



UN DESA HIGHLIGHTS 2025

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 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



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

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 cooperation—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.



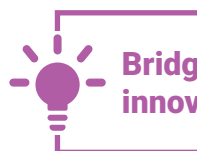
President of ECOSOC at its 2025 session, H.E. Mr. Bob Rae (Canada), addresses the special meeting on the theme “Haiti’s Children Cannot Wait: Supporting Stability, Resilience and Prosperity in Haiti,” December 2025, New York. | UN PHOTO/ESKINDER DEBEBE



Fostering an inclusive economy for sustainable development

UN DESA continues to champion inclusive economic models that empower marginalized communities and promote sustainable development. In partnership with the Government of Indonesia and other stakeholders, the Department advanced the implementation of a UN General Assembly resolution to promote the creative economy for sustainable development. Through capacity-building workshops in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Bali, and in collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office and Country Team, participants explored how creative industries such as performing arts, culinary arts, software development and publishing—comprising more than 50 million people worldwide, especially youth, women, and marginalized groups—can drive inclusive growth. These efforts emphasized the creative economy’s role in reducing inequality and empowering those in vulnerable situations, particularly in LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS.

UN DESA also leveraged the International Day of Cooperatives 2025 to position cooperatives as critical actors in advancing sustainable and inclusive development. The Department, through its role as co-chair of the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives, worked together with partners—the United Nations Federal Credit Union and the New York City Department of Small Business Services—to commemorate the Day. Held at UN Headquarters in New York, the event showcased how cooperatives foster social and economic inclusion, create decent work, and promote sustainable business practices.



Bridging research and policy to unlock innovative financing solutions

UN DESA ensured unprecedented international organization and academic engagement in the financing for development process. Our efforts included setting up a dedicated Academic Track, creating a powerful bridge between evidence and policy. The centrepiece of this

effort was the “Financing for Development Dialogues: From Evidence to Action,” held alongside the second session of the FFD4 preparatory committee in December 2024. Modelled on academic conferences but designed to foster direct engagement between scholars and policymakers, the event featured 19 expert-led panels. More than 400 registered participants generated fresh insights and practical recommendations on key issues, including debt sustainability, international tax cooperation, climate finance, and gender-responsive fiscal policy. Special efforts were made to ensure the participation of scholars from the Global South, enriching the discussions with diverse perspectives and highlighting region-specific challenges. In addition, through the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development, UN DESA facilitated the presentations of data and analysis from the international system through an extensive series of policy briefs prepared for Member State delegates negotiating the FFD4 outcome.



The UN Datathon 2024 demonstrated the power of bringing together young data scientists to address urban challenges through data innovation. Co-organized by UN DESA, the City of Medellín, and Colombia's national statistical office (DANE), it brought together over 300 data scientists across 108 teams. Forty teams successfully delivered creative proposals that tackled local challenges across three key dimensions of sustainable tourism—socioeconomic impact, environmental sustainability, and linkages to the SDGs. The grand prize went to the Data Science Lab of Mexico's National Statistical Office (INEGI), which showcased its integrated use of travel time analytics, crime pattern analysis, and environmental monitoring through



Teams of data scientists working at the UN Datathon: Innovating for Sustainable Tourism in November 2024, in Medellín, Colombia | UN DESA



Panelists discuss the policy use of AI and data science and the impact of digital transformation on economic decision-making at the International Symposium on AI and Data Science for Economic Statistics, in January 2025 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates | UN BIG DATA

innovative use of geospatial information—offering a robust decision-support tool for urban planners. Participants were mentored by experts from the private sector, research institutions, and DANE, fostering a collaborative environment.

Enhancing national capabilities in the use of innovative AI and data science applications

UN DESA advanced the capabilities of national statistical offices (NSOs) in harnessing AI and data science for economic statistics. Through two targeted webinars, organized in collaboration with the United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians and the Data Science Leaders Network (DSLNL)—a body established by the UN Statistical Commission in 2022—participants explored how AI and data science can revolutionize statistical operations. These sessions

highlighted practical applications such as automating business processes, enhancing efficiencies, and developing rapid indicators to respond to emerging issues.

Building on this momentum, an international symposium was convened by the Network and DSLNL in Dubai from 20 to 22 January 2025, to examine the policy applications of AI and data science, with a particular focus on the impact of digital transformation on economic decision-making. With around 70 participants from 28 countries and 10 international organizations, the symposium featured interactive formats, including gallery walks, mapping exercises, storyboard development, lightning talks, and peer-learning talks, which fostered rich dialogue and collaboration. Insights from the symposium, hosted by the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Center of the United Arab Emirates, served as inputs to the DSLNL playbook, equipping NSOs with cutting-edge tools and methodologies for modern statistical production.



Opening keynote session at the 7th High-level Forum on UN Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), October 2024, México City, Mexico | UN DESA

Harnessing geospatial innovation for national resilience and sustainable development

The 7th High-level Forum on UN Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), organized in October 2024 by UN DESA and the Government of Mexico, represented by its National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), marked a major step forward in harnessing geospatial innovation to drive national progress on social, economic and environmental fronts. Over 200 high-level policymakers and senior government officials gathered with scientists, engineers, innovators, entrepreneurs, as well as representatives of science and technology communities, the UN system and international organizations to strengthen partnerships for sharing and disseminating knowledge, good practices, approaches and strategies towards advancing the 2030 Agenda. The

Forum addressed the use of geospatial information to understand, communicate and manage climate-related challenges and accelerate the achievement of the SDGs through the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (UN-IGIF). The Forum also explored strategies on developing geospatial capacity, leveraging innovative tools and technologies, and fostering partnerships towards delivering positive national social, economic and environmental outcomes.

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



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

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.



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



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

2025, the Forum introduced strategic foresight and systems thinking as tools to overcome institutional fragmentation, 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.

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 SDG implementation. It also emphasized the connection

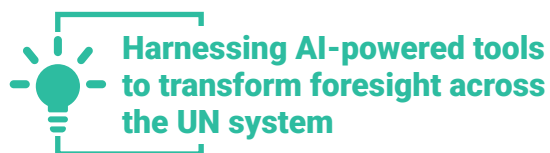
Driving action on digital government transformation and digital data governance

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



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

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.



UN DESA showcased a groundbreaking AI prototype to transform how the UN system harnesses foresight at the 2025 STI Forum, developed in collaboration with the UN Futures Lab. Drawing on horizon scanning reports from 2022–2024 by UN DESA, FAO, UNDP, UNEP, and WHO, the tool consolidates signals, trends, and drivers of change to support more informed decision-making, planning, and programming. Building on the efforts of the UN system, the UN Futures Lab/Global Hub and UN DESA have explored digital capabilities and analytics to enhance foresight processes by consolidating and analysing insights from horizon scanning initiatives across the UN system. At the heart of this effort is an AI knowledge repository designed to analyse and visualize foresight outcomes, strengthen institutional learning and coherence, and support users with tools to navigate complexity and harness collaboration in shaping anticipatory, SDG-aligned initiatives.



UN DESA supported Member States to apply open-source “overlapping generations” (OG) macroeconomic models to simulate long-term policy outcomes in the context of a fiscally constrained environment. These tools enable scenario modelling of taxation, debt, and demographic change aligned with national SDG priorities. In the Philippines, over 30 analysts from government and academia were trained by UN DESA in Manila in August 2024, laying the groundwork for robust fiscal sustainability simulations. South Africa held a second intensive workshop in Cape Town in March 2025, focusing on inequality, social protection, and green transition. In Indonesia, a March 2025 workshop in Bandung helped officials assess investment strategies and development pathways using national data-driven scenarios. Through hands-on training, joint research, and community-building, these efforts have deepened local ownership, enhanced policy coherence, and fostered lasting national expertise in macroeconomic modelling.



Participants at the overlapping generations macroeconomic model workshop in Indonesia work together to prepare their policy scenario | UN DESA

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the insightful and well-structured OG-Core training workshop. The sessions were highly engaging, and the materials provided have been incredibly useful in deepening my understanding of the model. [UN DESA's] expertise and clear explanations made complex concepts much more accessible.

Murendeni Nengovhela
Senior Economist for Economic Policy,
South Africa National Treasury

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Scaling innovation and systems learning for transformation

UN DESA reinforced its commitment to becoming a more agile, innovative partner in delivering effective, future-oriented capacity development support. Through its Digital Learning Centre (DLC), the Department strengthened its institutional capabilities to support SDG implementation, in line with the Secretary-General's vision of a UN 2.0. The DLC delivered over 53 courses to more than 9,400 participants across 185 Member States, issuing more than 3,800 certificates on topics ranging from governance and macroeconomic policy to disaster risk reduction and digital transformation. Together, these initiatives equip Member States to better anticipate and respond to emerging trends, design adaptive policies, and integrate futures thinking into national planning processes.



SDG Chat presented by UN DESA staff at the UN AI Day on 22 April 2025 | UN DESA



To enhance user experience and engagement with UN DESA's analytical products, the Department developed "SDG Chat"—an AI-powered chatbot that offers seamless, on-demand access to SDG-related content.

Leveraging generative AI technology, the tool connects users with authoritative data and content drawn from UN DESA's reports and publications. Launched in March 2025, the SDG Chat consolidates previously dispersed knowledge—spanning websites, databases, and social media—into a single, intuitive entry point. This innovation broadens global outreach, fosters deeper stakeholder engagement, and reinforces the Department's role in advancing the SDGs through cutting-edge digital solutions.