



ECOSOC

United Nations Economic and Social Council

TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

Meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Chairs of the Functional Commissions and Expert Bodies

1 February 2021

10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Virtual meeting on WebEx platform

Concept Note

The Economic and Social Council Bureau will convene a meeting with the Chairs of ECOSOC's Functional Commissions and Expert Bodies on 25 January 2021. The meeting will be open to all Member States. The objective of the meeting is to guide and coordinate the work of the ECOSOC system, ensuring that its work is coherent, avoids overlap and adequately covers the 2030 Agenda. It should also explore how the subsidiary bodies can best contribute to the theme of the 2021 session of the Council and the 2021 High-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF). It will also be the occasion to review how subsidiary bodies have been implementing General Assembly resolution 72/305, on the strengthening of ECOSOC, and discuss possible proposals for reinvigorating the Council and its relationship with its subsidiary bodies.

This meeting is being held against the backdrop of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations and ongoing discussions on what could be done to reinvigorate multilateralism so that it delivers more effectively and inclusively, leaving no-one behind. The Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations has identified 12 areas for a common agenda to current and future challenges which will be elaborated over the coming months culminating in a report of the Secretary General to the 76th Session of the General Assembly. These range from improving access to vaccines and treatments, to protecting our planet, building stronger conflict prevention tools, leaving no one behind, addressing inequality, racism and discrimination while improving digital cooperation. Clearly, there is a role for the wide range of the Council's subsidiary bodies to assist in this regard.

Coordination and oversight

One key role of the Economic and Social Council is to coordinate the work of the ECOSOC system. The implementation of the SDGs is strongly dependent on integrated policy-making and coordinated action, and the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of both.

In an effort to enhance policy coherence and coordination, Member States have encouraged the convening of the joint meetings of the ECOSOC Bureau with the Chairs of the functional commissions and expert bodies for ECOSOC to “fully implement its authority to take final decisions on the activities of its subsidiary bodies and on other matters in its system-wide coordination and overall guidance functions in the economic, social and related fields”¹ as well as to assure the balanced integration of economic, social

¹ A/RES/50/227

and environmental policies and programmes aimed at promoting sustainable development, providing direction towards the substantive coherence and coordinated follow-up of the UN development agenda.²

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, the subsidiary bodies were requested (para. 85), within the context of their respective mandates, to conduct thematic reviews of progress in achieving sustainable development, in support of the review and follow-up responsibility of the High-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF). Their contribution represents an important part of ECOSOC's contribution to the HLPF. These inputs are to be consolidated and discussed in ECOSOC's Integration Segment and then fed into the HLPF thematic review the following day.

In its resolution 72/305, the General Assembly emphasized the role of the Council "as the central mechanism for coordination of the activities of the United Nations development system and its specialized agencies and supervision of its subsidiary bodies while integrating their analysis throughout its segments". The Council would need to ensure "an adequate division of labour among its subsidiary bodies and harmonization and coordination of their agendas and work programmes, while ensuring that the principles, critical aspects and implementation gaps of the 2030 Agenda are addressed". This too is the purpose of the joint meeting.

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a dire threat to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The unrelenting spread of COVID-19 initially triggered an immediate health emergency but was quickly followed by a humanitarian and a development emergency. Over the past year, ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies immediately shifted focus to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to find policy solutions to respond to its devastating effects and recover and rebuild better. As the social and economic impact of the pandemic continue to grow, it has exposed long-term fragilities and vulnerabilities of the poorest and most vulnerable countries and people while revealing the fragility of food, international trade, health and climate systems. The joint meeting will have the opportunity to discuss how subsidiary bodies are addressing this issue in support of ECOSOC and Member States more generally.

Theme of the 2021 session of ECOSOC and the 2021 HLPF

The Council's theme shapes its annual programme of work and that of its subsidiary bodies and is sufficiently broad to benefit from the inputs from most of them while also providing scope for joint work on cross-cutting and emerging issues. Through the main theme, the Council promotes the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development; and provides guidance to the work of the entire ECOSOC system while respecting the agenda, diversity of mandates and specialized expertise of each subsidiary body. It also ensures that the ECOSOC system assists the Council to in its policymaking role.

The theme of the 2021 session of the Economic and Social Council and the 2021 HLPF is "*Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*". Pursuant to GA resolution 74/298, the HLPF will also discuss Sustainable Development Goals 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships in depth. It will also consider the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs. It would be important for the subsidiary bodies to make

² A/RES/50/227; A/RES/52/12B; A/RES/57/270B; A/RES/61/16; A/RES/68/1; E/RES/1998/46, E/RES/2006/44.

strong technically sound and evidence-based and action-oriented recommendations on integrated policies to respond to COVID-19 in a way that puts the world on track to achieve the SDGs.

Suggested questions

- How will functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies contribute to the HLPF review of the theme for 2021 as well as to the work of ECOSOC?
- What initial key policy messages can be offered on the 2021 theme, based on the work of the functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies thus far?
- How can the contributions of the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies to the HLPF thematic review and the work of ECOSOC be better utilized?
- What key initiatives will the subsidiary bodies take to realize the Decade of Action?
- How can the Integration Segment deliver on its mandates, guide the work of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and consolidate their key messages on the HLPF and ECOSOC theme?
- What should be a leading theme for the work of subsidiary bodies in 2022?

Review of implementation of GA resolution 72/305

In resolution 72/305, the General Assembly asked ECOSOC to: (i) ensure a division of labour among its subsidiary bodies, while ensuring that the principles, critical aspects and implementation gaps of the 2030 Agenda are addressed; (ii) improve its outcomes and the outcomes of its subsidiary bodies; and (iii) discuss and consolidate all the inputs of the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies, the UN system and other relevant stakeholders during the integration segment.

The resolution also called for ECOSOC to (i) ensure that the subsidiary bodies produce technical and expert analysis, assessments and policy recommendations based on a solid review of progress on the 2030 Agenda and other conferences; (ii) ensure that outcomes are effective and action-oriented; and (iii) consider whether there is a continued need for annual negotiated outcomes from its subsidiary bodies.

Subsidiary bodies have been undertaking efforts to align their work with that of the Council and the HLPF and to contribute to the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

Discussions in past joint meetings have also highlighted the wish and identified ways to explore more synergies between the work of the Council and that of its subsidiaries, and the HLPF. The 2021 review of GA resolution 72/305 and those pertaining to the HLPF, GA resolutions 67/290 and 70/299, may provide an opportunity for Member States to explore these synergies at a critical time to propel implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Decade of Action.

Discussions have also addressed the importance of multi-year themes of the Council and the HLPF in a way that could allow the for medium-term planning by subsidiary bodies. This could be achieved, for example, by defining the future themes in relation to global megatrends and the most pressing problems calling for global action, as well as referring to core aspirations of the 2030 Agenda, balancing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and transformative actions at all levels to reduce inequalities and leave no one behind. The themes could also be defined based on what the Council would expect to achieve, in consultation and coordination with its subsidiary bodies and the ECOSOC system, and be formulated in a way that would lead to the identification of concrete action.

Suggested questions

- What are some good practices in implementing the provisions of General Assembly resolution 72/305?

- How can subsidiary bodies further enhance their working methods and outcomes in response to resolution 72/305?
- In which area could the division of labour and cooperation among subsidiary bodies be improved?
- How can ECOSOC best support enhanced work of subsidiary bodies?
- What concrete proposals could be conveyed to Member States for the review of the Council and the HLPF in order to better explore the synergies between the work of the Council and that of its subsidiaries, and the HLPF?

Format

The Meeting will take place in the form of an informal dialogue among the ECOSOC President and Vice Presidents and the Chairs of subsidiary bodies, as well as Member States. The discussion will be facilitated by the ECOSOC President and Bureau. Following 5-minute presentations by the Chairs of the Subsidiary Bodies, based on the above questions, and follow-up questions from members of the ECOSOC Bureau, the floor will be opened to Member States for comments or questions.

Outcome

A summary of the meeting by the President will be transmitted to the ECOSOC system and members of the Council. It will present views and proposals notably for contributions of the subsidiary bodies to the 2021 work of ECOSOC and the thematic review of the HLPF. The summary will also contain recommendations for follow-up.