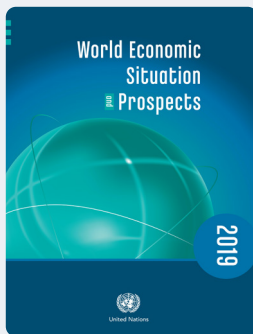


ADVANCING  
THOUGHT  
LEADERSHIP  
FOR  
SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT



# Advancing thought leadership for sustainable development

*Striving to stay ahead of the curve in its research and analysis on sustainable development and other social and economic issues, UN DESA is unique in its holistic analysis of global social, economic and environmental trends and issues. It draws on diverse sources of knowledge and expertise to paint as complete a picture as possible of the world we live in today. In 2018-2019, UN DESA also offered glimpses of the world to come by analysing the latest developments of frontier technologies and their impacts.*



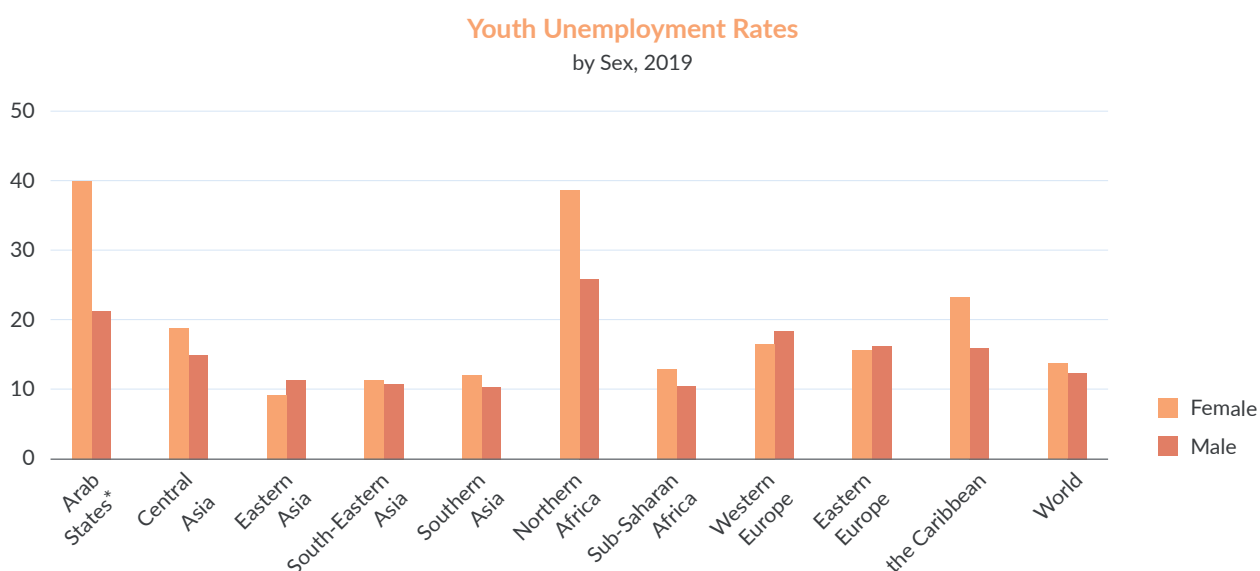
“ Our report is not just about the decimal points of GDP growth – we look at the bigger picture. We ask ourselves what the future of economic growth means for decent jobs and youth employment, for our environment and climate, for women's empowerment and for all the things that make up the Sustainable Development Goals. ” -Dawn Holland, Chief of the Global Economic Monitoring Branch at UN DESA.

## Seeing the bigger picture

UN DESA supports the deliberations of United Nations Member States on the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda. UN DESA submitted more than 300 parliamentary documents and reference materials to intergovernmental and expert bodies and provided expertise during 837 mandated meetings. UN DESA authored and released 192 analytical publications, think pieces, major databases and other technical material in support of the normative work of Member States. In 2018, UN DESA also led the development and implementation of 191 seminars, workshops and training events in support of sustainable development.

UN DESA set itself apart as a pioneer in taking an integrated approach to economic, social and environmental research and policy analysis. This holistic and integrated analysis continues today. For example, the 2019 edition of the flagship **World Economic Situation and Prospects** report, jointly produced by UN DESA, and UNCTAD the five UN Regional Economic Commissions, provides an in-depth inquiry into the linkages between short-term macroeconomic prospects and social and environmental issues.

The report, launched in January and updated in May 2019, found that, beneath the optimistic headline macroeconomic numbers, an undercurrent of growing trade and geopolitical tensions was threatening further growth. The study sounded the alarm on climate change, warning that global warming should no longer be treated as a long-term threat,



\*Arab States correspond to the countries of Western Asia with the exception of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Georgia, Israel, Turkey. Source: ILO (2018b).

but rather an immediate risk to the global economy. The report also warned that economic growth was failing to reach those who needed it the most – including the LDCs – placing the world off track to achieving the SDGs, particularly those on eradicating poverty and hunger and creating decent jobs for all.

### Addressing the complex challenges of today's youth

The **World Youth Report**, released by UN DESA in January 2019, provides insight into the role of young people in sustainable development. While all 17 Sustainable Development Goals are critical to youth development, this latest report focuses primarily on education and employment as fundamental. In addition, the report briefly analyses issues related to other Goals, including gender equality, good health, reducing inequality, combating poverty and hunger, and action on environmental issues and climate change. The report also includes a detailed statistical annex, a one-stop shop for all available data relevant to youth in the context of the 2030 Agenda indicators.

### LOOKING FORWARD

Young people's desire to “do good” socially while they “do well” economically is translating into a rise in youth social entrepreneurship around the world. The next **World Youth Report** will examine the role that youth entrepreneurship can play in supporting the 2030 Agenda.



### Global network, local insight

In March 2019, the Department organized the first meeting of the UN chief economists network, with participation from the ILO, the five UN Regional Economic Commissions, UNDP, UNCTAD, UNEP, UNRISD and UNU. Participants identified a set of key economic and social topics and themes - including social policy, technology, inequality, financing for sustainable development, trade and investment, measurement and data, and structural transformation - that will become the focus of joint research among UN agencies over the next two years. They expressed full support for the Network's twin objectives: facilitating the collaboration and joint work among agencies on issues of shared interest and relevance to the sustainable development agenda; and providing a network of support on economic, financial and social policy issues to the UN Country Teams and the Resident Coordinator Offices.

UN DESA has also been instrumental in strengthening the economic analysis capacities of the UN Resident Coordinator system, as part of a broader reform of the UN Development System.

### Tapping into a diverse brainpower

UN DESA repeatedly leveraged its convening power to bring together some of the world's leading experts on sustainable development, global economy, social development, population dynamics and many other issues, to tackle some of the most pressing problems facing the world.

Throughout the year, the Department supported the production of the **Global Sustainable Development Report**, prepared by 15 independent scientists. This report assesses progress made so far towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and identifies the levers of change that can accelerate action on multiple fronts at

the same time.

In March 2019, UN DESA organized the 21st session of the UN Committee for Development Policy, which comprises some of the most prominent names in contemporary development economy and which advises, among others, on countries' graduation from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) category. The Committee members warned against development under unfettered market conditions and poor institutional frameworks and against the threats of climate change. The Committee also analysed the VNRs and identified ways to make them more effective instruments of mutual learning.

In October 2018 and March 2019, UN DESA convened the UN High-level Advisory Board on Economic and Social Affairs to deepen the Department's understanding of critical development challenges and strengthen its thought leadership for fostering sustainable development. The Advisory Board is a group of former Heads of State, Senior Government officials, a Nobel Laureate and other eminent experts on economic and social policies that provides advice to the research and policy analysis work of UN DESA. The Board's discussions reviewed key development trends, challenges and risks shaping sustainable development today. The debates focused on inclusive, stable and sustainable growth; rapid technological change and inequality; uncertainty associated with conflicts, climate change and disasters. The group also analysed interlinkages, externalities and trade-offs that drive sustainable development outcomes.



Committee for Development Policy, March 2019. Photo: UN DESA/P. Vasić



High-Level Advisory Board on Economic and Social Affairs, March 2019. Photo: UN DESA/P. Vasić