

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS



UN DESA

...to improve people's lives

By fostering innovation and promoting accountability and digital government, UN DESA supported Member States in ensuring that governance systems are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all, including those in vulnerable situations. These efforts better equip public institutions to meet current and future challenges, accelerating progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UN DESA...

- Accelerated public sector transformation and developed new capacities of public servants by applying the UN 2.0 Quintet of Change through strategic foresight, changing mindsets and innovation, data governance, and digital government.
- Promoted digital government transformation, including in the areas of data governance, digital cooperation, and inclusion worldwide, and technology-driven capacity-building of public servants.
- Strengthened Member States' capacity to implement the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development.
- Brought together stakeholders to advance peace, justice, and institutions for sustainable development, and championed women's leadership in public governance.
- Launched new Standards of Excellence in Public Administration education and training to mainstream the SDGs and reflect new developments in public administration.

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Reimagining governance is essential to accelerating sustainable development. UN DESA supported Member States in strengthening governance systems and advancing effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions to promote the SDGs. It helped countries build capacities in systems thinking, strategic foresight, innovation, digital government transformation, digital data governance, and new public sector mindsets—enabling governments to navigate complex and emerging challenges better. The Department also strengthened global accountability for the SDGs through deeper collaboration with Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs).

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.

Leveraging the UN 2.0 Quintet of Change for effective governance

SDG 16 serves as the driving force behind the effective implementation of all other SDGs by promoting more effective, accountable, and inclusive public institutions. Throughout the year, UN DESA has played a pivotal role in helping Member States build strong public institutions through strategic foresight, mindset change, innovation, digital government, digital transformation, and data governance. These efforts have helped improve public



Participants at the "Changing Mindsets for Innovation, Digital Transformation, and Improved Public Service Delivery for SDGs Implementation" workshop in the Dominican Republic. | UN DESA

service delivery and promote the well-being of people, especially those at risk of being left behind.

For example, UN DESA's 2024 webinar series on "Effective Governance and the Quintet of Change for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals" brought together policymakers, public servants, and stakeholders from around the world to explore governance strategies for achieving the SDGs. The series provided hands-on tools, global case studies, and expert insights, empowering participants to apply innovative and citizen-centred approaches to governance, with a special emphasis on youth, women, and vulnerable populations as central actors in building equitable and effective institutions. Through dialogue and knowledge sharing, the series helped strengthen the capacity of participants to lead change within their institutions and communities.

Advancing mindset shifts and digital innovation for public service delivery

UN DESA has advanced global efforts to foster innovation, digital transformation, and changed mindsets, as well as improved public service delivery, in support of SDG implementation through a wide range of capacity development initiatives. In Africa, the Department organized a workshop on "The Future of Governance and New Mindsets, Knowledge, and Competencies Fit for the 21st Century" within the framework of the eighth edition

of the African Forum of Territorial Managers and Training Institutes. In the Dominican Republic, one workshop emphasized the need for mindset shifts in local governance to promote innovation, agility, and citizen-centred services, engaging over 300 participants in peer learning. Elsewhere in the Caribbean, interactive dialogues in the Bahamas and a workshop in Saint Lucia facilitated frank discussions among officials and stakeholders on transforming mindsets for long-term institutional change, aligning with national digital strategies. These meetings leveraged the [Curriculum on Governance for the SDGs](#) developed by UN DESA.

Celebrating excellence in public service and promoting innovation as a key driver for transformation

The 2025 United Nations Public Service Forum convened global leaders to strengthen public institutions and civil servants' capacities—human, institutional, and technological—to meet the evolving demands of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Ministers, senior officials, and public servants explored innovative and inclusive approaches to improve public service delivery, address emerging challenges, and foster transformation at all levels of governance. Held by UN DESA in collaboration with the Government of Uzbekistan in Samarkand from 23 to 25 June 2025, the Forum introduced strategic foresight and systems thinking as tools to overcome institutional fragmentation,



Assistant Secretary-General Navid Hanif speaks at the UN Public Service Forum 2025, held from 23 to 25 June in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. | UN DESA



The eighth Regional Symposium on Effective Governance and AI Transformation was held in Incheon, Republic of Korea from 30 October to 1 November 2024. | UN DESA

misaligned planning, and gaps in service delivery. It also emphasized behavioural and cultural shifts in governance, advocating for adaptability, cross-sector collaboration, and a proactive mindset. These efforts directly support the Pact for the Future and accelerate progress on the SDGs by building governance systems that can anticipate and respond to complex, interlinked challenges.

SDG implementation. It also emphasized the connection between governance, AI, digital inclusion, and sustainable development, aiming to foster systemic change and inspire innovation. A key outcome of the event was Mongolia's advancement in its data governance framework, an essential step toward developing a National Strategy for Big Data and AI. Co-organized by UN DESA, the Ministry of the Interior and Safety of the Republic of Korea, and Incheon Metropolitan City, the Symposium brought together more than 1,500 participants from 120 countries, fostering exchange of ideas and actions to drive more inclusive and effective governance across the Asia-Pacific region.

Bringing stakeholders together for effective governance and AI-driven innovation in Asia-Pacific

The eighth Regional Symposium on Effective Governance and AI Transformation for the 2030 Agenda in fall 2024 explored how AI technologies can transform public service delivery and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. The Symposium highlighted the growing role of AI in improving governance, efficiency, resilience, and service delivery in the public sector. It explored how AI and innovation could address both current and emerging challenges in public administration while advancing

Driving action on digital government transformation and digital data governance

Building on the insights of the [2024 UN E-Government Survey](#), which highlighted the vital link between digital transformation and sustainable development, UN DESA

launched the E-Government Toolkit Resource Center in September 2024 to provide essential guidance and best practices for both national- and local-level policymakers, supporting digital government transformation and digital data governance. The [National E-Government Toolkit](#) provides best practices for enhancing online public services at the national level. At the same time, the [Local E-Government Toolkit](#) helps municipalities strengthen citizen engagement, transparency, and service delivery.

The Department also supported the development of data governance in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region by organizing global and regional conferences, as well as national workshops, in December 2024 in Mongolia and in February 2025 in The Gambia.

Calling for global multistakeholder action towards inclusive internet governance



Participants brainstorm data security-related policies during a national data governance workshop in February 2025 in Mongolia. | UN DESA

The 19th Internet Governance Forum (IGF), held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 15 to 19 December 2024, marked a milestone in global digital cooperation, 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 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 peace, justice, and strong institutions for sustainable development

The sixth SDG 16 Conference, held in May 2025, showcased how investing in SDG 16 yields measurable

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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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benefits for governments and communities, helping them advance their development goals. The conference brought together stakeholders to mobilize action and partnerships, with SDG 16 serving as a catalyst to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and implement the Pact for the Future. It also featured the presentation of the



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

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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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2025 Civil Society Declaration on SDG 16+. The Conference’s key recommendations for promoting peace, justice, and effective institutions were shared as inputs to the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) and the 2025 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The event was organized by UN DESA, the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), and the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations.

Strengthening accountability for SDG implementation

Throughout the year, UN DESA strengthened global accountability for the SDGs by deepening collaboration with Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) and building their capacity to audit SDG implementation. For example, the Department, in partnership with the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI), organized the SDG Auditor Initiative meeting to enhance auditors’ competencies to audit the SDGs through professional education and



Speakers and participants at the SDG 16 Conference in May 2025 in New York. | UN DESA

audit support. The Department also collaborated with SAIs in the development of the 2025 edition of the World Public Sector Report, which will be disseminated at the XXV International Congress of SAIs (INCOSAI) in October 2025, highlighting the critical contributions of SAIs to SDG implementation, follow-up, and review. Furthermore, the Department also launched new on-line training courses on ethics and public integrity, and on the role of oversight institutions in strengthening accountability and combating corruption.

Driving effective governance from national to local levels

UN DESA, through its United Nations Project Office on Governance (UNPOG), supported countries in translating national development visions into local action. In Rwanda and Nepal, targeted workshops led to the creation of concrete action plans and roadmaps aligned with the 2030 Agenda and national priorities. In Southeast Asia, UN DESA promoted public sector innovation by helping Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam develop integrated governance strategies. Through hands-on training and collaboration with local institutions, these efforts equipped public officials with the tools and knowledge to implement more responsive, inclusive, and sustainable governance practices. These initiatives reflect the



Participants of the SDG Auditor Initiative. | SAI BRAZIL, INTOSAI DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Department's commitment to scaling practical solutions that address complex governance challenges and strengthen institutional capacity at all levels—ensuring that effective governance becomes a driving force for achieving both global and national development goals.



UN DESA supported Bhutan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mauritius, and Senegal in advancing public administration, with a focus on increasing women's leadership at national and local levels.

If anyone would like to become a professional planner, this workshop has certainly been one of the best. ... The knowledge gained here will be helpful in the coming years for the planning process, particularly in incorporating the implementation of the SDGs.

Participant of the Capacity Development Workshop on Effective National-to-Local Governance for Sustainable Development Goals Implementation
Rwanda, December 2024

Through a capacity-building project, the Department helped identify structural barriers and develop national action plans to promote women's participation in decision-making roles. South-South peer learning and collaboration across Africa and Asia-Pacific enriched the initiative, enabling countries to share experiences and strategies through peer reviews and joint activities. To sustain momentum, an online platform was launched, offering continued access to resources, reports, and discussions—ensuring long-term impact and engagement.

By synthesizing lessons from the project, UN DESA further helped identify and address barriers to gender parity in public decision-making across four countries, focusing on key areas—legal and policy frameworks, civil service rules, gender-responsive recruitment, leadership and ICT training for women, and improving accountability through better gender-disaggregated data systems. The study emphasized that political will, cultural transformation, and sustainable financing are essential to achieving gender parity in public decision-making, which are integral parts of good governance and directly aligned with SDGs 5 and 16.

On behalf of the NCWC, I would like to express our sincere gratitude for your continued support and collaboration throughout this important initiative aimed at advancing women's leadership within public institutions. The successful adoption of Bhutan's national action plan is a direct outcome of the valuable partnership between UN DESA, UNDP, and all the stakeholders involved, reflecting our collective commitment to promoting gender equality in public administration.

—Wangchuk Zangmo
Senior Programme Officer, National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), Bhutan



Participants in the Capacity Development Workshop on Effective National-to-Local Governance for Sustainable Development Goals Implementation work together in Rwanda. | UN DESA