DISMUN 2025-2026 | UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

STUDY GUIDE 2025-2026

United Nations
Economic and Social
Council (ECOSOC)

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL BACKGROUND GUIDE 2025-2026

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2025-26 Diyafah International Model United Nations Conference (DISMUN-Abu Dhabi)!
We are pleased to welcome you to the Security Council. This year’s Chair is Sahana Karthikeyan, who is currently in Year 13. This year’s Deputy-Chair is Joel Manimala, who is currently in Year 13.

The topic under discussion for the United Nations Economic and Social Council is:

- The Effectiveness of International Trade Agreements in Promoting Economic Development

The Security Council is comprised of five permanent members and ten non-permanent members. The five permanent members of the Security Council are China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

We hope our delegates can utilise this background guide, as it introduces the topics for this committee. We urge you all to recognise that this guide is not meant to replace further research. We highly encourage in-depth research into your member state’s policies and the use of the annotations to further your knowledge on these topics.

On the DISMUN webpage, you will find resources that are essential to your preparation for the conference and as a reference during committee sessions. The DISMUN Handbook explains each step in the delegation process from preconference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Delegates should not discuss the topics or agenda with other members of their committee until the first committee session. We urge our delegates to be respectful of this request.

In addition, please review the mandatory DISMUN Conduct Expectations and the DISMUN Procedure on the DISMUN website. DIS wants to emphasise that any instances of discrimination based on race, gender, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated.

If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the Conference itself, please contact Communications.DISMUN@diyafahinternationalschool.com

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Chair Sahana Karthikeyan
Deputy Chair Joel Manimala

Committee History

"One place where the world's nations can gather together, discuss common problems and find shared solutions."

Introduction

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was established in 1945 as one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN). Created under the UN Charter, ECOSOC was designed to serve as a central platform for encouraging international cooperation on economic, social, and environmental issues, according to Article 61 of the UN Charter, which outlines ECOSOC's composition and functions.

ECOSOC plays a vital role in advancing the UN's development agenda by promoting sustainable development, encouraging respect for human rights, and facilitating the coordination of UN specialized agencies. It brings together representatives from member states, non-governmental organizations, and stakeholders to discuss and shape policies. Through annual sessions and subsidiary bodies, ECOSOC addresses pressing global challenges such as poverty, gender inequality, climate change, and access to education. As a catalyst for innovative solutions and partnerships, ECOSOC remains a driving force in the pursuit of a more equitable and prosperous world for all.

Governance and Structure

ECOSOC's structure facilitates its role as a central forum for discussing international economic and social issues. It collaborates with 15 specialized agencies, 8 functional commissions, and 5 regional commissions to formulate policy recommendations addressed to member states and the UN system. Over 1,600 non-governmental organizations have consultative status, participating in the council's work.

Annual sessions in July and the meeting with finance ministers heading key committees of the World Bank and IMF contribute to policy discussions. The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is central to ECOSOC's structure, reviewing progress in achieving development goals and promoting policy coherence. Reforms since 2005 have aimed at strengthening ECOSOC's role and increasing engagement with international financial institutions, the private sector, and civil society.

Membership

Membership in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) consists of 54 United Nations member states elected by the General Assembly for overlapping three-year terms. The General Assembly elects 18 members annually, with terms ending on December 31st of the third year. ECOSOC's membership is based on the United Nations Regional Groups, with seats allocated as follows:

- *African Group:* 14 seats
- *Asia-Pacific Group*: 11 seats
- *Eastern European Group:* 6 seats
- *Latin American and Caribbean Group:* 10 seats
- *Western European and Others Group*: 13 seats

Outgoing ECOSOC members are eligible for immediate re-election. The election process requires a two-thirds majority vote in the General Assembly, ensuring broad support for each member.

Presidency

The ECOSOC Presidency is a critical role that oversees the council's sessions and operations. Elected annually, the President collaborates with Vice-Presidents and the Bureau to guide activities. Responsibilities include managing meetings, enforcing rules, and maintaining order. The election process ensures fair geographic representation, with the President and Vice-Presidents alternating between UN regions. Holding office for one year, the President is vital in increasing cooperation and promoting sustainable development, social progress, and economic growth, as according to Article 72; allows ECOSOC to adopt its own rules of procedure, including the selection of its President.

Participation

Any Member State of the UN may attend the Council’s meetings upon the invitation of the Council. Member States are invited if the ECOSOC is discussing an issue that directly concerns the interests of the Member State. Invited Member States do not have the right to vote but are allowed to submit proposals and draft resolutions. Furthermore, those Member States can inform the Council about a current crisis in their region. However, such proposals may be put to a vote only at the request of a member of the Council.

Voting

Every Member State of the ECOSOC has one vote. A proposal is introduced by a member state to start the voting process in the ECOSOC Council. Following debates and possible changes, the president asks for a vote. Using electronic systems or placards, members cast their votes by selecting "Yes," "No," or "Abstain." After tallying the votes, the president declares the outcome. A majority of the members who are <u>*present and voting*</u> make decisions, and in the event of a tie, the president casts the decisive vote. Decisions are usually made by consensus, but when voting is necessary, a majority of the members present, and voting decide the outcome. Each member state gets one vote.

Conclusion

By encouraging global collaboration on economic, social, and environmental challenges, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) plays a vital role in the UN system. Promoting sustainable development, defending human rights, and coordinating the efforts of UN specialised agencies are among ECOSOC's primary duties. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN's development agenda are greatly advanced by ECOSOC, which serves as a focal point for international policy discussions and development. The UN's commitment to a more just and prosperous society for all is reaffirmed by ECOSOC, which acts as a catalyst for creative partnerships and solutions by promoting cooperation among member states, non-governmental organisations, and stakeholders.

Committee History

"Serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues and formulating policy recommendations addressed to member states and the United Nations System."

Introduction

International trade agreements (ITAs) are pivotal in shaping global economic relations. Designed to reduce trade barriers and enhance cooperation, they aim to promote growth, encourage foreign direct investment (FDI), and foster development, particularly in emerging economies. However, the effectiveness of these agreements in promoting sustainable economic development remains a contentious issue. While proponents cite increased market access and economic diversification, critics argue that many agreements reinforce existing inequalities and benefit developed nations disproportionately. This essay evaluates the role of trade agreements in driving economic development, focusing on case studies, theoretical frameworks, and international critiques.

Understanding International Trade Agreements and Economic Development

Trade agreements are legally binding contracts between two or more nations that govern trade relations by reducing tariffs, quotas, and regulatory barriers. They come in various forms—bilateral (e.g., US-Korea FTA), regional (e.g., the African Continental Free Trade Area - AfCFTA), or multilateral (e.g., WTO agreements).
Economic development, distinct from mere economic growth, refers to long-term improvements in living standards, reduction in poverty, better health and education, and broader opportunities for all citizens (Todaro & Smith, 2020). The central question is whether ITAs facilitate such holistic development, especially in the Global South.

The Effectiveness of International Trade Agreements in Promoting Economic Development

International trade agreements (ITAs) have become a cornerstone of global economic integration, aiming to foster economic growth, development, and cooperation among nations. These agreements, ranging from bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) to multilateral accords under the World Trade Organization (WTO), are designed to reduce trade barriers, facilitate market access, and promote the exchange of goods, services, and investments. While their potential benefits are significant, their actual effectiveness in promoting sustainable economic development remains a subject of debate.

One of the primary advantages of ITAs is their ability to expand markets for participating countries. By reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers, these agreements enable countries to increase exports, access new markets, and benefit from economies of scale. For developing nations, such market expansion can lead to job creation, technological transfer, and increased foreign direct investment (FDI). For example, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aims to boost intra-African trade, which has historically been limited, thereby encouraging economic diversification and growth across the continent.

Furthermore, trade agreements can promote economic stability and integration. Regional blocs like the European Union (EU) and ASEAN facilitate not only trade but also policy coordination, which can lead to more predictable economic environments. Such stability attracts FDI, which is crucial for infrastructure development and technological advancement, especially in developing countries.

However, the effectiveness of ITAs in promoting equitable economic development is complex and often contested. Critics argue that these agreements tend to favor developed countries, which possess more bargaining power and advanced industries. As a result, developing countries may experience uneven benefits, with their industries vulnerable to competition from more established firms in developed nations. This can lead to the displacement of local industries, increased inequality, and a dependency on volatile export markets.

Moreover, trade liberalization can sometimes exacerbate social and environmental challenges. For instance, increased demand for raw materials and agricultural products can lead to environmental degradation, while the pursuit of cost competitiveness might result in labour exploitation and poor working conditions. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for example, created economic opportunities but also faced criticism for job losses in certain sectors and environmental concerns.

Another challenge is that trade agreements often lack provisions to address issues like income inequality, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Without integrated policy frameworks, the benefits of trade may not reach all segments of society, undermining the broader goal of sustainable development.
Despite these challenges, many international organizations advocate for fair and inclusive trade policies. The WTO plays a crucial role in establishing rules to ensure transparency and dispute

resolution, but negotiations often face deadlocks, especially on issues related to developing countries' special needs.

Case Studies:

1) **Official Name:** Assessing the Impact of the African Continental Free Trade Area on Economic Development

Example: Nigeria

This case study evaluates the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and its role in promoting economic development across Africa. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study examines both quantitative data and qualitative insights.

The findings reveal a mixed impact, with some countries experiencing increased trade volumes and economic growth, while others faced challenges such as inequality and job losses. Factors like institutional quality, economic diversification, and human capital were found to influence the outcomes.

This case study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach when assessing the effectiveness of trade agreements in Africa.

2) **Official Name:** Assessing the Effectiveness of ASEAN Free Trade Agreements in Promoting Indonesia's Economic Development

Example: Indonesia

The case study assesses the impact of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Free Trade Agreements on Indonesia's economic development. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data analysis with qualitative assessments.

The study finds that Indonesia experienced economic growth following the agreements, particularly in export-oriented sectors, but also faced challenges such as inequality and environmental degradation. Institutional capacity, economic diversification, and adaptability to market changes were key factors affecting the outcomes.

This case study emphasizes the need for tailored approaches that address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Indonesia when evaluating the effectiveness of trade agreements.

3) **Official Name:** Examining the Impact of European Union Trade Agreements on Germany's Economic Development

Example: Germany

The case study explores the effectiveness of the European Union's trade agreements in promoting economic development in Germany. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights.

The findings show that Germany benefited from increased trade volumes and economic growth in certain sectors while facing challenges like job losses and inequality in others. Factors such as institutional quality, human capital, and economic diversification were found to influence the outcomes.

This case study highlights the importance of considering multiple factors when assessing the impact of trade agreements on Germany's economic development.

Criticisms and Challenges

Several criticisms challenge the assumption that trade agreements automatically promote development:

- **Unequal Bargaining Power:** Developed nations often dominate negotiations, setting terms that Favor their interests, such as stronger intellectual property rights, which can hinder technology transfer to developing nations (Rodrik, 2018).
- **Lack of Inclusivity:** Many agreements lack enforceable provisions on labour rights and environmental protections, leading to a "race to the bottom" in standards (ILO, 2021).
- **Weak Domestic Institutions:** Countries with fragile institutions may not fully capitalize on the opportunities presented by trade agreements due to corruption, weak enforcement, or lack of industrial policy (Chang, 2002).

The Role of International Organizations

The **World Trade Organization (WTO)** plays a central role in promoting multilateral trade and resolving disputes. Meanwhile, **UNCTAD** supports developing countries by providing research and technical assistance to leverage trade for development. The **World Bank** and **IMF** often tie structural adjustment programs and loans to trade liberalization, though their effectiveness has been hotly debated.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Incorporate Development Clauses:** Trade agreements should include enforceable development-focused clauses such as support for SMEs, labour protections, and environmental sustainability.
2. **Capacity-Building for LDCs:** Provide technical and legal support to ensure least-developed countries (LDCs) can negotiate fair agreements and implement necessary reforms.

3. **Regional Integration:** Encouraging regional trade pacts like AfCFTA can help create economies of scale, reduce dependence on volatile global markets, and enhance bargaining power.

Conclusion

International trade agreements have the potential to significantly promote economic development by expanding markets, attracting investment, and fostering regional integration. However, their success hinges on design and implementation that prioritize inclusivity, sustainability, and capacity-building for less developed nations. To maximize their effectiveness, trade policies must be complemented by social, environmental, and developmental considerations, ensuring that the gains from trade contribute to long-term, equitable progress for all nations.

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