SOUTHERN DEBT REPORT: CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES
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Presentation

Increasing high debt levels in southern countries are a burden that is primarily paid at the expenses of the people that are more exposed to economic, social and climate vulnerabilities. The multiple crises are leading to non-concessional loans, public spending cuts and more extractivism, in an unequal recovery.

Debt landscape, composition and current risks as interest rates rise, impose new challenges to urgently address policies. A case-by-case approach, especially in this context, is not delivering at the scale needed to solve nor to prevent debt distress and defaults for low and middle-income countries.

This report aims to identify and address the main debt risks and commonalities for countries of three southern regions, Latin America, Africa and Asia, with proposals on global debt policies that would be a game changer towards a fair international financial architecture.

From the Global South, there are several demands and challenges for achieving social and economic justice, where debt is one of the instruments. The recommendations in this report contribute to feed advocacy discussions with decision makers about key debt architecture issues that are urgently needed to provide solutions for the increasing number of countries that need to solve debt problems and to prevent a debt crisis.
Acronyms

AEs: Advanced Economies
Afrodad: African Forum and Network on Debt and Development
APMDD: Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development
ASE: South and East Asia
CF: Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the DSSI
CoT: Comparability of Treatment
CSO: Civil Society Organizations
DSA: Debt Sustainability Analysis
DSF: Debt Sustainability Framework
DSSI: Debt Service Suspension Initiative
EAP: East Asia and Pacific
ECLAC: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EMDEs: Emerging Markets and Developing Economies
Eurodad: European Network on Debt and Development
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
GFC: Global Financial Crisis
GNI: Gross National Income
HIPC: Highly Indebted Poor Countries
IDA: International Development Association
IFA: International Financial Architecture
IMF: International Monetary Fund
LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean
LATINDADD: Latin American Network for Economic and Social Justice
LICs: Low-Income Countries
LIC DSF: Low-Income Country Debt Sustainability Framework
MDBs: Multilateral Development Banks
MICs: Middle-Income Countries
PPG: Public and Publicly Guaranteed
PRGT: Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust
RST: Resilience and Sustainability Trust
SA: South Asia
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
SDRs: Special Drawing Rights
SOE: State Owned Enterprises
SRDSF: Sovereign Risk and Debt Sustainability Framework for Market Access Countries
SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa
UN: United Nations
UNCTAD: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
[UNCTAD’s] SDFA: [UNCTAD’s] Sustainable Development Finance Assessment
WB: World Bank
Executive Summary

The economic fallout resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have resulted in a continuation of the surge of debt globally, with greater vulnerability for developing and emerging economies as an outcome. This report focuses on the regions South and East Asia (ASE), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). It charts the significant changes that have occurred in the type of external debt held and the type of creditors providing financing to sovereigns in these regions.

Since the global financial crisis of 2009, the share of public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) debt has grown, relative to other types of external debt namely private sector debt, in all three regions. The analysis then shows a major shift in composition within this PPG debt category. Here a common feature is that such state-led refinancing, which used to come primarily from official creditors, through bilateral and multilateral lending, now is provided mostly by private creditors, in particular via bonds. Issued mostly under the legal regimes of the global financial centers, an increase in bond refinancing for states entails increased dependency on international capital.

In light of the series of external shocks of the recent years, the report then discusses a number of fiscal and macroeconomic challenges for the examined countries. Access to financing for smoother fiscal consolidations may not be available for many countries. To reduce the primary surpluses that need to be spend on debt servicing and hamper state’s ability to recover and invest in development, restructurings will be needed. Faced with structural problems in the international financial architecture, a growing number of nations are sliding into increasingly untenable budgetary conditions, headed for ‘too little too late’ debt restructurings.

What is to be done? The report identifies a number of advocacy objectives, namely (1.) the adoption of sound Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) methodologies, (2.) the provision of more liquidity to developing economies to enable necessary expansionary macro policies. (3.) the enforcement of comparability of treatment in the context of the changing creditor landscape. (4.) the establishment of a new common sense around debt transparency and the (5.) rekindling and doubling of efforts for the establishment of a multilateral framework for debt restructuring. While each individual advocacy objective does not suffice to change the asymmetrical playing field against the backdrop of which the current wave of debt unfolds, they are designed to complement each other in a manner that generates a virtuous cycle, building momentum for much needed structural reform of the International Financial Architecture.
GLOBAL BACKGROUND: ROOTS AND CAUSES
GLOBAL BACKGROUND: ROOTS AND CAUSES

1.1. A wave of heavy external shocks in an already fragile situation

A well-documented result of the Covid-19 epidemic has been a surge in debt levels globally. For the countries in this report’s regional focus on South and East Asia (ASE), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), this meant an acceleration of the ‘fourth wave of debt’, that had started a decade earlier. Since then, significant changes have occurred in the type of external debt held and the type of creditor providing financing to sovereigns in the three regions. Faced with structural problems in the international financial architecture, a growing number of nations are sliding into increasingly untenable fiscal conditions, headed for ‘too little too late’ debt restructurings.

Decade-long accumulation: Accelerating growth of absolute debt levels

Figure 1: Regional distribution of total (gross) external debt stocks* 2007-21 in USD million

Source: World Bank (IDS)

Debt vulnerabilities were already heightened in Emerging Markets and Developing Economies (EMDEs) pre-pandemic and deteriorated sharply since the onset of the crisis in relative as well as absolute terms. Growth of the total external debt stock in EMDEs accelerated over 2021, totaling 9 trillion USD in Low-Income Countries (LICs) and Middle-Income Countries (MICs).

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1 See Annex for full country set data and methodology. The concept of a “debt wave” was coined by the World Bank Group’s Report Global Waves of Debt: Causes and Consequences (Kose et al, 2021a). The report builds on earlier work and finds there have been four major debt waves since 1970. The first three waves ended in financial crises—the Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s, the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, and the global financial crisis of 2007-09.

2 Definition (World Bank 2014b): Gross external debt, at any given time, is the outstanding amount of those actual current, and not contingent, liabilities that require payment(s) of principal and/or interest by the debtor at some point(s) in the future and that are owed to nonresidents by residents of an economy. (For further description see Methodology section in Annex 1).

3 In 2018 the debt-to-GDP ratio had reached 170%, a 54-percentage point rise, described as hitherto “the largest, fastest and most broad-based debt increase” since at least the 1970 (Kose et al. 2020a). In about nine out of ten EMDEs debt increased in the decade from 2010-20 and in half of them, it surged in excess of 30% points of GDP (Kose et al. 2021b).
It was up from 8.5 trillion USD, a nominal-term leap of more than 5% on average that year (World Bank International Debt Report 2022a: 7). In addition with a surge in private debt in EMDEs this spawns an unstable panorama: In fact, corporate sector foreign currency borrowing also has been growing significantly in many EMDE’s, and these types of liabilities are particularly exposed to macroeconomic shifts of the sort described above.

**Diverging paths: Relative growth of the debt burden**

When examining the relationship between the total external debt stocks and the gross national income (GNI), which gives insights to the general sustainability, a picture starts emerging. In 2010, all three regions were at a similar starting point of around 20–25% of external debt obligations in relation to economic output, then paths started diverging. While in Asia growth held pace, external debt took off in the other regions reaching half of GDP in LAC in 2020, and SSA only slightly trailing behind with a ratio of 45%.

The pandemic-induced spike in the external debt to GNI ratio slightly eased to 2019 levels (in 2021 it went down by 3 percentage points on average for LICs and MICs). This alleviation was, however, not driven by a cutback in debt levels but rather renewed GNI growth as lockdowns were lifted in many parts of the world. Yet, overall debt to GNI levels remain elevated in historical comparison (World Bank 2022a: XIII).

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4 The USD 0.56 trillion of net debt inflows were to a large extent due to short-term debt inflows for trade refinancing (ca. 50%), an exchange rate effects worth around USD 60 billion mainly caused by a US-Dollar appreciation. There was ca. USD 17 billion recorded in outflows, e.g. caused by non-resident sales of domestic debt holdings to residents.

5 Increase of 117% points of GDP reaching 142% of GDP in 2021, recording the biggest year-to-year increase in history. (Kose et al. 2021b: 5).

6 However, as the case of Mexico shows, balance of payments and economic crises may be triggered even at much lower debt to GDP levels. In 1994, just before its debt crisis, this ratio was at a mere 27% when the local currency and economy started collapsing (IMF 1999:8 and World Bank International Debt Statistics).

7 Dataset does not include the year 2022.
Incidence: Cumulative rise of debt servicing costs

A look at the interest and principal repayments in relation to exports reveals that debt service compared to trade receipts has been growing in all three regions. However, while in Asia this potentially destabilizing development has been less pronounced, doubling from a low base of 5%, in SSA it almost quadrupled over the same time span to 20%. In LAC this ratio was already much higher at 15% at the outset of the fourth debt wave in 2010, and today debt service is significantly less backed up by export earnings, where this relationship is hovering between 25–30%.

Particularly in LICs the financial burden is rapidly getting heavier. Debt servicing costs (including state guaranteed) have risen to more than 62 billion US dollars, an increase by over one third from 2021. It has now reached 3% of GNI. The upward trend is anticipated to persist over the coming years with a bulk of sovereign bonds reaching maturity in the time span against a backdrop of soaring refinancing costs (World Bank 2022a: XI, XIV).
1.2. The current situation: Narrowing funding options and debt distress

The impact of Covid-19 on the global economy had worse effects in poor countries, leading many LICs into debt distress or perilously close to entering that stage, according to the United Nations (UN FSD 2022). Nearly 60% of countries within the Debt Sustainability Framework (DSF) are now in debt distress territory or at elevated risk of experiencing it presently (World Bank 2022a: XIII).

The year 2022 brought another massive global shock with the War in Ukraine. The outbreak of a land war in Europe has caused the disarranging of global supply chains. As a result, commodities and industrial goods have been exposed to harsh inflation spikes. This has further clouded the global economic outlook and had distributional consequences worldwide—and especially so in commodity exporting countries and in LICs which food and energy are a more prevalent component in the consumption basket.

An important tool for development, accruing too much of a particular type of financing can quickly become unsuitable when the global macroeconomic tide changes and re-financing conditions worsen. The long list of past sovereign debt crises, which often follow similar patterns (see Reinhard and Rogoff 2008) is a vivid testament to that. Debt vulnerabilities continue increasing. Doom-scenarios are to be avoided. A realistic sense of the magnitude of the past shocks and the effects they have produced in EMDEs is however warranted.
REGIONAL RAMIFICATIONS AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
The composition of the total external debt burden

When comparing the three regions, ASE, LAC and SSA, the distribution of debt growth and the debt servicing costs progressed unequally over the last one-and-a-half decades. Likewise, the composition of the external debt burden, which includes long-term public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) debt, short term obligations (trade financing), and private sector non-guaranteed debt, differs significantly across regions (for a detailed graphic comparing of the debt composition in each region between 2011 and 2021, see Annex 1). Since the start of the fourth debt-wave the share of PPG debt has increased in importance in all regions. For this reason, we concentrate our analysis on this type of external debt in this section. A focus on such long-term state obligations reveals a major shift in composition within the PPG debt category, with one common feature in all three regions: refinancing of the state (and state guaranteed entities) used to come primarily from official creditors, through bilateral and multilateral lending, however, today it is mostly private creditors that provide financing. Those private investors provide funds in particular via bondholding. Issued mostly under the legal regimes of the global financial centers, an increase in bond refinancing for states means increased dependency on international capital.

2.1. Changes in the type of debt

Regional ramifications and comparative analysis

[2] PPG is 25% in East Asia, where private debt (29%) and short-term debt (44%) is increasingly important. PPG reaches 45% and 46% in LAC and South Asia respectively (here private debt is 33% and 38%; short-term debt only 17% and 11% of the total external debt stock). In comparison this proportion is 60% in SSA, which indicates the importance of the public sector financing in this region, making the state an indispensable actor for refinancing investments (private debt is a mere 21%; short-term debt only 11%). (World Bank 2022a).
Debt and development in East and South Asia

Asia has by far the biggest stock of external debt in absolute terms reaching almost $5 trillion in long- and short-term obligations as of 2021 (World Bank 2022a). A large and economically diverse region, ASE has generally succeeded to maintain balanced external debt stocks to GNI and debt service to exports ratios, as growth in the region has kept pace. There are exceptions, however, most notably with Sri-Lanka and Pakistan who recently had to turn to the IMF for support.

Private refinancing has risen significantly in importance in the debt mix, making up less than a fifth in 2008 and rising to over 62% in 2021. Within the private creditor category, bonds have emerged as source of financing, rising more than tenfold from USD 61.6 to 696 billion, constituting 84% of debt from private creditors and now being the main source of financing for development, while banks made up a mere 16% in that category at the end of 2021.

Persistently high debt burden in Latin America & the Caribbean

LAC counts 5 lower MICs as well as 17 upper MICs —among them Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines are at high risk of debt distress and Grenada currently in distress. The relative debt burden has been growing throughout the last one and a half decades. The region has long struggled with its debt and defaults occurred multiple times throughout its history (for 2021 credit rating actions in the region see ECLAC 2022:50–53).

Still recovering from a wave of debt crisis throughout the ‘90s, two decades later overall external debt levels stand at 1.9 trillion with the PPG share at just over 900bn. In fact, PPG debt has remained an important source of financing even increasing slightly from 39% in 2010 to 45% of the total external debt stock in 2021.

3 Most countries in the region are lower MICs (18), with only one LIC (Afghanistan). At the same time, all but one (the Maldives) of its five upper MICs are located in EAP.

4 Pakistan is recovering from a major natural disaster.
Refinancing comes mostly from private sources, in particular bonds. In contrast, official creditors play a minor role, and the region’s most important economy, Brazil, is itself among Paris club creditors16.

- Within the PPG category, private creditors continue to play an important role and now make up the bulk of debt obligations reaching two thirds. Sovereign bonds as a refinancing instrument are particularly central and have tripled over the last 15 years. As bonds have taken a preeminent stage, this makes market access a crucial condition in the region.

Crisis Nexus Sub-Saharan Africa

In SSA the USD 750 billion threshold in external debt holdings was crossed as recently as 2020, despite it being the poorest among the three regions. It counts 23 LICs and 17 lower MICs which make up 96% of the sovereigns in the region. Only six countries have reached the upper MICs bracket16, counting only one large economy among them, South Africa. It has 33 former HIPC nations among its members and the same amount of IDA countries17.

As a region, SSA has seen its debt to GDP duplicating from 32.7% to 65% since the start of the last decade (Tyson 2022) or 126 to 475 billion USD in public and publicly guaranteed debt. Meanwhile a change in the creditors’ base has taken place, building up over the last 15 years a fraction of the region’s external debt in the form of bonds that reached 30% in 2022. Another 17% is with non-Paris club creditor countries, most importantly China (ibid).

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15 Brazil became a full member of the Paris Club in 2016.
16 Botswana; Gabon; Equatorial Guinea; Mauritius; Namibia; South Africa.
17 World Bank International Development Association (IDA) countries are classified based on a country’s relative poverty, defined as GNI per capita below an established threshold and updated annually – currently $1,255 in the fiscal year 2023.
Such adverse shifts in the balance of payments could not be offset by state investments, as the fiscal space of many EMDEs was already constrained from 2010 onwards in the decade before the Covid-19 pandemic (AFRODAD interview 2023). Through this mechanism, the detrimental shocks triggered by the pandemic in all economies were amplified and exacerbated many times over. One example for a curtailment in cash flows via the reduction of remittances, which constitute a crucial revenue stream in many economies, has taken place18.

Regional ramifications and comparative analysis

However, Fuje (2021) found that in SSA for those countries with market access, so called ‘frontier markets’ turning to the DSSI did not adversely affect refinancing costs, as borrowing conditions did not worsen and risk spreads might have declined19. However, with the exception of South Africa and Nigeria no other economy in SSA could issue Eurobonds. The secondary market yield curve also points in a worrisome direction, with a jump in 6% on average and reaching up to 18% for some sovereign bonds (Tyson 2022). Short term debt stock has also grown, notably via the increased use of domestic debt issuance. A fifth of all banking asset books is in local debt instruments. The interconnection of sovereign debt crises with banking sector exposure, as financial institutions hold domestic debt as regulatory capital (200% according to Tyson 2022), described as the doom loop, might add further vulnerabilities.

SSA emerged as a likely center of a coming wave of debt defaults, with a high number of LICs approaching unsustainable situations or already in default, such as Zambia which had to turn to the IMF in 2021. Most recently, Ghana suspended payments on most of their external debts, a week after reaching an agreement with the IMF for a US$3bn loan. Also, further countries previously deemed as poster-children, flourishing with successful development strategies and rapid economic expansions such as Ethiopia and Kenya, are nearing the abyss too, potentially nurturing an atmosphere of regional instability. Debt crises in these countries have negative spill-overs for the neighbors in the region.

18 For the SSA region, remittances are a key revenue stream. In 2019, it amounted to around 47 billion US dollar. Up until the pandemic, growth rates were formidable: from 2015 to 2019 remittances rose by a total of 20%, only to then revert with a sudden decline in 2020 by over 7%. (OECD/ADBI/ ILO, 2021 in Debt and Pandemic 2021:6). As EMDEs have seen their income tumble, these have left their marks, and in an already unfavourable environment, balances of payment turned further into red territory. However they bounced back with and 16.4% increase in 2021 and 9.2% in 2022. World Bank (2022b).

19 Yet, according to the authors the “the impact is moderate and subject to considerable uncertainty” (13 countries that have access to capital markets in the sample: Angola, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Zambia, as well as South Africa).
Figure 7: SSA PPG (official vs private creditors) 2008–21 in USD million

Source: World Bank (IDS)

- PPG is with a 60% share in the total debt mix the most important category of external debt. Within the PPG category refinancing from private creditors has soared, with bonds now among the most significant sources of financing. Yet, official funds maintain an important share and have grown in absolute numbers, with both multilateral and bilateral creditors expanding the financing they provide to sovereigns in the region.
2.2. Changing creditor types

Despite MICs still making up for the largest share of the overall debt burden in EMDEs with access to private bond markets, LICs have been catching up. Also due to non-Paris Club’s countries lending, most notably China, overall debt levels have soared in LICs:

1. In absolute terms the Paris Club’s debt stock rose by about 15 billion USD over the last decade. Yet, its share of the overall debt obligations fell from 58% to just above 30%.

2. Over the same period Non–Paris Club creditor obligations, jumped over 100 billion USD from 42% to 68% of the total IDA official bilateral debt. China makes up for almost half of that (World Bank 2022a: XI).

China is a significant creditor in SSA making up 12% of the total external debt stock. For both other regions its around 1% of the overall external debt burden. Paris Club debt is also declining in importance down 6 percentage points in ASE to 3%, and fifteen percentage points in SSA. Only in LAC, the opposite trend can be registered, where it has grown slightly by 2 percentage points to 7% of total debt.

Source: World Bank (IDS)

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20 India is gaining weight as a bilateral creditor in ASE region.

21 In 2022 debt service payments to China were at 17 bn US$ (66 % of official bilateral debt service).
KEY MESSAGES
Systemic problems adversely affecting southern countries: Dissemination of crises

On top of the adverse effects from shutdowns and the health crisis in EMDE, ripple effects of the economic and financial fallout spilled over from the rich world: AE’s Central Banks raised interest rates. As a consequence of tighter monetary policy, a stronger US dollar rising 6 percent against EMDE currencies from the start of 2022 until the year’s fourth quarter (Gopinath and Gourinchas 2022) has manifested itself to be a bane for most EMDEs. In particular, for seven EMDE the depreciation was much more pronounced with 30% vis-à-vis the USD (Arteta et al 2022).

This has made combating inflation more difficult. Gopinath and Gourinchas (2022) point to an estimation, in which the pass-through of a 10% rise in USD against a country’s domestic currency translates into 1% inflation. The impact in EMDEs is particularly severe, as dependence on USD nominated imports is comparably high (ibid). Aggravating macro-economic and lending conditions further, this has proven to be a catalyst for defaults in previous crises as vulnerability to tapering and external currency shocks mounts. It is estimated that the likelihood of a financial crisis in EMDE has increased significantly since the start of 2022 due to a US 2-year yields rise of 1.14% (Arteta et al 2022:4).

In this context, refinancing the debt burden becomes more difficult for EMDEs and market access is increasingly restrained as funding conditions tighten (Arteta et al 2022). Investment and consumption levels fall and ensuing public spending cuts lead to further contraction (ibid). These economies are progressively unable to ensure the issuance of government bonds and find buyers at any reasonable interest rate. With this bleak outlook, debt restructurings can already be priced into sovereign bond auctioning (Martinez 2022:29) setting off negative feedback loops.

NB: US Federal Reserve interest rate hikes due to inflation shocks or changing macroeconomic environment are found to be detrimental to EMDEs economic prospects. By contrast, in case of US monetary policy tightening due an anticipated improvement of economic activity, this has shown to produce benign effects on EMDE.
The monetary policy response provided further support to AE. While advanced economies (AE) have been able to absorb this fiscal shock relatively well, it is in EMDE that the repercussions are most worrying and have in some cases resulted in debt defaults. The former deployed 11.4% of GDP in equity, loans, and guarantees over the first 18 month of the pandemic. By contrast, in emerging markets (EM) and LICs the corresponding figures were only a fraction with 4.2%, and 0.9% of GDP mobilized respectively (IMF 2021a).

Proximity: Lacking liquidity and fiscal space

In the *Debt and Pandemic in middle-income countries* (Latindadd 2021) Miranda et al urgently point to the need of more fiscal space for MICs, as their expenses to counter the negative impact of the Covid-19 epidemic have severely lacked behind those of AEs. While these economies were able to deploy around 12% of GDP in the onset of the crisis, MICs were able to cover a third of that in relative terms as a share of their economies. In absolute USD terms this is even much less significant. The countercyclical measures marshalled by LICs were even smaller (2% of GDP), unable to cushion the most severe damages to the economy23.

The rising refinancing costs are not only offsetting many states’ balances of payments in the short term. More severely, they are drastically reducing state capacity to provide basic services and invest in development. Climbing funding costs also endanger much needed investments in infrastructure, health systems and climate resilience, crowding out public budgets. A significant number of developing economies will hence face tighter trade-offs. Widespread fiscal consolidations based on real spending cuts would have adverse economic and social effects in the current juncture.

23 The monetary policy response provided further support to AE. While advanced economies (AE) have been able to absorb this fiscal shock relatively well, it is in EMDE that the repercussions are most worrying and have in some cases resulted in debt defaults. The former deployed 11.4% of GDP in equity, loans, and guarantees over the first 18 month of the pandemic. By contrast, in emerging markets (EM) and LICs the corresponding figures were only a fraction with 4.2%, and 0.9% of GDP mobilized respectively (IMF 2021a).
Domestic debt as a critical factor for sustainability

The domestic debt as % of total debt burden has augmented, featuring increasingly subnational debt and debt accrued by state owned enterprises (SOE). Increasingly also in LICs other forms of financing such as local debt issuance, issuance on sub-sovereign level or in domestic currency are important. Strengthening local bond issuance has shown to have positive effects on economic expansion, as a sovereign yield curve supplies a reference price for risk and a wider capital market is associated with a more moderate cost of long-term capital (World Bank. 2020a).

Capacities to issue debt under local law, on state or municipality level and in domestic currency is acutely curtailed in LICs, despite recent progress in various MICs24, where from 2011-2019 marketable public debt levels have duplicated from 6.5 to 13.5 trillion US dollars. Domestic currency debt issuance doubled to 12 trillion USD, up from 19 to 47% of total government debt, still minute compared to 95% in AEs (World Bank 2021b). As domestic currency obligations as a share of total the debt burden is increasingly relevant (APMDD 2023), it is important to conceive of a debt treatment mechanism that takes into account the exposure to currency risks of this particular asset class. In future, restructurings of sovereign debt issued under domestic law could become more frequent as external reputational costs of a restructuring, supporting efforts to retain access to external financial markets (IMF 2021).

Median Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) countries – the G20 initiative which sought to temporarily suspend debt servicing – more than duplicated their debt issuance in local currency in 2021 (IMF 2022a), which rose from 7% to 15% (of that group, even bigger jumps could be registered for those with market access where it increased from 8% to 28%). The pandemic shock resulted in fluctuating cash flows and a sharp decline in funding conditions for EMDE, in particularly for sovereign issuer with CCC and lower ratings since the start of 2020 (OECD 2021).

The impact of external shocks can be increased if domestic markets are illiquid, magnifying price shifts and heightening risks of sectoral spillover effects, as well as reducing financial stability (World Bank 2021b:133). This can put progress on the UN development agenda (UNCTAD)25, which hinges on equitable access to finance (see UNSDG 2019, UN IATF FSIF SR 2022) and stable debt coverage for public investment, at risk of stalling in the foreseeable future.

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24 A sample of 44 EM selected in the study cited.
The global crisis responses: Too little too late

The international crisis response led by the G20, was focused on offering assistance to IDA countries facing liquidity as well as solvency problems:

1. The DSSI targeted 73 eligible IDA countries providing temporary debt relief. Almost two thirds, 48 countries in total, took up during the program’s 20-month duration with an aggregate sum of debt service suspension reaching 12.9 billion.\(^{26}\)

2. Furthermore, the Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the DSSI (CF) was set up to coordinate debt treatments among Paris Club, non-Paris Club members and applying debtors. However, participation rates were very low, as only four African sovereigns, Chad, Ethiopia, Zambia and now Ghana have applied\(^{27}\), with none of them successfully carrying through the debt treatment until now. The extent to which comparable treatment with private sector debt will be attained also remains to be seen.

While the DSSI did provide some valuable breathing space to eligible countries at the height of the pandemic, the level-of-ambition of both initiatives, the implementation and design problems of the CF, and the broader architecture problems that remain unsolved, leave these initiatives with limited scope and widely ineffective in resolving structural issues.

Another measure adopted at the height of the pandemic was the general issuance of Special Drawing Rights (SDR) worth USD 650bn, which – given the quota-based allocation of SDR – disproportionally benefited AEs\(^{28}\). G20 countries received 70% of SDRs, while developing countries in dire need of liquidity received only 30%. The Africa region received just $32.3 billion of the general allocation.

The Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST) was established as an additional SDR on-lending or re-channeling scheme from countries with strong external positions to countries in need of liquidity (additional to the PRGT\(^{29}\)). The idea was to complement the IMF’s existing toolkit by providing longer term, affordable financings, particularly for climate change and pandemic preparedness. The RST’s design is flawed from its inception, however, and undermines its principal purpose. Other more ambitious financing mechanisms are thus still urgently needed, not last in the light of the global climate crisis.


\(^{27}\) IMF confirms Ghana seeks debt treatment under CF (Reuters 2023).

\(^{28}\) SDR are allocated according to quota, with the US, Japan, Germany, the UK and France holding almost 40%.

\(^{29}\) A fact sheet of the PRGT can be found [here](https://www.imf.org/en/About/Programs/PRGT).
Moreover, while the DSSI and the CF targeted only IDA countries and the SDR allocation mainly benefited AEs, no initiative was developed to support MICs specifically. According to a statement by Argentina and México (MECON 2021) these initiatives left a “forgotten middle” behind, not offering a solution or mechanism to adequately restructure for all EMDEs.

Missing debt crisis resolution mechanism and asymmetrical International Financial Architecture

The differing participation rates of the DSSI vs that of the CF allude to a pattern observable in past debt crises: while coordinated debt initiatives that focus on the short-term deferral of acute debt problems in the world’s poorest countries can be successfully implemented\textsuperscript{30}, efforts to address systemic problems fail\textsuperscript{31}. Kicking the can further down the road, this pattern has repeated itself many times in history\textsuperscript{32}, the international financial architecture continues to be inapt, and a non-system for sovereign debt crises resolution based on decentralized market-based instruments prevails.

Against the backdrop of this non-system for debt restructurings necessary sovereign debt restructurings continue to occur ‘too little, too late’, with governments postponing the inevitable and failing to achieve sufficiently deep restructurings that create the conditions for a sustainable economic recovery. When they do take place, they do not occur on an equal footing. On the contrary: distressed debtors bargain with creditors that largely overpower them in terms of information access, technical capacities, financial firepower, and lobbying capabilities. In this context, pressure from relevant stakeholders and Civil Society Organizations will surely be needed in order to ensure the relevant steps for reform will be undertaken\textsuperscript{33}.

\textsuperscript{30} An earlier version of such debt relief was the Debt Relief Under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative launched in 1996 and the related Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI). Over US$ 100 billion in debt was waived for 37 partaking countries, of which four out of five were on the African continent. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/hipc.

\textsuperscript{31} Here the definition of a ‘systemic’ crisis differs. Increasing debt defaults in EMDE might not jeopardize stability profits in the financial sector globally, but it endangers the existence of millions of people suffering from the consequences of the fallout (EURODAD Interview 2023).

\textsuperscript{32} As is the case with the IMF-WB HIPC initiative of the 90s – while assumed relatively successful in countries that met the criteria, it was also associated with a number of challenges and shortcomings.

\textsuperscript{33} Recently, the IMF formed a ‘global sovereign debt roundtable’ (GSDR) which aims at bringing key creditors such as Paris Club and non-Paris Club bilateral creditors, private finance, as well as some of the borrowing members (debtor countries with the IMF and the World Bank) to the table. The IMF considers this as a step to create a safer environment that is conducive for good decision making on the debt front. Yet, after initial constructive discussions at an initial GSDR, it is important to continue pointing out the need for timely reforms.
ADVOCACY
OBJECTIVES
4 ADVOCACY OBJECTIVES

The magnitude of the challenges pointed out in this report, as well as the fact that developing countries are facing them against the backdrop of a non-system for debt restructuring and an ill-equipped IFA, call for urgent action. At the same time, political-economic interests militate against an ambitious reform agenda of the IFA. In this section we identify strategic objectives with different levels of ambition. While they are all individually important, they will face different degrees of opposition. This is intentionally so. The hope is that while each individual advocacy objective may not suffice by itself to change the asymmetrical playing field against the backdrop of which the fourth wave of debt unfolds, they will empower developing debtor countries. At the same time, the strategic objectives are also designed to complement each other in a manner that generates a virtuous cycle, building momentum for much needed structural reform of the IFA. The following advocacy objectives should be front and center:

1. Adoption of sound Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) methodologies.
2. Provision of more liquidity to developing economies to enable necessary expansionary macro policies.
3. Enforcement of comparability of treatment in the context of the changing creditor landscape.
4. Establishment of a new common sense around debt transparency.
5. Rekindle and double efforts for the establishment of a multilateral framework for debt restructuring.
4.1. DSA

The two main DSAs currently used are the Low-Income Country Debt Sustainability Framework (LIC DSF) and the Sovereign Risk and Debt Sustainability Framework for Market Access Countries (SRDSF). While the LIC DSF was jointly approved by the Executives Board of the IMF and World Bank (IDA), and lastly reviewed in September 2017, the SRDSF was approved by the IMF Executive Board in 2021, and is currently in a phased adoption from June 2022 onwards. Neither of the two frameworks considers development finance needs on debt sustainability and only the SRDSF takes partial account of climate finance needs, including adaptation, mitigation and loss and damage. These exclusions underestimate the risks of debt distress faced by LICs and Market Access Countries.

Several analysts and institutions, including UNCTAD, have long advocated for and developed alternative DSA methodologies. For instance, in contrast to the IMF’s/WB’s LIC DSF and SRDSF, UNCTAD’s SDFA, which is currently under revision, claims to take into account the development finance requirements for sustainable development. At the G20, however, some advanced economies oppose treating the revision of DSA methodologies, claiming that the topic is too technical to be discussed and is best left to the IMF and WB.

Encouraging the adoption of alternative DSA methodologies (e.g. see for reference Guzman and Heymann 2015; Gluzmann, Guzman and Stiglitz J.E. 2018; as well as Guzmán, M. 2018) which avoid the typical overly optimistic scenarios that underestimate the depth of debt operations needed to restore sustainability, include social and climate risks, principles-based constraints, account for crucial investment needs to achieve SDGs and are based on sound assumption should thus be a central advocacy target. In parallel, opportunities should be created for government officials and debt managers of developing countries to share, teach, learn and revise their own DSA methodologies.
The report has shown the urgent need for greater fiscal space for developing countries, not only to offset many states’ balances of payments problems in the short term, but to enable the provision of necessary basic services and invest in development. What is needed today are not fiscal consolidations based on real spending cuts, but expansionary macro policies necessary to help countries recover. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) have a crucial role to play.

In the current IFA, the role of the IMF continues to be of great importance. It is the only global or regional institution which exists today that is capable of assisting countries when no one else would. At the same time, the shortcomings, conflicts of and vested interests of the institution are well established. If strategic reforms are implemented, however, it could still contribute to containing the costs of future crisis and even prevent systemic international crises from erupting. A general advocacy target should be the Fund’s governance reform and revision of its income position to increase the capacity to fulfil its purported mandate and to adapt to evolving circumstances. This includes studying the rule governing the setting of the SDR Interest Rate, as well as revising the access limits and surcharge policy of the Fund. The IMF should also publicly acknowledge the current limitations in the design and implementation of the RST and push for action on the matter, revising design elements and/or generating alternatives. At the same time, and despite its limitations, the capitalization of the RST should be increased, as it is one of the few existing instruments. Here, a campaign that identifies the differences between the initial objectives of the RST and current conditions could be fruitful.

The role of the MDBs in the provision of liquidity in the current juncture is critical since they are the only institutions capable of providing affordable, long-term financing to invest in development and economic transformation policies. Starting points to increase their lending capacity in the short term are the implementation of mechanisms to re-channel SDRs via MDBs and Regional Development Banks and the implementation of the conclusions of the G20’s independent review on the Capital Adequacy Frameworks of MDBs.

Advocacy Objectives

4.2. Increase Liquidity

The report has shown the urgent need for greater fiscal space for developing countries, not only to offset many states’ balances of payments problems in the short term, but to enable the provision of necessary basic services and invest in development. What is needed today are not fiscal consolidations based on real spending cuts, but expansionary macro policies necessary to help countries recover. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) have a crucial role to play.

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4.3. Comparability of treatment

As the report shows, since the GFC the creditor composition has changed substantively in EMDEs. Despite important differences between income groups and regions, the general tendency has been a relative decrease in concessional lending, an increase in private creditor debt (specifically an increase in bonded debt, and a retrenchment of international bank lending) and an increase in debts with non-Paris Club bilateral official creditors. These changing roles and weights in the creditor composition of EMDEs has resulted in evolving inter-creditor problems.

The importance of Comparability of Treatment (CoT) under the new inter-creditor landscape has gained further attention in discussions around the design and implementation of the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatment beyond the DSSI (CF). The CF expects CoT by relying on the Paris-Club CoT Clause for its enforcement. This has raised a number of questions including around the Paris-Club CoT clause for private creditor, the nature of different institutions (whether they are commercial or official creditors) and the implications of bilateral official creditors lending into arrears for CoT in debt restructurings. Ensuring intra-creditor CoT in debt restructurings with private creditors also continues to be challenging and existing enforcement mechanisms continue to be insufficient. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are crucial champions and allies in this area. They can draw attention to the experience and challenges EMDEs face in navigating the new inter-creditor landscape and join efforts of other CSOs and players promoting particular initiatives to promote inter and intra creditor CoT.

NB: CoT is an important concept also to be taken into account in debt renegotiation processes occurring outside the CF.
4.4. Debt transparency

The call for greater transparency, albeit of a specific kind, has become part of the mainstream. Much has been said about increasing the transparency of bilateral lending, especially in a context where China has become an important creditor to many developing countries, e.g., via infrastructure loans of the Road and Belt Initiative. However, transparency vis-à-vis private creditors is equally important, and far less talked about. Yet, increasing debt transparency and reducing information asymmetry between sovereign debtors and private creditors is equally as crucial, especially with respect to investors’ holdings in the bond market. Establishing a new common sense around debt transparency multilaterally, which recognizes that transparency on the side of debtors and creditors (both private and official) is an important condition for sustainable debt management and should thus be made an advocacy priority.

4.5. Multilateral framework

As noted in the report, the IFA for debt restructuring can be best described as a non-system, which results in large ex ante and ex post inefficiencies and in ‘too little’, ‘too late’ restructurings. Given the mounting challenges for LICs and MICs alike, a reliable process for debt workouts is urgently needed. A renewed proposal for such a restructuring mechanism met overwhelming support in the UN General Assembly resolution of 2014 and kicked off an expert consultation process to work out an appropriate model. Yet, its Achilles heel, missing support from creditors and countries where international financial centers are located (a problem that had already brought previous attempts such as the IMF’s 2001 Sovereign Debt Restructuring Mechanism proposal to fall), stalled this effort. Its devised goal, the establishment of a multilateral legal framework at the UN, could not be achieved, remaining, so far, an aspirational declaration of intent. Against this background, a crucial advocacy objective is to work to break multilateral deadlock and create a certain level of consensus among developing countries on the need of such as mechanism.
ANNEXES
Annex I: Country sets data and methodology

While EMDEs were all hit by this series of crises, the level of impact on each economy varied widely. Geographical distance, economic ties to the crisis hot-spots (which during the pandemic moved around the globe unpredictably)\textsuperscript{36}, health systems and general resilience are diverse. Also, in terms of indebtedness, fiscal exposure, and resilience each country has a different starting point. We compare aggregated regional data points (from EMDEs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, excluding high income countries). The country set we examine is based on the six regions from the World Bank’s geographical country categorization\textsuperscript{37}. Yet, we focus on three regions: Asia (ASE), which is composed of 24 EAP countries and eight SAS, as well as LAC and SSA\textsuperscript{38}.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total countries</th>
<th>LICs</th>
<th>Lower MICS</th>
<th>Upper MICS</th>
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<tr>
<td>ASE</td>
<td>24 (27%)</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>18 (45%)</td>
<td>5 (19%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>22 (24%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
<td>17 (65.5%)</td>
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<td>SSA</td>
<td>44 (49%)</td>
<td>23 (96%)</td>
<td>17 (42.5%)</td>
<td>4 (15.5%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90 (100%)</td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
<td>26 (100%)</td>
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</table>

First, we examined general debt sustainability measured in:

- The external debt stocks to GNI (%).
- The debt service to exports (%).

Then we analyzed data points within each region to work out the structural composition of the debt stock, measured by:

- Who issued the obligation (debtor type: public or publicly guaranteed v private).
- Who it is owed to (creditor type).

\textsuperscript{36} From 2022 on, the crisis epicenter was Ukraine, whose collapsing economy could no longer sustain its important role in grain production and shipping adversely affecting wheat and foodstuffs importers.

\textsuperscript{37} East Asia and Pacific (EAP), Europe and Central Asia (ECA), LAC, MENA, South Asia (SAS) and SSA full country list.

\textsuperscript{38} ASE: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Vanuatu, Vietnam.

LAC: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Overview of debt composition in each region from 2011 to 2021

![Figure 10: Composition of the total debt external debt 2011 vs 2021](image)

Source: World Bank (IDS)

The Measurement of External Debt: Explanation of the definition

“The definition of external debt is based on the notion that if a resident has a current liability to a nonresident that requires payments of principal and/or interest in the future, this liability represents a claim on the resources of the economy of the resident, and so is external debt of that economy. Such an approach provides a comprehensive measure of external debt across the range of debt instruments regardless of how they may be structured. The focus of the definition is on gross liabilities, i.e., excluding any assets.” (See World Bank Guide 2014:5).

Interviews

The following expert interviews were conducted during the research phase of this report:

- Eurodad (27 January 2023).
- Afrodad (6 February 2023).
- APMDD (8 February 2023).
### Annex 2: Regional debt tables

#### EAP

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<td>Use of IMF Credit and SDR allocations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term debt</td>
<td>557.763</td>
<td>655.749</td>
<td>791.562</td>
<td>861.309</td>
<td>1.044.817</td>
<td>1.022.201</td>
<td>1.044.356</td>
<td>1.365.802</td>
<td>1.656.492</td>
<td>1.753.639</td>
<td>1.845.401</td>
<td>1.975.843</td>
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<td>Public sector</td>
<td>317.857</td>
<td>363.295</td>
<td>393.401</td>
<td>413.766</td>
<td>457.032</td>
<td>441.963</td>
<td>475.394</td>
<td>543.756</td>
<td>640.318</td>
<td>727.254</td>
<td>834.541</td>
<td>992.949</td>
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<td>Private sector guaranteed by public sector</td>
<td>118.984</td>
<td>300.784</td>
<td>396.537</td>
<td>416.220</td>
<td>459.328</td>
<td>415.255</td>
<td>405.901</td>
<td>308.445</td>
<td>218.481</td>
<td>206.627</td>
<td>235.653</td>
<td>302.947</td>
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<td>Net financial inflows</td>
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<td>Net financial inflows</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-51</td>
<td>-370</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td>51.072</td>
<td>101.480</td>
<td>130.603</td>
<td>88.553</td>
<td>138.006</td>
<td>63.504</td>
<td>60.832</td>
<td>130.288</td>
<td>175.161</td>
<td>200.807</td>
<td>221.534</td>
<td>305.179</td>
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<td>Banks and other private</td>
<td>84.927</td>
<td>97.779</td>
<td>272.695</td>
<td>68.023</td>
<td>134.130</td>
<td>116.916</td>
<td>104.035</td>
<td>129.788</td>
<td>150.705</td>
<td>198.220</td>
<td>256.708</td>
<td>314.143</td>
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<td>Short-term debt to external debt (%)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>Short-term debt to external debt (%)</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>Debt service to exports (%)</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Interim financial inflows</td>
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<td>282.022</td>
<td>219.021</td>
<td>300.675</td>
<td>250.207</td>
<td>288.676</td>
<td>302.879</td>
<td>369.889</td>
<td>213.193</td>
<td>166.517</td>
<td>214.423</td>
<td>308.750</td>
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<td>Portfolio equity</td>
<td>39.996</td>
<td>37.277</td>
<td>34.017</td>
<td>28.950</td>
<td>32.893</td>
<td>30.085</td>
<td>3.705</td>
<td>26.471</td>
<td>48.821</td>
<td>46.237</td>
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<td>External debt to exports (%)</td>
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### Summary external debt data by debtor type

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total External debt stocks</th>
<th>Net financial inflows</th>
<th>Summary external debt stock by creditor type</th>
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#### Net financial inflows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Inflow from IMF Credit</th>
<th>Inflow from other official creditors</th>
<th>End-of-period in outstanding debt</th>
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#### Debt ratios

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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Debt service to exports (%)</th>
<th>Short-term to external debt stocks (%)</th>
<th>Multilateral to external debt stocks (%)</th>
<th>Reserve to external debt stocks (%)</th>
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**Source:** Southern Debt Report: Characteristics and Challenges

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**Notes:**

- Data for external debt stocks, net financial inflows, and debt ratios are based on the latest available statistics from relevant international organizations.
- The data for individual years may not add up to the totals due to rounding differences.
- The term 'GNI' refers to Gross National Income, which includes a combination of income earned by residents, factors in the production of goods and services, and current transfers.
- Debt service to exports refers to the proportion of debt service payments to a country's exports of goods and services.
- Short-term debt is typically considered more risky than long-term debt due to its shorter maturity and higher interest rates.
- The GNI is an economic measure that includes all income earned by residents and non-residents within a country's borders.
### Summary external debt data by debtor type

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### Debt ratios

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# Annexes

Annex 38
### Southern Debt Report: Characteristics and Challenges

#### Summary external debt data by debtor type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total/external debt stocks</th>
<th>Total/external debt allocations</th>
<th>Long-term external debt</th>
<th>Public and publicly guaranteed sector</th>
<th>Private sector</th>
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#### Debt ratios

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<th>Year</th>
<th>External debt stocks to GDP (%)</th>
<th>External debt stocks to GNI (%)</th>
<th>Debt service to exports (%)</th>
<th>Short-term to total external debt stocks (%)</th>
<th>Multilateral to external debt stocks (%)</th>
<th>Reserves to external debt stocks (%)</th>
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#### Net financial inflows

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