

BRIEF I. ECOSOC mandates and evolution of functions

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.

The mandate of the Economic and Social Council was defined by the Charter of the United Nations and various General Assembly resolutions. The responsibilities of the United Nations in the area of international economic and social cooperation established by the United Nations Charter are “vested in the General Assembly and, under the authority of the General Assembly, in the Economic and Social Council”. The UN Charter mandates ECOSOC to promote higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress; solutions of international economic, social and health problems; international cultural and educational cooperation; and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

« Early Years »

In the early years of the Council, it worked throughout the year setting up and reviewing reports of various functional and regional commissions and committees, establishing relationship agreements with specialized agencies and reviewing their reports¹ and deliberating on important post-World War issues such as the resettlement of refugees and displaced persons, expansion of the food supply, forced labour, the status of women, including the question of equal pay for equal work for men and women workers, full employment, among other pressing matters – which remain quite current today. With the expansion of membership of the United Nations and the increase in scope of international economic and social issues, agenda items were added, including on methods of financing development and technical assistance for developing countries. The rapid growth of technical assistance through international organizations also led to the need for the coordination of operational activities.

« International Conferences, Summits and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) »

With the emergence of the conferences and summits of the 1990s and 2000s, among them, the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992; the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994; the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995; the World Summit for Social Development in 1995; the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002; the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 and 2005, the mandates of some of ECOSOC’s Functional Commissions like the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission for Social Development, the Commission on Population and Development, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development were modified to allow them to implement the programme of action of these conferences. An additional Commission on Sustainable Development was created following the UNCED for the follow-up to Agenda 21. ECOSOC was given the task to ensure that conference follow-up was well integrated, coordinated and effective among countries and in its subsidiary bodies and the UN system. It did so by reviewing cross-cutting themes, an area where the Council has a special advantage over its subsidiary bodies as it was able to use the various goals and targets adopted at these conferences as its organizing principles for monitoring progress and conference implementation. The Millennium Summit of 2000 also gave ECOSOC the role as the principal body for the review of the international development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The 2005 World Summit made the Council a platform for the review of the implementation of the UN Development Agenda through the Annual Ministerial Reviews and the Development Cooperation Forum. Through an annual theme and national voluntary presentations (the predecessors of the voluntary national reviews), Member States were able to share lessons learned and best practices in implementing the MDGs. The Development Cooperation Forum on the other hand emerged as a platform for development partners to assess strategies and policies and in the process promoting greater coherence among them.

¹ The reports of the specialized agencies presented a summary of trends in the sector covered and programmatic responses, their relationship with other UN agencies, their engagement with the Chiefs Executive Board and the appraisal of their work. The objective of the review of these reports was to see how the various programmes overlapped in various sectors and could be better coordinated.

« 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development »

Following the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, ECOSOC was tasked to become a more issues-oriented body capable of overseeing implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Among other changes, the Council was mandated to provide greater leadership and guidance on substantive priorities by convening a separate segment on integrating the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. With the establishment of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to be convened under the auspices of ECOSOC every year and under the General Assembly every four years, Member States underscored the centrality of the Council and its subsidiary bodies in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda adopted in 2015.

Member States also gave ECOSOC the task to address the follow-up and review of the financing for development outcomes of past conferences and summits and the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda by creating the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development. The creation of this new Forum as part of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, adopted in July 2015, strengthened the previous arrangements for the follow-up to the financing development agenda. A Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, part of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, mandated by the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, was placed under the authority of the Presidency of ECOSOC.

« ECOSOC and Resolution 72/305 »

ECOSOC's diverse mandates and functions have been reaffirmed in resolution 72/305. These functions include being a convener, serving as a central platform for discussion on economic, social and related issues, coordinating the activities of the United Nations development system as well as monitoring the implementation of internationally agreed development goals.

« Major ECOSOC Mandates »

United Nations Charter (1945): [Chapter IX](#): "International economic and social cooperation" and [Chapter X](#): "The Economic and Social Council"

[A/RES/32/197 \(1977\)](#): Restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the UN System

[A/RES/45/264 \(1991\)](#): Restructuring and revitalization of the UN in the economic, social and related field's

[A/RES/48/162 \(1993\)](#): Further measures for the restructuring and revitalization of the UN in the economic, social and related fields

[A/RES/50/227 \(1996\)](#): Further measures for the restructuring and revitalization of the UN in the economic, social and related fields

[A/RES/53/12B \(1997\)](#): Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform

[A/RES/60/1 \(2005\)](#): World Summit Outcome Document

[A/RES/61/16 \(2006\)](#): Strengthening of the Economic and Social Council

[A/RES/66/288 \(2012\)](#): The Future We Want

[A/RES/67/290 \(2013\)](#): Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development

[A/RES/68/1 \(2013\)](#): Review of the implementation of GA resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council

[A/RES/69/313 \(2015\)](#): Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development

[A/RES/70/1 \(2015\)](#): Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

[A/RES/70/299 \(2016\)](#): Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level

[A/RES/72/305 \(2018\)](#): Review of the implementation of GA resolution 68/1 on the strengthening of the ECOSOC

[A/RES/74/4 \(2019\)](#): Political Declaration of the HLPF convened under the auspices of the General Assembly