DESA in the UN system

DESA is part of the UN Secretariat, which is funded through regular assessed contributions from Member States. The Department was reorganized into its present form in 1997 and is headed by Sha Zukang. As Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Sha manages the Department, advises the Secretary-General on social, economic and sustainable development, and nurtures key partnerships with governments, UN agencies and civil society organizations. The Under-Secretary-General convenes the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, the UN Secretariat’s network for joint planning and initiatives on development, and is the Programme Manager of the Development Account of the United Nations regular budget which is implemented by ten United Nations Secretariat entities.

Mr. Sha also serves as Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20.

In directing and managing DESA, the Under-Secretary-General is supported by the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs.

Forging global consensus

The focus on equitable participation by all people and nations is what makes the United Nations unique and gives the development agenda its universal legitimacy. By organizing global conferences and summits mandated by UN Member States, DESA has helped countries find common ground and elaborate plans of action on issues including sustainable development, population, social development, financing for development and other key areas. Together, these conferences have given shape to development strategies for achieving better standards of living in larger freedom – as envisioned by the UN Charter.

DESA supports deliberations and consensus-building in the General Assembly and in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its subsidiary bodies. The Department works to foster high-level engagement on a number of global development issues and supports consultation with multiple stakeholders, including UN system organizations, the private sector and civil society.

Over the last decade, consensus-building has become far more inclusive through increased participation by civil society organizations in UN deliberations. Facilitated by DESA’s outreach, a large number of accredited civil society representatives now attend ECOSOC sessions as well as its functional commissions and forums each year.

Promoting development for all

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, or DESA, helps countries around the world meet their economic, social and environmental challenges. Our work flows from the United Nations development agenda: a shared vision of human progress rooted in the values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and mutual responsibility.

The UN development agenda represents an unprecedented global consensus on issues ranging from poverty reduction, health and women’s empowerment to governance, finance and the environment.

The Millennium Development Goals are an integral part of the UN development agenda. In addition, the agenda also incorporates a range of cross-cutting issues that affect people’s lives and livelihoods, from inequalities among and within countries, to global economic governance, global crises, including climate change, and the relationship between development and conflict.

DESA serves to promote development for all, especially the most vulnerable. This reflects a fundamental concern for equity and equality within and among countries large and small, developed and developing.

Development for all goes beyond global agreements and is fundamentally about action. Through the UN, the international community identifies the most pressing global concerns and assesses policy options to address them. All stakeholders come together to build consensus on goals, guiding principles and solutions. Countries commit to specific courses of action and time-bound targets. Commitments are translated into action at global, regional, country and local levels. Progress is monitored and evaluated to ensure implementation and delivery of results especially for those most in need. DESA supports all of these actions.
Strengthening country capacities for development

Upon request, DESA advises Governments on ways to translate policy frameworks, developed in United Nations conferences, into strategies and programmes at the country level. Additionally, DESA helps build capacities to develop and implement successful national policies and programmes. It also provides many analytical and methodological tools for use by country-level partners.

From global commitments to national action

Within the framework of the United Nations development agenda, each division and office within DESA performs a critical function in promoting development for all.

ECOSOC support and coordination

www.un.org/ecosoc

The Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination assists the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council in reaching consensus on global development issues. It does so by facilitating negotiations among Member States based on substantive analysis and advice from DESA and the UN system. The Office advises on follow-up to the UN development agenda, particularly through the Annual Ministerial Review and the multi-stakeholder Development Cooperation Forum. The Office actively engages UN agencies, including the International Financial and Trade institutions and reach out to civil society. Non-governmental organizations apply in large numbers for consultative status with ECOSOC each year.

Social development

social.un.org/index

The Division for Social Policy and Development promotes awareness and understanding of the core social issues of poverty eradication, employment generation and social integration through its analytical and normative work. The Division assists governments and civil society organizations in formulating social policies that foster more secure, just, free and inclusive societies: societies in which all members – young and old, rich and poor, with disabilities and indigenous peoples alike – are active participants. The Division’s work is vital for the social pillar of sustainable development. It also serves as the Secretariat for the Commission for Social Development, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Sustainable development

www.un.org/esa/sdsd

The Division for Sustainable Development is an authoritative source of information and analysis on sustainable development and ensuring that all countries and their populations can gain from an increasingly integrated world economy. The Division's core functions include monitoring the global economy, research mechanisms of macroeconomic policy coordination, analysing emerging long-term development trends to inform the UN development agenda, listing the least developed countries, and providing support to developing countries in strengthening analytical capacities to better integrate macroeconomic, social and environmental policies.

Public administration

www.un.org/esa/padmin

The Division for Public Administration and Development Management promotes awareness and understanding of public administration and development management as means of promoting sustainable global development and ensuring that all nations and their populations can gain from an increasingly integrated world economy. The Division’s core functions include monitoring the global economy, research mechanisms of macroeconomic policy coordination, analysing emerging long-term development trends to inform the UN development agenda, listing the least developed countries, and providing support to developing countries in strengthening analytical capacities to better integrate macroeconomic, social and environmental policies.

Economic Growth

www.un.org/esa/economic

The Division for Economic Growth coordinates the statistical activities of the United Nations. Its mission is to provide the analytical basis for designing and implementing sustainable global development and ensuring that all countries and their populations can gain from an increasingly integrated world economy. The Division’s core functions include monitoring the global economy, research mechanisms of macroeconomic policy coordination, analysing emerging long-term development trends to inform the UN development agenda, listing the least developed countries, and providing support to developing countries in strengthening analytical capacities to better integrate macroeconomic, social and environmental policies.

Statistics

unstats.un.org

The Statistics Division is committed to the advancement of the global statistical system. It serves as the secretariat to the UN Statistical Commission, coordinates global statistical activities, compiles and disseminates statistical information, develops methodological standards and norms, and supports national statistical systems. The Division facilitates the access to UN statistical resources covering a wide range of economic, social, demographic, environmental and geographic data sources which are available on-line free of charge through UNdata.

Population

www.unpopulation.org

The Population Division studies population dynamics and monitors worldwide demographic trends and policies. Population standards and projections prepared by the Division for all countries – on fertility, mortality, international migration and urbanization, as well as on population size and structure – are widely used by entities of the UN system for the derivation of other indicators and for modelling purposes. The Division also provides training and capacity-building to civil society for information and advocacy purposes. In its role as substantive secretariat for the Commission on Population and Development, the Population Division is also responsible for monitoring progress toward the achievement of selected indicators for the improvement of maternal health under Goal 5 of the Millennium Development Goals.

Development policy analysis

www.un.org/esa/policy

The Development Policy and Analysis Division is the main development research unit of the United Nations. Its aim is to provide the analytical basis for designing and implementing sustainable global development and ensuring that all countries and their populations can gain from an increasingly integrated world economy. The Division’s core functions include monitoring the global economy, research mechanisms of macroeconomic policy coordination, analysing emerging long-term development trends to inform the UN development agenda, listing the least developed countries, and providing support to developing countries in strengthening analytical capacities to better integrate macroeconomic, social and environmental policies.

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Capacity Development

www.un.org/esa/cd

The Capacity Development Office (CDO) supports the Under-Secretary-General of DESA in overseeing the use of resources for capacity development purposes. Building on the department’s comparative strengths, the CDO helps Member States develop coherent capacity development strategies. The CDO also supports DESA in actively engaging as a member of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). The Office promotes linkages between development capacity and analytical and work the UN system’s operational work, including through regional and country-level cooperation mechanisms. The CDO also helps DESA mobilize partnerships to support its capacity development activities.

Strategic Planning

www.un.org/esa/strategic-planning

The Strategic Planning Unit supports the Under-Secretary-General in defining and pursuing DESA’s strategic objectives, facilitates department-wide action in selected areas, and works to strengthen DESA’s ties to and collaboration with Member States, UN and other partners around key substantive priorities. The Unit serves as the secretariat for the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and focal point for implementation of DESA’s and other inter-agency initiatives in the Policy Committee and other strategic planning processes. It also leads the work of the DESA Task Force on Conflict, Disaster and Development.

Cutting-edge research

DESA’s professional staff researches a wide range of economic, social and environmental issues, identifying trends and analysing policy options. Their work is essential to UN negotiations and guides global policies and practices. Each year, DESA publishes research reports and policy papers which are distributed in print and electronic formats around the world.

DESA’s analytical work includes assessments of the world economic and social situation, which have been a mainstay of the global dialogue on development since the 1940s. In producing its surveys, DESA draws on expertise in universities, private research organizations, government agencies and central banks in more than 60 countries.

Moreover, DESA plays a central role in monitoring and implementing global commitments to economic and social progress, including the Millennium Development Goals. National reports on sustainable development, social development, population ageing and forests are synthesized with data and analyses to review achievements on many fronts, including financing for development, energy, water and sanitation, consumption and production and public administration.

DESA also oversees the global statistical system and produces authoritative population and other projections that are used around the world. These statistics provide a basis for informed evaluation and design of strategies for achieving development goals.