



## Small Island Developing State Q&A

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### What is a Small Island Developing State?

Small Island Developing States, also called SIDS, are a group of small island countries that share common development issues. SIDS face unique challenges as a result of their size, remoteness, small economies, and vulnerability to global economic and environmental changes. Within the United Nations (UN), SIDS are represented by the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

### Who can become a Small Island Developing State?

There is no standard definition of what qualifies as a SIDS and a country can declare itself to be one at any time. However, SIDS are typically small in size and population, have developing economies, and face one or more significant challenges due to their unique status. The following UK Overseas Territories are already SIDS: Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Turks & Caicos.

### What is the process for becoming a Small Island Developing State?

While Executive Council has taken the decision to declare St Helena a SIDS, the UN formally represents only those countries that are 1) UN Member States or 2) associate members of a UN Regional Commission. As a UK Overseas Territory, St Helena is not eligible to become a UN Member State. For this reason, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has offered to facilitate associate membership with the relevant UN Regional Commission.

### What is a UN Regional Commission?

Regional Commissions are the local offices that do the work of the UN around the world. Currently, there are five Regional Commissions representing Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Pacific. These offices play a key role in promoting implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and building economic, social, and environmental capacity among their members. The Regional Commissions facilitate knowledge sharing and networking at the regional level and represent the views of their members at global meetings related to climate change, economic development and other topics.

### What are the benefits of becoming a Small Island Developing State?

In general, SIDS can benefit from special provisions or funding that is secured for them, and some international and regional institutions have prioritised SIDS for support or apply less restrictive rules on support provided to SIDS. While St Helena's status as a UK

Overseas Territory means it will not be eligible for funding designated for independent countries, SIDS status may open up additional opportunities that were not previously available.

Most of the benefits of SIDS status will come from joining a UN Regional Commission. As an associate member of a UN Regional Commission, St Helena would gain access to a well-organised network of expertise and peer-to-peer engagement. In Montserrat's experience, peer support provided through regional or SIDS groups has been beneficial for increasing technical capacity and implementing reforms. In addition, associate members of the UN Regional Commissions may have access to funding that is earmarked for members of that region, though rules for specific funding sources may still exclude non-independent territories.

## Which UN Regional Commission should St Helena join?

While the UN Regional Commissions are generally organised by geography, there are no strict criteria for which region a particular country belongs to. For example, Canada and the United States are members of the UN Economic Commission for Europe due to historical and economic ties to the European continent.

After evaluating options, Executive Council has approved the recommendation that St Helena request to join the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC). Nearly half of UNECLAC members are SIDS and the region currently includes a number of other non-independent territories, including other UK Overseas Territories. This creates a significant opportunity for St Helena to engage with other countries that have similar experiences, challenges, and opportunities.

In addition, because UNECLAC includes such a large number of SIDS, it is most likely to advocate for positions that benefit St Helena when representatives of the Regional Commission participate in global meetings (e.g., UN conferences on climate change or sustainable development).

Finally, membership in UNECLAC potentially offers a path to membership in the Caribbean Development Bank. Regional Development Banks offer finance to member countries at attractive terms. This is an option SHG intends to evaluate in the future.

## Why doesn't St Helena join the African region?

While Africa is St Helena's nearest neighbour, membership in the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) does not offer as many benefits as membership in UNECLAC. Only a small percentage of UNECA member states are SIDS and all of those are independent countries that do not share the specific challenges St Helena faces as an UK Overseas Territory. In addition, UNECA is dominated by large countries that have significant development needs of their own, meaning priorities for the Regional Commission may not align with St Helena's interests. In addition, the African Development Bank is only open to independent states. Although St Helena will not request to join UNECA, it is important to note that this does not mean that St Helena cannot not engage with the African region or specific countries in other ways.