

Economic and Social Council

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is the real backbone of the United Nations system. Under the authority of the General Assembly, the Council is the principal co-ordinating body for the economic and social activities carried out by the UN and the various funds, programs, organizations and specialized agencies that make up what is called the United Nations system or extended family. It has 54 member states, each elected for a three-year term. Canada's last term on the Council ended December 31, 1998.

The activities overseen by ECOSOC are aimed at promoting economic growth and progress in the developing world, respect for human rights, and international co-operation in such areas as housing, family planning, environmental protection and crime prevention. More specifically, ECOSOC's main functions and powers are as follows:

- to serve as the main body for examining international economic and social issues of a global or interdisciplinary nature and for developing, on the basis of studies and reports commissioned by the Council, practical recommendations on these issues for member states in the economic, social, cultural, education, public health and other related spheres;
- to ensure effective, universal observance of human rights and basic freedoms;
- to convene international conferences on questions in its areas of expertise and prepare draft conventions for submission to the General Assembly;
- to co-ordinate the activities of specialized agencies while consulting with them and making recommendations to them, as well as to the General Assembly and UN member states; and
- to consult the over 1500 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) enjoying consultative status with the Council on questions that come under its scope.

To successfully carry out its mandate, the Council has several commissions and committees with specific responsibilities. This structure includes nine functional commissions charged with studying issues and making recommendations in their fields of expertise. They are as follows:

- the Commission on Human Rights;
- the Commission on Population and Development;
- the Commission for Social Development;
- the Commission on the Status of Women;
- the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice;
- the Commission on Narcotic Drugs;