Panel 1. Measuring the SDG financing gap in vulnerable countries

With the technical assistance of the High-Level Expert Panel established by the President of the General Assembly, the United Nations will soon finalize the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index to serve as a complementary metric to the GNI per capita for developing countries to access development financing and fill the SDG financing gap. In this context, the speakers of Panel 1 shared their views on how the SDG financing gap can be measured; what methodology is their organization adopting to identify the costs of advancing on each SDG; and why it is essential to measure the SDG financing gap.

Moderator

**Dr. Isabella Massa** is a Senior Economist working on the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index at the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). Prior to joining SDSN, she was an independent consultant and previously worked as Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in London, where she led the international finance stream of work. Isabella also worked as Economist at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the Middle East and Central Asia Department, and as researcher and instructor in different universities.

Dr. Massa is specialized in macro-finance and development. She has policy-oriented research experience in particular with respect to developing countries (including SIDS), and has experience in conducting quantitative and qualitative analysis. She has published in academic journals, and authored books and book chapters.

Dr. Massa holds a Ph.D. in Economics and Organization from Ca’ Foscari University in Italy, and an MSc degree in Financial Markets and Intermediaries from the University of Toulouse in France. She speaks Italian, English, French and Spanish.

Panelists

**Dr. Simona Marinescu** is UN Resident Coordinator in Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau leading a large portfolio of programmes including climate mitigation and adaptation, energy transition, governance, basic services and human rights for those Polynesian nations. Dr. Marinescu leads the joint work of the UN Resident Coordinators on the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index for Small Island Developing States in partnership with Prof. Jeffrey Sachs and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Prior to that, Dr. Marinescu led the Development Impact Group in UNDP HQ coordinating programme and development effectiveness including inter-alia results management, South-South Cooperation, Knowledge Management and Innovation. Dr. Marinescu led the Istanbul International Center for Private Sector in Development and served as UNDP Senior Economist in Baghdad. Former World Bank social protection expert in the Middle East and North Africa region and USAID Sector Lead for Social Safety Nets, Dr. Marinescu also worked in her own country as Minister Secretary of State for
Labour and Social Protection Committee of the Senate.

**Dr. Valerie Cerra** is an Assistant Director in the Fiscal Affairs Department of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and was previously the Division Chief of the Inclusive Growth and Structural Policies Division and the European and Middle Eastern Division in the IMF’s Institute for Capacity Development. She has been involved in policy advice, lending, and capacity development in the IMF’s Western Hemisphere, African, European, and Asia and Pacific departments, and the IMF Institute. She obtained undergraduate degrees in finance and engineering from the University of Pennsylvania, a PhD in Economics from the University of Washington, and is a Chartered Financial Analyst. She has published widely in leading economics journals on topics related to international macroeconomics, financial crises, economic scarring, and inclusive growth.

**Prof. Avinash Persaud** is non-resident Senior Fellow of the Peterson Institute for International Economics Washington, Emeritus Professor if Gresham College in the UK and non-executive Chairman of Elara Capital, an investment bank based in Mumbai. He was ranked one of the leading public intellectuals in the world on the financial crisis by a panel of experts for the UK’s Prospect Magazine a few years ago. He was senior executive at J.P Morgan in its Commodity and Currency Division, and an Investment Director at GAM London ltd, the leading hedge fund manager. He was a top-ranking analyst in the leading surveys of international investors for a decade. In Trinidad and Tobago he is a non-executive director of RBC, Beacon Insurance and Media InSite.

Professor Persaud has published widely on finance and economics and has served on a number or major policy commissions, including chairing the Warwick Commission and the regulatory subcommittee of the UN Commission on Financial Reform he was an expert member of the UK Treasury’s Audit and Risk Committee and the Pew Task Force to the US Senate Banking Committee. He is a former Governor of the London School of Economics, was elected Trustee of the Royal Economics Society and is a Past President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Economics Section.

**Mr. Paul Akiwumi** is the director of UNCTAD’s division for Africa, least developed countries and special programmes.

He has a wealth of knowledge and extensive experience in the areas of political, diplomatic and development policy at the national, regional and global levels with governments, the private sector and civil society.

Previously, Mr. Akiwumi served as director of the economic, social and development affairs unit in the executive office of the secretary-general of the UN in New York. Prior to this role, he was the chief of staff in the office of the deputy secretary-general of the UN.
Before joining the UN, he was a senior advisor to the chief executive officer of the Global Environment Facility in Washington D.C. Earlier in his career, he served with the UN Environment Programme as chief of staff. He also worked for the Food and Agriculture Organization and the Economic Commission for Africa.

He holds a master's degree from the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom.