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Technical assistance and capacity-building

Operations of the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Work of the Human Rights Council

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 34/40, in which the Council requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report, in consultation with the beneficiaries of the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Work of the Human Rights Council, in which the Office evaluated the activities of the Trust Fund in meeting its training and capacity-building mandate, and to present the report to the Council at its forty-ninth session, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Trust Fund, in March 2022. The report provides an update on the programmes and activities of the Trust Fund since its establishment by the Council in its resolution 19/26, and offers some recommendations on how to improve them.

* The annex to the present report is circulated as received, in the language of submission only.



I. Background and mandate

1. The Human Rights Council established the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Work of the Human Rights Council by its resolution 19/26, adopted on 23 March 2012. The creation of the Trust Fund was the initiative of a core group, led by Maldives and Mauritius, to enable Member States that did not have a permanent mission in Geneva to participate in the Council, thereby promoting the universal and meaningful participation of all Member States in the Council's work.

2. Managed by the Human Rights Council Branch of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Trust Fund provides funding for the following activities:

(a) Targeted training courses and capacity-building activities, including e-learning, on the international human rights system, international human rights law and the rules and functioning of the Council and its mechanisms;

(b) Travel and accommodation for participation in Council sessions;

(c) Fellowship programmes to undertake three-month work placements relating to the work of the Council;

(d) Induction training sessions to provide information on the multilateral human rights system, as well as focused, practical training related to the working methods of the Council and its mechanisms.

3. In 2017, the Human Rights Council adopted its resolution 34/40, the second-most sponsored resolution since the establishment of the Council in 2006. In that resolution, which strengthened the Trust Fund's programme of work, the Council:

(a) Encouraged the Trust Fund to conduct at least one annual briefing on the outcomes of the regular and special sessions of the Council in New York, prior to the commencement of each session of the General Assembly, with a view to supporting the engagement of delegations of least developed countries and small island developing States in the work of the Third Committee;

(b) Also encouraged the Trust Fund to conduct workshops in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Caribbean, before the tenth anniversary of the Trust Fund, reflecting on its achievements, identifying areas where further improvements might be made and assessing the value of its activities in fulfilling its training and capacity-building mandate in support of the engagement of least developed countries and small island developing States with the Council and its mechanisms;

(c) Requested OHCHR to prepare a report in which it evaluated the activities of the Trust Fund in meeting its training and capacity-building mandate, and to present it to the Council at its forty-ninth session, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Trust Fund.

4. In March 2021, by its decision 46/115, the Human Rights Council decided to convene a high-level panel discussion during the high-level segment of its forty-ninth session. It requested OHCHR, through the Trust Fund, to secure the participation in the session of Member States without a permanent mission in Geneva so as to achieve universal participation of all Member States. It also requested OHCHR to prepare a summary report on the panel discussion and to submit it to the Council at its fiftieth session. The decision was co-sponsored by 160 Member States, making it the most sponsored resolution or decision in the Council's history.

II. Overview and achievements of the programmes and activities of the Trust Fund

A. Overview

5. In the fulfilment of its mandate, the Trust Fund, which became operational in January 2014, has developed two programmes that are entirely funded through voluntary contributions. The delegate programme and the fellowship programme support selected beneficiaries through a daily subsistence allowance and a monthly stipend, respectively, for the duration of their stay in Geneva. The programmes also cover the cost of a round-trip ticket in economy class, as per United Nations rules and regulations.

6. The secretariat has undertaken a proactive approach to encourage Member States to avail themselves of this assistance. Notes verbales have been sent to all 72 eligible least developed countries and small island developing States¹ that have a permanent mission in Geneva and/or New York, in the months prior to the regular sessions, outlining the programme, the main entitlements and the steps that need to be taken to request assistance. The Trust Fund has also relied on OHCHR office in New York and field offices and other United Nations agencies to disseminate information about the programmes. This targeted approach, coupled with regular briefings to concerned Member States and organizations with links to least developed countries and small island developing States, has yielded positive results. The Trust Fund has in turn prioritized the selection of government officials from Member States that do not have a permanent mission in Geneva as well as those from countries that are sitting as members of the Council. While in Geneva, those beneficiaries that have a permanent mission have to work closely with their delegations. In addition, in accordance with OHCHR policies, the Trust Fund secretariat strongly encourages applications from women and persons with disabilities. Each beneficiary receives an OHCHR certificate of participation upon completion of the programme.

7. Prior to each session, the Trust Fund secretariat organizes an in-person induction course in Geneva for all selected beneficiaries. The two- to three-day induction courses are designed to familiarize beneficiaries with the rules, procedures and modalities of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms; provide logistical support, in particular for those without representation in Geneva; and advise on the modalities of engagement in the Council. The course also provides an opportunity for beneficiaries to meet with Geneva-based human rights experts, exchange information, and build and develop a stakeholder network. Moreover, the secretariat organizes briefings with regional groups, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks and other OHCHR programmes, including recipients of other funds, to encourage the sharing of experiences and lessons learned.

8. In 2016, an e-learning course was developed to complement the in-person induction courses. All beneficiaries must complete the online course prior to their arrival in Geneva. The secretariat also provides each beneficiary with a package containing OHCHR publications, in English or French, and other relevant documents produced by United Nations organizations, NGOs and think tanks.

9. Following their time in Geneva, beneficiaries are asked to provide testimonies of their experiences. This feedback has enabled the secretariat to regularly reflect on and modify its programmes and activities to better meet the needs of the beneficiaries. These testimonies provide much appreciated information on actions taken by the beneficiaries upon return to their home countries.

1. Delegates programme

10. The delegates programme covers the participation of a government official during one of the three regular Human Rights Council sessions that are held during the year. The

¹ The list of least developed countries and small island developing States eligible for the Trust Fund is available at www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/SIDS-LDCs.aspx.

programme is open to representatives of least developed countries and small island developing States who work on human rights and/or related fields, and who are based in their countries or abroad. Owing to insufficient time for processing travel arrangements, the Trust Fund is unable to support participation in special sessions and intersessional activities. To ensure that the Trust Fund builds and strengthens the national capacity of beneficiary Member States, it does not support the same government official more than once.

2. Fellowship programme

11. The aim of the fellowship programme is to provide fellows from least developed countries and small island developing States with the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of and practical working experience with the Council and its mechanisms, in particular the universal periodic review and the special procedures. In addition to enhancing the participation of the fellows in the work of the Council, the programme allows beneficiaries to work closely with Geneva-based delegations, OHCHR and other United Nations departments and agencies, as well as NGOs represented in Geneva.

12. Fellows are based in Geneva. The secretariat organizes briefings and holds regular meetings with them. The three-month programme runs once a year from September to November to enable fellows to participate in the Council's September session; attend a session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review; attend relevant meetings of the human rights mechanisms being held during the period (i.e. human rights treaty bodies); support the daily work of its delegation, including through representation at conferences and events; and carry out a project of their choice to facilitate the future participation and engagement of their country in the work of the Council, a proposal for which must be submitted before returning to their country.

B. Achievements

13. Since it became operational in 2014, the Trust Fund has supported 172 government officials (151 delegates and 21 fellows), including 104 women and 68 men, from 71 of the 72 least developed countries and small island developing States: 35 from Africa, 22 from Asia and the Pacific, and 14 from the Caribbean and Latin America. In 2017, 100 per cent of the least developed countries and small island developing States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) were supported at least once by the Trust Fund. A similar milestone was reached for the Commonwealth, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Community of Portuguese Language-speaking Countries in 2018 (see annexes I and II).

14. In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 6/30 on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system, and bearing in mind Council resolution 5/1 on institution-building of the Council, the secretariat encourages Member States to consider gender balance when submitting applications for participation in the Trust Fund programmes. The Trust Fund has been a committed gender champion. To date, 60 per cent (104) of its beneficiaries have been women, and 70 per cent of the beneficiaries from the Caribbean region have been women. In 2018, the Trust Fund celebrated its 100th beneficiary, who was a female delegate from Tonga, which does not have a permanent mission in Geneva. In addition, a visually impaired female delegate was able to participate in its programme in 2016.

15. The majority of Trust Fund beneficiaries have delivered at least one statement in their national capacity. A total of 37 have delivered joint statements² to the Council on behalf of their beneficiary cohorts, often for the first time.

² Available at www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/Beneficiaries.aspx.

C. Other activities of the Trust Fund and their impacts

1. Training

(a) *e-learning course on the Human Rights Council*

16. In June 2016, the secretariat launched the first e-learning course, which was free of charge. The course focused on the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms and was aimed at government officials from least developed countries and small island developing States working in the field of human rights. As of 2017, all beneficiaries are required to undertake the online course prior to applying to the least developed countries and small island developing States programmes.

17. The training was developed with the active participation, input and feedback of beneficiaries. It integrates videos taken during the in-person induction courses in Geneva and interviews of various beneficiaries and donor countries. The tool is interactive, accessible to persons with disabilities and gender-sensitive. It was designed for delegates who have never attended a Human Rights Council session and is aimed at providing practical information in a user-friendly format. It introduces delegates to the Council and its work, includes information on the international human rights system and international human rights law, and seeks to familiarize delegates with the entry points, rules and modalities for participation in the regular sessions of the Council.

18. Following its successful roll out, the e-learning course has been extended beyond the least developed countries and small island developing States beneficiaries.³ It is available in English and French⁴ and can be taken offline, using USB drives provided by the secretariat upon request. The offline option enables delegates with limited and poor Internet connectivity to take the course and to share it with their colleagues back home.

19. As at 31 December 2021, a total of 6,368 persons had been enrolled in the e-learning course, including 2,498 women. Of those who were enrolled in the training, 1,784 were from least developed countries and small island developing States. The statistics demonstrate that although the course was specifically tailored for government officials from least developed countries and small island developing States, it has also been used by an impressive number of other stakeholders. Enrolment has sharply increased in the years since it was first introduced: from 92 enrolments in 2016 to 4,083 in 2021 (see annex III).

20. The secretariat is planning to update the online tool to reflect the new modalities (virtual and hybrid) and platforms that have been introduced to facilitate ongoing participation in Human Rights Council sessions in light of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) restrictions.

(b) *Online induction course*

21. During the pandemic, the Human Rights Council was the only United Nations body that was able to fulfil its mandate. The Trust Fund increased its online activities to ensure that least developed countries and small island developing States, in particular those 18 that did not have a permanent mission in Geneva, continued to receive timely information on how to engage with the Council.

22. In response to imposed travel restrictions, the Trust Fund organized its first virtual induction course in May 2020. The 30-hour course was organized for delegates that had been selected to participate in the fortieth session of the Human Rights Council. Since then, the online induction course, which is complementary to the in-person induction and mandatory e-learning course, has proven to be extremely useful. Delegates were briefed by the Trust Fund secretariat, officers from other branches and divisions, and key stakeholders, including intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and think tanks. Delegates were also able to interact

³ The e-learning course is hosted on the website of the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization.

⁴ See www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/Tool.aspx.

directly with the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Clément Voule.

23. In August 2020, the Trust Fund organized a 20-hour induction course, with simultaneous interpretation, for the 16 delegates (10 women, 6 men) who were selected to participate in the Human Rights Council's forty-eighth session. It was the second-largest cohort of beneficiaries in the history of the Trust Fund.

24. In February 2021, the Trust Fund secretariat organized two online induction courses in anticipation of the forty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council. A total of 71 government officials (38 women, 33 men) from 26 least developed countries and small island developing States (14 in Africa, 8 in Asia and the Pacific, 4 in the Caribbean) participated in the three-hour induction sessions. The majority of participants, 68 per cent, were based in capitals, 21 per cent in Geneva and 11 per cent in North America and Europe. Representatives of six countries without a permanent mission in Geneva were also in attendance. Two sessions were held to accommodate their varied time zones. The courses were conducted using a multilingual conferencing platform, with simultaneous interpretation in English and French. According to the polls conducted at the end of the sessions, 90 per cent of the participants indicated that the course had met or exceeded their expectations.

25. A similar training that was scheduled to be held prior to the forty-seventh session of the Council was cancelled owing to technical problems.

26. Throughout the pandemic, the Trust Fund has participated in multiple webinars organized by a variety of stakeholders, including Member States, NGOs, think tanks and intergovernmental organizations, to ensure that least developed countries and small island developing States continue to receive adequate support and that no one is left behind. The Trust Fund has also increased its presence on social media platforms, in particular Twitter. Regular updates on Human Rights Council discussions are sent to former and upcoming selected delegates of the Trust Fund.

(c) *In-person training at the national level*

27. On the occasion of the Trust Fund's workshop for the Pacific region in 2019, the Government of Vanuatu invited the secretariat to conduct a two-day induction course in Port Vila on 26 and 27 November 2019. The government-funded training was attended by 12 participants, 52 per cent of whom were women, from the national human rights committee, which was composed of both government and NGO representatives. The Trust Fund received additional requests for national-level training on the Human Rights Council, but was unable to positively respond owing to very limited human resources and travel restrictions.

2. Regional workshops

28. In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 34/40, the Trust Fund organized four regional workshops between 2018 and 2021, in Africa, Asia and the Pacific,⁵ and the Caribbean.

29. Two in-person regional workshops were conducted. The workshop for the Caribbean was held in Georgetown in 2018, and the workshop for the Pacific region was held in Nadi, Fiji, in 2019. Online workshops were conducted in Africa and Asia. The workshop for Africa was held in April and May 2021 and was co-hosted by Burkina Faso and Mauritius. The workshop for Asia was held in November and December 2021 and was co-hosted by Maldives.

30. The objectives of the workshops were three-fold:

(a) Assess the contribution of the Trust Fund in building the capacity of least developed countries and small island developing States for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Asia region, including by providing Member States with opportunities to

⁵ Owing to logistical reasons and the distance between countries, it was decided to hold one workshop for Asia and one workshop for the Pacific.

share their collective expertise, experiences and good practices that could then be shared with the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms;

(b) Identify practical actions that beneficiary delegates could recommend to the Trust Fund secretariat for implementation, assess the impact that the courses of action were likely to have and determine the relevance of the practical experience of beneficiary delegates and fellows on implementation at national and regional levels;

(c) Serve as a unique forum for open and interactive dialogue regarding approaches and procedures for ensuring that human rights challenges of concern to small island developing States were placed and remained on the Human Rights Council's agenda and that opportunities were identified to address them.

31. The workshops organized in the Africa and Asia regions also discussed specific recommendations to strengthen the participation of least developed countries and small island developing States in the work of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms when the Council was meeting virtually or in a hybrid format.

32. The workshops provided an opportunity for beneficiaries from the same region to meet and build networks. They also brought together former beneficiaries from four regions to enable cross-regional learning and information-sharing experiences.

33. Each workshop was organized according to a participatory and all-inclusive approach to enable all voices to be heard. These unique gatherings allowed the secretariat to hear the suggestions and recommendations of beneficiaries on how it could better fulfil its mandate and provide information on assistance that was available from other key partners of the Trust Fund to further support their engagement with the United Nations human rights mechanisms.

34. Moreover, invitations were extended to representatives of intergovernmental organizations with members from least developed countries and small island developing States, namely the Commonwealth, CARICOM and the International Organization of la Francophonie; NGOs; and think tanks. The sitting Presidents of the Human Rights Council attended each of the four workshops, thereby bringing the Council to the Caribbean and Pacific regions. The Presidents also met with national authorities, United Nations country teams and representatives of civil society.

35. A rapporteur, usually a former beneficiary, was designated by the Trust Fund secretariat to moderate group discussions aimed at identifying recommendations and priorities. The outcome documents were entitled Declarations Towards 2022, the year when OHCHR will present its report on the activities undertaken by the Trust Fund in the previous 10 years.

36. At the request of the workshop host countries, the four declarations were circulated by the sitting Human Rights Council Presidents to all permanent missions in Geneva. They are as follows:

- (a) Georgetown Declaration Towards 2022;⁶
- (b) Nadi Declaration Towards 2022;⁷
- (c) Ouagadougou-Port Louis Declaration Towards 2022;⁸
- (d) Malé Declaration Towards 2022.⁹

⁶ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/LDCs_SIDS/Workshops/CaribbeanRegion/GeorgetownDeclarationTowards2022.pdf.

⁷ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/LDCs_SIDS/Workshops/PacificRegion/Nadi_Declaration_Towards_2022.pdf.

⁸ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/LDCs_SIDS/Workshops/AfricaRegion/Declaration_Ouagadougou_Port_Louis_EN.pdf.

⁹ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/LDCs_SIDS/Workshops/AsiaRegion/Male-Declaration-Towards-2022.pdf.

37. The declarations yielded a total of 161 recommendations: 32 for Africa, 40 for Asia, 35 for the Caribbean and 54 for the Pacific. Participants issued specific recommendations based on their experiences and the needs of their respective countries. The limited staffing of the Trust Fund secretariat, comprising one coordinator and ad hoc general services, and reliance on voluntary contributions to support its programmes and activities were taken into account during the discussions.

38. While many of the recommendations were similar, some were specific to the needs of each region. The secretariat planned to convene a meeting with all former rapporteurs to consolidate the recommendations; however, this was not possible owing to the rescheduling of the last two workshops.

3. Help desk for small States: from on-site to online

39. In 2020, the President of the Human Rights Council appointed two focal points, Fiji and Singapore,¹⁰ to address challenges faced by delegations from small and developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries, and to follow up on the implementation of the measures on the use of modern technology. In 2021, Singapore and Slovenia were designated to assume these roles.

40. Based on the recommendations of the focal points, a dedicated Human Rights Council help desk for small States was established in 2020, to be managed by the Trust Fund secretariat. The objective of the service is to strengthen the understanding of Council rules and practices by small delegations and enhance their participation in Council sessions. It also provides small delegations with information on various issues, such as rules and procedures, voting, the programme of work and the use of different platforms before, during and after Council sessions.

41. Until March 2020, the help desk held in-person consultations; however, consultations are now online as a result of restrictions related to COVID-19. Even prior to the pandemic, virtual consultations were available upon request. An average of 50 requests for assistance are processed during each session. Beneficiary delegations, including those in New York, have provided positive feedback and suggested that the help desk should continue to be available. The help desk can be reached by email (hrcdesksmallpm@ohchr.org), telephone (+41 79 500 00 32) and WhatsApp.

4. Information-sharing

42. The Trust Fund secretariat sends key information from the Human Rights Council secretariat to all delegations not represented in Geneva. It also shares summaries, in English and French, of discussions held during regular and special sessions of the Council and the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, that are prepared by the Department of Information of the United Nations Office at Geneva. Small delegations have expressed their appreciation for these useful and timely documents.

III. Other accomplishments

A. Engagement of least developed countries and small island developing States in the Human Rights Council

1. Least developed countries and small island developing States members of the Human Rights Council

43. Since the Human Rights Council was established, 123 Member States have served as members. Of these, only 28 were least developed countries and small island developing States. Specifically, 22 members were least developed countries, with 19 from Africa and 3 from Asia and the Pacific; and 5 were small island developing States, with 1 from Africa, 3 from Asia and 1 from Latin America and the Caribbean. The Trust Fund has supported a

¹⁰ See [A/HRC/PRST/OS/12/1](#) and [A/HRC/PRST/OS/13/1](#).

number of small island developing States that were not previously represented on the Council, including the Marshall Islands, with seven beneficiaries, all women; Fiji, with two beneficiaries; and the Bahamas, with four beneficiaries.

44. The membership of least developed countries and small island developing States in the Council has increased slowly since its inception. In 2007, five least developed countries and one small island developing State were members of the Council. In 2012, there were seven least developed countries and two small island developing States.

45. Consequently, the level of representation of least developed countries and small island developing States in the Bureau has been low. Two least developed countries held the position of Vice President until the seventh cycle of the Human Rights Council, when the Trust Fund was established. From the eighth to the fifteenth cycles, seven least developed countries and three small island developing States were represented in the Bureau. During that period, the presidency of the Council was held by one least developed country (Senegal) and one small island developing State (Fiji). However, it is worth noting that the gender balance of the Bureau has significantly improved. While all representatives of least developed countries and small island developing States in the Bureau were men until the seventh cycle, the number of women from least developed countries and small island developing States increased to five between the eighth and fifteenth cycles, including as the President of the Human Rights Council in 2021. Also in 2021, Council members included 10 least developed countries, with 8 from Africa and 2 from Asia and the Pacific; and 3 small island developing States, with 2 from Asia and the Pacific and 1 from Latin America and the Caribbean.

46. In 2021, three of the five Bureau members were least developed countries and small island developing States and all were women. In 2022, nine least developed countries (eight from Africa, one from the Pacific) and one small island developing State (from Asia and the Pacific) will serve as Human Rights Council members. None of them will be members of the Bureau.

2. Universal periodic review

47. Participation of Member States in the review process has been universal since the universal periodic review mechanism was established in 2006. Least developed countries and small island developing States have demonstrated their strong commitment to and acceptance of the mechanism as a critical tool of the Human Rights Council. Their commitment has been reiterated during the reviews and interactive dialogues of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review and at the adoption of the universal periodic review outcomes and general debates under agenda item 6 of the Council's regular sessions.

48. As a result of support provided by the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review, established pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 6/17, senior government officials of least developed countries and small island developing States have travelled to Geneva to participate in:

(a) Sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review when the human rights situation of the representative's country was being reviewed;

(b) Plenary sessions of the Human Rights Council during which the outcome of the review was adopted. The Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review also provides for the travel of one official representative per delegation from developing countries, in particular least developed countries that are members of the Council and do not have a permanent mission in Geneva, in order to serve as rapporteurs as members of the troika.

49. The secretariats of the two funds are increasingly working together to ensure complementary support and an efficient use of limited resources. For example, the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review seeks to support the participation of beneficiaries from countries that are under review by the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, in order to assist their delegations. The Trust Fund also encourages applications for the fellowship programme to enable them to gain first-hand experience with the modalities and proceedings of the Working Group.

50. In fact, 12 former beneficiaries of the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Work of the Human Rights Council have been involved in the universal periodic review process at the national level and/or as a member of their delegation. In November 2021, for example, during the thirty-ninth session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, the head of the delegation of a small island developing State in the Caribbean was a visually impaired former beneficiary of the Trust Fund. She had participated in the programme during the thirty-second session of the Human Rights Council, in 2016, demonstrating that the Trust Fund's training and capacity-building had successfully empowered a delegate.

51. Two positive trends have been noted. First, there is an increase in the participation of least developed countries and small island developing States in the universal periodic reviews, and second, their participation has expanded from countries in their respective regions to all other regions. In addition to showing their commitment to the peer review process, they are contributing to achieving the objective of promoting and protecting human rights in all parts of the world.

52. It is also encouraging to note that representatives of least developed countries and small island developing States have also actively participated in informal consultations, despite a variety of challenges, some of which include a large number of informal consultations to follow; the predominance of English drafts, including on discussions related to situations in French-speaking regions; lack of interpretation; and the time difference between Geneva and capitals, when discussions took place virtually. In another positive development, least developed countries and small island developing States successfully proposed and led initiatives on topics of particular interest to them. For instance, they played a critical role at the forty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council to ensure that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment was recognized as a human right¹¹ and in establishing the mandate of a special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change.¹²

3. Special procedures

53. During its induction courses, the Trust Fund organizes briefings with the Special Procedures Branch to enable beneficiaries to become more acquainted with these mechanisms, follow up on long-standing requests for country visits, facilitate responses to correspondence from the special procedures and encourage their Governments to issue standing invitations.

54. There has been limited representation of the least developed countries and small island developing States among special procedures mandate holders with regard to both thematic and country mandates. As of November 2021, 3 of the 13 country mandate holders, 1 of whom was a woman, were from African least developed countries. Among thematic mandate holders, 13 of 45 mandate holders were experts from 10 least developed countries, including 8 from Africa and 2 from Asia and the Pacific; and 3 small island developing States, including 2 from Africa and 1 from Asia and the Pacific.¹³ It is worth mentioning that 9 of these 13 least developed countries and small island developing States mandate holders were women. Despite significant progress made in terms of geographic and gender representation, there have been no mandate holders from the Pacific and the level of representation from the Caribbean remains extremely low.

55. The Trust Fund will continue to disseminate the calls for applications for vacancies of mandate holders to its former beneficiaries and its larger network in order to encourage qualified candidates from least developed countries and small island developing States to apply.

¹¹ Human Rights Council resolution 48/13.

¹² Human Rights Council resolution 48/14.

¹³ As there are a number of vacancies, the statistics only refer to filled positions.

B. Working together: ensuring strategic partnerships

56. The Trust Fund's secretariat has established and strengthened partnerships with regional and Geneva-based organizations that support least developed countries and small island developing States.

57. The Trust Fund works closely with the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva. It provides space and logistical support to visiting delegations or to the members of its organizations that are least developed countries or small island developing States and that wish to establish a mission in Geneva. It also makes its conference room facilities available for the Trust Fund's in-person induction courses. The Commonwealth Small States Office's expertise in reporting to the human rights treaty bodies is widely recognized. Two of its human rights experts held briefings for beneficiaries of the Trust Fund on the Commonwealth's technical assistance programmes.

58. The Trust Fund has also established a strong working relationship with the International Organization of la Francophonie as 29 of its member and observer States are least developed countries and small island developing States. The importance of providing technical assistance is mentioned in the 2019–2021 cooperation agreement of OHCHR and the International Organization of la Francophonie,¹⁴ which has been renewed every two years since 2007. The International Organization of la Francophonie plays a critical role in promoting multilingualism and is particularly appreciative of the Trust Fund's efforts to conduct its programmes in the two working languages of the United Nations. Eleven members of the International Organization of la Francophonie are providing financial support to the Trust Fund.

59. Furthermore, the Trust Fund has cooperated with CARICOM, including with its secretariat, Caucus of Permanent Representatives in New York, and the CARICOM Group in Geneva, since the 2018 adoption of the Georgetown Declaration Towards 2022. As an example of the increased engagement by the Geneva CARICOM Group in the Human Rights Council, it delivered 10 joint statements in 2019, compared with only 1 delivered in 2017. In total, the Group has delivered 24 statements since 2019, and five Ministers from CARICOM States have participated in the plenary sessions of the Council.

60. The assistance provided by the Trust Fund was reflected in the 2019 report of the General Assembly on cooperation between the United Nations and CARICOM, which highlighted progress made towards the implementation of the Georgetown Declaration.

61. The Trust Fund has briefed the Pacific small island developing States in New York on several occasions and the African Group of Human Rights Experts in Geneva.

62. The Forum of Small States, through its Chair in Geneva (Singapore) is another key partner. In addition, the Trust Fund interacts with the two focal points designated by the President of the Human Rights Council to address challenges faced by delegations from small and developing countries, in particular least developed countries and small island developing States, and has followed up on the implementation of the measures on the use of modern technology.

63. Finally, the Trust Fund maintains partnerships with NGOs and think tanks, including UPR Info and the Universal Rights Group. The Universal Rights Group issues a publication at each session entitled "Inside track", aimed at providing concise information on the upcoming session. The Trust Fund secretariat is a regular contributor to the publication. The Trust Fund secretariat is also a member of the group of the friends of the small island developing States in Geneva, and it is an observer of the group on Human Rights Council membership.

¹⁴ See www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/CooperationOHCHRandFrancophonie.aspx.

C. Beyond room XX: events and familiarization with work of other human rights bodies

64. The secretariat has increased its efforts to organize side events, such as briefings and receptions, to raise awareness about the activities of the Trust Fund. This has been undertaken with the support of interested stakeholders, namely beneficiary and donor Member States, as well as intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and think tanks. The events offer an opportunity for beneficiaries to expand their networks with Geneva-based delegations and share the primary human rights issues in their countries and the challenges they face in addressing them. It also enables beneficiaries to engage with other human rights mechanisms, in particular treaty bodies. As a result of briefings organized by the secretariat with the Convention against Torture Initiative and advocacy undertaken by beneficiaries when they return home, two small island developing States in the Caribbean ratified this important instrument.

65. Since 2016, the Trust Fund has organized an average of five events in Geneva, on the margins of the regular sessions of the Human Rights Council. Activities were also conducted in New York from 2017 to 2019. Despite the limitations imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trust Fund has been able to organize a total of seven events for the beneficiaries in attendance in June and September 2021.

66. The most significant and well attended events¹⁵ that were organized by the Trust Fund included an exhibition and brochure on ensuring that the voices of all Member States are heard, in June 2016; a brochure on the historic first universal session of the Human Rights Council and the contributions of the Trust Fund, in 2016; the launch of a brochure marking the fifth anniversary of the Trust Fund, in 2017; the first regional publication on voices of CARICOM in the Human Rights Council and the historic milestone of participation by all small island developing States of CARICOM through the support of the Trust Fund, in 2017; and the celebration of the 100th beneficiary of the Trust Fund, during which a photo booth was set up to promote universality in the Human Rights Council, in 2018.

67. The secretariat has taken a proactive approach to increasing the visibility of the work of the Trust Fund and its impact, including through outreach to the media, the production of publications and videos commemorating its milestones and showcasing testimonials by former beneficiaries and their subsequent actions to promote and protect human rights in their respective countries. In 2019, the secretariat produced a new awareness-raising tool on facts and figures for each regular session,¹⁶ outlining the background, activities and engagement of the beneficiaries and highlighting the events organized for the beneficiaries.

IV. Donors of the Trust Fund

68. Since the establishment of the Trust Fund, there has been growing interest in its activities, achievements and impacts. This has contributed to an exceptional expansion of its donor base, which needs to be sustained and further expanded. Financial support from donor countries remains critical. At present, a total of 31 donors have supported the Trust Fund (see figures I and II, and annex IV). Only two donors provided support in 2014. It is worth noting that one beneficiary country, the Bahamas, took the decision to stand with its fellow beneficiary Member States and made a symbolic contribution to the Trust Fund. OHCHR is grateful for the support of donors, which has facilitated the Trust Fund's remarkable accomplishments. It thanks them for their support and confidence. A list of donors and their quotes about the Trust Fund, as well as the financial statements, are available online.¹⁷

¹⁵ Examples are available at the following links: see www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/UniversalSession.aspx; www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/5thAnniversaryLDCsSIDSTrustFund.aspx; and www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/Videos.aspx.

¹⁶ See www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/FactFiguresHRCSessions.aspx.

¹⁷ See www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/supporttrustfund.aspx.

Figure I
Number of donors to the Trust Fund, by year, as of December 2021

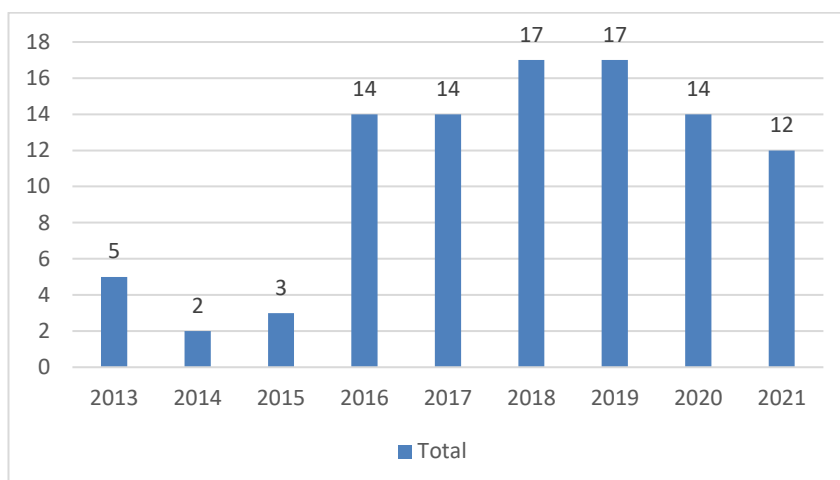
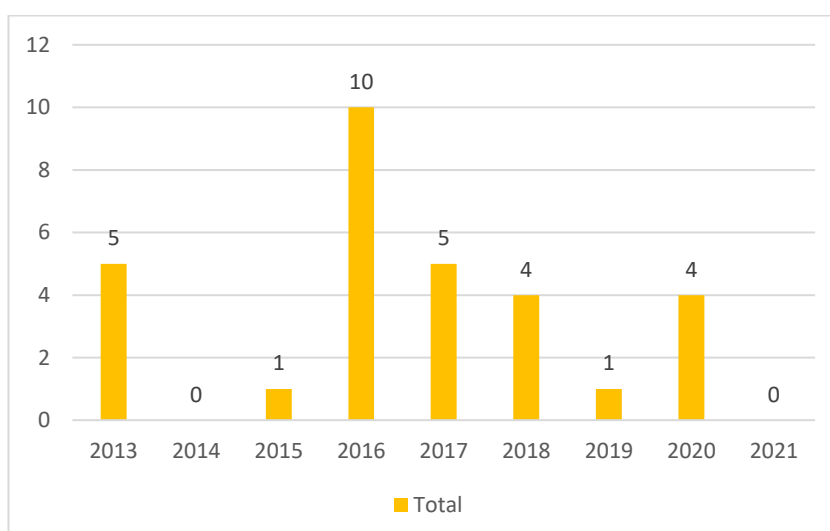


Figure II
New donors, by year, as of December 2021



69. In 2021, the average cost to support the participation of a delegate and fellow was \$14,000 and \$19,000, respectively. For more information about the Trust Fund, visit our web page¹⁸ or contact the secretariat (email: ohchr-sidsldc@un.org). Interested donors are requested to liaise with the Donor and External Relations Section of OHCHR (email: ohchr-dexrel@un.org).

V. Challenges

70. Despite the significant and impactful support provided by the Trust Fund, several challenges have limited the capacity of the Trust Fund to maximize its support. For instance, administrative challenges can impede the timely availability of funds that are needed to enable the participation of delegates from least developed countries and small island developing States in the two programmes of the Trust Fund. In 2016, the fellowship programme was cancelled for this reason. Since the Trust Fund has not enjoyed a predictable pattern of income, substantial resources are held as a reserve for future activities.

71. Another challenge relates to the fact that a high number of delegates are required to travel to another country to apply for a Schengen visa: for example, a delegate of the Gambia

¹⁸ See www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/TrustFund/Pages/SIDS-LDCs.aspx.

must travel to Senegal for the application process. The organization of additional travel through the United Nations administrative system is time-consuming and often leads to air tickets being issued after the 21-day deadline because of late and incomplete applications. A number of requirements of the United Nations rules and procedures created specific challenges for least developed countries and small island developing States.

72. It has also been challenging to secure the participation of some beneficiaries in the fellowship programme owing to the length of the three-month programme. Additionally, domestic political and environmental factors can prevent the last-minute participation of beneficiaries from least developed countries and small island developing States who have been selected by their respective Governments. Furthermore, there is a lack of space available at OHCHR and the United Nations Office at Geneva to conduct the in-person induction courses.

73. The main challenge for the Trust Fund has been the absence of a consistent and dedicated administrative staff, including to process the complex travel arrangements of beneficiaries, since its terms of reference did not provide for such positions. Most arrangements have been made with difficulty, using the already strained resources of the Human Rights Council Branch.

74. The pandemic has amplified some of these challenges. The Trust Fund has been unable to support least developed countries and small island developing States in the Pacific and Caribbean regions owing to closed borders and severe quarantine restrictions. Consequently, from June 2020 to June 2021, the Trust Fund did not support the travel of beneficiaries to attend regular sessions of the Council in Geneva. As a result of the ongoing situation, the fellowships were cancelled in both 2020 and 2021.

VI. Recommendations

75. The outcome documents of the four mandated regional workshops, which were organized by the Trust Fund, contain a series of recommendations and proposals emanating from the feedback and experiences of the beneficiaries.

76. Although it is important to take full account of the specificities of each region and avoid a “one size fits all” approach, the following recommendations may assist in shaping and strengthening the mandate of the Trust Fund and its activities and programmes. The recommendations reflect the availability of funds and the staffing capacity of the Trust Fund’s secretariat.

A. Strengthen current activities

1. e-learning course

77. The e-learning course should be evaluated every two to three years to ensure that it reflects the new virtual and hybrid working methods of the Human Rights Council and that it takes into account the specific needs of permanent missions. The certificate at the end of the e-learning course should be officially validated by OHCHR.

78. The next update should include new modules to explain the various online platforms in use by the Human Rights Council and videos on different procedural topics, including the right to reply, points of order and the delivery of joint statements. In addition, beneficiaries require information on: how to draft and record video statements; where to find useful information, including reports and past Council resolutions; how to draft resolutions and decisions; how to organize and conduct informal consultations; how to establish a permanent mission in Geneva, including interviews with permanent representatives; and key elements for undertaking a Council membership campaign. The first update should be completed in 2023. Copies of the USB drives of the e-learning course should be distributed to the permanent missions in Geneva and New York of all least developed countries and small island developing States, members of the Human Rights Council and relevant partners of the Trust Fund.

79. The Trust Fund should also develop a pocket-sized practical guide for newly deployed delegates of least developed countries and small island developing States in Geneva.

2. Induction course for beneficiary delegates prior to regular sessions of the Human Rights Council

80. The induction course organized by the Trust Fund should include a virtual segment and an in-person session in Geneva, conducted at least three days prior to the commencement of each regular session. The course should be complemented with social events and tailored briefings by key partners.

3. Fellowship programme

81. For least developed countries and small island developing States, the duration of the fellowship programme should be six months for non-members of the Human Rights Council and 12 months for members. The programme should contain practical examples of the various situations that delegates may face during their stay in Geneva and outline how they may be addressed.

4. Strengthening the capacity of least developed countries and small island developing States without permanent missions in Geneva or with small delegations in Geneva

82. General briefings were previously co-organized by the Trust Fund secretariat and the Human Rights Council secretariat on upcoming sessions. Invitations were also extended to all interested delegations. These briefings should be resumed in a virtual or in-person format.

83. The permanent missions of least developed countries and small island developing States in New York should be added to the distribution list of the Human Rights Council secretariat to ensure that those without permanent representation receive all relevant notes verbales at the same time as the permanent missions in Geneva.

84. A group of peers from least developed countries and small island developing States should be established, with rotating geographic representation, to serve as a forum to exchange ideas on strengthening engagement with the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, promote themes and topics of common interest and share knowledge and good practices.

5. Future regional workshops

85. Given the successful outcomes of the regional workshops that were mandated by Human Rights Council resolution 34/40, the Trust Fund should continue to organize regional workshops based on the results of consultations on themes and timing. Steps should be taken to ensure the participation of the sitting President and Vice-President of the Council, when applicable, to increase the visibility of the challenges faced by least developed countries and small island developing States when engaging with the Council, and to amplify their voices.

86. The cross-regional dimension of the workshops, including the participation of beneficiaries from other regions, which was initiated by the Trust Fund, has added value to the programmes. It should continue, as it contributed to nurturing constructive partnerships. Key partners of the Trust Fund should also be invited to participate.

B. Expanding and developing new programmes

1. Supporting the participation for special sessions and intersessional activities

87. The Trust Fund should explore, on a trial basis, ways to support delegates from least developed countries and small island developing States that are members of the Human Rights Council and who are based in European embassies, with a view to facilitating their participation in special sessions and/or important intersessional activities.

88. Least developed countries and small island developing States that are members of the Human Rights Council should receive support to participate in each of the Council's regular sessions during their first year of membership. Such support should only be given once to the

same delegate in order to broadly build the capacity of least developed countries and small island developing States that are members of the Council.

2. Technical support to participate in online and hybrid training sessions

89. The Trust Fund should explore ways to provide least developed countries and small island developing States with the opportunity to request necessary technical and financial assistance, if needed, to ensure their access to adequate Internet connectivity.

3. Support for the participation of beneficiaries from least developed countries and small island developing States in the work of the Third Committee in New York

90. The Trust Fund should explore the proposal, on a trial basis, to enable the beneficiaries selected to attend the fifty-third session of the Human Rights Council, to be held in June 2023, or the fifty-fourth Council session, to be held in September 2023, and to also participate in the work of Third Committee. This would enable beneficiaries to become familiar with the policies and operational procedures of the Third Committee and the respective roles of the two bodies.

4. Training at the national level

91. The Trust Fund should undertake training at the national level, at the request of interested least developed countries and small island developing States, through a training of trainers on the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, with the participation of interested former beneficiaries of the Trust Fund. This cost-effective training would enable them to share their first-hand experiences in Geneva and further develop their skills.

5. Sustainability of the Trust Fund

92. The Trust Fund is entirely reliant on voluntary contributions to support its activities and programmes and has limited opportunities to have them partially or fully covered by the regular budget. As a result, the beneficiaries of the Trust Fund suggested that OHCHR, through the Trust Fund, organize an annual meeting with existing and potential donor countries to keep them informed of its achievements and challenges, with a view to sustaining its funding and mobilizing additional funding. The meeting could also serve as a forum for former beneficiary delegates and fellows to share their testimonies and highlight the knowledge they gained through their participation in the Trust Fund's programmes.

VII. Conclusions

93. Since it became operational in 2014, the Trust Fund has been instrumental in ensuring the increasing participation, engagement and contribution of least developed countries and small island developing States in the work of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms. The efforts deployed to ensure universality have been commended by beneficiary countries and all Member States, United Nations departments and agencies, and NGOs and civil society representatives. The decision to convene a high-level panel on universality on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Trust Fund at the forty-ninth session of the Council was supported by a record number of 160 Member States. In December 2021, Council members supported the President's proposal that the theme of the 2022 annual mainstreaming panel would be the contribution of universal participation to the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Trust Fund in the work of the Council. These decisions reflect the importance of hearing all voices to promote and protect human rights around the world.

94. The Trust Fund has been a game changer for three reasons. First, through the support of the Trust Fund, 91 per cent of its beneficiaries attended a regular session of the Council and visited the United Nations for the first time. Second, more than 80 per cent of its beneficiaries have continued to work for their respective Governments. Third, several beneficiaries have been posted in Geneva and New York, in recognition of the human rights expertise that they have gained through their participation in one of the programmes.

95. Through creative and diverse outreach events, the Trust Fund secretariat has engaged partners and expanded its donor base, affirming its wide-reaching impact. The Trust Fund has proven to be a vital entry point for the technical cooperation activities of OHCHR, since it has enhanced the knowledge and increased the capacity of governmental officials, who bear primary responsibility for promoting and protecting human rights in their respective countries.

96. While impressive efforts have been undertaken through the activities and programmes of the Trust Fund, the voluntary financial contributions and the commitment and engagement of key stakeholders and partners, much remains to be done to achieve universality at every session of the Council to ensure that no one is left behind.

Annex I

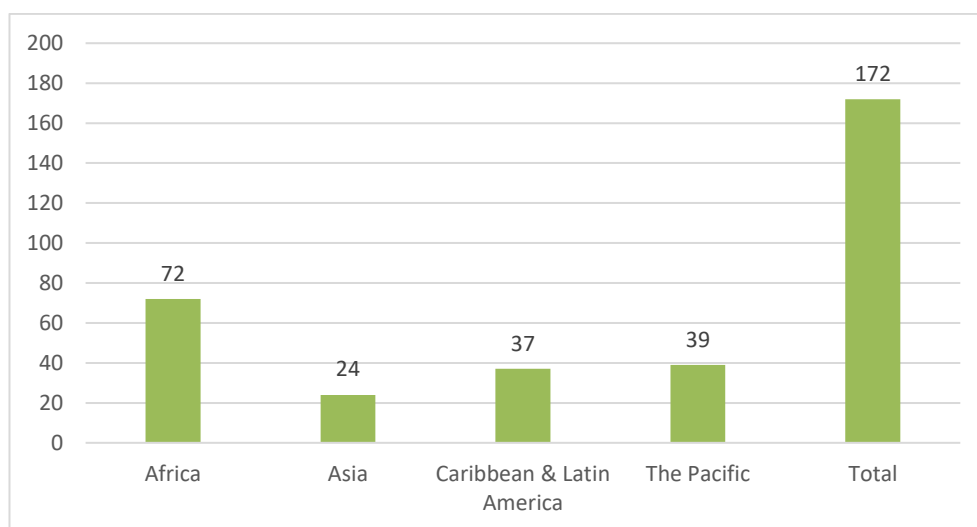
Statistics on the beneficiaries of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund

	<i>Total eligible LDCs/SIDS</i>	<i>Total eligible LDCs/SIDS supported</i>
Africa	36	35
Asia	10	10
Caribbean & Latin America	14	14
The Pacific	12	12
Total	72	71

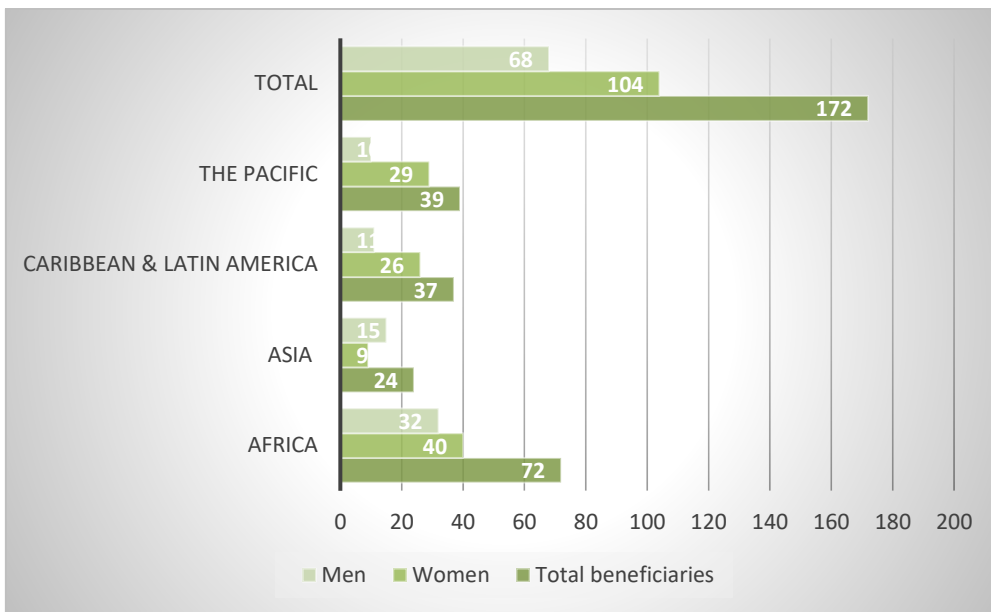
Beneficiaries per region, gender, programmes (delegates, fellows)

	<i>Delegates</i>			<i>Fellows</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Africa	65	35	30	7	5	2
Asia	20	7	13	4	2	2
Caribbean & Latin America	32	23	9	5	3	2
The Pacific	34	25	9	5	4	1
Total	151	90	61	21	14	7

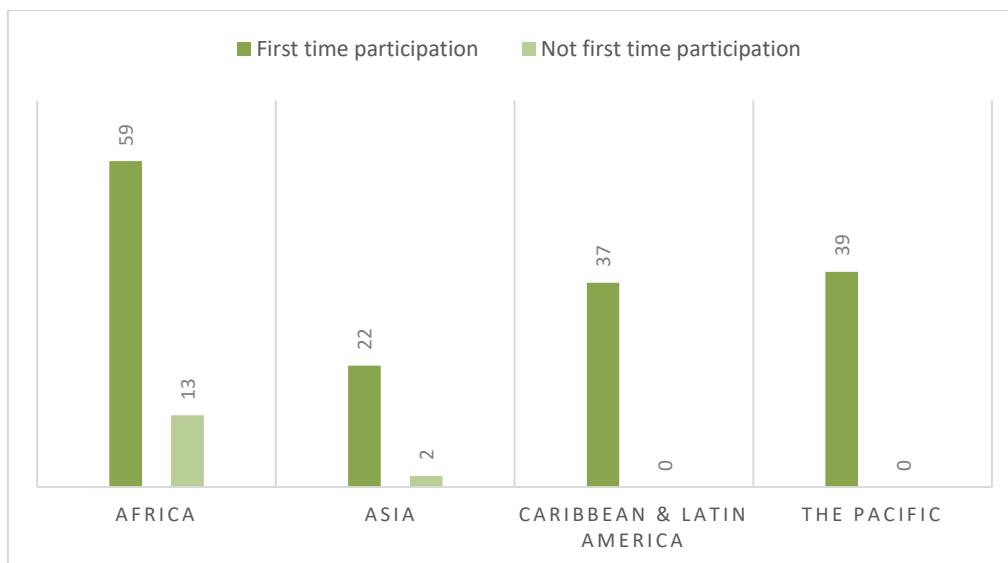
Beneficiaries per region



Beneficiaries per region and gender

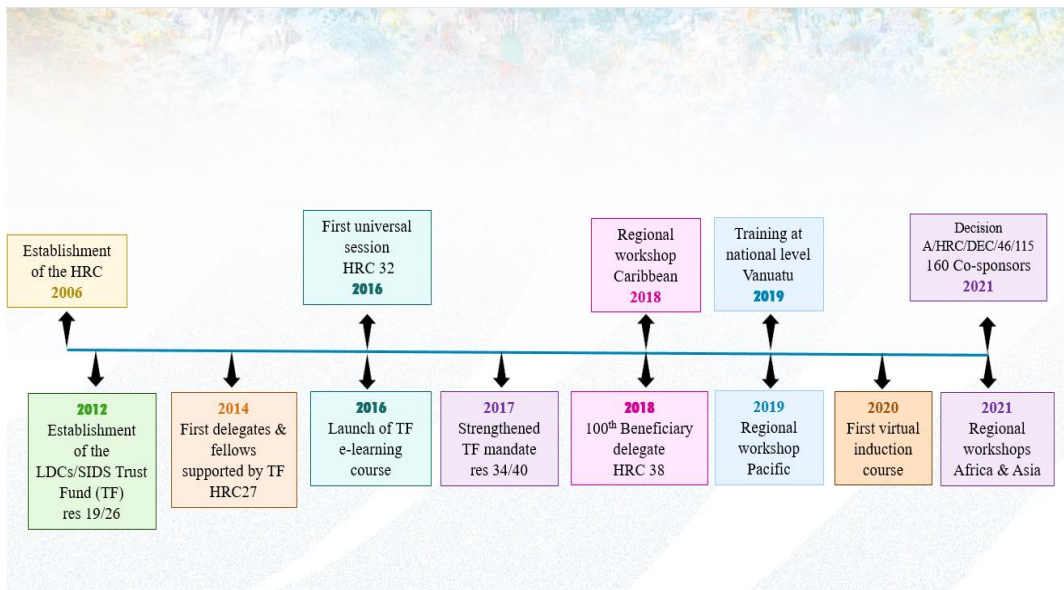


Beneficiaries' first-time participation in a regular HRC session per region



Annex II

Key dates of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund



Annex III

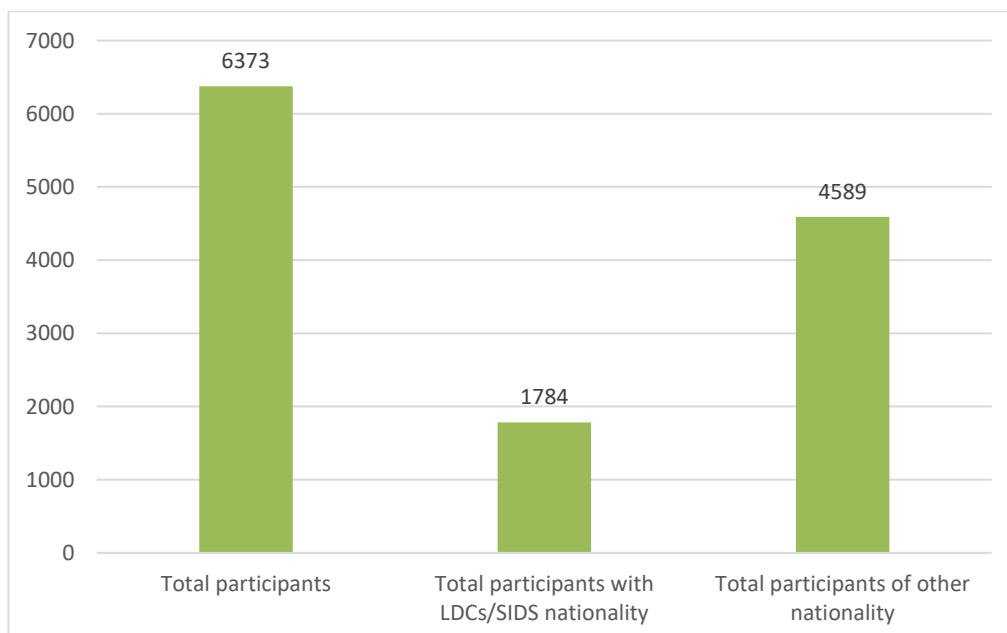
Statistics on participants enrolled in the e-learning course of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund (2016 to 2021)

Source: ICT-ILO

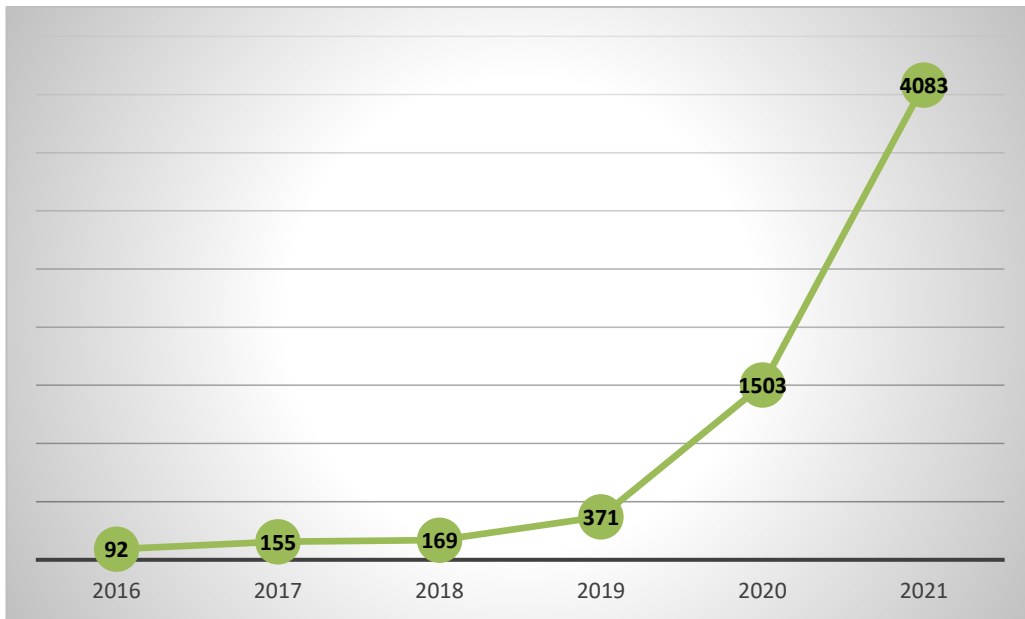
Enrolment in the e-learning course of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund, by gender



Enrolment in the e-learning course of the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund, by nationality



Number of participants enrolled (2016–2021)



Annex IV

List of donors to the Trust Fund (2013–2021)

