Total population. In 2014, the population of the small island Developing States (SIDS) is estimated to be 66 million, which represents nearly 1 per cent of the world’s population. Between 1990 and 2014, the total population of SIDS increased by 14 million, or 26 per cent. The population of SIDS varies greatly among countries or territories, from less than 100,000 persons (Mauritania, Nauru and Tuvalu) to more than 10 million (Cuba, The Democratic Republic of Haiti and India).

Population growth rate. Annual population growth rates also vary over time and across countries, but, overall, the average annual population growth rate has declined from 1.6 per cent in 1990-1995 to 1.1 per cent in 2010-2015. In 2010-2015, 17 of the 41 SIDS have population growth rates higher than 1.2 per cent per year, the world average population growth rate. At the other extreme, four countries or territories—American Samoa, Cuba, Nauru and Puerto Rico—are currently experiencing negative growth rates.

Total fertility rate. The total fertility rate in SIDS declined from 2.2 children per woman in 1990-1995 to 1.8 children per woman in 2010-2015. The number of countries or territories with total fertility of 4 children per woman or greater declined from 17 to 12 in 1990-1995 to 2000-2010, and from 12 countries in 1990-1995 to 6 countries in 2010-2015. Eleven countries had a TFR below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman in 1990-1995.

Life expectancy at birth. Life expectancy at birth has increased from 65.9 years in 1990-1995 to 71.5 years in 2010-2015. During 2010-2015, only 13 countries or territories achieved the life expectancy of 70 years. In 2010-2015, 13 countries had life expectancy between 65 and 70 years. For the remaining 12 countries, life expectancy at birth remained at 60 years or below in 2010-2015, including 6 countries where it was 60 years or below.

Percentage of population under 15 years of age. Except for Singapore and Cuba, SIDS have relatively young populations. In 2014, 27.4 per cent of SIDS total population was under 15 years of age. This is due to low life expectancy, relatively high fertility and high rates of emigration of the working-age population in some SIDS. The majority of SIDS with high fertility average of four or more children per woman had young population-aged structures with over 40 per cent of their population below the age of 15.

Percentage of population aged 65 years or over. The share of older persons in the population aged 65 years or over in SIDS has risen from 8.1 per cent in 1990 to 11.3 per cent in 2014. Almost half of SIDS has a share of older persons below 10 per cent. Andorra, Barbados, Cocos, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Singapore and the United States Virgin Islands are the most aged SIDS, with more than 10 per cent of their population aged 65 years or over.

Net migration rate. Migration is an important phenomenon in most SIDS. In the Caribbean and Pacific regions, the emigration from SIDS exceeded immigration. People from SIDS are among the world’s most mobile. However, while nationals from the Caribbean migrated to Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, while emigration can boost remittances and alleviate local labour market pressures, it can pose particular challenges because of the emigration of highly skilled workers.

GDP per capita at PPP. GDP per capita varies greatly among SIDS, from as high as $35,789 (Singapore) to as low as $647 (Guinea-Bissau). The average GDP per capita for SIDS (US$5,140) was far below the average for 36 countries or territories (Australia, Argentina, and Ireland, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brunei, Cape Verde, Palestinian, Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Seychelles, Singapore and Trinidad and Tobago) that had GDP per capita higher than this amount.

Total unemployment rate. The unemployment rate in SIDS varies from 1.1 per cent in Tonga to 21.6 per cent in Saint Lucia. Eleven of the 26 countries with available data had unemployment rates above 11 per cent. The unemployment rate is higher in the Caribbean than in the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea SIDS.

Net Official Development Assistance (ODA) received (as percentage of GNI). 2014.

SIDS 2014

Population and Development in SIDS 2014

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Top 20 recipients of net official development assistance received, 2005-2012

Proportion of the population using improved sanitation facilities. In 2011, 67 per cent of SIDS population relied on improved sanitation facilities. The greatest progress had been made in the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea SIDS (where sanitation coverage had increased from 72 per cent in 1990 to 79 per cent in 2011). However, there was significant disparity among countries, in Haiti, Gambia-Beaus and Papua New Guinea, less than a quarter of the population had access to improved sanitation facilities.

Population affected by natural disasters. Ninety per cent of SIDS are in the tropics. Due to their geographic location and the patterns of oceanic circulation, precipitation varies greatly from one year to the next, leading to various forms of extreme rainfall events, such as droughts and floods. SIDS are also affected by seasonal weather events such as tropical storms, cyclones and hurricanes. Between 1980 and 2013, 154 natural disasters were registered in SIDS. Tropical storms were the most common natural disaster accounting for an estimated 47 per cent of all natural disaster in this period, which affected about 17 million people. The second most common natural disaster was floods, affecting 3.1 million people. The top five countries for the number of people affected by natural disasters during this period were Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Papua New Guinea and Jamaica.

Renewable internal freshwater resources per capita (cubic meters). The availability of freshwater is a major limiting factor for the economic and social development of SIDS. Many of these countries relied entirely on a single source of water supply, making them highly vulnerable to climate and other environmental changes. According to the Falkenmark Water Stress Indicator, a country or region is said to experience “water stress” when annual water supply drops below 1,700 cubic meters per person per year. Eight out of 24 SIDS (33 per cent) have water stress. When water supply drops below 1,800 cubic meters per person per year, the country is said to experience “water scarcity.” Seven out of 24 SIDS (29 per cent) have chronically limited fresh water resources (absolute water scarcity).

Environment Performance Index (EPI). The 2014 Environmental Performance Index of 24 SIDS (33 per cent) have water stress. When water supply drops below 1,800 cubic meters per person per year, the country is said to experience “water scarcity.” Seven out of 24 SIDS (29 per cent) have chronically limited fresh water resources (absolute water scarcity).

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Proportion of the population using improved drinking water sources. Access to safe drinking water is a critical development issue for SIDS, with profound implications for economic, growth, human rights, public health and the environment. In 2011, 40 per cent of SIDS used an improved drinking water source. The Caribbean and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea SIDS (WTO) regions had the highest percentage of population using improved drinking water sources, while access was more limited in Papua New Guinea, Haiti and Kiribati, where less than two thirds of the population used improved drinking water.

GDP per capita (as a percentage of GDP). The aggregate amount of remittances received by SIDS in 2012 was $36 billion. Among countries with available data, the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Jamaica received the largest absolute amount of remittances. However, Haiti, Gapana and Samo received the highest contribution of the remittances as a share of their GDP.