



Technical and statistical report

## SDG Pulse 2024

The pulse of progress towards  
the Sustainable Development Goals



United  
Nations





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**United  
Nations**

Geneva, 2024

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United Nations publication issued by the United Nations  
Conference on Trade and Development.

UNCTAD/STAT/2024/1  
ISBN: 978-92-1-003130-1  
eISBN: 978-92-1-358951-9  
ISSN: 2789-9543  
eISSN: 2789-9551  
Sales No. E.24.II.D.10

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# Foreword

In a world awash with information, credible data is the bedrock of effective strategies for sustainable development, especially as climate change, environmental challenges, the consequences of the pandemic, escalating wars and human conflict are impacting developing economies' ability to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2024 SDG Pulse report, a comprehensive analysis of our progress towards the SDGs, provides a vital snapshot – a 'pulse' – of our current reality, allowing us to zoom into the gaps, setbacks, and successes of countries to inform targeted actions.

This sixth edition paints a complex picture of global development, highlighting the stark disparities that persist despite significant advancements. On trade, for example, it shows that while the value of global trade in services has demonstrated resilience, growing by 8.9% globally in 2023 and even 9.5% in developing economies, merchandise trade has faltered, declining by 4.6% globally and 6.3% in developing economies. This disparity is particularly pronounced in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), whose share of global exports remains stubbornly at around 1%, a far cry from the SDG target of doubling it.

These trade imbalances are further exacerbated by the escalating debt burden of developing economies, which has more than doubled in the past decade. This alarming trend, coupled with a shortage of development finance and the increasing concentration of foreign direct investment, fuels inequalities both within and between countries, hindering progress towards achieving the SDGs on time.

Yet, amidst these challenges, there are signs of progress. The 2024 SDG Pulse presents early estimates of illicit financial flows for a related SDG indicator, developed with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the UN Regional Commissions. We also share progress in a joint project to assist countries in collecting and reporting their own data on South-South cooperation, based on a voluntary framework that seeks to change the development support narrative with data developed, compiled, and endorsed by the countries of the global South.

The report also delves into UNCTAD's data on trade in plastics, oceans trade, and biodiversity-based goods trade, emphasizing the urgency of the green transition and the need for equitable access to clean energy and sustainable solutions.

This SDG Pulse is structured around the four transformations of UNCTAD15's Bridgetown Covenant (UNCTAD, 2021): multilateralism and trade, sustainability and resilience, development finance, and diversification. It also features an In-Focus section on gender equality in international trade, based on a new set of indicators that reveal persistent disparities and highlight the need for targeted policies for women in trade.

This report serves as a call to action, urging policymakers, businesses, and civil society to leverage its insights to drive meaningful change. The upcoming United Nations Summit of the Future in September offers a unique opportunity to recalibrate our efforts and ensure the 2030 Agenda is put back on track. The time for data-informed action is now.



**Rebeca Grynspan**

Secretary General of UNCTAD



# Abbreviations

<b>2G</b>	Second generation of cellular network technology
<b>3G</b>	Third generation of cellular network technology
<b>4G</b>	Fourth generation of cellular network technology
<b>5G</b>	Fifth generation of cellular network technology
<b>CDP</b>	Committee for Development Policy
<b>CO<sub>2</sub></b>	Carbon dioxide
<b>DMFAS</b>	Debt Management and Financial Analysis System
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technology
<b>IFF</b>	Illicit financial flow
<b>IGI</b>	Inclusive growth index
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>ITC</b>	International Trade Centre
<b>LDC</b>	Least developed country
<b>LLDC</b>	Landlocked developing country
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PCI</b>	Productive Capacities Index
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SIDS</b>	Small island developing states
<b>SIGI</b>	Social institution and gender index
<b>TESS</b>	Forum on Trade, Environment & the SDGs
<b>UNDRR</b>	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>WMO</b>	World Meteorological Organization
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization



# Introduction

As we pass the half-way mark of the 2030 Agenda, concerns about achieving sustainable development for all are mounting. The SDG Pulse reveals progress in various areas, but setbacks continue to undermine momentum. Economic and social distress, particularly for those most in need, is exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, and in Gaza, leading to longer and more expensive trade routes, increased hunger and food insecurity, and rising CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, impacting developing countries' ability to meet the SDGs, and the need for reliable information becomes even more critical.

SDG Pulse serves three main purposes: firstly, to update on the evolution of selected official SDG indicators and complementary data and statistics; second, to report on progress in developing new concepts and methodologies for SDG indicators for which UNCTAD is a global custodian; and third, to showcase UNCTAD's support to member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Building on the previous edition, SDG Pulse continues to track progress according to four transformations identified at UNCTAD's intergovernmental meeting in Bridgetown (UNCTAD, 2021).

The report also delves into thematic issues relevant to the 2030 Agenda bringing to the forefront key messages related to trade and multilateralism, development finance, economic diversification, and sustainability and resilience. This year's In-Focus topic explores gender equality in trade. Despite global advancements, gender inequality persists, affecting women's lives through economic participation, education, health, and political empowerment worldwide. UNCTAD's new gender equality in trade indicator set helps illuminate gender gaps in trade to inform effective policy actions and accelerate just and equal development.

This overview provides a glance at recent developments and analysis related to sustainable development. The full SDG Pulse report is available online, and readers are invited to explore the comprehensive report at: <https://sdgpulse.unctad.org/>. The SDG Pulse online offers an interactive reading experience by theme, goal, and SDG indicator, equipped with interactive data visualizations and further analysis.







# 1. Services trade surged as goods trade fell in 2023

In 2023, global goods trade declined by 4.6%, while world services exports went up by 8.9%. In 2023, developing economies' total exports of goods and services saw a 3.7% dip to about \$12 trillion, following a record high of almost \$13 trillion in 2022. This downturn was primarily driven by a 6.3% fall in the value of trade in goods. In contrast, trade in services of developing economies increased notably by 9.5%.

In 2023, international travel receipts experienced a remarkable 56% annual increase in developing regions. However, transport exports dropped by an estimated 17% compared to the previous year, driven by the decline in freight transport value.

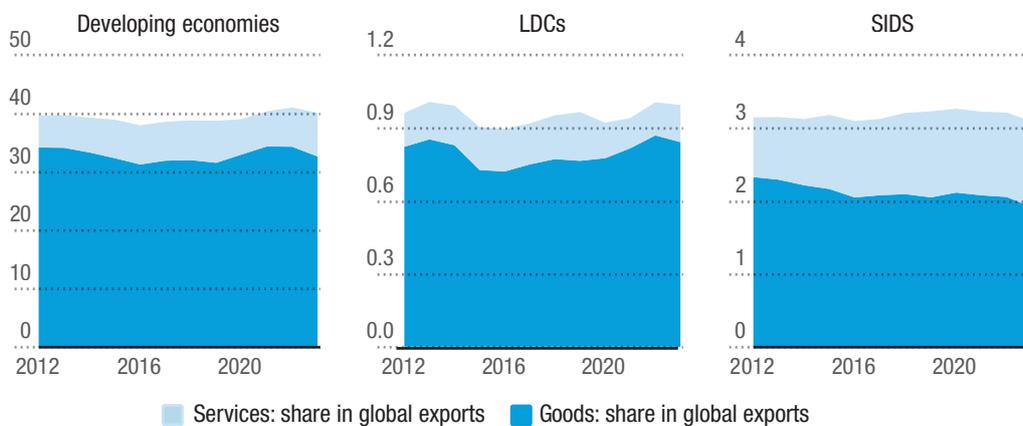
## Developing economies' share in global trade stagnates

Developing economies did not manage to increase their share in global trade in 2023, and the trend was similar for LDCs and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). While SDG target 17.11 sought to double the LDCs' share of global exports from one per cent in 2011 to two per cent, despite growth in absolute terms, LDCs' share in world exports of goods and services remained flat at around one per cent in 2023. In comparison, SIDS accounted for three per cent of global exports in 2023, while all developing economies collectively represented 40%. Within LDCs' export share, goods accounted for 0.8% and services for 0.2%.

Developing economies export 30% of global services; LDCs only 0.6%.

**Figure 1. LDCs are not on track to reach SDG Target 17.11 to significantly increase their share in global exports**

Percentage of global exports (SDG 17.11.1)



Source: UNCTADstat (UNCTAD, 2024a).

Note: Year 2023 figures are preliminary. Goods are measured according to the balance of payments concepts.

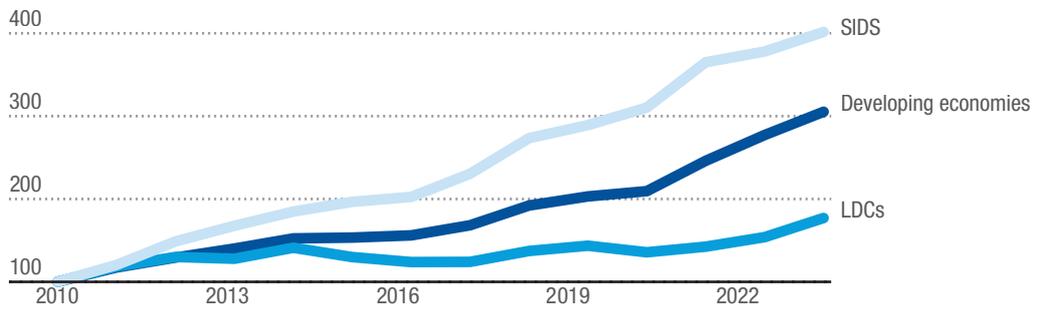
## Digitalization drives the surge in trade in services

Boosted by the pandemic, digital trade, encompassing products ordered or delivered remotely over computer networks, has surged in significance over the past decade. While services such as transport, travel or construction faced sharp declines with the pandemic, digitally deliverable services trade witnessed a notable uptick across all regions and country groups. In 2023, the exports of digitally deliverable services from developing economies were three times higher than in 2010, with SIDS experiencing a four-fold increase. The increase in SIDS was particularly boosted by Singapore’s services exports.

**Figure 2.**  
**LDCs lag in trade of digitally deliverable services**

Exports, Index (2010 = 100)

Exports of digitally deliverable services more than tripled in developing economies since 2010, but LDCs lag behind.



Source: UNCTADstat (UNCTAD, 2024a).

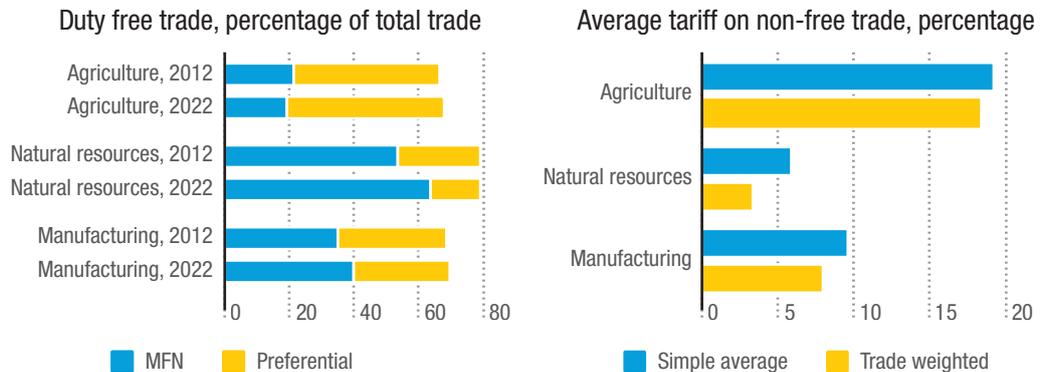
Note: Year 2023 figures are preliminary.

## Two thirds of global trade now tariff-free, with tariffs trending down

Between 2012 and 2022, most-favoured nation and preferential tariffs registered a slight decline in agriculture, manufacturing, and natural resources. In 2022, agricultural trade was largely free from tariffs, while the remaining tariffs were fairly high at nearly 20%. Preferential access remains significant for trade in manufacturing products with non-free trade tariffs averaging at around ten per cent in 2022.

**Figure 3.**  
**Two thirds of international trade is free of tariffs in 2022, but the remaining tariffs are still high**

Agricultural trade is mainly tariff-free, the remaining tariffs are fairly high.



Source: UNCTAD calculations based on UNCTAD (2024b), ITC (2024) and WTO (2024).

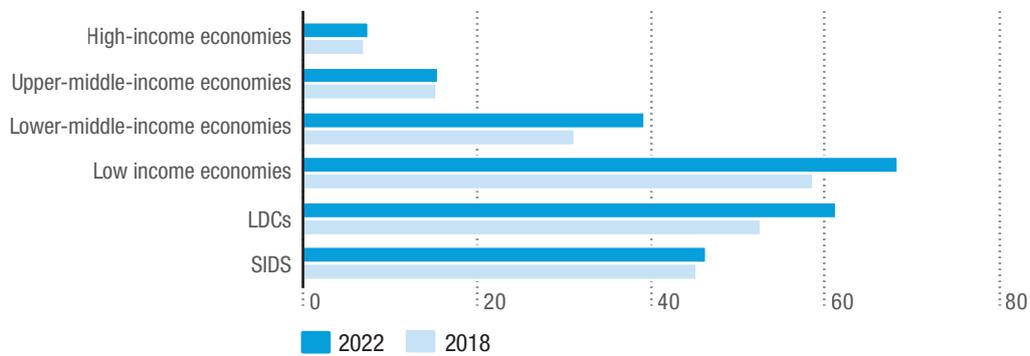
## The goal to end hunger is falling further behind schedule

Since the early 2000s, the world has seen a reduction in hunger; however, recent years have witnessed a troubling reversal of this progress. This deterioration is particularly pronounced in LDCs where 61% of the population faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2022. Additionally, due to the conflict above 1 million people have been driven into a food catastrophe in Gaza. Trade is crucial in the global effort to enhance food security, with a significant portion of merchandise trade in many economies consisting of food ready for consumption.

The median country imports 12% of its merchandise as basic food.

**Figure 4.** Food security deteriorating most where hunger was already prevalent

Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the total population, percentage (SDG 2.1.2)



Source: FAO (2024).

Note: Numbers are three-year averages with 2022 representing the period 2021–2023 and 2018 the period 2017–2019.





# 2.

## Despite new highs, development assistance far from agreed targets

In 2023, total official development assistance (ODA) reached a record high of \$223.7 billion, an annual increase of 1.8% (OECD, 2024a). Despite this fifth consecutive annual record level, the share of ODA in gross national income only reached 0.37%, lagging significantly from the committed target of 0.70%.

LDCs, Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and SIDS confront heightened challenges in achieving their development goals. Total resource flows to these countries, comprising ODA, other official flows and private flows, exhibited slow growth post-2008, with heightened volatility during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and the highs of 2020. Despite the decline since then, total resource disbursements remained higher in 2021 than pre-COVID-19-levels, totalling \$60.4 billion for LDCs and \$37.2 billion for LLDCs. Funding for SIDS was more modest at \$4.2 billion in 2021 with greater volatility observed around the peak in 2007.

### Aid for trade disbursements reached a new high in 2023

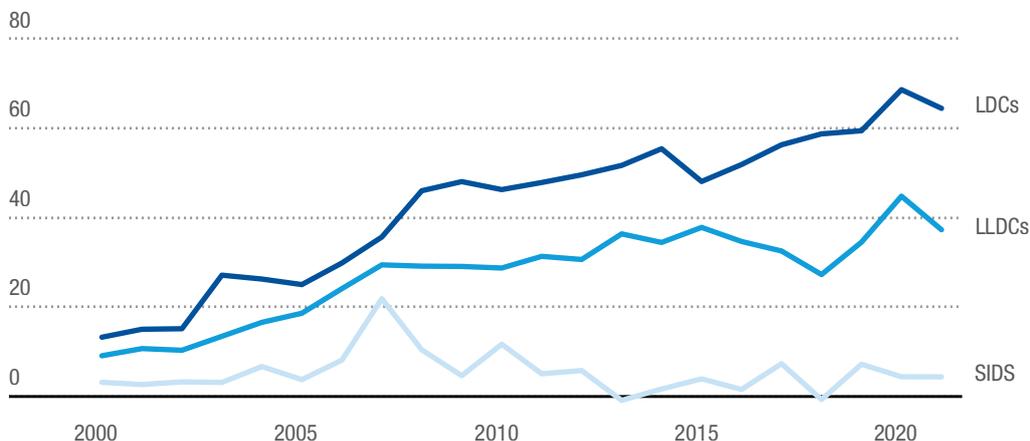
In 2022, Aid for Trade reached a new high, with over \$55.3 billion disbursed to developing economies out of the \$69.6 billion committed. Aid for Trade commitments for developing economies rose by 15% in 2022 compared to 2021. However, the Aid for Trade Gap increased again after a significant drop in 2021, slightly surpassing the long-term average at \$14.4 billion. The Aid for Trade gap for LDCs remained at \$5.6 billion in 2022, leaving disbursements 27% short of commitments.



#### Figure 5.

#### Sharp decline in total assistance for development after the COVID-19 pandemic for LDCs and LLDCs; for SIDS the flows remain stagnant

Billions of United States dollars (SDG 10.b.1)



Source: UNCTAD calculations based on data from OECD (2024) and United Nations (2024).

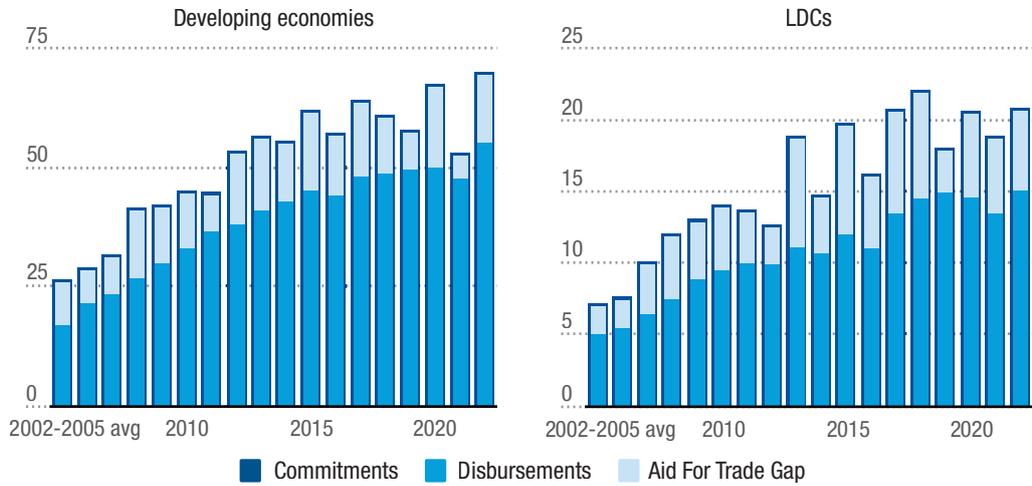
Despite a sharp decline, total resource disbursements remained higher than pre-pandemic levels, at \$60.4 billion for LDCs and \$37.2 billion for LLDCs.



**Figure 6.**  
**The Aid for Trade gap returned to its long-term average in 2022**

Billions of United States dollars in constant 2021 prices (SDG 8.a.1)

Aid for Trade disbursements more than tripled since 2002, and represent about one third of total ODA.



Source: UNCTAD calculations based on data from OECD (2024c).

Note: Aid for Trade gap is calculated as the difference between Aid for Trade commitments and disbursements.

3.3 billion people live in countries that spend more on interest than on health and education.

### A long way towards aligning global investment flows with SDGs

Amid an economic slowdown and rising geopolitical tensions, global foreign direct investment (FDI) fell by two per cent, while flows to developing economies fell by seven per cent in 2023 from 2022, most steeply in Asia (UNCTAD, 2024c). FDI flows to LDCs rose to \$31 billion, or 2.4% of global flows. SDG-relevant international project finance, crucial for infrastructure development, declined by 26%, while the number of SDG-related greenfield projects rose by two per cent, concentrating in developing economies with an increase of 15%.

### Developing economies' external debt stocks more than doubled in a decade

The external debt stocks of developing economies reached \$11.4 trillion in 2023, more than double the value recorded a decade ago. Since 2009, the total external debt stocks of developing economies have increased on average by 7.6% per annum, similar to the annual growth rates before the Global Financial Crisis (2000 to 2008). However, the pace of growth has markedly slow down after 2019 to 3.2% per annum, three times less than the growth rate of period from 2009 to 2018 at 9.9% per year.

### Data can unlock progress to curb illicit finance

Illicit financial flows (IFFs) deplete resources both when they leave and enter a country, fuelling money laundering and corruption, and undermining the rule of law and stability. As of now, 22 countries have piloted IFF measurement using methods developed by UNCTAD and UNODC for SDG indicator 16.4.1. The first official IFF estimates, released in 2023, reveal significant flows linked to trade, tax, and criminal activities.

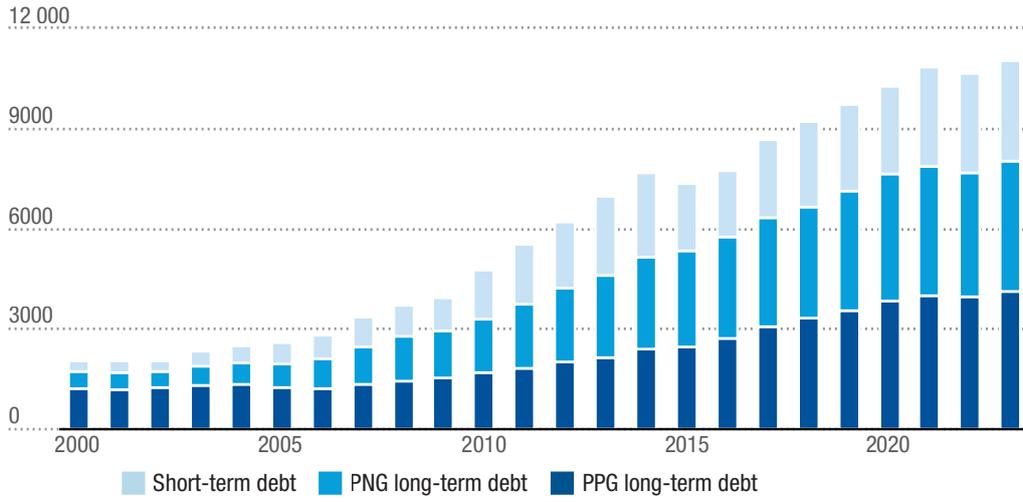


Currently, only a few economies report IFF data globally, while a global survey highlights the pressing need for support in applying recommended methodologies and tools. Tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance deprive countries of tax revenue, threatening human rights and particularly affecting vulnerable groups such as women, children, and people with disabilities. IFF estimates help to identify loopholes that must be closed to redirect funds to the official economy.



**Figure 7.**  
**Total external debt of developing economies continues to rise**

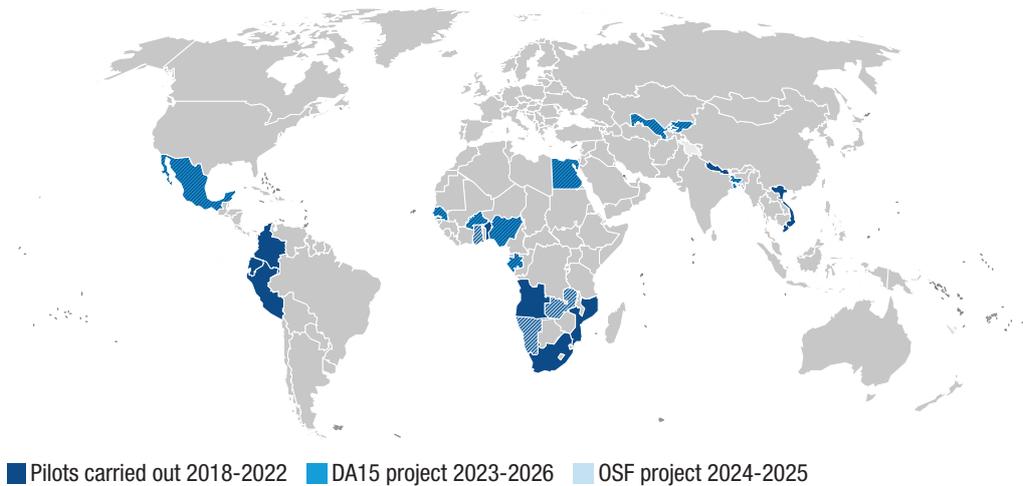
Billions of United States dollars



Source: UNCTAD calculations based on data from the World Bank (2024), IMF (2024) and national sources. Data for 2023 are estimated.



**Map 1.**  
**22 countries have studied the measurement of IFFs in 2018-2022 and twelve countries will do so between 2023 and 2026**



Source: UNCTAD and UNODC.

Note: Situation reflected on the map as of April 2024.

Concerted efforts needed to report data on SDG indicator 16.4.1 with harmonised methods.



# 3.

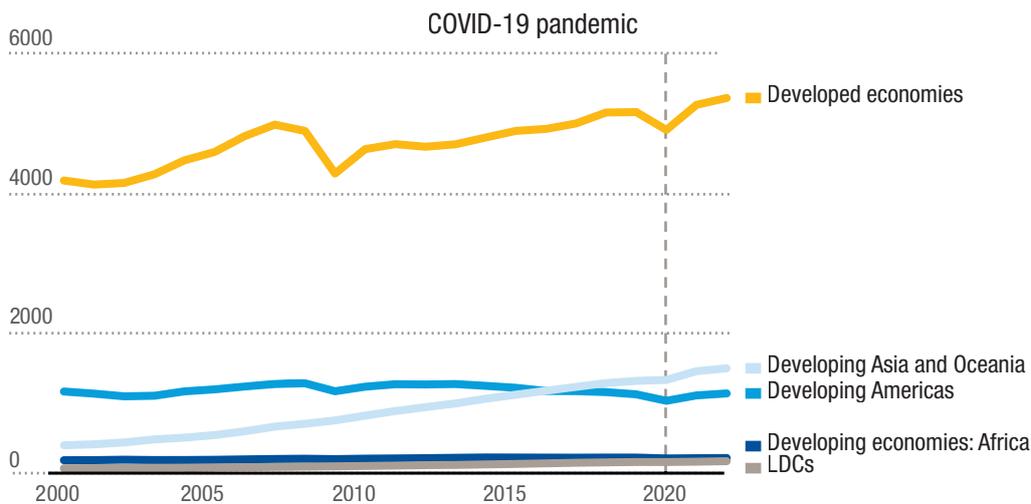
## Vulnerabilities, low diversification and digital divides leave Africa and LDCs behind

Over the past two decades, manufacturing value added per capita in developing Asia and Oceania has steadily risen to 3.5 times its 2002 value. In contrast, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced a slow decline over the last decade, with the region overtaken by Asia in 2016. Africa has seen a modest increase of 13% over 20 years, although there has been a recent downward trend since 2018, with a drop from \$216 to \$209 in 2022. In LDCs, manufacturing value added per capita averaged \$163, at 2015 prices, 33 times less than the average of the developed world. Despite this gap, LDCs have seen steady growth, reaching 4.5 times higher levels in 2022 compared to 2002. However, growth in LDCs has stagnated since the pandemic.



**Figure 8.** Manufacturing value added per capita: stable in most regions, rapid growth in Asia and Oceania

United States dollars in constant 2015 prices (SDG 9.2.1)



Source: UNCTAD calculation based on UNCTADstat (UNCTAD, 2024a).

Developed economies' manufacturing value added per capita is over 25 times higher than in Africa.

## Disruptions persist in maritime transport, challenging its resilience

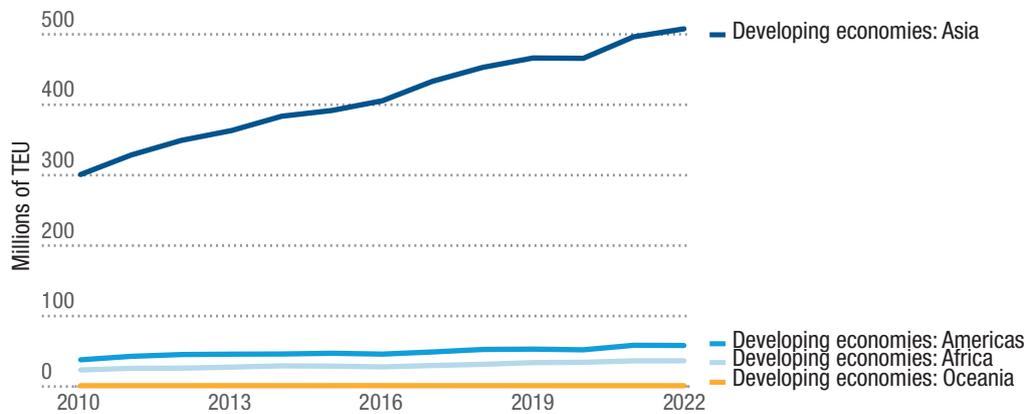
Containerized trade recovered by 1.2% in 2023.

After a 3.7% drop in 2022, UNCTAD forecasts a modest recovery in containerised trade with growth of 1.2% in 2023 and between 2.9% and 3.2% annually from 2024 to 2028, still below historic growth rates. In 2022, regional and route differences were notable: a 6.5% decline in containerized trade between East-Asia, especially in China, and the United States of America, a 4.9% on the Asia-Europe route but increases in intraregional routes (particularly intra-Asian) and other routes involving developing economies. Despite these variations, main East-West routes continue to dominate global containerized flows.



**Figure 9.**  
**Asian ports are increasingly dominant in the number of containers handled**

Container port throughput, annual (SDG 9.1.2)



Source: UNCTADstat (UNCTAD, 2024a).

## Freight rates and costs increased due to crises and disruptions

Recent disruptions in the Black Sea, Red Sea and Panama Canal accelerate an increase in shipping distances. Diverting ships around Africa generates extra miles and longer transit times, resulting in additional operational costs, risks, legal claims for delayed vessels, disrupted shipments, damaged ships, and spoiled cargo. Longer transit times resulting in off-schedule deliveries necessitate higher inventories and negatively affect just-in-time delivery systems. The Red Sea crisis alone has led the average container shipping spot rates to increase notably.

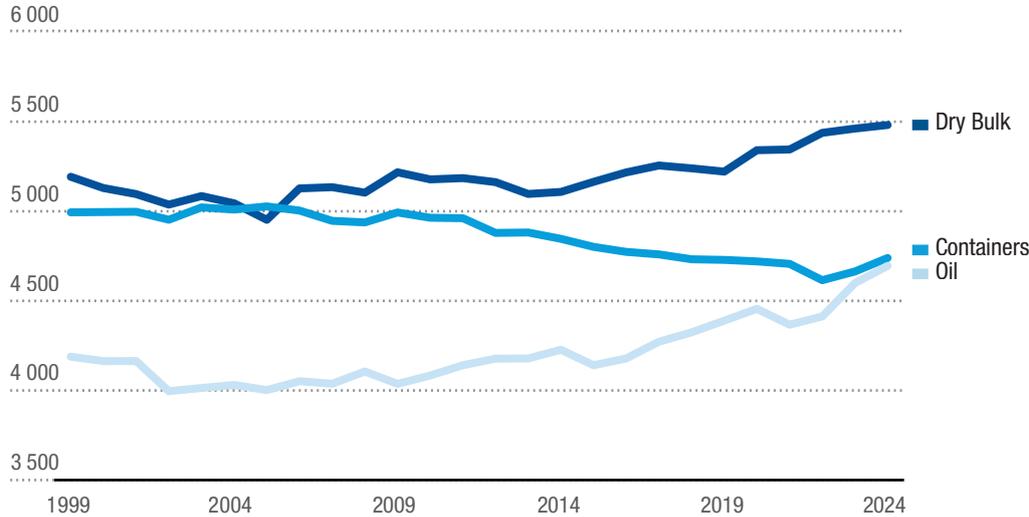
## Digital technologies are key to economic diversification

By 2023, 90% of world population was covered by 4G mobile networks, double the share in 2015. However, there is considerable variation in 4G deployment between regions; while 4G is available to all in Eastern Asia and in Europe, only 54% of people in sub-Saharan Africa live in areas covered by 4G+ networks. However, many other factors than broadband coverage, such as affordability, can create gaps for digital inclusion. In 2023, two thirds of the world's population used the Internet, leaving 2.6 billion people offline. This divide is alarming given the opportunities digital trade and technologies offer for economic diversification in developing economies.



**Figure 10.** Recent disruptions in the Black Sea, Red Sea and Panama Canal accelerate an increase in shipping distances.

Average distance travelled in nautical miles



Source: UNCTAD (2024b) based on data from Clarksons Research (2024b)

Note: Distances for 2024 are forecasts.

## Weak productive capacities in LDCs up for graduation

The Productive Capacities Index (PCI) informs UNCTAD’s vulnerability profiles for the five least developed countries considered for graduation at the 2024 triennial review of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP): Cambodia, Comoros, Djibouti, Senegal, and Zambia. The PCI provides new insights into conventional LDC graduation criteria. While these countries’ productive capacities slightly exceed those of other LDCs, they lag significantly behind other developing economies, especially in human capital, energy, information and communications technology (ICT) and institutions.

PCI reveals stalled structural transformation in LDCs up for graduation.

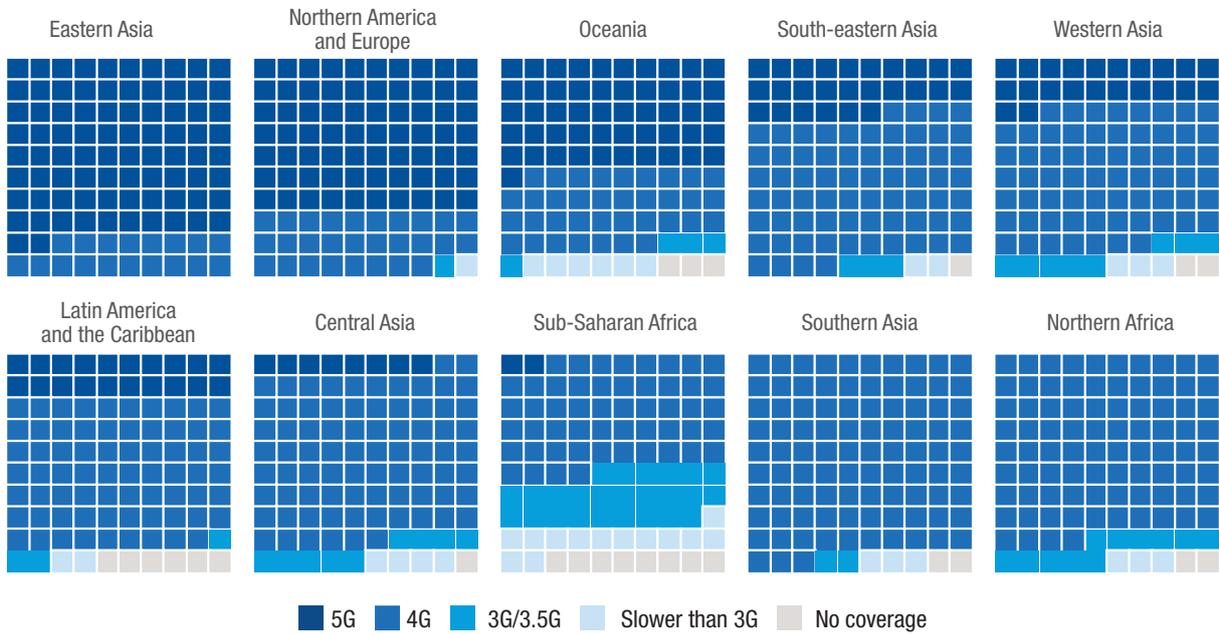
**Table 1.** Five LDCs, up for graduation, lag behind in human capital, energy, ICT and institutions

PCI country scores for selected categories, 2022

Country	Overall	Human capital	Energy	ICT	Institutions	Structural Change
Djibouti	124	180	141	150	165	41
Senegal	138	155	157	136	94	68
Comoros	148	151	144	169	171	189
Cambodia	152	132	146	127	155	133
Zambia	161	164	169	174	130	111

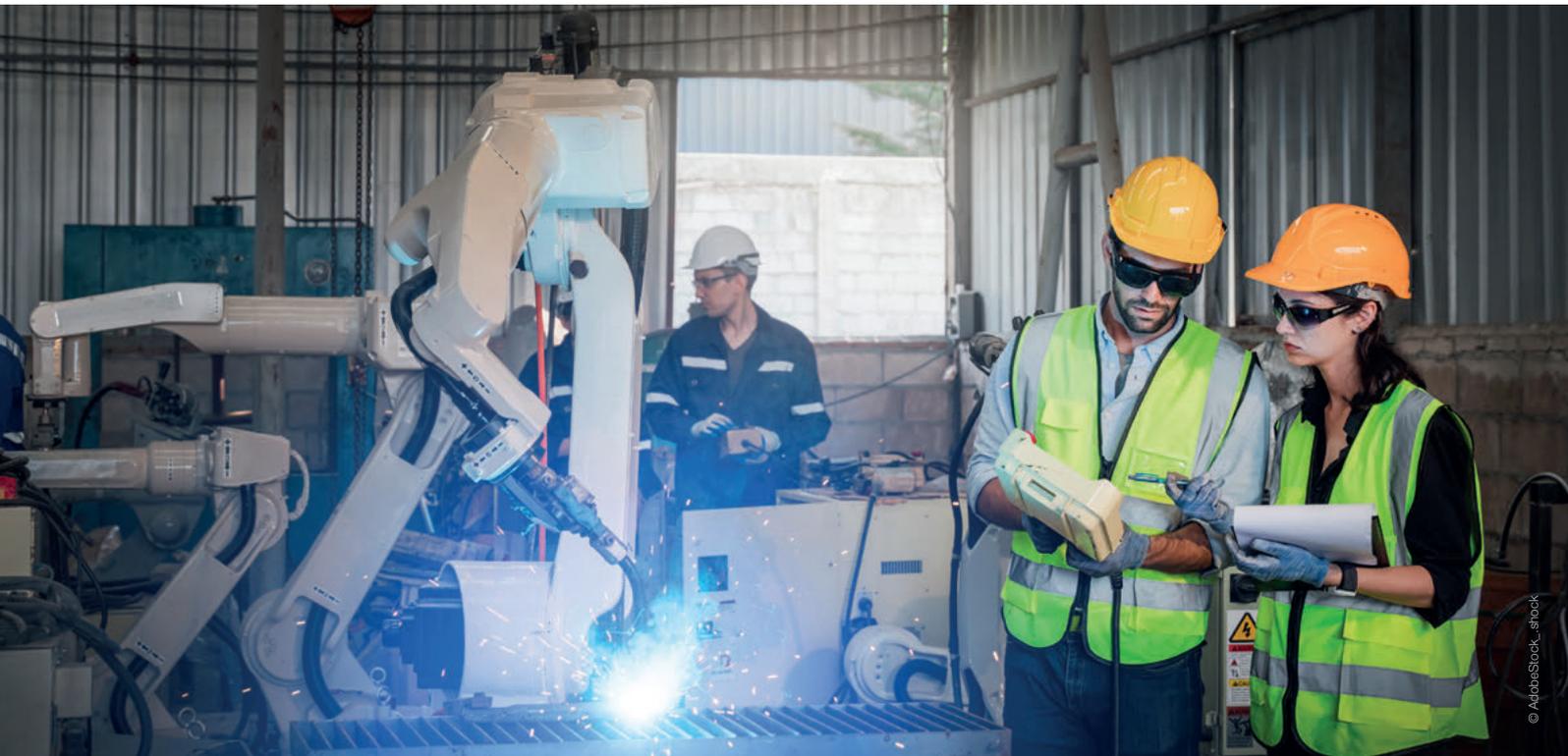
Source: UNCTAD (2023b)

**Figure 11.** Ten per cent of people worldwide live outside 4G mobile network coverage  
 Distribution of population by mobile network coverage, by technology, 2021 (SDG 9.c.1)



Source: UNCTAD calculations based on ITU (2024).

Note: The values for 2G and 3G networks show the incremental percentage of the population that is not covered by a more advanced network technology.







# 4.

## World is off track in reducing vulnerabilities and risks

Over the past 50 years, the number of disasters has increased fivefold (WMO, 2023), and this trend is expected to continue (UNDRR, 2022), significantly impacting human lives. Despite contributing the least to climate change (UNDRR, 2023), low-income countries face the highest exposure, with 70% of the world’s disasters occurring there (World Bank, 2023). LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS bear the brunt of these disasters. In LDCs and LLDCs, disaster-related deaths and missing persons (per 100 000 population) was 2.7 times the global average, and in SIDS 2.13 times higher (UNDRR, 2024). As population grows further, more people are expected to be affected by disasters (UNDRR, 2023).

Greenhouse gas emissions up by 1.4% in 2022 and continue to grow.

### Large regional differences in carbon intensity remain

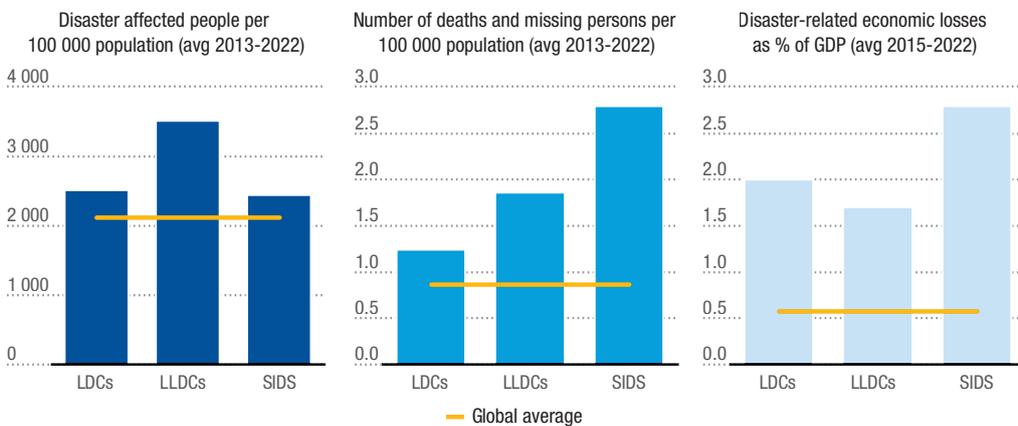
Emissions are rising, yet reductions in carbon intensity are starting to counterbalance increasing consumption and population growth. Despite significant regional differences in carbon dioxide emissions intensity, all regions have seen notable reductions since 1990. Global carbon intensity decreased by 63% from 1990 (998 g/\$) to 2022 (371 g/\$), indicating slower CO<sub>2</sub> emission growth than gross domestic product (GDP). Europe stands out with a 27% decrease in annual fossil CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2022 compared to 1990 (Crippa et al., 2023). In contrast, China and India saw their emissions rise significantly, by 5.3 and 4.5 times, respectively, since 1990.

Low-income countries most affected by disasters.



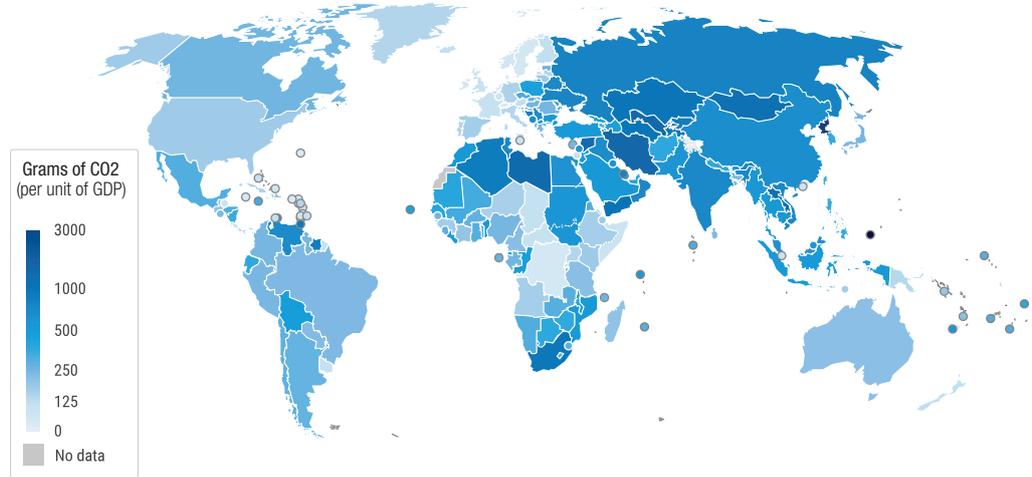
**Figure 12.** LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS pay the heaviest human and economic toll of disasters

(SDG 1.5.1 & SDG 1.5.2)



Source: UNCTAD calculations based on UNDRR (2024).

**Map 2.**  
**High regional variation in fossil carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP**  
 Carbon intensity (grams of CO<sub>2</sub> per unit of GDP measured by United States dollar (SDG- 9.4.1)



Source: UNCTAD calculations based on UNCTADstat (UNCTAD, 2024a) and EDGAR Community database version 8.0 (2023) for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Crippa et al., 2023).

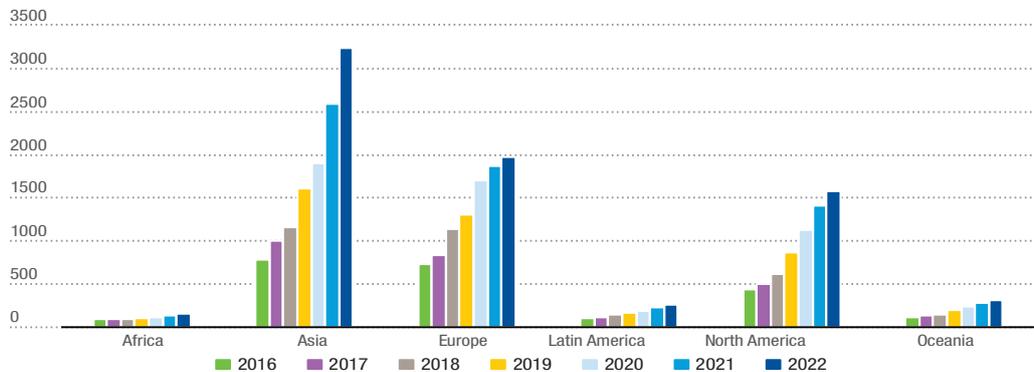
Note: Emissions from fuels burned on ships and aircrafts in international transport are not included.

**Businesses increasingly undertaking sustainability reporting**

A preliminary analysis of over 10 000 companies finds that 73% of companies in the sample published sustainability reports in 2022, more than doubling their number since 2016 (Refinitiv, 2024), with growth observed in all regions. In 2022, the manufacturing and finance and insurance sectors had the highest number of companies publishing sustainability reports, while the agricultural sector saw the biggest increase from 2016 to 2022. Environmental and governance dimensions are more commonly reported than social dimensions.

**Figure 13.**  
**Enterprise sustainability reporting increasing in all regions, but growth slowest in Africa**

Growth in number of company reports (SDG 12.6.1)



Source: UNCTAD and UNEP calculations based on Refinitiv (2024).

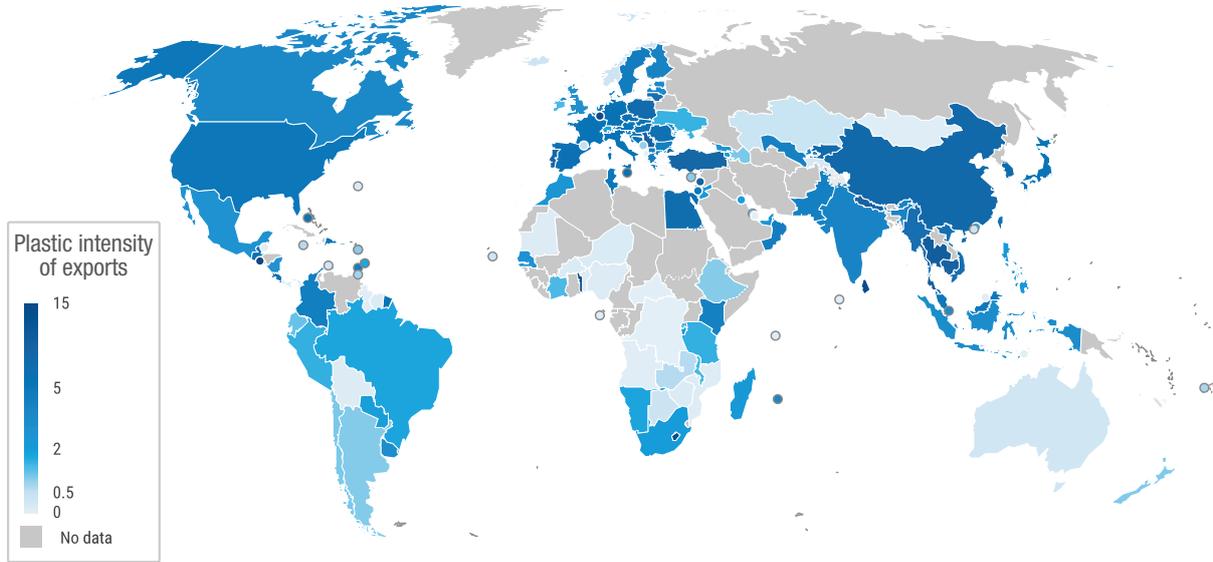
Note: Preliminary data from a sample of 10310 companies included in the above-mentioned database.

## Global exports of plastics doubled in value since 2005

Plastics trade comprises a significant share of global goods trade, almost five per cent of total merchandise exports in 2022, valued at \$1.2 trillion. The largest exporters of plastics by volume were China (74.5 Mt), Thailand (33.3 Mt), United States of America (26.5 Mt), Republic of Korea (20.5 Mt), and Germany (19.7 Mt). In 2022, several economies were particularly reliant on plastics in their goods trade. These included El Salvador, Luxembourg, Togo, Sri Lanka, Lesotho, Thailand and Lebanon, where plastics exports accounted for more than ten per cent of total merchandise exports.

In 2022, over 80% of plastics waste exports from developed economies.

**Map 3.** Plastics intensity of exports by country, 2022



Source: UNCTAD calculations based on UNCTADstat (UNCTAD, 2024a).

Note: Data refer to plastic products and products containing plastics, as identified by UNCTAD (2024d) jointly with the Forum on Trade, Environment & the SDGs (TESS) at the Geneva Graduate Institute, based on HS codes.



# 5.

## In Focus: Women produce only 20-40% of export value

Women’s contribution to domestic value added in exports still lags significantly behind men’s, though it is higher in services exports compared to agriculture and industry. Globally, women employees are underrepresented in tradable sectors, with only 36% in developed and 39% in developing economies. However, their employment in the trade of services has increased at a faster rate than men’s. This analysis is enabled by the release of the first ever set of gender equality in trade indicators by UNCTAD.

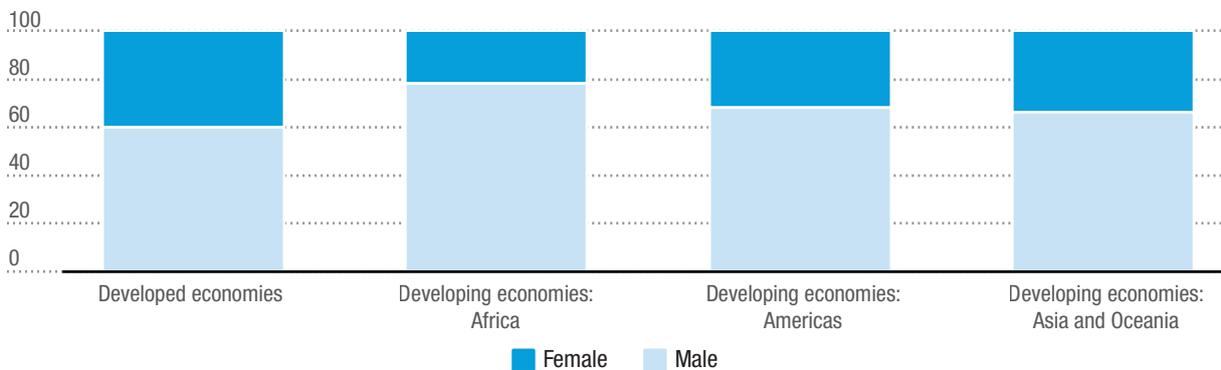
### Services trade offers potential for women’s economic empowerment

Women are concentrated in the services sector in all regions. The share of services as an employer of both women and men has been increasing from 1991 to 2022 in all regions. The shift to services is also mirrored in international trade as growth of trade in services has surpassed that of goods since 2011. Developing economies in Africa, Asia, and Oceania show potential for growth in the services sector, where women are highly concentrated. This growth could significantly bolster women’s economic contribution.



**Figure 14.** Women’s contributions to domestic value added in gross exports lag behind men’s across all regions

Percentage, 2020

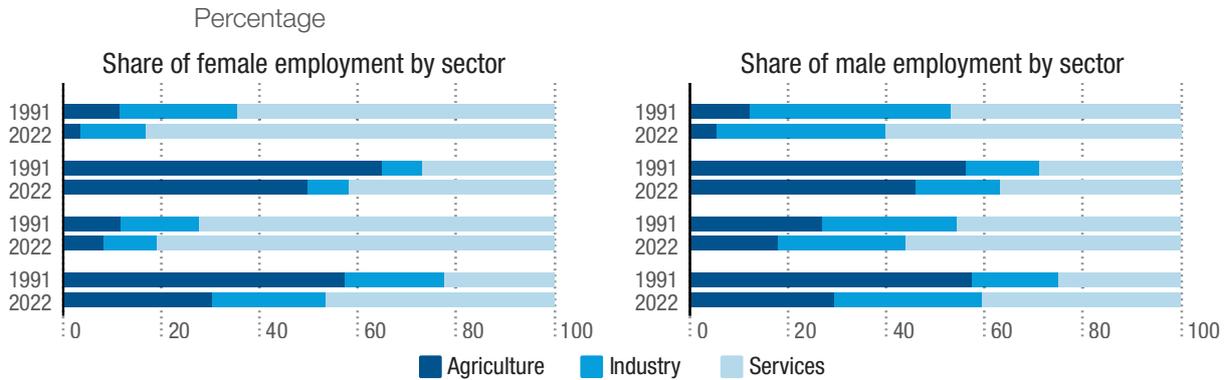


Source: UNCTAD calculation based on ILO (2024) and OECD (2024).

Note: Aggregated figures are based on data on employment and trade in value added for 76 economies. This analysis assumes that there are no differences in gender distribution between exporting and non-exporting firms. The proportions of male and female contributions to domestic value added are calculated assuming homogeneity in labour intensity, skills, etc., thereby stating that women represent a comparable share of value added to their proportion in employment.



**Figure 15. Women's employment in services increased at a faster rate than men's since 1991.**



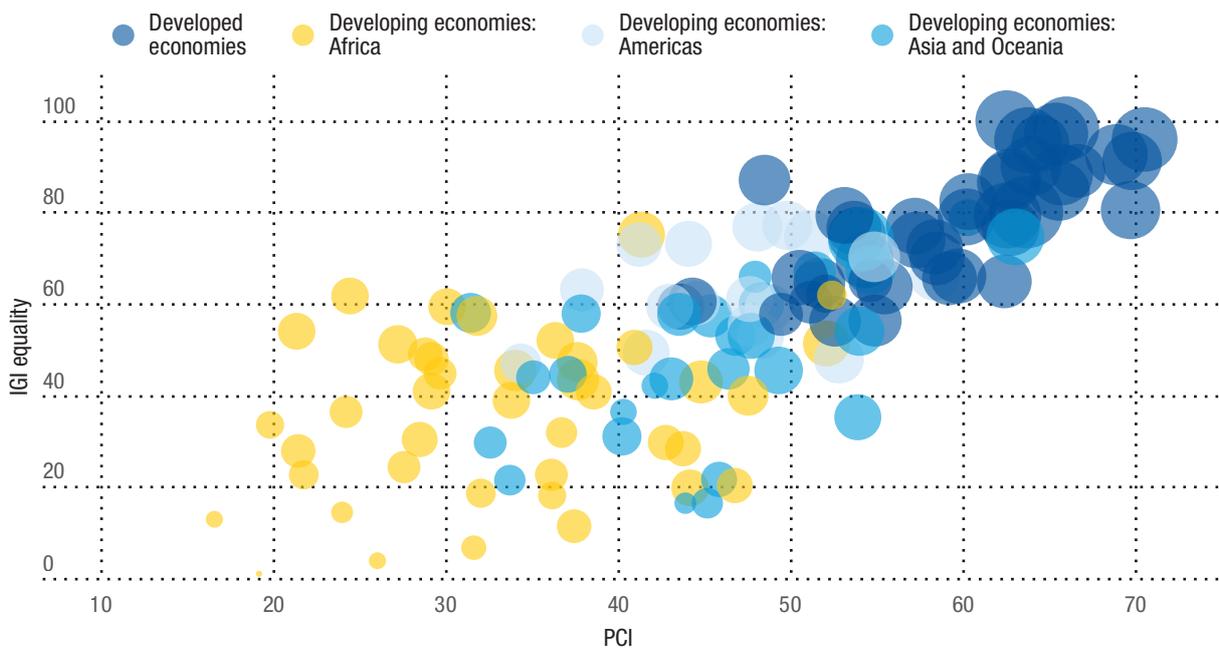
Source: UNCTAD calculations based on ILO (2024).

### More inclusive economies reach higher productive capacities

High-skill female workers face less gender inequalities.

Enhancing a country's productive capacities — comprising of human and natural capital, energy, transport and ICT capacities, well-functioning institutions and private sector, and structural change — fuels inclusive economic growth and resilience. Economies with higher productive capacities tend to achieve greater gender equality and more inclusive growth, as measured by UNCTAD's inclusive growth index (IGI). Among developing economies, Asia and Oceania demonstrate higher average equality scores, whereas African economies exhibit significant diversity in equality, suggesting that women's productive capacities have not been optimally developed and utilized (UNCTAD, 2022).

**Figure 16. Developed economies reveal higher PCI and IGI equality scores in 2021**



Source: UNCTAD (2024).

Note: The figure compares overall PCI scores (x-axis) and IGI equality scores (y-axis). The size of the bubbles refers to the overall IGI scores. IGI is composed of four dimensions – economy, living conditions, equality and environment.

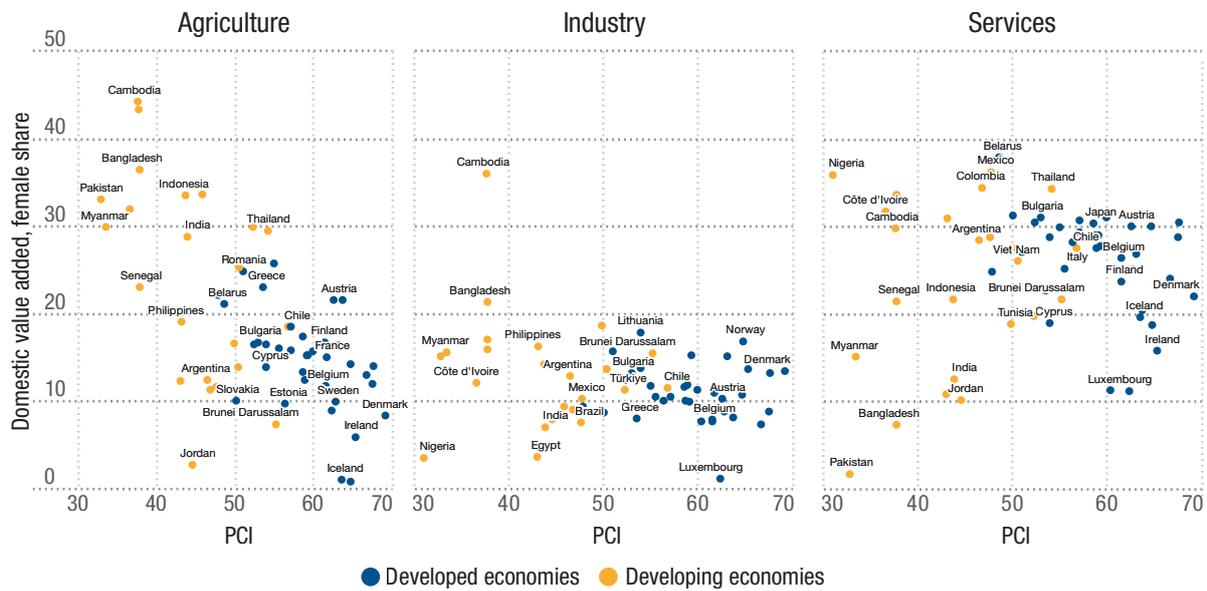
## Women’s active participation in services trade can enhance productive capacities

Developed economies stand out as a relatively homogenous group with higher gender equality in education and social conditions and in trade participation with a stark contrast to developing economies. Developing economies with lower PCI scores show higher contribution female contribution in agriculture than in other sectors. In Cambodia, Lao PDR, Peru and Viet Nam, for instance, women participate significantly in industries and sectors heavily reliant on trade.

Evidence-based trade policy key to bridging gender inequality.



**Figure 17.** Developed economies reveal higher gender equality in education and social conditions and in trade participation



Source: Data for the analysis is collected from multiple sources, UNCTAD Gender-in-trade indicators (UNCTAD, 2024a), OECD Social Institutions & Gender Index (SIGI) indicators (OECD, 2024d) and UNDP Women Empowerment Index (WEI) indicators (UNDP and UN Women, 2023).

Note: The figure shows gender equality in education and social conditions (PC1) on the x-axis and gender equality in trade and labour participation (PC2) on the y-axis.



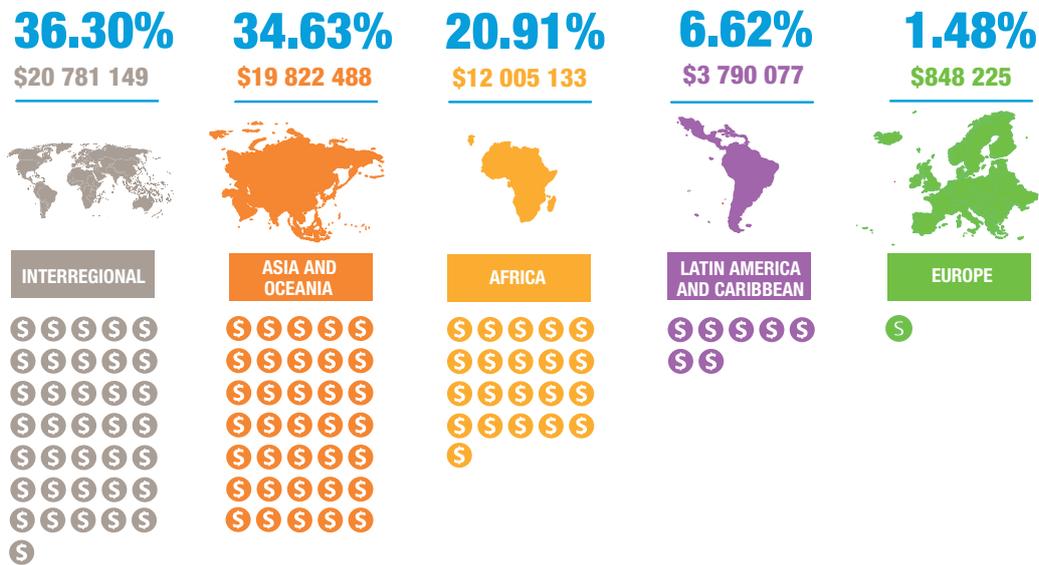


# 6.

## UNCTAD in action for sustainable development

UNCTAD aligns its technical cooperation with the 2030 Agenda, continuously adapting to the new opportunities and challenges in trade and development and interrelated issues of finance, technology and investment. The UNCTAD Toolbox (UNCTAD, 2020) was developed to better integrate these efforts with the SDGs. In 2023, UNCTAD’s technical cooperation expenditure surpassed \$57 million, funding delivered through 219 projects in 74 countries (UNCTAD, 2024e, forthcoming) (figure 18).

**Figure 18.** Most project expenditures in 2022 were interregional, followed closely by projects in Asia and Oceania, and Africa

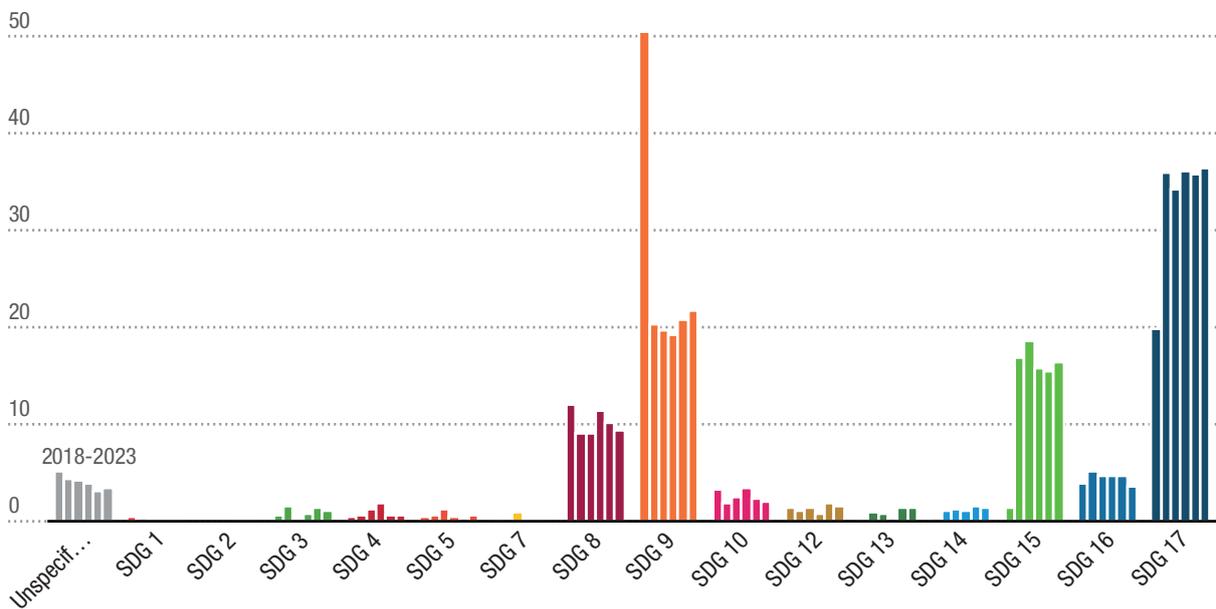


Source: UNCTAD (forthcoming).

Note: Values in this figure may differ from UNCTAD Annual report (UNCTAD, 2024e) as this is based on preliminary figures, while the values represented here utilize final finance figures. Only expenditures for country and regional projects are considered, and the share of North America is not reflected as only \$22,795 was recorded in the region in 2023.

Project expenditure by SDG has remained relatively stable over the past few years. However, since 2018, there has been a noticeable shift: expenditures on SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) more than halved, while expenditures for SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals) significantly increased. This trend continued in 2023 (figure 19), with SDGs 17, 9, 15 (life on land), and 8 (decent work and economic growth) dominating project expenditures. The proportion of expenditures not directed to a specific SDG (labelled 'Unspecified' in figure 2) slightly increased in 2023 but remains below pre-2022 levels. Additionally, the project expenditure supporting SDG 2 (zero hunger), first recorded in 2021, continued albeit limited in 2023 (0.1%).

**Figure 19.**  
**SDGs 9, 15 and 17 remain stable at the top of project expenditures**  
 Percentage of total expenditure



Source: UNCTAD (forthcoming)

## UNCTAD takes action on various fronts

UNCTAD provides high-quality technical support across various areas, benefiting countries, national stakeholders, and the international community. By leveraging its convening power, UNCTAD brings together governments, businesses, civil society, academia, and other international organizations to address today's challenges and promote sustainable development and inclusive trade and economy for all.

UNCTAD contributes to enhancing member States' capacities to reach the 2030 Agenda in several areas, including:

Empretec has benefitted over half a million entrepreneurs over the past 35 years.

## UNCTAD Empretec – inspiring entrepreneurship

UNCTAD Empretec programme promotes entrepreneurship and enhances the productive capacity and international competitiveness of SMEs in developing countries. The training is delivered through a global network of 42 national business development centres. Since its inception in 1988, Empretec has trained over 550 000 people, helping them to start or expand businesses and create jobs in the process.

## The Convening Power of UNCTAD

UNCTAD leverages its convening power to unite governments, businesses, civil society, academia, and other international organizations to promote sustainable development and inclusive trade and economy for all. Since 2016, nearly 94 000 participants have attended 869 official and registered meetings, with women making up 42% of attendees.

Almost 94 000 participants at UNCTAD meetings in 8 years.

## TrainForTrade delivers knowledge and skills for all

TrainForTrade provides technical assistance to developing countries in three key areas: (1) port management; (2) international e-commerce; and (3) international trade statistics. The programme aims to empower countries to participate in and benefits from international trade equitably and sustainably. From 2018 to 2023, TrainForTrade enhanced the capacities of over 20 000 participants from 219 different countries, with 43% of participants being female.

## Measuring South-South cooperation - at the roots of solidarity

For the first time, a voluntary Framework to Measure South-South Cooperation, developed by countries of the South, is available to quantify mutual support flows among these countries. As a custodian agency, UNCTAD supports countries' in enhancing their capacity to collect data and measure South-South Cooperation. In collaboration with UN Regional Commissions, UNCTAD is implementing a new UN Development Account project to test the Framework in eight pilot countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Since 2023, they have organized several events emphasizing the importance of measuring SSC for sustainable development.

116 people from 64 countries met in-person at the High-level segment of South-South Cooperation meeting in Qatar.



DMFAS has trained over 7 000 experts (48% women) in debt management since 2014.

## Enhancing debt management and debt data transparency

The UNCTAD DMFAS programme advises developing economies in debt management and helps them to record and report reliable debt statistics for policymaking. The programme assists developing economies in managing their debt and producing reliable debt statistics for policymaking. The programme provides practical solutions for public liability management and debt statistics production, supported by the DMFAS software, capacity development, and advisory services. Since its inception, DMFAS has trained over 7,000 experts in debt management, nearly half of whom are women.

## Tracking illicit financial flows by analysing existing data

UNCTAD supports member States in strengthening their statistical capacity to define, measure and disseminate statistics on illicit financial flows as a custodian of SDG indicator 16.4.1, in partnership with UNODC. Currently, 3 projects by UNCTAD and UNODC and UN Regional Commissions support 12 countries on four continents to measure illicit finance with the aim of reporting data to the Global SDG Indicators Database and informing national policy. An inter-regional expert meeting held in September 2023 in Geneva, brought together 66 experts, of which 30 women, to launch global work. In April and May 2024, national training workshops were organized in Ghana, Namibia, and Zambia bringing together 88 national experts, including 25 women.

44 countries have successfully implemented UNCTAD eT Readies, E-Commerce Strategies or Action Plans.

## Promoting ICT as a tool for development

UNCTAD's "eTrade for all" initiative has fostered a global partnership comprising 35 organizations dedicated to enhancing the enabling environment for sustainable development through e-commerce. Through eTrade Readiness Assessments conducted in LDCs and other developing nations, UNCTAD has facilitated the implementation of UNCTAD eT Readies, E-Commerce Strategies, or Action Plans in 44 countries.

## Fostering productive capacities and economic transformation

UNCTAD has developed a comprehensive programme aimed at fostering productive capacities and driving structural economic transformation in developing countries. It helps countries to enhance their statistical capacities, involves conducting National Productive Capacities Gap Assessments, assists in formulating development programmes to enhance productive capacities, and provides training on the knowledge and skills necessary to drive economic transformation. In 2022-2023, UNCTAD trained 140 national statisticians in five countries representing 74 different institutions and civil society organizations, with 21% being women.

## Promoting sustainable production of biodiversity based products

UNCTAD's BioTrade Initiative with its Principles and Criteria reconciles economic development with poverty alleviation and the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity-based products and services. A regional BioTrade project in Africa supported the sustainable use of more than 320 000 hectares of wild collection, mobilized more than €1.3 million through private sector investment, and trained more than 150 stakeholders, 48% women, to enhance knowledge on resource valorization, biological ingredients, and access and benefit sharing contracts, among other key areas.

## Enhancing data and skills for gender-responsive policy and action

Gender inequality persists globally, impacting women's economic participation, education, health, and political empowerment. Despite some progress, significant disparities remain entrenched. UNCTAD has been at the forefront of efforts to address these challenges, including through targeted training initiatives and the development of pioneering gender equality indicators for trade. To date, nearly 2 200 people, of whom 62% are women, in 154 countries have benefitted from 25 iterations of the online course in 2015-2023. Six pilot countries – Cameroon, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Senegal, and Zimbabwe – tested UNCTAD's methodology and compiled experimental indicators on gender equality in international trade.

2200 people trained on UNCTAD's e-learning courses on trade and gender in 2015-2023.



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Printed at United Nations, Geneva  
2413162 (E) – July 2024 – 151

**UNCTAD/STAT/2024/1**

United Nations publication  
Sales No. E.24.II.D.10

ISBN 978-91-1-003130-1



9 789210 031301