Economic and Social Council

Committee Mandate

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is the principal organ of the United Nations which coordinates the economic, social, and related work of the UN, and specialized agencies and other bodies.\(^1\) It was established in 1945 by Chapter X of the *Charter of the United Nations* and is comprised of 54 UN Member States elected by the UN General Assembly (GA) to three-year overlapping terms. Seats in the Council are based upon balanced geographical representation, with 14 allocated to African states, 11 to Asian states, 6 to Eastern European states, 10 to Latin American and Caribbean states, and 12 to Western Europe and other states. ECOSOC, by and large, serves as the central mechanism within the UN system for reflection, debate, and negotiations on sustainable development. It makes recommendations and provides information to the GA, United Nations Security Council, Member States of the UN, and to the specialized agencies concerned.\(^2\) The Council serves the critical function of managing 70 percent of UN human and financial resources.\(^3\) It oversees a number of subsidiary bodies, including functional commissions, regional commissions, standing committees, programs and funds, research and training institutes, and specialized agencies.

*The Economic and Social Council*

As mandated in the UN Charter, ECOSOC along with its subsidiary bodies, makes or initiates studies and reports on a broad range of topics including international economic, social, cultural, educational, and health issues; and the promotion and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.\(^4\) ECOSOC has grown and developed over time to best address the evolving needs of the UN system and the international community. The GA has responded to these needs by passing a number of resolutions to help ECOSOC take on new and coordinating roles within the UN system, including the far-reaching Resolution 68/1 in 2013.\(^5\) These reforms to strengthen ECOSOC’s mandate helped the body better address economic and social issues. Some key powers enshrined within this resolution included: granting ECOSOC the ability to adopt an annual theme; making ECOSOC the lead entity to address new and emerging challenges; having ECOSOC monitor the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic, and environmental) within the UN system; providing more efficient oversight of work through one of four Coordination and Management Meetings; and redesigning the Council’s calendar and cycle of meetings.\(^6\)


\(^5\) Ibid.

The Council holds several short sessions and many preparatory meetings, panel discussions, and round tables throughout the year, including a high-level segment in July for cabinet ministers and other officials to discuss major economic, social, and environmental issues. Its substantive sessions also include segments on humanitarian affairs, integration, and operational activities for development. Substantive sessions are comprised of all 54 ECOSOC Member States, each having a single vote; no State receives special veto authority nor is given extra weight due to monetary or other contributions.

Reporting

There are multiple subsidiary and related bodies that report to ECOSOC, including 8 functional commissions, 5 regional commissions, three standing committees, expert bodies, and other bodies, such as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The annual integration segment meeting makes full use of ECOSOC’s multidisciplinary network of specialized bodies, as well as coordinates with UN programs and specialized agencies, such as the United Nations Development Program, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the International Labour Organization, and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

ECOSOC also plays a vital role in the involvement of civil society within the UN system itself. Non-governmental organizations can be granted ECOSOC consultative status, which allows them certain privileges, such as delivering written statements, oral statements, and organizing side events at the UN itself. The selection process is conducted through the Committee on NGOs, which is a subsidiary body of ECOSOC that meets twice a year.

Delegates in ECOSOC debate a topic and develop working papers which can then be adopted as a draft resolution by majority vote of the committee. Draft resolutions are then passed on to the ECOSOC Plenary. Due to membership of each body, not every Member State is represented in every committee that attends the plenary session; more Member States review and vote on draft resolutions in plenary sessions than in committee sessions. Draft resolutions that receive majority support in plenary session are adopted as resolutions of the Economic and Social Council.

Bibliography


7 “UN Charter, Structure, and System.”
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
