

## **BACKGROUND**

### **E-discussion, “Building a future for today’s youth: improving access to education” on Facebook**

**16 February to 16 March 2011**

From 4-8 July 2011, Member States, policy-makers, civil society, academia and the private sector will meet in Geneva during the high-level segment of the substantive session of the [United Nations Economic and Social Council \(ECOSOC\)](#) to address the challenges and solutions to implementing the commitments made in relation to education.

In this context, and as part of the communication campaign to promote “Education for a Sustainable Future”, the [United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(UNDESA\)](#) and the [United Nations Academic Impact \(UNAI\)](#) will organize an e-discussion on “Building a future for today’s youth: improving access,” to be hosted on Facebook mid-February to mid-March 2011. This discussion will also be held as a contribution to the celebration of the International Year of Youth.

At a time when most countries are facing multiple crises, from the fragility of the global economic and financial situation to food and fuel price volatility to climate change, many national budgets are facing cuts, especially in the social sector. Poor families are also finding it difficult to support their children’s education. Young people have been unable to find and keep jobs. In 2009, about 81 million young people were unemployed, the highest number ever.

This situation adds urgent relevance to the focus of the United Nations Academic Impact on encouraging higher education institutions to address universally accepted principles on educational opportunity and capacity building, poverty and sustainability---and the intrinsic relationship between them. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted at the launch of UNAI on 18 November 2010, “climate change is not just an environmental threat, it is closely tied to poverty. Poverty is not just about jobs, it is directly related to food security. Food security has an impact on health. Health affects generations of children. Children hold the key to our future. And education can lead to progress on all these fronts.”