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United Nations Development Programme
Background Guide 2026

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NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2026 National Model United Nations Spain Conference (NMUN•Spain)! We are pleased to introduce to you our committee, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Your committee's work is facilitated by volunteer staffers. This year's committee staff are: Director Kendrick King and Assistant Director Juan Manuel Marbis. Kendrick King works as Provider Relations Manager at a start up company called Care Connect Medical Inc. He holds a MPH in Public Health Policy and Management from Georgia Southern University. Juan Marbis works as part of the Finance team at 4Founders Capital, where he oversees AI operations. He is in the final year of his Bachelor's degree in BI and Data Analytics at La Salle Barcelona. The preparation of these materials was supported by Deputy Secretary-General Caitlin Hopper.

The topics on the agenda for this committee are:

1. Localizing SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, through Sub-National Governance
2. Technology and Governance in the Digital Age

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the conference, each delegation should submit a Position Paper by 11:59 p.m. ET on 1 November 2026 in accordance with the guidelines in the Position Paper Guide and the NMUN•Spain Position Papers website.

Two resources, available to download from the NMUN website, serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

- The NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide, which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions.

- The NMUN Rules of Procedure, which includes the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory NMUN Conduct Expectations on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for this committee, please contact the Deputy Secretary-General at dsg.spain@nmunstaff.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Kendrick King, Director
Juan Manuel Marbis, Assistant Director

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Committee Overview

Introduction

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) draws its purpose from Article 55 of the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), which outlines that the organization should promote "higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development."[1] UNDP is the leading United Nations agency on sustainable development and assists Member States with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and implementing the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) (2015).[2]

NMUN simulates the **Executive Board** in terms of composition and size; however, delegates are not limited to the strict mandate of the Executive Board. For the purposes of NMUN•NY, the committee can make programmatic and policy decisions on issues within the mandate of UNDP in line with the overall function of the organization.

Mandate, Function, and Powers

UNDP's core mandate is to "end poverty, build democratic governance, rule of law, and inclusive institutions."[3] The *Strategic Plan 2026-2029* (2025) outlines four strategic objectives: (1) prosperity for all, (2) effective governance, (3) crisis resilience, and (4) healthy planet.[4] It has defined accelerators that drive progress along those strategic objectives towards the coexistence of human development and a healthy planet, which are digital and AI transformation, gender equality, and sustainable finance.[5] While the following list is not exhaustive, UNDP's mandate can be summarized as:

- UNDP will **generally**: support country-led efforts to achieve the SDGs with its projects and programs; work with governments to identify funding, investment, and partnership opportunities for programs focused on development and a healthy planet; support Member States to develop their governance structures, institutional capacities, and legislative approaches; provide data and analysis to Member States; develop and foster partnerships between local, national, and international actors; make recommendations to and coordinate with Member States, regional bodies, and other international actors on the achievement of the SDGs.[6]

- UNDP **will not generally**: direct Member States, non-governmental organizations, other United Nations agencies, and stakeholders to carry out specific development activities or actions; create new development frameworks or policies that do not align with those adopted by the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council; and work on areas not covered by its *Strategic Plan 2026-2029*.[7]

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[1] United Nations Development Programme. *About us*. 2024; United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. art. 55.
[2] Ibid. (2024); United Nations Development Programme. *The SDGs in Action*. 2024.
[3] United Nations Development Programme. *About Us*. 2024.
[4] United Nations Development Programme. *Strategic Plan 2026-2029*. 2025. pp. 6-7.
[5] Ibid. pp. 8-9.
[6] Ibid; United Nations Development Programme. *Strategic Plan 2026-2029*. 2025; United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 (DP/2021/28)*. 2021.
[7] Ibid.

Governance, Funding, and Structure

UNDP reports annually to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).[8] Its leadership consists of an Administrator and an Executive Board.[9] The Administrator leads a team of five Regional Bureaus and provides support to other Bureaus, such as the Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy and the Crisis Bureau, to carry out UNDP's programs.[10] In addition, the Administrator also acts as the Vice-Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, which is the United Nation system's high-level forum for policy coordination on sustainable development and includes other United Nations entities focusing on sustainable development.[11]

The Executive Board oversees all of UNDP's projects, approves budgets, and ensures that projects adapt to changing situations and the unique needs of each Member State.[12] The Executive Board consists of 36 rotating Member States from five geographic groups: eight from the group of African states, seven from the group of Asia-Pacific states, four from the group of Eastern European states, five from the group of Latin America and the Caribbean states, and 12 from the group of Western European and other States.[13] Only the group of Western European and other States decides on its rotation internally.[14] The Executive Board holds three sessions each year: one annual session and two regular sessions, typically held in New York City.[15] UNDP shares its Executive Board with the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).[16]

UNDP's work is carried out by its offices in different Member States, which are focused on helping governments develop policies, institutional abilities, leadership skills, and resilience to achieve poverty eradication and reduce inequalities.[17] UNDP also administers and utilizes the United Nations Volunteers program and the United Nations Capital Development Fund to support its work for sustainable development.[18] To achieve its mandate, UNDP relies entirely on voluntary contributions.[19] Its budget is segmented into core resources, which are unrestricted and can be used for its day-to-day operations, and earmarked contributions, which can only be used for specific themes, programmes or projects.[20] In 2024, the total annual contributions to UNDP decreased slightly by 1% to $4.9 billion from the year before.[21] Three quarters of its financial resources come from donor countries and multilateral institutions, and one quarter from countries where projects are implemented.[22]

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[8] United Nations Development Programme. *Information Note About The Executive Board Of UNDP, UNFPA And UNOPS*. 2024.
[9] Ibid.
[10] United Nations Development Programme. *Leadership*. 2024; United Nations Development Programme. *2024 Organizational Chart*. 2024.
[11] United Nations Sustainable Development Group. *Who We Are*. 2024.
[12] United Nations Development Programme. *Information Note About The Executive Board Of UNDP, UNFPA And UNOP*S. 2024; United Nations Development Programme. *Executive Board*. 2024.
[13] United Nations Development Programme. *Executive Board*. 2024; United Nations Development Programme. *Members of the Executive Board*. 2024.
[14] United Nations Development Programme. *Executive Board*. 2024.
[15] United Nations Development Programme. *Reports on Sessions*. 2024.
[16] United Nations Development Programme. *Executive Board*. 2024.
[17] United Nations Development Programme. *About Us*. 2024.
[18] New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2024-2025*. 2024. p. 8.
[19] United Nations Development Programme. *Funding*. 2024.
[20] Ibid.
[21] United Nations Development Programme. *Funding Compendium 2024*. 2025. p. 4.
[22] Ibid.

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United Nations Development Programme. *Leadership*. 2024. Retrieved 18 October 2024 from: https://www.undp.org/our-leadership

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United Nations Development Programme. *Reports On Sessions*. 2024. Retrieved 18 October 2024 from: https://www.undp.org/executive-board/reports-on-sessions

United Nations Development Programme. *The SDGs in Action*. 2024. Retrieved 18 October 2024 from: https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals

United Nations Development Programme. *Funding Compendium 2024*. 2025. Retrieved 18 October 2024 from: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-08/funding_compendium-aug_27.pdf

United Nations Development Programme. *Strategic Plan 2026-2029*. 2025. Retrieved 25 October 2025 from: https://strategicplan.undp.org/assets/docs/UNDP-Strategic-Plan-English-Summary.pdf

United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. Retrieved 18 October 2024 from: http://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/70/1

United Nations Sustainable Development Group. *Who We Are*. 2024. Retrieved 18 October 2024 from: https://unsdg.un.org/about/who-we-are

1. Localizing SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, through Sub-National Governance

Introduction

Cities are centers of innovation and economic growth that provide extensive opportunities towards progressions of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), however significant challenges stand in the way of achieving these goals.[23] SDG 11 centers around the sustainable development of inclusive, safe, and resilient cities, which the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) (2015) designates as the future of global living.[24] Per the World Bank's *World Urbanization Prospects* (2025), a city is defined as any growing geographic area with a population density of at least 50,000 people.[25] The *Sustainable Development Goals Report* (2025) highlighted more than 12,000 cities worldwide collectively housing 45%, nearly 4 billion, of the global population and it is expected to increase by roughly 70% by 2050.[26] However, many cities are not prepared to accommodate the demands brought forth by rapid urbanizations since it outpaces the development of housing, infrastructure, and services, which has led to a rise in challenges like poverty, inequality and environmental degradation.[27]

The targets of SDG 11 are designed to help Member States navigate key areas of urban development and governance to ensure the development of sustainable cities that can respond to situations where ultimately all citizens can gain a decent living.[28] With four years remaining until the 2030 Agenda deadline, United Nations Human Settlement Programme's (UN-Habitat's) Urban Indicator Database released information highlighting the stagnation in Member States progress and efforts in achieving the targets of SDG 11.[29] As of 2025, cities accounted for 80% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and 75% of global natural resource consumption which contributed to the less than 50% average completion score for SDG target 11.1 on access for all to adequate and affordable housing and SDG target 11.6 on reducing environmental impact of cities.[30] In addition, 3 billion people living in cities worldwide are suffering from inadequate and slum-like housing conditions, thus highlighting the likelihood of achieving SDG target 11.2 on providing access to sustainable transport systems and SDG target 11.7 on providing universal access to green and blue spaces.[31]

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[23] Gaia Education. *SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities Explained.* 2025.
[24] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*. 2026.
[25] United Nations, Department of Economic Social Affairs. *The World Cities in 2025.* 2025. pp. 2-5.
[26] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025*. 2025. p. 32.
[27] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*. 2026.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid; United Nations Human Settlement Programme. Urban Indicator Database. *Urban Sustainable Development Goals*. 2025.
[30] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*. 2026.
[31] United Nations, Department of Economic Social Affairs Statistic Division. *Sustainable Cities and Communities*. 2026.

The success of the 2030 Agenda will greatly depend on the implementation of SDGs in cities since one can observe and receive measurable results regarding implemented change.[32] However, this task cannot be achieved without participation from subnational governments (SNGs) to assist in the localization of SDG 11.[33] SDG localization is the process of adapting and customizing the SDGs into local development plans and strategies to promote sustainable development with input from local stakeholders, such as mayors, teachers, and community leaders.[34] This process is vital, but the lack of autonomy regarding SDG implementation has become an obstacle for localization to overcome financial and political factors.[35] Upon adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Member States strived towards working closely with SNGs like school boards, who are primarily responsible for implementing policies and frameworks designed to promote sustainability at local levels through localization of SDG 11.[36] The usage of Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) has shown that the majority of cities worldwide report little to no SNG participation in SDG localization.[37] These are annual reports designed to examine SDG progress through analysis of SDG localization and SNGs involvement in cities, while also providing an opportunity for SNGs and city governments to share experiences and challenges.[38]

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) utilize those reports to support SNGs processes as local enablers for SDG localization.[39] UNDP recognizes the necessity for more efficient localization of SDG 11 policies through transparent, participatory, and inclusive implementation facilitated by SNGs.[40] With the advent of frameworks such as the *United Nations Pact for the Future* (2024), the *New Urban Agenda* (NUA) (2016), and the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030* (2015), the development of critical urban infrastructure, affordable housing, and essential social services are imperative to creating resilient and sustainable cities that meet the needs of all.[41] Depending on the type of governing systems, SDG localization can undergo varying levels of difficulty since it does involve decentralization of certain aspects of government to empower SNGs with financial and oversight independence within Member States national guidelines.[42]

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[32] Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development. University of Strathclyde. *Localizing the SDGs: regional governments paving the way*. 2018. pp. 6-10.
[33] Ibid.
[34] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *United Nations Inter-Agency Policy Debrief: Accelerating SDG Localization to Deliver on the Promise of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2024. p. 3.
[35] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Importance of Subnational Governments.* 2020.
[36] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *United Nations Inter-Agency Policy Debrief: Accelerating SDG Localization to Deliver on the Promise of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2024. p. 3.
[37] Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. United Cities and Local Governments. *7th Report to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF): Towards Localization of the SDGs*. 2023. pp. 11-13.
[38] Ibid.
[39] United Nations Development Programme, Governance for the People and Planet. *Local Governance*. 2026.
[40] Pickup et al. United Nations Development Programme. *Urban Governance Vital for Cities to Prosper*. 2024; United Nations, Department of Economic Social Affairs Statistic Division. *Sustainable Cities and Communities*. 2026.
[41] United Nations Human Settlement Programme. *The New Urban Agenda*. 2026; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *What is the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*. 2026.
[42] United Nations Development Programme. *Future Ready-Urban Governance: Rethinking Urban Governance for Tomorrow's Cities in Asia-Pacific*. 2025. pp. 19-36.

The empowerment of SNGs is essential for the delivery of effective changes and the shaping of local sustainable development policies.[43] Since the 1980s, several national governments have attempted to decentralize governing power so SNGs may have a voice in implementing and managing urban development policies within their area, at their own discretion, and within the limits of the national guidelines.[44] The intent was to limit the constraints of SDG localization by allowing SNGs and local governments to have more autonomy regarding usage of limited resources and finances to make feasible implementation without major central government oversight.[45] The consistent disconnect between SNGs and central governments towards SDG localization centers on the dilemma of meeting national policy standards versus addressing local urban sustainability when implementing new urban frameworks.[46] The disconnect is also associated with the lack of input from stakeholders and the dependency of SNGs on national support in the development of sustainable urban development planning and management.[47] Ignoring SNGs can lead to rapid yet unplanned urbanization that further exacerbates misuse of local capacity in construction and policy management while also promoting more planning errors caused by limited data on urban infrastructure and financing.[48] Due to their proximity to local communities, UNDP and other United Nations bodies recognize that SNGs can serve as the catalyst for innovating and promoting new urban governance structures that can ensure sustainability for all.[49]

International and Regional Framework

SDG 11 is an indispensable accelerator towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.[50] The 2030 Agenda aims to transform rapid, unplanned urban growth into sustainable development with the goal of creating future cities that are inclusive, free of slums, access to green spaces, and minimal on environmental impact.[51] The 2030 Agenda emphasizes the impact of SDG 11 on human settlements through recognition of cities as the primary location of interconnected global challenges and issues.[52] SDG 11 is becoming a catalyst for achieving all other SDGs as highlighted in the NUA, which emphasizes urbanization reform as a solution to addressing multiple SDGs.[53] Additionally, the tenants of SDG 11 have been at the core of the United Nations' legal framework since its founding, and had been built upon in the subsequent decades.[54] Article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) guarantees all citizens the right to safe

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[43] Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. United Cities and Local Governments. *7th Report to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF): Towards Localization of the SDGs*. 2023. pp. 11-13.
[44] United Nations Development Programme. *Future Ready-Urban Governance: Rethinking Urban Governance for Tomorrow's Cities in Asia-Pacific*. 2025. pp. 19-36.
[45] Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. United Cities and Local Governments. *7th Report to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF): Towards Localization of the SDGs*. 2023. pp. 11-13.
[46] United Nations Development Programme. *Multi-Level Governance in Crisis Affected Settings*. 2025. p. 11.
[47] Ibid.
[48] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Importance of Subnational Governments.* 2020.
[49] Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. United Cities and Local Governments. *7th Report to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF): Towards Localization of the SDGs*. 2023. pp. 11-13.
[50] Ibid.
[51] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*. 2026.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Gaia Education. *SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities Explained.* 2025.
[54] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights *What Human Rights can bring to SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities*. 2026.

living conditions that provide adequate standards of living.[55] The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) *Guiding Principles on Resettlement* (2026) iterated urban planning guidelines that would eliminate forced evictions from homes based on discriminatory standards.[56] The *Basel Convention* (1989) and *Basel Convention Plastic Waste Amendment* (2019) provided guidelines for cities' waste management facilities to meet the necessary environmental and health standards.[57] These standards were designed to prevent waste and reduce resource consumption in conjunction with SDG target 11.6 on reducing waste consumption and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).[58]

Regional frameworks are also essential to empower SNGs on localizing SDG 11 and creating sustainable cities.[59] The *European Charter of Local Self-Government* (1986) of the Council of Europe follows a similar principle of empowering SNGs while protecting their autonomy over city governance.[60] The Economic Commission of Asia and the Pacific's (ECAP) *Crisis Resilient Urban Futures* (2023) report highlights the role of SNGs and local actors in formalizing existing urban frameworks to respond to any city crisis.[61] The *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* (2015) of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development emphasizes the need for financial reforms towards creating an enabling environment for SDG localization where SNGs are able to mobilize, allocate, and manage financial resources.[62]

SNG involvement is vital towards achieving and maintaining sustainable cities.[63] The *United Nations Pact for the Future* (2024) recognizes the importance of SNG's role in advancing SDG localization and makes recommendations to strengthen SNG involvement.[64] During the 2024 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16), Member States reinforced the pivotal role that SNGs play in maintaining green space and biodiversity within urban settings as designated by the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* (GBF) (2022) and the *Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity 2023-2030* (2022).[65] United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) *8th Summit for Subnational Government and Cities* was held in 2024 and worked in tandem with COP16 to highlight the vital role of SNGs, specifically with Target 12 of the GBF, in providing insight into creating open green space in cities.[66] The Economic Commissions for Latin American and the Caribbean's (ECLAC) *Escazú Agreement* (2018) aligned with the *Paris Agreement* (2015) regulated the climate impact

[55] United Nations, Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. 2026.
[56] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights *What Human Rights can bring to SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities*. 2026. pp. 1-3.
[57] United Nations Statistics Division. *SDG indicator metadata*. 2025. pp. 2-4.
[58] Ibid.
[59] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Inter-agency Policy Brief on Accelerating Progress on 2030: Agenda from local to global levels: The Critical Importance of SDG Localization.* 2024.
[60] Economic Commission of Asia and the Pacific. *Inclusive, Low Carbon, Resilient, Smart and Sustainable Cities.* 2026.
[61] Economic Commission of Asia and the Pacific. *Crisis Resilient Urban Futures*. 2023. p. 33.
[62] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *United Nations Inter-Agency Debrief Breaking the SDG finance gridlock through strengthening local government finance*. 2025.
[63] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025*. 2025. p. 32.
[64] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Our Common Agenda*. 2024.
[65] Local Governments for Sustainability. *Subnational governments and cities play leading role in taking action towards achieving the targets of the GBF*. 2024.
[66] Ibid.

of urban development within cities to decrease GHG emissions while highlighting SNGs role in implementing these climate action in conjunction with SDG 13 (Climate Action).[67]

Role of the International System

UNDP and other United Nations bodies work to provide technical, financial, and educational assistance in the strengthening of SNGs participation in localizing SDG 11.[68] In 2026, UN-Habitat and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), in cooperation with UNDP, convened the 2026 Expert Group Meeting on SDG 11 in advance of the 2026 HLPF on Sustainable Development.[69] The meeting acted as a forward-looking assessment of progress toward SDG 11 while also identifying obstacles and policy failure towards localizing SDG 11.[70] Through UNDP's Local Action Plan, UNDP was able to allocate $1.8 billion to support and strengthen financial capacities of SNGs and local actors across multiple cities.[71] The UNDP *Strategic Plan 2022-2025* focuses on localizing SDGs to address sustainability issues, like urban poverty, while highlighting the role of SNGs in fostering sustainable cities resistant to climate change and other crises.[72] UNDP has worked to coordinate Leadership for the Future dialogue forums where city leaders are able to share mutual governing insight that promotes greater SNGs participation in urban development and embrace adaptive SNGs governance.[73] In addition, UNDP has collaborated with UN-Habitat, and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to construct the Local2030 Coalition, which is a United Nations system-wide platform designed to help local actors promote innovative solutions for supporting and accelerating the localization of SDGs.[74]

UNDP and other United Nations bodies provide ongoing assistance in strengthening SNGs role and capacity in creating sustainable cities.[75] United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA) helps with the assignment of SNGs role in climate action within urban planning through the Cities and Regions Summits.[76] These summits allow SNGs to share experiences, showcase best practices, and contribute to

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[67] Economic Commissions for Latin American and the Caribbean. *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2026.
[68] Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services. *UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 (DP/2021/28)*. 2021. p. 4.
[69] High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2026. *2026 HLPF Thematic Review Expert Group Meeting*. 2026.
[70] Ibid.
[71] United Nations Development Programme. *Local Action: Empowering people, transforming lives*. 2026.
[72] Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services. *UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 (DP/2021/28)*. 2021. p. 4.
[73] United Nations Development Programme. *The challenges and opportunities of rapid urban expansion*. 2025.
[74] United Nations Development Programme. *The opening of the Local2030 Coalition Secretariat will be held in Bilbao on October 31: Spain, the Basque Government and the United Nations join forces to localize the Sustainable Development Goals*. 2022.
[75] Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services. *UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 (DP/2021/28)*. 2021. p. 4.
[76] United National Environment Programme, Summit. *United Nations Environmental Assembly-7 Cities and Regions Summit*. 2025.

multilateral environmental governance in accordance with multilateral environmental agreements.[77] The *Global Urban Monitoring Framework* (2022) that prompts development of monitoring data systems that track urban indicators, like air quality, that SNGs can utilize to enact more efficient localization of SDG 11.[78] UNDP developed the digital SDG Investor Platform that would enable SNGs and Member States to build stronger financial capacity that could support SDG localization without being limited by implementation cost or dependency on national support.[79] The Secretary-General's *Funding Compact 2.0* (2023) report produced a framework called the *Joint SDG Fund* (2023) that acts as the United Nation's premier innovative funding mechanism, strategically designed to assist with SDG implementation and localizations.[80] Through its funding mechanisms, Member States in partnership with UNDP have helped promote the role of SNGs in SDG localization as seen with the Kingdom of Belgium's *Second Walloon Sustainable Development Strategy* (2016).[81]

Member States must address decentralization of decision-making powers to SNGs for effective sustainable implementation.[82] Member States recognize that the strengthening of SNGs and local government is essential in localization of SDGs.[83] Member States must understand that some current governing frameworks act as barriers towards SDG localization since they centralize decision making power, thus making it difficult to address hyper-local needs or cities.[84] Member States have utilized UNDP's Regional Programmes and Strategic Offers programs to help construct initiatives designed to transform decision-making responsibilities to SNGs and local governments regarding SDG localization while also respecting national sovereignty.[85] The Republic of Liberia utilized these services to start their Accelerated Community Development Programme (ACDP), which is a peace-building initiative that emphasizes decentralization reforms towards implementing SDG policies.[86] With cooperation from UNDP and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the program has had a direct influence on public finance management and revenue codes, allowing SNGs and local governments to develop financial independence regarding SDG implementation and localization.[87] UNDP and United Nations bodies also work with Member States to foster regional SDG localization through the UNDP SDG Local Action initiative, which creates opportunities for Member States to share knowledge on localizing SDGs and promoting development of sustainable cities through SNGs.[88]

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[77] United National Environment Programme, Summit. *United Nations Environmental Assembly-7 Cities and Regions Summit*. 2025.
[78] United Nations Human Settlement Programme. *The Global Urban Monitoring Framework*. 2022.
[79] United Nations Development Programme. Private Finance for the Sustainable Development Goals. *SDG Investor Platform*. 2026.
[80] Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund. *Joint SDG Fund*. 2026.
[81] Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. United Cities and Local Governments. *7th Report to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF): Towards Localization of the SDGs*. 2023. pp. 11-13.
[82] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *United Nations Inter-Agency Policy Debrief: Accelerating SDG Localization to Deliver on the Promise of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2024. p. 3.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] United Nations Development Programme. Asia and the Pacific. *SDG Localization, Local Governance and Urbanization*. 2026.
[86] United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strengthens Partnership with Ministry of Internal Affairs*. 2024.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Local Action. *SDG Local Action Results*. 2026.

Limited NGO participation in urban planning and development remains a major barrier to SDG localization.[89] Without NGO involvement, top-down municipal development plans frequently fail to address hyper-local needs, while neglecting marginalized populations, such as migrants, women, and children in low-income housing.[90] The United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) provides funds that support projects that strengthen the voice of NGOs in their participation within urban development.[91] NGOs help in bridging the gap between policy and action by supporting the need for improved data collection and monitoring on urban development and conditions to allow SNGs to make better informed decisions on implementing SDG 11 policies.[92] NGOs, like Premise Data and Data4Change, are often invited as experts to the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data where Member States consult them on methods to utilize urban data to promote more efficient SDG localization.[93]

Strengthening the Role of Sustainability in Urban Development Planning

The development of urban settlements and sustainable cities plays a pivotal role in addressing climate change.[94] Cities consume substantial resources, like energy and water, and serve as key transportation hubs while emitting substantial amounts of air and water pollution through extensive road networks and public transit systems.[95] Exploiting synergies between SDG localization and subnational climate action helps address the need for urban development planning that can limit the environmental impact of growing cities in conjunction with SDG 13 and SDG target 11.6 on reducing environmental impact.[96] The NGO-led Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action presented at COP28 presented frameworks and innovative ideas that would allow SNGs to better utilize SDG localization to reduce cities GHG emissions in alignment with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of the Paris Agreement.[97] The CHAMP significantly emphasized the development of urban blue and green spaces that are natural and semi-natural areas such as parks and lakes, that are integrated into urban and regional planning to improve climate resilience and public health.[98] Cities struggle with developing blue and green spaces due lack of funds, lack of space, and lack of suitable climate environment that support construction.[99] Target 12 of the GBF further emphasizes their importance in decreasing cities' environmental impact, while the 7th Summit for Subnational Governments and Cities highlighted how SNGs can help in providing insight on feasible implementation for blue and green spaces

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[89] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Importance of Subnational Governments.* 2020.
[90] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *United Nations Inter-Agency Policy Debrief: Accelerating SDG Localization to Deliver on the Promise of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2024. p. 3.
[91] United Nations, Democracy Fund. *United Nations Democracy Fund Projects.* 2026.
[92] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *United Nations Inter-Agency Policy Debrief: Accelerating SDG Localization to Deliver on the Promise of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* 2024. p. 3.
[93] Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data. *Better Data, Better Decision, Better Lives.* 2026.
[94] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Seeking Synergy Solutions How Cities Can Act on Both Climate and the SDGs.* 2024.
[95] United Nations Development Programme Climate Promise. *Cities have a key role to play in tackling climate change – here's why*. 2024.
[96] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*. 2026.
[97] World Resource Institute. *Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action.* 2026.
[98] United Nations Environment Programme. Copenhagen Climate Centre. *Green and blue spaces*. 2026.
[99] Ibid.

without major financial strain.[100] VSRs and VLRs can also impact climate action through observation of other effective urban resource management involving NGOs and SNGs.[101] This is done to avoid exacerbating existing urban infrastructure thus creating more pollution, using un-needed energy, and making areas more susceptible to natural disasters.[102]

Cities face many challenges that simultaneously affect the climate and other development priorities.[103] Cities are centers of innovation and economic growth but they are also the primary node for many interconnected environment issues and targets outlined in the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda.[104] A city's urban development and expansion have significant impact on climate change, citizens health, and environmental degradation if left un-checked or mismanaged.[105] Still, cities do typically lack the necessary resources, such as finance, space, or infrastructure to implement sustainable changes to address growing environmental concerns.[106] This shortage is attributed to lack of financial support from national governments, mismanagement of existing resources due to inadequate local input, and failure to consider cheaper and eco-friendly alternatives to existing urban infrastructures.[107] Climate action investment in renewable energy can help alleviate concerns regarding shortage in cities resources.[108] Over 90% of newly commissioned renewable energy projects cost less than the cheapest fossil fuel alternatives.[109] Investments in renewable energy that consider both climate action and the SDGs can support enhanced safeguarding, reduce risk, and unlock a wider pool of potential funding sources.[110] Through UNDP's Climate Promise initiative, SNGs can assist in transitioning cities away from fossil fuel consumption to renewable energy by providing insight on how to better allocate development-specific resources.[111] UNEP's Coalition for Supporting Cities To Deliver Integrated Urban Energy Systems initiative assists in transitioning cities to net-zero urban energy networks through SNG participation in designing proper energy systems, identifying priority areas that require energy management, and advising on best implementation practices.[112]

Harnessing Smart City Technology to Assist SNGs in Localization of SDG 11

Smart cities use technology and innovation to sustainably meet the needs of citizens through development of urban infrastructure with SNG input.[113] Smart cities have also been defined by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) as an "innovative city that uses information communication

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[100] Local Governments for Sustainability. *Subnational governments and cities play leading role in taking action towards achieving the targets of the GBF*. 2024.
[101] Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. United Cities and Local Governments. *7th Report to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF): Towards Localization of the SDGs*. 2023. pp. 11-13.
[102] Ibid.
[103] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.*Seeking Synergy Solutions How Cities Can Act on Both Climate and the SDGs.* 2024.
[104] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*. 2026.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.*Seeking Synergy Solutions How Cities Can Act on Both Climate and the SDGs.* 2024.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] United Nations, United Nations Energy. *Coalition for Supporting Cities To Deliver Integrated Urban Energy Systems*. 2026.
[113] United Nations General Assembly. *New Urban Agenda (A/RES/71/256)*. 2016. p. 9.

technologies (ICTs) to improve the quality of life, efficiency of urban operation and services, and reduction of environmental impact.[114] Technological advances in the era of digitalization and urbanization are potent allies when it comes to localizing SGDs for urban development as outlined in the 2030 Agenda.[115] The *Global Sustainable Development Repor*t (2023) and the *Global Digital Compact* (GDC) (2024) both emphasize the critical role of SNGs in the digital transformation of urban governance in enabling the effective implementation of the SDGs.[116] The GDC highlights the effectiveness of advanced technologies in strengthening urban governance through effective data systems, like Geographical Information Systems (GIS).[117] Technological advancement in urban air and light monitoring systems can provide SNGs and local actors with information regarding mismanagement of local resources, presence of potential slums, or gaps in essential services caused by rapid urbanization.[118] The ECAP Smart Cities Innovation Lab initiative promotes SNGs' usage of smart poles, free Wi-Fi, and solar energy products to build cities to increase the quality of services and mitigation of disaster risks.[119] UN-Habitat and UNDP also works with SNGs and Member States to create long-term plans to create smart cities, such as the Rwanda Smart City Masterplan, for sustainability for all.[120]

UNDP and other United Nations bodies focus on helping cities transition to technology and innovation in a way that supports SNGs in managing urban development.[121] The capability of national governments to develop and manage cities are different depending on the Member States.[122] The European Union's (EU) 2021 Digital Decade initiative was designed to promote widespread digitalization of cities across the EU, however less than 50% of cities and citizens will have access to the latest ICT by 2030.[123] The stagnation is linked to lack of technology access and insight on implementation of digitalization policies in urban communities.[124] Digitalizing cities provides SNGs with access to data on current GHG emissions, resources consumption, and poverty levels, thus making early intervention feasible. UNDP has advocated for digitalization initiatives, like the Digital Twins program, to assist SNGs in addressing development vulnerabilities while building resilience and responsiveness through efficient SDG localization.[125]
UN-Habitat has worked with SNGs to utilize the Global Smart Cities initiative of 2019 World Economic Forum, which focuses on usage of data-sharing platforms and best practice manuals to foster sustainable urban governance frameworks.[126] Additionally, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has advocated use of artificial intelligence (AI) in urban development planning in conjunction

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[114] United Nations Task Team on Habitat III. *Habitat III Issue Papers: 21- Smart Cities*, 2015, p. 1; *Centre for Cities, Smart Cities Definitions*. 2014.
[115] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Inter-agency Policy Briefs on Accelerating Progress on the 2030 Agenda from Local to Global Levels: The Critical Importance of SDG Localization* . pp. 31-40. 2024.
[116] Ibid.
[117] United Nations, Web TV. *One UN-Localizing the Global Digital Compact at the City Level*. 2026; High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2026. *2026 HLPF Thematic Review Expert Group Meeting*. 2026.
[118] Ibid.
[119] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Our Common Agenda*. 2024.
[120] The Globe and Mail. *Five ways smart cities can change daily life in the public realm; Giles, African 'smart cities:' A high-tech solution to overpopulated megacities?*. 2018.
[121] United Nations Task Team on Habitat III. *Habitat III Issue Papers: 21- Smart Cities*. 2015. p. 1.
[122] Ibid.
[123] World Economic Forum. *Digital safety: We are shaping a more secure digital future*. 2026.
[124] Ibid.
[125] The Globe and Mail. *Five ways smart cities can change daily life in the public realm; Giles, African 'smart cities:' A high-tech solution to overpopulated megacities?*. 2018.
[126] United Nations Task Team on Habitat III. *Habitat III Issue Papers: 21- Smart Cities*. 2015. p. 1.

with SDG Target 11.3 on efficient sustainable growth.[127] The committee cited the effectiveness of AI usage for SNGs through access to accurate information and mapping data that can assist in policy implementation, while maintaining significantly lower energy consumption.[128]

Conclusion

UNDP is committed to supporting the localization of SDG 11 through the utilization of SNGs in urban cities.[129] While recognizing the vital role of SNGs in the development of sustainable cities, UNDP in collaboration with other relevant actors have worked to strengthen SNG involvement in the decision-making process of urban development policies.[130] These methods include decentralizing central government responsibilities to give SNGs a voice in sustainable urban development and developing local capacity to foster independence from national support.[131] With the 2026 HLPF convening on 15 July 2026, Member States will evaluate the effectiveness of current SDG 11 policies, while potentially recommending new innovative ideas on achieving the SDG targets.[132] Through the promotion of participatory governance for SNGs, UNDP and Member States can strive towards SDG 11 through the creation of inclusive and sustainable cities that are resilient to climate change and equipped with digital infrastructure to address all sustainable issues.[133]

Further Research

As delegates began their research, the following questions should be considered: How can Member States further strengthen SNG participation in localizing SNG? What tools are needed for SNGs to address urban issues and make informed decisions regarding implementing SDG policies? How can UNDP assist Member States, SNGs, NGOs, and other local actors in improving the progression of SDG 11 before the 2030 Agenda deadline?

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[127] United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. *UNECE joins United Nations' call for AI and emerging tech to support better city and community life.* 2026.
[128] Ibid.
[129] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Importance of Subnational Governments*. 2020.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

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2. Technology and Governance in the Digital Age

Introduction

Despite the rapid growth of the digital age, achieving universal digital inclusion remains an ongoing challenge.[134] Digital inclusion is defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as equitable access to and meaningful use of digital tools and services across all population groups, regardless of income, geography, gender, age, or ability.[135] As of 2025, an estimated 2.2 billion people lacked internet access, and within Least Developed Countries (LDCs), only 34% of residents were online against a global average of 66%.[136] UNDP links this digital gap to lower outcomes in health, education, and financial inclusion, as the services that deliver income, health information, and economic participation increasingly operate online.[137] These exclusions extend to social protection where weak civil registration and digital identity systems leave populations unable to claim digitally delivered benefits.[138] Weak governance also carries direct risks, as cybercrime and the misuse of personal data have expanded along digital adoption, undermining the public trust digital services depend on.[139] UNDP's *A Shared Vision* (2024) defines e-governance as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve transparency, accountability, and access to public institutions.[140] The *Global Digital Compact* (GDC) (2024) defines Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) as foundational systems, encompassing digital identity platforms, interoperable payment rails, and data exchange tools, through which public and private services reach populations at scale.[141] The same framework defines Digital Public Goods (DPGs) as open-source software, open data, artificial intelligence (AI) models, and standards that adhere to applicable privacy laws and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[142] In response, UNDP supports Member States in building the governance systems, institutional capacity, and policy frameworks to manage digital transformation for equitable human development.[143]

Digital technology has become essential to how governments deliver services, maintain accountability, and advance the well-being of their populations.[144] Uneven adoption of DPI and DPG frameworks across Member States reflect governance gaps preventing digital transformation from reaching the populations

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[134] United Nations Development Programme. *Management Response to the Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Digitalization of Public Services (DP/2024/7)*. 2024. pp. 4–6.
[135] United Nations Development Programme. *Digital Strategy 2022–2025*. 2022. p. 48.
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[140] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. p. 5.
[141] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024. p. 16.
[142] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact* (A/RES/79/1). 2024.
[143] United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-2029*. 2025. p. 1.
[144] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. p. 4.

most in need.[145] Member States increasingly depend on digital platforms to register citizens, deliver payments, and administer public services, yet readiness remains uneven as the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) *ICT Development Index*, which measures connectivity progress, showed a 2025 global average of 78.2%, with several Member States below 50%.[146]

Many developing Member States lack the basic institutional frameworks required for digital governance and transformation.[147] The World Economic Forum argues that innovation thrives in environments guided by clear and predictable regulatory frameworks.[148] In high-income settings, digital governance centers on algorithmic systems that encode social inequalities and the private monopolization of digital infrastructure, limiting regulatory oversight and public accountability.[149] While in fragile states, defined as those with chronically weak institutions highly vulnerable to shocks and with poor state-society relations, the institutional foundations for judicial oversight and digital rights are frequently absent.[150] These deficits stem from structural constraints such as conflict-driven erosion of civil service capacity and shortages of expertise.[151] The *United Nations E-Government Survey* (2024) illustrates this divergence, reporting compromised index scores where conflict and fragility have dismantled the systems digital transformation requires.[152] In response, UNDP's *Digital Transformation Framework* (2023) structures support through five pillars covering people, connectivity, government, regulation, and economy, addressing the layered governance gaps in access, literacy, and governance that fragile states face.[153] Addressing the five pillars together builds the connectivity, regulatory, and institutional foundations that inclusive digital infrastructure requires.[154] For UNDP, these distinctions define the scope of its work.[155] UNDP's primary mandate, achieving sustainable human development, supports DPI and DPG initiatives as a means towards that goal.[156] Other United Nations bodies and organizations hold separate responsibilities in AI ethics, cybercrime regulation, and digital trade governance.[157] AI has become one of the fastest-growing frontiers within global digital governance, presenting opportunities for development and risks of deepening existing inequalities across countries.[158]

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[145] United Nations Development Programme. *Management Response to the Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Digitalization of Public Services (DP/2024/7)*. 2024.
[146] International Telecommunication Union. *ICT Development Index 2025*. 2025. pp. 4-6.
[147] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. p. 7.
[148] World Economic Forum. *Digital Innovation and Governance Aren't Mutually Exclusive – They Are Inextricable.* 2026.
[149] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. p. 7.
[150] Ibid; United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP's Offer on Fragile and Conflict-Affected States*. 2023.
[151] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. pp. 7-9.
[152] Ibid.
[153] United Nations Development Programme. *Digital Transformation Framework.* 2023. p. 5.
[154] United Nations Development Programme. *From Vision to Action: Explaining UNDP's Digital Transformation Framework (Concept Note).* 2023. p. 5.
[155] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. pp. 13-17.
[156] Ibid. p. 13.
[157] United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 2025*. 2025. p. 153.
[158] Ibid.

International and Regional Framework

Universal access to the internet is a human right.[159] The *Declaration on the Right to Development* (1986) established that all people have the fundamental right to participate in and benefit from development, creating the rights-based foundation for later United Nations digital inclusion frameworks.[160] The two-phase *World Summit on the Information Society* (WSIS), Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005), built on this foundation, promoting a people-centered and inclusive information society while establishing the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as a multistakeholder forum for digital governance.[161] As a non-regulatory body, the IGF produces non-binding recommendations on connectivity, data rights, and cybersecurity, shaping international discourse without enforcing authority.[162] The General Assembly adopted resolution 68/167 on "The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age," affirming that rights held offline must be equally protected online.[163] UNDP's governance programming, under its Governance for People and Planet portfolio, identifies access to information as a core component of accountable digital governance, linking transparency and citizen participation to inclusive development under the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) (2015).[164]

The lack of uniform definitions across digital governance frameworks influences how international organizations coordinate efforts toward equitable digital development.[165] In contrast to DPI and DPGs, the digital commons, a governance philosophy emphasizing communal stewardship of digital resources lacks an internationally agreed-upon definition, making it susceptible to inconsistent interpretation across national policymaking.[166] Divergent interpretations complicate cross-border cooperation, as systems governed under incompatible national rules cannot deliver shared services or protections at scale.[167] In an effort to address this, the United Nations established the main development frameworks that continue to guide digital governance and digital inclusion efforts in 2015.[168] The General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda, designating SDG 9 (industry infrastructure and innovation), SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals) as UNDP's primary digital mandate anchors.[169] SDG target 9.c on ICT access and SDG target 16.9 on legal identity serve as the benchmark used to evaluate United Nations bodies' digital initiatives.[170] The *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* (2015) reinforced this framework by promoting blended finance, international technology cooperation, and capacity-building for

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[159] United Nations, General Assembly. *Declaration on the Right to Development (A/RES/41/128)*. 1986.
[160] Ibid.
[161] International Telecommunication Union. *World Summit on the Information Society: Documents*. 2003-2005; United Nations, General Assembly. *World Summit on the Information Society (A/RES/60/252)*. 2006.
[162] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Internet Governance Forum opens, marking 20 years of global digital cooperation*. 2025.
[163] United Nations, General Assembly. *The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age (A/RES/68/167)*. 2013.
[164] United Nations Development Programme. *Promoting an Open and Inclusive Public Sphere*. 2024; United Nations Development Programme. *Access to Information: Practice Note*. 2003. pp. 1-2.
[165] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. p. 10.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.
[168]United Nations, General Assembly. *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (A/RES/69/313)*. 2015; United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.
[169] United Nations. General Assembly. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.
[170] Ibid.

digital infrastructure in developing countries.[171] The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) adopted the *Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean* (eLAC2018) (2015), committing to infrastructure, connectivity, and digital rights aligned with the 2030 agenda.[172] The *New Urban Agenda* (2016) identified information and communication technology as a driver of sustainable urbanization, expanding the digital inclusion mandate into urban development.[173] With these commitments as building blocks, two major agreements adopted in 2024 strengthened the international framework for digital governance and cybersecurity cooperation.[174] The GDC*, annexed* to *the Pact for the Future* (2024), organizes global digital cooperation around five objectives, closing digital divides, expanding the benefits of the digital economy, protecting human rights online, advancing responsible data governance, and governing AI, and links through SDG 9, SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 16, and SDG 17.[175] In 2024, the General Assembly adopted the *United Nations Convention against Cybercrime*, the first comprehensive global treaty on cybercrime, administered by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).[176] The convention establishes measures for Member States to prevent and combat cybercrime, strengthen international cooperation, and provide technical assistance directly to developing countries building cybersecurity governance capacity alongside DPI systems.[177] Regional and national frameworks extend this cooperation, as the *African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection* (2014) sets continental standards for cybercrime prevention and data protection that African Union (AU) members translate into national data protection laws.[178]

The United Nations continuously works to renovate the existing digital framework for practical implementation.[179] Frameworks drafted before the current generation of digital technologies require updating to remain effective.[180] In 2020, United Nations and the African Union Commission advanced the digital cooperation agenda grounded in the 2030 Agenda through complementary frameworks addressing methodical implementation, certification standards, and continental digital strategy.[181] Also in 2020, UNDP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) co-facilitated the launch of the *Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) Standard*, providing the criteria to certify open digital tools as DPGs.[182] Certification helps governments identify open tools that meet current privacy standards and advance the SDGs.[183] The GDC (2024) later referenced this standard in its Objective 1 commitments, integrating it within international

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[171] United Nations, General Assembly. *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (A/RES/69/313)*. 2015.
[172] United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC2018)*. 2015.
[173] United Nations, General Assembly. *New Urban Agenda (A/RES/71/256)*. 2016.
[174] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1).* 2024.
[175] Ibid; United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024.
[176] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1).* 2024; United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Convention against Cybercrime (A/RES/79/243).* 2024.
[177] United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Convention against Cybercrime (A/RES/79/243).* 2024.
[178] African Union. *African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection*. 2014.
[179] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024.
[180] Ibid. p. 10.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Digital Public Goods Alliance. *Digital Public Goods Standard*. 2020.
[183] Ibid.

digital governance frameworks.[184] The African Union Commission adopted the *Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020-2030* (2020), establishing a continental framework aligned with both the *AU Agenda 2063* and the 2030 Agenda.[185] Together, these frameworks allow for more coordinated digital development planning across United Nations systems.[186] However, implementation of this framework remained limited by persistent gaps in connectivity infrastructure, institutional capacity, and financing across LDCs and fragile states.[187]

Role of the International System

UNDP plays a vital role in implementing international digital agreements and standards across Member States.[188] WSIS assigned technical implementation to ITU and cultural and educational responsibilities to UNESCO.[189] UNDP retained a limited coordinating role, leaving development-focused digital governance without a dedicated institutional home.[190] The *UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-2029* (2025) identifies digital and AI transformation as one of UNDP's three main development accelerators, guiding UNDP's programming across sectors and country contexts.[191] The Chief Digital Office manages the *Digital Strategy 2022-2025* (2022) and oversees the AI Sprint, UNDP's organization-wide initiative for responsible AI governance.[192] It also coordinates the UNDP Accelerator Labs, whose laboratories develop locally grounded solutions to digital inclusion and governance challenges.[193] The UNDP Executive Board reviews program implementation and holds UNDP accountable for development outcomes, including digital transformation.[194] This oversight gives Member States a central role in shaping UNDP's strategic direction, including its digital and AI transformation agenda.[195] With UNDP, Member States establish digital transformation priorities through leadership, sustainable program design, and resource allocation.[196]

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[184] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024.
[185] African Union Commission. *Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020–2030*. 2020. pp. 9-10.
[186] Ibid. pp. 8-9, 14; United Nations, Secretary-General. *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation: Report of the Secretary-General*. 2020. p. 23; Digital Public Goods Alliance. *Digital Public Goods Standard*. 2020. pp. 5-7.
[187] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. pp. 11-12.
[188] United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan 2026–2029 (DP/2025/22)*. 2025. pp. 3-4.
[189] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. p. 10.
[190] Ibid.
[191] United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan 2026–2029 (DP/2025/22)*. 2025. pp. 5, 9-10.
[192] United Nations Development Programme. *Digital Strategy 2022-2025*. 2022.
[193] United Nations Development Programme. *Accelerator Labs Network 2025 Annual Report: Six-Year Journey*. 2026. p. 3.
[194] United Nations Development Programme. *Management Response to the Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Digitalization of Public Services (DP/2024/7)*. 2024. pp. 9-10.
[195] United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-2029* (DP/2025/22). 2025. pp. 2, 10, 16.
[196] United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan 2026–2029*. 2025. pp. 1, 9.

The GDC divides digital governance responsibilities across the United Nations system.[197] Under GDC Objective 1, UNDP, in conjunction with ITU and UNESCO, supports development of DPI while maintaining connectivity standards and AI ethical frameworks.[198] Under Objective 5, UNDP supports AI readiness while UNESCO maintains the AI ethics frameworks and partners with UNDP on national AI capacity-building.[199] UNODC administers the *United Nations Convention against Cybercrime* (2024), providing Member States enforcement measures and cybercrime governance standards.[200] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) manages digital trade and e-commerce frameworks through policy reviews and its annual SDG Pulse monitoring, which quantifies the financing gaps constraining digitalization.[201] This distribution of mandates positions UNDP's development role within the GDC's multi-institutional architecture.[202]

Digital governance requires coordination because no single agency can manage digital transformation alone.[203] At the 2024 Summit of the Future Action Day, UNDP and ITU co-led SDG Digital, securing over a billion dollars in public and private commitments to connectivity, infrastructure, and digital skills.[204] The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development worked alongside UNDP and the African Union Commission to develop the *Data Governance Toolkit* (2025), providing Member States rights-based frameworks for data governance and equitable AI deployment.[205] The Republic of Mozambique adopted its *National Data Governance Policy* (2025) and *Implementation Strategy* (2025) following structured capacity-building and stakeholder consultation, producing a roadmap with pilot projects in agriculture, health, and finance.[206] United Nations Legal Identity Task Force, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), and UNICEF coordinate civil registration and digital identity programs to advance SDG Target 16.9 for over 300 million people.[207] These partnerships provide the multi-institutional context in which all agencies design and implement their digital infrastructure, inclusion, and AI governance.[208]

Civil society organizations (CSOs) shape national digital governance policies.[209] They provide community-level accountability and rights-based perspectives that technical frameworks alone cannot

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[197] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact* (A/RES/79/1). 2024.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.
[200] United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Convention against Cybercrime (A/RES/79/243).* 2024.
[201] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1).* 2024.
[202] Ibid.
[203] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. p. 13.
[204] United Nations Development Programme. *First Regular Session of the Executive Board 2025*. 2025.
[205] Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development. *Data Governance Toolkit: Navigating Data in the Digital Age*. 2025. pp. 9-10.
[206] Ibid. United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa. *ECA is Advancing the AU Data Governance Framework in Mozambique*. 2025.
[207] United Nations Development Programme. *Legal Identity Programme*. N.d.; United Nations Development Programme. *OneRegistry Joint Programme Document*. 2025.
[208] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024.
[209] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. pp. 4, 7.

reflect.[210] UNDP integrates civil society perspectives into national digital transformation strategies through its country offices, aligning governance initiatives with the priorities of affected communities.[211] Digital Impact Alliance research documents this role, showing CSOs advancing DPI accountability through policy advocacy, digital rights education, and community-based monitoring.[212] CSOs partnerships strengthen multiple United Nations bodies' rights-based approach to digital governance, particularly in areas of data protection and accountability mechanisms for DPI deployment.[213] This engagement reflects the GDC's multi-stakeholder commitment to digital governance, which recognizes that effective digital transformation requires participation from government, the private sector, civil society, and the communities most affected by digital exclusion.[214]

Building Inclusive Digital Systems: Infrastructure, Connectivity and Governance

Structural gaps in connectivity, affordability, and governance continue to limit DPI's potential to expand government service delivery across developing Member States.[215] In 2025, LDCs had fewer than 29% of women online compared to 41% of men, reflecting structural barriers that connectivity investment alone cannot overcome.[216] The *Gender Snapshot* (2025) identifies these gaps as overlapping constraints, including affordability, social norms restricting device ownership, and unequal digital literacy access.[217] UNDP's *Digital Transformation Framework* (2023) addresses infrastructure and governance together, recognizing that access without governance produces systems that exclude the populations they are designed to support.[218] GDC Objective 1 commits Member States to connect all people and establish DPI safeguards by 2030.[219]

Legal identity is a prerequisite for accessing digital government services, yet an estimated 800 million people worldwide still lack it.[220] SDG Target 16.9 on legal identity calls for universal civil registration by 2030, but roughly half of Member States still lack such systems, leaving millions in LDCs and fragile states formally unrecognized.[221] The gap in legal identity has direct consequences for social protection.[222] Per the World Bank Group's *State of Social Protection Report* 2025, 2 billion people lack adequate

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[210] Access Now, & European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL). Joint Recommendations & Resources for the United Nations Global Digital Compact. 2024. p. 2.
[211] United Nations Development Programme. Digital Governance. 2024.
[212] Onyango. Digital Impact Alliance. *The People's Network: Civil Society Organizations in Digital Public Infrastructure Development in Africa*. 2025. p. 1.
[213] United Nations Development Programme. *Digital Governance*. 2024.
[214] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024.
[215] United Nations Development Programme. *Digital Transformation Framework*. 2025. p. 5.
[216] International Telecommunication Union. *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2025*. 2025 pp. 3-5; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Gender Snapshot 2025*. 2025. p. 5.
[217] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Gender Snapshot 2025*. 2025. p. 5.
[218] United Nations Development Programme. *Inclusive by Design: Accelerating Digital Transformation for the Global Goals*. 2022. pp. 4-6.
[219] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024.
[220] World Bank Group. *ID4D Global Dataset 2025*. 2025; United Nations Development Programme. *Management Response to the Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Digitalization of Public Services (DP/2024/7)*. 2024.
[221] United Nations Development Programme. *Legal Identity Programme*. N.d.
[222] United Nations Statistics Division. *United Nations Legal Identity Agenda Task Force*. N.d.

coverage.[223] Most modern social protection programs now depend on digital ID and interoperable civil registries to verify eligibility, disburse e-payments, and prevent duplicate enrollment, so without a recognized legal identity, people are effectively locked out of the systems.[224] This scale of exclusion is most relevant in low-income Member States, as three out of every four people cannot access essential social services, showing how weak civil registrations systems hinder development progress.[225] UNDP's Legal Identity Programme supports Member States in building inclusive, rights-respecting civil registration systems that advance SDG target 16.9 on legal identity.[226] The OneRegistry joint program establishes interoperable civil registration platforms that connect national systems and extend registration to populations in remote and conflict-affected areas.[227] UNDP's *Model Governance Framework for Digital Legal Identity* (2024) provides a standards-based template for designing rights-respecting identity systems that protect personal data and prevent discriminatory exclusion.[228] Together, these initiatives address the exclusion of people whose unrecognized identity cuts them off from services and legal protection.[229]

Weak governance frameworks can undermine the effectiveness and security of DPI systems.[230] UNDP identifies three main causes of failure when implementing DPI, including design flaws that limit access to eligible populations, fragmented agencies that force registration across multiple systems, and resource deficits that prevent proper oversight.[231] Design flaws manifest as eligibility criteria that exclude undocumented populations, while agency fragmentation forces individuals to register separately across ministries, creating barriers for remote and displaced populations.[232] Resource deficits aggregate these failures by leaving DPI systems without the maintenance capacity or accountability mechanisms required to remain functional and inclusive.[233] UNDP identifies cybersecurity governance as a prerequisite for DPI integrity, since digital identity systems concentrate large volumes of sensitive personal data in centralized platforms, making them high-value targets for exploitation.[234] In developing Member States, these governance deficits limit the capacity to implement and maintain adequate cybersecurity frameworks

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[223] World Bank Group. *State of Social Protection Report 2025*. 2025. p. xxi, 21.
[224] Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit et al. *Building an Integrated and Digital Social Protection Information System*. 2020. pp. 30-32.
[225] World Bank Group. *State of Social Protection Report 2025*. 2025. p. xxi; United Nations Development Programme. *Management Response to the Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Digitalization of Public Services (DP/2024/7)*. 2024. p. 7.
[226] United Nations Development Programme. *OneRegistry Joint Programme Document*. 2025; United Nations Development Programme. *Model Governance Framework for Digital Legal Identity*. N.d; United Nations Development Programme. *OneRegistry: Transforming Local Administrative Data Collection Systems for SDG Acceleration in Sri Lanka.* 2024.
[227] Ibid. 2024.
[228] United Nations Development Programme. *Model Governance Framework for Digital Legal Identity*. N.d.
[229] United Nations Development Programme. *OneRegistry Joint Programme Document*. 2025. p. 26; United Nations Development Programme. *Model Governance Framework for Digital Legal Identity*. 2023.
[230] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. p. 7.
[231] United Nations Development Programme. *The DPI Approach - A Playbook: Mapping the Journey from Conventional Public Service Delivery to the DPI Approach*. August 2023. pp. 51-52.
[232] Ibid. p. 15.
[233] United Nations Development Programme. *The DPI Approach - A Playbook: Mapping the Journey from Conventional Public Service Delivery to the DPI Approach.* 2023. pp. 36-52.
[234] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. p. 7.

alongside DPI systems, leaving sensitive identity data exposed to exploitation.[235] Digital identity systems that collect sensitive data without adequate privacy protections risk discouraging participation from vulnerable populations, reinforcing the barriers DPI seeks to address.[236] UNDP and United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology developed the *Universal DPI Safeguards Framework* (2023), creating guidelines for user-centered, rights-based DPI systems with open-source architectures and accountability tools.[237] The framework gives delegates a reference for weighing the safeguards, oversight, and financing inclusive DPI requires.[238]

Transparent governance and open standards are essential to ensure fair public digital systems that protect digital rights and serve the public interest.[239] UNDP's Inclusive by Design framework explains that DPGs allow local adaptation and interoperability without vendor lock-in, the dependence on a single private provider for critical infrastructure, while proprietary DPI architectures can restrict government oversight and technological independence by concentrating infrastructure control in one commercial provider.[240] Governments that retain architectural control through open standards preserve the capacity for independent auditing, competitive procurement, and rights-based accountability.[241] The *DPGA Standard* (2020), co-facilitated by UNDP and UNICEF, is referenced in GDC Objective 1 as the benchmark for open tools used in DPI development.[242] UNDP's *Digital Rights Dashboard* (2025) and *Governance Assessment Framework for Data Exchange Systems* (2025) provide Member States accountability frameworks to evaluate whether DPI systems serve all populations equitably and help guide the policy priorities that delegates may address through this committee.[243]

Governing Emerging Technologies for Equitable Development

AI development is concentrated among a few actors, creating major inequalities in global digital power.[244] UNDP's AI Readiness Index, introduced in the *Human Development Report 2025*, shows that Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries lead in AI infrastructure, while LDCs lack the capacity to participate on equal terms.[245] AI governance remains underdeveloped in part because regulatory institutions, technical expertise, and financing have not kept pace with AI adoption.[246] Most LDCs lack the regulatory and institutional capacity to build AI systems that reflect their

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[235] Ibid. pp. 38, 51.
[236] World Bank Group. *Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development: Toward the Digital Age.* 2017. pp. 5, 14.
[237] United Nations Development Programme. *The Universal Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Safeguards Framework: A Guide to Building Safe and Inclusive DPI for Societies*. 2024. pp. 23–25.
[238] United Nations Development Programme. *First Regular Session of the Executive Board 2025*. 2025; United Nations Development Programme. *OneRegistry Joint Programme Document*. 2025.
[239] United Nations Development Programme. *Inclusive by Design: Accelerating Digital Transformation for the Global Goals*. 2022. p. 4; United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024.
[240] Ibid. 2022. p. 16.
[241] Ibid. p. 20.
[242] United Nations Development Programme. *Digital Rights Dashboard: Pilot Country Insights*. 2025. p. 16; United Nations Development Programme. *Governance Assessment Framework for Data Exchange Systems*. 2025.
[243] Ibid.
[244] United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 2025*. 2025. p. 149.
[245] Ibid.
[246] United Nations, High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence. *Governing AI for Humanity: Final Report*. United Nations. 2024. p. 28.

local languages, cultural contexts, and development needs.[247] Many industrialized economies possess this capacity but have adopted only fragmented or voluntary approaches to AI regulation, leaving governance limited across income levels.[248] These constraints predate AI, as the *United Nations E-Government Survey* 2024 reports that many LDCs and fragile state governments lack basic internet connectivity.[249] UNCTAD estimates the annual digitalization financing gap for LDCs sits at USD 20.6 billion, worsening these disadvantages.[250] For these Member States, implementing international AI governance commitments remains difficult, limiting their participation in intergovernmental AI discussions.[251]

Digital transformation now shapes whether technological progress reduces or deepens existing development inequalities.[252] The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the consequences of inadequate digital governance, while AI has emerged as the next major frontier of digital transformation.[253] As Member States shifted services online, populations without digital access, particularly rural, female, and low-income, were largely excluded from emergency support.[254] Member States that had invested in DPI before 2020 showcased stronger response capacity, reaching an estimated 1.7 billion people through digital social transfers.[255] UNDP's *Human Development Report 2025* applies this lesson directly to AI, arguing that governance choices made today will determine whether the technology serves the public good or worsens exclusion.[256]

The United Nations has developed a coordinated framework to address global inequalities in AI governance and access.[257] In 2024, General Assembly created the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue on AI Governance, both of which serve as standing mechanisms through which developing Member States can shape AI governance.[258] These mechanisms pursue safe and trustworthy AI guards against harmful deployments, capacity-building to close readiness deficits, and interoperability for equitable cross-border AI deployment.[259] UNDP's *AI and Human Security* (2025) identifies data sovereignty, a government's right to control how its population's data is collected, stored, and used, as foundational to AI development that serves national priorities.[260] Regional action

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[247] United Nations Development Programme. *AI and Human Security*. 2025. p. 149.
[248] United Nations. *Governing AI for Humanity: Final Report*. Report of the High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence. 2024. pp. 7-9.
[249] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *E-Government Survey 2024: Accelerating Digital Transformation for Sustainable Development*. 2024. pp. 70-74.
[250] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. *SDG Pulse 2025.* 2025.
[251] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *E-Government Survey 2024: Accelerating Digital Transformation for Sustainable Development.* 2024. pp. 164-165.
[252] United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. pp. 4-5.
[253] Research Information Communication Technology Africa. *COVID-19 Responses in the Global South*. 2023. pp. 9-10.
[254] United Nations Development Programme. *Inclusive by Design: Accelerating Digital Transformation for the Global Goals*. 2022. p. 4.
[255] World Bank Group. *State of Social Protection Report 2025*. 2025. p. 52.
[256] United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 2025*. 2025. pp. 6,103.
[257] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024.
[258] United Nations, General Assembly. *Terms of reference and modalities for the establishment and functioning of the Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence and the Global Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence Governance (A/RES/79/325)*. 2025.
[259] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024.
[260] United Nations Development Programme. *AI and Human Security*. 2025. pp. 8, 10.

complements these mechanisms, as the AU's *Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy* (2024) commits its members to a common, development-centered approach to AI governance.[261] Civil society organizations, including Access Now and ECNL, further contributed by submitting joint recommendations to the GDC advocating human rights-based, multistakeholder AI governance.[262] In 2026 UNESCO and UNDP launched Data Governance for Inclusive Digital and AI Futures, bringing together officials from 23 Member States across Africa, Asia, and the Arab States to design rights-based national data governance frameworks.[263]

UNDP's AI governance programs help developing Member States build fair, accountable, and nationally controlled AI systems.[264] The AI Sprint, led by UNDP's Chief Digital Office, turns these commitments into local action by protecting country-level data ownership, making AI systems transparent, and ensuring the tools UNDP deploys undergo rights-based evaluation.[265] UNDP's *AI and Human Security Policy Paper* (2025) provides country-level guidance on building domestic AI research, data sovereignty frameworks, and national AI governance standards.[266] Through South Africa's G20 2025 AI Task Force, UNDP helps developing Member States shape intergovernmental AI negotiations.[267]

Conclusion

The challenge outlined in this guide is not primarily technical, as Member States already possess the frameworks, partnerships, and tools to build inclusive digital systems and govern emerging technologies equitably.[268] Whether governance investment reaches the people furthest from development before the digital divide becomes permanent remains unresolved.[269] UNDP Executive Board holds the organization accountable for its digital results.[270] Through this forum, Member States direct UNDP's work across the areas of legal identity, DPI governance, and AI capacity-building.[271] This oversight links international commitments to outcomes for people currently outside the digital economy.[272] The first Global Dialogue on AI Governance and WSIS Forum 2026 and the inaugural report of the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI will have just reshaped the multilateral baseline before the conference opens.[273] The 6th

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[261] African Union. *Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy: Harnessing AI for Africa's Development and Prosperity*. 2024. p. 28.
[262] Access Now. Joint Recommendations & Resources for the United Nations Global Digital Compact. 2024. p. 2.
[263] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Governments Advance Rights-Based Data Governance to Unlock Inclusive AI Futures*. 2026.
[264] United Nations Development Programme. *AI and Human Security*. 2025. p. 8.
[265] United Nations Development Programme. *Digital Strategy 2022–2025*. 2022. pp. 9-10; United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. pp. 13-15.
[266] United Nations Development Programme. *AI and Human Security*. 2025. p. 149.
[267]United Nations Development Programme. *South Africa Sets Its Ambitious G20 Agenda for Digital Public Infrastructure and AI*. 2025.
[268] United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan 2026–2029*. 2025. p. 9-10.
[269] United Nations Development Programme. *Inclusive by Design: Accelerating Digital Transformation for the Global Goals*. 2022. pp. 4-6; United Nations Development Programme. *A Shared Vision for Digital Technology and Governance*. 2024. p. 13.
[270] United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan 2026–2029*. 2025. pp. 2,10,16.
[271] United Nations, General Assembly. *Pact for the Future, Annex II: Global Digital Compact (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024.
[272] United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan 2026–2029* (DP/2025/22). 2025. pp. 8-10.
[273] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Global Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence Governance*. 2026; International Telecommunication Union. *World Summit on the Information Society*

United Nations World Data Forum and the 2026 Internet Governance Forum, the first IGF convened as a permanent United Nations body, will further shift the environment for UNDP's digital commitments.[274]

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research on how to address this topic, they should consider: How can LDCs develop data sovereignty frameworks and domestic AI capacity given structural digitalization financing gaps? How does the UNDP Executive Board translate Member State resolutions into equitable country-level digital programming outcomes? How do fragile states build rights-based civil registration systems toward universal legal identity under SDG Target 16.9 on legal identity?

(WSIS) Forum 2026. 2026; United Nations. *Independent International Scientific Panel on AI: Frequently Asked Questions*. 2026.

[274] United Nations Statistics Division. *About the United Nations World Data Forum*. 2026; Internet Governance Forum. *IGF 2026*. 2026.

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