



*ECOSOC Contribution to the
75th Anniversary Commemoration of the United Nations*

**Multilateralism after COVID 19:
what kind of UN do we need at the 75th anniversary?**

17 July 2020 from 9:45 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. EDT

BACKGROUND NOTE¹

The 75th Anniversary of the United Nations is being commemorated in 2020 under the overall theme of *“The future we want, the United Nations we need: reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism.”* A range of activities - now all held virtually - are planned throughout the year culminating in a General Assembly high-level event on 21 September 2020 in New York. As a Charter organ of the United Nations and a key instrument of multilateralism, ECOSOC will make a substantive contribution to the 75th Anniversary commemoration by holding a conversation among leaders from the fields of international development, politics, economics, academia, civil society and youth focusing on the need for global solidarity and renewed multilateralism during times of crisis and to meet long-term challenges to sustainable development.

At a time when the world is facing a multitude of global challenges ranging from the coronavirus pandemic and its severe socio-economic impacts to climate change, socio-economic and gender inequality and threats to peace and security, global solidarity and international cooperation are more urgently needed than ever. At the same time, multilateralism has been questioned and undermined from various fronts. The United Nations is at the heart of this debate as the preeminent platform for multilateral responses and international solidarity.

¹ This background note has been prepared by the UN Secretariat.



Over the past 75 years, the United Nations served as the apex institution of a system of global governance guided by the UN Charter. The organization proved to be sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respond to the changing demands of the time. The decolonization movement of the '50s, '60s and '70s, the international conferences of the '90s giving way to the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Paris Agreement on climate change, underscored the UN's convening and norm-setting power and its ability to launch ideas and inspire commitment over a span of three-quarters of a century.

Against the backdrop of a changing international environment and the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, the session will focus on critical forces shaping the course of multilateralism and explore ways to bolster the multilateral agenda through strong multilateral leadership, effective international institutions, a broadening of participation and an enhanced focus on global public goods.

The meeting will reflect on the kind of multilateralism needed today and in the future to deliver an effective collective response to global crises. It will consider concrete steps the international community could take, including through ECOSOC, to enhance global solidarity and international cooperation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as long-term challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss, while accelerating progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Central to the discussion will be the role of the UN and its institutions in charting the way forward towards more trusted, effective and impactful international cooperation. An important aspect of a reinvigorated and strengthened multilateral system is to make the work of the UN more open and inclusive by strengthening the voices and participation of civil society, the private sector, the scientific community and other non-state actors. More could be done to ensure that stakeholders more effectively and systematically influence the trajectory and outcome of inter-governmental processes.

ECOSOC's mandate and work on promoting economic and social progress, full employment and decent work, gender equality and the advancement of women, addressing international economic, social and health challenges, and upholding universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all remains relevant in the face of today's pressing economic, social and environmental challenges. ECOSOC's functions have evolved over time in response to the trajectory of the global political discourse and actions. The Council has promoted the integrated follow-up to major UN conferences and summits in the 1990s and then reviewed progress, identified gaps in implementation and recommended priority follow-up actions for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in the 2000s. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs, ECOSOC shifted its focus to promoting a coherent and coordinated UN system support to Member States in the delivery of sustainable development.



ECOSOC's role as convener, coordinator of the activities of the specialized agencies, platform for policy dialogue and forger of consensus continues to serve as an important platform for global cooperation. ECOSOC has shown its ability to contribute to establishing global norms and standards. For example, the Council was instrumental in establishing the Universal Charter on Human Rights, as well as the Transport Convention which sets standards in relation to road safety. It also effectively responded to global emergencies, creating UNAIDS in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the Ad hoc Advisory Groups on African Countries Emerging from Conflict to address the problem of countries relapsing into conflict, a precursor to the Peacebuilding Commission.

At the same time, ECOSOC is also currently undergoing a process of review and strengthening that offers opportunity to enhance the Council's role and potential within the broader context of a renewal of multilateralism and global governance.

The format of the session will be a moderated high-level discussion that brings together leaders in the fields of international development, politics, academia, civil society and youth for an exchange of view on a critical issue of our times.

Guiding questions

- What concrete steps could the international community take, through the United Nations, to enhance global solidarity and international cooperation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- In light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, what would an "ideal United Nations" look like and how can we get there?
- What actions would need to be taken to make the work of the UN more open and inclusive?
- Looking ahead, what is the role and contribution of ECOSOC to a reinvigorated and strengthened multilateral system that is fit for addressing short and long-term global challenges, including the provision of global public goods?