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PRESS RELEASE

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Fighting poverty: Annual Convention will urge Member States to prioritise social investment

The third Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion takes place in Brussels on 26-27 November 2013. The focus will be on the implementation of the Social Investment Package (SIP), which urged Member States to prioritise social investment, and commitments for action at EU, national, and regional levels to pursue social policy reforms in this direction.

Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, and José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, will address the opening ceremony. Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, will open the second day. László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, and Michel Barnier, Commissioner for Internal Market and Services, will also participate.

"Europe is facing increasing disparities and inequalities. The economic crisis has particularly hit the weakest citizens, the youngest generations and the poorest regions and cities. The number of people at risk of poverty has increased by more than 7 million in the last two years. The Social Investment Package urges Member States to upgrade their active inclusion strategies and continue investing into more efficient and more effective social protection. We now need to commit to concrete actions to safeguard Europe's social model" Commissioner László Andor commented.

The 2013 Convention will address the steps taken and to be taken in order to implement the Social Investment Package presented by the Commission in February 2013 (see [IP/13/125](#), [MEMO/13/117](#) and [MEMO/13/118](#)). Social investment helps people to adapt to challenges such as changing labour markets and to avoid hardship such as falling into poverty or losing their homes. Examples are early childhood education and care, prevention of early school leaving, lifelong learning, training and job-search assistance, housing support, accessible health services and facilitating living independently in old age.

In particular, the Commission is currently supporting Member States' efforts to:

- Make social protection systems more efficient and effective, for instance by simplifying benefit administration and setting up 'one-stop-shop' services
- Give access to best practices in social policy by building a knowledge bank to help policymakers and experts share experiences and disseminate information
- Ensure adequate income support by investing in reference budgets and providing technical support to encourage minimum income schemes in countries like Greece.

Through workshops and debates, the Convention will discuss how to tackle major current challenges such as access to healthcare, early childhood education and care, disadvantaged young people, reduction of homelessness and Roma inclusion. Opportunities for action at local level will also be highlighted, giving prominence to the role cities and municipalities and the need to support them in fighting poverty and social exclusion.

Furthermore, the Convention will also show the possibilities to use the European Social Fund (ESF) and the new Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) in the new financing period that will start in 2014.

The outcomes of these debates will feed into a collective commitment at European, national and local levels on the way forward, which will be examined at the next Convention in 2014.

Background

The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion is a flagship initiative of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs, launched in 2010 to help achieve the target of poverty reduction by at least 20 million people by 2020. Every year, the Convention takes stock of progress made towards this goal and focuses on the structural social policy reforms to be achieved.

The current economic crisis has increased the levels of poverty. In 2012, 125.3 million people living in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, an increase of more than 7 million from 2010.

Combating poverty and social exclusion is primarily a responsibility for Member States. However, EU action supports and complements what is done at national level.

The Social Investment Package adopted in February gives guidance to Member States on more efficient and effective social policies in response to the significant challenges they currently face. In particular, it focuses on:

- Ensuring that social protection systems respond to people's needs at critical moments throughout their lives.
- Simplified and better targeted social policies to provide adequate and sustainable social protection system, optimizing the efficiency of social policy spending.
- Upgrading active inclusion strategies in the Member States in policy areas such as affordable quality childcare and education, prevention of early school leaving, training and job-search assistance, housing support and accessible health care are all policy areas with a strong social investment dimension.

The [latest Eurostat figures](#) indicate that after a rise between 2008 and 2009, social protection expenditure in the 28 Member States fell slightly from 29.7% of GDP in 2009 to 29.4% in 2010 and 29.1% in 2011.

For more information

Further information on [Social Investment](#)

Further information on the [European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion](#)

Further information on the [Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion](#)

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[László Andor's website](#)

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