



Background

United Nations 4th International Conference on SIDS
27-30 May, 2024 - Antigua and Barbuda

About SIDS4

The fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) will be held from 27 to 30 May 2024 in St John's, Antigua and Barbuda. Under the overarching theme of "Charting the course toward resilient prosperity", the Conference will assess the ability of SIDS to achieve sustainable development, including the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. It will result in an intergovernmentally agreed, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented political outcome document.

The Conference will focus on revitalizing SIDS' economies, aid effectiveness and increasing climate finance in the wake of UNFCCC COP28. Delegates will also discuss human capital, health and youth, as well as address data and digital technologies – an area of focus of the upcoming Summit of the Future in September 2024.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) comprise [37 UN member nations](#) and [20 associate members of regional commissions](#), uniquely and unfortunately positioned at the forefront of multiple global crises, notably climate change. These remote economies, prone to natural disasters were formally recognized as a special case both for their environment and development at the [1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development](#) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Occupying less than 0.5 per cent of the world's surface, these nations are spread across three key regions: the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea.

In the face of escalating global crises, including climate change and COVID-19, SIDS find themselves on the frontline, constantly navigating through a cycle of environmental disasters and recovery efforts, which tests their resilience and ability to sustain their communities and economies.

Challenges and characteristics

Due to their geographic isolation, SIDS face unique sustainable development challenges, from the existential threat of climate change, to biodiversity loss, pollution, lack of economic diversification and

recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic which disproportionately affected their transportation and tourism- dependent economies.

Climate change constitutes an existential threat for SIDS, with some countries - such as the Maldives, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Nauru and Kiribati - expected to be uninhabitable by the end of the century due to sea level rise. Contributing less than one per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, SIDS disproportionately suffer from climate change impacts: they are both the most vulnerable to climate change and the least responsible for it. Weather-related disasters in SIDS have doubled in two decades, significantly undermining social and economic progress. Climate change is also a significant threat to SIDS' biodiversity: for instance, 19% of the world's coral reefs are found in their waters, but 75% of those are directly threatened by the changing climate. SIDS have large, unmet climate finance needs: the annual cost of adaptation is estimated between USD 22 billion and USD 26 billion, underscoring the need for urgent global cooperation and support.

SIDS are ocean economies that rely strongly on external markets and the exploitation of their limited natural resources, exposing them significantly to exogenous shocks. They grapple with high import and export costs and are particularly vulnerable to inflation. Their economies are heavily dependent on tourism and fisheries, with tourism constituting about 30% of their GDP. Due to this lack of economic diversification, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was significant: the contraction of the ocean economy caused SIDS' GDP to drop by 6.9% versus 4.8% in all other developing countries in 2020.

The extensive marine areas surrounding SIDS serve as vital resources, but also increase their vulnerability. With a population density that is significantly higher than the global average, SIDS are acutely susceptible to the catastrophic effects of natural disasters, which can incur annual damage costs ranging from one to eight per cent of their GDP. This situation is further exacerbated by fiscal challenges such as high debt, costly debt servicing and limited access to concessional financing due to their middle-income status. Compounded by factors such as limited population size, isolation from international markets, elevated transportation costs and exposure to external economic shocks, these states face heightened risks to their fragile land and marine ecosystems, making them particularly prone to biodiversity loss and the impacts of climate change.

UN and SIDS

The United Nations supports SIDS through UN entities within country and regional level presence, including through the UN Resident Coordinator Offices. The Regional Commissions also support the sustainable development of SIDS at the regional level. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States support SIDS at the global level. Additionally, the Caribbean and the Pacific SIDS are also supported through their own intergovernmental organizations and agencies at the regional and sub-regional level, e.g. by the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#), and by the [Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific \(CROP\)](#) Agencies. The countries in the AIS regional have been at certain intervals supported by the [Indian Ocean Commission \(IOC\)](#) and by the [Economic Commission for Africa \(ECA\)](#).