

BRIEF II. ECOSOC Policy Dialogue and Guidance

This brief is part of a series aimed to provide background information on ECOSOC strengthening. Briefs include (i) ECOSOC mandates and evolution of functions; (ii) policy dialogue and guidance; (iii) guiding and promoting a coherent and coordinated UN system; (iv) subsidiary bodies; (v) relationship with the General Assembly, Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council; (vi) countries in special situations; and (vii) addressing emergency issues.

ECOSOC is the central platform for policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on issues of economic and social development (A/RES/72/304). The UN Charter mandates ECOSOC to serve as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues and for formulating policy recommendations addressed to Member States and the United Nations (UN) system (Chapters IX and X). The Council is also vested with the authority to prepare studies or initiate reports on a wide range of issues. It also has the power to assist the preparations and organization of major international conferences on economic and social and related fields. It is also mandated with the integrated and coordinated follow-up of all UN conferences in economic, social and environmental fields while mandated to ensure the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

« International Conferences, Summits and the 2030 Agenda »

The way ECOSOC's policy dialogue and guidance functions were discharged by the Council has evolved over time to respond to various development frameworks. The Council has promoted the integrated follow-up to major UN conferences and summits in the 1990s; and then reviewed progress, identified gaps in implementation and recommended priority follow-up actions for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in the 2000s. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, ECOSOC shifted its focus to promoting a coherent and coordinated UN system support to Member States in the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all other international commitments.

ECOSOC delivers its policy deliberation function in the High-level Segment and to some extent in the Integration Segment. The Council's subsidiary bodies, including the Regional Commissions, have an important role in supporting ECOSOC's policy review and guidance. According to the 2030 Agenda, while the thematic reviews of progress on the SDGs, including cross-cutting issues, were envisioned to take place at the HLPF, they would be supported by reviews by the ECOSOC functional commissions and other intergovernmental bodies and forums.

« ECOSOC High-Level Segment »

In A/RES/70/299, the President of ECOSOC was requested to jointly convene the high-level segment of the Council and the three ministerial days of the HLPF to avoid duplication, enhance efficiency and strengthen complementarity and synergy (OP18). The General Assembly decided, in resolution 72/305, that the high-level segment of ECOSOC would focus on future trends and scenarios related to the Council theme, the long-term impact of current trends, such as the contribution of new technologies, in the economic, social and environmental areas on the realization of the SDGs. Furthermore, the Council should aim at enhancing knowledge-sharing and regional and international cooperation. The same resolution also decided that the outcome of the HLPF and the high-level segment of ECOSOC would continue to be a negotiated ministerial declaration.

The General Assembly also decided to adopt one main theme for the HLPF and ECOSOC (para. 4 of Annex of A/RES/72/305). This has allowed greater focus in the work of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies, which, since 2015, have embraced the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs also as a way to enhance their impact and contribution to the HLPF.

« ECOSOC Integration Segment »

With GA resolution 72/305, the ECOSOC Integration Segment has been tasked to provide policy guidance on the annual theme of ECOSOC which should feed into the HLPF. The duration of the Integration Segment was changed from 3 days, with a general debate, to one day prior to the HLPF thematic review. The ECOSOC Vice-President is invited to share the key messages from the Integration Segment at the opening of the HLPF the following day. The Integration Segment also discharges functions related to UN system coordination.

« ECOSOC Forums »

ECOSOC continues to engage global constituencies in its policy dialogue processes. ECOSOC is home to forums that address financing for development, development cooperation, and science, technology and innovation.

- The ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development Follow-up (FfD Forum) reviews the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and other financing development outcomes, as well as the means of implementation of the SDGs. The Forum is the only intergovernmental forum on Financing for Development with universal participation that leads to an annual negotiated outcome. Over the years, the Forum has acted as a platform for consensus-building and meaningful exchanges among all key stakeholders to address the challenge of financing and creating an enabling environment at all levels for sustainable development.
- The Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) reviews the latest trends and progress in international development cooperation and encourages coordination across diverse actors and activities. The DCF brings together ministers and senior experts from developing and developed countries, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, international organizations and development banks, local governments, philanthropic foundations and private sector. Its outcome is a President's summary.
- The Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for the SDGs brings a variety of actors together to discuss cooperation on science, technology and innovation for implementing the SDGs. It leads to a summary feeding into the HLPF.

In addition, the annual informal Youth Forum has established itself as the largest gathering of young people at the UN. It is the platform for young leaders from around the world to engage in a dialogue with UN Member States, and to share ideas and concrete actions to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Young people have been calling for more engagement at the ECOSOC Youth Forum and a stronger participative role at the High-level Political Forum. Furthermore, ECOSOC's Partnerships Forum has in the past been an important platform for gathering partnerships and the private sector at the United Nations.

« Key Dates »

- 1991 ECOSOC begins convening a single five-week annual substantive session consisting of a high-level segment, a coordination segment, an operational activities and development segment and a committee segment as per resolution 45/264.
- 1996 ECOSOC introduced panel discussions and interactive debates with experts and stakeholders as per resolution 50/227.
- 1999 Ministerial Declaration was created as outcome of ECOSOC's High-level Segment.
- 2005 The 2005 World Summit Outcome (A/RES/60/1) mandated ECOSOC to convene an Annual Ministerial Review, with National Voluntary Presentations, and a biennial Development Cooperation Forum; ECOSOC becomes the main platform for follow-up and review of major UN conferences and summits
- 2006 GA Resolution on strengthening of the Economic and Social Council (A/RES/61/16)
- 2007 First ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) was held during the High-Level Segment
First National Voluntary Presentations were held as part of the AMR
- 2008 First Development Cooperation Forum
- 2009 First ECOSOC Partnership Forum
- 2012 First ECOSOC Youth Forum
- 2013 Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (A/RES/67/290)
Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council (A/RES/68/1)
- 2014 First High-level Political Forum under the auspices of ECOSOC
- 2014 First ECOSOC Integration Segment
- 2015 Adoption of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (A/RES/69/313)
Adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)
- 2016 Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level (A/RES/70/299)
First multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the SDGs
First ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development Follow-up (FfD Forum)
- 2018 Review of the implementation of GA resolution 68/1 on the strengthening of the ECOSOC (A/RES/72/305)
- 2019 Political Declaration of the HLPF convened under the auspices of the General Assembly (A/RES/74/4)