

REPORT

JULY 2012

THE 2012 NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMMES (NRP) AND THE NATIONAL SOCIAL REPORTS (NSR) FROM A CHILD POVERTY AND WELL-BEING PERSPECTIVE



KEY MESSAGES

The following recommendations are intended to address the main issues identified by Eurochild members' in their analysis of the National Reform Programmes and National Social Reports.

ISSUE 1 - CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IS NOT GIVEN DUE POLITICAL WEIGHT IN THE NRPS

Despite repeated commitments to tackling child poverty and promoting well-being, only a minority of Member States identify child poverty and social exclusion as an important issue in their 2012 National Reform Programme (NRP). Some of the countries which provide evidence that child poverty and social exclusion is a significant challenge in practice give little in-depth attention to the issue in their NRP. The majority of NRPs fail to give a specific focus to child poverty and social exclusion. Only two Member States have set specific targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion in their NRPs as part of their agreed national target derived from the EU headline target on poverty and social exclusion and just two others are considering doing so.

Recommendation 1: The forthcoming Commission Recommendation on child poverty, social exclusion and child well-being must put tackling child poverty and social exclusion at the centre of the Europe 2020 strategy and future NRPs and NSRs. To this end it should propose that targets to reduce child poverty and social exclusion are made an integral part of the Europe 2020 process. The Recommendation should also introduce more timely and more comprehensive monitoring and analysis of children's situation across the EU.

ISSUE 2 – THE APPROACH IS TOO NARROW AND NOT UNDERPINNED BY CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

In most NRPs the measures outlined to tackle child poverty and social exclusion are not sufficiently wide-ranging and comprehensive and often not very appropriate. In so far as child poverty and social exclusion is addressed the focus is primarily on increasing parents' access to the labour market and on tackling educational disadvantage. These issues are often somewhat or, in a few Member States, very well addressed. Other important issues such as income support, early education and child care, family support, access to services (health, social services and child protection, housing and environment, and sport, leisure and cultural activities), tackling geographic concentrations of disadvantage are most often poorly or not at all addressed in most NRPs. Too often measures are piecemeal and in the vast majority of NRPs are not integrated into an overall national strategy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion and to promote child well-being. Among the few NSRs (8 plus 3 drafts) that were submitted in time to be assessed the same weaknesses are evident as in the NRPs. Child poverty and social exclusion features as a priority in slightly less than half and only two set child poverty and social exclusion reduction targets. Furthermore, in only a small number of countries' NRPs/NSRs can some elements of a rights based approach to tackling child poverty and social exclusion and to promoting child well-being be detected. In the vast majority of NRPs and NSRs there is no emphasis on children's rights.

Recommendation 2: In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to which all Member States are signatories, Member States should develop more comprehensive approaches to tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting child well-being as part of overall national strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion.

ISSUE 3 – THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN ARE TOO OFTEN IGNORED WITH LITTLE OR NO ATTENTION TO HOW THEY ARE AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS

Most NRPs/NSRs do not sufficiently and often not all acknowledge the impact of the economic and financial crisis on children even if they often acknowledge its impact more generally. In most NRPs/NSRs there is no explicit acknowledgement of the need to protect children, particularly those at greatest risk of severe poverty and social exclusion and educational disadvantage, from the worst effects of financial consolidation or austerity packages. Furthermore, in the majority of NRPs and NSRs, measures that are included do not sufficiently reach out to the children most at risk of severe poverty and social exclusion such as children who are migrants and children from a migrant background, children from ethnic minorities (including Roma children), children with disabilities and children in/leaving institutions. Measures to address child poverty and social exclusion experienced by these groups in the NRPs and NSRs have been assessed as being three times as frequently inappropriate as they were considered suitable.

Recommendation 3: Much greater effort should be made to identify and protect the most vulnerable groups of children and their families from the worst effects of the economic and financial crisis and the introduction of financial consolidation/austerity measures. To this end greater use should be made of child impact assessments when austerity measures are being considered.

ISSUE 4 – INTEGRATED APPROACH OF EUROPE 2020 HAS NOT BEEN TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Although the NSRs are meant to underpin and elaborate on the social inclusion dimension of the NRPs, most Member States failed to develop clear linkages between the NRPs and NSRs so that they are mutually reinforcing. Also the contribution played by measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion – and child poverty in particular – to achieving other Europe 2020 headline targets is very infrequently acknowledged in the NRPs and NSRs. Likewise the potential contribution of work on other Europe 2020 targets to tackling child poverty and social exclusion is rarely highlighted.

Recommendation 4: The NSRs should be developed as a means of reporting on such national strategies and they should include a distinct section on combating child poverty and promoting child well-being. The NSRs would then underpin the social dimension of Europe 2020 and the NRPs. Greater attention must be given to developing synergies between poverty and social exclusion targets and other Europe 2020 targets and to mainstreaming children's rights and well-being goals across all policy areas.

ISSUE 5 – THERE IS TOO LITTLE EMPHASIS ON HOW EU MONEY IS GOING TO BE USED

Most NRPs/NSRs do not indicate the extent to which EU Structural Funds will be used to tackle child poverty, social exclusion and educational disadvantage. This is in spite of the fact that the next European budgetary framework (2014-2020) already makes a clear link with the Europe 2020 targets. It is vital that countries use available EU resources more strategically to tackle poverty and social exclusion and the social consequences of the crisis.

Recommendation 5: In the context of the next European Budgetary Framework much greater use should be made of EU Structural Funds for tackling child poverty and social exclusion.

ISSUE 6 – THERE IS NO RECOGNITION OF MEANINGFUL STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

The majority of Eurochild members were not consulted about the preparation of the NRPs or the NSRs. Some countries have even gone backwards in this regard. More generally consultation with children experiencing poverty and social exclusion and the organisations that work with them was very limited or non-existent in many countries. Where consultations did take place with stakeholders they were often very limited and inadequate. They were often too rushed and happened at too late a stage. Children and families experiencing poverty were rarely involved.

Recommendation 6: Meaningful involvement of civil society in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of NRPs and NSRs is crucial. These organisations are closest to the realities of children and families experiencing poverty and social exclusion. To this end the Social Protection Committee and the European Commission should develop a set of standards or guidelines for the involvement of stakeholders in the social dimensions of the Europe 2020 process and should monitor their implementation by Member States. Children and young people must be recognised as actors in their own right and actively consulted on policies and practices to promote their social inclusion and well-being at local, regional and national level.

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ABSTRACT

In June 2012 Eurochild carried out an analysis of the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and National Social Reports (NSRs) of EU Member States with the help of its member organisations. Based on a framework document, respondents provided information about the extent to which NRPs and NSRs take into account child poverty and well-being objectives under the poverty target and the education targets, based on Integrated Guidelines 10 and 9, respectively.

The compiled analysis of responses provides an EU-wide overview of the commitment to fight child poverty and social exclusion. A similar analysis was undertaken in 2011 of the first round of NRPs under the Europe 2020 strategy and Eurochild made a series of recommendations for strengthening the child poverty and well-being dimension of the process. It is disappointing that, from a child poverty and child well-being perspective, there has been little improvement in the 2012 NRPs and that the criticisms Eurochild made in 2011 remain valid. Also, the introduction of NSRs so far appears to have had little impact in strengthening the social inclusion dimension of the Europe 2020 process and their potential remains to be developed.

EUROCHILD

Eurochild is a network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to improve the quality of life of children and young people.

We envisage a Europe where every child grows up happy, healthy and confident, and respected as an individual in his/her own right. We work :

- to promote wide recognition of children as individual rights holders;*
- to convince policy and decision makers to put the best interest of the child in every decision affecting them;*
- to encourage all those working with and for children and their families to take a child-centred approach;*
- to give children and young people in Europe a voice by promoting participatory methods in child and family services, raising children's awareness of their rights and supporting child and youth led organisations.*

Eurochild currently has 116 full member organisations across 35 European countries.

For more information see: www.eurochild.org

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 2012 National Reform Programmes (NRPs) are intended to set out how Member States will achieve their national targets set in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy. In particular they are meant to explain how Member States intend to tackle obstacles to achieving the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 strategy and its Integrated Guidelines for the economic and employment policies of Member States. The most relevant guidelines from a child poverty and social inclusion perspective are Guidelines 9 (Improving the quality and performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary or equivalent education) and 10 (Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty) and¹. The 2012 National Social Reports (NSRs) are intended to provide a more in-depth coverage of social inclusion and social protection issues than is possible in the NRPs and thus to underpin and elaborate on the coverage of issues like child poverty and social exclusion and child well-being in the NRPs.

This report assesses to what extent child poverty and social exclusion have featured in the 2011 NRPs and NSRs and how effective the policy actions/measures proposed are likely to be in reducing child poverty and social exclusion and in contributing to achieving the Europe 2020 targets¹. The report is based primarily on assessments by Eurochild members and partners, from the following countries: Austria (Sonja Blum, Austrian Institute for Family Studies at the University of Vienna), Belgium (Tine Rommens, Kind en Gezin), Bulgaria (Dani Koleva, National Network for Children), Cyprus (Ninetta Kazantzis and Takis Konis, PCCPWC), Czech Republic (Michaela Hazdrova, League of Human Rights), Denmark (Inge Marie Nielsen, The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark), Estonia (Ene Tomberg, Estonian Union for Child Welfare), Finland (Hanna Heinonen, Central Union for Child Welfare), France (Fabienne Quiriau and Justine Honoré, CNAPE, National Federation of Associations for Child Protection), Germany (Katja Sieg and Ulrike Wisser, Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, AGJ), Greece (Ioanna Avloniti, The Smile of the Child), Hungary (Maria Herczog and Eva Flora Varga, Family Child Youth Association), Ireland (Maria Corbett, Children's Rights Alliance), Italy (Alessandra Pavani, Fondazione l'Albero della Vita), Lithuania (Dovile Sakaliene, Human Rights Monitoring Institute), the Netherlands (Beata Stappers, Defence for Children), Poland (Wielislawa Warzywoda-Kruszynska, University of Lodz), Portugal (Francisca Baptista da Silva, UNICEF Portugal), Romania (Daniela Gheorghe, NGOs Federation for Children), Slovakia (Anna Klimackova, National Centre for Equal Opportunities), Slovenia (Tamara Narat and Ružica Boškić, Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia), Spain (Gabriel González-Bueno, UNICEF Spain), Sweden (Marie Gustafsson, Örebro Regional Development Council), United Kingdom – England (Nick Davies, Children England), United Kingdom – Northern Ireland (Robyn McCready, Children in Northern Ireland), United Kingdom – Scotland (Marion Macleod, Children in Scotland), United Kingdom – Wales (Sean O'Neill, Children in Wales). The report has been drafted for Eurochild by an independent expert on European social inclusion policies, Hugh Frazer, who is adjunct professor at the National University of Ireland (Maynooth). Thanks go to Agata D'Addato (Eurochild Policy Officer) for the overall coordination and supervision, and to Reka Tunyogi (Eurochild Parliamentary Officer) and Ronan Mangan (Eurochild Policy Intern) for their help.

In the light of the findings of this report Eurochild makes a series of recommendations to the European Commission and Member States on how the NRP and NSR processes can be strengthened in future to give greater attention to the social inclusion and well-being of children.

It should be noted that in this report, where the experience in one or more individual Member States is highlighted, this is either because the Eurochild members from these countries have emphasised the particular point or because they represent a good illustration of the issue under discussion. Consequently, the fact that a particular country is mentioned does not necessarily mean that the point being made does not apply to other countries.

¹ Countries subject to an EU/IMF lending programme were not required to submit a full NRP but were asked to report to the Commission, in the form of a letter, on, among other things, their national Europe 2020 targets, state of lay and any possibly updates. They were asked to submit NSRs.

2. CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

2.1 RECOGNITION AND TARGETS IN NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMMES (NRP)

Child poverty not an important issue in most NRPs

Only a minority of Member States (e.g. AT, BE, BG, CY, DK, FI, HU, UK) identify child poverty and social exclusion at least to some extent as an important issue in their NRP. For instance, Austria names it to be one of the priorities in the field of social inclusion. Denmark does in general terms through a focus on the limitation of inequality, through giving special priority the reduction of poverty and disadvantaged children, and through initiatives to prevent social problems, especially in relation to socially disadvantaged children. In Greece, despite the fact that child poverty is not highlighted in the NRP, social exclusion of children is quite taken into consideration. In the UK the social exclusion chapter of the NRP acknowledges that child poverty is a priority, however, the rest of the NRP makes no reference to child poverty (except in relation to action that Wales is taking with respect to employment) and only passing reference to social exclusion.

Some of the countries which provide evidence that child poverty and social exclusion is a significant challenge (e.g. FI, FR, IE, PT, UK) in practice give little in-depth attention to the issue in their NRP. For example, in the French NRP, figures are given highlighting, for instance, the high level of relative poverty for lone parent and large families but no explicit reference is made to child poverty. In the Irish NRP children are listed as a 'vulnerable group' and it is noted that improving the position of these 'vulnerable groups' will be critical to the achievement of the national poverty target and reform of child incomes supports is also referred to. However, the level of emphasis on children in this section of the NRP does not suggest that child poverty is a priority issue. Many other countries (e.g. CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, IT, LT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK) also fail to give a specific focus to child poverty. For instance the Czech Republic, while devoting a section to poverty and social exclusion considers that poverty should be eliminated primarily by an open, functional and flexible labour market. Social exclusion and poverty is mainly deemed as an economic problem. Estonia's NRP does not cover the issue of child poverty separately. However, the issue of poverty is covered within the framework of the issues of education available to children, goals to improve the quality of the educational system, and adapting to demographic changes. Greece's NRP while mentioning social exclusion and poverty in general, doesn't explicitly address child poverty and only mentions it as a type of poverty with special characteristics. The Romanian NRP develops measures for poverty and social exclusion not for child poverty in particular. Similarly, child poverty is not identified separately in the Slovak NRP, but is hidden in other measures such as improving the access women/mothers to labour market such as support in child care, and support of parents and flexibility of the labour market. The Spanish NRP doesn't include any reference to child poverty (nor general poverty and social exclusion) even though in the 2011 NRP child poverty was specially quoted in the general objective of poverty and social exclusion reduction.

Lack of child poverty targets

Only a few Member States (EL, UK) have set specific child poverty targets in their NRPs as part of their agreed national target derived from the EU headline target on poverty and social exclusion. Ireland has agreed to adopt sub-targets for children but no further detail on these has been provided. For instance:

- Greece sets a not quite ambitious target of reducing the number of children (0-17 years) at -risk-of poverty by 100.000 by 2020, which is translated into a reduction of at-risk-of poverty rate for children (0-17) from 23% in 2008 to 18% in 2020;
- the United Kingdom NRP (and the separate Scottish NRP) contains five sufficiently ambitious targets in relation to children. These cover relative low income, absolute low income, low income and material deprivation, persistent poverty and children living in workless households. There are variations set by the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland and Wales.

In some Member States (e.g. BG, HU) while there isn't a separate child poverty target it is considered to be part of the overall national 2020 target for reducing poverty and social exclusion. For instance, in Bulgaria it is only

mentioned as part of the national target but it's not made explicit. Hungary sets an ambitious "general" poverty and social exclusion target that includes children as well and the NRP states that "In respect of the poverty target of the Europe 2020 strategy, Hungary aims to reduce the level of poverty amongst families with children, the number of people living in severe material deprivation and the number of people living in households with low work-intensity by 20 per cent each by 2020". The NRP (HU) acknowledges that: "Based on a breakdown of all three indicators into age groups, we may conclude that the indicators deteriorated most primarily amongst children."

Importance of anti-poverty measures for other Europe 2020 targets not acknowledged

The contribution played by measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion – and child poverty in particular – to achieving other Europe 2020 headline targets is very rarely acknowledged.² Most countries (e.g. BE, BG, CY, EL, ES, FR, NL, PL, PT, SI, UK) do not explicitly acknowledge this.

There are, however, some Member States (e.g. HU, IE, IT, LT, UKS) who do, at least to some extent, make a link. For instance, The Irish NRP mentions such a link a number of times, however with reference to poverty in general rather than child poverty in particular. Likewise the Italian NRP makes a link between tackling poverty and social exclusion and achieving other Europe 2020 targets but also does not refer to child poverty. The Lithuanian NRP suggests that the implementation of measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion of all residents – without any specific focus on child poverty – will contribute to achieving of the priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy. The Scottish NRP has specific sections outlining how a range of early years, childcare and educational activities and strategies contribute to the Scottish Government's performance objectives. Though individually they are not specifically linked to the Europe 2020 targets the document makes clear that all actions described in the NRP are intended to support the 2020 targets.

Sometimes the link is mentioned more the other way around. For instance, the Austrian NRP refers to synergy effects, which measures in other fields will have for reducing (child) poverty such as measures to raise women's participation in the labour market, to improve reconciliation of work and family life, and to reduce school drop-out rates of young people. The German NRP focuses on the reduction of the long term unemployment rate of 20% and considers that reducing the number of households with jobless adults should lead to the amelioration of living conditions and lead to more social integration. Likewise in the Netherlands the focus is more on more labour participation for adults (parents) as the (now demissionary) government suggests that only labour participation can support social inclusion. The Swedish NRP emphasises that the main determinant of children's financial vulnerability is generally that their parents lack work or education. Measures in these areas are therefore of great importance in trying to prevent children from living in financially vulnerable circumstances.

2.2 RECOGNITION AND TARGETS IN NATIONAL SOCIAL REPORT (NSR)

At the time of preparing this report NSRs from only 11 Member States (BG, CZ, DK (draft), FI, FR, HU, LU, NL (draft), PT, SI (draft), UK) were available for assessment even though these were due at the same time as the NRPs in mid April. The late/non arrival of NSRs reinforces the impression that social inclusion issues have been a low priority in the Europe 2020 process given that they were meant to deepen and underpin the social inclusion aspects of the NRPs.

² The Europe 2020 targets are:

- Employment: 75% of men/women 20-64 to be employed
- R&D/innovation: 3% of EU's GDP
- Climate change/ energy (20/20/20): 20% lower than 1990 for greenhouse gas emissions (30% if...), 20% of energy from renewables, 20% increase in energy efficiency
- Education: Reduce school drop-out below 10% & Ensure that at least 40% of 30-34s complete third level education
- Social inclusion: reduce by 20 million the number of people in EU "at risk of poverty or social exclusion"

Less than half NSRs identify child poverty and social exclusion as an important issue

Even though it could be expected that child poverty and social exclusion would feature more frequently in the NSRs than the NRPs in fact it features as a priority in slightly less than half of the NSRs that are available (BG, DK, HU, PT). In some cases (FI), while not specifically featured as a key issue the NSR does recognize children living in poverty when listing the groups most at risk of poverty and exclusion, such as single parents. It is not given special importance in many NSRs (CZ, FR, NL, SI, UK). However, the Czech NRP does give more details on measures contained in relevant policy documents already listed in the NRP such as the National Strategy Rights of Children 2012 – 2015 and in the National Action Plan which implements the National Strategy Rights of Children 2012 – 2015 are listed.

Few poverty targets

Only two countries (BG, HU) have set targets in their NSRs. For instance, Bulgaria has set a target of reducing the number of children living in poverty by 78,000 (30 % of the general national target and 25 % of the poor children in 2008). Hungary repeats the NRP overall poverty and social inclusion target of which children are part (see 2.1 above).

No child poverty targets are set in the majority of the NSR's available (FI, FR, LT, NL, PT, UK).

Importance of anti-poverty measures for other Europe 2020 targets not acknowledged

Most NSRs (e.g. BG, DK, FR, NL, PT, UK) do not recognise that measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion – and child poverty in particular – will also contribute to achieving other Europe 2020 headline targets. However, Hungary does to some extent acknowledge that measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion – and child poverty in particular – will also contribute to achieving other Europe 2020 headline targets. However, the NRP highlights the employment issues primarily and stresses that access to employment is the optimal way out of poverty and social exclusion. It acknowledges that an increase in employment reduces child poverty and social exclusion and that this is necessary for the “inclusive growth”.

2.3 SYNERGIES BETWEEN NRP AND NSR

Most NRPs (e.g. BG, FI, FR, HU, PT, SI, UK) fail to establish a link with the NSR and in particular to indicate that measures to tackle child poverty and social exclusion are developed in more detail in the NSR. However, a few (CZ, DK, NL) do to some extent. In the Czech Republic there is a link between NSR and NRP. NSR provides additional information to the several adopted national strategies. The NSR describes the various strategies, but not in detail, although, unfortunately, a link among those strategies is missing. In the Netherlands there is a link but details concerning children inform only about financial support for better access to (pre-school) education.

There is slightly more frequent recognition in several NSRs (BG, FR, HU) that measures they describe to tackle child poverty and promote well-being will contribute to the achievement of the social inclusion goals of the NRP and Europe 2020. For instance, while the French NRP makes no cross reference to the NSR, the NSR specifically makes a cross reference to the NRP in relation to measures to combat poverty and social exclusion and to the French government's strategy for including Roma. Also the Finnish NSR recognises that its content is connected to the Europe 2020 Strategy report prepared simultaneously by the Finnish Ministry of Finance. The United Kingdom NSR states that progress against the EU headline social exclusion target, primarily through the UK's child poverty strategy, is covered in the NRP. It makes no other reference to child poverty.

2.4 COMPREHENSIVE AND RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

2.4.1 Lack of comprehensive approach

In many countries (e.g. BE, BG, CY, DE, IE, IT, LT, NL, PT, RO, UK) the measures to tackle child poverty and social exclusion outlined in the NRP and/or NSR are not sufficiently wide-ranging and comprehensive. In so far

as child poverty and social exclusion is addressed it is primarily focussed on increasing parents' access to labour market and tackling educational disadvantage. Other issues such as income support, early education and child care, family support, access to services (health, social services and child protection, housing and environment, and sport, leisure and cultural activities), tackling geographic concentrations of disadvantage are poorly or not at all addressed in most NRPs and NSRs (see Table 8.1 for more information on this). Too often measures are piecemeal and not part of an overall national strategy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion and to promote child well-being. For instance:

- in Belgium, though there are poverty strategies (linked to employment and re-training) there is nothing specifically outlined for children. There is a specific reference to youth and young person's wellbeing but this is in the context of unemployment, lack of education and exclusion. The NRP is more like a list of separate actions and projects, without a common view or framework which would guarantee a comprehensive approach;
- in Bulgaria measures are piecemeal and ad-hoc. While there is an attempt to move towards a more comprehensive and rights based approach with the drafts of a new Children's and School and Pre-school Education Act it's not clear when they would be approved;
- in France the measures in the NRP and NSR relevant to the struggle against poverty and social exclusion are not specific to children. However key measures such as the Revenu de Solidarité Active (RSA), the national strategy for accommodation and access to housing for homeless and measures ensuring the fundamental rights of the most vulnerable, because they benefit families, contribute to combating child poverty though they are not specifically designed to address their situation;
- in Hungary the focus is on material well-being. There is no rights based, comprehensive approach which harmonises the sector based programs. This is despite the fact that all ministries have been amalgamated into one ministry – Human Resources – including education, health, social policy, labour, culture;
- in Ireland, aside from the commitment to sub-targets for children, there are no other measures outlined and children are listed only as one of a list of 'vulnerable groups', rather than being singled out for attention;
- in Lithuania the NRP provides for the measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion in general – without any focus on child poverty and social exclusion. Consequently, the mentioned measures are not sufficiently wide-ranging and comprehensive as they do not reach out to the most vulnerable persons -- children -- and fail to promote child well-being;
- in Portugal child poverty in itself is not addressed in a multidimensional way rather it is addressed as a social emergency problem dealt through specific and isolated measures that are included in a broader Social Emergency Plan that cover all vulnerable groups;
- in Romania child well-being is discussed but only for children with disabilities and vulnerable groups and there are no clearly defined objectives for beneficiaries, goals and deadlines; everything is stated generally quoting the EU documents;
- in the Slovenian NRP measures are not comprehensive and wide-ranging but this may be due to the fact that in Slovenia the child poverty rate is lower than in most EU countries;
- in the United Kingdom NRP the measures are not sufficient wide-ranging or comprehensive. Some policies will reach out to the most vulnerable and promote child well-being but their potential positive impacts are dwarfed by the negative outcomes produced by other policies and the wider economic climate. There is limited coverage of measures being taken by the Welsh Government thus there is a lack of the necessary detail within either the NRP or NSP from a Wales perspective.

Only a few countries (e.g. BE, HU, UK) directly link measures in their NRPs/NSRs on child poverty to an overall national strategy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. For instance, in Belgium Flanders has drawn up a specific action programme for combating child poverty that focuses on children from age 0-3 (to be reinforced in 2012) and Wallonia has the Children's Rights 2011 – 2014 programme. The Hungarian NSR includes a range of measures in line with the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy. These cover areas such as child welfare, employment, housing anti-discrimination, early childhood care services, family support and child welfare services, school social work services, juvenile probation services. It also identifies as priority target groups the

Roma, children living in poverty and the population of disadvantaged regions. In the United Kingdom the government published child poverty and social mobility strategies in April 2011 as well as a social justice strategy in March 2012. The Northern Ireland Executive published their Child Poverty Strategy in March 2011 which sets out the actions proposed by the Northern Ireland Executive to address the issue of Child Poverty. There is a Scottish Government Child Poverty Strategy. However, the Welsh Government's Child Poverty strategy is not referenced in either the NRP or NSR though the Government's overarching Programme for Government, where measures to tackle poverty are identified, is referenced. In Bulgaria a draft strategy for reduction of poverty and promotion of social inclusion 2012 – 2020 is being developed and it is envisaged that this will be submitted for review of the Council of Ministers in June/July. However, the National Network for Children (NNC) and its members have neither participated in its development, nor were consulted on its contents. In France the measures included in the NRP/NSR would form part of an overall strategy to tackle child poverty but there other measures in France which are more specifically focussed on tackling child poverty and would be more central to an overall strategy;

More generally in many countries (e.g. DE, FI, FR, NL) there is a lack of specific measures focussed on child poverty and social exclusion as the focus is almost exclusively on economic and employment issues. For instance, the Finnish NRP and NSR are focused on employment, public expenditure, competition and issues far from any social dimension or issues. The French NRP amongst other things refers to the development of child care so as to facilitate the reconciliation of family and professional life but these measures are more designed to enable the employment of parents and there is a need to develop measures more specifically focussed on children and adapting responses to the situation of children living in poverty.

2.4.2 Limited focus on children's rights

In a small number of countries' NRPs/NSRs some elements of a rights-based approach to tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting child wellbeing can be detected, even if there is still a long way to go. For instance:

- the Belgian NRP makes specific reference to the Federation Wallonia – Brussels where the action plan *Children's Rights 2011-2014* provides for information, education and training with regards to children's rights and the fight against social inequalities and discrimination. The ambition is to guarantee an adequate living standard for all children, with special focus on housing, parenting support, to guarantee quality care, education and training for all children, to fight against inequalities in the field of health and to combat child abuse. However, while there are a lot of measures that reflect a children's rights approach it is still waiting for the real result.
- the Estonian NRP reports on a policy document *Smart Parents, Good Children, Strong Society: 2012–2020 Development Plan for Children and Families*. One of its strategic goals is to set up a system of combined benefits and services to support the adequate financial coping of families and thereby offer families a continuing feeling of security;
- in Greece, although it is not mentioned explicitly, a children's rights approach is evident in some parts of the NRP, especially with regards to the educational reform such as measures for children with special needs, children with serious health problems as well as measures to include Roma children in the educational system;
- in the United Kingdom the Scottish Government is currently developing legislation that will both enshrine children's rights in law and set out specific service entitlements for children. It will also place duties on service providers (such as local authorities and National Health Service Boards) to deliver those entitlements. The intention of the legislation and the policies it seeks to give force to is to promote early and preventative support for children and families, to achieve better service integration, to coordinate interventions for individual children more effectively and to reduce inequalities.

However, in the majority of NRPs and NSRs (e.g. AT, DE, DK, CY, HU, IE, IT, NL, PT, RO, SE, UK) there is no emphasis on children's rights. For instance:

- in the Cypriot NRP only education is explicitly mentioned as "a right". No other issues are seen as "children's rights" and there is no mention of the CRC or other instruments for children's rights. A feel

national strategy specific to children does not exist as children, except when it comes to the educational system, are viewed as part of families and benefits etc come as part of family support measures;

- in Hungary the children's rights approach does not appear frequently as child poverty is rather viewed as an economic and social policy issue;
- in Ireland the approach to addressing child poverty – through the national poverty target and the reform of child income supports – is more structural and process oriented than rights focused;
- in the Netherlands children's rights are not mentioned in neither the NRP nor NSR. A children's rights approach is not at all visible;
- in Portugal, while special support is given to children from the poorest households or from households with both parents unemployed and while there are measures to address the needs of children with disabilities, strategies are not integrated and reflect a charitable approach to poverty rather than a human rights approach;
- in Romania, although the NRP tackles social inclusion, integration and increasing the life quality of the children, children's rights are not specifically reflected in to the NRP;
- in Sweden no links are made in the NRP to the National Strategy to Strengthen the Rights of the Child even though this strategy says a lot about vulnerable groups and a link between these documents should be obvious;
- in the United Kingdom, despite the rhetoric towards promoting and implementing children's rights in Wales and the early progress being made around developing a child rights approach since the passing of recent legislation, there is no reference to this activity being undertaken in Wales and there are no measures to progress this in either the NRP or NSR.

2.4.3 Limited focus on the most vulnerable children

In the majority of NRPs and NSRs measures do not sufficiently reach out to the most vulnerable children and promote their well-being. For instance:

- in Cyprus children are not mentioned as an age group and there is no specific mention of different vulnerable groups besides a lukewarm approach for "foreign speaking" children in the educational system;
- in Ireland's NRP a breakdown of vulnerable groups that fall under the 'children' umbrella (e.g. migrant children, traveller children, children in lone parent families etc.) is not mentioned at all;
- in the Netherlands the most vulnerable children are not mentioned in neither the NSR nor NRP.

When making their assessment of the NRPs/NSRs Eurochild members were asked to fill in a summary table indentifying the key groups of children at risk of severe poverty and social exclusion and the appropriateness of the policy responses in the NRPs and NSRs. These key groups include children who are migrants and children from a migrant background, children from ethnic minorities (including Roma children), children with disabilities and children in/leaving institutions. The appropriateness of the policy responses in the NRPs/NSRs for these key groups is rated as being more than three times as likely to be not at all appropriate or not appropriate as it is appropriate or perfectly appropriate (see table 8.2).

2.4.4 Strength and weaknesses of measures outlined

When assessing the NRPs and NSRs Eurochild members analysed how well the different key policy challenges are addressed. Their findings are summarised in Table 8.1. Overall their rankings show that key policy challenges in relation to child poverty and social exclusion are twice as likely to be little/poorly or not all addressed (165 times) as they are to be somewhat or very well addressed (83 times) in the NRP. Surprisingly this gap increases further for the NSRs (25:91). However, there are in fact very big variations between challenges. There are two areas where the challenges are more frequently very well or somewhat addressed than little or poorly or not at all addressed. These are the challenges of poor access to labour market for parents and high level of educational disadvantage (in particular early school leaving and leaving with no/low qualifications). On the other hand the challenges relating to income support, child care and childhood services, family and parenting support, access to services (health, social services and child protection, housing and environment,

sport/culture/leisure), and geographic concentrations were all much more likely to be poorly or not at all addressed.

Main strengths

Given the lack of overall rights-based strategies in most NRPs and NSRs it is not surprising that measures announced in many NRPs/NSRs are too limited and inadequate. However, some measures and strategies are singled out as being positive. For instance:

- in Belgium, the fact that Flanders has a solid action plan with specific measures to tackle child poverty, is a very important and positive thing. There is an outlined implementation plan and schedule. There is also a working group that follows the progresses. In Wallonia the action plan *Children's Rights 2011-2014* provides for information, education and training with regards to children's rights and the fight against social inequalities and discrimination. The ambition is to guarantee an adequate living standard for all children, with special focus on housing, parenting support, to guarantee quality care, education and training for all children, to fight against inequalities in the field of health and to combat child abuse;
- in Bulgaria the draft new Children's Act and the School and Pre-school Education Act and the political will to close institutions for children and develop integrated services are evidence of the desire to move to a more comprehensive and rights based approach;
- in Hungary it is encouraging that the government is in principle aiming to tackle child poverty by strengthening employment and social, educational services, decreasing discrimination;
- in Ireland improving child literacy is identified as important to addressing educational disadvantage which is linked to addressing child poverty. Also the commitment to set a child poverty target was arrived at following a comprehensive consultation process with stakeholders;
- in Portugal the increase in the number of infra structures for early childhood and the adjustment of the unemployment subsidy (10%) in case of families with children where both parents are unemployed are positive developments;
- in the United Kingdom the Pupil Premium will target additional funding on poorer school students could have a positive impact on poverty while the extension of the free early education offer and simplification of the benefits system could reduce the poverty trap, helping disadvantaged parents into work. In Northern Ireland the Programme for Government has introduced a Delivering Social Change framework including strategic actions to reduce child poverty based on an outcomes based model and to address intergenerational poverty; implementation of a strategy for integrated and affordable childcare; and legislation to tackle age discrimination. In Scotland 'due regard' to the UNCRC will be required to be given in decisions of Scottish Government Ministers thus embedding to some extent children's rights in domestic law. They will convey specific entitlements and require public services to deliver them. In Wales the main strengths of the measures listed is an acceptance that tackling poverty and social exclusion is a Welsh Government priority and that actions around improving educational attainment, reducing health inequalities, enhancing the prospects for employment and intervening early will go some way to both mitigate the impact of poverty on low income families and help prevent poverty in the first instance.

Main weaknesses

There are many weaknesses or gaps in the measures outlined in the NRPs/NSRs. The following are examples from some countries:

- in Belgium there is no specific mention of wellbeing, quality children services, mainstreaming child poverty or the defining of specific targets to the reduction of child poverty and exclusion. Also a lot of measures are short-term and thus not very efficient and the NRP does not provide a sufficiently comprehensive view;
- in Bulgaria there is: insufficient attention to ensuring adequate housing and appropriate living conditions; lack of focus on children at high risk such as children of Roma origin and children with disabilities; a risk that deinstitutionalisation pilot projects will lead to the replacement of large-scale institutions with small ones; insufficient emphasis on integrated services which can prevent problems; lack of commitment to strengthening the capacity of child protection bodies; insufficient attention to improving access to and

affordability of health services; and a failure to develop a system for independent monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment of policies and legislation;

- in Cyprus “educational reform” is presented as the ultimate and only solution to all problems faced by children, totally disregarding social issues and children’s well being;
- in Greece there is not enough priority given to child poverty, even if poverty in general is a very important and frequently mentioned issue, This means, that when it comes to poverty, no special attention is given to the needs of children;
- in Hungary the approach is too fragmented; there is a lack of adequate family support (cash and in-kind, services) for those in need, active labour market policies are missing; public employment does not give adequate standard of living for the most vulnerable families; the decrease of the compulsory school age to 16 years and the weakening of access to secondary education of deprived children and the withdrawal of the family allowance in families where children do not attend school over 16, increase the risk of severe poverty;
- in Ireland key weaknesses are: the high level of poverty experienced by children in lone parent families and thus the link between supports for lone parents and addressing child poverty is not addressed; measures are not rights-based and there is no reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; the failure to mention measures that will negatively affect child poverty rates e.g. cuts to the Child Benefit payments in recent years (specifically to large families) and the withdrawal of support to lone parents once the child reaches a specific age; legislation withdrawing One Parent Family Payment to lone parents when their youngest child reaches the age of seven has been enacted but this has not been noted in the NRP and will seriously undermine any attempts to lift lone parent families and their children out of poverty;
- in Italy The Child perspective is not considered, measures are not part of an overall mainstreaming strategy of child rights’ protection;
- in Portugal there is: a failure to address the root causes of poverty (such as low wages or income, low intensity work); the lack of a preventive and integrated approach; a failure to develop policies which are evidence based and the lack of basis for monitoring; a tendency for measures to be too targeted just at families and not at children themselves;
- in the Netherlands focus is put on the parents and their responsibility to have a job and not on the well-being of children and the State’s obligation to support children in need. Most vulnerable children are not mentioned at all in the NRP nor NSR;
- in Romania measures are very general referring to the number of the children that will be integrated, the measure for social inclusion, the access of the services etc. The NRP gives only the general idea and not the clear and measurable measure;
- in Sweden whereas the 2011 NRP addressed needs for improvement in social services and addressed measures for this there is nothing about this this in 2012 although social services meet the most vulnerable children, children in care, disabled children, refugee children, asylum seeking children without parents and so on. There is nothing about these groups in the 2012 NRP;
- in the United Kingdom, while some policies may be beneficial in isolation, the wider agenda of the UK Government combined with the worrying economic environment will most likely be detrimental to those living in poverty. Most prominently, the decision to cut £18bn a year from benefits and reduce funding for local government by 25% by the end of this Parliament will have a major impact on child poverty and social exclusion and even positive policies may be undermined. In Northern Ireland the Executive has failed to report on its child poverty strategy and the child poverty action plan is still outstanding. It has also excluded its commitment to end severe child Poverty from its current programme for Government. The government’s Delivering Social Change framework may be so wide-ranging that it may dilute the Government’s child poverty obligations. In Wales there is an overreliance on employment as a route out of poverty with less detail around other measures, such as early years programmes, enhancing childcare provision and early intervention and prevention measures, which can have a positive impact on a child and their families well-being.

3. EDUCATION

3.1 RECOGNITION AND TARGETS

In many countries (e.g. BG, EL, FR, NL, PT, SE, SK, UK, UKS) the education targets set by their country in the context of the overall EU target are appropriate.

The following are some examples of education targets set in the NRPs/NSRs:

- 11 % early school leavers by 2020 and 36 % of 30-34 years old with completed high education; (BG)
- keep the school drop-out rate at 5,5%, and have 32% of people aged 30 to 34 years having completed tertiary education; (CZ)
- reduce the early school drop out rate of young people between 18 and 24 years old to less than 10% (from 11,1% in 2009) (DE)
- 95 per cent of a youth cohort must complete at least an upper secondary education; (DK)
- increasing the share of those having completed tertiary level education or equivalent to 30.3 per cent within the population aged 30-34 and reducing the share of early school-leavers (those without education or training in lower secondary education) to 10 per cent within the population aged 18-24; (HU)
- reduce the percentage of 18-24 year olds with at most lower secondary education and not in further education and training to 8%; increase the share of 30-34 year olds who have completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 60%; (IE)
- achieve a level of early school leaving of 9.5 % et a level of diplomas in higher education of 50 % of the population aged 17 to 33; (FR)
- reduce school drop out rate to 10% by 2020 (from 23,2% in 2011); (PT)
- the percentage of 18–24-year-olds who have not completed upper secondary school and who are not studying is to be less than 10 per cent by 2020; (SE)

However, in many Member States (e.g. BE, CY, CZ, FR, IE, PL, SE,SI, UK), the overall education targets do not sufficiently and sometimes not all take into account children most at risk of educational disadvantage. For instance in Cyprus the target does not adequately address educational disadvantage, neither for Roma children nor for other vulnerable groups (disability, migrant/foreign speaking children, socially deprived etc). In Italy there is no reference to Roma children. In France the targets are general and are not broken down for those children most at risk of being disadvantaged. In Lithuania none of the targets take into account such persons at risk of educational disadvantage such as Roma children, ethnic minorities and disabled persons. Ireland's headline education does not include any sub-targets to specifically address key areas including: early childhood education and care, literacy and numeracy, special educational needs, measures for children at greatest risk (e.g. Traveller, Roma and children migrant). In Poland while the NRP underlines the necessity to provide early education and reduce school drop-outs, children at risk of educational disadvantages are not mentioned. In Sweden the overall target is appropriate but it does not take into account children at risk or younger children's situation in education.

The following are examples of groups of children at particular risk being taken into account. For instance:

- in Spain there are plans to reinforce the *Plan for educational support and guidance for children with sociocultural disadvantages* (PROA) which includes actions with schools, families and local communities in order to guarantee equity in access to quality education;
- in Denmark a National strategy for Roma inclusion has been launched to combat poverty and social exclusion and to facilitate best practices and agreed principles for Roma inclusion to the municipal level;
- in Finland the National Policy on Roma promotes equality and inclusion of the Roma in different spheres of life and the special needs (in education) of the Roma children are taken into account quite well;

- in Germany, while there are no specific targets set for special groups such as young people with migrant background or from socially disadvantaged areas who are known to be mostly exposed to school drop out, nevertheless specific programmes and measures at national and regional level are implemented in order to address the needs of specific groups;
- in Greece special measures are taken for the inclusion of more Roma children in education, as well as children with special needs and children with serious health problems that cannot attend school;
- in Hungary there is an expansion and reinforcement of quality education in early childhood pursuant to the public education law in force as of September 2012, effective as of September 2014, kindergarten attendance will be compulsory from the age of 3, rather than 5 as at present;
- in Portugal both the NSR and NRP mention the need to reinforce measures to address under achievement in education in areas of social disadvantage, particularly by reinforcing schools (through increase in expenditure, support expenditure with staff and new activities) in problematic neighborhoods through the program Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária (Educational Priority Intervention Territories) for students at risk or in a situation of social exclusion;

3.2 APPROPRIATENESS OF MEASURES

Many Member States (AT, BE, BG, CY, DE, EE, ES, FR, HU, IE, IT, NL, PT, SE, UK) highlight specific education measures in the NRP and/or NSR which contribute to reducing educational disadvantage. There are also often specific measures on early childhood care and education. For instance, in the Austrian NRP, the main focus for tackling child poverty is on reducing the social ‘inheritance’ of educational opportunities. Also early childhood education and care is possibly the most important field through which the NRP states child poverty will be tackled. In the Netherlands there is more money available for municipalities for pre-school education.

In Sweden the Government has a strong focus on new educational measures. What is important is to include all children in these measures and be sure that also vulnerable groups and children in disadvantaged housing areas will be reached by this. However, in some NRPs (CZ, DK, FI, PL, RO, SI) there is a lack of concrete measures focusing on educational disadvantage, for instance in Poland education measures are just considered as measures to modernize labour market. In Romania the measures are formulated very generally (e.g. “to reduce the child educational disadvantage”) and there are some ideas put forward but the real plan or the real measures are missing.

Strengths

The area in which positive measures are identified most frequently are developing pre-school/early education especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. AT, BE, BG, CY, DE, EE, FR, HU, IT, LT, NL, PL, PT, SI, UKE). Other key areas identified include:

- subsidising care services for women re-entering labour market (CY)
- imposing compulsory school attendance for 6-year old children from 2014; (PL)
- introducing measures to prevent school drop outs (AT, BG, IT) e.g. through full day activities which combine lessons with extracurricular activities at school and initiatives focusing on special groups such as migrants
- developing “second chance” education programmes and making school curriculum more relevant and improving basic competencies of students to reduce disparities (BG)
- improving education and linking it better with labour market requirements (SK)
- taking measures to increase the employability of teenagers (AT)
- developing career counselling and advice (BG, IT)
- improving the training and qualifications of staff (BG, IT)
- focussing on education priority areas (PT)

- extending the Delivering Equality of Education in Schools programme, the only programme for addressing educational disadvantage and the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy; (IE)
- promoting equal opportunities through the boarding schools of excellence, the program FLASH, funding of scholarships, using specific tutoring, help for extracurricular activities, access to the canteen, access to culture, leisure and vacation; (FR)
- developing “local partnerships for education” which should promote the participation of disadvantaged children and youth in cultural and non-formal education activities; (DE)
- providing additional funding for schools attended by disadvantaged students through the Pupil Premium; supporting those from poorer backgrounds to access higher education; providing funding to support disengaged 16-17 year olds access education and training; introducing Free Schools which the Government hopes will drive up educational standards; introducing plans to reform schools, vocational education, skills and welfare provision with the aim of increasing the number of young people who are engaged in education, training and work; (UKE)
- providing a learning grant for young people aged 19+ and living in low income households who wish to attend a further education college; introducing a training programme (Go Wales) to improve the employability of students and the retention of graduate skills; introducing a scheme (Reach the Heights) for young people aged 11-19 in the most deprived parts of Wales to help them remain engaged and to re-engage in employment, education or training; (UKW)
- introducing new curricular approach in all Scottish schools and pre-schools, structured monitoring of literacy and numeracy, reform of post-16 education, post-school education funding and development of university education. (UKS)

Gaps and weaknesses

In some NRPs/NSRs there is an insufficient connection made between the targets set and the measures to achieve them. For instance, in Cyprus the problem is not in the targets set but in the absence of concrete actions, policies and measures to reach targets.

The following are some of the gaps and weaknesses in relation to educational disadvantage in the NRPs/NSRs where more attention is needed or where policies being introduced have a negative impact:

- improving access to and quality of education for children at high risk of disadvantage (e.g. Roma children and children with disabilities); developing and introducing in practice early childhood standards; (BG)
- better targeting education measures to take account of the special needs of vulnerable groups; reviewing mainstream education to identify whether children with disabilities are really benefitting from this method; improving programs offered to foreign speaking children during school hours; (CY)
- singling out Traveller children for attention especially in view of significant cuts in supports for Traveller children in education in recent years; evaluating the effectiveness of various supports for children with special educational needs developing a clear strategy; including references to the introduction of the universal free pre-school year which plays an important role in addressing educational disadvantage in the early years and is an important and successful investment made by Government in recent years should have been included in the NRP; (IE)
- guaranteeing sufficient access for all children in need and including more measures to reduce educational disadvantages at all levels of education; (NL)
- strengthening in-formal education and improving cooperation between schools and non-governmental organisations working with vulnerable children; (PL)
- developing civic education; promoting social and psychological support to both students and family; (PT)
- addressing the impact of cuts in educational grants, childhood care (0-3 years) and general educational budgets to children (reduced in no less than 3.000 € million in the last two years); (ES)

- developing links between education and social services to ensure that children with different forms of special needs get the services they need; including parental support as part of the links to education and school as parental support is important through the whole childhood; (SE)
- reducing subsidized care for the second child in kindergarten and encouraging childcare at home (especially for the first age group (0-3)) is an inappropriate measure, because of its negative effects on women's participation in the labour market; (SI)
- replacing the Education Maintenance Allowance with a less generous system, deep cuts to youth support services and the merging of the Connexions service with adult careers provision; (UK)
- not enough about specific disadvantage, nothing about under 3s, and little about younger children; (UKS)
- neither the NRP nor the NSP makes reference to early childhood care and education measures and programmes despite a number being in place in Wales, including programmes which operate in the most deprived areas of Wales to re-engage parents and provide support for childcare provision and basic training and skills development. (UKW)

4. THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC/FINANCIAL CRISIS AND AUSTERITY PACKAGES

Most NRPs/NSRs (e.g. BE, BG, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK) do not sufficiently or do not all acknowledge the impact of the economic and financial crisis and financial consolidation measures on children even if they often acknowledge its impact more generally. For instance, the Belgian NRP does not directly mention the impact on children but it does emphasise the important role that social security plays in protecting the population against the consequences of the crisis and its role as an important economic stabiliser. The Irish NRP does not single children out as a specific group affected by the crisis, however it does note the impact of the crisis repeatedly and its consequences more broadly. The Italian NRP does not openly mention the impact on children as the family is mostly referred to. The French NRP and NSR make several references to the impact of the crisis on employment, economic policy and the public finances but don't analyse the consequences for children and young people. The UK NRP and NSR focus heavily on the economic environment but make no reference to the impact on children.

There are some countries which however do, to some extent, highlight the impact of the crisis (e.g. AT, CY, EL, HU, PT, UKS). For instance, the Austrian NRP, while not discussing the impact of the crisis in detail does, however, point out that through an increased labour market participation of women, the income situation of households could be improved and child poverty could be reduced during the last years – despite the crises. The Cypriot NRP does acknowledge the impact of the crisis but everything is measured financially and the social dimension is not present in most of the chapters. There is no mainstreaming of the social pillar. The Portuguese NRP does not directly mention the impact of the crisis on children, however, the NSR acknowledges the impact of the crisis on unemployment and therefore, in households. It mentions particularly that the percentage of children living in households where no adults are employed increased from 4.7% in 2008 to 7% in 2010. It also underlines the level of family debts but does not relate it directly to children. The Scottish NRP includes a chapter on the impact of the crisis with quite a bit about tackling youth unemployment (with specific support for care leavers) but nothing about younger children.

In most NRPs/NSRs (e.g. BE, BG, CY, ES, FR, IE, FI, LT, NL, RO, SE, SI, SK) there is no explicit acknowledgement of the need to protect children at risk of poverty and social exclusion and educational disadvantage from the worst effects of austerity packages.

However, there are a few exceptions (e.g. DE, EE, EL, PL, PT, UKS). For instance:

- in Estonia child welfare and social workers as well as school and kindergarten teachers make sure that poverty does not lessen a child's possibilities to cope with education and studies and also engage in after school activities. Also In cooperation with the Open Estonia Foundation, in two summers the Union for Child Welfare has carried out a child summer camp project where 1200 children at risk have been granted free camp passes;
- in Germany there is a general understanding that austerity packages should not harm the living situation of families and children but, actual policy strategy focuses on prevention of crises. Since 2011 an additional financial support is provided for families living on social welfare allowance. The additional funds are meant to promote a higher education level and prevent social exclusion, through financial support for school lunch, participation in music school or sport clubs as well as assistance or coaching in learning;
- in the Greek NRP it is mentioned that measures will be adopted in order to limit the social consequences of the crisis for the most vulnerable and promote social integration: eg. provision of integrated local support and care services for poor families with children;
- in Hungary there are: integrated regional programmes to enhance the inclusion opportunities of children and their families; efforts to enhance participation in the labour market by alleviating the impact of the tax reform on low earners in a budget-neutral manner; efforts to strengthen measures to encourage women's participation in the labour market by expanding childcare and pre-school facilities;
- in the Polish NRP there is an emphasis on developing a coherent policy for supporting families and child care. Measures covered include family support, substitute parental care, financing of adoption centres and a programme for supporting children and families in the smallest administrative units;

- in Portugal the Social Emergency Plan (Plano de Emergência Social) is a short term measure that establishes a solidarity network of social canteens for children. There are also other measures for families such as social house renting and measures to promote access to services and equipments (in transports, health, energy, etc.). Another measure is the 10% increase of the unemployment subsidies for families with both parents unemployed and with children at their care. This is also available for single parents. At the time of the announcement of this measure, the government mentioned it had already identified 4.400 families in this situation;
- in the UK the Scottish Government is committed to protecting children from the impact of the crisis and austerity measures as evidenced in its efforts to protect children and other vulnerable groups from the impact of the UK government welfare reforms.

5. EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS

Most NRPs/NSRs do not indicate the extent to which EU Structural Funds will be used to tackle child poverty and social exclusion and tackle educational disadvantage. However there are several countries where the role played by these funds is mentioned. For instance:

- in Austria, the NRP highlights that through the Funds, measures are financed in the field of employment (e.g. for migrants, for women with childcare duties, for older workers);
- in Bulgaria the European Social Fund is currently performing vital functions for the employment and educational system. Employment policy would collapse without the ESF. The extreme budgetary cuts in 2010, preserved in 2011 and 2012 would bring social disaster if for example the gap in the National Employment Plan was not at least partially compensated by measures from the Human Resource Development Operational Programme. Furthermore, the ESF has helped preserve important functions of the education system as the training of teachers and the organisation of extra-curricular activities for the students;
- in Cyprus there is specific mention of ESF funding proportion for several measures to be taken. For training of teachers: pre-training is cofunded by the ESF at 85% and so is the in-service teacher's training that aim at implementing the new educational system allegedly solving all educational problems in Cyprus, for all groups of children! Mention is also under the continuation of the ZEP (Zones of Educational Priorities) scheme where the ESF contributes by 85% of the total expenditure. Additionally, establishing reception classes for migrants, asylum seekers etc. (including but not specific to children) is co funded by the ESF at 70%. A number of other measures under education that refer to young people also mention ESF cofunding;
- in France the NRP states that the ESF will be used for particular actions to integrate young people into employment;
- the German NRP does not specifically say how much is spent on child poverty reduction but it includes a list of measures at national and regional level. A wide range of ESF funded programmes seek to overcome educational disadvantages, like the national initiative "Jugend Stärken" (Empower Youth) etc.;
- in Hungary Structural Funds are used for improving the employability and labour market chances of most disadvantaged groups, those living in segregated housing environments; for enhancing the chances of inclusion for children and Families; and for the development of vocational training in higher education;
- in Italy Structural Funds are used in favour of a cohesion strategy, to reduce regional differences, with a quarter going to education to improve basic competences of students and therefore reduce disparity, to fight early school leaving, to improve teachers' competences, to improve orientation services to students in school and job choices. They are also being used to improve also early education (teacher's preparation, buildings' improvement, economic support to families in need);
- in the United Kingdom the NRP states that the Government will invest £448m in the Troubled Families programme, adding value to the European Social Fund investment. However, that is the only mention of EU Structural Funds in relation to child poverty and social exclusion. However, the UK Scotland NRP emphasises the use of Structural Funds for economic regeneration and employment activity and Children in Scotland is actively lobbying (with some degree of positive response from the SG) on the direct use of the structural funds to support development of high quality ECEC. Within the section on Education, the UK NRP makes reference to both the graduate employability programme 'Go Wales' where £16.7 million has been invested through ESF, and the Reach the Heights' engagement programme for 11-19 year olds in the most disadvantaged areas which has up to £20 million provided by ESF.

6. STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

The majority of Eurochild members (e.g. AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UAE, UKN, UKW) were not consulted about the preparation of the NRP. Some countries have even gone backwards in this regard. For instance, Eurochild's Spanish member was consulted about the NRP in 2011 but not in 2012.

In a few countries Eurochild members were consulted about the NRP (CY, DK (draft), EE, IE, NL, UKS). A slightly higher proportion (BG, PT, SI) were consulted about the NSR but many were not (CY, FI, HU, NL, UAE, UKS, UKW).

Where some consultations have taken place with stakeholders they were often very limited and inadequate. Consultations were often too rushed and at too late a stage. Children and families experiencing poverty were rarely involved. For instance:

- in Bulgaria, while both the NPR and the NSR emphasise the importance of stakeholder involvement, the NPR was uploaded on a NGO resource web-portal for consultation only a week before the deadline, a ridiculously short time given the length of the document and the time it takes for an umbrella organisation such as NNC to consult its members;
- in Cyprus the draft NRP was sent for comments but there was no follow up meeting or discussion. While the NRP does put importance on consulting stakeholders and NGOs in general children or families experiencing poverty are not acknowledged at all and direct participation of people experiencing poverty is not recognised;
- in Portugal although the NSR recognises the importance of involving social partners in the design and implementation of policies, it does not refer to any in particular (such as children's NGOs). Regarding the families or children themselves, there is also no reference; participation of the non-profit sector, particularly in the diagnosis and policy development, is not a very developed subject, priority is given to implementation;
- in Slovenia the Eurochild member was only invited to make comments on a draft version of the NSR, but not during the preparation of the document.

Some NRPs/NSRs (e.g. DE, FI, FR, IE, IT, NL, PL, SE, UK, UKS) do at least acknowledge the importance of developing consultation processes. For instance, the French NRP emphasizes the need to improve the participation of people experiencing poverty and exclusion in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies. Several examples are given (National Advisory Board on persons received or accompanied, programmes for access to prevention and care of the poorest people, action to promote access to employment for people with disabilities) but none relate to children and young people. In Germany central civil society actors have been invited to comment and add to the German NRP, such as the social partners but as well umbrella organisations of social welfare organisations, the National Antipoverty conference etc. The Irish NRP acknowledges that the role social partners played in developing the NRP and also the role played by these organisations in identifying linkages across policy areas (e.g. the link between tackling educational disadvantage and addressing the intergenerational transmission of poverty). The Italian NRP gives several mentions to the importance of stakeholder involvement. The Netherlands NRP states that achieving the Europe 2020 objectives will require the commitment not only of central government but also of other stakeholders such as social partners and local authorities. However, while NGOs were consulted there was no consultation with children or families involved. The Polish NRP states that the "opinion or representatives of regions and civil society organisations should be better listened to". In Sweden there is more acknowledgement of the importance of involving stakeholders than in the 2011 NRP but within this there is no reference to children's NGOs or children and families experiencing poverty. The United Kingdom acknowledges the importance of consultation though relevant child poverty stakeholders in England and Northern Ireland were not consulted on the development of the NRP or NSR.

It is also worth commenting that the lack of consultation in relation to the NRP/NSR does not mean that there is no consultation on policies relevant to children. For instance, in the Czech Republic the National Strategy on Rights of Children, which is mentioned both in the NSR and NPR, was widely discussed with the NGO sector.

7. MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 CONCLUSIONS

The findings in this analysis of the 2012 NRPs and NSRs are most disappointing. They have shown, for the second year in succession³, that the issue of child poverty and child well-being remains a relatively minor and unaddressed issue in the Europe 2020 process. Most Member States' NRPs do not prioritise the issue of child poverty and social exclusion. Very few set targets for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion. Even when these issues are a priority the approach is often far too narrow, focussing just on labour market access and educational disadvantage but largely ignoring issues of income support and access to services. In most NRPs there is no focus on children's rights. There is often little focus on those children most at risk of severe poverty and social exclusion and policies to tackle educational disadvantage often don't sufficiently focus on those at greatest risk. There is a lack of systematic links between the NRPs and the NSRs and a lack of synergies between the social dimension of the NRPs and the other priority policies or the Europe 2020 strategy. The expectation that the NSRs, which were submitted for the first time in 2012, would provide an in-depth underpinning to the coverage of poverty and social exclusion issues in the NRPs has, so far not been met. Those that have been submitted have, to a large degree, shared the same failings as regards child poverty and well-being as the NRPs. The impact of the economic and financial crisis on children is only very occasionally acknowledged and very few NRPs or NSRs provide any evidence of taking measures to protect children from the worst effects of austerity packages. The potential of the EU Structural Funds to support measures to combat poverty and social exclusion of children is infrequently recognised. There involvement of stakeholders, especially children experiencing poverty and social exclusion and organisations working with them, in the NRP and NSR process remains very limited and superficial.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The very limited and inadequate attention given to issues of child poverty and child well-being in most 2012 NRPs and NSRs is unacceptable. There is an urgent need to now take action to put the interests of children at the heart of the Europe 2020 process in future. Investing in the social inclusion and well-being of children is an essential step if we are to build a stronger and more sustainable Social Europe and a sustainable and inclusive European economy.

In the light of this the forthcoming Commission Recommendation on child poverty and social exclusion and child well-being takes on particular importance. It is vital that the Recommendation sets out a clear roadmap for putting children at the heart of Europe 2020. This then needs to be followed by a strong political commitment to implement the proposals included in the Recommendation. In particular, a political commitment to ensuring that child poverty and child well-being become central issues in the 2013 Annual Growth Survey and the 2013 NRPs and NSRs will be a vital first step. The forthcoming Cypriot and Irish Presidencies of the EU can play a key role in ensuring that this is the case.

The following are a set of 11 recommendations which aim to address the key weaknesses identified in this analysis of the 2012 NRPs and NSRs.

1. The forthcoming Commission Recommendation on child poverty, social exclusion and child well-being must put tackling child poverty and social exclusion at the centre of the Europe 2020 process and future NRPs and NSRs. To this end it should propose that targets to reduce child poverty and social exclusion are made an integral part of the Europe 2020 process. The Recommendation should also introduce more timely and more comprehensive monitoring and analysis of children's situation across the EU.

³ See Eurochild's analysis of the 2011 NRPs. Eurochild (2011). The 2011 National Reform Programmes (NRP) from a child poverty and well-being perspective, Brussels.

2. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to which all Member States are signatories, Member States should develop more comprehensive approaches to tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting child well-being as part of overall national strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion.

3. Much greater effort should be made to identify and protect the most vulnerable groups of children and their families from the worst effects of the economic and financial crisis and the introduction of financial consolidation/austerity measures. To this end greater use should be made of child impact assessments when austerity measures are being considered.

4. The NSRs should be developed as a means of reporting on such national strategies and they should include a distinct section on combating child poverty and promoting child well-being. The NSRs would then underpin the social dimension of Europe 2020 and the NRPs. Greater attention must be given to developing synergies between poverty and social exclusion targets and other Europe 2020 targets and to mainstreaming child poverty and well-being goals across all policy areas.

5. In line with the next European budgetary framework (2014-2020), which already makes a clear link with the Europe 2020 targets, much greater use should be made of EU Structural Funds for tackling child poverty and social exclusion.

6. Meaningful involvement of civil society in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of NRPs and NSRs is crucial. To this end the Social Protection Committee and the European Commission should develop a set of standards or guidelines for the involvement of stakeholders in the social inclusion dimensions of the Europe 2020 process and should monitor their implementation by Member States. Children and young people must be recognised as actors in their own right and actively consulted on policies and practices to promote their social inclusion and well-being at local, regional and national level.

8. SUMMARY TABLES

Table 8.1 - Eurochild members' analysis of how well the key challenges related to child poverty and social exclusion are addressed in the 2012 NRPs and NSRs

Key policy challenges for addressing child poverty	How well do you think that this challenge is addressed in your country's 2012 National Reform Programme (NRP)?				How well do you think that this challenge is addressed in your country's National Social Report (NSR)?			
	<i>Very well</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Little/ poorly</i>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Very well</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Little/ Poorly</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
Lack of adequate income support for families and children	EE, FI	EL, PL, NL, RO, SE	BE, BG, CY, DE, HU, IE, IT, SI, SK, UKE, UKNI, UKS, UKW	ES, LT PT		NL, PT	BG, FI, HU, UKE, UKNI, UKW	SI, UKS
Poor access to labour market for parents	CY, DE, EE, HU	BE, BG, EL, IE, IT, NL, PL, RO, SE, UKE, UKNI, UKS, UKW	FI, LT, PT, SK	ES, SI	HU	NL, PT, UKE, UKNI, UKS	BG, UKW	FI, SI
Lack of affordable and good quality child care and early childhood services	BE, DE	EE, HU, IT, PT, UKE	BG, CY, EL, LT, NL, PL, RO, SI, SK, UKW	ES, FI, PT, SE, UKNI, UKS		HU	BG, PT	FI, NL, SI, UKE, UKNI, UKS, UKW
Lack of family and parenting support and intervention		BE, BG, DE, EE, RO, UKE	CY, EL, ES, HU, IT, LT, NL, PL, SI, SK, UKNI, UKW	FI, IE, PT, SE, UKS		BG, NL	HU, UKE, UKNI	FI, PT, SI, UKS, UKW

High level of educational disadvantage: early school leaving & leaving with no/low qualifications	BE, DE, EE, EL, HU, SE	CY, FI, IE, IT, LT, NL, PT, RO, UKNI, UKS, UKW	BG, ES, PL, SK	SI		FI, HU, NL, PT	BG, UKE, UKNI, UKS	UKW
Poor access to services and opportunities:								
- Health	FI	CY, NL, RO, SK, UKS	BE, BG, DE, EE, EL, HU, IT, LT, UKNI	ES, IE, PL, PT, SI, UKE, UKW		HU, UKS, UKW	BG,	FI, PT, SI, UKE, UKNI
- Social services & child protection		BG, EL, HU, NL, RO, SK	CY, EE, IT, PT	BE, DE, ES, FI, IE, LT, PL, SE, SI, UKE, UKNI, UKS, UKW		BG, HU	NL, PT, UKS, UKW	FI, SI, UKE, UKNI
- Housing and environment		BE, CY, EL, SE, SK, UKS	BG, EE, ES, HU, IT, LT, PT, UKE, UKNI, UKW	DE, FI, IE, NL, PL, RO, SI		UKS	BG, HU, PT	FI, NL, SI, UKE, UKNI, UKW
- Sport, leisure & cultural activities	DE	BE	CY, HU, IT	BG, EE, EL, ES, IE, LT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, UKE, UKNI, UKS, UKW			HU, NL	BG, PT, SI, UKE, UKNI, UKS, UKW

Geographic concentrations of disadvantage (e.g. urban ghettos or isolated rural communities)	UKS	HU, LT, SK	BG, IT, SK, UKNI	BE, CY, EE, EL, ES, FI, IE, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, UKE, UKN		HU	BG, UKS	FI, PT, SI, UKE, UKNI, UKW
Lack of integrated policy framework for addressing child poverty and social exclusion	UKE	EE, NL, UKNI, UKW	BE, BG, EL, HU, IT, PL, UKS	CY, DE, ES, FI, IE, LT, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK,			BG HU, NL	FI, PT, SI, UKE, UKNI, UKS, UKW
Other challenges (please specify any other challenge that you consider important for your country) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - development of independent monitoring and evaluation - children in alternative care, child protection; children with special needs, disability; mental health (substance abuse, suicide, depression, etc); co-operation with the civil society, awareness raising, campaign; child participation; vocational training of professionals 				BG HU			BG	

Table 8.2 - Eurochild members' identification of the key groups of children at risk of severe poverty and social exclusion and the appropriateness of policy responses in the NRPs and NSRs

Key Target Groups	3 key groups of children at high risk of severe poverty & social exclusion that are the most urgent for a country to focus on from a social inclusion perspective. 1 = group most at risk, 2 = group next most at risk, 3= group third most at risk.			Assessment of the quality of policies in the NRPs and NSRs to support the social inclusion of the 3 target groups identified in each country. Scale used: -2 (not at all appropriate), -1, 0, +1, +2 (perfectly appropriate)										
	1	2	3	2012 National Reform Programme					2012 National Social Report					
				-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	
Children who are migrants and children from a migrant background	BE*													
	CY				x									
	EL				x									
	ES				x									
	FI					x					x			
			IE		x									
	IT							x						
			RO		x									
	SE							x						
			SI*											

	UKE*												
	UKNI*												
			UKW*										
Children from ethnic minorities (including Roma children)		BE*											
	BG				x					x			
			EL				x						
		ES		x									
		FI			x					x			
	HU						x					x	
		IE		x									
		IT			x								
		LT		x									
	RO						x						
	SI*												
				UKE*									
			UKNI*										
Children with disabilities			BE*										
	BG				x					x			
			CY	x									

	EE						x						
		HU					x			x			
			LT			x							
	PL				x								
			SE		x								
			UKNI*										
			UKS			x							
		UKW*											
Children in/leaving institutions	BG						x						x
		EE					x						
			ES		x								
			FI		x						x		
			HU		x					x			
			IT						x				
		LT			x								
			PL		x								
			RO				x						
			SE		x								
				SI*									

		UKE*											
	UKS				x								
	UKW*												
Homeless children		EL				x							
		UKS		x									
Other** - children in lone parent families		CY				x							
		IE			x								
- children of alcoholics/drug users			EE			x							
- children in poor n'hoods in post indust. Towns			PL	x									

* no assessment of appropriateness of policy responses was provided

** Eurochild members were given the option of adding another group of children as one of their 3 choices

i **Guideline 9: Improving the quality and performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary or equivalent education**

In order to ensure access to quality education and training for all and to improve educational outcomes, Member States should invest efficiently in education and training systems notably to raise the skill level of the EU's workforce, allowing it to meet the rapidly changing needs of modern labour markets and society at large. In line with the lifelong learning principles, action should cover all sectors (from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training, as well as adult learning) taking into account also learning in informal and non-formal contexts. Reforms should aim to ensure the acquisition of the key competencies that every individual needs for success in a knowledge-based economy, notably in terms of employability in line with the priorities mentioned in guideline 4. International mobility for learners and teachers should be encouraged. Steps should also be taken to ensure that learning mobility for young people and teachers becomes the norm. Member States should improve the openness and relevance of education and training systems, particularly by implementing national qualification frameworks enabling flexible learning pathways, and by developing partnerships between the worlds of education/training and work. The teaching profession should be made more attractive and attention should be paid to the initial education and the continuous professional development of teachers. Higher education should become more open to non-traditional learners and participation in tertiary or equivalent education should be increased. With a view to reducing the number of young people not in employment, education, or training, Member States should take all necessary steps to prevent early school leaving.

The EU headline target, on the basis of which Member States will set their national targets, taking into account their relative starting positions and national circumstances, will aim to reduce drop out rates to less than 10 %, and increase the share of 30-34 year-olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40 % [1].

Guideline 10: Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty

The extension of employment opportunities is an essential aspect of Member States' integrated strategies to prevent and reduce poverty and to promote full participation in society and economy. Appropriate use of the European Social Fund and other EU funds should be made to that end. Efforts should concentrate on ensuring equal opportunities, including through access for all to high quality, affordable, and sustainable services, in particular in the social field. Public services (including online services, in line with guideline 4) play an important role in this respect. Member States should put in place effective anti-discrimination measures. Empowering people and promoting labour market participation for those furthest away from the labour market while preventing in-work poverty will help fight social exclusion. This would require enhancing social protection systems, lifelong learning and comprehensive active inclusion policies to create opportunities at different stages of people's lives and shield them from the risk of exclusion, with special attention to women. Social protection systems, including pensions and access to healthcare, should be modernised and fully deployed to ensure adequate income support and services — thus providing social cohesion — whilst remaining financially sustainable and encouraging participation in society and in the labour market.

Benefit systems should focus on ensuring income security during transitions and reducing poverty, in particular among groups most at risk from social exclusion, such as one-parent families, minorities including the Roma, people with disabilities, children and young people, elderly women and men, legal migrants and the homeless. Member States should also actively promote the social economy and social innovation in support of the most vulnerable. All measures should also aim at promoting gender equality.

The EU headline target, on the basis of which Member States will set their national targets, taking into account their relative starting conditions and national circumstances, will aim at promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion [2].

[1] The European Council emphasises the competence of Member States to define and implement quantitative targets in the field of education.

[2] The population is defined as the number of persons who are at risk of poverty and exclusion according to three indicators (at risk of poverty; material deprivation; jobless household), leaving Member States free to set their national targets on the basis of the most appropriate indicators, taking into account their national circumstances and priorities.