

BRIEF VII. ECOSOC Addressing Emerging Issues and Emergency Situations

Updated January 2024

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.

The Charter mandates the Council to discuss economic, social and cultural issues, expanding over time to cover sustainable development issues. Its mandate thus also encompasses the impact of emergencies of a developmental nature. The Council was specifically requested in GA resolution 32/197 to convene special sessions to deal with emerging problems meriting special or urgent international attention. This was reiterated in resolution 50/227. Resolution 61/16 also mandated the Council to convene ad hoc meetings on specific humanitarian emergencies on the request of the affected Member State(s) and following a recommendation of the Bureau, to raise awareness and promote the engagement of all stakeholders in support of international relief efforts aimed at addressing those emergencies. Resolution 75/290A requested the Council to continue to convene these ad hoc meetings, and it also called on the Council to address new and emerging issues in the economic,

social, environmental and related fields and provide overall support for a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. During a developmental or humanitarian crisis, ECOSOC's political legitimacy, convening power, substantive expertise, coordination role and stakeholder networks provide it with the potential to provide direction and recommendations on ways to support an effective coordinated response by the United Nations and partners.

Through [special meetings and briefings](#) convened by its President, the Council promotes awareness of global emergencies, including public health, natural disasters and other crises, and emerging issues. The Council promoted a coordinated response by the UN system with the engagement of all stakeholders following:

- Tsunami in Indonesia in 1994
- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003
- Avian Flu in 2005
- Global food crises in 2008/9
- Earthquake in Haiti in 2010
- Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013
- Ebola in 2014
- Zika Virus in 2016
- Aftermath of hurricanes in 2017
- Climate-affected SIDS in 2018
- Cyclone Idai in Southern Africa in 2019
- COVID-19 pandemic in 2020
- A Vaccine for All in 2021
- Food security in Haiti in 2023

These special meetings and briefings have served as a useful and timely opportunity to update Member States on needs and funding requirements in the countries affected by humanitarian or health emergencies, and to mobilize Member States in support of response and recovery efforts on the ground. However, the Council does not receive the same level of budgetary and conference service support similar to that received by the other Charter Bodies.

In addition to meetings/briefings on emergencies, the Economic and Social Council also convened special meetings on:

- Reimagining equality to put a spotlight on structural racism and racial inequalities (February 2021).
- Natural resources, peaceful societies and sustainable development (March 2022)
- Implementation of the New Urban Agenda (April 2022)
- Social and economic measures to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (January 2023)
- Transformative power of SDG16 to improve governance and reduce corruption (May 2023).

- The future of work: towards a productive, inclusive and sustainable global society (January 2024, Santiago, Chile)