

INTRODUCTION

UN DESA has continued to push forward action to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for all people everywhere. The work of the Department is guided by the 10 critical action areas to which Member States committed in the political declaration at the SDG Summit in September 2019, and focuses on the entry points most effective for accelerating integrated and cross-sectoral progress. Even as the COVID-19 pandemic shook the world at its core, further stalling progress in some areas of development, and reversing gains in others, UN DESA has remained steadfast, providing the hard-hitting analysis, data, projections, policy guidance and capacity-building Member States need to respond today with tomorrow in mind, and fulfil the promise of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

10 priority action areas of Member States:

- Leaving no one behind
- Mobilizing adequate and well-directed financing
- Enhancing national implementation
- Strengthening institutions for more integrated solutions
- Bolstering local action to accelerate implementation
- Reducing disaster risk and building resilience
- Solving challenges through international cooperation and enhancing the global partnership
- Harnessing science, technology and innovation with a greater focus on digital transformation for sustainable development
- Investing in data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals
- Strengthening the High-level Political Forum

Photo credit: Mr. HE Long, Shenzhen Special Zone Daily

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UN DESA: Responding today for a better tomorrow

As I introduce this second edition of the UN DESA Highlights, the world faces compounded crises. Just as local, national, regional and global leaders were gearing up for accelerated action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, our attention was turned to battling a deadly coronavirus as it rapidly spread across the globe, attacking our communities at the very social and economic fissures that the SDGs are designed to fill.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been further offsetting efforts to implement the SDGs and it threatens to undo the achievements already made in many areas. Through the pace of its spread, the nature of its symptoms and the responses that have had to be put in place to curb them, COVID-19 has been devastating health systems globally and threatening already achieved health outcomes. It is pushing tens of millions of people back into extreme poverty and hunger and has kept hundreds of millions of students out of schools for prolonged periods. The pandemic has been severely affecting the livelihoods of the global workforce, with economic slowdown fuelling unemployment and underemployment, and it has caused disruptions



in global value chains and the supply of products.

The pandemic is affecting the world's poorest and the most vulnerable people the most, which too often includes older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees, and informal sector workers. Women and children are also bearing the heaviest brunt. So too are the most vulnerable countries, including least-developed and land-locked developing countries, small island developing States and countries in fragile situations.

In responding to this emergency, the Department immediately pivoted our intellectual resources toward understanding and projecting the real and potential socioeconomic fallout of the pandemic and identifying policy recommendations and concrete actions for Member States to consider. In support of the work of the Secretary-General and the broader UN family we released these insights as a series of focused policy briefs, designed to guide policy makers through the tough decisions that they have faced, and continue to tackle, as we manoeuvre amid the impact of the crisis. The twenty-three briefs, released from 1 April 2020 through June of this year, addressed a number of hard-hitting issues, including designing inclusive stimulus packages, preventing a global debt crisis, supporting countries in special situations, protecting the most vulnerable groups of people, and strengthening the role of science and technology. The briefs emphasized the need for an effective and coordinated response to COVID-19 that places the most vulnerable populations at its core.

Under tremendous pressure and with limited resources, our experts worked hard to ensure that their analysis was fit for purpose and accessible to the policy makers who needed it most. They swiftly adjusted working methods, and partnered with academicians, governments and other stakeholders to host webinars and virtual trainings for applying their recommendations on the ground.

Against this rapidly shifting landscape, UN

DESA's engagement with Member States remained firmly anchored in supporting their intergovernmental processes and deliberations. Despite the challenges posed by connectivity and the unprecedented need for virtual negotiations, there were some notable successes, including adoption, by the ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum, of the first universally agreed set of United Nations policies to finance COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. A mapping of financing mechanisms was also made available, to aid Member States' efforts to access such resources.

We provided effective and critical substantive support to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies. As the first major meeting of the universal membership to discuss the major threats COVID-19 represents for SDG implementation since the current emergency response measures came into effect, the Forum delivered a strong message that we need a multilateral response to the COVID-19 crisis and that the 2030 Agenda must be our guidepost as we recover better.

While COVID-19 has brought new context and urgency to our work, the underlying impetus of our thought leadership, capacity development and other support to Member States has remained constant.

As the highlights in this volume will attest, we continued to demonstrate UN DESA's commitment and contribution to supporting and strengthening multilateralism, and to

advancing inclusive, people-centred, sustainable development, guided by a commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

We entered 2020 with a concrete plan of action, spring boarding from the milestone decisions of Member States at the SDG Summit, High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, and High-level Mid-term Review of Implementation of the SAMOA Pathway, among others.

We strengthened our work to further enhance the synergies between climate action and realizing the SDGs. 2019-2020 saw increased research and analysis on sustainable transport, oceans, energy, water and sanitation, and the launch of related information networks, and data initiatives.

Our increased focus, in UN DESA publications, on identifying and forecasting the trajectory of persistent and emerging social, economic, demographic, political and environmental megatrends, and on tracking and forecasting their impact on sustainable development, proved a valuable asset as the United Nations sought to shape the multilateral response to the social and economic impacts of intersecting crises. And as the world explores options for recovering better - with resilience and forward-looking policies - the Department is supporting mobilization of financing for sustainable development, including through increased attention to the impact of private investment, supporting delivery of the objectives of the GISD Alliance, and forests financing.

Effective partnerships for amplifying impact have become an increased feature of work in UN DESA. The United Nations Economists Network has been a testament to that, facilitating collaboration and joint work among agencies on issues of shared interest. The Network has been a platform for integrated support on economic, financial and social policy issues to the UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinator Offices. Its first collaborative volume will be released later this year.

Throughout the 74th session of the General Assembly, the Department has seen the growth of its impact and relevance in related fora and processes in the international development sphere, including the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC, the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, G20, World Economic Forum and World Bank-IMF meetings.

As we enter the period of the 75th Session of the General Assembly, the vision of UN DESA is clear.

We are forging ahead with the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs with a solid plan for integrating our varied expertise to support and guide Member States along five key areas of action: 1) promoting equality and inclusive growth, 2) supporting evidence-based decision making through high-quality data and statistics, 3) strengthening the science-policy interface, 4) working at the synergies of climate action and SDG achievement, and 5) supporting countries to incorporate demographic trends into development policy and planning. Setting the

foundation for this work is an underlying focus on sustainable finance, effective governance and ensuring the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women across all areas, at all levels.

Working with stakeholders across the international community, we will continue to push forward evidence-based policies and build the capacities of Member States for moving the world towards sustainable development for all.

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Liu Zhenmin

Under-Secretary-General for

Economic and Social Affairs

September 2020

What does UN DESA do?



Intergovernmental support

By facilitating major global conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields, as mandated by UN Member States, UN DESA assists countries as they find common ground, set norms, and take decisive steps to move the world forward.



Analysis

As the think tank of the United Nations, UN DESA, generates, analyses and compiles a wide range of economic, social and environmental data and statistics to inform and advise Member States and other stakeholders as they take stock of trends and policy options to tackle common problems.



Capacity-building

UN DESA aids in translating policy frameworks developed in UN conferences and summits into programmes at the country level and, through technical assistance, supports Member States in building national capacities.



Major databases

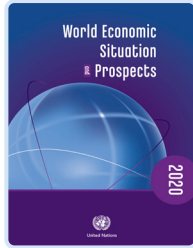
- Ocean Voluntary Commitment Database
- Population Databases
- SDG Acceleration Action Database
- SDG Good Practices Database
- SIDS Partnerships Database
- UN Comtrade International Trade Statistics Database
- UN COVID-19 Data Hub
- UN Data
- UN e-Government Knowledge Database
- UN Global SDG Indicators Database
- UN LDC Data
- UN Public Service Awards Database
- UN SDG Data Hub
- UN System SDG Implementation Database
- Voluntary National Reviews Database



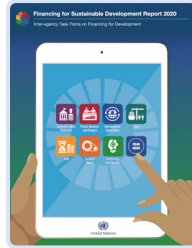
Major publications



World Social Report



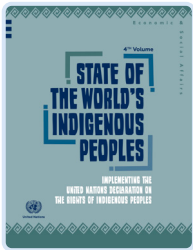
World Economic Situation and Prospects



Financing for Sustainable Development Report



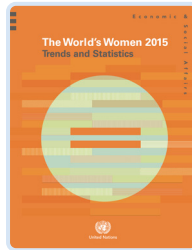
International Migration Report



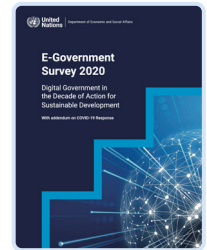
State of the World's Indigenous Peoples



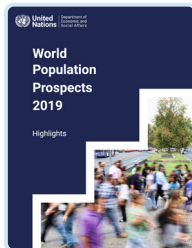
The Sustainable Development Goals Report



The World's Women



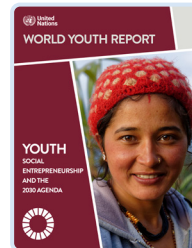
United Nations E-Government Survey



World Population Prospects



World Public Sector Report



World Youth Report

UN DESA in Numbers



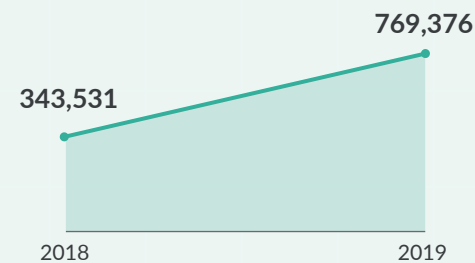
UN DESA staff represent more than **80** countries worldwide, from all regions.

From January to December 2019, UN DESA submitted in total **369** parliamentary documents, including:

- 54 Reports of the Secretary-General
- 33 Notes by the Secretary-General
- 59 Notes by the Secretariat
- 10 Agendas
- 4 Committee Experts Reports
- 2 Summaries by ECOSOC President
- 2 Reports of an intergovernmental group meeting
- 33 New Applications for Consultative Status with ECOSOC
- 5 Quadrennial Reports
- 90 Summaries of technical papers
- 77 NGO Statements

In 2019, UN DESA ran more than **200** capacity-building projects in more than **90** countries across the globe.

Total downloads of Top 5 UN DESA Publications



In 2019, UN DESA's top 5 most popular publications were downloaded a combined **769,376** times, more than doubling total downloads for the top 5 publications in 2018.

5 most downloaded UN DESA publications in 2019



In 2019 UN DESA's overall website visits increased by 16% over 2018. **Traffic to the main UN DESA website increased by 30%**, a testament of the efforts to coordinate outreach at the Departmental level.

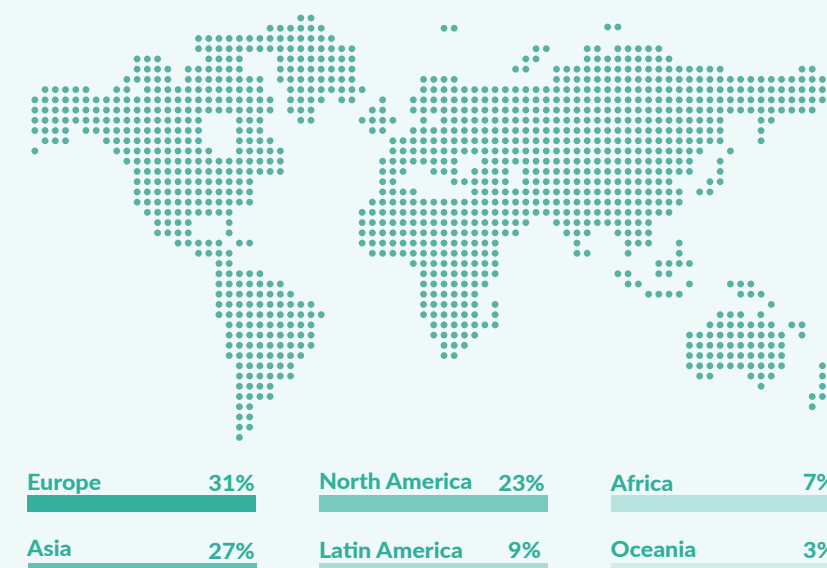
TWITTER

Combined followers across accounts managed by UN DESA: **734,884**
Total average growth in 2019: **3.3%**.

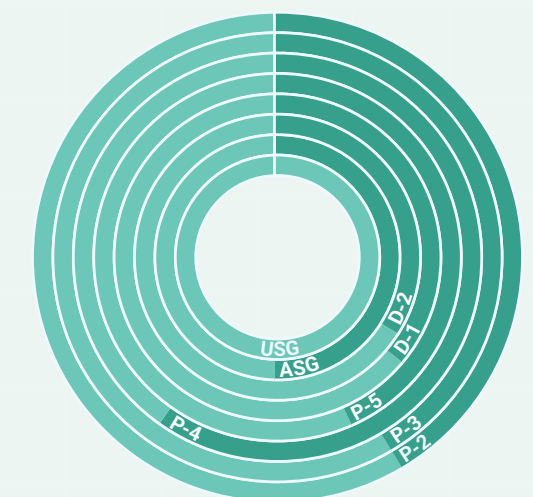
FACEBOOK

Combined followers across accounts managed by UN DESA: **2,088,143**
Total average growth in 2019: **3.3%**.

Share of visits to the UN DESA websites (by region, 2019)



Progress toward gender parity at the Professional level in UN DESA



■ Female
■ Male

As of 31 March 2020, UN DESA had achieved its target for gender balance at the ASG and P4 levels. The Department remains committed to the promise of gender parity and women's empowerment within its workforce, operations and substantive approach.

In the wake of COVID-19, UN DESA undertook a range of immediate actions to support and advise the Secretary-General and help Member States to respond to the pandemic and navigate the policy choices ahead. Led by the COVID-19 response task team established in March 2020, the Department's experts have been closely monitoring the situation and the impact of the crisis on economic, social and sustainable development. The findings and related recommendations were shared through analytical reports, policy briefs, webinars, data and information hubs, enabling the international community to make informed decisions.

Supporting the Secretary-General's initiatives in response to COVID-19

UN DESA has actively supported the Secretary-General's initiatives to counter COVID-19, contributing analysis to help policy makers take informed decisions. The Department supported the development of the United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response, which provides practical guidance to Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams. UN DESA also provided direct input to several policy papers and calls to action. The Department has contributed insights, and shared policy recommendations, on various socioeconomic challenges.



Policy brief and webinar series on the economic and social impact of COVID-19



UN DESA launched a special policy brief series on the economic and social impact of COVID-19 on 1 April 2020. The 23 thematic briefs, released from April to June 2020, highlighted a number of critical issues – including designing inclusive stimulus packages; preventing a global debt crisis; supporting countries in special situations; protecting the most vulnerable groups of people; strengthening the role of science, technology and institutions for an effective response; and working together to recover better and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The series was made available as a compilation volume **Responding to COVID-19 and Recovering Better**.

Looking ahead, the Department continues to provide updated analyses, policy recommendations and practical tools to support countries in recovering better from the pandemic and advancing the Decade of Action for sustainable development.

Online dialogue: launch of the compilation of the High-level Advisory Board for Economic and Social Development (HLAB)

UN DESA convened 14 world renowned experts for a high-level panel event **Recover Better: Economic and Social Challenges and Opportunities** on 22 July 2020. The event launched a compilation of essays by HLAB members. The Volume reflects a wide range of development trends and issues of critical importance to the achievement of the SDGs and the recovery from COVID-19.



COVID-19 response databases

UN DESA established the UN COVID-19 Data Hub and a COVID-19 resources portal for national statistical offices. This rapid response to the need for accurate, real-time data has been a welcome assistance to Member States, helping to guide informed decision-making amid the global pandemic.

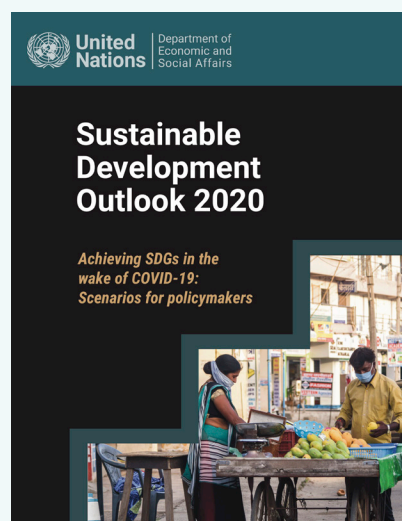


Sustainable Development Outlook 2020

UN DESA released a special in-depth analysis focused on presenting scenarios for policy makers to shape action for achieving the SDGs in the wake of COVID-19.

The recommendations of the report revolve around three key messages:

1. The setbacks caused by COVID-19 need not be permanent.
2. Our recovery from the COVID-19 crisis must direct investment towards realization of the SDGs.
3. While the lockdowns and other measures taken during the crisis negatively impacted economies and livelihoods, many planet-related SDGs have benefited, a vivid revelation that the current ways of achieving prosperity conflict with the health of the planet.



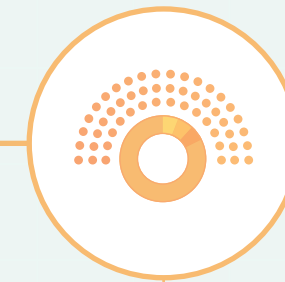
Supporting development for all through intergovernmental processes



General Assembly





High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development



Economic and Social Council

- Plenary
- Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee)
- Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (Third Committee)

-  **Commissions**
 - Commission for Social Development
 - Commission on Population and Development
 - Statistical Commission
 - United Nations Forum on Forests
-  **Committees and Advisory Bodies**
 - Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters
 - Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations
 - Committee of Experts on Public Administration
 - Committee for Development Policy
 - Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
 - UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management
 - United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

-  **Forums**
 - Development Cooperation Forum
 - Financing for Development Forum
 - Internet Governance Forum
 - Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs
 - Partnership Forum
 - World Data Forum
 - Youth Forum
-  **UN Collaborative Mechanisms**
 - Collaborative Partnership on Forests
 - Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs
 - High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-building for the 2030 Agenda
 - Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators
 - Inter-agency Consultative Group on SIDS
 - Inter-agency Support Group for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
 - Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development
 - Inter-agency Task Team for the Technology Facilitation Mechanism
-  **UN Collaborative Mechanisms**
 - UN-Energy
 - UN-Water
 - UN Inter-agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues
 - United Nations Inter-agency Network on Youth Development
 - United Nations Global Working Group (GWG) on Big Data for Official Statistics