



INCLUDING? CHILDREN?

EURONET PRINCIPLES

- Children have a right to live without experiencing prejudice, exclusion and discrimination
- Children have a right to be heard within the European institutions including the European Parliament, Commission, Council of Ministers and the Council of Europe
- Children have a right to be recognised as citizens of the European Union with a statement of their fundamental rights included in the Treaty on the European Union.
- Children have a right for their needs and interests to be given priority in the work of local, regional, national authorities and European and International institutions.
- The European Union and the member states have a duty to amend and bring forward legislation which fully reflects and implements the principles contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Politicians, political parties and political groups have a duty to give priority to children's rights in their manifestos and programmes
- NGOs and other bodies have a duty to develop inclusive and participatory work with children
- NGOs have a duty to promote the rights and needs of children including effective campaigning on children's issues within the context of the developing European Union

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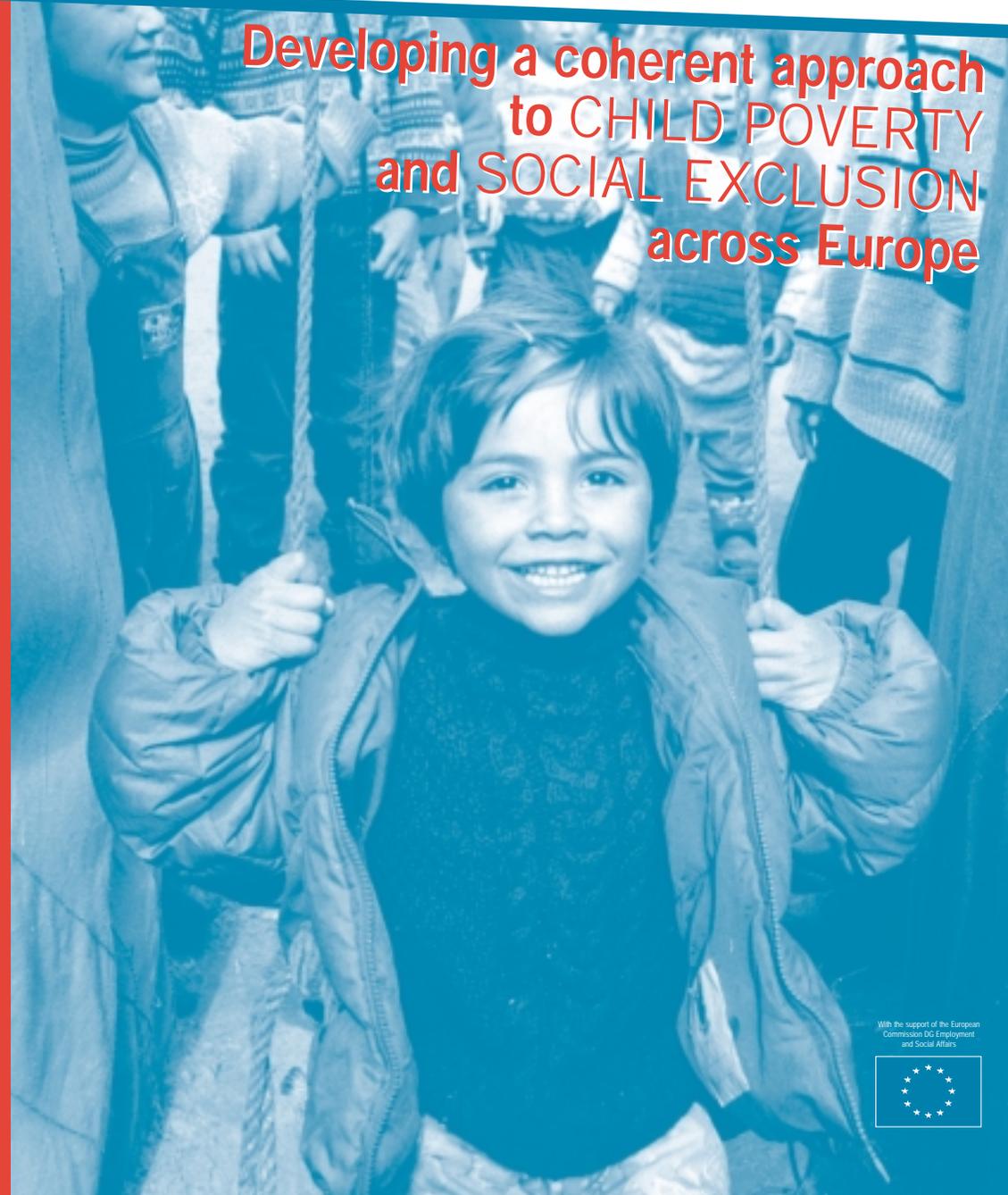
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- Institute of Child Health (GR)
- Save the Children Italia (IT)
- FICE (LUX)
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Developing a coherent approach
to CHILD POVERTY
and SOCIAL EXCLUSION
across Europe



With the support of the European
Commission DG Employment
and Social Affairs





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Developing a coherent approach to CHILD POVERTY and SOCIAL EXCLUSION across Europe

The report was commissioned by Euronet – The European Children's Network
and written by Sandy Ruxton and Fran Bennett, independent researchers
and financed with support of the European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs

This report is also available in French and Spanish

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Chapter 1.

Executive Summary

Key findings

Child poverty and social exclusion in Europe – what is the problem?

Because their physical, mental, emotional and social capacities are still evolving, children are especially vulnerable to the effects of poverty and social exclusion. The impact is harmful for them at the time, and undermines their longer-term prospects and lifetime chances. It is also damaging for the future of Member States and the EU as a whole (and applicant countries as well), because of the enormous waste of human potential and the damage to social cohesion and solidarity involved. For this project, Euronet reviewed the latest comprehensive data to be published on a comparable basis, which show that:

- 21 per cent of children in the EU were living in a low-income household in 1996 (16.9 million children, in 7.9 million households). Child poverty rates ranged widely across Member States, from 25 per cent (UK) to 4 per cent for boys and 5 per cent for girls (Denmark);
- In most Member States, children are at greater risk of poverty than adults. But this is not the case in some countries (e.g. Denmark and Greece). The variation in child poverty rates across Member States shows that high levels are not an inevitable result of current global trends, or social and economic developments in the EU, but must at least in part result from different histories and differing policy choices made by different countries;
- In Central and Eastern Europe, children have been greatly affected in recent years by increases in poverty and income inequality, although in some countries they are protected in some ways by a legacy of collective provision and more equal incomes.

The main source of information about child poverty and social exclusion in the EU on a comparable basis is the European Community Household Panel survey; but the analysis is only available after a time lag. The problem of out-of-date data is therefore serious, especially when attempts are being made to evaluate current policies, and every effort should be made to overcome it.

Levers for policy change

A successful strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion amongst children needs to act on a combination of levers for policy change, including (for example):

- Achieving social consensus on core values (for example, about children as a shared responsibility and social investment, rather than as the private property, or the sole responsibility, of their parents);
- Macro-economic policies which favour measures which benefit children;
- Policies to create an inclusive society, including child-friendly and parent-friendly measures and the promotion of gender equity;
- An agreement that redistribution over the family lifecycle, and between those with and without children, is a social priority;

- Better employment opportunities, of the right kind to help parents into paid work and combine their work and family lives;
- The promotion of the type of labour market which is more successful at preventing children falling into poverty;
- Generous cash transfers (tax allowances, social security benefits etc. for families) and good public services for families with children.

Any strategy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion will be mediated by different governmental structures, including the degree of decentralisation of responsibility for relevant measures.

Poverty and social exclusion from children's perspective

Euronet emphasises the importance of a children's perspective on poverty and social exclusion, and children's right to participate actively in society and in decision-making processes (as set out in Article 12 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). This can influence the way poverty and social exclusion are analysed and tackled. Looking at child poverty and social exclusion from this perspective could mean, for example, putting greater emphasis on specific issues such as:

- The sources of household income, and who receives and manages income, not just its amount –because research has shown that children's well-being can be affected differently by what kind of income comes into the household and who is in charge of it;
- Insecurity and impermanence, and how children experience them –making it important to monitor frequent moves of housing, school etc., because these are likely to have a negative impact on children's quality of life;
- "Equivalence scales" –the weight given to children, including those of different ages, in calculations of the living standards of different household types; the use of different equivalence scales can affect our perceptions of reality in terms of the volume of child poverty, and/or its distribution between children of different ages;
- Revising the definition and measure of social exclusion used by Eurostat, since it has not been designed with children in mind, and relies on answers to some questions which are only put to those over 16;
- Investigating children's experiences of exclusion from the world of other children now, as well as from the world of adults in the longer term –and therefore taking seriously children's exclusion from access to rights in the present, and not just the implications of this exclusion for themselves, or the EU, later on;
- Encouraging the development of participatory exercises involving children and young people themselves, to explore their views and priorities.

A child audit of the National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/incl)

The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 identified children as a target group for action against social exclusion, and children are mentioned in several objectives in the NAPs/incl framework; this is a significant step forward, and provides an excellent

opportunity to put children's rights more firmly on the EU's political agenda. If this is to be fully exploited, Euronet's analysis of the NAPs/incl suggests that the following points must be addressed:

- The references to children are currently scattered throughout the framework for the NAPs/incl, rather than forming part of a coherent whole –perhaps partly as a result of the lack of a legal base in the Treaties for dealing with children;
- Few Member States integrate a concern for child poverty and social exclusion throughout the NAPs/incl, or use the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child consistently as a shaping framework;
- Children are seen more often in their family context (for example, in terms of the challenges posed by developments in the labour market or family structures) than in their own right;
- Similarly, in education, children may sometimes be seen primarily as the future workforce, though access and the costs of so-called "free" education are also identified as key issues for some Member States;
- Many Member States list their general policies on the reconciliation of work and family life, but do not analyse them from the perspective of children, or of parents on low incomes;
- The discussion of family support highlights differences among Member States in how much the family is seen as providing the primary form of protection against social exclusion;
- Some Member States see children as a whole as a group that is vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion; others only pick out certain categories of children (such as disabled or ethnic minority children);
- Few Member States mention either children or their organisations being consulted in the preparation of the NAPs/incl; the promotion of participation and self-expression by people living in poverty is not systematically addressed, and the need to include children is often not acknowledged;
- Only the UK and Portugal have so far developed targets on child poverty, though their definitions of child poverty are not necessarily clear to others.

In the development of the NAPs/incl over the next few years, it is essential that children's rights, needs and interests are recognised and prioritised.

Main Recommendations

Euronet believes that a coherent European approach to child poverty and social exclusion must be developed, in line with the framework set out in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Here we summarise the main recommendations from this project for achieving this aim. (More detailed recommendations are set out in chapter 6., Conclusions and Way Forward):

Principles of approach to child poverty and social exclusion:

- Poverty and social exclusion should be re-examined through children's eyes;
- It is essential that policy on children is not simply subsumed within family or gender policy if child poverty and social exclusion are to be tackled effectively;
- The approach to child poverty and social exclusion should use children's rights as a framework for analysis and action, including the right to participate;
- Children should be involved in decision-making processes on issues which affect their lives, and participation exercises which involve children should make special efforts to reach out to those who are poor and excluded;
- Child poverty and social exclusion should be given high visibility at EU and Member State level, and should be treated as a political priority in practice;
- Policy on children should focus on children's quality of life and opportunities now, as well as on the longer-term effects of poverty and social exclusion on them as adults in the future, and on society as a whole;
- The circumstances of children facing poverty and social exclusion are not homogeneous, and discrimination against specific groups of children, as well as against children as a whole, should be actively combated (in line with Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child);
- Effective responses to child poverty and social exclusion depend on comprehensive and wide-ranging strategies, including economic and social policies.

EU level: legal base

- Member States should agree the insertion of a new Article into the EU Treaties, so that the Community can contribute to the promotion and protection of the rights and needs of children within existing legal competences of the EU Treaty, whilst respecting the lead role of the Member States.

Member State level

- Member States should conduct child poverty impact analysis of social and economic policies and of budgets at central, regional and local levels;
- Member States should seek to ensure that the maximum resources available are invested in the promotion of children's economic, social and cultural rights, in line with their commitments under Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;

- There should be overall management and co-ordination of a strategy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, based on cross-departmental working to agreed priorities, and with a specific unit/department having a leading role;
- Appropriate mechanisms for delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy should be developed.

The Nice European Council Objectives and NAPs/incl

- An agenda on child poverty and social exclusion is gradually emerging at EU level –but the objectives agreed at Nice need further development to reflect children's interests systematically throughout the framework for the National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/incl);
- The European Commission should give further guidance to Member States about how to incorporate a children's perspective as the National Action Plans are developed in future; Member States themselves should ensure that they make children visible and mainstream child poverty and social exclusion throughout;
- Children living in poverty/social exclusion and the organisations representing their interests should be involved in monitoring, evaluating and developing the National Action Plans.

Indicators

- Indicators of poverty and social exclusion should be developed further at EU and Member State level, to focus more clearly on the position of children, and children should be prioritised more clearly in the common indicators to be used to monitor progress of the NAPs/incl.

Targets for tackling child poverty and social exclusion

- All Member States should, on the basis of clear indicators, adopt targets for the elimination of child poverty in the next National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion;
- A short-term target is for all Member States to aim to match the performance of the average of the best three in relation to child poverty;
- Consideration should be given to setting an EU-wide target for the elimination/reduction of child poverty.

Minimum standards

- In developing the National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion, Member States should move towards the achievement of minimum standards for social provision, to tackle child poverty and social exclusion more effectively.

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Chapter 2.

Introduction: Child Poverty and Social Exclusion Problems and Perspectives

Context

Child poverty in the EU has increased significantly overall during the past twenty years or more. Although the position varies between Member States, across the EU as a whole one in five children¹

aged 0-18 live in a low-income household, according to the latest official figures. Younger children face a higher risk of relative poverty than any other population group –twice that of adults in the 25-49 age range, according to the latest figures.²

The above statistics say nothing, however, about children's actual experiences of poverty and social exclusion –nor do they reveal children perspectives on these issues. Children may be going hungry (or their parents may be doing so, in order to feed them); children may be inadequately clothed, or live in overcrowded and/or temporary accommodation in run-down areas; and children may be missing out on toys, books, school trips and holidays because their parents cannot afford them.

For some children –those living in workless or lone parent households, leaving school early, living in disadvantaged areas, coping with disabilities or poor health, or coming from ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds– the risks of suffering poverty and social exclusion are particularly severe. For example, across the EU 40 per cent of lone parents with at least one child live in poverty, four times more than for households in which there are two adults and one child. The poverty rate of children in workless households is over 60 per cent.³

New risks are also emerging:

- Labour market changes may raise growth and present new job opportunities. However, they may also result in parents facing increasingly insecure, temporary and low-paid employment –with an obvious negative impact on their children;
- Similarly, benefits may arise from the transition to a knowledge society; but some children in disadvantaged groups risk falling further behind their peers as they have limited or no access to new technology;
- Demographic change is also significant, with more people living longer and birth rates falling, a shift which could lead to resources being transferred away from children and children's services;

"...if you're poor when you're a child, you don't expect to be rich when you grow up".

(Child quoted in C. Willow, "Bread is free": children and young people talk about poverty, Children's Rights Alliance for England/Save the Children, 2001.)

"The parents are unemployed, and their children are unemployed; you do not know who should help whom."

(French parent, quoted in Cooper L., Wattam C., Burke J., Katz I., Social Inclusion and Family Support, NSPCC/University of Central Lancashire, 2000.)

- Family structures and gender roles are changing, as a result of increasing divorce rates, more extramarital

births, a rise in lone parent families, growing ethnic and religious diversity and a decrease in family size; although not all these trends are necessarily negative, there is a danger that increasing family breakdown is resulting in more children experiencing poverty.

Beyond poverty, awareness has grown of the processes involved in social exclusion –the obstacles many children and their families face in gaining access to the fundamental rights (such as education, health, welfare and leisure services) which should be available to all citi-

"What's the point of being there at all? Me and the other traveller kids are in a corner drawing while the others learn to read and write."

(Child quoted in article by NEWMAN M., "The long road to equality", Open your eyes to child poverty, Irish Independent newspaper, 26 June 1999.)

Defining poverty and social exclusion

There is still no widely accepted agreement about how to measure poverty, nor about what definition to use. However, for the purposes of this report, Euronet uses the EU's concept of relative poverty –those whose "resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member States in which they live".⁴

In many surveys, this has been interpreted as those whose incomes fall below half of the average (mean) income for the country in which they live. However, since 1998 the EU has defined as "poor" a person whose net disposable income is below 60% of the median income in their country (usually measured by household).⁵

There is less clarity over definitions and measures of social exclusion. However, over the past decade it has been increasingly accepted that the concept is a dynamic one, which takes into account multi-dimensional disadvantage, and focuses more on issues such as inadequate social participation and integration, and lack of power. Some commentators see social exclusion as encompassing failure in any one or more of four types of integration and participation: civic (the democratic and legal system); economic (mainly labour market); social (welfare state provision); and family and community (social capital, networks etc.).⁶

Social exclusion has also been described as being about relationships as well as resources; about the forces of exclusion, and the actions of those doing the excluding, rather than just the person affected by these; and about expectations and prospects, not just current low income or deprivation. This understanding of social exclusion means that the denial of access to rights and full participation in society is essential to the analysis of social exclusion, for children and adults alike.⁷

zens. Adding social exclusion to our analysis of the situation of children allows us to put more emphasis on (lack of) ability to participate, (lack of) respect from others, and discrimination.

Central to the experiences of children facing poverty and social exclusion is a sense of stigma and shame. Children tend to describe their feelings at being set apart from others as "sad", "unhappy", "embarrassed" or "ashamed". Such feelings can be reinforced in a range of direct and indirect ways. By subtle dress codes, fostered by advertisers, which mark out children unable to wear fashionable items. By parents, who may –in many cases for understandable reasons– have low aspirations for their children, or may even be tempted to blame their poverty on their children. By schools, who may pay less attention to children who are seen as less deserving or less likely to achieve. By whole communities, which may marginalise poor neighbourhoods and ascribe "bad" reputations to them.

Poverty and social exclusion in the EU: the need to focus on children

Because their physical, mental, emotional and social capacities are still evolving, children are especially vulnerable to the effects of poverty and social exclusion. Research increasingly shows that child poverty and social exclusion –especially in early childhood– is associated with negative outcomes for children, including child mortality, low birth weight, accidents, teenage pregnancy, bad housing conditions and educational underachievement.⁸

"There is a considerable body of international research which demonstrates that subsequent performance in education is strongly influenced by early developmental experiences and that well-targeted investment at an early stage is one of the most effective ways of countering educational disadvantage and literacy problems. Children from poor backgrounds and vulnerable groups are often particularly at risk of missing out in this regard."

(European Commission, Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, Draft Joint Report on Social Inclusion, (COM [2001] 565 final), 2001.)

This reality is harmful for individual children, many of whom will find it impossible to overcome the difficulties they faced in childhood. It is also highly damaging to the future of Member States and the EU as a whole. The economic, social, political and cultural development of the EU depends on all its 90 million children achieving their full potential. Children are the future and will provide the ideas, energy and commitment to respond to the huge challenges facing the Union.

The fact that several central and eastern European (CEEC) countries will shortly accede to the EU⁹ means that this argument extends to children in applicant countries as well. There is clearly a significant challenge to the EU in helping to combat high levels of child poverty and social exclusion in these countries, although on several indicators of child well-being there are CEEC countries which compare well with EU members.¹⁰

For these reasons, it is essential that the EU and Member States should develop positive strategies to tackle poverty and to ensure that the rights of all children –not only civil and political, but also economic, social and cultural– are adequately addressed. In part, this means focusing on the needs of tomorrow's generations; but it also means paying greater attention to children's needs as active citizens today.

A key challenge here is to ensure that children's experiences are not rendered invisible by a focus purely on the needs of parents or families. Approaching children through this latter lens can result in key issues being overlooked. Research may fail to disaggregate the position of children and ignore the impact of certain policies on them. The rights of children who live separately from their parents (e.g. those who are homeless, or asylum-seekers or refugees, or living in institutions) may be sidelined. And although in the majority of cases children's interests are similar or identical to those of their families, there are occasions (such as separation and divorce, or child protection) when interests may conflict.

Despite the importance of children's actual and potential contributions to the future well-being of the EU, so far children's rights –and in particular those of children facing poverty and social exclusion– have largely been ignored by the EU's institutions. To some extent, it is possible to discern an emerging emphasis on children within the development of EU strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion. The Lisbon European Council¹¹ in March 2000 recommended, among other things, that priority actions should be developed by Member States for children (and other vulnerable groups).¹² And the objectives agreed at the Nice European Council in December 2000, for example, explicitly refer to the importance of tackling social exclusion among children (see also chapter 5. below). However, this nascent framework must be developed significantly if a greater degree of coherence across Europe is to be ensured in the fight to combat child poverty and social exclusion.

Some may argue that the only coherent European response to child poverty and social exclusion is to begin by assessing these issues according to a common European standard rather than using national poverty lines; that there should be uniform policies in this area; and that these should be set centrally by the EU. The growing convergence of macro-economic policy between Member States symbolised by the introduction of the euro is likely over time to add to the pressure to develop unified responses of this kind; indeed, this has already happened in some other policy areas. However, we also recognise that the current position is one where Member States have primary responsibility for defining the policies on poverty and social exclusion which are appropriate to their national circumstances. Our recommendations are therefore framed in accordance with the present reality –which encourages an "open method of co-ordination" on strategies to tackle poverty and social exclusion– rather than with future possibilities.

Euronet's approach: child rights and child poverty

The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines in international law children's rights to protection, provision and participation. Given that the Convention has been ratified by all EU governments, it provides an extremely useful and dynamic tool for promoting and protecting children's rights, both for local and central government and for groups and individuals working with and for children at all levels.

In relation to child poverty and social exclusion, Clause 1 of Article 27 in particular asserts that:

"States Parties (to the Convention) recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development".

This wording makes clear that poverty should not just be considered as an absolute concept, measuring minimum standards based on biological needs for food, water and shelter, but must take account of the wider needs of the child relative to standards which are considered acceptable within that society.

Clause 2 of the same Article goes on to underline the primary responsibility of parents and/or other carers to provide an adequate standard of living. Clause 3 outlines the State's duty to assist them to implement this right, and is reinforced by Article 4 which states that governments must invest "the maximum resources available" for the promotion of children's and young people's economic, social and cultural rights.

A range of other Articles are also highly relevant. These include:

- General Articles which set out principles which must apply universally to all children (such as Articles 2 [the non-discrimination principle], 3 [primary consideration to the "best interests" of the child] and 6 [the right to life]); and
- Specific Articles in relation to particular areas of policy, including disability, health care, social security, education, play, cultural activity, and humanitarian assistance (see Appendix II for further details).

"The European Meeting of Children's ministers 2001 reaffirms the merits of efforts to eradicate poverty, ... to reduce economic disparities, and to get up social and economic policies to meet the needs of children and families."

(Conclusions, European Meeting of Children's Ministers, 9 November 2001.)

Euronet's approach: the importance of child participation

The trend of encouraging child participation has been emerging since the adoption of the Convention, and is reflected most clearly in Article 12. This sets out that:

- All children are capable of expressing views;
- Children should have opportunities to express their views and should be heard in all matters affecting them;
- Children's views should be taken seriously, in accordance with their age and maturity.

These principles do not give children the right to control decision-making, or to override the rights of adults. However, they do imply that greater efforts must be made to ensure effective collaboration between adults and children, so that children can be heard and appropriate strategies for incorporating their views can be developed.

"Children realise that what they say is hardly ever given the same weight as what adults say. Children have the right to express themselves, but are not necessarily listened to and what they say is often undermined."

(Young person, Euronet consultation on discrimination and participation undertaken in the region of Lyon by COFRADE and SLEA, July 2000.)

It is essential that particular attention is devoted to involving children who face poverty and social exclusion in such processes –failing to give them a voice is in itself a form of exclusion. Whilst there are barriers which all children have to overcome in order to participate in society, these difficulties are made worse for the most marginalised groups of children (and especially those in the younger age groups). They often feel stigmatised

and discriminated against, and are often disengaged from, or neglected by, formal and informal approaches to consultation. Yet children who are poor or socially excluded (including, for example, homeless children, travellers, asylum seekers and refugees) have views and experiences to draw upon which will not be voiced by children from less disadvantaged backgrounds.

Involving children in decision-making, both within the home and beyond, is part of building a cohesive and inclusive society. Many of the complex problems facing governments and other public authorities cannot be adequately tackled without involving children in finding solutions, and incorporating their needs and rights into policy-making. There are many examples across Europe (and beyond) of children contributing to policies across a range of areas, including education and vocational training, the environment and urban regeneration, transport policy and, crucially, poverty and social exclusion.¹³

"There are a lot of people out there who want to have a say, but either they don't know enough about how to go about it or they do have a say but are ignored so they won't speak again."

(Young person at Euronet consultation on discrimination against children, 2000.)

Worthwhile though many of these initiatives are, as yet it appears that few have addressed the challenging task of engaging with poor children whose experiences and perceptions may be very different from the mainstream. This report seeks to contribute to redressing this balance.

Background to this report

In its 1999 report *A Children's Policy for 21st Century Europe*,¹⁴ Euronet has previously highlighted significant general weaknesses in the EU's approach to children.¹⁵ For example:

- The political priority accorded to children is low across the vast majority of policy issues;
- There are restricted opportunities for child participation;
- Limited EU action has been taken, and only in specific policy areas;
- Overall policy direction and co-ordination are lacking; and
- There is a lack of information on the specific needs of children.

Underlying all the above, the report identified that the legal bases in the EU Treaties for action in relation to children are relatively limited. The sole specific reference to children is provided by Article 29 of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty;¹⁶ but this only covers offences against children.¹⁷ The report concluded with a range of recommendations for the development of legislation and policy at EU level, including in particular the need to build upon existing legal bases for children and insert a new legal base at the next Intergovernmental Conference to promote and protect the rights of children.

The current report extends this analysis in relation to child poverty and social exclusion, believing that an approach which emphasises children's rights and the importance of seeing poverty and social exclusion through children's eyes can bring fresh insights to the developing debate at EU and Member State levels. We focus specifically on the rights of younger children, believing that the EU has paid insufficient attention to their needs, as they are outside the labour market and so have not been included in the predominant "citizen as worker" focus of the Community.

Building on the objectives to combat poverty and social exclusion set out at the Nice European Council in December 2000, the aims of this report were:

- To assess the impact of poverty and social exclusion on children in Europe;
- To examine Member States' good policy and practice in these areas;
- To review the extent to which Member States and the EU have developed and met targets in relation to child poverty and social exclusion; and
- To formulate EU level and Member State level policy recommendations and identify European targets on poverty and social exclusion of children.

The report draws upon the broader framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In line with Article 12 of the Convention in particular, the report places a strong emphasis on the need to ensure that children and young people's views on combating child poverty and social exclusion are fully represented.

Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe

Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 3. examines the impact of poverty and social exclusion on children in the EU (based on a literature review, available statistics etc.), and then analyses the levers of policy change which can affect child poverty and social exclusion and the broad direction of Member States' current policies;
- Chapter 4. explores how our perspective would change if we looked at poverty and social exclusion through children's eyes;
- Chapter 5. looks at the recent history of the EU's approach to child poverty and social exclusion, and presents a "child audit" of the National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/incl); and
- Chapter 6. suggests ways forward towards a coherent European approach to child poverty and social exclusion and makes recommendations for action at EU and Member State level.

Introduction

This chapter first analyses the existing EU-wide data on child poverty and social exclusion, including the number of children facing poverty, the particular groups of children for whom the risks are greatest, and the length of time children are in poverty. It then compares child poverty rates between Member States, highlights key aspects of social exclusion at this level, and identifies commercialisation as a growing pressure on parents and their children. This section concludes by setting out key aspects of child poverty and social exclusion in EU enlargement countries.

The remainder of the chapter explores the available levers for policy change in tackling child poverty and social exclusion –including policies related to incomes and more comprehensive strategies, covering a much wider range of measures– and then examines key aspects of Member States' policies in some of these areas.

Child poverty across the EU as a whole

What data are available?

We still do not have comprehensive, up-to-date figures on the number of children living in households on low incomes in the EU, despite improvements in international data in recent years. So Member States have drawn up National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (see chapter 5.) to attack a problem without up-to-date comparative information –though each of them will have access to more recent national data than this.¹⁸

The major sources of comparisons of child poverty (usually measured in terms of relative income) across EU Member States, or between industrialised countries, are:

- The "Luxembourg Income Study", based on national household income surveys, and now covering more than 25 countries;
- The OECD's project on income inequalities in 17 OECD countries (mid 1980s to mid 1990s);

"[All governments should] commit themselves to the elimination of child poverty in their countries because... it is the fundamental task of any democracy to provide an equal opportunity from birth to every child born under its wings..."

Especially in the affluent economies of the industrialised world, there are no valid excuses to prevent governments from having a low child poverty rate... It is not a matter of budget, rather a matter of priority that faces these [industrialised] nations."

(VLEMINCKX K. and SMEEDING T.M. (eds.), Child Well-being, Child Poverty and Child Policy in Modern Nations: What do we know?, The Policy Press, UK, 2001)

- A study of national panel surveys in 7 industrialised countries, focusing on child poverty;¹⁹ and in particular
- From the mid 1990s, the European Community Household Panel Survey.²⁰

Several of these (which we draw on in this report) cover more countries than just the Member States of the EU. The ECHP, however, is EU-specific, and also includes some information on non-monetary measures of deprivation; it is therefore often used as a major data source – despite the fact that the latest comprehensive figures available to the public at the time of writing are for 1996, and that until now it has only covered 13 out of the 15 Member States in the EU.²¹

What do the figures show?

Nearly 1 in 4 of the EU population is aged under 18; and on average, about 1 in 3 households in the EU contains a child or children aged 0 to 18.²² In 1996, 21 per cent of dependent children under 18 in the EU were living in a low-income household – that is 16.9 million children, in 7.9 million households (across 13 Member States).²³ Children in the EU have a higher risk of living in poverty compared to adults – 21 per cent, compared to 16 per cent of adults who were defined as poor at the same date. (There are of course many poor adults living in households containing children.)

Which children are more likely to be poor?

Looking at this total in more detail:

- Almost 1 in 3 children in poverty lived in a workless household;²⁴ and
- Almost 1 in 4 children in poverty lived in a lone parent household.

Or, to look at some of the figures in another way:

- 46 per cent of children in lone parent households, and
- Some 25 per cent of all children in large families (couples with 3 or more children)

lived in poverty. This varied significantly between Member States, however, and in some countries large families were more likely to be poor than lone parent families.²⁵

However, as one study notes, to list the characteristics of poor households containing children is not the same as defining the causes of children's poverty. Some countries are better than others at breaking the connection between living in certain employment or family situations and having a high risk of living in poverty.²⁶ Policy decisions could ensure, for example, that benefit levels for unemployed people are high enough to escape poverty.

How long does poverty last for children?

Many of the figures we see on poverty are “snapshots”, taken at one point in time; we often have no way of knowing whether the next snapshot shows the same people or not. But longitudinal studies, which look at the same group of people over time, are now increasing. The European Community Household Panel (ECHP) survey is a panel of people interviewed on an annual basis.²⁷ It shows that children are more likely to be persistently poor: in 1996, 7 per cent of people in the EU had been living in a low-income household for at least 3 consecutive years, but 9 per cent of

children had done so.²⁸ This means a significant proportion of their childhood is overshadowed by poverty.

As one recent study points out, if we are concerned about unequal shares, the concentration of poverty amongst a smaller group of children, which these figures show, must be particularly worrying.²⁹ The authors also found that children experiencing poverty at some time might often be living on the margins of poverty at other times; in other words, even if sometimes they were not living in poverty, these children were precariously close to doing so, and would still be suffering some degree of disadvantage.

Should we compare children in poverty only with other children?

One recent study notes that the average standard of living of families with children is lower than that of the general population, and puts forward the idea of measuring child poverty in relation to the living standards of other families with children, rather than in relation to the average income of the whole population in a country, as is currently done.³⁰

Another study suggests that if we are interested in children's own views of social exclusion, we could look only at experiences among children as a group, rather than across the whole population.³¹

However, children do not relate solely to other children or other families with children, but also need, and want, to participate in the wider society.

Euronet would support the idea of trying to discover children's own definitions and views of poverty and social exclusion, and of focusing on their experiences in relation to other children. But we must not be prepared to allow the relatively disadvantaged position of families with children in society overall to lead to the adoption of a lower standard by which to judge children's poverty compared with that of any other groups.³²

Is low income the only problem?

As Professor David Piachaud has argued:

“What is of concern for the quality of children's lives and opportunities is not low family incomes in themselves, but their consequences – for nutrition, stress, lack of stimulating childhood experiences, exclusion from normal social activities. All these are linked to child poverty.”

(David Piachaud, “Child poverty, opportunities and quality of life”, *The Political Quarterly*: Vol. 72, no. 4, October-December 2001.)

A recent study examined the relative importance of income compared to other factors in determining children's experiences. It argued that poverty of opportunity and expectation are increasingly recognised as forces to be reckoned with in their own right; raising family income may therefore not be enough on its own. However, it may be easier for governments to affect income than other factors in the short term; and providing higher income may help to raise parents' expectations too.³³

Another recent study notes that some behavioural problems causing particular concern in many countries (including smoking, alcohol/drug use etc. among children and young people) do not always have such a close relationship with poverty – but they are often concentrated in disadvantaged areas.³⁴

"There is no local drug centre in Dundalk or any other town in Ireland outside the cities."

(Focus on Children report for Euronet consultation, 2000.)

"Poverty and social exclusion take complex and multi-dimensional forms which require the mobilisation of a wide range of policies..."

Alongside employment policy, social protection has a prominent role to play, while the importance of other factors such as housing, education, health, information and communications, mobility, security and justice, leisure and culture should also be acknowledged."

(European Commission, statement on *The Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion*, October 2000.)

These studies remind us that the relationship between income and other aspects of poverty and social exclusion is a complex one, and that multi-faceted policies are required to tackle them. The consensus from the studies seems to be that income does matter; but that policies must also go wider, to tackle the consequences of low income and other factors affecting children's opportunities and quality of life.

Social exclusion amongst children across the EU as a whole

What is social exclusion?

The concept of social exclusion seems to have become more important in the EU over recent years, as the process and dynamics of poverty have increasingly become a focus of attention.³⁵ Poverty itself is also increasingly described as multi-dimensional, however.

The definition used in Eurostat documents forms the basis for the comparable statistics available on an EU-wide basis:

"Social exclusion is analysed as the link between low income, activity status and a number of indicators which relate to means, perceptions and satisfaction of the groups under study with respect to their standard of living and quality of life. In this way, social exclusion is understood to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon covering different aspects of life in EU societies."

(Lene Mejer, "Social exclusion in the EU member states", *Statistics in Focus: Population and Social Conditions, Theme 3* -1/2000, Eurostat, 2000.)

Eurostat therefore uses a framework which links

- Socio-demographic characteristics;
- Income level;
- Activity status; and
- Indicators of means (main income source, educational attainment, housing tenure, car ownership), perceptions (ability to make ends meet, and to pay for a week's holiday away) and satisfaction (with paid work or other main activity).

Eurostat is also able to investigate how many people suffer multiple disadvantage, in more than one of these dimensions.

In a recent report, the European Commission seems to extend this rather limited definition:

"Throughout this report, the terms poverty and social exclusion refer to when people are prevented from participating fully in economic, social and civil life and/or when their access to income and other resources (personal, family, social and cultural) is so inadequate as to exclude them from enjoying a standard of living and quality of life that is regarded as acceptable by the society in which they live. In such situations people often are unable to fully access their fundamental rights."

(European Commission, *Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Draft Joint Report on Social Inclusion (COM [2001] 565 final)*, 2001.)

This definition is similar to the EU's long-standing definition of poverty. But the important difference is the reference to inability to access fundamental rights as a significant factor in situations of poverty and social exclusion.

The statistics from Eurostat, however, using its more restricted definition, provide very limited information, especially on children. Below, we therefore also discuss ways in which our picture of social exclusion amongst children could be extended, made more relevant to children's interests and linked with discrimination.³⁶

Children and social exclusion

The ECHP survey results do include a breakdown of how many children live in households experiencing various kinds of deprivation linked to low living standards, including being unable to save regularly, not being able to afford three or more basic necessities,³⁷ having financial burdens or debts etc.

The incidence of financial problems does seem to be age-related, with more children/young adults living in households that had great difficulties in making ends meet, and/or were in arrears with utility bills and/or housing costs, and had cumulative problems in meeting their needs in terms of diet, clothing and holidays.

Lone parents and their children scored higher on these deprivation factors than other households.³⁸ For example, nearly 3 in every 4 lone parent households –and over half of households with 3 adults and dependent children (which are more likely to contain 3 generations)– found it difficult to make ends meet.³⁹ People in lone parent families and large families also had an above average percentage of cumulative housing problems.

"Children get no special place in the Eurostat analysis –there are no specific indicators that are intended to capture exclusion among children."

(J. Micklewright, "Social exclusion and children: a European view for a US debate", UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy (personal view), 2001.)

Percentage of children living in households which:

- had great difficulties in making ends meet : 9 %
- were in arrears with (re)payments of utility bills and/or housing costs during the past 12 months : nearly 12%
- could not meet more than one of dietary, clothing and holiday needs 40:14%
- could not afford a car : 9%

(Eurostat, *European Social Statistics - Income, poverty and social exclusion: Theme 3 – Population and Social Conditions, 2000.*)

It is therefore possible to pick out the percentage of households with children affected by each factor; and it is also clear that certain household types containing children –in particular lone parent families and large families– are more likely to be exposed to multiple disadvantages of various kinds.

In fact, the figures are broken down by age-group, including the under-18s –although not all the available data are published by Eurostat. But Eurostat concludes that

“children run the highest risk of having disadvantages, which cumulated over more domains in life (23 per cent)”.⁴¹

On this definition of social exclusion, therefore, children in the EU are affected more seriously than any other age-group. It is not only poor children who suffer these disadvantages. But children living in low income households and, especially, living in persistent poverty (i.e. living in a low income household for several years), are considerably more vulnerable. Among children living in poor households, some 45 per cent also suffered cumulative disadvantage; in persistently poor households, this rose to nearly half.⁴²

One striking feature of the focus groups run as part of a study of social inclusion and family support in six countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and the UK) was

“...the effect that the consumer society has on those who cannot afford to participate. Several mothers in different countries were very concerned about the fact that their children were discriminated against or ostracised for not wearing brand-name clothes, or not having computer games etc. This was apparent for children as young as five or six, and was not just a feature of teenage or adolescent culture. This is a matter of considerable concern to those parents and added to their already difficult parenting situations.”

(COOPER L., WATTAM C., BURKE J. and KATZ I., *Social Inclusion and Family Support: A Survey of Six Countries*, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, UK, 2000.)

Who is excluding children?

One of the advantages of the term “social exclusion” is that it can lead to questions about who is excluding children. One author identifies potential excluders as parents, schools, employers and governments.⁴³ He warns against the simple attribution of blame, and suggests that any focus on parents would be principally in order to help them fulfil their responsibilities. But he argues that this perspective usefully focuses attention on the various influences on children’s well-being.

It has been argued that another agent of exclusion is commercialisation, which can be blamed for increasing pressures on parents to purchase the latest “brand” items for their children and worsening stigma for children when they are unable to do so.⁴⁴

If most “needs” are socially defined, and these needs increase, unless resources increase proportionately the result is more poverty. Commercialisation may undermine even the most determined government’s attempts to tackle child poverty.

“Marketing and economic pressures mean that children who do not wear brand-name clothes (because their parents cannot afford it) are discriminated against. The issue is not about giving all children access to all brands, but about exposing the manipulation of advertising and marketing which creates social exclusion.”

(Barbara Walter, SLEA, regional organisation of Conseil Français des Associations pour les Droits de l’Enfant, France, Euronet member, response to draft report, 2001.)

Child poverty in Member States

The measure of poverty adopted by the EU is relative rather than absolute.⁴⁵ Currently the “poverty line” most often used is 60 per cent of national equivalised median disposable income.⁴⁶ This is measuring how many people are living in poverty by a national standard, rather than one which is the same across the EU.⁴⁷ It could be argued that this is unfair to Member States with higher overall living standards for their populations, because such a measure takes no account of this, but only tells us how many fail to reach a certain percentage of that higher median income. However, even if a common “poverty line” is taken across the EU, over one-third of those living in poverty live in France, Germany or the UK –all countries with relatively high national incomes.⁴⁸ Most income inequality in fact is found within Member States (86 per cent), rather than between them (14 per cent).⁴⁹

There is substantial variation in child poverty rates in the EU, measured by national low income thresholds, with the “lowest in the Nordic and northern European countries and highest in English-speaking countries and southern Europe”.⁵⁰

But despite the higher risk of poverty amongst children in many Member States, child poverty is not given great prominence in many of the relevant EU publications. Even in a specialised statistical report on income poverty in the EU investigating children, gender and poverty gaps, the information on child poverty is contained not in the section on children but only in a table in the gender section, which breaks down poverty percentages by men and women, including young people under 18.⁵¹

Whether measured by physical and mental development, health and survival rates, educational achievement or job prospects, incomes or life expectancies, those who spend their childhood in poverty of income and expectation are at a marked and measurable disadvantage.

(UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy, *Innocenti Report Card No. 1, June 2000. “A league table of child poverty in rich nations.”*)

In 1996, the percentage of under-18s in low income households ranged from 25 per cent in the UK to 4 per cent (boys) and 5 per cent (girls) in Denmark. The other Member States with high child poverty levels are Ireland (24 per cent) and Italy (23 per cent). Other relatively low rates are found in the Netherlands (15 per cent) and Austria (15 per cent boys, 16 per cent girls), although none approaches Denmark.⁵²

Poverty rates of men and women by age, 1996 (%) –under 18s

	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	UK	EU-13
male	21	4	20	20	23	18	24	23	21	15	15	21	25	21
female	19	5	20	18	24	19	24	23	15	15	16	25	25	21

(Eurostat, "European Social Statistics – Income, poverty and social exclusion": Theme 3 – Population and Social Conditions, 2000, Table 2.5, page 27)⁵¹

In Denmark, children under 18 are far less likely to be found in a low income household than adult Danish citizens; Greek children also had a lower risk of poverty. But children in Luxembourg, Ireland and the UK in particular have a much higher likelihood of living in a low income household than adults do.⁵⁴

National income per head is, generally speaking, misleading as a guide to the level of relative poverty among children;⁵⁵ countries may have broadly similar levels of economic development, but very different levels of child poverty. Inequality tends to be lower in the more prosperous Member States –except for the UK, which has above average prosperity and above average inequality.⁵⁶

On one measure, child poverty in the UK is twice the rate of that in France and Germany, and 4 times the rate of the Scandinavian countries.⁵⁷ For the best part of twenty years, according to one recent study, the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have managed to hold child poverty at around 5 per cent.⁵⁸ This study points out that those countries with the best relative poverty records for children also tend to have the lowest levels of absolute poverty as well.⁵⁹

Over the past ten years, the level of child poverty fell in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Spain, but increased in the UK, Germany and Italy, with France experiencing little change.⁶⁰ The UK and Italy are amongst the bottom 4 countries in UNICEF's international study of child poverty, measuring poverty in relative terms.⁶¹

"Social policy interventions were typically sectoral, mostly concentrated on particular categories of people in difficulty, prioritising elderly people and people with a social security contribution history... for many years in Italy there was no basic safety net for individuals and families with no income. Similarly, there has never been a social policy action aimed at children suffering from poverty. The child suffers the social situation in which his family finds itself."

(Response to Euronet questionnaire from Caritas and Save the Children Italy, 2001.)

When measuring income poverty, a broader definition of "income" is sometimes suggested, also taking account of the monetary equivalent of in-kind benefits in the form of services etc. This could potentially alter the child poverty "league table". However, a recent study argues convincingly that including non-cash benefits –especially health, education and housing– would not make much difference to the cross-national pattern of child poverty. Countries which provide low cash benefits do not tend to provide higher non-cash benefits and services in compensation.⁶²

Social exclusion amongst children in Member States

Eurostat investigates regularly 15 non-monetary indicators and their relationship with low income, both on an EU-wide level and by Member State.⁶³ However, these figures are not always broken down in Eurostat publications available to the general public by Member State, income and age together, to allow a detailed comparison between the situation of children in different countries. Since free access to the original ECHP survey data is restricted, it is also difficult for outside individuals or organisations to do this kind of exercise themselves.

The overlaps between low income, lack of work and non-monetary disadvantages vary between Member States, and each factor does not always affect the same people.⁶⁴ Some non-monetary indicators, although they are uniform across the EU, may in reality be culturally or nationally specific. The links between poverty and indicators of social exclusion or disadvantage are not obvious or uncomplicated. However, it is crucial to explore non-monetary aspects of deprivation.

Health

On some non-monetary indicators, the performance of Member States tends to reflect their child poverty rates. For example, Sweden and Finland, as well as having low child poverty rates, also had the lowest under-5s mortality rates (in 1996 and 1995 respectively), at 5 per 1,000 live births. This compared with 10 per 1,000 live births in Belgium (the highest, at double the rate –though the figure for Belgium is for 1992). The report which reveals this notes⁶⁵ that

"...the variation today within the EU is such that 10,000 lives would have been saved in 1996 if all Member States had had the under-5s mortality rate of Sweden."

Education

The authors also found that some 20 per cent (in Greece) and 30 per cent (in Portugal) of 16-year-olds were not in education in mid-1995. Member States with higher enrolment in education also have higher percentages scoring at least the median in international maths scores at 14, with Portugal again being an outlier.⁶⁶

Housing

Housing conditions vary more than many other aspects of life across Member States, though they are not always closely correlated with income levels.

"We've got two double beds and a single bed. I sleep in the single bed, dad sleeps with my baby sister and my mum sleeps with my other sister, and my brother sleeps downstairs. There are two bedrooms, and eight people live in the house."

(Interview with young person from the UK for Euronet "Agenda 2000" project.)

It is difficult to measure child homelessness accurately, since it may not be highly visible. Children living in immigrant families are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness.⁶⁷

Homeless children and young people often have more than just accommodation problems. Additional difficulties include truancy, dropping out of school, family problems, addiction and unemployment –demonstrating the often complex and interacting realities of multiple deprivation.⁶⁸

"It's not very nice on the streets. It's cold and lonely and you meet all kinds of people. I want a home but I can't get one. I have nothing to look forward to, and nothing to do."

(Quote in Irish government's Report to Children on the Public Consultation, National Children's Strategy, 2001.)

Vulnerable groups

There is considerable concern about the vulnerability of children in care and care-leavers in many countries; the UK, for example, is particularly concerned about their low educational achievement. However, the data in the ECHP survey do not include the institutionalised population; this means that children "in care" who do not live in private households are omitted. Some organisations suggest monitoring the number of children who are taken into statutory care as a result of their parents' poverty.

In the UK, the rate of teenage pregnancy is the highest in Western Europe, being twice the German, three times the French and six times the Dutch rate. There is a

clear association with deprivation, the highest rates of teenage pregnancy being found in communities experiencing the lowest incomes, poorer housing and higher levels of unemployment.⁶⁹ A recent study of women who had their first child as teenagers found that the younger the mother, the more difficult it is for her and her family to achieve a reasonable standard of living. It also found that former teenage mothers are worst off in Ireland and least disadvantaged (relative to other families) in Austria, Germany and Greece; in terms of poverty alone, Dutch women who had their first child as a teenager were most likely to be in poverty.⁷⁰ This is a vivid example of how

"Children who have to go to a children's home are stigmatized. Nobody asks you what you want, nobody cares for your rights. [They] are discriminated against because they are considered to have lower intelligence than average children and therefore not supported to go for a higher degree."

(Children from Austria, quoted in G. Lansdown, Challenging Discrimination Against Children in the EU: A policy proposal by Euronet, Euronet, 2000.)

"You don't see many Asian people out on the street... If my brother went out after 8 p.m. he'd get a broken nose. If I went out I'd get hassle because I'm a girl."

(Quoted in S. McGlinchey, Voices for Change: Young people's views on poverty and social exclusion in Scotland, Save the Children Scotland, 2000.)

disadvantage as a child/teenager, and the linked "choices" which result from that experience, may affect life chances in the future.

Discrimination

Some groups of children are more vulnerable to poverty, and experience particular difficulties in accessing their rights when facing social exclusion. These include Gypsy and Traveller children, children in immigrant families and those from minority ethnic communities.⁷¹

A rise in racism and xenophobia in Europe has been reported during the last twenty years or so. The discrimination faced by the Roma in many ways symbolizes some of the most common contemporary forms of racial discrimination.⁷² Traveller children also face particular difficulties. In Ireland, for example, there are extremely low levels of participation among Traveller children in education, especially at secondary level. Infant mortality rates are over twice those of the settled community.⁷³

"...children of refugees from Africa have great problems in our culture which really differs from their family's original values and habits."

(Response to Euronet questionnaire by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, Helsinki, Finland, 2001)

It is estimated that there are roughly 100,000 children in Europe who are separated from their parents or other caregivers and seeking asylum. Alongside children who have fled conflicts in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Somalia and former Yugoslavia, there is growing evidence of a rise in cases of economic and sexual exploitation, for example of Albanian children in Greece and Italy, and children from Nigeria and Eastern Europe in the Netherlands.⁷⁴

"Some Kosovan children came to my school, but they had difficulty communicating with us and we kept our distance from them. The school set them apart too as they had different timetables from us."

(Euronet consultation on discrimination and participation undertaken by the Conseil Français des Associations pour les droits de l'enfant [COFRADE] and the Société Lyonnaise pour l'Enfance et l'Adolescence [SLEA], July 2000.)

We only give a few examples here of aspects of social exclusion; the National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/incl), drawn up recently by Member States themselves (see chapter 5.), contain many more.

Child poverty and social exclusion in EU enlargement countries

Following the transition to market societies during the past decade, children in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have been greatly affected by increases in poverty and income inequality. The available evidence suggests that overall children and young people face similar kinds of problems to their peers in Western Europe, though often the scale is greater.⁷⁵ A full consideration is outside the scope of this report.

Reliable data are lacking, and it is important that aspects of child well-being which are not being examined under the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession are also studied.⁷⁶ But from what is known, the picture is a mixed one. For example, unlike many other CEE states, the former Czechoslovakia would emerge well from a comparison of child poverty rates with its EU counterparts, and in the late 1990s both the Czech Republic and Slovakia had income inequality below the 1980s EU average.⁷⁷

There are, however, areas of significant concern. Whilst Slovakia, for instance, had an under-5s mortality rate which was lower than the EU average in 1996, the poorer countries of Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania had rates which were much higher; a child born in the latter countries has a probability of death before the age of five of 2 per cent or more.⁷⁸

Further up the age range, although generally children and young people in the CEE states increasingly recognise the value of education, the number who are not attending school is large, and growing. There are a number of reasons, including poverty, abuse, family breakup, and child labour. As elsewhere, children from minorities (such as the Roma) and children with disabilities face widespread discrimination at school and in the community which severely impedes their progress.⁷⁹ In certain CEE countries, there has been a systematic routing of Roma children to "special schools" for the mentally disabled. Roma are often barred from public facilities, and are frequently victims of racist attacks.

"Dropping out of school often leads to the child starting to live in the streets, and becoming involved in criminality or prostitution. Another problem is that many children are stateless or non-nationals of the country in which they reside. Therefore, they are sometimes excluded from exercising their rights. The growing number of children working as prostitutes and sexual trafficking of children is very alarming. The phenomenon of placing children in institutions, on the pretext that this is the best alternative for the child, has been a widespread practice of the authorities in Central and Eastern Europe. The conditions under which many children, often with disabilities, live in institutions are equally very upsetting."

(Save the Children Sweden, Unfinished Business: EU enlargement and child rights, 2001, Sweden.)

The proportion of the 15-19 population who are neither in the labour force nor in school is considerable in CEE states, rising as high as 35% in Bulgaria in 1996. Significant disparities also persist between areas with a relatively high concentration of declining industries and other employment-generating sectors, such as services in urban areas.⁸⁰

The proportion of the 15-19 population who are neither in the labour force nor in school is considerable in CEE states, rising as high as 35% in Bulgaria in 1996. Significant disparities also persist between areas with a relatively high concentration of declining industries and other employment-generating sectors, such as services in urban areas.⁸⁰

As identified above, the problems facing children in EU applicant countries are undoubtedly serious. Nevertheless, it is important not to regard the performance of the CEE states as wholly inadequate in comparison with EU Member States. Indeed, the authors of one study argue that

"The enlargement process offers a valuable opportunity for existing Member States to hold up a mirror on their own performance. Few if any should be fully satisfied with what they see".⁸¹

In particular, the legacy of commitment to collective provision seems to lie behind the positive indicators on the state of children's health in some of these countries compared with EU Member States.

"More funds must be granted to the social services, health care, child care, and to schools. These are the institutions that have the best opportunity to prevent social exclusion with measures at an early stage but they need the financial resources to do it."

(Office of the Children's Ombudsman, Sweden, in response to Euronet questionnaire, 2001.)

Levers for policy change in tackling child poverty and social exclusion

Major variables which may affect whether or not children live in poverty include family composition, parental labour market status and rewards, and social transfers (allowances paid to children/families and/or reductions in their tax payments). Tackling poverty

and social exclusion amongst children must involve action across a much wider range of policy areas. More generally, the way children are seen in particular countries, and the priority they are given in public policy, has the potential to affect their quality of life and opportunities. Save the Children Sweden, for example, endorses the view that child- and parent-friendly policies are the best way to avoid social exclusion amongst children.⁸² Here, we look at some of the potential levers for change in tackling child poverty and social exclusion. We then examine some aspects of Member States' approaches, particularly in relation to poverty.

Family composition can be identified as a risk factor for child poverty. However, a recent study notes that variations in the proportion of children in lone parent families in different industrialised countries do not seem to affect differences in child poverty rates very much, because lone parent families are usually quite a small proportion of families overall. But their poverty rate is more significant in affecting the overall child poverty rate. The study argues that reducing poverty among lone parent families would have a significant impact on child poverty in some EU countries.⁸³

"Children are kept in poverty not by a padlock to which there is a single key but by a combination lock that requires an alignment of factors if it is to be released."

(UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy: Innocenti Report Card No. 1, June 2000, "A league table of child poverty in rich nations".)

If family structure is not in itself an important explanatory factor, employment status seems to be⁸⁴ –although the mere fact of being without paid work does not automatically result in child poverty. There is a close link, however, between child poverty rates and adult joblessness.

Cash transfers (tax allowances, tax credits, social security benefits etc.) for families with children are less important than **wages** in explaining differences between countries. There is an association between child poverty rates and the percentage of full-time low-paid workers in different countries, for example.⁸⁵

However, **cash transfers** do seem to be important in reducing child poverty in some countries. Countries with the lowest child poverty rates allocate the highest proportion of GNP to social expenditure in total; and poverty amongst children created by market forces can be reduced by up to 20 per cent by using tax and social expenditure policies.⁸⁶

Member States' approaches

Member States' general approaches to poverty and exclusion

Some examples given to a recent conference on 'building an inclusive Europe' described the range of Member States' approaches to tackling poverty in general:⁸⁷

- Ireland and Portugal both have self-proclaimed national anti-poverty strategies;
- The Netherlands, Belgium and the UK are all giving poverty a political priority, and all branches of government are involved, with a mechanism for co-ordination, annual reports, objectives and indicators;
- France has developed framework legislation to boost the impact of policy on social exclusion in a variety of different areas (France says its approach involves not special rights for the poor, but making all rights a reality for everyone);
- Denmark and Sweden are trying to prevent exclusion, but also to reduce benefit dependency via more active employment/social protection policies.

Member States' approaches to child poverty and social exclusion

Employment: because of the link between adult worklessness and child poverty, countries should look carefully at the distribution of new employment opportunities. There may be a potential trade-off here, however, between children and young people: Spain has fewer children in poverty relative to its unemployment rate than might be expected, for example, because unemployment is so concentrated on young people, rather than on adults in families with children.⁸⁸

Wages and income inequalities: one report says the importance of variations in market income has been under-estimated in previous studies, which have focused more on analysing welfare states. If market income is examined instead:

"...it would appear that despite, or perhaps because of, their well-known rigidities, continental European labour markets do a better job in providing resources to the most disadvantaged children."

(B Bradbury and M Jantti, *Child Poverty Across Industrialized Nations*, Innocenti Occasional Papers, ESP Series no. 71, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, Italy, 1999.)

'It is safe to say that in no EU country are the economic and social rights of all children fully respected in practice.'

(J Micklewright and K Stewart, *Child Well-being in the EU –and Enlargement to the East*, Innocenti Working Papers, ESP no. 75, UNICEF, 2000.)

Another study also argued that "a less regulated economy [in the USA] was not associated with greater mobility for children across the income distribution, or by more movements in and out of poverty"; in fact in some respects, the authors argued that it resulted in less mobility than in Germany and the UK.⁸⁹

The importance of **cash transfers** should not be underestimated, however, as they do succeed in reducing cross-national variations in child poverty.⁹⁰ One study found:

- Child poverty is reduced by very little in Denmark and Luxembourg via cash transfers –but this is because it is low in these countries in any case;
- In Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal and Ireland, child poverty rates are high, and cash transfers do little to change this; but
- In the UK, Belgium, Austria, France and the Netherlands, cash transfers are both relatively high and relatively successful at reducing child poverty.⁹¹

In the Nordic Member States, family/child benefits represent over 10 per cent of total social benefits, whereas in the Mediterranean Member States they are lower (for example, 2 per cent in Spain and 5.6 per cent in Portugal).⁹² But the European Observatory on Family Matters suggests that the low share of family/child benefits in total social benefits in the Mediterranean countries shows that "many functions (especially caring) are still covered by the family".

One approach to including children

The percentage of children in poverty in Nordic countries has tended to remain stable, and low. One study examines the elements which make up these countries' policy approach. It includes a focus on **helping people into paid work** –including men and women, and often including both parents in couples– and on devising social policies with an **inclusive, rather than targeted, approach**, to redistribute income to reduce market inequalities. Day care and parental leave provisions convey the clear message that **children are a shared social responsibility, and an investment** in the future, rather than a private choice of parents (or mothers).⁹³ The European Commission has noted, however, that there are often specific problems in countries such as these, which their employment policies and social protection systems have not managed to resolve.⁹⁴

Most of the above areas of policy relate to levels of income. However, in addition, a **broader range of policies is needed to combat social exclusion amongst children**, which will encompass action on housing, education, other public and private services, care for disabled people, access to legal rights, area deprivation and many other fronts. The authors of a recent study conclude that a **comprehensive strategy, covering both economic and social policies**, is required to tackle child poverty and social exclusion effectively. Countries must not think "economic priorities first and social needs later"; if child poverty is to be overcome, social policy cannot be an afterthought. They argue convincingly that progress on all fronts is necessary; and that reducing child poverty

"is a complex process that must be advanced by research, debate, consultation and advocacy".⁹⁵

C

Chapter 4.

Poverty and Social Exclusion through Children's Eyes

Conclusion

Several messages emerge from this picture of child poverty and social exclusion across the EU, in individual Member States, and in Central and Eastern Europe:

- First, it is clear that there needs to be a **more consistent focus on children** in the figures published by Eurostat, and that information on poverty and social exclusion amongst children should be more comprehensive and up to date;⁹⁶
- Second, Member States need to **adopt comprehensive strategies** to tackle child poverty and social exclusion effectively; and
- Thirdly, as we have seen above, **other areas of policy** not usually associated with economic or social policy are also relevant –such as consumer policy, including legislation about marketing and advertising to children.

Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter where available information about child poverty and social exclusion in the EU was presented, this chapter examines how seeing poverty and social exclusion through children's eyes would provide a more rounded and informative picture. We explore two complementary ways to achieve this. First, a more coherent child perspective could be brought to the analysis; and secondly, more direct initiatives to involve children in expressing their views should be developed, to inform analysis and action on child poverty and social exclusion.

"Our world is a world that is far from our dreams. A world where many families live in poverty and some children cannot afford to go to school. A world where people are not treated equally and their rights are not always respected. A world where young people are pushed to turn to drugs and alcohol and don't get the support they need. A world where education systems fail to prepare us for life. A world where public health services are not always available for everybody. A world where our families are falling apart and where we are not protected from the dangers in our societies. A world where adults do not take us seriously. A world created by YOU, but experienced by US..."

("Towards a Children's Agenda for Europe and Central Asia", Consultation of young people, Budapest, 23-29 April 2001.)

Child poverty and social exclusion: limitations of the traditional perspective

Are our assumptions right?

The figures on child poverty and social exclusion seem precise and clear. But in fact our perceptions of who is living in poverty depend on the assumptions we make.

First, we assume that there is a fair sharing of resources within households/families, whether poor or not. But this may not be accurate. We cannot assume that all children living in non-poor households receive a fair share of the household's income and assets. We do know from research that the majority of parents –particularly mothers– in low income families attempt to protect their children from the full impact of the household's poverty, and so often go without themselves. But we also know that the opposite can happen: children can try to protect their parents from worrying about the impact of poverty on them, and therefore reduce what they ask for out of the household budget.⁹⁷

Secondly, assumptions have to be made in the official figures about the varying needs of different household members. For example, the ECHP, on which many figures used here are based, counts each “first adult” in a household as 1, with each additional adult, or child of 14 or over, as 0.5, and each child under 14 as 0.3.⁹⁸ This way of allowing for different needs in looking at the incomes of different kinds and sizes of household is called an “equivalence scale”. If this scale under-estimates the “weight” of children in the household, child poverty figures will be under-recorded (and vice versa).⁹⁹ If the judgments about the needs of children of different ages are mistaken, the impact of poverty at different ages may also be misjudged.

Publication of the data using different equivalence scales giving different weights to children, and to children of different ages, would be useful. Indeed, there should be a much wider debate about the choice of “equivalence scale”; and groups representing the interests of children and young people should be included in such a debate. However, as far as the “league table” of the performance of Member States in relation to child poverty is concerned, varying the poverty line and/or the equivalence scales is unlikely to make much difference.¹⁰⁰ Member States remain in much the same position in relation to one another in terms of their performance on child poverty whatever range of reasonable equivalence scales is used.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the framework to examine social exclusion in the EU has not been designed with children in mind.¹⁰¹ Its perspective is not noticeably “child-friendly”. Indeed, the questions which investigate subjective experiences of poverty and exclusion (such as self-reported health status, meeting other people regularly, and satisfaction with your main activity) are not posed to the under-16s at all.¹⁰² And there are no equivalent questions for children, either.

Child poverty and social exclusion from children’s perspective

So what would be done differently if child poverty and social exclusion were being examined from children’s perspective?

Rethinking traditional perspectives

One study suggests that it is important, in trying to examine poverty amongst children and its impact on them, to include:

- Measures of input (for example, duration of poverty and exposure to risk);
- A range of outcome measures (such as health and education); and
- Other mediating factors which may influence outcomes, such as how much resilience children have; household composition, parenting practices etc.; and/or the extent of poverty and quality of services in the neighbourhood.¹⁰³

It is important to highlight experiences which are already known to have a particularly damaging impact on children’s later development, and ensure that data on these are being collected and made widely available. For example, there is some evidence to suggest that poverty in young childhood has worse effects on life-time opportunities; so we need to know how old children in poverty are, and be aware of the timing of periods of childhood spent in households with low living standards.¹⁰⁴

Certain other points of transition during childhood may also be particularly sensitive to the damage caused by poverty and exclusion. It is not sufficient to publish only one figure, for the total number of under-16s or under-18s living in poor households.

“The French children also articulated the extent to which children were more vulnerable to discrimination when some disruption takes place within their family lives –divorce, moving house or country, new partners.”

(From consultations with children of 8-18 years old carried out for: G. Lansdown, Challenging Discrimination against Children in the EU: A policy proposal by Euronet, Euronet, 2000.)

Insecurity and transience (impermanence) are also often seen as particularly damaging to children, and they are common experiences for families living in extreme poverty.¹⁰⁵ Longitudinal data should therefore include a focus on multiple moves by low income families with children –tracking how often they move house, school, neighbourhood etc. (and if possible, for what reasons).

A children’s rights perspective on social exclusion

Looking at poverty and social exclusion through children’s eyes means more than rethinking traditional perspectives, however. A perspective which emphasises children’s rights could be based on the major relevant articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 27 could be seen as encapsulating the key aspects necessary for the social inclusion of children, since it recognises the right to

“a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.”

But this could be developed and expanded by including other Articles (see Appendix II).

This perspective could change our views about what to prioritise. For example, one recent study argues that the relevant aim in education, if we are concerned about all children’s rights, should be maximising the potential of each child, rather than raising the sum total of achievement; the correct policy emphasis, therefore, would be on the distribution of access and achievements, rather than on averages.¹⁰⁶

Poverty and social exclusion from a participatory perspective

Many small-scale studies have started from children’s own experiences of poverty and social exclusion and their voices and views. However, comparative evidence across Member States which does the same is lacking. We therefore do not have some key measures of social exclusion in terms of children’s own experiences.

Poverty and social exclusion from children’s point of view

Euronet believes that children’s perceptions are a key factor in developing policies or indicators on child poverty and social exclusion. So it is important to develop a definition of poverty and social exclusion which includes children’s own views and experiences.

“The indicators which are generally used in Spain in relation to poverty and social exclusion are not specific to children.”

(Response from Save the Children, Spain, to Euronet questionnaire, 2001.)

"[We] found almost no evidence of children being allowed to help develop and shape the concepts which are used to measure their well-being."

(H. Barnes, "How other countries monitor the well-being of their children", in J. Bradshaw (ed.), *Poverty: The outcomes for children*, Family Policy Studies Centre, UK, 2001.)

Previous experiments suggest that self-esteem, the way in which relationships with parents and peers are seen, and the sense of future possibilities, will be likely to be key factors.¹⁰⁷ These may in turn be influenced by how the area children live in is perceived; whole streets or estates can be labelled by individuals and sidelined by private and public services because of their reputation, worsening such children's sense of being stigmatised, especially as they grow older.

"Young people gain qualifications which they work hard to achieve but they cannot get jobs as there are none in the area, or no-one willing to take on a young person. This leads to young people feeling bad about themselves, and results in low self-esteem and lack of confidence."

(Focus on Children report for Euronet consultation, 2000.)

In the EU, people are more likely to see themselves as living in poverty in countries which have either greater income inequality, or lower average income;¹⁰⁸ it would be useful to explore whether the same is true for children.

Children are also likely to see their own situation in terms of exclusion from the world of

children, as well as from that of adults, or society as a whole. For example, research suggests that for children the inability to participate in school events and trips, which form an important part of shared cultural and social experiences in childhood, should be given higher priority.¹⁰⁹ More generally, as well as what is spent on education and what educational outcomes are achieved, we need to know whether education is a positive, inclusive experience for children, or whether they are being stigmatised and feeling shamed. The process of education should promote equal participation and access.¹¹⁰ We would want to know whether children are being respected, and their rights upheld, at school.

Children are different

However, "children" cannot be seen as a homogeneous group. First –even leaving aside any distinction between children and young people– some indicators of child poverty and social exclusion have to be differentiated by age. This will include, for example, the direct impact of the neighbourhood on children, which becomes gradually more important as they get older and their independence and interaction with peers increase.

Secondly, some issues will be more important for certain groups, such as members of minority ethnic groups, and disabled children. Disabled children are disproportionately likely to be confined to institutional care, and their rights to social integration through friendships, play, leisure and culture may be limited.¹¹¹ Indeed, there is a case for breaking down data on child poverty and social exclusion by gender, disability and ethnic origin, as well as age.

"Children who experience failure at school often refuse to go back fearing rejection by their school companions and teachers."

(Conclusions from Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance Italy's consultation for Euronet project, 2000.)

"Because of busy roads you can't really play out much, and there aren't enough play areas where young people can go to."

(Interview with young person from the UK for Euronet "Agenda 2000" project.)

Listening to children

In 1999-2000, Euronet co-ordinated a project to listen to children's opinions, to involve them in decision-making and to support their participation in society. Children –among them many from disadvantaged backgrounds– from Belgium, France, Italy, the UK, Ireland and Spain took part, with the assistance of the Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance (Belgium and Italy), Conseil Français des Associations pour les droits de l'enfant (France), Save the Children (UK), Focus on Children (Ireland), and the Platform of Children's Organisations (Spain). The method involved consultations in each country via group discussions, interviews by children and questionnaires, culminating in a joint meeting of child representatives from each country. The project resulted in the drawing up of "Agenda 2000 for children and young people in Europe",¹¹² which set out recommendations in relation to education, social integration, the media and the internet, health, citizenship and participation. The Agenda was presented to the European Parliament and the European Commission, and was received very positively.

Though this project was conducted on a pan-European scale, it reflects the gradual emergence of participation initiatives of all kinds at national and local level across Europe. In France, youth councils were established in the late 1970s and similar initiatives have been instigated in many other countries since, especially with the support of local municipalities. In the sphere of education policy, mechanisms exist through which children can influence education policy and its implementation in several countries, including Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands.¹¹³ Some youth centres and projects have also had considerable success in piloting methods of working with children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

These kinds of initiatives are increasingly being reflected in a stronger emphasis on children as social actors within national research programmes,¹¹⁴ and in the establishment within several countries (notably Austria, Belgium, France, Portugal and Sweden) of formal Commissioners/Ombudspersons to represent and defend children's interests (see chapter 5).¹¹⁵ The relationship between developments such as these and policy on children or the level of child poverty and exclusion in different countries is complex; but Euronet would argue that giving children greater political visibility is in principle likely to result in them being given higher priority.

These approaches are beginning to percolate into thinking at EU level. For example, in 1998 the Council of Ministers adopted a proposal for a resolution on youth participation,¹¹⁶ which stressed that the increased participation of young people is "one of the central tasks to be undertaken in the process of shaping European society in political, social and economic terms".

"I realised very early in my childhood that I had to work harder than children who did not have a disability to achieve and be accepted in society. I often wonder how many children with a disability are living without full human dignity and respect and as a result are unable to reach their full potential."

(Quote from "In Our Own Words...": The voices of children experiencing poverty, Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative, Ireland, 2000.)

Whilst the resolution is welcome, it remains the case that child participation at EU level is limited. In part, this reflects the fact that, although initiatives exist at Member State and local levels, governments have on the whole remained cautious in their attempts to encourage child participation. Moreover, there is little evidence of children's perspectives being mainstreamed across policy areas.

Most importantly, it is clear that many of these exercises have not been developed specifically with children and young people who are living in poverty and/or socially excluded in mind; if this is not done, it is likely that their marginalisation will be perpetuated, even within exercises which are intended to encourage greater participation. This reality was highlighted recently in the lack of child participation in the development of the National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (see Chapter 5. below).

What do children say about poverty and social exclusion?

As indicated earlier, there are significant obstacles in ascertaining children's perspectives. These include lack of self-esteem and confidence; few opportunities to engage with decision-makers; the assumption that their views are unimportant or unwelcome; lack of knowledge of children's rights; literacy problems; and tokenistic forms of consultation. The existence of these obstacles means that children rarely participate in policy-making processes.

These problems are multiplied for children who face poverty and social exclusion. They are frequently unwilling to define themselves as being "in poverty" (as are adults), owing largely to the shame which is often attached to this label. And

researchers have sometimes shied away from this topic, for fear of further labelling or stigmatising individual children.

Furthermore, many children appear to believe that "poverty" affects children in other countries, such as Africa, rather than children in their own country – or indeed themselves. In practice, the language of poverty is

In the Belgian city of Antwerp, a new measure (the "youth paragraph") was recently introduced to guarantee the 'child friendliness' of political decisions concerning public areas and buildings (e.g. streets, squares, playgrounds, libraries, youth centres). In these cases the city council is obliged to include a "youth paragraph" in written and official decisions and minutes to demonstrate that the Youth Office, Youth Council, and youngsters themselves were asked for their opinion. When youngsters have to be involved this is normally by questionnaire, but sometimes they are more actively involved (e.g. in designing a playground), often by use of a special computer programme. According to local youth workers, these initiatives are proving successful.

(Information provided for Euronet by City of Antwerp Youth Office, 2001.)

"More needs to be done about poverty, the beauty on the water and the land, traffic, playgrounds, and even more about fights and weapons."

(Response of Dutch child to Euronet questionnaire, 2000.)

lies simply cope with the circumstances that face them. Their real feelings about their lives may be more clearly revealed by their reduced expectations in the present, and their low aspirations for the future.¹¹⁷

Children's views of poverty and social exclusion have received relatively little attention, and it is only recently that initiatives have begun to explore this area. The evidence from the few consultation exercises that have been undertaken is that children are concerned about the extent of poverty and social exclusion in their communities and that there is a significant degree of unanimity among them about what the broad issues are.

Drawing largely upon the consultations carried out by Euronet in relation to discrimination and social exclusion, it is possible to identify a number of recurring themes, including: the stigma and shame associated with poverty; poor quality of housing; problems at school; poor environment; lack of employment; high levels of violence and bullying; concerns about drugs; fears of racism and harassment; discrimination; and missing out on material possessions, leisure activities and holidays.

not familiar to children, and if we are to understand their views about this issue, it is important to explore in greater depth their self-perceptions and their day-to-day experiences in their local environment.

Rather than talk about poverty in the here and now, many children in low income fami-

"For the world of children, social exclusion and marginalisation are terms that have to do with their group, their same-age companions rather than with the many words of adults.

"When they play together, children do not see the differences nor do they discriminate against others if they have never seen this happen among adults. If children do marginalise or exclude others, they do so on the basis of principles produced and passed on by the adult world."

(Conclusions from BICE Italy consultation for Euronet project, 2000.)

When opportunities to make their views known are presented, it becomes clear that children do have practical suggestions for policy change. Among the many recommendations relating to poverty and social exclusion expressed by children in the Euronet "Agenda 2000" were the following, aimed at the European Union:

- "To give teachers better training to deal with pupils with problems, violent pupils and pupils with learning difficulties, in order that they can change pupils' attitudes, giving them more support and paying them more attention..."
- "To support children and young people with difficulties in school, and those who are thinking of dropping out, so that they get help and encouragement to keep attending school..."
- "To help improve communication with adults, parents and teachers in order to establish more trust, understanding and attention, so that if any conflict arises there is a way of looking for solutions through dialogue."
- "More support for and protection of the rights of children and young people with physical and mental disabilities..."
- "Special protection for children and young people who are immigrants or refugees whatever their situation..."
- "To fight addiction to drugs, alcohol and tobacco using prevention, information and the example of teachers and educators, our role models within educational situations..."
- "Not to waste money on unnecessary things like weapons, armies and to provide more resources in order to grant children and young people the right to free health care..."
- "To secure every person's right to participate as a citizen in his/her community and country of residence, regardless of their country of origin. To educate us to participate in society..."

Beyond specific suggestions for policy development, the recommendations also identify clearly some of the practical reasons why participation flounders. For example, lack of adequate funds for resourcing school activities and neighbourhood associations mean that when children propose new ideas they are often turned down. More fundamentally, it is argued that adults –and politicians in particular– sometimes do not listen to children, and do not provide spaces where children can communicate with them.

Although child participation initiatives are gradually emerging at local level, children tend to feel remote from national and European politics. The children consulted by Euronet argued that the EU institutions did have a role in assisting children to have a voice, but that at present there were few occasions where this could happen.

Success in developing child participation is not straightforward –especially among those who face poverty and social exclusion– and depends on a range of factors. These include greater efforts by adults to:

In the UK, over 100 UK children aged 5-16 living in areas with high levels of poverty and social exclusion were interviewed for a recent report on child poverty. The children suggested many proposals for eradicating child poverty, ranging from straightforward redistribution of wealth (advocated by the youngest participants) to providing more leisure and social activities and reducing the cost of housing and household bills.

The need to engage banks, building societies and the commercial sector in tackling child poverty was also raised. Some suggested too that the Government should give financial support on a universal basis to young people and to parents to purchase essential educational items, including school clothes, stationery and books. Many felt that free school meals should be available to all low-income families, not just to those in receipt of benefits.

(C. Willow, "Bread is free": Children and young people talk about poverty, Children's Rights Alliance for England/Save the Children UK, www.crights.org.uk, 2001.)

- Recognise the value of children's experiences and perspectives, and seek to ensure that children feel positive about their participation and about themselves;
- Avoid the danger of labelling or stigmatising individual children (e.g. use group discussion rather than individual interviews);
- Use everyday language that children can understand;
- Use child-friendly procedures and methods for consultation (e.g. short meetings, games, art work);
- Approach children in settings in which they feel comfortable and at ease;
- Devote sufficient time to engaging with children;

- Allow children the choice of not answering questions if they do not want to or feel unable to;
- Provide accessible information about opportunities; and above all
- Deliver on promises made.

If these basic principles are adhered to, there is considerable potential to mobilise the efforts of children and the organisations which represent them in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as the objectives agreed at the Nice Council meeting demand.

Tackling Child Poverty and Social Exclusion at EU and Member State Level

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this chapter suggests that a range of measures will be necessary to incorporate a view of poverty and social exclusion through children's eyes. The emphasis of policy and data collection would have to be changed if a children's rights perspective on child poverty and social exclusion were adopted. And in-depth participatory exploration of children's own experiences of poverty and social exclusion, including their exclusion from the world of other children, would be used to refine the focus of indicators and policy measures alike.

Introduction

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the European Community developed three experimental Poverty Programmes which helped to put poverty on the European agenda. However, the legal basis to develop an EU strategy to combat social exclusion was only established by the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty.

Long-standing neglect of the rights of children facing poverty and social exclusion clearly reflects the general lack of emphasis on children at EU level, due to the lack of legal base. In this chapter, we trace the recent development of EU policy to combat poverty and social exclusion, identify the gradual emergence of a limited focus on children, and highlight how a greater degree of coherence towards children's rights could be ensured within the existing policy framework

We then set out a "child audit" of the National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/incl) drawn up by Member States in line with the Nice European Council objectives. The audit explores whether child poverty and social exclusion are visible in the NAPs/incl analysis, whether these issues are mainstreamed in Member States' strategies, what specific policies and practices are in place to ensure this –and what gaps there are in existing approaches. It then examines how far children are a focus within proposals for common indicators or for those developed by individual Member States, and how far children and organisations representing them have been involved in developing the NAPs/incl to date.

"I just need a chance in life, a chance to show people who I really am and to reach my potential, a chance to have a nice life –a chance is not too much to ask for."

(Quote in Irish government's Report to Children on the Public Consultation, National Children's Strategy, 2000.)

"We, the participants of the Berlin Conference on Children in Europe and Central Asia... affirm our commitment to the following:...

Make all possible efforts to eradicate poverty and address its negative impact on children, inter alia reducing economic disparities."

(The Berlin Commitment for Children of Europe and Central Asia, published following a meeting of representatives from 51 countries in Europe, Central Asia and the Holy See, who met to discuss how to create an environment fit for children in the region, May 2001.)

The emerging EU agenda since Amsterdam

The Amsterdam Treaty – new Articles to combat social exclusion

Article 136 formally recognised the "combating of social exclusion" as an EU social objective, alongside the promotion of

employment, improved living and working conditions, proper social protection, collective bargaining between management and labour, and the development of human resources. Article 137 goes on to provide for:

- Directives setting out minimum requirements for the integration of those who are excluded from the labour market; and
- Measures to encourage co-operation between Member States aimed at improving knowledge, developing exchanges of information and best practice, promoting innovative approaches and evaluating experiences in order to combat social exclusion.

The importance of the EU Employment Strategy (EES)

In most Member States during the 1990s unemployment was high, especially among young people. Just after the Amsterdam Treaty was signed in 1997, the decision was therefore taken at the Luxembourg European Council to implement a “European Employment Strategy” (EES), in line with the view that, alongside economic growth, getting people into paid work is central to tackling poverty and social exclusion.

The direct impact of the EES on children is limited, as the main focus for this age group is on the upper end and beyond, ie 15- to 25-year-olds.¹¹⁸ This approach reflects the long-standing emphasis at the heart of the EU Treaties on the “citizen-as-worker”, which has had the effect of excluding children below age 15 from the vast majority of potentially relevant EU programmes (e.g. in the fields of education and youth employment).¹¹⁹

However, experience in recent years has shown that an employment strategy which fails to address social exclusion will overlook the needs and potential contribution of those belonging to vulnerable groups. In relation to children/young people, this is explicitly recognised in the EU’s 2000 Employment Guidelines (see box below).

2000 Employment Guidelines

(Extract)

“Employment prospects are poor for young people who leave the school system without having acquired the aptitudes required for entering the job market.”

Member States will therefore “improve the quality of their school systems in order to reduce substantially the number of young people who drop out of the school system early. Particular attention should also be given to young people with learning difficulties” (Guideline number 7).

(Council decision of 13 March 2000 on Guidelines for Member States’ Employment Policies for the year 2000 (COM 2000/228/EC.)

The Lisbon Council – a first mention of children

At the Lisbon European Council¹²⁰ in March 2000, the EU set itself the new strategic goal for the next decade of becoming “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. The Council also underlined the importance of modernising the European social model, investing in people and combating social exclusion. In particular, it recommended that:

- Understanding of social exclusion should be improved on the basis of commonly agreed indicators;
- Inclusion should be mainstreamed in key policies in Member States’ employment, education, training, health and housing policies
- Priority actions should be developed by Member States for defined target groups (“for example, minority groups, *children*, the elderly and the disabled”).¹²¹

Agreement was also reached on a new “open method of co-ordination”, building on key elements of the approach adopted in relation to the European Employment Strategy. This involves setting common EU guidelines and targets, designing appropriate national policies to achieve these, and reporting on national developments and outcomes.

In many ways, the Lisbon Council represented a significant advance in terms of EU policy to combat social exclusion. In relation to children, it was highly significant in that it specified that their needs should be addressed. Although the European Commission’s proposal¹²² that the Council should back a target for Member States to reduce child poverty by 50 per cent by 2010¹²³ was rejected, the inclusion of children in the Council conclusions was a watershed, in that it identified children for the first time as key targets for policy-making on social exclusion.

The Nice Summit - adoption of child-related Objectives

At the Nice Summit in December 2000, the European Council adopted a set of broad multi-dimensional Objectives to combat social exclusion:

1. To promote participation in employment and access for all to resources, rights, goods and services;
2. To prevent the risks of exclusion;
3. To help the most vulnerable; and
4. To mobilise all relevant actors.

Within the more detailed commitments under these headings, there are several sections where children’s interests are clearly highlighted:

- Objective 1 highlights the importance of reconciling work and family life (including childcare);
- Objective 2 identifies the need to prevent exclusion in crisis situations (such as indebtedness, school drop-out and becoming homeless), and to “preserve family solidarity in all its forms”; and
- Objective 3 refers in particular to tackling social exclusion among children, as one amongst a number of “vulnerable” groups.

Whilst it is true (as Objective 3 suggests) that children are especially vulnerable to social exclusion, viewing children in this way can reinforce a traditional image of them as purely “dependent” and “unproductive”. This should be balanced with the knowledge that many children make an active contribution to society now (e.g. through their knowledge of languages or computer technology, their labour in hotels and on farms, or participation in local community projects), and that children’s activities in school represent a significant addition to the supply of human capital for the future.¹²⁴

In addition, many of the more general aims and aspirations in the Objectives are also applicable to children. For example:

- Objective 1.1: pathways/training to be provided for the most vulnerable groups;
- Objective 1.2: access for all to decent and sanitary housing; appropriate health care; education; culture, sport, and leisure;
- Objective 2: preventing exclusion from the knowledge-based society;
- Objective 4: promoting the participation and self-expression of people in exclusion; and mainstreaming the fight against exclusion into overall policy.

These Objectives clearly represent a significant advance for children, and Euronet believes that they are an important step towards comprehensive mainstreaming of a children's rights perspective, which should be translated into concrete policy and practice at national and local levels as soon as possible.

Taking forward the social inclusion agenda

• **National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion**

Alongside the Objectives adopted at the Nice Summit, the European Council also agreed that Member States should be invited to submit two-yearly "National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion" (which then became known as National Action Plans for social inclusion, and hence NAPs/incl) on how they are seeking to translate the Objectives outlined above into national level action, taking into account national circumstances and priorities. The first reports were submitted by June 2001. They have been subject to peer review, and the European Commission and EU ministers presented a joint analytical report for discussion at the European Council at Laeken in December 2001.

• **A new EU Funding Programme**

In addition to the NAPs/incl, a new Community programme of action was proposed at the Feira Summit in June 2000. The proposal has now been developed in greater detail. The programme will last from 2002 to 2006, and is aimed at encouraging co-operation between Member States to understand and combat social exclusion. With a proposed budget of 75 million over five years, the programme will finance transnational activities, including studies and the improvement of statistics, exchange of good practice and the participation of NGOs at European level. This programme will be on top of existing EU programmes, such as the Structural Funds which are targeted on "cohesion", in particular the development and structural adjustment of regions lagging behind.

In relation to children, it is important that the new programme builds on lessons learned from experience with the Structural Funds. In particular, it is essential that funding is made available to support children below age 15 in other EU Action Programmes; whilst the Structural Funds have helped unemployed young people –and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds– into work, they have been of limited benefit to younger children who have been almost completely excluded from their scope. The new programme is more likely to be able to benefit children, and current guidelines pick out children living in poverty as one specific focus of concern (alongside deprived areas).

• **The development of appropriate indicators**

Member States were encouraged to develop their own indicators to measure their progress on tackling poverty and social exclusion. At the time of writing, there are no commonly agreed indicators across Member States, although a recent official study made some suggestions.¹²⁵ The study on indicators suggested that at a minimum data on income poverty should be disaggregated to show the position of children (and elderly people).

A subgroup of the Social Protection Committee has undertaken further work on common indicators on behalf of the European Council (see below), starting from 7 structural indicators proposed by the European Commission; it reported to the Laeken Summit in December 2001. The European Council at Stockholm also invited the Commission and the Council to develop indicators on the provision of care facilities for children and other dependants, as well as family benefit systems; the subgroup is due to consider the latter as part of its future work programme.

"Child audit" of the National Action Plans (NAPs/incl)

Starting points

The NAPs/incl build on what is seen as a successful recent experiment, when Member States drew up national action plans on employment. However, it is significant that the analysis of the problem, and the definitions used as the basis for indicators, are more widely shared in the employment than the poverty field, and an agreed operational measure of social exclusion is particularly hard to develop.

The first National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/incl) have been written within tight time constraints and to a certain page limit. Issues relevant to child poverty and social exclusion are scattered throughout the recommended framework given to Member States for structuring the plans. Different countries also had different starting points, in terms of the magnitude of child poverty/exclusion in their country and their policy framework (see chapter 3.).

Member States also differ in the degree to which responsibility for policies affecting children is **devolved to regional and/or local level**. Responsibility for children's well-being is highly decentralised in, for example, Austria, Spain, Belgium and to some extent Germany; and in the Netherlands and Scandinavia, it is largely the municipalities which deal with child poverty issues. Given current developments, decentralisation is likely to grow in importance for such strategies; it would be interesting to explore whether greater decentralisation also requires more social consensus at national level on the priority to be placed on preventing child poverty and social exclusion in order to result in positive outcomes across the country.

In addition, an emphasis on children in one country's NAP/incl may demonstrate a real sensitivity to children's rights, which has already helped reduce child poverty to low levels –or, alternatively, a realistic recognition that child poverty and exclusion represent a huge challenge. Moreover, the NAPs/incl differ in their emphasis on analysis compared to strategies, and on describing existing policies compared to setting out planned actions.

The NAPs/incl are a crucial instrument in the potential development of a coherent European approach. A "child audit" of their contents is therefore essential, and we

try to provide this here. Because of these differences between countries and contexts, however, analysing the NAPs/incl in their present form is not comparing like with like, and should be tackled with caution.

Strategy and Objectives for the NAPs/incl

The overall strategy and Objectives for the NAPs/incl are central, in terms of their potential impact on children. It is therefore worth noting the general lack of linkage between macro-economic developments and policies to tackle poverty and exclusion –though Greece does defend its record in moving towards European Monetary Union without a negative impact on poverty. There is little discussion in most of the NAPs/incl about what pattern(s) of economic growth might be preferable for the prospects of children living in poverty.¹²⁶

Neither is there a debate about the future pattern of EU-wide subsidies or regulations on state support for industries etc. A section on each Member State's use of EU Structural Funds was inserted by the European Commission itself into its own draft joint report, presumably because Member States had not usually referred to this themselves. This omission seems indicative of a lack of connection between the preparation of the NAPs/incl and national budgetary processes, which may be due to timing. The result, however, seems to be that there is little analysis by Member States of their spending on poverty and social exclusion, in particular on children, and its impact. If this reflects reality, it puts a greater burden on micro-economic adjustments and social transfers; some critics might argue that poverty and social exclusion are being tackled by the EU with one hand behind its back.

Moreover, there are few signs of consistent "poverty-proofing" –though Ireland states that all government policies have to be considered in terms of their impact on people in poverty. In most cases, therefore, Member States are not yet "mainstreaming" an anti-poverty perspective into their general policy-making processes on economic and social issues. Some Member States, however, might argue that their focus on goals of equity and solidarity is largely successful at preventing poverty, and that this therefore renders "poverty-proofing" unnecessary.

Are child poverty and social exclusion visible in the NAPs/incl analysis?

The European Commission's report¹²⁷ notes that in Member States' analysis, there is general acceptance that the economic and employment situation has improved, but the **perception of trends in poverty and social**

"The very common view in the Finnish society is that we do not want any distinct strategy to combat child poverty and exclusion but instead we have to build our society in such a way that these kind of problems or questions are not even arising."

(Response from Save the Children Finland to Euronet questionnaire, 2001.)

"If your friends have got something and you can't have that, you feel like you are left out because everyone else has got it, and they pick on you because you are the odd one out."

(Quote from C Willow, Bread is Free: Children and young people talk about poverty, Children's Rights Alliance for England/Save the Children UK, 2001.)

exclusion is quite uneven. The Commission argues that the lack of a common framework of analysis and up-to-date statistics across all Member States makes definite conclusions difficult. However, it concludes that absolute poverty seems to have been reduced over recent years, and the numbers lacking basic necessities have declined, though one in six people still face multiple disadvantages. But those on the lowest incomes have tended to fall behind the rest of society, and inequalities have widened.

"**Key challenges**" highlighted in the NAPs/incl include labour market changes, the knowledge-based society, demographic trends and changes in structures and roles in the family/household. Each of these challenges has **implications for children; but often these are not explicitly drawn out.**¹²⁸ (For example, the Netherlands is the only Member State to highlight the decline of children as a proportion of the population –though the implications for their future are not necessarily clear.)

The European Commission's own overview of "**key risks**" does highlight, amongst other factors, "growing up in a vulnerable family" and the transition from school to work; and it emphasises the importance of breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Its focus on **8 "core challenges"** includes "preserving family solidarity and protecting the rights of children" –identified as a key challenge in a number of countries. But no Member State analyses in detail whether the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is being fulfilled in full in its country.

Some Member States do **address the issue of child poverty and social exclusion in a more comprehensive way** than others:

- The UK, for example, picks out the challenge of child poverty specifically in its analysis. This is in part for positive reasons –because it adopts a framework of lifecycle stages, and in part because it stresses (and demonstrates) the impact of early disadvantage on the whole lifecourse. But it is also for more negative reasons –because poverty amongst children in the UK is currently so high;
- Sweden also focuses on children, but in contrast to the UK has few living in poverty;
- The Netherlands admits that the risk of poverty for its children is higher than the average; the Alliance for Social Justice is planning to examine the effects of poverty on children and young people in 2001;
- In Finland, the government is reporting to parliament on child poverty in autumn 2001, and it is thought it will then draw up a social inclusion action plan;
- In Luxembourg, there will be a study of one and two earner families and lone parent families, with a view to the possible readjustment of relative benefit rates.

In some countries, lobby groups have argued that more analysis is needed. For example, in Austria the European Anti-Poverty Network has called for more research on the poverty of children. Although child poverty still features as a key issue in its NAP/incl, Ireland puts more emphasis on the review of its existing national anti-poverty strategy –in which child poverty will be examined across the board. Its figures show that "consistent poverty" has been reduced by less among children since the mid 1990s than the average across the whole population.

Other Member States focus on **specific points about child poverty/exclusion**:

- Portugal highlights early leavers from education and the low level of qualifications relative to the EU average, but does not examine child poverty and social exclusion more comprehensively;
- Italy mentions the “alarming” extent of child poverty, especially among large families and in the south;
- France emphasises the importance of its family policies in bringing about its low rate of poverty overall, and child poverty in particular, relative to the EU average –though it also says that one of the main groups vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion is children under 15 living in poor households;
- Greece, on the other hand, states that in its country “low income is grey in colour” –and speculates that the lower risk of poverty for children may be due to women postponing childbearing until they can afford it; but it also draws attention to the likely impact of changing family patterns on future support;
- Luxembourg links women’s increased likelihood of poverty to children’s;
- Belgium picks out educational disadvantage; and
- The UK mentions disadvantaged young people in neither education nor work.

The UK puts most emphasis on lack of paid work in its analysis (although in fact, whilst 1 in 3 children in the UK live in poverty, only 16 per cent live in jobless households). Several Member States mention immigrants, though only a few (such as Spain) highlight the position of immigrant children or ethnic minority groups.

None of the analyses discusses the concept of **children’s exclusion from the world of children**.¹²⁹ This may be partly because social exclusion is often seen as closely

related to lack of participation in employment (though such a narrow view would be denied by many). Generally, the analyses tend to focus more on income poverty, perhaps because it is more easily defined and measured –although the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a broader conceptual framework which Member States could have used to analyse child poverty and social exclusion. The position of children in each Member State could have been examined under each Article, to

“The main weakness is that child poverty is still denied or non-existent for most politicians, and with a deteriorating economy it will be even more so.”

(Response to Euronet questionnaire from the Kinderschutzbund in Germany, 2001.)

assess to what extent children did not have access to these rights, and where there was a priority need for action (see chapter 4.).

Are child poverty and social exclusion prioritised/mainstreamed in Member States’ strategic approach and main objectives?

The NAPs/incl are modelled on the National Action Plans on Employment, and followed them closely in time. This ensured that a focus on paid employment, and “active welfare”, runs throughout. Another consistent theme is family structure. Children are often seen in the NAPs/incl as appendages of their parents in these two

areas, rather than as people in their own right. The strong emphasis on employment, with a lack of focus on children’s rights, also tends to mean that children are dealt with in terms of their future well-being, rather than their well-being and participation in society here and now. The tendency to see children largely in terms of their parents’ status, or family policy, also means that some issues of central significance to children’s welfare are not explored. For example, the make-up of household income (ie different sources of income), and who receives it –not just family income in total, household economic status or family type– may be key to children’s well-being (see chapter 4.); yet this is not discussed explicitly.

The guidelines for drawing up the NAPs/incl encouraged Member States to develop a strategic and integrated, rather than sectoral and target group, approach. This may have tended to work against Member States addressing child poverty and social exclusion in the round, if they saw children as a “target group”. In addition, they were told that moving towards eliminating social exclusion amongst vulnerable groups including children (under Objective 3.) could be pursued by incorporating this aim in the other Objectives and/or through specific policies or actions.

Children’s rights

Whilst some Member States’ NAPs/incl are more coherent in their approach, this does not usually extend to mainstreaming a children’s rights perspective:¹³⁰

- Sweden is one of the few Member States to declare that its policy for children is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also states its philosophy on shared responsibility for care of children between parents and society. However, Sweden admits that in the 1990s its system did not fully guarantee the welfare of some, including some children/young people, and the European Commission says some vulnerable groups’ situation deteriorated;
- Ireland has developed a National Children’s Strategy –but this is not part of the NAP/incl, and is not described in it;
- Denmark also says its legislation is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Italy says respect for children’s rights is a priority policy area for the NAP/incl, with an objective of preventing poverty and social exclusion; it intends to develop a plan for children, as one of the 4 groups it will focus on;
- Luxembourg has developed draft legislation promoting children’s rights and protecting young people; and
- The UK continues its lifecycle approach to the analysis of poverty and social exclusion by presenting its strategy in a lifecourse perspective; one focus is therefore children and young people –although a major reason for concern about this age group is the longer-term impact on poverty and social exclusion.

What focus on child poverty and social exclusion is there within Member States’ consideration of specific Objectives for the NAPs/incl?

As outlined above, child poverty and social exclusion are highlighted explicitly or implicitly in several of the sections of the NAPs/incl Objectives. Without listing each of these in detail for each Member State, it may be valuable to note areas of progress –or, alternatively, glaring omissions– across Member States in general.

Objective 1: to facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services

The overwhelming focus on **employment** in many NAPs/incl can overshadow issues of resources and rights for anyone not in the labour market, including children. Most Member States include lone parents amongst the groups needing help to participate in employment, and many highlight problems for some young people around the transition from school to work; others describe additional financial support for families with children in paid work.

"A systematic child perspective must become more apparent in the decision-making of officials on the governmental level and on the local level. A child impact assessment is to be done before a decision is made no matter at which level the decision is to be made. The Ombudsman has developed a model for child impact assessment of governmental decisions."

(Response to Euronet questionnaire by the Swedish Children's Ombudsman, 2001.)

In relation to employment, Member States were asked to look at **reconciling work and family life**. Most Member States merely outline their general policies, including the provision of parental leave and child care, without examining how they might chime with the priorities and lives of people in poverty. Still less do they try to look systematically at work/family life issues through children's eyes –though Sweden is one of the few which discuss the advantages to children of child care outside the family in terms of social integration, rather than merely seeing it as related to parental

employment. Sweden also asserts the importance of more equal sharing of care to child welfare (as well as to gender equity). Denmark and Finland promote the right to child care independent of parental employment status. Austria has instead recently introduced an allowance for those caring for young children.

Social protection plays a central role in access to resources and rights. Some Member States (e.g. the Netherlands, Greece) describe plans to improve benefits for families with children, especially those going into employment –although some start from a low base (such as Ireland, which plans to increase child benefit). Others focus on ensuring access to minimum resources; Portugal's "guaranteed minimum income" is said to help combat early school leaving and child labour.

The European Commission report notes that "access to minimum resources for young people is becoming an issue". But another issue generally not discussed is the difficul-

"One of the key policy objectives of policy makers in the drive to combat social exclusion is for socially excluded people to obtain employment. Employment is seen as the surest route out of social exclusion, and is seen both as a way of lifting families out of poverty and also as a way of providing them with a stake in mainstream society. However, the research showed that pressurising mothers of young children into employment can lead to social exclusion rather than helping them to escape from it."

(Cooper L., Wattam C., Burke J., Katz I. (2000), *Social Inclusion and Family Support: A Survey of Six Countries*, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, UK.)

ty of reconciling young people's desire for greater independence with their parents' need for an adequate income to care for them. This may be another casualty of the failure to consider children and young people fully in their own right.

Access to rights is rarely broken down into adults' and children's rights. Only a few Member States include a discussion of access to legal services by people living in poverty, to ensure that rights are real entitlements –though some mention their Children's Ombudsman. Moreover, despite research findings suggesting that neighbourhood factors may affect children's well-being in particular,¹³¹ issues which may be significant to them –such as local amenities, the quality of the immediate environment etc.– are hardly mentioned. The sections on housing do not generally include reference to the possible stresses and strains on services and/or the community resulting from a concentration of families with young children –though housing assistance to young people is mentioned in several NAPs/incl.

The European Commission report notes that "the legal, cultural, sporting and recreational dimensions remain undeveloped in many NAPs/incl". Several of these "undeveloped" areas are of particular significance for children's well-being and development.

Education, however, does emerge as a key issue, and a fundamental right, for many Member States –though for many, this may focus less on children's rights to good education (and a good educational experience), and more on securing a passport to integration in the adult world, especially in terms of information and employment. There is also some emphasis on adults' access to lifelong learning, as this was also a relevant concern for the National Action Plans on employment.

There could have been more focus within the sections on education on what is needed to avoid the stigma and exclusion suffered by so many children, and their parents, as well as on the prior need to combat poverty if children are to gain fully from their time in school. The place of schools in upholding the values of an inclusive society aware of the rights of children and others, and in helping children to become aware of their rights and willing to exercise them, could also have had more emphasis. However, there is some discussion of the need to reduce costs of access to the so-called "free" education system, and/or to increase funding for disadvantaged schools and areas (Belgium, the Netherlands, France and the UK). Whilst such areas may be largely urban for some Member States, Ireland notes that over three-fifths of its educationally disadvantaged children live in rural areas.

Belgium is the only one to mention the crucial issue of teachers' lack of knowledge about the poverty in which their pupils may live. Several Member States focus on particular groups such as ethnic minority, immigrant, bilingual, Traveller or Roma

"At first glance, one would assume that the whole issue of reconciling family and work was predominantly about children. However, a closer inspection shows that a childhood and/or a children's perspective is generally missing in the debate. If at all, children are seen as objects and obstacles rather than as subjects and as a population group with its own needs and expectations."

(H. Wintersberger, "Work Viewed from a Childhood Perspective", *Family Observer* 1999, 1999
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg05/family/observatory/home.html>.)

children; there is also (as noted above) consensus about the seriousness of school drop-out/early school leaving. The Netherlands covers education under Objective 2 instead, describing a plethora of measures to try to pre-empt the risk of exclusion.

Objective 2: to prevent the risks of exclusion, including preventing life crises and preserving “family solidarity in all its forms”.¹³² The emphasis in the NAPs/incl varies between preventative versus curative services, and between universal provision and more selective services for families seen as already having problems. Some describe family support services as one way of keeping families under stress together. Despite the greater likelihood of families with children being indebted, most Member States do not seem to target relevant services to them –though Germany mentions training in financial matters for children and young people. Some Member States link family poverty and children being taken into care. Several countries mention improvements in social service provision for children and young people. Others focus instead on couples splitting up, and discuss ways to improve child support, custody arrangements etc.

The European Commission notes that in Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal, the family and community are key sources of support against poverty and social exclusion; they must see measures to preserve family solidarity as crucial.

“In the Netherlands, family support services are deliberately targeted at all social classes, and family support is seen much more as a ‘right’ than as a service to be accessed only by those in severe need.”

(L. Cooper, C. Wattam, J. Burke and I. Katz, *Social Inclusion and Family Support: A survey of six countries*, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, UK, 2000.)

The UK’s emphasis on early intervention in disadvantaged children’s lives (e.g. through the intensive support provided by the Sure Start scheme) is echoed in several other NAPs/incl. This raises the more general question about whether strategies on child poverty/exclusion should be differentiated more by age-group –a question most Member States do not address.

Objective 3: to help the most vulnerable seems to highlight children as a whole as a group vulnerable to social exclusion. Some Member States, however, have preferred to interpret this as referring to children and young people in situations of heightened risk (such as those leaving care, or teenagers becoming pregnant, in the UK’s NAP/incl). This is particularly true of those Member States which either, like the UK, focus on child poverty as a priority in their NAP/incl, or see their employment and social protection systems as largely succeeding in preventing children becoming vulnerable. Sweden, for example, focuses on children “ill-treated at home” or in care, and France highlights parenting help to prevent family break-up. Several Member States look at early childhood education and support, and the prevention of problems at this stage.

Objective 4, to mobilise all the relevant bodies, is dealt with below.

What is missing?

Many NAPs/incl do not include analysis of policies which may have **damaging effects on children in situations of poverty and social exclusion** who are associ-

ated with adults who are seen as “undeserving”. This may include, for example, the impact on children’s well-being of benefit sanctions for parental refusal to take up opportunities for employment/training, or to pursue child support; or the stigmatising form or limited amount of support given to certain groups such as asylum-seekers. Greece is one of the few countries which admits in its NAP/incl to conditionality in benefits (in its case, family benefits conditional on school attendance).

Member States could argue that any short-term impact on children’s welfare is more than offset by the long-term advantages accruing from their parent(s) being persuaded to take up employment, pursue child support etc. However, if we take seriously the argument that poverty may be particularly damaging at certain stages of children’s lives –especially young childhood– this might lead us to question this. And a child rights perspective could also suggest that children should be asked their views. These issues should be pursued with Member States in future, to examine the impact on children of such policies and to debate the complex issues involved.

How much are children a focus in the proposals for the commonly agreed indicators of poverty and social exclusion?

The European Commission prioritises the development of **commonly agreed indicators** (see above). A major focus for the ‘common indicators’ suggested in a paper commissioned by the Belgian Presidency is on indicators relevant to the working age population.¹³³ The **report on indicators from the Social Protection Committee**¹³⁴ suggests that Member States use commonly agreed and defined primary (lead) indicators, and secondary (supporting) indicators, in the next round of NAPs/incl. In addition, the Report recommends that they could if desired use a third, more specific, level of indicators at national level which would not be in common.

The first primary indicator suggested by the Social Protection Committee –low income rate after transfers (with the threshold set at 60 per cent of median income)– would be broken down by household type, which would distinguish those households with dependent children from others. It would also be analysed by age, as well as other factors; this would reveal how many children were living in low income households. However, the proposal appears to envisage only one category for children –0 to 15 years old. This means that there would not be a published category across Member States corresponding to the agegroup identified as children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (i.e. 0 to 18 years old)– though it is possible that, as now, Eurostat would publish comparative figures on that basis. In addition, as now, there would be no easy way to assess whether, for example, younger children were at greater risk of poverty than older children.

Apart from this, **few if any of the common indicators suggested by the Social Protection Committee appear able to be applied to children in their own right**, rather than as members of affected households, although the paper commissioned by the Belgian Presidency proposed that in principle people should be regarded as individuals in their own right, rather than merely as members of households.¹³⁵ There also seem to be no proposals to break down any data by ethnic origin; this omission will result in a glaring gap in the understanding of patterns of poverty and social exclusion amongst children, as well as amongst other groups, in the EU.

Some elements of the Social Protection Committee’s planned work on indicators will be of particular relevance to children –including an examination of fami-

ly benefits, as well as the development of indicators on literacy, numeracy and access to education. There seems to be no coherent strategic perspective on child poverty and social exclusion from a children's rights perspective, however, or any plans to explore the development of indicators appropriate for measuring children's well-being and participation in society. The Committee's statement about the importance of involving 'excluded people' in the development of indicators, and exploring "the most effective means of giving a voice to the excluded", is welcome in principle. But it is accompanied by no specific proposals for ways forward and makes no specific reference to involving children and their organisations.

How much are children a focus in Member States' own proposals on indicators, and will the impact on children of the NAPs/incl be monitored and evaluated?

The European Commission report mentions **three kinds of indicators** –performance, policy (usually understood as inputs) and context– and also warns that Member States' initial starting points should be taken into consideration.¹³⁶

The NAPs/incl themselves **vary in their use of data**, with some using harmonised EU-wide figures, and others drawing on their own national surveys; this makes comparisons between them more difficult. Member States may also use different definitions (the Netherlands, for example, uses a "financial poverty index", and Sweden uses the percentage of people living below the social allowance level). Few NAPs/incl systematically set out arrangements for monitoring and evaluation using their chosen indicators,¹³⁷ although the NAPs/incl are meant to state what progress is aimed for and how Member States will move towards common indicators.

Several countries say they will break down overall totals (such as low income or workless households) and show how many of these households contain children. Member States **vary in the emphasis on children** in their indicators:

- At one extreme, Ireland says it will disaggregate all its indicators to show the position of children (though this may in fact be inappropriate for some), whilst other countries put little emphasis on indicators at all;
- Belgium wants to monitor the relationship between parents' educational status and their children's education;
- One focus for France is families' position before and after taxes/benefits, and the extent of horizontal redistribution (between those with and without children); but it also proposes a range of relevant indicators, including the percentage of school-leavers without qualifications and young people with reading difficulties;
- Spain's proposed indicators include child poverty, non-attendance at school and the percentage of 15-year-olds with educational delay.

Whilst several countries include infant mortality, health indicators are generally less prominent than those for education. A few countries say they will look at numbers of children living in bad housing or temporary accommodation.

Some Member States do seem to be **more systematic** in their approaches. Sweden's Children's Ombudsman has developed a model for child impact assessment; and Ireland is setting up a national longitudinal study on children. The UK sep-

arates indicators of current poverty and exclusion and those which could cause increased risk for the future, and its emphasis on children carries through into the sections on indicators –though some of these are used more as aspirations (to move in the right direction) than as specific targets. By having different indicators for children, people of working age and elderly people, the UK more or less explicitly adopts definitions of disadvantage which vary for different age groups.¹³⁸

Italy and Belgium include "subjective" indicators, which can convey how people living in poverty or social exclusion feel. But the idea of using **participatory methods** of devising or testing qualitative and quantitative indicators against the realities and priorities of people with experience of poverty and social exclusion is not explored –with the exception of Belgium, which is conducting an experiment along these lines– and neither is the potential for children to be involved in any such exercises.

Targets

In contrast to the National Action Plans on employment, the **NAPs/incl do not contain any EU-wide targets on poverty and social exclusion**, either for the population as a whole or for children specifically. Some Member States have their own

"Competence for child policy is decentralised in Spain, and regional and local government is responsible. Comprehensive mechanisms for co-ordination and systematic data collection on children in Spain do not exist."

(Save the Children, Spain, in response to Euronet questionnaire, 2001.)

national targets –Ireland apparently judges the overall poverty target the single most important element of its national anti-poverty strategy– whilst others disagree with this approach, or argue that in practice a national target would be meaningless for them because they have a regional system of government (such as Italy). But there has been no general move towards setting targets on eradicating, or even ameliorating, poverty. This tends to give the impression that the EU and Member States put less priority on poverty and social exclusion than employment. Because of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of poverty and social exclusion, Member States

In Ireland, a coalition of children's and anti-poverty NGOs has been raising the profile of child poverty under the banner "Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty". The coalition has made a submission to the government review of Ireland's existing National Anti-Poverty Strategy, and has organised a national consultative seminar to ensure that the setting of a formal child poverty elimination target was on the government's agenda. To raise awareness more broadly, it has designed a booklet (with children) on the issues involved, setting out facts and figures on child poverty, myths about poverty, recommendations for action, and campaign activities. The coalition is currently initiating research on the development of good methodology for working with children.

(Response to Euronet questionnaire from the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Ireland, 2001.)

“Children should be seen and heard.”

(Title of project in Denmark for children of parents with alcohol problems)

should probably be developing several targets, rather than only focusing on reducing the numbers on relatively low income. The careful develop-

ment of clear indicators would be the best foundation for developing targets.

The UK and Portugal are the only Member States to set specific **child poverty targets** in their NAPs/incl. Portugal aims to eradicate child poverty by 2010, and the UK by 2020 (halving it by 2010) –though neither sets a target for reducing social exclusion amongst children. Their measures of child poverty may not be transparent: Portugal does not define child poverty; and the UK’s suggested measures of child poverty are multiple, perhaps meaning that it will be difficult to assess whether it has achieved its target.¹³⁹ Ireland, which sees itself as a model for the EU for its existing national anti-poverty strategy, has been under pressure from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to adopt a target on child poverty, but has not yet done so (see box above). The Netherlands sets a more specific target, on young people: to halve the numbers of early school leavers by 2010.

Have children, particularly those living in poverty and social exclusion, been involved in developing the NAPs/incl?

Objective 4 of the framework for the NAPs/incl recommends that Member States should promote the participation and self-expression of people suffering exclusion, mainstream the fight against exclusion into their overall policies, and “mobilise all relevant actors”. The involvement of stakeholders outside government in drawing up the NAPs/incl has so far varied enormously:

- Those countries which have a social partnership model, such as Denmark, or a national consensus model, such as Ireland, could more easily incorporate the NAPs/incl discussions –though in Ireland the government’s priority was reviewing the existing national anti-poverty strategy;
- Those countries in which there is an ongoing dialogue with NGOs/civil society groups, such as the Netherlands, also had a mechanism which could be used; the Netherlands acknowledges NGOs’ influence in its emphasis on targets;
- Those in which no structures exist for regular debates about overall policy priorities, such as the UK, were not able to involve groups as systematically or constructively. In some Member States with more devolved governance, however, lower level consultation may have been more satisfactory.

Sweden’s is the only NAP/incl to define the standard of living as including “taking conscious control over one’s life” –thus embedding participation and empowerment in its definition. In general, the promotion of participation and self-expression by people living in poverty and social exclusion is not systematically addressed, and the need to include children in this objective is not usually even acknowledged.¹⁴⁰

Ireland says children will have a voice in its national strategy for children, especially on work and education; the UK is also developing consultation on a similar plan. However, hardly any Member States mention the involvement of children’s organisations or children themselves in drawing up the NAP/incl. Denmark says that the National Council on Children was involved in consultation in the run-up to the NAP/incl. Other Member States are likely to have involved children’s organisations, amongst other NGOs, in consultation. But Sweden is the only one to set out a goal of integrating children’s point of view into all the measures it proposes.

“The National Organisation for Social Care was asked by the Ministry of Health and Welfare to submit a description of its activities with regard to the fight against social exclusion. However, it was not consulted in any other way on the development of the NAP”

(Response to Euronet questionnaire from the National Organisation for Social Care and Save the Children Greece, 2001.)

“The European Children’s Ministers meeting underlines the merits of a specific consideration for childhood in the national plans implemented by the Member States, especially those with respect [...] to fighting social exclusion.”

(Conclusions, European Meeting of Children’s Ministers, 9 november 2001.)

Conclusions and Way Forward

Conclusion

The draft joint report from the European Commission on the NAPs/incl¹⁴¹ divides them into four groups:

- **Denmark, the Netherlands and France** provide comprehensive, proactive and preventive plans with a holistic approach and clear objectives (despite some gaps);
- **Portugal, Finland, Sweden and the UK** produced solid, reasonably coherent plans, but their starting points vary: Finland and Sweden suggest specific improvements to their universal systems; Portugal and the UK are strong on diagnosis and targets, but the Commission's draft joint report has doubts about priorities (Portugal) and the focus on particular issues (the UK);
- **Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy and Ireland** are described as having a sound analysis, but are at an earlier stage (or, in Ireland's case, have not refocused, because of the ongoing review of its anti-poverty strategy), and give no targets. Except for Ireland, much responsibility is devolved; and
- **Greece, Austria and Luxembourg** give a snapshot analysis and describe current policies, but with less of a long-term perspective.

All these characteristics –which may, but do not necessarily, reflect countries' overall position in terms of anti-poverty strategies– are also likely to affect children. Most Member States which either have low levels of child poverty, or which foreground children in their analysis and/or targets, tend to be found amongst the first two groups. However, some countries in the last two groups may have informal support mechanisms which are currently able to provide some protection for children. Risks for children will arise if family support lessens under pressures of change without more comprehensive systems being created to take the strain.

Some commentators hope that the NAPs/incl process will be a catalyst for developing EU-level targets on poverty and social exclusion, like the existing cross-EU employment target. It is also possible that the development of common indicators will in the longer term lead to minimum standards of social protection or welfare provision being developed by Member States. If this does happen, it is essential that children are recognised and prioritised in these developments.

Guidance from the European Commission could try to ensure that the approach to child poverty and social exclusion in the NAPs/incl is less piecemeal and more strategic in future; the treatment of gender may provide a potential model for how to do this. It is also crucial that Member States take it upon themselves to develop their focus on children further in the next round of NAPs/incl.

Principles of approach to child poverty and social exclusion

- **Poverty and social exclusion should be re-examined through children's eyes**

The definitions and indicators of social exclusion currently used in major Eurostat documents have not been developed with a child-related perspective. Without ignoring the issue of children's exclusion from the wider society, there are also specific issues around the exclusion of children from the experiences enjoyed by other children. Such a perspective would put more priority on, for example, the quality of children's educational experiences and how much they can share with others.

- **It is essential that policy on children is not simply subsumed within family or gender policy if child poverty and social exclusion are to be tackled effectively**

Families –and women in particular– currently play the central role in caring for children, and there are obviously areas where interests coincide and where family or gender policy overlaps with policy on children. But this is not always the case, especially for children facing poverty and social exclusion. In cases involving separation and divorce, or child protection, children's interests may be neglected if not given specific consideration. Children also have worlds and needs beyond the family, such as school; this is especially true for children living in institutions, homeless children, and unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

- **The approach to child poverty and social exclusion should use children's rights as a framework for analysis and action, including the right to participate**

In line with the principles underpinning the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children should be seen as subjects and bearers of rights, and should be able to develop their capabilities to the fullest extent possible.

"Politicians often refer to us children as being the future of Europe. But we are living right now. Our childhood is happening now and not in the future. We do not think it is enough for decision-makers (for example politicians and public officials) to speak a lot about children. We want them to listen to us. We want to see action!"

("Build Children's Europe –make child rights real" statement from the Children's Summit Meeting, Göteborg, Sweden, 13 June 2001.)¹⁴²

- **Children should be involved in decision-making processes on issues which affect their lives; and participation exercises which involve children should make special efforts to reach out to those who are poor and excluded**

The lack of “voice” is a core element of the powerlessness involved in living in poverty. It is often assumed that children facing poverty and social exclusion are unable or unwilling to participate; but the evidence suggests that this is largely false. Instead, awareness and understanding about the obstacles they face in making their views heard should be improved, and appropriate methodologies should be developed to respond to their needs;

- **Child poverty and social exclusion should be given high visibility at EU and Member State level, and should be treated as a political priority in practice**

Central goals should include increased investment in tackling child poverty and social exclusion, and a fairer distribution of resources between social groups. Policies which attempt to influence the behaviour of parents living in poverty by making their access to income or services conditional on fulfilling certain obligations (e.g. to take up employment) may damage children's rights and should generally be reviewed. Gender may serve as a useful model for combining the disaggregation of information on child poverty and social exclusion with a model for “mainstreaming” a focus on children through a range of policies and strategies.

- **Policy on children should focus on children's quality of life and opportunities now, as well as on the longer-term effects of poverty and social exclusion on them as adults in the future and on society as a whole**

Lack of attention to the immediate interests of children means that current disadvantage is often seen only in terms of its implications for integration into the adult world, rather than its impact on child rights in the present. If ensuring children's access to rights in the present is also prioritised, there would be serious concern about adopting “trickle-down” policies, which only undertake to help people in poverty escape in the longer term. There would also be severe doubts about policies with short-term transitional costs in return for longer-term benefits, because such policies could damage children at particularly vulnerable stages of life, with any positive effects coming only at a later stage when it may be very difficult for children to catch up.

- **The circumstances of children facing poverty and social exclusion are not homogenous, and discrimination against specific groups of children, as well as against children as a whole, should be strenuously tackled**

Whilst it is often important to look at the child population as a whole, the impact of poverty and social exclusion on children is also mediated through factors such as age, race, gender and disability. Specific groups (such as asylum seekers, travellers, or homeless children) will also experience poverty and exclusion in different ways from others. Both data and policies must reflect those experiences. Discrimination experienced by children is a major factor in their social exclusion; Euronet has published a policy proposal which specifically addresses this issue.¹⁴³

- **Effective responses to child poverty and social exclusion depend on comprehensive and wide-ranging strategies, including economic and social policies**

Some of these (e.g. family policy, taxation, education, health and social services) directly address the needs of children. Others affect children more indirectly. These include economic policy, regional policy, employment strategies, human rights, citizenship and environmental policy. Member States should also review their consumer policy, and especially legislation on marketing and advertising, to ensure that it is in children's best interests (Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), and that children are not being targeted by advertisers in ways which are likely to foster social exclusion.

EU level: legal base

- **Member States should agree the insertion of a new Article into the EU Treaties so that the Community can contribute to the promotion and protection of the rights and needs of children within existing legal competences of the EU Treaty, whilst respecting the lead role of the Member States**

There is currently no clear legal base in the EU Treaties to ensure that children's rights are fully respected in EU legislation, policy and programmes. The predominant emphasis within the Treaties on the “citizen-as-worker” means that the interests of children are not systematically taken into account in all relevant EU legislation, policy and programmes, and that EU institutions are not bound by the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which EU Member States have ratified. Euronet has set out elsewhere¹⁴⁴ the case for a legal base to promote and protect children's rights.

Member State level

- **All Member States should conduct child poverty impact analysis of social and economic policies and of budgets at central, regional and local levels;**
- **All Member States should seek to ensure that the maximum resources available are invested in the promotion of children's economic, social and cultural rights, as set out in Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;**
- **There should be overall management and co-ordination of a strategy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, based on cross-departmental working to agreed priorities, and with a specific unit/department having a leading role; and**
- **Appropriate mechanisms for delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy should be developed.**

Nice objectives and NAPs/incl

- **An agenda on child poverty and social exclusion is gradually emerging at EU level –but the objectives agreed at Nice need further development to reflect children's interests systematically throughout the NAPs/incl framework**

- At present, references to children are scattered throughout the recommended framework. Euronet is disappointed that most Member States have not taken a strategic and integrated approach to child poverty and social exclusion in their NAPs/incl. **The European Commission should give further guidance to Member States about how to incorporate a children's perspective, as the NAPs/incl are developed in future. Member States themselves should ensure that they make children visible and mainstream child poverty and social exclusion throughout their NAPs/incl, incorporating child rights as a shaping perspective.**
- Children living in poverty/social exclusion and the organisations representing their interests should be involved in monitoring, evaluating and developing the NAPs/incl.

Indicators

- **Indicators of poverty and social exclusion should be developed further at EU and Member State level to focus more clearly on the position of children, and children should be prioritised more clearly in the common indicators to be used to monitor progress of the NAPs/incl**

The systematic collection and publication of information on child poverty and social exclusion is an essential prerequisite for developing effective policies to tackle these issues. Euronet welcomes the development by the EU of general indicators of poverty and social exclusion. It would emphasise the importance of up to date data in order to evaluate the effectiveness of current policies, with all Member States (and ideally also countries hoping to accede to the EU) participating in data gathering on a comparable basis. It would also recommend that existing data gathered via the European Community Household Panel survey should be exploited more systematically to reveal a more complete picture of the lives of children living in poverty and social exclusion.

However, Euronet also believes that the integration of a child perspective is crucial, at EU and Member State level. This means:

- "Equivalence scales" which weight the needs of different people within households should be under constant examination, to see whether they accurately reflect reality, and in particular the relative needs of children; it would be useful to publish calculations of the volume and distribution of child poverty using different equivalence scales;
- Disaggregation of data to show the position of children is crucial –data taking children as the unit are still not available easily for all countries; there should be a particular focus on measuring factors known to be important in children's experience, such as poverty in young childhood, frequent moves of house and school, and mediating features for the individual, household and neighbourhood;
- Adoption of a children's rights perspective would alter the emphasis of data collection (as well as policy measures) –for example, in education, away from increasing overall achievement levels towards ensuring every child's right to maximise their potential and to enjoy a positive educational experience;
- There should also be in-depth participatory exploration of children's own experiences of poverty and social exclusion, including their exclusion from the

world of children, with a view to developing indicators which reflect this perspective –but the lower standard of living of families with children as a whole should not be reflected in a lower standard for measuring child poverty;

- EU-SILC, the new survey of income and living conditions across Europe, should contain appropriate questions to allow more comprehensive analysis of children's well-being in the future, with particular attention to issues relevant to children living in poverty/social exclusion.

Targets for tackling child poverty and social exclusion

Euronet recommends the following ways of addressing the development of appropriate targets for tackling child poverty and social exclusion in the EU:

- **All Member States should, on the basis of clear indicators, adopt targets for the elimination of child poverty in the next National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/incl)**

Only the UK and Portugal currently have child poverty targets in their NAPs/incl (and the definitions they use are not transparent). Yet in most EU countries children run a higher risk of poverty than the population as a whole. Member States should develop an appropriate target for the elimination of child poverty (based on relative income measures) as part of their preparation for the next NAPs/incl (2003-05). The European Commission should give guidance about this, and Member States should develop a timetable to monitor their own progress. A limited number of "headline" targets on other aspects of child poverty and social exclusion could also be developed.

- **A short-term target is for all Member States to aim to match the performance of the average of the best 3 in relation to child poverty**¹⁴⁵

'Benchmarking' of this kind would give more definitive guidance to Member States and would give an appropriately ambitious goal for those Member States with worse child poverty levels. (Those Member States with better records could set themselves more specific targets in relation to groups of children who are still disadvantaged.)

- **Consideration should be given to setting an EU-wide target for the elimination/reduction of child poverty**

Such a target would give a clear message about the political priority put on eliminating/reducing child poverty. It would raise the status of tackling child poverty to match the importance of targets on employment, inflation and public expenditure. We recognise that to have nationally specific poverty lines and an EU-wide target may seem inappropriate, however; this could therefore be seen as a longer-term aim. In principle, any target which does not involve the elimination of child poverty could be seen as insufficiently ambitious, or indeed unacceptable. Any targets must focus on causes rather than symptoms, and should be developed with the best interests of the child in mind, to avoid the temptation of taking "short cuts" to achieve a particular target, which may be damaging to children's wider interests.

Background to the Report and Acknowledgments

Minimum standards

- **In developing the National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion in future, Member States should move towards the achievement of minimum standards for social provision, to tackle child poverty and social exclusion**

The NAPs/incl may be seen as a suitable vehicle for the joint development by Member States of more specific minimum standards of social provision in the future. Objective 1 sets out goals of giving access to rights of various kinds, which are broader than just income. Adopting a child rights perspective in relation to these goals, and developing them over the longer term in line with the standards set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, could result in all Member States being involved in a mutual endeavour to ensure that no child was denied their rights (to adequate resources, housing, health care, social security, education, play and leisure etc.)

“The persistence of child poverty in rich countries undermines both equality of opportunity and commonality of values. It therefore confronts the industrialized world with a test both of its ideals and of its capacity to resolve many of its most intractable social problems.”

(UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Innocenti Report Card No. 1, “A league table of child poverty in rich nations”, 2000.)

Euronet commissioned two researchers, Sandy Ruxton and Fran Bennett, to prepare the current report. It is the culmination of a year long project ‘Combating Children and Young People’s Social Exclusion –The Development of a Coherent European Approach’ which was undertaken by Euronet (the European Children’s Network) during 2001 with financial support from the Directorate General Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission. It complements two previous Euronet reports: *A Children’s Policy for 21st Century Europe: First Steps* (1999) and *Challenging Discrimination against Children in the EU: A policy proposal by Euronet* (2000).

Methodology

The researchers have drawn on the existing literature, responses to a questionnaire sent to European NGOs, a small number of interviews at European level, and accounts of recent participatory projects with children and young people.

Literature sources have included information and documentation from EU and Council of Europe institutions; reports by Euronet and other transnational networks (in particular the European Anti-Poverty Network, the European Observatory on the Family, and NGOs); Member States’ National Action Plans on social inclusion (NAPs/incl) and submissions and comment on these by NGOs; other international sources (e.g. UNICEF, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Children’s Rights Information Network); and reports from expert commentators.

The questionnaire was distributed by email to key contacts across the EU, including Euronet member organisations, NAPs/incl contacts of the European Anti-Poverty Network, and relevant academics, and replies were received from 12 of the 15 Member States. At the same time, a small number of interviews were conducted by the researchers with key contacts at European level, in order to explore the current direction of EU thinking and to help identify other relevant work in this area.

In order to integrate child participation in the report, the researchers drew upon existing work undertaken in this field. This included: consultations by Euronet for its previous “Challenging Discrimination” project; a transnational youth participation project undertaken by Euronet in cooperation with BICE (Bureau International Catholique de l’Enfance) in 2000 in five EU countries; conclusions from a large UNICEF survey (“Young Voices”); and specific country initiatives.

A regular newsletter was also published and circulated to interested parties to keep them informed about the development of the project, to pass on up-to-date information about EU activities, and to encourage the development of more solid networks and partnerships for future action.

Acknowledgments

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Sandy Ruxton is an independent social policy expert, specialising in children's rights. He worked for ten years with children and young people in education, community work and the prison system. He has written extensively on issues concerning children and families, and was the author of the Euronet report *A children's policy for 21st century Europe: First steps*, which sets out a comprehensive agenda for an EU children's policy. He is also a Policy Advisor on UK/EU poverty for Oxfam GB, and has forthcoming publications on men and poverty and on economic, social and cultural rights. He lives in Oxford, UK.

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The Experts Group

The Experts Group met twice with the Management Committee and authors during the writing of the report. Several experts also commented individually on drafts of the report. Euronet is extremely grateful to the Experts Group for the advice and support they provided. The content of the report however remains the responsibility of the authors alone.

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Floor Gussenhoven was the temporary co-ordinator of Euronet during the first half of 2001.

Mieke Schuurman is the Co-ordinator of Euronet and was involved in work for the Euronet reports *A Children's Policy for 21st Century Europe: First steps* of 1999 and *Challenging Discrimination against Children* of 2000. She led the Euronet campaign for the inclusion of an article on children's rights in the EU Fundamental Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Diana Sutton is European Officer, Save the Children-Europe Group, Brussels, Belgium. She is the co-author of *Towards an EU Human Rights Agenda for Children and Children, Economics and the EU: Towards child friendly policies* and she wrote the Euronet publication on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Euronet also wishes to thank the wide range of people not identified above who have participated in the project, especially those who replied to the questionnaire or were interviewed, and Professor Jane Lewis and professor David Piachaud who commented on the draft report.

Financial support

Euronet expresses particular thanks to Directorate General Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission for their financial support for the duration of this project. The project also received financial support from Save the Children UK, BICE and NSPCC.

Relevant Articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

General principles

- Article 2 – All rights in the Convention apply equally to all children and young people;
- Article 3 – The best interests of children and young people must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them;
- Article 4 – Governments must invest the maximum resources available to the promotion of children's and young people's economic, social and cultural rights; by contrast, the full implementation of participation rights is not to be determined by available resources;
- Article 6 – Every child or young person has the right to life; and governments shall ensure to the maximum extent possible children's and young people's survival and development;
- Article 12 – All children and young people who are capable of forming a view have the right to express and have these views given "due weight" in all matters concerning them.

Specific articles

- Article 18 – The principle that both parents have "common responsibilities" for the care and upbringing of children and young people; and governments shall provide "appropriate assistance" to ensure parents carry out these responsibilities;
- Article 22 – The right of young refugees to "appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance";
- Article 23 – Young disabled people's right to "enjoy a full and decent life";
- Article 24 – The right of children and young people to the "highest attainable standards of health";
- Article 26 – Governments shall recognise the right of every child or young person to "benefit from social security";
- Article 27 – Children's rights to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development;
- Article 28 – The right to education, including vocational education, on the basis of equality of opportunity;
- Article 31 – The right to play, rest and leisure, recreation and to participation in cultural activities and the arts.

References

- 1 Children are defined in this report in the same way as in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, i.e. as 0-18 years of age. See note 3 below.
- 2 These statistics are drawn from the European Community Household Panel survey and quoted in European Commission (2001), *Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, Draft Joint Report on Social Inclusion* (COM (2001), 565 final). They are based on the number of children aged 0-15 living in households where the household income is below 60% of the national equivalised median income. It is important to note that these latest figures are from 1997, and are thus still significantly out-of-date.
- 3 Eurostat (2000), "Income Poverty in the European Union: Children, gender and poverty gaps". *Statistics in Focus: Population and Social Conditions, Theme 3 - 12/2000*. These and most other figures used in this report are based on 1996 data (some of which are based on interviews carried out in 1995), and cover 13 out of 15 Member States, excluding Finland and Sweden. See note 23.
- 4 Council of Ministers of the European Communities, Decision of 19 December 1984.
- 5 The definition of 60 per cent of median income (in each Member State) was recommended by the Task Force on Statistics on Social Exclusion and Poverty (Eurostat, 1998). The median is less affected by movements at the outer edges of the income distribution than the mean, and so will not be as sensitive to (e.g.) large increases in the incomes of those at the top of the income scale. In two Member States it is not possible to use the household as measure and a narrower unit is used instead.
- 6 BERGHMAN J. (1995), "Social exclusion in Europe: policy context and analytical framework", in Room G. (ed.), *Beyond the Threshold*, The Policy Press.
- 7 ATKINSON A.B. (1998), *Social Exclusion, Poverty and Unemployment*, CASEPaper 4, Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics.
- 8 BRADSHAW J. (ed.) (2001), *Poverty: The Outcomes for Children*, Family Policy Studies Centre, UK.
- 9 Accession negotiations were formally opened between the EU and Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia in 1998, and with Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and Slovakia in 2000. New EU members are likely to join from the end of 2002.
- 10 MICKLEWRIGHT J. and STEWART K. (2000), *Child Well-being in the EU and Enlargement to the East*, Innocenti Working Paper 75, UNICEF, Florence, Italy; and Save the Children Sweden (2001), *Unfinished Business: EU enlargement and child rights*, Stockholm, Sweden.
- 11 The "Council of Ministers" of the European Union is made up of representatives of Member State governments and is the ultimate decision-making forum within the EU. "European Council" meetings set overall policy directions for the EU, and are chaired by the Member State which holds the Presidency at the time.
- 12 *Presidency Conclusions*, Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, SN 100/00.
- 13 LANSDOWN G. (2001), *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-making*, Innocenti Research Centre, UNICEF, Florence, Italy.
- 14 RUXTON S. (1999), *A Children's Policy for 21st Century Europe*, Euronet.
- 15 RUXTON S. (1999); see note 14.
- 16 Article 29 comes under the "Third Pillar" (Justice and Home Affairs) of the European Union, and as such only sanctions action on a case-by-case intergovernmental basis.
- 17 In December 2000, the Council of Ministers signed the EU "Charter of Fundamental Rights", Article 24 of which specifically addresses the rights of the child. However, the Charter has not at this stage been incorporated into the EU Treaties, and is therefore not legally enforceable. Although Article 24 has been criticised for being too weak and for not focusing sufficiently on the rights of the individual child, it does provide a clear public statement of the importance which the EU attaches to children's rights.

- 18 At the time of writing, income data from 1997 for EU Member States was due to be published shortly, and some information had already been made available to the European Commission. See note 2.
- 19 Now published as BRADBURY B., JENKINS S.P. and MICKLEWRIGHT J. (eds.) (2001), *The Dynamics of Child Poverty in Industrialised Countries*, Cambridge University Press, UK.
- 20 MILLAR J. and RIDGE T. (2001), *Families, Poverty, Work and Care: A review of the literature on lone parents and low income couple families with children*, DWP Research Report, Corporate Document Services, UK. The EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) is currently being developed, and will become the main source of information over the next decade.
- 21 The European Commission reports that 18 per cent of the EU population (over 60 million people) were living in households below 60 per cent of the national equivalised median income in 1997, half of whom had been living below it for 3 years. (European Commission (2001), see note 2.)
- 22 MICKLEWRIGHT J. (2000), *Macroeconomics and Data on Children*, Innocenti ESP series no. 73, UNICEF.
- 23 MEJER L. and SIERMANN C. (2000), see note 3. These figures do not include Finland and Sweden; Sweden did not participate in the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) survey at this stage, and Finland only joined in Wave 3 (although the Nordic countries have regularly produced joint reports). Data is based on the 1996 ECHP survey, which refers to income in 1995; low income is defined as 60 per cent of the median equivalised household income in each Member State.
- 24 That is, a household with no adult in paid employment.
- 25 MEJER L. and SIERMANN C. (2000), see note 3.
- 26 BRADBURY B. and JANTTI M. (1999), *Child Poverty Across Industrialised Nations*, Innocenti Occasional Papers ESP 71, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, Italy.
- 27 The results are then “weighted” to reflect the population as a whole. There is some change in the panel membership, as some people do not respond each year and others are interviewed.
- 28 Eurostat (2000), “European Social Statistics - Income, poverty and social exclusion”: *Theme 3 - Population and Social Conditions*.
- 29 BRADBURY B., JENKINS S.P. and MICKLEWRIGHT J. (2000), *Child Poverty Dynamics in 7 Nations*, Innocenti Working Paper no. 78, UNICEF (and see note 19). This study included 3 EU Member States (Germany, Ireland and Spain), plus Britain (not the UK). It is based on national panel survey data, and uses the square root of the household size as its equivalence scale and half median income as its “poverty line” (whilst also looking at children in the bottom fifth of the income distribution).
- 30 BRADBURY B. and JANTTI M. (1999), see note 26.
- 31 MICKLEWRIGHT J. (2001), UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, “Social exclusion and children: a European view for a US debate”, draft paper for conference (personal view).
- 32 This is also the position put forward by John Micklewright, after due consideration of alternatives.
- 33 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), Florence, Italy, Innocenti Report Card No. 1, “A league table of child poverty in rich nations”.
- 34 BRADSHAW J. (ed.) (2001), see note 8.
- 35 JONCKERS J. (2001), “Towards a European policy on poverty: recent developments”, unpublished paper for Round Table Discussion on ‘The Inclusive Europe’, Brussels, Belgium, 22 June 2001.
- 36 This point is also made by John Micklewright (2001), see note 31. See also LANSDOWN G. (2000), *Challenging Discrimination against Children in the EU: A policy proposal by Euronet*, Euronet.
- 37 The combination of low income and inability to afford basic necessities is used in Ireland as an official poverty measure.
- 38 Eurostat (2000), see note 28.
- 39 Eurostat (2001), *The Social Situation in the European Union 2001*, European Commission. The data are based on the European Community Household Panel survey data for 1996. This publication also gives a figure of 20 per cent for children under 16 living in a household with low income.
- 40 Needs defined as: eating meat/chicken/fish every second day; buying new clothes; having a week’s holiday away from home.
- 41 The figures show the share of people with disadvantages in more than 1 out of 3 “domains” by age in 1996. The 3 “domains” include: financial problems (arrears with repayments); problems in satisfying basic necessities (see previous note); and problems with accommodation (lack of a bath/shower, and/or shortage of space and/or problem with damp walls/floors).
- 42 The proportion of people from lone parent and large family households in poverty, and unemployed and non-retired inactive households, which were experiencing multiple disadvantages was also very high, but is not discussed in detail here.
- 43 MICKLEWRIGHT J. (2001), see note 31.
- 44 PIACHAUD D. (2001), “Child poverty, opportunities and quality of life”, *The Political Quarterly*: Vol. 72, no. 4, October-December, UK.
- 45 “Relative” definitions of poverty relate someone’s poverty to the here and now, i.e. the society they live in, and usually go up (or down) in line with general living standards in the population as a whole. “Absolute” poverty definitions are more fixed, in theory, and relate to minimum subsistence needs –though they can also refer to a relative poverty line which is then only changed in line with price movements.
- 46 This means the poverty line is related to national incomes, rather than incomes in the EU as a whole; it is equivalised, meaning it is adjusted according to the number of adults, and children, in that household; and it is 60 per cent of the amount someone in the middle of the income distribution gets.
- 47 See Eurostat (2000) (see note 28), page 20, where a uniform poverty line (i.e. the same for each Member State) is used, and shows an EU poverty rate of 17 per cent, with poverty ranging from one in every 20 people in Denmark and Austria to almost one in two in Portugal.
- 48 MICKLEWRIGHT J. and STEWART K. (2001), “Poverty and social exclusion in Europe”, *New Economy*, spring 2001, Institute for Public Policy Research/Blackwells, UK. (These figures are for the population in poverty as a whole, and do not differentiate between children and adults.)
- 49 Eurostat (2001), see note 39.
- 50 Finding cited by MILLAR J. and RIDGE T. (2001), see note 20.
- 51 MEJER L. and SIERMANN S. (2000), see note 3.
- 52 However, Finland and Sweden –which are known, from other sources, to have very low rates of child poverty– are excluded from these data.
- 53 B: Belgium; DK: Denmark; D: Germany; EL: Greece; E: Spain; F: France; IRL: Ireland; I: Italy; L: Luxembourg; NL: Netherlands; A: Austria; P: Portugal; UK: United Kingdom.
- 54 Eurostat (2000), see note 28.
- 55 MICKLEWRIGHT J. and STEWART K. (2000), see note 10.
- 56 Eurostat (2000), see note 28.
- 57 PIACHAUD D. and SUTHERLAND H. (2001), “Child poverty: aims, achievements and prospects for the future”, *New Economy*, spring 2001, Institute for Public Policy Research/Blackwells, UK.
- 58 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), see note 33. The study looks at 23 industrialised countries. The definition of poverty used is half national median income, and the data are largely taken from the Luxembourg Income Study (from 1990-1997).
- 59 Based on the US official poverty line, converted into national currencies.

- 60 Cited in HM Treasury (2000), *The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System: Supporting children through the tax and benefit system*, UK.
- 61 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), see note 33. See note 58 for definition of poverty used.
- 62 BRADBURY B. and JANTTI M. (1999), see note 26. (However, the authors note that it is rare for such analyses to take into account, e.g., childcare expenditure, or education quality, or access to health care or subsidised housing –all of which can have a crucial impact on child poverty and social exclusion.)
- 63 See Eurostat (2000), see note 28.
- 64 Eurostat Task Force on Social Exclusion and Poverty (1998), noted in MICKLEWRIGHT J. and STEWART K. (2001), see note 48.
- 65 MICKLEWRIGHT J. and STEWART K. (2000), see note 10.
- 66 MICKLEWRIGHT J. and STEWART K. (2000), see note 10.
- 67 FEANTSA, *Youth Homelessness in the European Union*, 1998.
- 68 AVRAMOV D. (1997), "Youth homelessness: data and trends", in *Youth Homelessness in the European Union*, FEANTSA; www.feantsa.org. (Note that homeless people in general are not included in the European Community Household Panel survey.)
- 69 Social Exclusion Unit (1999), *Teenage Pregnancy*, Cm 4342, The Stationery Office, UK.
- 70 BERTHOUD R. and ROBSON K. (2001), *The Outcomes of Teenage Motherhood in Europe*, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, in association with UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre; data based on 13 countries.
- 71 LANSDOWN G. (2000), see note 36. (Illegal immigrants are not included in the European Community Household Panel survey.)
- 72 Information from EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, Vienna
- 73 Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative (2000), *"In Our Own Words...": The voices of children experiencing poverty*, Ireland.
- 74 RUXTON S. (2000), *Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Europe: A programme for action*, UNHCR/Save the Children Sweden.
- 75 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy (2000), *Young People in Changing Societies*, Regional Monitoring Report No. 7. This report covers 27 countries, including not only the ten EU applicant countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), but an additional 17 from the region (Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, FR Yugoslavia, Albania, Belarus, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan).
- 76 The "Copenhagen Criteria", agreed by the European Council in 1993, specify that EU applicant countries must have a functioning market economy in place and the capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces. They must also have achieved "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities".
- 77 MICKLEWRIGHT J. and STEWART K. (2000), see note 10.
- 78 MICKLEWRIGHT J. and STEWART K. (2000), see note 10.
- 79 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), see note 75.
- 80 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), see note 75.
- 81 MICKLEWRIGHT J. and STEWART K. (2000), see note 10.
- 82 Save the Children Sweden (2000), *Children, Economics and the EU: Towards child friendly policies*, Sweden.
- 83 Paper by FORSSEN K., cited in UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), see note 33.
- 84 MILLAR J. and RIDGE T. (2001), see note 20.
- 85 MILLAR J. and RIDGE T. (2001), see note 20.
- 86 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), see note 33.
- 87 JONCKERS J. (2001), see note 35.
- 88 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), see note 33.
- 89 BRADBURY B., JENKINS S.P. and MICKLEWRIGHT J. (2000), see note 29.
- 90 BRADBURY B. and JANTTI M. (1999), see note 26.
- 91 IMMERVOLL H., SUTHERLAND H. and DE VOS K. (2001), "Reducing child poverty in the EU: the role of child benefits", in VLEMINCKX K. and SMEEDING T. (eds.), *Child Wellbeing, Child Poverty and Child Policy in Modern Nations: what do we know?*, The Policy Press, UK. This study focused on family benefits (including child benefits, maternity benefits and carers' allowances), rather than on means-tested safety nets.
- 92 FOTAKIS C. (2000), "How social is Europe?", in *Family Observer no. 2/2000*, European Observatory on Family Matters. (The EU average is 8 per cent; family/child benefits are 8.3 per cent of total social benefits, ie above the EU average, in Greece.)
- 93 Paper by FORSSEN K., cited in UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), see note 33.
- 94 European Commission (2001), see note 2.
- 95 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), see note 33.
- 96 As recommended in UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2000), see note 33.
- 97 RIDGE T. (forthcoming, 2002), *Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion*, The Policy Press, UK.
- 98 This is known as the modified OECD equivalence scale, and is in common use internationally. However, individual countries may use different equivalence scales in their own national surveys, and there are other equivalence scales in international use (e.g. square root of household size).
- 99 This issue is studied in more detail by SMEEDING T.M. and RAINWATER L. in a draft conference paper, "Comparing Living Standards Across Nations: Real incomes at the top, the bottom and the middle", Luxembourg Income Study Working Paper no. 266, written in May 2001.
- 100 BRADBURY B. and JANTTI M. (1999), see note 26.
- 101 This was carried out for earlier statistics from the European Community Household Panel survey by the European Observatory on National Family Policies (1998), in DITCH J., BARNES H., BRADSHAW J. and KILKEY M., *A Synthesis of National Family Policies 1996*, University of York.
- 102 The European Community Household Panel survey data do however, reveal that people (over 16) in households with children were more dissatisfied with their main activity than those in childless households; this was more likely for those living on a low income, and even more so for those in long-term poverty.
- 103 BRADSHAW J. (ed.) (2001), see note 8.
- 104 BERTHOUD R. (2001), "A childhood in poverty: persistent versus transitory poverty", *New Economy*, spring 2001, Institute for Public Policy Research/Blackwells, UK.

- 105 See, for example, TARDIEU B. in BEN ARIEH A. and WINTERSBERGER H. (eds.) (1997), "Monitoring and Measuring the State of Children: Beyond survival", *Eurosocial Report 62/1997*, European Centre, Austria, and BRADSHAW J. (ed.) (2001), see note 8.
- 106 KLASSEN S. (2001), "Social exclusion, children, and education: conceptual and measurement issues", University of Munich, Germany.
- 107 BRADSHAW J. (ed.) (2001), see note 8.
- 108 Eurostat (2001), see note 39 (based on European Community Household Panel survey data).
- 109 RIDGE T. (forthcoming, 2002), see note 97.
- 110 See KLASSEN S. (2001), see note 106, for more detail on this viewpoint.
- 111 LANSDOWN G. (2000), see note 36.
- 112 Euronet, "Agenda 2000 for children and young people in Europe", Presentation for the European Parliament, Brussels, 22 November 2000.
- 113 DAVIES and KIRKPATRICK (2000), *The Euridem Project: A review of pupil democracy in Europe*, Children's Rights Alliance for England, UK.
- 114 For example, the Economic and Social Research Council's "Children 5-16 Programme" in the UK, and the Research Council of Norway's 'Child, Youth and Family' Programme.
- 115 There is considerable variation in the roles and functions of Commissioners/Ombudspersons in different countries. See LANSDOWN, G., (2001), "Independent Institutions Protecting Children's Rights", Innocenti Digest No. 8, UNICEF, Florence, Italy, for further detail.
- 116 Council of Ministers of Youth, Resolution on Youth Participation, Brussels, 20 November 1998.
- 117 SHROPSHIRE J. and MIDDLETON S., (1999), *Small Expectations: Learning to be poor?*, York Publishing Services Ltd. for Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK.
- 118 Clearly, children are likely to benefit in terms of financial security if their parents obtain work; however, the impact is less direct.
- 119 Relevant education programmes have included SOCRATES (co-operation), LEONARDO (vocational training policy), and Youth for Europe III (co-operation in the youth field). In relation to employment, elements of the EU's Structural Funds (and especially the European Social Fund) have been directed towards supporting young unemployed people –particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds– into work.
- 120 See note 11.
- 121 Presidency Conclusions, Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, SN 100/00.
- 122 European Commission, "Building an Inclusive Europe", COM(2000) 79.
- 123 The Commission also proposed a general target of reducing the number of those living below the poverty line from 18% in 2000 to 15% by 2005 and 10% by 2010.
- 124 WINTERSBERGER H. (1996), "The Ambivalence of Modern Childhood: A Plea for a European Strategy for Children", in *Children on the Way from Marginality towards Citizenship*, European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Report 61, Vienna, Austria.
- 125 ATKINSON A.B., CANTILLON B., MARLIER E. and NOLAN B. (2002), *Social indicators: The EU and social inclusion*, Oxford University Press, UK.
- 126 See Save the Children Sweden (2000), see note 82.

- 127 European Commission (2001), see note 2.
- 128 In some cases (for example, Germany, Belgium), other reports on poverty or related topics are referred to within the NAPs/incl; such reports may refer to child poverty and social exclusion, even if the NAPs/incl themselves do not.
- 129 RIDGE T. (forthcoming, 2002), see note 97.
- 130 It could be argued that to integrate a child rights perspective throughout would be to take a "sectoral" or "target group" approach. However, the same criticism is not made of gender, which is intended to be mainstreamed throughout the NAPs/incl. We would argue that a child rights perspective is similar to that of gender in this respect.
- 131 See, for example, ATKINSON A.B. (2000), "A European social agenda: poverty benchmarking and social transfers", CAE2000, UK. (Belgium does discuss play space in its National Action Plan against poverty and social exclusion.)
- 132 It is not entirely clear what "family solidarity (in all its forms)" means.
- 133 ATKINSON A.B., CANTILLON B., MARLIER E. and NOLAN B. (2002), see note 125 (to be published by Oxford University Press, UK).
- 134 Social Protection Committee (2001), *Social Protection Committee: Report on indicators in the field of poverty and social exclusion*, October 2001.
- 135 ATKINSON A.B., CANTILLON B., MARLIER E. and NOLAN B. (2002), see note 125 (to be published by Oxford University Press, UK).
- 136 European Commission (2001), see note 2.
- 137 There is an analysis of Member States' use of indicators in their NAPs/incl in the draft paper written by ATKINSON A.B., CANTILLON B. and NOLAN B. (2001) for the Belgian EU Presidency on common indicators of poverty and social exclusion. This discussion is informed by that analysis. See note 125.
- 138 This is argued by MICKLEWRIGHT J., (2001), see note 31.
- 139 ATKINSON A.B., CANTILLON B., MARLIER E. and NOLAN B. (2001), see note 125.
- 140 This is not to deny the very real problems involved in discussing issues about poverty and social exclusion with children. Ethical frameworks for involving children in research are now widely used.
- 141 European Commission (2001), see note 2. This analysis describes the Commission's view of the contents of the NAPs/incl as a whole, rather than their relevance to children in particular.
- 142 The statement was drawn up by 350 children and young people aged 11-16 from eleven schools in Göteborg and sent to the Swedish Presidency of the EU.
- 143 LANSDOWN G. (2000), see note 36.
- 144 RUXTON S. (1999), *A Children's Policy for 21st Century Europe: First steps*, Euronet, Belgium.
- 145 This proposal was put forward by A.B. Atkinson in relation to total poverty (see note 131). He has also suggested that child poverty targets would be a useful addition.



What is Euronet ?

EURONET - The European Children's Network - is a coalition of networks and organisations campaigning for the interests and rights of children (defined in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as all persons under 18 years of age). Together these agencies share a concern about the general invisibility of children in EU policy, legislation and programmes. As a result of intense campaigning by Euronet, the Amsterdam Treaty included for the first time in EU history a specific reference to children. Following this, Euronet has developed a comprehensive EU Children's policy "A Children's Policy for 21st Century Europe: First Steps", published in 1999. Taking into account the necessity to promote children's participation Euronet started a European Network of Children and Young People who have written their "Agenda 2000 for children and young people in Europe". Euronet has also campaigned extensively for a recognition of the rights of the child in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and welcomes the new Article 24 as the first recognition of the principle of children's rights in the EU Treaty.

Euronet qu'est-ce que c'est ?

EURONET (le réseau européen des enfants) est une coalition de réseaux et d'organisations qui mènent campagne en faveur des intérêts de l'enfant (défini dans la Convention de 1989 relative aux droits de l'enfant comme tout être humain âgé de moins de 18 ans). Ensemble ces agences se préoccupent du caractère relativement invisible de l'enfant dans les politiques, la législation et les programmes de l'UE. Suite aux vigoureuses campagnes orchestrées par Euronet, le traité d'Amsterdam contient pour la première fois dans l'histoire de l'UE, une référence spécifique à l'enfant. Dans la foulée, Euronet a élaboré une politique européenne détaillée en faveur de l'enfance intitulée 'Premiers pas vers une politique de l'enfance pour l'Europe du 21ème siècle' et publiée en 1999. Conscient de la nécessité de promouvoir la participation des enfants, Euronet a démarré un réseau européen des enfants et des jeunes qui ont rédigé leur 'Agenda 2000 pour les enfants et les jeunes en Europe'. Euronet a également vigoureusement mené campagne pour la reconnaissance des droits de l'enfant dans la Charte européenne des droits fondamentaux et se félicite de l'article 24 qui constitue la première reconnaissance du principe des droits de l'enfant dans un traité sur l'UE.



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