

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT



### Thematic Panel Discussion

### *“Education for the Future – Changing Needs”*

Friday, 8 July 2011

10:00 am – 12:30 am

#### **Background**

There is rising concern that education systems are not adequately preparing students to meet the demands and challenges of tomorrow’s world. International learning assessments show that too many students are leaving school without acquiring basic competencies in key subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics and science. Close to 800 million adults lack basic literacy skills, two-thirds of these are women. Some 70 million children are still out of primary school and the same number of adolescent youth are not benefiting from a secondary education.

In increasingly **knowledge-based societies** that are driven by technology and growing integration, lack of education is a powerful factor of exclusion and a threat to social cohesion. More fundamentally, education plays a forceful role in shaping peace and more sustainable development patterns.

**Labour markets** are currently going through unprecedented change, with direct consequences for education systems. It is vital to identify the knowledge, skills and competencies, as well as the values and attitudes that are required to shape today’s learners into responsible and informed citizens. In an increasingly globalized world, characterized by increased mobility of students and migrate workers, values such as global citizenship, education for intercultural dialogue and language skills are increasingly important.

**Life-long learning** has become a necessity, because innovation and rapidly changing environments call for upgrading skills and acquiring new ones. Skills such as critical and creative thinking, problem solving, learning to learn, and entrepreneurship are increasingly valued.

The speed of change in **ICT development** means that skills depreciate much more rapidly than they once did. To compete effectively in this constantly changing environment, workers need to be able to upgrade their skills on a continuing basis. On the other hand, ICT can increase access and reach out to wider population. The delivery mode of education could also change with the spread of ICT. While addressing the needs of current and future generations in catching up with ever evolving required skills, the potential of ICT should be exploited in improving access, quality and equity of education.

The challenges we face are global in nature – climate change, biodiversity, food scarcity and financial instability. Tomorrow’s students require the knowledge and skills to promote **greener economic growth**, while at the same time addressing social inequalities.

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) highlights the need for innovative ways of addressing global education challenges. Initiatives to develop and integrate the values, principles and practices of sustainable development into curricula and teacher training in education – including technical and vocational education – are on the rise across all regions.

### **Objective**

The key objective of the thematic panel is to stimulate substantive dialogue among key stakeholders, i.e. governments, civil society and private sector actors on the present challenges and opportunities in the area of education and sustainable development.

### **Conceptual framework**

The substantive framework for the speaker presentations in the thematic panel will be developed around three overarching questions:

- What are the emerging educational needs?
- What changes are needed to enable education systems to respond to these emerging educational needs?
- How can the needed changes be brought about?

### **Format**

The thematic panel would follow a format similar to the previous two years in which 3-4 well-known policy-makers and experts were invited as panelists, followed by an open discussion. These presentations broadcasted on the United Nations website.

### **Outputs**

The thematic panel has the potential to generate several outputs:

- Policy content to the High-level Segment, leading up to 2011 Ministerial Declaration;
- An informal summary, which could be circulated following the deliberations in ECOSOC. This report could provide a succinct synthesis of views expressed in the thematic panel with recommendations on possible ways forward;
- A policy brief, following the proposed substantive architecture of the thematic panel.