

Mauritius



Directory

Country Profile

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NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (NESC)

Conseil Economique et Social de L'île Maurice

Year Established	2001
Year Operational	2002
Legislation/Executive Orders	The National Economic and Social Council Act 2001 (Act No.29 of 2001) Available on http://www.nesc-mauritius.org/index1.asp
Frequency of meetings	At least once quarterly
Membership structure	23 members representing workers' organizations, business organizations, civil society, and government
ESC Focus	Focus is promoting dialogue as a means to reach consensus for social integration to keep pace with economic development, and to make recommendations to the government on these issues.
Executive Directors	Mr Mohamad A. VAYID C.M.G, G. O.S.K., Chairman Mr Jayeraj RAMJADA, Secretary General Ms. Daisy Brigemohane, Assistant Secretary General
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Website	www.nesc-mauritius.org
Affiliation	International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (IAESCSI) Union of Economic and Social Councils of Africa (UCESA)

¹ Information verified by the ESC.

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National Economic and Social Council (NESC)²

BACKGROUND

NESC was established as an independent consultative body through law under the National Economic and Social Council Act 2001 (Act No. 29 of 4 December 2001).³ The Act has not been amended.

Prior the establishment of NESC in 2001, earlier attempts had been made to form a similar body. In March 1983, a NESC Act was passed to provide for the establishment of the National Economic and Social Council, although it ultimately never materialized. Instead, a National Economic and Development Council (NEDC) was set up in 1991 to act mainly as a think tank and policy advisory body on economic issues. The concept for NEDC was based upon the British model and originated with a speech from the throne in 1990. NEDC, however, had no legal standing and it was felt that it did not adequately reflect a wide enough cross-section of civil society. In June 2000, the Economic Development and National Integration Council (EDNIC) Act was passed to replace NEDC, but again it was felt that the new structure still did not provide a wide enough platform for social dialogue. A small, tripartite working group was commissioned, which studied the South African (NEDLAC) and French (CES) ESC models, produced its findings and recommendations based upon the comparisons it noted, and drafted the NESC Act that was later amended and formally adopted by the National Assembly.

The **objective** of NESC is to foster consensus-building through dialogue among social partners including civil society and help address economic and social issues facing the nation. Per the NESC Act, the Council shall: 1) Promote dialogue as a means of achieving consensus for social integration to keep pace with economic development and 2) to express its opinions, and make appropriate recommendations to Government, for the promotion of social integration and national development.

To fulfill these objectives, the Council undertakes studies on socio-economic issues of national importance, works to build consensus through social dialogue, and makes recommendations to government regarding its economic and social policies. The Council, per the NESC Act, “is not a forum for salary negotiations and positional bargaining on employment conditions, but shall strive to promote industrial relations at large to ensure social harmony.”

The **organizational structure** of NESC is a membership of not more than 23 councilors operating in three Commissions (see following section), along with an Executive Committee, ad hoc working groups, and a Secretariat.

² Information has been sent to ESC for verification. Information obtained from the NESC website (www.nesc-mauritius.org), the NESC Act (on the website), and internal communication with NESC.

³ The NESC act repealed the Economic Development and National Integration Council Act of 2000.

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The councilors hold office for a 3-year period.

NESC is funded from a General Fund, which consists of funding from Government, all approved donations, contributions, and grants from donors, and any other charge, fee, or sum accrued by the Council.

FUNCTION

The councilors consist of the following:

- 5 representatives from workers' organizations (One nominated by the Minister and one representative each from the four most representative federations of trade unions registered under the Industrial Relations Act of Mauritius)
- 5 representatives from business organizations (one nominated by the Minister and four appointed by the Joint Economic Council)
- 8 representatives from civil society (one each nominated by representatives of the Mauritius Council of Social Service, National Women's Council, Senior Citizen's Council, National Youth Council, and four nominated by the Minister with emphasis on academia and experts in various fields relevant to the issues at stake at the time of their appointment.)
- 5 representatives from Government (Head of the Civil Service; Financial Secretary; Director of Economic Development; Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations; and a representative appointed by the Minister who represents the issues of the nearby government-administered island of Rodrigues)

The councilors operate in three Commissions of the Council: Commission on Economic Affairs; Commission on Infrastructure, Physical Resources, Environment and Sustainable Development; and Commission on Social Affairs and Human Resource Development. The primary function of the Commissions is to undertake studies and prepare statements, reports, and recommendations as required by the Council. Councilors can be members of up to two Commissions, and Commissions may have 8-12 members.

In addition to these commissions, it is important to note that the NESC Secretariat is also the National focal point to oversee the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The APRM is a pan-African initiative to improve good governance and promote development and is part of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). In this way, it is significant that NESC has been tasked with a coordination role in an international governmental policy.

Procedures

NESC undertakes studies and gives opinions and recommendations either of its own initiative, when at least 5 councilors request it to, or if requested by the Minister assigned to oversee economic development.

The Council publishes reports on its regular meetings and consultations with the President, the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Before finalizing its opinion on an issue, the Council may interact with the Minister concerned. The Council shall, within three months after the end of the financial year, furnish to the Minister the annual report and audited accounts of the Council.

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Reports produced by the Council will be published in the Gazette and laid before the National Assembly, giving greater opportunity to the politicians to have a formal role and to react to the input from the broader civil society.

Civic participation

The Commission on Social Affairs and Human Resource Development has, in particular, undertaken initiatives that promote civil society participation. In its programme of work for 2004-2005, NESC settled upon the issue of the family as its core thematic focus and has since also conducted a study on violence in Mauritius.

The Working Groups that are established on an ad hoc basis are aimed at including more civil society participation in the Council. The Working Groups usually prepare opinion statements, carry out studies, and propose future studies and research.

The Council also holds an Annual Summit, chaired by the Prime Minister of Mauritius, to which a cross-section of civil society is invited to build a broader consensus. For example, the 2003 NESC Summit included more than 150 stakeholders and interest group representatives, far more than the regular 23 councilors, and so enjoyed greater civil society representation than in the formal sessions of the Council.

Accomplishments/outcomes involving civic engagement

An example of a major accomplishment of the Commission on Social Affairs and Human Resource Development is its research findings and recommendations on the elderly, contained in the 2005 report [<The Integration of the Elderly in the Family - Proposals for New policies>](#).

To produce the report, the Commission sought the input and expertise from focus groups of elderly individuals as well as from a variety of civil society groups that are active in the provision of care for the elderly, especially NGOs dealing with pensioners' issues and social welfare, and also the advice of homes for the elderly. The civil society groups participated in consultative meetings with the Secretariat and made suggestions that were considered in the final NESC report. NESC also consulted the Center for Applied Social Research of the University of Mauritius to conduct a large-scale survey of the perceptions, behavior, and attitudes of the elderly, and so a wide variety of input from the elderly was included in the report.

The conclusion of the report includes a recommendation to include an autonomous structure within the Ministry or to establish an independent statutory body such as a Senior Citizens' Council, again emphasizing greater civil society participation in the government policy-making process. The elderly report is one example of direct consultation with civil society; the annual summits and ad hoc working groups are other indirect channels that encourage civic engagement.