



Subsidiary Bodies of the Economic and Social Council

Introduction

ECOSOC oversees a complex system of subsidiary bodies, including eight functional commissions (composed of government representatives), nine expert bodies (some composed of governmental experts and others

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.

composed of experts serving in their personal capacity); and five regional commissions. In addition, it oversees standing committees, such as the Committee on the NGOs and the Committee for Programme and Coordination; ad hoc bodies, such as the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti; and other related bodies, such as the International Narcotics Control Board and UN Nutrition.* The Council is entrusted to guide and coordinate the work of its subsidiary and related bodies. It thus has an influence on a wide remit of the work of the UN system on sustainable development.

Functional commissions and expert bodies

Functional commissions are deliberative bodies whose role is to consider and make recommendations on issues in their respective areas of responsibility and expertise in the economic, social, health, environmental and related fields, including population and development, statistics, gender equality and the empowerment of women, narcotic drugs, crime prevention and criminal justice, science, technology and development, among others. In effect, they constitute the technical arm of the intergovernmental machinery, providing policy options, suggesting indicators and benchmarks, and carrying out the detailed analysis of economic and social issues needed to inject substance into the proceedings of their parent body, ECOSOC. These bodies have their unique membership and own working methods. Some are policy oriented and provide policy options, suggest indicators and benchmarks, and carry out the detailed analysis of the economic and social issues needed to inform the substantive work of ECOSOC. Others are more technical in nature, tend to work with and for their own constituency and help establish global norms and standards on a number of issues, including statistics, drug control, crime prevention.

ECOSOC's range of technical work through its expert bodies extends deeper into areas that require international cooperation for their adequate functioning. For example, the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters provides authoritative guidance to promote international cooperation on tax matters, while the Committee of Experts on Public Administration provides guidelines and recommendations on effective governance and other public administration matters, and the Committee for Development Policy advises the Council on cross-cutting sustainable development issues and also defines the list of the Least Developed Countries. The Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods promotes sustainable transport that is safe, clean and competitive, by improving traffic safety, environmental performance, energy efficiency, inland transport security and efficient service provision. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues provides expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the UN system through ECOSOC.

The recommendations of the functional commissions and expert bodies, contained in their reports to the Council, are considered during the June and July Management Segment. While the Council is often expected to endorse negotiated outcomes that are adopted by a subsidiary body and avoid duplicating the discussions held in their sessions, the Council is expected to review their recommendations and can negotiate draft resolutions recommended for its adoption. There is considerable room for Member States to better harness the opportunity

* For information on the subsidiary bodies of the Council, please see <https://ecosoc.un.org/en/about-us/ecosoc-subsidiary-bodies>



to respond to issues raised by subsidiary bodies. This, as well as the adjustment of the reporting and timing of the sessions of subsidiary bodies so to facilitate their contribute to ECOSOC and the HLPF, have been some of the recurrent issues.

Oversight and coordination

In an effort to enhance policy coherence, ECOSOC subsidiary bodies have evolved, and their functioning has been modified.[†] The General Assembly, in its resolution [50/227](#), called on the Council 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. Resolution [52/12B](#) requested the review of “mandates, composition, functions and working methods of the Functional Commissions and Expert Groups and bodies with a view to ensuring more effective and coordinated discussions and outcomes of their work”. This was followed by resolution 57/270B which again requested the subsidiary bodies to review their working methods to better maximize their impact on the implementation of major UN conferences.

The Council has also undertaken numerous initiatives to improve interaction with its subsidiary bodies. ECOSOC resolution 1998/46, mandated the Council to hold joint bureau meetings with each of the functional commissions. Those meetings provided the opportunity for the commissions to highlight the important aspects of their work and how they would support the Council’s theme to be considered in that particular year. In the period 2002-2006, the Council hosted a dialogue with Chairpersons from the various Commissions during the then Coordination Segment of the annual substantive session. To promote a more efficient approach, resolution 2006/44 led to the replacement of the joint bureau meetings with each bureau of the Functional Commissions and specific expert bodies with one meeting with the Chairpersons to be held at the beginning of each calendar year during which issues of agenda-setting, horizontal and vertical coordination were discussed. In 2020, for the first time, the ECOSOC Bureau decided to open its meeting with the Chairs to the membership of the United Nations and civil society.

Following the 2005 Summit, in its [resolution 61/16](#), the GA mandated ECOSOC to oversee system-wide coordination and the balanced integration of economic, social and environmental policies and programmes aimed at promoting sustainable development, providing direction towards the substantive unification and coordinated follow-up of the UN development agenda. The subsidiary bodies were also requested to strengthen their contributions to ECOSOC’s agenda, particularly its new functions, the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) and the [Development Cooperation Forum](#) (DCF).

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](#) (HLPF). Their contribution represents an important part of ECOSOC’s contribution to the HLPF. The annual joint bureau meeting therefore become a relevant space for the Council to provide guidance to the subsidiary bodies on integrated approaches in follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda thus contributing to the coherence and coordination demanded of ECOSOC by Member States.

Subsequent resolutions on the strengthening of ECOSOC have emphasized and strengthened its mandated to provide oversight and coordination of its subsidiary bodies. In [resolution 68/1](#), the GA called on ECOSOC to promote the harmonization and coordination of the agendas and work programmes of the functional commissions by promoting a clearer division of labour among them and providing clear policy guidance to them. It also tasked the Council to conduct action-oriented reviews of the activities, reports and recommendations of the subsidiary bodies. Furthermore, it called on the subsidiary bodies to review the resolution in relation to their

[†] A/RES/50/227; A/RES/51/240; A/RES/52/12B; E/1997/61, E/1998/46, E/1999/51, 2001/27.



respective work programmes with a view to exploring necessary adjustments and changes to their methods of work, reporting and timing of their sessions. This was intended to facilitate consideration of substantive changes to their work programmes, and to find meaningful ways to contribute to ECOSOC and the HLPF.

Following the adoption of the resolution, some functional commissions adopted a multi-year programme of work to align with the main theme of ECOSOC and to support the thematic reviews of the HLPF. The subsidiary bodies have included in their report an executive summary with conclusions and recommendations and issues that require attention by the Council. In addition, the President of the Council has invited the functional commissions and expert bodies to submit contributions which are included in a synthesis of voluntary submissions, the latest version of which for the 2023 session is contained in document [E/HLPF/2023/4](#).

In its [resolution 72/305](#), the GA noted that ECOSOC should:

- 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 (para. 2);
- improve its outcomes and the outcomes of its subsidiary bodies, making them more relevant, coherent and solution-oriented to address implementation challenges and ensuring their follow-up so as to strengthen the impact of the work of the Council (para. 3);

The GA called on ECOSOC subsidiary bodies to adopt their own respective themes, aligned with the main theme of the Council (para. 5). Furthermore, the mandate of the integration segment was clarified to provide substantive, integrated and technical policy guidance on the annual theme of ECOSOC which should feed into the HLPF. Specifically, the segment, which was to be held for one day immediately before HLPF[‡], would:

- discuss and consolidate all the inputs of Member States, including case studies and lessons learned, the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies, the UN system and other relevant stakeholders to promote the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development;
- bring together the key messages from the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and the UN system on the main theme, develop action-oriented recommendations for follow-up and feed into the HLPF;
- coordinate the work of the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies, promoting a clearer division of labour among them, and the policies and activities of the specialized agencies relating to the SDGs and other internationally agreed development goals;
- strengthen its oversight and coordination role of its subsidiary bodies. It should review their work with a view to ensuring their continued relevance. It will also ensure that they produce technical and expert analysis, assessments and policy recommendations to inform the integrated view of the Council and inform efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. It should effectively integrate the outcomes of its subsidiary bodies into its own work (para.26);
- request its subsidiary bodies to ensure that they best support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the work of the Council. Their work should reflect the need for an integrated and action-oriented approach to the SDGs. Their recommendations should build on a solid evidence-based review of progress on the 2030 Agenda and of the outcomes of conferences and summits in their respective area. They should work in an efficient, effective, transparent and inclusive manner (para. 29).

[‡] This was changed with GA resolution 75/290A.

Each subsidiary body was called on to consider whether there is a continued need for annual negotiated outcomes and ensure that, when they produce such outcomes, they are effective and action-oriented and result in increased levels of cooperation.

More recently, in its [resolution 75/290 A](#), the General Assembly invited the Economic and Social Council to continue to strengthen its oversight, guidance and coordination role of its subsidiary bodies and invited[§] the President and Bureau to work with the Bureaux of its subsidiary bodies, and in consultation with delegations during the 2022 session of the Council, so as to identify possible actions to be taken to implement the provisions of paragraphs 28 and 29 of the annex to resolution 72/305.** A review was undertaken, under the facilitation of the Vice-President responsible for the Management Segment, Amb. Lachezara Stoeva (Bulgaria), on the basis of the [assessments](#) and recommendations of the Bureaux of ECOSOC functional commissions and expert bodies and informal consultations among Member States. A decision ([2022/334](#)) was adopted in June 2022, which invited the President and Bureau of the Council as well as the Chairs and Bureaux of its functional commissions and expert bodies, all Member States and the Secretariat to implement, to the extent possible within existing mandates and resources, the recommendations contained in the [Vice-President's summary](#). Functional commissions and expert bodies have informed in their reports their progress in the implementation of these recommendations. The requests for meetings between the ECOSOC Bureau and the Bureaux of subsidiary bodies during their sessions as increased, as has the participation of representatives in each others' meetings.



In this same resolution, the GA decided that the coordination segment would replace the integration segment and the informal meeting of the Council with the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies. The revamped [coordination segment](#) is mandated to coordinate, including through forward-looking policy guidance to ensure coherence and direction, the policies and normative work of subsidiary bodies, principal organs and specialized agencies in the economic, social, environmental and related fields relating to the 2030 Agenda and other internationally agreed development goals, steering “the Council system towards an efficient and integrated workflow throughout the Council cycle leading up to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.” More specifically, the coordination segment, which is held annually for up to two days by early February, would:

- take up coordination matters arising from subsidiary bodies, principal organs and specialized agencies in the economic, social, environmental and related fields;
- steer the Council system towards an efficient and integrated workflow throughout the Council cycle leading up to the high-level political forum on sustainable development;

[§] Paragraph 33 of the annex of resolution 75/290 A.

** 28. The Economic and Social Council should strengthen its oversight and coordination role of its subsidiary bodies. It should review their work with a view to ensuring their continued relevance. It will also ensure that they produce technical and expert analysis, assessments and policy recommendations to inform the integrated view of the Council and inform efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. It should effectively integrate the outcomes of its subsidiary bodies into its own work. 29. The Economic and Social Council should request its subsidiary bodies to ensure that they best support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the work of the Council. Their work should reflect the need for an integrated and action-oriented approach to the Sustainable Development Goals. Their recommendations should build on a solid evidence-based review of progress on the 2030 Agenda and of the outcomes of conferences and summits in their respective area. They should work in an efficient, effective, transparent and inclusive manner.



- provide forward-looking policy guidance to ensure coherence and direction in the policies and normative work of subsidiary bodies and specialized agencies relating to the 2030 Agenda as well as to other aspects of the work of the Council;
- formulate common action-oriented policy guidance on all matters requiring implementation or coordination efforts (i) by the Economic and Social Council functional and regional commissions and other subsidiary bodies as well as (ii) by the United Nations system, notably the specialized agencies, in the policy and normative area, including detailed guidance on the implementation of the intergovernmentally negotiated ministerial declaration of the previous year.
- examine key policy issues, lessons learned, best practices and recommendations emanating from the work of the subsidiary bodies, including regional commissions, during the previous cycle
- allow the Council to address issues identified by subsidiary bodies as requiring the attention of the Council at the global level and to build on the policy conclusions of its subsidiary bodies, along with inputs of the United Nations system, so as to promote the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development;
- provide guidance and coordination to subsidiary bodies, ensuring a clearer division of labour among them, aligning their work with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and promoting their implementation of the intergovernmentally negotiated ministerial declaration of the previous year, bearing in mind the respective mandates and functions of those bodies;
- provide detailed guidance to the subsidiary bodies of the Council and the United Nations system on their upcoming work on the main theme and develop action-oriented assessment and recommendations so that those bodies best contribute to the preparations for the thematic review of the high-level political forum on sustainable development;
- review how subsidiary bodies and the United Nations system work on the interlinkages among the Sustainable Development Goals and the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda, guiding their work for the rest of the Council cycle.

According to the 2030 Agenda, the thematic reviews of progress on the SDGs taking place at the HLPF could be supported by reviews by the ECOSOC functional commissions and other intergovernmental bodies and forums, a request emphasized in resolution [75/290 B](#).

Subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC

Regional commissions

- [Economic Commission for Africa \(ECA\)](#)
- [Economic Commissions for Europe \(UNECE\)](#)
- [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean \(ECLAC\)](#)
- [Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific \(ESCAP\)](#)
- [Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia \(ESCWA\)](#)

Functional commissions

- [Statistical Commission](#)
- [Commission on Population and Development \(CPD\)](#)
- [Commission for Social Development \(CSocD\)](#)



- [Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#)
- [Commission on Narcotic Drugs \(CND\)](#)
- [Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice \(CCPCJ\)](#)
- [Commission on Science and Technology for Development \(CSTD\)](#)
- [United Nations Forum on Forests \(UNFF\)](#)

Expert bodies composed of governmental experts

- [Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals \(TDG-GHS\)](#)
- [Intergovernmental Working Group of Experts on International Standards of Accounting and Reporting \(ISAR\)](#)
- [United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names \(UNGEGN\)](#)
- [UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management \(UN-GGIM\)](#)

Expert bodies composed of members serving in their personal capacity

- [Committee for Development Policy \(CPD\)](#)
- [Committee of Experts on Public Administration \(CEPA\)](#)
- [Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters \(UNTC\)](#)
- [Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(CESCR\)](#)
- [Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues \(PFII\)](#)

Standing Committees

- [Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO Committee\)](#)
- [Committee for Programme and Coordination \(CPC\)](#)

Ad hoc bodies

- [Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti \(AHAG Haiti\)](#)

Other related bodies

- [International Narcotics Control Board \(INCB\)](#)
- [Programme Coordinating Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS \(UNAIDS\)](#)
- [UN Nutrition](#)
