ECOSOC HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

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

16 July 2021

CONCEPT NOTE

Evolving towards an inclusive and networked multilateralism in the area of sustainable development as part of our common agenda: contribution of ECOSOC at its 75th anniversary

During the 2020 High level Segment, ECOSOC contributed to the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations, which was commemorated under the overall theme of “The future we want, the United Nations we need: reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism.” It did so through a conversation among leaders from the fields of 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.

To mark the 75th anniversary of the UN, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report back within a year prior to the conclusion of the 75th session with “recommendations to advance our common agenda and to respond to current and future challenges.” The Secretary General is consulting with thought leaders and a range of civil society representatives to elicit innovative and visionary ideas on how the biggest global challenges in the twelve areas identified by the UN 75 Declaration could be addressed. The ideas and proposals to emanate from this inclusive reflection will include recommendations to reinvigorate multilateralism so that it delivers more effectively and inclusively, today and in the future, leaving no one behind.

In 2021, ECOSOC will again contribute to this ongoing conversation, known as the United Nations Common Agenda, as it also celebrates its 75th anniversary. The further strengthening of the Council is part of efforts to move towards a more inclusive, impactful and networked multilateralism in the area of sustainable development. The discussions will address ways to achieve this objective by introducing new dynamics and new ways of working among the key UN system and other intergovernmental and other bodies engaged in the policy dialogue and governance of sustainable development and its economic, social and environmental dimensions, including ECOSOC.

1 https://undocs.org/A/RES/75/1
The Council continues to advance solutions to global economic, social and environmental challenges and crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Its range of functional commissions, regional commissions, expert bodies and forums (on financing for development and science, technology and innovation) are giving it the knowledge and expertise to contribute to some of the critical issues identified in the UN 75 Declaration, including leaving no one behind, putting women and girls at the center, ensuring sustainable financing, improving digital cooperation and preventing conflict. It discusses the specific challenges of countries in special situations and offers dedicated opportunities for youth to engage with policy makers as equal partners. ECOSOC is also supporting post-conflict countries in pursuit of long-term development and working in close collaboration with the Peacebuilding Commission.

The Council continues to oversee the UN development system in implementing the guidance of the General Assembly on the operational activities of the UN system, including the recently adopted quadrennial comprehensive policy review of UN system operational activities (QCPR) and the reforms undertaken to reposition the UN development system. It also promotes the active engagement of diverse stakeholders in the delivery of UN mandates. Over 5,000 non-governmental organizations from around the world are in consultative status with ECOSOC and are actively engaged in the work of the Council and the UN more generally. The Council is also looking at ways to boost partnerships with the private sector. It stands ready to contribute to achieving the SDGs by 2030 and to lead in promoting a more inclusive and networked multilateralism for a more resilient, greener, and sustainable recovery from COVID-19.

As the world is progressing with rebuilding and recovery efforts, 75 years after its creation, ECOSOC’s role and mandate are more relevant than ever in advancing the necessary committed global solidarity and cooperation to avoid another catastrophic event with devastating impact. The meeting will provide the space for ECOSOC to elicit from its members and observers some innovative ideas in a number of areas that could contribute to the reflection on how best to deliver on the common agenda and improve multilateralism while celebrating the Council’s impact during its 75 years of existence and reflecting on maximizing its use and impact.

The issues of special interest for a new type of multilateralism would be those of an existential nature and that would severely impact the achievement of the 2030 Agenda as we move forward on the Decade of Action and Delivery for sustainable development. These include topics such as the economic and social impact of climate change, pandemic preparedness and the policy implications of global public goods and their financing and delivery, countering worsening inequalities, and resources for achieving the SDGs.

**Scenarios in times of crisis**
The response to the COVID-19 pandemic should not be guided only by emergency concerns. It is important to reflect on how the policy measures being taken today can shape a better future.
As decided by the General Assembly in its resolution 72/305, the High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council will focus on “future trends and scenarios related to the Council theme, the long-term impact of current trends, such as contribution of new technologies, in the economic, social and environmental areas on the realization of the SDGs based on the work of the UN and other regional and international organizations and bodies as well as other stakeholders.”

The Council will accordingly examine policies that can both respond to COVID-19, overcome its negative impacts on the SDGs and kick off accelerated progress to realize the 2030 Agenda. It will also discuss scenarios for reaching sustainable development in the long term within the context of the current pandemic.

While the pandemic has accelerated digitalization, it has also amplified persistent technology divides due to underlying inequalities, excluding billions of people from reaping the benefits of digital technologies and innovations. Currently, the potential of digital consumer innovations in mobility, food, buildings, and energy services remains largely untapped, and could be readily deployed worldwide to radically transform global service efficiencies, bridge gaps, open up more feasible pathways towards the achievement of the SDGs, and ensure that no one is left behind. However, the vast majority of financial stimulus packages in response to the pandemic are not yet focused on longer-term measures and sustainable investments. The session will analyze cooperative, near-term actions for transforming service efficiencies and discuss economic, social and environmental strategies that promote a sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the achievement of the SDGs by 2030.

This year’s High-level Segment is informed by two Secretary-General’s reports. The first report on this year’s theme, and thus addresses how to drive a sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that puts us on 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 (E/2021/62). The report highlights economic, social and environmental strategies that countries could consider to achieve this objective. It offers analysis and policy recommendations to inform discussions during the High-level Segment.

A complementary report by the Secretary-General on “Long-term future trends and scenarios - impacts in the economic, social and environmental areas on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals” (E/2021/61) details a best-case scenario for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in terms of achieving high living standards for everyone. It explores the untapped potential of digital consumer innovations in mobility, food, buildings, and energy services, which could be readily deployed worldwide at a level commensurate with the global “best-case scenario” identified in last year’s report.²

² E/2020/60.
Programme

The ECOSOC High-level Segment will bring together expert panellists, eminent personalities, and keynote speakers from Governments, the UN system, think tanks, regional organizations and other stakeholders. All sessions will be held virtually, New York time.

Details on the programme, including speakers and links to reports and statements: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021#programme

Morning:

10:00 to 10:30- Presentation of the Secretary-General’s reports (E/2021/61) and (E/2021/62) and the report of the Committee on Development Policy (E/2021/33)

10:30 to 13:00- High-level interactive discussion on “Evolving towards an inclusive and networked multilateralism in the area of sustainable development as part of our common agenda: contribution of ECOSOC at its 75th anniversary”

Guiding questions for the morning session:

- How can we evolve towards the kind of multilateralism that can better respond to existential challenges to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, such as the current pandemic or the economic and social impact of climate change?
- What mechanisms are needed to make multilateralism more inclusive and more conducive to the policy coordination, international solidarity and delivery of global public goods?
- What should the multilateral architecture, including ECOSOC, look like to advance transformative actions for a more resilient, greener and sustainable recovery and for long-term sustainable development?
- How can the ECOSOC be better equipped to ensure that it continues to support the peoples of the world in peace, dignity and equality?

Afternoon:

15:00 to 16:30- High-level interactive discussion on “Scenarios and possible medium and long-term trends related to the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the achievement of SDGs”
Guiding questions for the afternoon session:

- How can national COVID-19 recovery plans incorporate innovations for reducing inequalities and bridging the digital divide over the medium and long-term?

- How can women be empowered to contribute to recovery strategies, so that gender perspectives are well represented?

- What strategies are being adopted to ensure that financial stimulus packages are applied toward sustainable solutions for a resilient recovery?

- What are some examples of national legal, policy and institutional measures that can enable better social protection and healthcare systems, as part of sustainable and resilient recovery strategies?

- What are examples of near-term decisions that can be made immediately to ensure long-term positive outcomes in areas of food security, education, energy and transport?

16:30 to 18:00- The High-level Segment will conclude with the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration, as adopted by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on 15 July.