Youth Actions for the SDGs and Beyond." The event called on the global community to move beyond symbolic support and to take concrete steps to empower young people as partners in development. Local youth actions are not isolated activities; they are integral to broader efforts to achieve national development plans and the SDGs. By highlighting and supporting these initiatives, the international community can help bridge the gap between top-down policy frameworks and bottom-up implementation, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Through its United Nations Project Office on Governance (UNPOG) in the Republic of Korea, UN DESA also strengthened youth engagement by coordinating the eighth annual Youth Forum on SDG Implementation, providing a dynamic platform for young people to shape conversations on the 2030 Agenda. Held under the theme "Empowering Young People as Digital Innovators

to Realize the SDGs" and co-organized with the Ministry of the Interior and Safety and Incheon Metropolitan City, the Forum spotlighted youth as key drivers of innovation and sustainability, amplifying their voices through fresh solutions to accelerate SDG progress. With 412 registrations from youth all over the world, the Forum launched the "Ideas for Change Contest," encouraging young people to share innovative project proposals to help accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.



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.

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.



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.



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 for ECOSOC consultative status—a key gateway for NGOs to participate meaningfully in UN decision-making. In



UN Under-Secretary-General Li Junhua participates in the SIDS Civil Society Engagement Forum at UN Headquarters in New York on 12–13 May 2025. | UN DESA/
PREDRAG VASIC

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.

Turning commitments into action for SIDS

UN DESA has played a critical role in mobilizing coordinated UN support to advance sustainable development priorities for SIDS, as identified at the SIDS4 in May 2024. Serving as joint secretariat alongside UN-OHRLLS, the Department was instrumental in supporting the Secretary-General’s Inter-agency Task Force in developing the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the ABAS. This Framework, owned and led by SIDS, will be a key tool for tracking progress,

promoting accountability, and accelerating action toward the SDGs.

At the same time, UN DESA actively supported the co-chairs of the UN Steering Committee on Partnerships for SIDS in crafting recommendations to strengthen the SIDS Partnerships Framework. Drawing on extensive consultations with Member States, UN entities, and a wide range of stakeholders, these efforts focused on enhancing the effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of partnerships. The goal was to ensure that partnership initiatives are better aligned with ABAS priorities and deliver tangible, measurable development outcomes for SIDS.