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## **High-level meeting of UN Economic and Social Council to focus on education**



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Making education accessible for all will be the focus of a United Nations conference in Geneva next week that will bring together representatives from governments, international organizations, civil society and academia to discuss ways of ensuring everyone has an opportunity to acquire knowledge.

Delegates at the High-level Segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will discuss how to accelerate progress towards achieving the goal of education for all and look into ways of promoting sustained and inclusive economic growth, while exploring policies that governments can pursue to achieve those objectives.

“The perspectives of different regions are very different. In Africa... their concerns are around the problem of access to those who are marginalized,” Nikhil Seth, the Director of ECOSOC’s Office for Support and Coordination, said in an interview with the UN News Centre.

“In Latin America and the Caribbean, the problems are of a totally different nature. There it is a struggle for equality... a struggle of not essentially looking at primary education, but looking at ways in which you can enhance secondary and tertiary education to ensure higher quality of learning and learning outcomes,” he added.

“We trying to bring in all these regional perspectives for a process by which we can share this information and best practices can be learned and shared with everyone.”

He noted that 67 million children of school age were out of school globally, according to 2008 statistics, with an estimated 10 million youngsters dropping out of school every year in sub-Saharan Africa. About 17 per cent of the world's adults, or almost 800 million people, lacked basic literacy skills.

“At the meeting we will of course have some legislative outcomes in the form of a ministerial declaration where we hope that all the preparations that we have done will help accelerate progress by bringing all the stakeholders in collective action for achieving the goals that we have set for ourselves in education,” said Mr. Seth.

“On the issue of understanding the state of the world economy and of promoting sustained inclusive growth, we hope ECOSOC will come up with a better understanding of what are the sensible policies governments should pursue to make growth inclusive,” he added.

Eleven countries – Bangladesh, Belarus, Germany, Malawi, Mauritius, Mexico, Pakistan, Qatar, Senegal, Turkey and Venezuela – will outline in presentations to the ECOSOC High-level conference – their experiences in trying to expand education opportunities, including lessons learned and difficulties encountered in their development policies.

“The meeting will enable a better understanding of how we assess where we are, not only in the state of the world economy, but also what are the sensible policies that the UN would like to recommend in having inclusive and equitable growth,” said Mr. Seth.

“We hope that the participation of a large number of policy-makers and other stakeholders will help policy-makers at the national level bring these lessons back into national policy because at the end of the day it's countries and their national policies which determine their responses to all these crises,” he said.

“There is action of course at the global level and there is action at the national level and we hope that ECOSOC will help in better understanding of all these issues.”

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