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Background Note Session III

Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Social Affairs

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Session III: Taking stock of the policies of Europe 2020 and the way forward

According to the latest EuroStat research, one in four people in the EU is at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Such a high number of people living on the margins of society undermines social cohesion and limits Europeans' potential. Europe 2020 is the EU's growth strategy for the coming decade. It will enable the EU to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. Its actions include delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. Concretely, the EU has set five ambitious objectives - on employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and climate/energy - to be reached by 2020.

The European poverty and social exclusion headline target has been set on the basis of three combined indicators – the number of people at risk of poverty, levels of severe material deprivation and numbers of people living in households where under-employment features prominently. These indicators address the various features of poverty and exclusion across Europe and the differing situations and priorities among Member States.

It is not very easy to define inclusive growth because the definitions vary and tend to be vague. In general, what appears to be widely recognized is that inclusive growth involves improving living conditions for a large majority of the population, particularly for the disadvantaged people by creating equal opportunities and reducing barriers to achieving these objectives. Policies for combating poverty and inequality do not necessarily include the creation of productive employment that goes beyond income and is one of the basic factors in almost every conceptualization of inclusive growth; it also requires equal opportunities in terms of access to resources in the labour market.

Who is at risk of poverty and exclusion?

Children, the elderly, single women, lone parents, the low-skilled, the unemployed, inactive people of working age including those with disabilities, people living in rural areas and migrants face the highest risk of poverty or exclusion. Ethnic minorities, including the Roma, cannot be identified through official EU statistics but some national sources indicate that they also face a high risk of exclusion.

Questions that may guide the discussion:

- EU heads of State and Governments have committed to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion in the next decade. How can Member States translate these objectives into national targets?
- What role should national parliaments have in the achievement of the national targets?
- Are employment and education policies sufficient tools to combat poverty and social exclusion?
- What other policies are deemed to be conducive to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion?
- Are present active inclusion strategies combining income support, access to the labour market and health and social services working to prevent long-term exclusion?
- What strategies are effective in encouraging a labour market participation rate, targeting in particular women and the young?
- What specific attention is being given to prevent and fight homelessness and housing exclusion?
- Ensuring universal access to quality care for all will require renewed efforts to maintain an efficient health sector. Are Member States taking steps in increasing effectiveness, sustainability and responsiveness of health care and long-term care in the context of austerity and ageing?
- The success of the Europe 2020 Strategy depends on an integrated and coherent approach between all relevant policy areas in particular social, employment and economic policies as well as close cooperation between all levels of government, social partners and civil society. How can linking EU funds to Europe 2020 priorities supporting social innovation?