BACKGROUND GUIDE— Seniors Intermediate

GIISMUN
TOKYO 2025
CHAPTER 5

Committee:

ECOSOC

Economic and Social Council

Agenda:

Addressing the economic challenges of digital inequality in developing countries, focusing on policies to expand access to affordable technology, enhance digital literacy, and foster innovation for sustainable development.

Hosted by Global Indian International School Tokyo
18th July ~ 23rd July 2025

Committee Overview

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is a central UN body focused on global economic and social issues, coordinating development work across the UN system. Comprising 54 elected Member States, it operates without veto powers, fostering collaboration. ECOSOC guides policy on sustainable development, relying on studies and expert input, and engaging extensively with non-governmental organizations. Fifty-four member countries take turns on this council, and everyone gets an equal say—no single country has a veto, which really encourages everyone to collaborate and find common ground

History of the committee

The Economic and Social Council is an advocacy-driven discussion about closing the digital divide between the developing nations. With the economy becoming global, billions of individuals are still offline, deprived of education, healthcare, and employment due to inadequate infrastructure, limited levels of digital literacy, and prohibitively costly technology. This committee will focus on actionable policies to enable equal access to digital technologies, promote innovation ecosystems, and empower marginalized groups through inclusive digital development.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of the first and most important committees since it attempts to advance global monetary, social collaboration and improvement. Its origin is profoundly entwined with the development of the UN in the repercussions of the Second Great War, denoting a critical shift towards a worldwide joint effort to forestall future contentions and improve worldwide success.

ECOSOC is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations. It was created to promote international economic and social cooperation and development.
Its formation followed World War II, reflecting a global commitment to peace and prosperity through collaboration.

A few important moments that are defined in ECOSOC's historical timeline include:

- **Formal Designation:**

ECOSOC was officially established on June 26, 1945, with the signing of the UN Charter. It is one of the original six organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, the Secretariat, and ECOSOC.

- **Responsibilities:**

ECOSOC coordinates economic, social, and related work of the 15 UN specialized agencies and oversees the work of functional commissions and regional commissions.

- **Membership Expansion:**

ECOSOC initially had 18 members, however, it expanded in 1965 and 1974 to reflect the growing UN membership. It now has 54 members, elected based on geographical representation.

- **Impact of Expansion:**

The establishment and expansion of ECOSOC increased diversity of perspectives on global economic and social issues and improved representation and participation of member states.

Background Information

The Economic and Social Council is at the heart of the United Nations system to advance the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. It is the central platform for fostering debate and innovative thinking, forging consensus on ways forward, and coordinating efforts to achieve internationally agreed goals. It is also responsible for the follow-up to major UN conferences and summits.

ECOSOC links a diverse family of subsidiary bodies and UN entities (Organigram) dedicated to sustainable development, providing overall guidance and coordination. These include regional economic and social commissions, functional commissions facilitating intergovernmental discussions of major global issues, expert bodies establishing important global normative frameworks, and specialized agencies, programs, and funds at work around the world to translate development commitments into real changes in people's lives.

Sustainable development is the international community's most urgent priority and the core aim of the 2030 Development Agenda for sustainable development. ECOSOC operates at the center of the UN system's work on all three pillars of sustainable development—economic, social, and environmental. It is the unifying platform for integration, action on sustainable development, and follow-up and review.

Building on its coordination role within the UN system, ECOSOC offers a unique global meeting point for productive dialogues among policymakers, parliamentarians, academics, foundations, businesses, youth and 3,200+ registered non-governmental organizations.

Each year, ECOSOC structures its work around an annual theme of global importance to sustainable development. This ensures focused attention, among ECOSOC's array of partners, and throughout the UN development system.

By emphasizing combined economic, social and environmental concerns, ECOSOC encourages agreement on coherent policies and actions that make fundamental links across all three.

Key Definitions

- **Digital inequality:** refers to the disparities not only in access to digital technologies such as the internet, smartphones, and computers, but also in the skills required to use these technologies effectively. It encompasses issues related to connectivity, affordability, digital literacy, and usage. In developing countries, digital inequality often mirrors existing socioeconomic divides, where marginalized communities—particularly in rural areas—face significant barriers in accessing and benefiting from digital tools.

- **Developing countries:** are nations characterized by lower industrial and economic development, low per capita income, and limited infrastructure. These countries often struggle with inadequate healthcare, education, and technology systems. In the digital context, developing countries frequently experience limited access to ICTs, lower levels of digital literacy, and underdeveloped innovation ecosystems, which further hinders their progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- **Digital literacy:** is the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and communicate information through digital platforms. It includes foundational skills such as using a computer or smartphone, navigating the internet, engaging with digital content safely, and understanding cybersecurity and privacy concerns. In developing countries, boosting digital literacy is vital for empowering citizens to fully participate in the digital economy and access essential services such as e-learning and e-health.

- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** PPPs are collaborative ventures between governments and private sector companies designed to finance, build, and operate infrastructure or services. In the digital sector, PPPs are often used to expand internet connectivity, build ICT infrastructure, and deliver e-government services. These partnerships can reduce the financial burden on governments while leveraging the technical expertise and efficiency of private companies.

Agenda Overview

The agenda and the committee's aim/targets

Agenda: Addressing the economic challenges of digital inequality in developing countries, focusing on policies to expand access to affordable technology, enhance digital literacy, and foster innovation for sustainable development.

As the digital divide persists across developing nations, its economic repercussions continue to hinder sustainable growth and global equity. Recognizing the transformative potential of digital technology, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) underscores the urgency of addressing digital inequality by advancing policies that ensure equitable access to technology, promote digital literacy, and encourage innovation.

Limited access to affordable technology and infrastructure in developing countries restricts participation in the digital economy, exacerbating existing socio-economic disparities. Additionally, inadequate digital literacy among marginalized populations creates barriers to meaningful engagement with technology, hindering opportunities for employment, education, and social inclusion.

However, narrowing the digital divide presents significant opportunities for sustainable development. Expanding access to affordable technology can unlock new economic prospects, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and remote communities. Moreover, fostering innovation tailored to the unique challenges of developing countries can drive economic diversification and resilience.

Policymakers must prioritize investment in infrastructure to expand digital access, implement programs to enhance digital literacy, and create ecosystems that encourage innovation. By bridging the gap between technological opportunity and accessibility, ECOSOC can champion an inclusive digital transformation that empowers developing nations and contributes to shared prosperity on a global scale.

Discussion Points

1. **Understanding Digital Inequality**
   - Defining digital inequality and its dimensions (access, affordability, skills, and usage).
   - Examining the economic impact of digital exclusion on developing countries.
   - Identifying demographics most affected (e.g., rural populations, women, youth, persons with disabilities).
2. **Access to Affordable Technology**
   - Strategies to reduce the cost of internet access and devices (e.g., smartphones, laptops).
   - Role of public-private partnerships in infrastructure development.
   - Supporting local manufacturing and tech industries to lower costs.
   - Promoting community-based internet access points (libraries, digital hubs).
3. **Enhancing Digital Literacy**
   - Integrating digital skills education into school curricula and vocational training.
   - Providing teacher training to improve digital instruction.
   - Launching nationwide digital awareness campaigns.
   - Addressing gender disparities in digital education access.
4. **Fostering Innovation for Sustainable Development**
   - Supporting local solutions to local challenges using digital tools (e.g., in agriculture, healthcare).
   - Promoting green and sustainable digital infrastructure.

5. Financing and International Support

- Exploring innovative financing mechanisms (e.g., impact bonds, digital taxes).
- Encouraging technology transfer and capacity building from developed countries.
- Collaborating with international organizations (e.g., ITU, UNDP, World Bank).

6. Policy and Governance Frameworks

- Establishing inclusive national digital strategies.
- Ensuring data privacy, cybersecurity, and ethical use of AI in development contexts.
- Harmonizing regulations to encourage cross-border digital trade and innovation.
- Involving civil society and marginalized groups in policy formation.

7. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Impact Assessment

- Creating metrics to measure digital inclusion progress.
- Collecting disaggregated data to track who is being left behind.
- Sharing best practices and success stories between countries.

Issues faced by the committee

Limited Resources:

ECOSOC faces the challenge of limited resources in addressing the multifaceted issue of digital inequality. Building affordable technology, launching widespread digital literacy programs, and supporting innovation demand substantial investments. The scarcity of funding, trained personnel, and access to data in developing nations further complicates efforts.

Socio-Cultural Barriers:

Cultural attitudes toward technology and education can impede progress in addressing digital inequality. In some regions, traditional mindsets may discourage the adoption of new technologies or undervalue the importance of digital literacy, especially among women and marginalized groups. ECOSOC must prioritize inclusive programs that are culturally sensitive and work to challenge stereotypes hindering technological integration.

Technological Accessibility:

High costs and limited availability of digital devices create a significant barrier for individuals and businesses in developing countries. Outdated equipment and lack of reliable internet connectivity hinder widespread digital inclusion. Addressing this requires ECOSOC to collaborate with stakeholders to promote affordable access and leverage emerging technologies like satellite internet and open-source tools.

Policy Fragmentation:
Disparate policies across nations create obstacles to addressing digital inequality cohesively. Many countries lack comprehensive digital inclusion strategies, and there is limited alignment on international standards for technology access and innovation. ECOSOC must work to harmonize policies and encourage cross-border collaboration to ensure consistency and inclusivity in addressing this global challenge.

UN Response (Actions taken)

Integrating the ECOSOC proposals with the broader agenda of addressing digital inequality for sustainable development:

Addressing the economic challenges of digital inequality in developing countries requires a multi-faceted approach, as shown by ECOSOC's solutions for the digital age. Simply expanding access to affordable technology is not enough; we must also improve digital literacy and encourage innovation.

To achieve this, ECOSOC highlights the need for investment in education, training, and lifelong learning programs. This effort aims to equip people with the knowledge and skills needed for success in a technology-driven economy. It specifically focuses on underserved communities and marginalized groups to reduce the digital divide. By increasing access to quality education and vocational training programs, ECOSOC wants to empower individuals to adapt to changing business needs, move between industries, and seize new opportunities created by AI. This, in turn, supports innovation for sustainable development.

Moreover, to ensure that the benefits of technological advances are shared fairly, ECOSOC recommends policies that address income inequality and the root causes of wealth and opportunity gaps. These could include advocating for fair wages and improved work standards.

ECOSOC also suggests approaches to assist affected workers and communities in order to lessen the impact of displacement caused by automation and artificial intelligence. This includes providing unemployment benefits, job placement and employment counseling to help displaced workers transition into new employment opportunities or become entrepreneurs in addition, ECOSOC supports businesses aimed at boosting productivity and supporting the growth of innovative growth industries. Through work improvement, ECOSOC expects to animate monetary development and give business open doors to people impacted by modern interruption.

Scope of Debate

Possible Caucus Questions:

- What measures has your country taken to improve access to affordable digital infrastructure and internet services?
- How can governments in developing countries collaborate with private tech companies to reduce the cost of internet and devices?
- Should internet access be considered a basic human right? If so, what policies are needed to uphold it?
- What role can regional cooperation play in developing shared digital infrastructure (e.g., cross-border fiber optic networks)?
- How can we ensure that rural and marginalized communities are not left behind in digital expansion efforts?
- What national strategies exist in your country to improve digital literacy among youth, adults, and underserved groups?
- How can international organizations assist developing countries in creating and funding digital literacy programs?
- How can we ensure that digital innovation addresses local and environmental challenges (e.g., climate change, food security)?

- What responsibilities do developed countries have in supporting the digital development of low-income nations?
- How can countries ensure ethical and secure use of digital technologies while promoting innovation?
- Should there be a global fund to promote digital inclusion in the Global South?

Sources/ Useful Websites

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