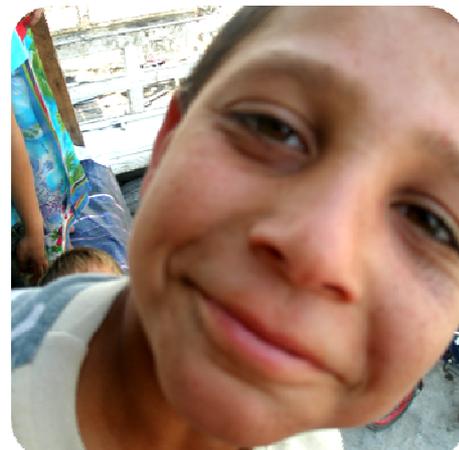


# ENDING CHILD POVERTY WITHIN THE EU?

A REVIEW OF THE 2008-2010 NATIONAL STRATEGY REPORTS  
ON SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION



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## **EUROCHILD KEY MESSAGES**

### **⇒ WE NEED EU LEADERSHIP TO ERADICATE CHILD POVERTY**

#### **EU TARGET ACCOMPANIED BY NATIONAL TARGETS**

Eurochild urges the European Commission to propose an overall EU target for the eradication of poverty, including a specific target related to child poverty, in line with the European Parliament recommendation<sup>1</sup> to reduce child poverty by 50% by 2012. At the same time, Member States should set their own targets to trigger progress at national level and respond to the reality of each country and the specific needs of most vulnerable groups.

#### **RECOMMENDATION ON CHILD POVERTY TO BE ADOPTED IN 2010**

Combating child poverty and breaking the inter-generational transmission of poverty is an investment in the future, from which the whole society will benefit. The year 2010 is being dedicated to the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Child poverty and the intergenerational transmission of poverty must be a priority. Much in-depth analysis has already been carried out<sup>2</sup>. It is now time to call Member States to account. An EC Recommendation on child poverty would build on the work of the past and demonstrate a firm commitment to implementation.

#### **CONTINUAL MONITORING AGAINST AGREED RECOMMENDATIONS**

Monitoring and evaluation is essential to appraise progress, assess impact, and design effective policies measures. Member States and the European Commission should set sound evaluation criteria for a proper assessment of the efficiency of action. When possible, the same criteria should be used in order to allow comparisons between countries.

#### **STRENGTHENED SOCIAL OMC**

Coordination through the social Open Method of Coordination (OMC) has helped set common objectives, strengthen coordination and mutual learning throughout the EU. However, real impact on poverty levels in Member State level is limited. Links need to be reinforced with other EU initiatives, particularly the EU strategy for Growth and jobs and the structural funds. Whatever post-Lisbon architecture is adopted after 2010, it should ensure a strong social dimension. Policies should be directed to children's well-being as a sure investment in the future, and sufficient resources allocated. Sound governance principles need to be established and ensure that all stakeholders, including children, are engaged in policy dialogue.

### **⇒ A CHILD WELL-BEING APPROACH IS ESSENTIAL**

#### **A BROADER SET OF EU-WIDE INDICATORS**

Indicators are essential to measure progress and link policy to practice. Child poverty has a multidimensional nature, so Eurochild strongly supports the recommendation of the child well being report to develop indicators on material deprivation, housing, health, exposure to risk and risk behavior, social participation and family environment, and education. The involvement and commitment of the National Statistic Institutes in this domain is essential.

#### **HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL COORDINATION OF POLICIES AFFECTING CHILDREN**

Promoting the well-being of children cuts across several policy areas and requires strong coordination both within and between different ministries, as well at different governance levels – local, regional and national.

#### **USE THE EXISTING UNCRC FRAMEWORK**

All EU Member States are signatories of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). They should therefore adopt a child rights based approach, whereby all policies are reviewed from the perspective of their compatibility

1. Idem footnote 2  
2. Child poverty and well-being in the EU: Current status and way forward, January 2008

with children's rights as defined in the Convention.

## **CHILDREN MUST BE RECOGNISED AS KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

### LISTEN TO THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN THEMSELVES

Child participation is a core principle of the UN CRC and its application should be taken seriously. A child's opinion is an added value while children share their vision on decisions affecting them. Participation is even more important for the most vulnerable children.

### EMPOWER CHILDREN THROUGH PARTICIPATION

There are many participatory methods through which children and young people can be involved and express their opinions. Children are also society actors and both the EU and Member States have everything to gain with their involvement in the NAP process and in broader policy making.

## **MORE ATTENTION MUST BE GIVEN TO THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN**

### MORE DATA ON THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS OF CHILDREN

Information is still missing on the most vulnerable groups, namely on children in alternative care, street children, separated children and migrant children. It is crucial that research is undertaken and data on these groups collected in order to be able to address correctly their specific needs.

### FOCUSED MUTUAL LEARNING EXCHANGES ACROSS THE EU

Exchange of experiences and good practices is one of the best ways to steer debate and share ideas on how best to address a problem. Stakeholders, be they policy makers, NGOs, or children benefit strongly from the exchange of positive experiences. And children can by themselves provide valuable input on how policy makers can best respond to their aspirations.

## INTRODUCTION

Eurochild is a network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to promote the rights and welfare of children. Our work is underpinned by the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The fight against child poverty is a core part of Eurochild's work. Eurochild recognises child poverty as a denial of children's fundamental human rights resulting from the lack of resources (economic, material and immaterial)<sup>3</sup>. It is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon whose dimensions extend far beyond income. Child poverty differs from adult poverty in that it has different causes and effects, and – most importantly – has long-term implications on the child's ability to fulfil their true potential.

The EU's Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion (known as the Social OMC) has the potential to be a powerful instrument for change. We welcome the attention it has brought to child poverty, and the detailed analysis carried out during 2007 when child poverty was selected as a thematic priority<sup>4</sup>.

The National Strategy Reports on Social Inclusion and Social Protection are crucial elements of the Social OMC. They promote better governance and participatory decision-making; they enable a comparative analysis of Member States policy responses thus strengthening mutual learning; and they enable stakeholders to hold governments accountable to their commitments to make "*a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty*"<sup>5</sup>.

The national action plans for social inclusion (NAPs/inclusion) are the social inclusion pillar of the National Strategy Reports. Eurochild, through its members, has been involved in influencing and monitoring the NAPs/inclusion since 2004. In 2007 Eurochild produced a report of country analyses by NGOs and national experts of 27 member states' NAPs/inclusion from the point of view of children and young people<sup>6</sup>.

This synthesis report draws on the analysis carried out by Eurochild members of the NAPs/inclusion 2008-2010. Eurochild is particularly grateful to:

**George Bogdanov**, Social Activities & Practices Institute Bulgaria

**Veronika Kristkova**, Czech League of Human Rights

**Inge Marie Nielsen**, Joint Council for Child Issues, Denmark

**Malle Hallimäe**, Estonian Union for Child Welfare

**Pirjo Pietilä**, The Central Union for Child Welfare, Finland

**Jana Schröder**, Child and Youth Welfare Association, Germany

**Mária Herczog**, Family, Child, Youth Priority Non-Profit Association, Hungary

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**Isabel Baptista**, CESIS – Centro de Estudos para a Intervenção Social, Portugal

**Anna Klimackova**, National Centre for Equal Opportunities, Slovakia

**Tatjana Rakar & Urban Boljka**, Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia

**Conchi Ballesteros**, Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia, Spain

**Marie Gustafsson**, Örebro County Regional Development Council, Sweden

**Marion Macleod**, Children in Scotland

**Sean O'Neill**, Children in Wales

The synthesis report has been compiled by **Hugh Frazer** together with the Eurochild Secretariat.

3. Eurochild discussion paper, A child rights approach to child poverty – discussion paper, September 2007

4. The report "Child poverty and well-being in the EU: Current status and way forward" was endorsed by the Social Protection Committee in January 2008 and 5. contains an evaluative review of child poverty and social exclusion in the EU; policy monitoring and assessment on child poverty and well-being in the Member States; and a set of recommendations on better monitoring and assessment at EU and country levels.

6. This commitment was made at the Lisbon European Council in 2000 on adoption of the OMC on poverty and social exclusion, Ending Child Poverty within the EU? A review of the 2006-08 national reports on strategies for social protection and social inclusion, May 2007

# 1.OVERVIEW

## 1.1 KEY TRENDS

### CONTINUING SERIOUS PROBLEM

In their 2008-2010 NAPs/inclusion Member States provide much evidence that child poverty and social exclusion remains a very severe problem across the European Union (EU), though with significant variations in extent and intensity both within and between countries. This adds substance to the overall EU data<sup>7</sup> which shows that children have a risk of poverty of 19% which is 3% higher than that for adults (16%). It also shows that rates vary from 12% or less (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Cyprus, Slovenia and Germany) to those countries in the 22-24% range (Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom).

### LITTLE OVERALL IMPROVEMENT

Some countries show modest reductions in child poverty levels between 2005 and 2007. The biggest reductions (3-5%) being in Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Ireland. In others there have been small increases over the same period. For instance Greece and Sweden have increased most (3-5%). However, overall there has been little change in child poverty levels in the EU since 2003.

Poverty is likely to increase as a consequence of the current economic and financial crisis. Giving the timing of the reporting process most countries did not take into account the likely impact of the crisis on the poverty and social exclusion of children and as a result their projections and plans are often too optimistic. In fact, recent information from Eurochild members shows that budgets are already being cut, with social benefits being reduced.

### SIGNIFICANT VARIATIONS WITHIN COUNTRIES

Several of the assessment reports emphasise that the national figures for risk of poverty can mask significant variations within countries. For instance, in Estonia there are major regional differences in child poverty. The poverty rate of children living in the cities is almost half of that of the children living in rural areas (16% v 27%).

### LONE PARENT AND LARGE FAMILIES AT HIGH RISK

The analysis of the social situation in the NAPs/inclusion reinforces the evidence from EU data<sup>8</sup> that in most Member States the two main groups of children most at risk of poverty are children in lone parent families (32%) and those living in families where there are 3 or more children (25%). In Hungary over 50% of families with 3 or more children are living under the poverty line regardless of their social status otherwise.

### JOBLESSNESS AND IN-WORK POVERTY ARE SIGNIFICANT FACTORS

Many NAPs/inclusion highlight the high risk of poverty for children whose parents are unemployed. This bears out EU data that, on average in the EU, more than half of the children in households with no or very weak attachment to the labour market is at risk of poverty.

However, a job is not necessarily enough to lift families out of poverty and several assessment reports stress the problem of insecure or low paid employment. For instance, the Estonian analysis points out that even working does not fully avoid poverty. As much as 7-8% of working households with children in Estonia live below the poverty line.

The evidence from the NAPs/inclusion adds substance to the EU level data which shows that 13% of children living in households at work (work intensity greater than 0.5) are living under the poverty threshold. This rate ranges from 7% or less in the Nordic countries to more than 20% in Poland, Portugal and Spain<sup>9</sup>.

### SOME GROUPS AT RISK OF SEVERE POVERTY

Some Member States only give a crude breakdown of the main categories at risk of poverty and therefore fail to high-

<sup>7</sup>EU-SILC (2005)

<sup>8</sup>ibid

<sup>9</sup>European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the 2008 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, SEC(2008) 91

light situations where children are experiencing more extreme disadvantage (e.g. Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Poland). However, overall there is enough evidence to highlight some groups. The risk of severe poverty and social exclusion for children from a migrant background (e.g. in Austria, France and Sweden) or an ethnic minority background, especially Roma children (e.g. Hungary, Romania, Slovakia), stands out. For instance, in Sweden coming from an ethnic background makes the risk of poverty for children four times greater. Another group that are often highlighted are children with a disability (e.g. in Austria, Hungary, Romania and the UK). In some Member States (e.g. Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia) the plight of children living in or leaving institutions is stressed.

Among other groups of children facing extreme situations are: children experiencing violence, abuse or trafficking; children living in families where there is domestic violence or problems such as drugs and alcohol, poor health or psychiatric problems; street children or children living in very poor environments, children forced into child labour; children whose parents are working abroad; children with one or both parents in prison.

## 1.2 WEAKNESSES IN THE ANALYSIS

Eurochild members raise concerns over the uneven quality of Member States' analysis of the situation of children. The development of effective and comprehensive strategies against child poverty and social exclusion depend on thorough analysis and understanding of the situation. This will also affect member states' ability to establish appropriate targets and indicators for monitoring progress. Worryingly, there is little evidence of Member States taking into account the important new data and analysis in the EU Social Protection Committee's Task Force report on child poverty and well-being<sup>10</sup> in their analysis of the situation of children.

There is also very limited or no use of transnational comparisons to inform the analysis (e.g. Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK). Where comparisons are made with other EU Member States, as in the Portuguese NAP/inclusion, there is often only a marginal use of available data which does not represent a relevant added value to a better understanding of the situation of children. Perhaps understandably, Denmark and Finland do refer to EU data, as it shows them comparably in a good light. Eurochild members' point out that comparable indicators should not be used as an excuse for inaction as there are clearly pockets of high levels of poverty and no EU Member State has room for complacency.

### NAPs/INCLUSION ARE REPORTS NOT STRATEGIES

The majority of Member States use the NAPs/inclusion as a means of gathering information, more or less comprehensively - and sometimes rather disjointedly - about existing strategies and/or policies and programmes in relation to children. As a result, many fail to be sufficiently forward looking and ambitious and to lack new measures. Most members' analysis point to a real gap between intention and the reality.

Some Member States, notably Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Portugal and Romania, have adopted a more positive approach and, to a greater or lesser extent, have used the NAPs/inclusion as a strategic planning tool to monitor and strengthen their strategies on child poverty or at least as an opportunity to introduce some new measures.

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<sup>10</sup> Social Protection Committee (SPC), *Child poverty and well-being in the EU: Current status and way forward, 2008*

## 2. MEMBER STATES' POLICY RESPONSES

### 2.1 CHILD POVERTY AS A PRIORITY IN THE NAP/INCLUSION

It is encouraging that 19 Member States make tackling child poverty and social exclusion one of their key priorities. However, the clarity, comprehensiveness and specificity of their objectives varies widely. Examples of appropriate and clear child poverty objectives are:

*Austria* to offer all children and young people equal development opportunities, e.g. regardless of the income situation of their parents, their nationality or their health status.

*Bulgaria* to limit the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion (with a focus on child poverty and social exclusion).

*Estonia* to prevent and alleviate the poverty and social exclusion of children and families.

*Hungary* to fight against child poverty by improving the income position of families with children through providing cash and in-kind allowances to them, and by facilitating the employment of parents; by strengthening the daytime care of small children and other child welfare and child protection services; by guaranteeing equal opportunities in the educational/training system; by protecting the health of children and young people.

*Malta* to improve the social inclusion prospect of children and young persons.

*Poland* to counteract the poverty and social exclusion of children and youth.

*Portugal* to fight child poverty through measures that ensure their basic citizenship rights.

*Slovakia* to reduce child poverty and solve the inter-generational reproduction of poverty by preventive measures and support to families with children.

However, too often the objectives remain at a general level and are not reinforced by specific objectives in relevant policy domains.

For example, the listed objectives of the German NAP/inclusion fall short of clear quantifiable targets and lack indicators by which to monitor progress. Furthermore, the challenges are described too generally and there is a lack of data to back up the needs analysis. Eurochild's member identifies a complete failure to acknowledge and address youth poverty which according to them affects one in every four young people. In fact young people dependent on apprenticeship pay have income levels under the poverty threshold.

A few Member States, notably the Czech Republic and Finland do not identify child poverty as a specific objective, however, it is included as a key element in other broadly defined priorities.

For example, Finland is targeting child poverty within a broad universal approach. In general, this decision is appropriate. Child poverty rate is low in Finland and the reasons for poverty in families are varied (unemployment, low income, mental health problems, long-term illness or disability of a parent or a child, alcohol and substance misuse). These problems can be tackled through other objectives, if children and families in risk of poverty are properly taken into account in policy planning and implementation. However, it would have been good to have also included more targeted measures at family poverty issues in the strategy.

France, Latvia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden do not prioritise the issue of child poverty. In the case of Latvia and Spain this is surprising given the high levels of child poverty in both countries. While Sweden and Slovenia are amongst the best performing countries on child poverty indicators there are still significant child poverty issues that need addressing and the failure to address this issue in their NAP/inclusion is a weakness. Indeed, in Sweden's previous NAP/inclusion children in high risk situations were identified as a special group to focus on but now this focus no longer exists even though there is clear evidence of some children (especially those from a migrant background) being at risk of poverty.

## 2.2 QUANTIFIED TARGET SETTING – AN IMPROVEMENT BUT NOT FAR ENOUGH

An encouraging development is that the majority of Member States include quantified targets for the reduction of child poverty in their NAPs/inclusion. However, in some cases targets are not very ambitious and it is often not clear that they have been established on the basis of careful analysis. Thus a more systematic and analytical approach is needed in order to ensure that appropriate targets which are ambitious and realistic are set for the reduction of child poverty in each country. These need to be backed up by specific targets for the children at greatest risk and for key policy areas. It is encouraging that there is now enough evidence of good practice which can be used to help Member States who are lagging behind.

Several Member States, notably Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Slovakia and the UK also set targets for specific groups of children or for specific policy areas. Relevant examples of targets include:

- the reduction of the risk of poverty among single-parent families;
- the reduction of the proportion of children aged 0-17 who live in job-less households;
- the reduction of the proportion of early school-leavers;
- the reduction in poverty levels of Roma children;
- the reduction of the number of children in institutional care;
- the reduction in the share of 15-year-old children with low reading skills;
- improving health, housing and education outcomes;
- increasing access to the labour market amongst adults.

### IRELAND – COHERENT APPROACH TO TARGETS AND COMMITMENTS

In Ireland a strength of the approach is that the specific targets which are set in different policy domains are linked to other strategies and policy documents and so there is a coherence to the approach. For example, the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2007-2016)* commits to maintaining child income support at a certain level; this commitment is repeated in *Towards 2016: the National Social Partnership Agreement*, which is the result of consultation and has wide buy-in.

However, the praise is cautious. This may also lead to lack of ambition as government simply repeats existing new targets and commitments in their new strategies.

### GOOD EXAMPLES OF QUANTIFIED TARGET SETTING

*Austria* – Reduce risk of material poverty of children and young people by one third by 2016.

*Bulgaria* – Decrease the at-risk-of-poverty rate among children to 15%.

*Cyprus* – Reduce the risk of poverty among children (0-17 years) from 11% to 10%.

*Estonia* – Reduce the share of 0-15-year-old children living below absolute poverty line from 9.4% to 6.2% and the share of 0-15-year-old children living below relative poverty line (2006) from 17.4% (in 2006) to 16.8% by 2010.

*Greece* – Drop the children's (0-17 years old) risk of poverty rate from 23% in 2006 to 18% in 2013.

*Hungary* – Decrease the poverty rate of children by one fourth by 2013 (in 2006: 19%).

*Malta* – Reduce the risk of child poverty below 19%.

*Portugal* – Increase the Minimum Wage by 24% until achieving the amount of 500 Euros in 2011; increase to 10 working days obligatory paternity leave, half of which is to be immediately after the birth; increase parental leave to 6 months paid at 83% (of gross income); double the number of childcare facilities working with schedules that cover more than 11 hours per day.

*Slovakia* – Reduce the risk of child poverty by 2011 by 4 percentage points against 2004 Child poverty-risk rate (0-15 years of age).

*UK* – to reduce child poverty by a quarter by a half by 2010/11 and to eradicate it by 2020.

## 2.3 LACK OF IMPLEMENTATION STILL A CONCERN

However, even where there are ambitious objectives and targets and extensive measures outlined, many Member States have a poor track record in implementing the measures outlined. There is too much “wishful thinking” not based on reality. There is often a failure to specify the resources available to implement measures and exactly which Ministries or agencies are responsible for delivering them. This issue becomes even more acute in a period when economic decline means that resources are likely to become scarcer and cut-backs in expenditure will increase.

The Eurochild analysis identifies some positive efforts of Member States to clearly allocate responsibility and resources:

- The Swedish NAP/inclusion describes which national authorities, county councils or municipalities are responsible for implementing which measures.
- The Estonian NAP/inclusion clearly identifies the ministries responsible for implementation.

It is also clear that in several Member States (e.g. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) the EU Structural Funds have the potential to play a key role in funding measures in the NAPs/inclusion. However, in only some instances, such as Estonia and Poland, are the links between measures in the NAPs/inclusion and the European Social Fund expenditure systematically worked out.

In many countries' NAPs/inclusion (e.g. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Slovakia), the issue of implementation and specifically the allocation of resources and responsibilities is either not or only insufficiently addressed. However, our Cypriot member welcomes the fact that, for the first time, specific funds have been allocated.

In Bulgaria, the elimination of child poverty and social exclusion is a priority political goal and appropriate objectives and target groups are identified. Nonetheless, the proposed measures are too general and there is little substance in terms of concrete activities and institutions who will address the needs of vulnerable groups. It is even less clear what measures will be taken with regard to state systems and institutions in order to implement the quoted measures.

In Hungary, in spite of a very well developed plan to tackle child poverty, the allocation of responsibility for delivery is weak and there is a need for more professional planning, monitoring, outcome measurement and accountability.

The Irish NAP/Inclusion is also criticised for the significant gap between commitments and implementation, and lack of accountability. While a steering group exists to monitor implementation there is no recourse when a commitment is not met.

## **2.4 MULTI-DIMENSIONAL NATURE OF CHILD POVERTY IS ACKNOWLEDGED**

The majority of Member States who prioritise the issue of child poverty adopt, to a greater or lesser extent, a multi-dimensional approach involving a mix of different policy areas. These include Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. This is encouraging as such an approach is consistent with the finding in the SPC Task Force Report that the countries that achieve the best outcomes on child poverty are those that are performing well on all fronts, notably by combining strategies aimed at facilitating access to employment and enabling services (child care, etc) with income support.

The Irish NAP/inclusion, for example, aims to look at children in terms of their stage in the lifecycle and all of the policies that join up around them. This means that children's health, educational achievement and material wellbeing are linked.

But there are clearly weaknesses in many member states' approach. In many the multi-dimensional approach does not go far enough and is not comprehensive enough (e.g. Latvia, Portugal and Slovakia). Several countries fail to look at the interaction between different ministries and departments (e.g. Austria, Germany, Portugal, Slovakia).

A specific child or youth-centred approach is clearly lacking in many NAPs/inclusion. For example, the German NAP/inclusion includes measures to combat child poverty and social exclusion in the corresponding strategies on the labour market, integration, education and family policies. However, there is no integrated, multidimensional approach with a specific focus on children and young people. Coordination and agreement on a common child and youth policy objective between the various policy-makers is not outlined in the report.

### ***FOCUS ON ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT PRESENT IN MOST NAPs/INCLUSION***

Policies to reduce the number of jobless households with children and to support parents, especially lone parents, into employment are evident in many NAPs/inclusion. Examples include:

- Hungary emphasises increasing the employment of parents.

- Ireland emphasises the importance of ensuring that increasing child income support does not create employment disincentives for parents.
- In Slovakia, measures against child poverty focus on integrating employment and labour market policies, state family and social support, and tax policy, working from the principle that employment and education are the key tools in preventing and eliminating poverty and social exclusion.
- The UK stresses support for low income families and increasing parents' employment. The government is currently consulting on proposals which will help lone parents with younger children to begin improving their employment prospects as early as possible.

The issue of youth unemployment is raised by several countries:

- The Austrian federal government adopted a comprehensive "youth employment package" in 2008. The programme is predominantly based on joint proposals of the social partners. The system of apprenticeship training in companies and at training centres will be subject to fundamental restructuring measures starting in the training year 2008/09.
- The Estonian NAP/inclusion refers to several measures aimed at fostering youth employment: attention is paid to the extension of the circle of services provided to the young as well as the raise of the awareness of employers about flexible forms of work. Various active employment measures will be provided for the young, as career counselling, speciality training, practical training, work exercise, work club and social rehabilitation.
- According to the employment service in Slovenia, the number of young unemployed fell by 9,000 between 2006 and 2008 – a reduction of 50%.

According to Eurochild's German member, the German NAP/inclusion underestimates the problem of youth unemployment. Unemployment statistics do not take account of the number of young people who cannot find a job or training placement after completing school. Nor is there any reference to the situation in the new and old Federal states. In 2007 a report of the Institute for Employment Research from the Federal Employment Agency stated that, *"that the extent of youth unemployment in Germany is considerable and the risk of becoming unemployed is unequally distributed (...) Whoever merely contrasts the unemployment rate of young people against the overall rate is actually underestimating the extent of youth unemployment in Germany. International comparative data from the OECD shows, however, that unemployment among young people in recent years has almost risen to the EU-15-average. The assumption in Germany is that as far as youth unemployment goes, if it still looks reasonably 'rosy' it is outdated."*

### **INCOME SUPPORT PLAYS A VITAL ROLE**

The importance of income support schemes in reducing levels of child and family poverty is stressed in several countries NAPs/Inclusion (e.g. Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Netherlands). In fact, recent reports<sup>11</sup> highlight that social transfers other than pensions (such as unemployment, family and housing benefits) reduce the risk of poverty by 38% and that the impact is higher for children with the EU average reaching 42% in 2006.

- In Estonia research shows that state family benefits, parental benefit and additional basic exemption reduced the proportion of children living below relative poverty threshold by almost one third (approximately 20,000 children) and affected first and foremost families with more than three children.
- The German NAP/inclusion explains that social and family policy transfer payments such as unemployment benefit II, welfare payments, family allowance, child allowance etc, clearly reduce relative income poverty and along with it children's risk of poverty falls from 34% before the social transfer payments to 12%.
- In the Netherlands in 2009, the child allowance will be converted into a child-linked budget which will considerably increase the income of families with more than one child.

### **EARLY YEARS SERVICES ARE CRUCIAL TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF POVERTY**

It is encouraging that many Member States recognise the importance of early years' services in breaking the cycle of poverty and the intergenerational inheritance of poverty. The following are just a few examples that members identified:

- In Estonia local level authorities search for and develop alternative child day care: payment of home childcare

11. Monitoring progress towards the objectives of the European Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, Commission staff working document. [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/spsi/docs/social\\_inclusion/2008/omc\\_monitoring\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/docs/social_inclusion/2008/omc_monitoring_en.pdf)

allowance, training of child-minders, payment of transportation benefit for transporting children to more distant kindergartens, payment for private service. The State finances a child-minder service for disabled children parents.

- Germany has set the target of creating 750,000 childcare places by 2013 and stresses the need for early individual child support for children under the age of 3.

However, in several Member States (e.g. Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Slovakia) early years services are inadequately addressed in the NAP/inclusion. In Bulgaria, while they emphasise 'increased investment in early child development (0-7 years), which will extend the range of school possibilities afterwards', there is no mention of who is responsible for delivering concrete measures.

### ***FOCUS ON EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION IS WELCOME***

Many member states do, encouragingly, emphasise the importance of early intervention.

- The German Federal government has announced a comprehensive health campaign, with a specific focus on children with a migrant background. The introduction of child protection and child health in the report on social inclusion is to be welcomed. It also gives a commitment to early detection medical examinations for children, coupling of youth welfare and the health system, and simplification of family-friendly measures when the welfare of children is at stake.
- In the UK, the Social Exclusion Task Force undertook a Families at Risk Review which set out a vision to improve the life chances of families at risk - identified as having multiple and complex problems - through improved services and systems. In addition, there is recognition of the need to improve childcare support for parents entering or re-entering the labour market with legislation and programmes developed (with targets) to meet these challenges. Equally, there are varying different themes on the Sure Start model and the development of Children's Centres in each of the nations which provide a range of health, play, education and family support for parents with pre-school children living in deprived communities. A further good practice model is reference as being the Family Nurse Partnership Programme (England) and increased investment in early education programmes.
- The Czech Republic implements an annual grant programme aimed at preventing social exclusion of families and parent support. This includes strengthening family competencies, in terms of economic self-sufficiency, and ensuring timely intervention and multidisciplinary approach to working with families.

### ***EDUCATION A VITAL ROUTE OUT OF POVERTY***

The vital role played by education as a route out of poverty and a means of breaking the inter-generational inheritance of poverty is a strong theme in many NAPs/inclusion. Key elements that emerge are: the importance of early education; the need to overcome barriers (e.g. discrimination, language difficulties, cost of participation) that hinder some children's integration into schools (especially children from a migrant background, ethnic minority background [Roma children], children with a disability); and the need to tackle early school leaving. Positive examples that merit highlighting include:

- Finland focuses on school drop-outs and stresses the importance of safeguarding a smooth transfer from basic education to secondary education and further to working life. Developing the school into a community that promotes the welfare of children and young people and thus prevents social exclusion is a target in the Government Policy Programme for the well-being of children, youth and families. Also the national KASTE programme (the national development plan for social and health care services) includes measures concerning the prevention of social exclusion of children and young people. These programmes are carefully monitored by organisations for their intended results. The horizontal approach in the programmes is warmly welcomed.
- Germany aims to reduce the number of young people who

#### **SUPPORTING MIGRANT CHILDREN IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN GERMANY**

In Germany in the Rhineland-Palatinate state there is a programme entitled "InPact" which aims to support migrant families by accompanying their children through the educational system. The project works together with milestones, indicators and polling of participants.

leave compulsory education with no qualifications through the action framework of the conference of German cultural ministers (2007) such as the ESF-Programme “Truancy – a second chance” (since 2006). There is also the provision of further care facilities for children over three years old with after-school care through Federal states’ programmes such as the investment programme “Future, Education and Care” to the opening and closure of all-day schools.

#### **KOMENSKY FUND: AN INITIATIVE OF THE ERSTE FOUNDATION AND CARITAS IN AUSTRIA**

The Komenský Fund was established first to help people in difficult social and economic situations to take advantage of educational opportunities, and secondly to raise awareness of the fact that education is the most efficient way to end poverty.

Concrete examples of cases illustrate the positive effects (e.g. new job after retraining measures, increased school attendance through incentives like offering hot meals, etc.). The examples show that these measures made it possible to supplement acute emergency aid with measures aimed at the sustainable improvement of life situations. The results show very clearly that educational and/or measures supporting education have favourable effects on life situations of the persons concerned.

#### **ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE**

A few NAPs/inclusion (e.g. Finland, Germany, Slovenia and Sweden) give attention to the importance of improving children’s mental and physical health. For instance the Swedish Report describes clearly various investments on improving young people’s health, a special investment on child-och youth psychiatry with aim to improve the psychic health at children and young.

The Finnish Plan highlights the national KASTE programme (the national development plan for social and health care services) which includes measures concerning the prevention of social exclusion of children and young people. These programmes are carefully monitored by organisations for their intended results. The horizontal approach in the programmes is very welcome.

However, improving access to health services for children at risk of poverty is an area that needs to be better integrated into many Member States’ efforts to tackle child poverty.

#### **HEALTH CARE GOOD PRACTICE IN SLOVENIA**

The importance of primary healthcare is stressed through the organised services and care for the population groups whose health is most at risk (newborns, children pupils, women as regards their reproductive health), since they offer immediate access to a paediatrician, gynaecologist and school medicine specialist. Another interesting initiative is the work of the child developmental department at the Ljubljana Moste Health Care centre, which produced a pilot study and examined the data on children born in 2003. As many as 90% of children who were examined had their first examination prior to reaching the age of one year.

#### **PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL, SPORTING AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES**

Increasing opportunities for children who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion to participate in social, sporting and cultural activities is not addressed in most NAPs/inclusion. However, the Dutch Report includes a range of measures with that aim in regard to children from a disadvantaged background. It is aimed to reduce the number of children who do not take part socially in cultural and sporting activities by reason of poverty by half by 2011, to establish at least 2500 combined functions under the community schools, sport and culture programme and to reduce the backlog in sport participation of the non-native young by 2010.

#### **FAMILY SUPPORT & WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

An important issue both for the well-being of children and parents is to foster support for families and to promote a work-life balance. Some good examples from the NAPs/inclusion include:

- In Portugal the explicit concern to support childhood and to support the work life balance is welcomed.
- The Swedish NAP/inclusion describes clearly the modern family policy, with parental benefits, child-care and

others parts, that aims to give parents the possibility to reconcile family lives and working lives.

- In Ireland the Family & Community Services Resource Centre Programme has been further expanded by 6 new Family Resource Centres bringing the total countrywide to 106 centres. Overall family support initiatives, strengthening services for teen parents, and implementing the youth homelessness strategy are highlighted as areas of priority in terms of strengthening support for families with children.

### **LACK OF GENDER DIMENSION**

Only a few countries take gender issues into account in their analysis of child poverty.

- In the Finnish NAP/inclusion gender equality is of great importance in the analysis and it is mainstreamed. The NAP/inclusion sets the objective to reform the gender equality programme, to diminish the pay gap between men and women and to realise the equal pay programme would help single mothers substantially.
- In Slovakia there have been several programmes and projects on equal opportunities in access of women to the labour market.
- Austria gives a specific focus on the position of migrant women and on childcare provision.

The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare has published a survey about Family centres. Family centres have increased in recent years and are situated now in 131 towns. The centres focus mainly on families with small children on the basis of health, pedagogy and social work, with the objective to promote a good health for children and parents.

More commonly many countries (e.g. the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovenia) do not sufficiently take into account the impact of gender inequalities on child poverty.

### **GENDER EQUALITY IN SWEDEN**

The NAP/inclusion describes the Swedish family policy as a strategic initiative. The general aim is to create equal possibilities for everyone and to create equality between men and women. The policy contributes to giving parents the possibility to reconcile family and working lives. The parental insurance along with a child-care that is paid from families with child's different wishes and needs, gives both men and women the possibility to reconcile family and work. This contributes to an increased equality. Sweden has high female labour participation, including among women with small children which is also higher than in most other European countries, and the birth rate is relatively high.

## **2.5 POLICIES FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN**

The countries which are most successful in ensuring low levels of poverty and social exclusion have policies and programmes that cover all children and their families. However, universal policies need to be complemented by additional attention and resources focusing on children in the most vulnerable situations. Not all Member States identify such children clearly in their NAPs/inclusion (see Section 1. above), but some positive developments can be mentioned.

Several Member States focus on improving child protection systems and social services for families and children at risk of violence or abuse.

In Finland the number of children and young people subject to child protection measures has risen alarmingly. Substance abusers have been identified as a group in need of special attention. The government is continuing a separate Alcohol Programme launched in 2004, which aims to development of broad-based cooperation in prevention and reduction of alcohol problems. The target of the overall alcohol policy is to reduce the adverse effects of alcohol use on the welfare of children and families significantly and to reverse the trend in the total consumption of alcohol by raising the taxes on alcoholic beverages. This is strongly supported by organisations. Promoting a healthy, substance-free lifestyle to prevent social exclusion of young people will be implemented in conjunction with the Government Policy Programme for the well-being of children, youth and families.

- The Dutch NAP/inclusion highlights efforts to address child abuse. Initiatives include the establishment of a

nationwide network of Centres for Youth and Family (CJG) by 2011, a nationally operating Reference Index for Young People At Risk by 2009, a Care and Advice Team (ZAT) for school children of all ages by 2011.

- The Slovenian NAP/inclusion a “Project man” programme for self-help therapy and social rehabilitation of persons with different forms of addiction and a network of maternity homes and shelters for women and children, victims of violence.

Integrating children from an ethnic minority background, especially Roma children, is addressed by several Member States.

- Slovenia adopted ‘The Roma Community in the Republic of Slovenia Act’ in 2007. This paved the way for a national programme of measures targeted at the Roma community, including an emphasis on the integration of Roma children into the education system.
- Slovakia gives specific priority to the Roma minority in its efforts to reduce child poverty, emphasising education and scholarships for children from excluded families.

Initiatives targeted specifically at children of a migrant background are referred to several NAPs/inclusion but much more can be done.

Germany refers to its programme in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate entitled “InPact” as a particular example of good practice. It aims at supporting migrant families by accompanying their children through the educational system.

The Greek NAP/inclusion refers to a programme targeted at Muslim children during the years 2005-2008. The programme aimed to foster the integration of minority children in the education system; safeguard the acceptance of these children by the educational staff and all citizens of Thrace; provide knowledge and suitable educational material to teachers; support the families to encourage their children’s good school performance; raise awareness of the education administration mechanism and representatives of local administration; and raise the awareness of all parents and the public opinion in general. As a result of the project, school attendance among muslim children is said to have increased 4 times in high school and 6 times in lyceum since 2000. Early school leaving from compulsory education went from 60% in 2000 down to 30% at present.

Too little attention is given to refugee children, either living as separated children or within families, many of whom find themselves in severe financial difficulty in a hostile environment. Sweden is in the process of developing a national strategy for newly arriving refugee children and young people, but this is not mentioned in the Swedish NAP/inclusion.

## 3. STRENGTHENING THE SOCIAL OMC

Members' assessments of the NAPs/inclusion show that the real impact of the Social OMC on the eradication of child poverty and social exclusion is still too limited. In order to be more effective, the National Strategy Reports must take into account:

- ⇒ links with other EU strategies, in particular the EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs;
- ⇒ links with national efforts to promote the rights of children and in particular the reporting process on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- ⇒ better governance practices in terms of civil dialogue, childrens' participation, mainstreaming and coordination;
- ⇒ better monitoring and evaluation by taking on board the recommendations of EU's thematic year on child poverty and well-being in 2007.

### 3.1 STRENGTHEN LINKS OF NAPs/INCLUSION WITH OTHER EU STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES

In preparing their NAPs/inclusion as part of their NRSSPSI Member States were encouraged to look at links between the three strands of the social OMC (social inclusion, health and long-term care and pensions) and links between the social OMC and other key EU strategies such as the EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs. In particular they were invited to illustrate how these strategies can be mutually reinforcing in the field of child poverty.

In general the child poverty objectives of the NAPs/inclusion are not mainstreamed into the wider growth and job strategy and linkages are rarely made with other EU initiatives, for instance in the fields of sustainable development, education and training and the European Youth Pact. There are only a few exceptions (e.g. Portugal, Slovakia) where direct linkages in the area of child poverty and social exclusion are made.

#### PORTUGAL LINKS CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION TO GROWTH AND JOBS

In Portugal the connection between the efforts to tackle child poverty and exclusion for the achievement of the EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs is visible in the specific field of access to education and childcare facilities. The connections are made between preventing intergenerational transmission of poverty, by increasing access to education, and its impact in economic growth. Links between higher school achievement and productivity. Links between the enlargement of the childcare facilities network, promoting better life-work balance, higher levels of productivity and therefore economic growth. At the same time, the enlargement of this network will create more jobs, strengthen the social economy sector and therefore again contribute for the development of an important sector of economy.

There are some NAPs/inclusion where indirect links can be identified:

- In the Austrian NAP/inclusion it is clear that the anti-poverty policy improves the living conditions throughout the entire life cycle and helps to avoid the transmission of poverty to the next generation. Besides pursuing the short-term goal of reducing poverty, these efforts are considered also as a long-term investment in the people as well as the national economy (e.g. higher probability of employment, lower probability of requiring social transfers).
- In the Czech Republic the emphasis on lowering the youth unemployment rate in order to increase participation in the labour market and avoiding the exclusion of groups of individuals from the labour market as an important step on the way to ensuring macro-economic stability and sustainable economic growth can be seen as having an implicit link with the Growth and Jobs strategy.
- In the Finnish NAP/inclusion there is an indirect link between child poverty and the EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs: through increased employment and income the government is trying to alleviate and prevent poverty in general and to achieve the Lisbon goals.
- In Hungary links are made through education and early childhood programs to prepare children for school.
- In Greece while direct links are not made, the National Social Cohesion Fund is expected to assist the vulnerable groups at risk of poverty through integrated targeted income augmentation actions and goals are directly

linked to the corresponding goals of the Lisbon Strategy and the social OMC.

- In the Netherlands a high priority is given to increasing labour participation of all groups, because paid work is the most effective and sustainable manner of combating poverty. The NAP/inclusion also highlights that promoting child participation and tackling child poverty will improve their possibilities for entering the labour market in the future.

Overall much more needs to be done to link the objectives on tackling child poverty and social exclusion in the NAPs/inclusion with other EU processes.

## 3.2 LINK OF STRATEGIES ON CHILD POVERTY TO THE UNCRC & NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN

The failure of most NAPs/inclusion to adopt a children's rights perspective to combating poverty and social exclusion is a serious weakness. In particular, most NAPs/inclusion make no reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or to the parallel reporting process to the UNCRC Committee and the very relevant recommendations made by that Committee. Indeed, in several countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Ireland and Lithuania) important work done in the context of the UNCRC appears to be ignored in the preparation of the strategy in relation to child poverty. The failure to emphasise children's rights can lead to an overemphasis in some Member States on childhood policies which are centred on the future economic and labour potential of children and not sufficiently on their rights and specific needs and well-being now.

Some exceptions include:

- The Belgian NAP/inclusion refers to a report of the National Conference for children's rights which devotes a chapter to child poverty.
- The Finnish NAP/inclusion at least mentions the reports of the Children's Ombudsperson in the list of references but no direct link is made to her work.
- The Romanian NAP/inclusion makes several references to the importance of rights and lists the National Authority for the Protection of Child's Rights amongst organisations responsible for delivering the objective on promoting integrated family policies.

The fact that few links are made with children's rights in the NAPs/inclusion does not mean that in some countries children's rights do not inform policy making. For instance, in the Swedish Report, while no links were made with the Children's Rights infrastructure during its preparation, there is a final comment that the child's rights according to UNCRC is a perspective that will always inform Swedish policy.

### SLOVAKIA BUILDS ON UNCRC RECOMMENDATIONS

The Slovak Report links to the recommendation of UN CRC reporting in the area of child poverty and inter-generational transmission of poverty (financial support of families at risk of poverty, programmes for improvement of employment of women and long term unemployed, financial support for education of children from low income families, mainly Roma children), education (integration of children from marginalised groups, scholarships for their children etc.), health services mainly for Roma communities - development of the community programmes, programmes on socio-legal protection of children.

## 3.3 STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE

It is clear from the analysis of the NAPs/inclusion that there are three aspects of governance that need to be strengthened:

### ***MORE AND BETTER DIALOGUE WITH CHILDREN'S NGOs IS NEEDED***

The involvement of organisations working with children in the preparation of the NAPs/inclusion has been uneven. In several instances Eurochild members report quite positive experiences.

- In Estonia the process was quite open.
- In Spain a greater participation of representative institutions and social NGO's dealing with children matters was facilitated and the Platform of Childhood took part in the consultation process.

- In Romania, there is a good involvement of NGOs working with children or with youth and the Romanian national authorities have improved, year by year, the mutual collaboration.
- In the Netherlands there was involvement of organisations working with children which brought out issues such as child abuse and the importance of recreational facilities in deprived neighbourhoods.
- In Germany, civil society had the opportunity to feed into the National Strategy Report and the main welfare organisations working with children and young people were included in the consultation.
- In Bulgaria, social partners and NGOs were consulted via electronic means and generated some feedback. However, NGOs working with children were not involved to the extent that was necessary.
- In Denmark a conference was held in April 2008 with representatives from NGOs from many different areas, including representatives of NGOs from different areas, researchers, EU representatives, Ministries, trade unions, employers, local authorities etc. The conference was an open forum which gave inspiration and suggestions for the drafting of the Danish Strategic Report. A draft version was available for comments and ideas and a debate forum was open in a separate homepage before the final Report was presented in relevant government committees.

#### **CHILDREN PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING (OUTSIDE THE NAPs/INCLUSION)**

In Ireland the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has a child and youth participation focus, which facilitates ongoing consultation with children through the Dail na nOg and Comhairle na nOg structures, and through student councils and a children and young people's forum.

In Latvia the report of children to the United Nations prepared by Latvian Save the Children during 2006 included the views of approximately 9500 children including children at high risk as well as medium level families.

In Romania in 2007, Save the Children made the alternative "Report Regarding the Child's Rights in Romania", in order to offer an alternative preview at the national situation in the field.

There were workshops and about 22 NGOs from Romania drafted the alternative report regarding the respecting of the child's rights in Romania. During the report process, "Save the Children – Romania" involved children from different schools, social institutions, etc. who have offered feedback on the issues discussed.

However, in many Member States (e.g. Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden) members reported limited or non-existent involvement of organisations working with children. Often there was no clear information given on the impact of consultations on the final version of the NAP/inclusion nor was there any feedback on individual suggestions. Arrangements for the ongoing involvement in the implementation and monitoring of the NAP/inclusion is often missing.

#### ***THE VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT***

There was no consultation with children themselves in the preparation of the NAPs/inclusion. Even in countries where there have been some efforts to consult with children in other contexts (e.g. Ireland, Latvia and Sweden) and where the views of children have been heard in the context of reports to the UNCRC Committee no account was taken of their views in the NAPs/inclusion.

#### ***A CHILD-CENTRED APPROACH MUST BE MAINSTREAMED INTO ALL POLICY AREAS***

Tackling child poverty and social exclusion requires that children's well-being is a visible objective within all relevant policy areas. There are some positive examples evident from the NAPs/inclusion:

- In Finland, while not specifically talking about children mainstreaming, child inclusion is seen in universalistic terms. Government policy programmes are multidimensional and demand cooperation between different government agencies and hearing of stakeholders. Child inclusion is considered in education, employment, social security, health and mental health, migration, environment, and housing.
- In Austria child inclusion is considered in education, social security and migration policies.
- In Ireland the Poverty Impact Assessment (PIA) is a tool for mainstreaming. It has positive potential but requires greater visibility in terms of how it is being implemented. Greater engagement with groups that experience poverty and those that represent them is also needed.

- In Belgium the government plans to increase the number of places available in housing developments for single women with children. This would contribute to mainstream children rights into other policies such as housing policy.
- In Bulgaria some progress has been made towards mainstreaming social inclusion objectives by involving experts from other line ministries beyond the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies in the preparation of the NAP/inclusion. Nonetheless much more can be done.

However, in many cases (e.g. Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania) mainstreaming is not addressed. Even in a case like Hungary, where there is a significant political focus on child poverty, there is no mainstreaming arrangement of the child inclusion programme. It stands alone.

### 3.4 COORDINATION

Closely linked to mainstreaming child inclusion objectives is the need for effective coordination across different policy domains and between different levels of governance. The NAPs/inclusion provide some interesting examples of positive developments in this area. However, too often there seems to be a lack of effective arrangements for coordinating and integrating effort across different policy areas. Efforts remain too divided by sectoral interests.

The following are a few of the positive examples in the NAPs/inclusion:

- Portugal has created a platform to ensure a better transversal coordination between the different sectoral strategic plans. Given the diversity of existing national plans, this may prove to be an important value-added to the existing institutional arrangements. The Coordinator for the National Initiative for Childhood and Adolescence is present in this platform (although we understand this initiative is currently stalled).
- In Ireland the NAP/inclusion cites the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) as part of a new arrangement to facilitate new and integrated ways of designing and delivering services for children.

#### FINLAND – COOPERATION

##### BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES REDUCES DISPARITIES IN SERVICE DELIVERY

The Finnish government is continuing the PARAS project launched in 2005 to reform Finland's municipal and service structure. The objective is to safeguard the availability of social and health services in the future by forcing municipalities to work together in organising basic social and health care services. The municipalities have to fulfil a 20,000 population baseline for services to increase the productivity when producing services. Increased cooperation of municipalities is supported by organisations, as it is aimed to diminish inequalities in access to quality services between regions.

### 3.5 STRENGTHENING MONITORING & EVALUATION

The SPC Task Force report on child poverty and well-being made several clear recommendations on the monitoring and evaluation of policies to tackle child poverty and well-being. Although these recommendations were adopted by the Social Protection Committee, and therefore by all Member States, there is only very limited evidence that they were taken into account in the preparation of the NAPs/inclusion. However, the Reports do show some increased awareness of the importance of evaluation and monitoring and some steps forward in developing evaluation and monitoring arrangements.

Several countries have quite elaborate arrangements (e.g. Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Portugal, United Kingdom). However, in too many cases the NAPs/inclusion remain very weak in this regard. The social OMC process could be greatly strengthened if Member States were now to systematically review and develop their monitoring and evaluation procedures in the light of the SPC recommendations.

#### LOCAL PLATFORMS SHOULD IMPROVE EVALUATION AND MONITORING IN PORTUGAL

The monitoring and evaluation mechanisms planned in Portugal build on existing mechanisms that include: structural indicators of social cohesion; outcome indicators regarding the priorities and targets; indicators for the monitoring of the implementation of the policy measures.

Whilst this system was introduced in the NAP/Inclusion 2006-2008, local information systems failed to work properly. The NAP/Inclusion 2008-2010 introduces the involvement of the Local Platforms that should resolve this weakness. However it is still unclear whether mechanisms will be put in place to overcome the difficulties found in the previous attempts and Eurochild fears that these good intentions will not be fully implemented.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This analysis of the NAPs/inclusion 2008-2010 has shown an encouraging level of recognition being given to the issue of child poverty and social exclusion and some interesting and positive developments. However, most NAPs/inclusion still fall short of what is needed to make a decisive impact on the eradication of child poverty and social exclusion. Thus, in order to build on the progress that has been made and to further strengthen the impact and effectiveness of the social OMC, Eurochild makes the following recommendations.

### ***ADOPT A COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION ON CHILD POVERTY AND WELL-BEING***

Given the high level of importance attached to combating child poverty in the NAPs/inclusion, given the clear need to further strengthen the European Commission and Member States' efforts in this regard, given the growing body of knowledge on how best to prevent and tackle child poverty and social inclusion, and given the precedent established by the Commission's Recommendation on active inclusion<sup>12</sup>, **the European Commission should start a process leading to the adoption in 2010 of a Commission Recommendation on child poverty and well being.**

### ***MAKE CHILD POVERTY A KEY PRIORITY OF THE 2010 EU YEAR ON POVERTY & SOCIAL EXCLUSION***

In the light of the continuing unacceptably high levels of child poverty and social exclusion and given the low political and public awareness of and debate about issues of child poverty and social exclusion in general and the NAPs/inclusion in particular, Member States should elect **child poverty and social exclusion a key theme of the 2010 EU Year on Poverty and Social Exclusion.**

### ***STRENGTHEN TARGET SETTING***

In view of the recent European Parliament recommendation urging Member States to reduce child poverty by 50% by 2012<sup>13</sup>, in view of the recommendation in the EU Task Force Report on child poverty and well-being that quantified objectives for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion need to be based on a diagnosis of the causes of poverty and social exclusion in each country and in the light of weaknesses identified in the NAPs/inclusion in relation to target setting, the Commission and Member States should work together to strengthen target setting in the social OMC. First, **the European Union should adopt an overall EU target for the reduction of child poverty in line with the European Parliament's recommendation.** Secondly, the Commission should undertake a detailed analysis of target setting on child poverty and social exclusion in the NAPs/inclusion and use this as a basis for **discussing with Member States how they might adopt more appropriate and quantified outcome targets** in this area which would represent their contribution to achieving the overall EU target.

### ***STRENGTHEN INDICATORS, ANALYSIS AND MONITORING AND EVALUATION***

Given the weakness in analysis and monitoring in the NAPs/inclusion and given the recommendations in the SPC Task Force report both on developing indicators to capture the multidimensional nature of child poverty and well-being and on effective monitoring and evaluation arrangements, the Commission should examine in depth the arrangements in place in each Member State and, in the light of the EU Task Force Report, make **concrete recommendations to each Member State as to how they could improve their analysis and their monitoring and evaluation of child poverty and social exclusion.**

### ***STRENGTHEN LINKS TO THE UNCRC***

Given the very limited attention paid to children's rights in most NAPs/inclusion, given the lack of links in most Member States between the Social OMC and the reporting process in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in view of the European Commission's Communication "Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the child", **the Commission and Member States should urgently consider how synergies might be developed between**

12. See the Recommendation of the Commission of the 3rd October 2008 on the active inclusion of people distant from the labour market and also the Conclusions of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Council on the common principles on active inclusion in favour of a more effective struggle against poverty, Brussels, 17 December 2008.

13. Report on promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, including child poverty, in the EU, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Rapporteur: Gabriele Zimmer

**the EU social inclusion and children's rights processes and between the NAPs/inclusion and the national reporting processes in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

***IMPROVE MAINSTREAMING AND COORDINATION***

In view of the continuing weaknesses in many Member States in mainstreaming child inclusion objectives across all policy areas and in ensuring effective coordination between different actors and in view of the failure of most Member States to mainstream child inclusion objectives in the EU Strategy on Growth and Jobs strategy, **the Commission should identify examples of good practice in mainstreaming and use these as a basis for promoting exchange of good practice between Member States and for making recommendations to Member States lagging behind on how they might improve their efforts in this area.**

***INCREASE CHILD & YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN'S ORGANISATIONS***

In the light of the failure of most Member States to involve children, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, in the development of the NAPs/inclusion, in view of the continuing weaknesses in many Member States in relation to the ongoing involvement of organisations working with children but also drawing on the many examples of good practice across the European Union, **the Commission in conjunction with the Social Protection Committee should draw up good practice guidelines on involving children and the organisations that work with them in the social OMC process and then use these to monitor Member States' performance and to make recommendations for their improvement.**

***MONITOR IMPACT OF ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISIS ON CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES***

In view of the potentially very serious impact that the current economic and financial crisis can have on children experiencing poverty and social exclusion and on the implementation of plans outlined in the NAPs/inclusion, **the Commission and Member States should ensure that when monitoring the impact of the crisis a high priority is given to considering the impact on children and their families and to investing in measures to protect them.**

*Eurochild is an active network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to improve the quality of life of children and young people. Our work is underpinned by the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

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- providing analysis and policy advice on PROGRESS policy areas;*
- monitoring and reporting on the implementation of EU legislation and policies in PROGRESS policy areas;*
- promoting policy transfer, learning and support among Member States on EU objectives and priorities; and*
- relaying the views of the stakeholders and society at large.*

*For more information see: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/progress/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.html)*

*The views expressed by Eurochild do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.*

