

# UN DESA: RESPONDING TO THE CALL FOR A RESCUE PLAN FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET



It is somewhat fitting that this fifth anniversary edition of the UN DESA Highlights coincides with the mid-point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In five short years, we witnessed a world filled with ambition and hopes for a better future transform into a battleground for its very survival. The unrelenting aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, an intensifying climate emergency and escalating conflict seemingly converged to undermine the global community's resolve to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At this half-way point, only fifteen per cent of the SDG targets with trend data are on track to be achieved by 2030. The message is clear: leaders from all sectors of society must step up in the second half of this journey, with urgency and ambition, to turn things around for a better future.

A commitment to supporting Member States meet this great challenge with action, agility and accountability was the driving force behind UN DESA's work in the past year. Getting the 2030 Agenda on track remains at the core of our commitment,

as we championed the SDGs as the pathway to a safe and secure future.

This edition of the UN DESA Annual Highlights report aligns with previous editions in demonstrating how UN DESA strives to deliver concrete achievements in its three key pillars of work – intergovernmental support, analysis and capacity-building.

UN DESA Highlights 2022-2023 showcases the achievements of the Department over the course of the 77th session of the General Assembly (September 2022-August 2023). Consisting of seven thematic chapters, the Highlights 2022-2023 presents the Department's latest efforts to advance key priorities of Member States and the Secretary-General. These include support to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and preparation for the SDG Summit, as well as the continued push to reform the international financial architecture, move beyond GDP, harness digitalization and deliver global public goods. The report also shows how UN DESA is expanding and leveraging partnerships and collaboration within the UN system and beyond to ensure meaningful and lasting impact where it matters most, particularly for the Least Developed Countries. Taken together, the report demonstrates UN DESA's alignment with the Secretary-General's call for a rescue plan for people and planet to accelerate efforts towards achieving the SDGs with just seven years left in our journey.

Chapter 1, "Accelerating action on the SDGs at the national and international level", highlights UN DESA's support to Member States and other stakeholders across various intergovernmental and multistakeholder platforms. During 2022-2023, the Department's efforts centred on successful delivery of the High-level Political Forum in July 2023, as well as support to

the preparatory processes leading up to the SDG Summit in September. The year also saw major progress in mobilizing SDG localization, strengthening the capacities of local governments to produce Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) of SDG progress. Since their launch in 2018, there have been more than 200 VLRs conducted worldwide.

Chapter 2, "Reducing poverty and inequality", shows how the imperative to leave no one behind is reflected in the Department's activities. In 2022-2023, UN DESA promoted fully inclusive discourse in key UN processes, amplifying the voices of older persons, youth and persons with disabilities. The Department provided capacity-building support for vulnerable groups, including small-scale farmers and women entrepreneurs, as key agents of SDG transformation. We also tackled the digital divide by calling on Governments to adopt the principle of "inclusion by design" in their policies and regulations.

Chapter 3, "Ensuring sustainable financing", features the Department's continued effort and progress made to overcome the 'great finance divide'. This means ensuring SDG financing and investment reaches those most in need, including Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, Small Island Developing States and other countries in heavy debt distress. Throughout the year, UN DESA has supported major financing for development processes, as well as the Secretary-General's key priority agendas, including the SDG Stimulus and reforms to the international financial architecture.

Chapter 4, "Making data count", gives attention to UN DESA's support to Member States in collecting official data crucial to monitor and assess SDG progress. Despite the many challenges in meeting the Goals by 2030, underlying work to expand the coverage and availability of data for SDG monitoring has steadily improved throughout the year, serving as a critical foundation to inform policymakers and identify areas for policy intervention. The Department also supported the Secretary-General to build momentum for broader measures of well-being, beyond traditional economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product.

Chapter 5, "Strengthening national institutions and accountability", places emphasis on UN DESA's work towards SDG 16, as a key enabler for the 2030 Agenda. It features actions the Department has taken at international, regional, national and local levels, to provide knowledge-sharing and capacity-building support and tools to Governments and institutions to effectively deliver on the SDGs.

Chapter 6, "Ending the war on nature", highlights the Department's work to tackle the climate and environmental crises, by ensuring a synergistic implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. This includes a successful United Nations 2023 Water Conference, as well as follow-up to key events on oceans, energy and forests. Together, these serve as a platform for accelerated actions by Member States and other stakeholders in the form of commitments, pledges and partnerships.

Lastly, Chapter 7, "Framing the future of development", presents UN DESA's key initiatives to enhance its strategic foresight and address socioeconomic challenges critical not only to meeting the SDGs, but also future-proofing sustainable development beyond 2030. It provides examples of the Department's analytical and capacity building work, offering policy options for countries to enhance their resilience to future shocks and crises, especially for the most vulnerable.

As we look to the key milestone moments of the 78th session of the General Assembly, UN DESA will continue to facilitate, and add value to, Member States deliberations on critical sustainable development issues. The upcoming COP 28 in 2023, at the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, the annual High-level Political Forum and the Summit of the Future are among those critical moments of action and accountability that will demonstrate whether or not we've answered the call and are headed in the right direction, at pace. We in UN DESA stand ready to deliver results and help Member States to get ahead of the world's development challenges.

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and Social Affairs and Head of UN DESA