



## 2025 ECOSOC High-level Segment

### Informal Summary of discussions Thursday, 24 July 2025

#### Overview

The ECOSOC High-level Segment took place on 24 July 2025 marking the end of the Ministerial week of the Council. Two discussion sessions were organized to offer an opportunity to Member States and other stakeholders to advance thinking and recommendations on the *UN at 80: the role of ECOSOC in leading action for a stronger and more effective multilateral system* (morning session) and on *Global Trends and Their Future Impacts: Globalization and International Cooperation in a Transforming World* (afternoon session).

The **morning session** brought together government leaders, heads of UN agencies, and civil society representatives to discuss how ECOSOC can revitalize and strengthen its leadership and core functions to address today's global challenges in the context of the UN's 80th anniversary. The session examined how ECOSOC, as a UN Charter body, can become a more agile, inclusive, and impactful platform - both by contributing to the UN80 reform process and by accelerating progress across the SDGs. With only five years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), participants stressed the need for ECOSOC to adapt to a rapidly changing global

landscape characterized by geopolitical tensions, climate shocks, social inequalities, and digital transformation. Participants also emphasized the importance of structural reforms, stronger coordination across the UN system, expanded public-private and multistakeholder partnerships, and renewed political will to advance multilateral commitments.

The **afternoon session's** discussion emphasized that a new era of globalization must be equitable, green, and inclusive, addressing historical imbalances and centering on sustainability, resilience, and opportunity for the Global South. Technology, especially AI and renewable energy, can be transformative, but equitable access, infrastructure, and digital capacity building are essential to avoid deepening inequalities. Calls were made for the reform of the international financial architecture to be addressed with urgency, to ensure fair, adequate, and efficient development finance and to unlock investment flows toward climate action and SDGs. It was stressed for the UN and ECOSOC to evolve, embracing decentralization, multi-level governance, and proactive coordination to remain impactful in a multipolar world.

#### *UN at 80: the role of ECOSOC in leading action for a stronger and more effective multilateral system (morning session)*

The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr. Krzysztof Szczerski, Vice-President of ECOSOC.



Mr. Sherwin Bryce-Pease, Bureau Chief and Correspondent of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, moderated an interactive dialogue. Panelists included Mr. Guy Ryder, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Policy; Mr. Gilbert F. Houngbo, Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO); Ms. Kitty van der Heijden, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and Mr. Tomas Lamanauskas, Deputy Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Respondents included H.E. Ms. Robinah Nabbanja, Prime Minister of Uganda, and H.E. Mr. Abdulaziz bin Nasser bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, Secretary-General of the National Planning Council of Qatar. In addition, fourteen representatives from Member States and civil society organizations contributed with interventions.

## Summary:

- **Strengthening ECOSOC's Role in the UN80 reform process:** Broad consensus emerged on the importance of positioning ECOSOC at the heart of the UN80 Initiative to modernize the multilateral system and accelerate SDG delivery.
- **Bridging policy and implementation:** Participants emphasized the need for ECOSOC to act as a stronger connector between political dialogue and operational delivery, including reforming its structures to enhance impact and reduce fragmentation.
- **Inclusion, digitalization, and innovation:** Calls were made for ECOSOC to promote digital transformation, strengthen inclusive participation, especially youth and civil society, and embrace innovation, including AI, to foster agile and anticipatory responses to global challenges.

## Main messages from the interactive discussions:

- Participants viewed the **UN80 Initiative and the upcoming General Assembly review of ECOSOC and the HLPF as key opportunities to modernize and revitalize ECOSOC**, streamline mandates, and enhance coherence across the UN development system. While acknowledging geopolitical fragmentation and mounting global crises, they underscored ECOSOC's potential to drive institutional reform and strengthen the UN development pillar.
- **UN heavy mandate burden on the social and economic fields** - over 4,000 often-overlapping mandates - was seen as a barrier to impact. Participants called for a fit-for-purpose structure focused on delivery and results, with greater protection of social agendas that are frequently deprioritized in crises. The 2025 World Summit for Social Development in Doha was highlighted as a pivotal moment to renew commitments to social justice and equity. Many participants emphasized the need to better translate global commitments into tangible benefits for people.
- Recognized as a vital convener for collective action, **ECOSOC needs a "structural reset"** with clearer priorities, more agile decision-making, and results-oriented budgeting. Many participants urged for ECOSOC to focus on practical implementation, connecting better the humanitarian, development, and peace efforts, and ensuring resources reach the most vulnerable. Greater coherence across intergovernmental processes and measurable results were identified as essential.
- **Digital technologies and AI were highlighted as catalysts for SDG progress.** While connectivity has grown significantly, the digital divide remains wide, particularly in LDCs. Participants called for greater digital investment and highlighted initiatives such as *AI for Good* and UN-wide innovation efforts to enhance efficiency and service delivery.



- Some Member States stressed that **reforms must reflect development needs, particularly for developing countries**, and highlighted the role of the regional commissions in linking local priorities to global action.
- Many delegations supported **structural reforms, stronger coordination, and more inclusive engagement in ECOSOC's work**. Proposals included simplifying structures, strengthening the resident coordinator system, enhancing digital cooperation, and improving evidence-based impact tracking.
- Several participants called for **institutionalized stakeholder engagement**, meaningful participation of women and youth, greater private-sector involvement, especially SMEs, and the use of digital platforms for real-time policy feedback to strengthen SDG partnerships.

### *Global Trends and Their Future Impacts: Globalization and International Cooperation in a Transforming World Bottom of Form (afternoon session)*

The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr. Bob Rae, President of ECOSOC.

Ms. Elizabeth Cousens, UN Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer moderated an interactive dialogue. Panelists included H.E. Ms. Fitsum Assefa Adela, Minister for Planning and Development, Ethiopia, H.E. Mr. Suman Bery, Vice Chair, National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), Government of India, and Global Fellow, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, H.E. Ms. Yuriko Koike, Governor of Tokyo, Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Mr. Amar Bhattacharya, Senior Fellow, Center for Sustainable Development, Global Economy and Development Program, Brookings. Respondents included H.E. Ms. Rosemarie G. Edillon, Undersecretary, Department of Economy, Planning and Development, Philippines; Ms. Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Mr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, United Nations Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda. Representatives from Member States and civil society organizations contributed with remarks.

#### **Summary:**

- **Reimagining Globalization for Sustainability:** Speakers emphasized that globalization remains a powerful force, but must now be reshaped to serve sustainability, development, and equity.
- **Technology, AI, and Inclusion:** Participants pointed to technology as both a solution and a challenge. Solar energy, AI, and digital platforms were cited as key opportunities for driving sustainable development, although wide access remains highly unequal among countries. It was noted that 70% of AI investment is concentrated in one country (the U.S.) and 15% in China, leaving the rest of the world behind in the AI revolution.
- **Reforming Multilateral Finance and Investment:** Several participants stressed that current global financial systems are "insufficient, inefficient, and unfair". Despite significant investment needs in developing countries, capital is not flowing at the scale needed due to structural constraints, high costs, and outdated rules. The need to mobilize and redirect private capital, particularly from large institutional investors, toward sustainable investment opportunities in the Global South was stressed.



- **The role of ECOSOC and the UN80 Initiative:** Several participants acknowledged that ECOSOC would need to adapt in line with the UN80 Initiative. Discussions emphasized the need to reinvigorate ECOSOC to elevate the voice of developing countries; ensure even-handedness and fairness in global rule-setting; bridge silos across development, finance, and technology governance, and serve as a space for proactive and inclusive multilateralism in a fragmented world.
- **Cities and Local Governments as global actors:** The concept of “multi-city-lateralism” was introduced by Governor Yuriko Koike of Tokyo, emphasizing the growing role of cities in driving innovation and sustainability. Cities are on the frontlines of challenges like floods, AI disruption, and service delivery, and must therefore take global action beyond national mandates. The call for decentralized governance and inclusive multilateral cooperation was stressed.

## Main messages from the interactive discussions:

- A **"new growth model"** was highlighted based on investment in green transitions, resilience, and restoration of natural capital, particularly in developing countries where such investment is most needed.
- The **evolution of globalization** from goods-based trade to services was noted. The importance of fair-trade rules was emphasized to ensure that globalization would reduce rather than exacerbate inequality.
- **Globalization should no longer mean simply economic integration** but must now be synonymous with resilience, justice, and human-centered development.
- The **creation of an international platform for city collaboration** focusing on sustainability, climate resilience, and urban technological innovation was highlighted, including water and sewage management tools.
- Many **low-income countries faced lack of access to quality data, skills, and infrastructure** which makes AI adoption difficult. Calls were made for international support in making AI and other digital tools more accessible, including satellite-based data, small language models, and targeted technical assistance.
- **Technology must be understood and deployed more strategically** in value chains, e-commerce, and services to ensure inclusion.
- The **necessity of meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes** was stressed, alongside with safeguarding human rights, gender equality, and social inclusion.
- Developing new **incentive structures that enable transformative financing** was cited as one important step to addressing the reform of the international financial architecture.
- A **paradigm shift in development finance** was suggested, not as a resource transfer but as a way to build self-reinforcing domestic capacity, including skills, infrastructure, and capital formation as well as the inclusion of trade finance in development financing strategies.
- ECOSOC could help **shape the “incentive architecture” needed for sustainability** by addressing behavior, regulations, and domestic policy design.
- There were repeated calls to **support purposeful collaboration, reform, and hope** as well as for the **ECOSOC’s evolving role to prioritize renewed multilateralism, solidarity and practical action** to address global challenges.

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