



Digitization, Statistics, and AI: A path towards well-informed decision-making

Thursday, 9 July, 1.15 – 2.30pm (EST)

On-site at UNHQ New York, Conference room 3

Side Event at the High-Level Political Forum 2026

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Concept note

Organized by the Permanent Missions of Singapore, Rwanda, and Jamaica to the United Nations, in partnership with the DESA's United Nations Statistics Division under the [Data for Now initiative](#).

1. Context

In a rapidly evolving landscape, policymakers are under increasing pressure to take timely decisions while maintaining credibility, accountability, and public trust. Reliable, fit-for-purpose statistics are essential to meet this challenge and to advance evidence-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond.

At the same time, the data, statistics, and scientific communities must adapt to respond to new information needs driven by digitization, technological innovation, and the rise of AI. These forces are reshaping how data are produced, integrated, analyzed, and used — opening new possibilities for closing persistent data gaps, while raising fundamental questions about quality, ethics, and governance.

These challenges are particularly acute for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Small populations, dispersed geographies, limited statistical capacity, and heightened vulnerability to climate and economic shocks place exceptional demands on national data systems. The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) recognizes that resilient prosperity depends on resilient data, and calls for stronger national statistical systems, modernized data infrastructure, and the responsible use of new data sources and technologies.

Recent global commitments, including the Pact of the Future and the Global Digital Compact, underscore the urgency to strengthen capabilities and harness technology and data to anticipate risks, seize opportunities, act early, and manage uncertainty. It also highlights the importance of strengthened data governance and international cooperation, with inclusive and meaningful participation of all countries.

2. Objective

In this context, this high-level side event will bring together ministers, Permanent Representatives, countries presenting their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and key partners to explore how stronger data ecosystems can enable better decisions and accelerate SDG delivery.

The discussion will focus on:

- How robust data ecosystems support effective policymaking, institutional trust, and integrated SDG delivery.
- The importance of adopting a multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral, and inclusive approach to address national development needs.
- Lessons and challenges in digitizing large and diverse data sources, transforming them into official statistics, and building capacity for responsible use of AI to inform policymaking.
- Priority investments in infrastructure, skills, governance, and partnerships to prepare data systems for now and the future.

3. Format and audience

The event will feature brief opening remarks, keynote interventions, and a high-level panel discussion, followed by an interactive discussion and an opportunity for participant engagement.

Target audience:

- Line Ministries, including Ministries of Finance and Planning, Digital Transformation, and National Statistics Offices
- Permanent Representatives and diplomatic missions
- International and regional organizations
- Development partners
- Civil society organizations
- Academia and research institutions
- Private sector organizations

4. Contact

For any questions, please contact:

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Agenda

Time	Agenda
13.15 - 13.25	<p>Welcome and opening remarks</p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Shantanu Mukherjee, Acting Director, Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, DESA</p> <p>H.E. Mr. Burhan Gafoor, Permanent Representative of Singapore to the United Nations</p>
13.25 - 13.35	<p>Keynote address</p> <p>Dr. Eng Chuan Koh, Chief Statistician, Singapore Department of Statistics (DOS) <i>(Strengthening Data Ecosystems for Effective Policymaking and SDG Delivery)</i></p>
13.35 - 14.10	<p>High-level panel</p> <p>H.E. Mr. Martin K. Ngoga, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations</p> <p>Ms. Allele G. Reid, Deputy Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations</p> <p>Ms. Maria Dimitriadou, World Bank Special Representative to the UN and Head of Multilateral Affairs <i>(Investments in infrastructure, skills, governance, and partnerships to prepare data systems for now and the future)</i></p> <p>Mr. Dave Hotchkiss, Engineering Manager, Google <i>(How to harness technology and build collaborative, scalable AI programs to analyze massive datasets and drive human impact)</i></p>
14.10 - 14.25	Q&A
14.25 - 14.30	<p>Closing Remarks by Mr. Shantanu Mukherjee, Acting Director, Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, DESA</p> <p>(TBC) H.E. Mr. Burhan Gafoor, Permanent Representative of Singapore to the United Nations</p>