



POLICY POSITION

Child poverty – family poverty: are they one and the same?

A rights-based approach to fighting child poverty*

October 2011

“The child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding”¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two key factors distinguish a child poverty approach from a family poverty approach: the first is putting the child at the centre of all policy measures to combat child poverty and the second is acknowledging the child as a social actor outside of the family. Once framed in a child rights context - based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the existing legal base of the European Union - the distinctiveness of a child poverty approach becomes clear and should drive all policy initiatives to combat child poverty.

The key role of parents as guardians and advocates of their child's rights is not compromised by this. Adopting a child rights approach to child poverty does not undermine parents' rights and we reiterate that the majority of children will realise many of the rights laid out in the UNCRC in a family environment. **Child poverty cannot be addressed without tackling family poverty. However,** as we demonstrate in this paper, even within the family context, there are other important dimensions of a rights-based perspective to be addressed as well as additional services for children that can improve their well-being and help reduce child poverty. **Child poverty cannot be reduced by tackling family poverty alone.**

In this context, we re-state that the best way to tackle child poverty and social exclusion is to focus on **a multi-dimensional approach based on the three pillars of access to adequate resources, access to quality services and opportunities and children's participation.** These three pillars constitute the basis of a **Recommendation on child poverty and well-being** to which the European Council confirmed its commitment on 17th June 2011.

Translating principles into policy:

➔ Access to adequate resources

To deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people we must accept that they are not only disadvantaged by material poverty, but also by growing up in emotional and intellectual poverty. Children need to know and spend time with their parents. They need to form secure attachments. They need to have a good quality of family life as well as a good standard of living and it is crucial to hold on to these child-centred values, especially where poorer families feel they have to struggle even harder to get the things for their children that other better off children have. A policy approach that focuses exclusively on moving families out of material poverty through more active labour market participation runs the dual risk of, not only fuelling a

* This policy position was prepared by Agata D'Addato and Reka Tunyogi (Eurochild secretariat) with valuable inputs from members of the Eurochild Policy Steering Group and of the Family and Parenting Support Thematic Working Group.

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Preamble.

materialistic approach, but also disadvantaging children emotionally if they have to spend most of their day in childcare, away from a family environment.

A rights-based approach to moving families out of material poverty means putting effective child-centred measures in place to create decent employment opportunities for parents that do not involve long working hours on low pay, that entitles both parents to flexible working hours and paid parental leave, that ensures adequate family benefits and income support and that does not just focus on children as ‘the next working generation’ but as children who need a good childhood now.

➔ **Access to quality services and opportunities**

Ensuring all children have equal access to good quality services is key to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty and disadvantage and is the hallmark of an effective child poverty approach. Poor quality services are destined to have the opposite effect, reducing life chances and potentially incurring long-lasting detrimental effects on children’s development.

Good quality early childhood education and care services should be available to all children of pre-school age. As complementary to the role of the family, they contribute to the social and personal development of the child to give the child a good start in life. At the same time, they offer an invaluable service to parents who want to enter the labour market.

An education system that ensures equal opportunities for all children of the same age and that fosters the social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual development of the child mitigates against a lack of engagement with the system and concomitant lowering of self-esteem.

Access to decent housing and quality health care will stimulate children, contributing to their success in school. By contrast, overcrowded accommodation in a disadvantaged neighbourhood will almost certainly contribute to poor health, low educational attainment, and early school drop-out.

The role of high quality services is even more important for those children living outside the family as they require particular support and care to overcome more than only material deprivation. It hardly needs to be said that as a society we owe no less to particularly vulnerable children – those who may, for example, have been exposed to exploitation, abuse, discrimination, drugs and alcohol, mental health problems, separation from their families – than to provide additional services of the highest quality to help them overcome much more than just material deprivation.

➔ **Children’s participation**

Acknowledging children as social actors outside of the family means, in keeping with the provisions of the UNCRC, respecting children’s right to be heard and ensuring that their views and experiences are taken into account in the development of all services and policies that affect them. This influences children’s personal and social development and lays the foundations for an active life as confident, responsible citizens.

Participation leads to an inclusive society so children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not feel discriminated against or think that their experiences and views are not valued. For children living in poverty, it is crucial that their voices are heard if we are to develop policies that promote their well-being in the most effective way.

Participation starts within the family with the individual recognition of children and encouragement to be heard but extends beyond the family to participation as individuals in school, in civil society, in cultural and recreational activities. A child rights approach recognises this, ensuring cultural, social, recreational and sports activities are affordable and available to all children and that resources are available to enable their voices to be heard.

INTRODUCTION

Children and young people are the most likely group of people to be threatened by poverty. As new chapters of the financial crisis unravel in Europe, the number of children at risk is still on the rise. Many children will suffer as families worst hit by the on-going recession struggle to make ends meet. There are more than 20 million children and young people living at risk of poverty, and even before the crisis, 20% of children living at risk of poverty was unacceptably high compared to 16% of the population as a whole. The at-risk-of-poverty rate for households with dependent children in 2009 was 17.6% in the EU. Furthermore, over the past twenty years, poverty risks have shifted towards families with children.²

Experiencing poverty at a young age has untold detrimental effects on children's well-being and on their personal, emotional and capacity development. Children inherit the conditions of poverty and social exclusion experienced by their parents, and they are in turn more likely to transmit them to the next generation. Especially at times of economic downturn it is important to ensure that there is commitment and adequate measures put in place to support children and families and to break the vicious circle of intergenerational transmission of disadvantage³, which poses serious threats to social cohesion and national stability. It is therefore crucial that the European Union takes a child-rights approach to address child poverty in a holistic way, and that the child's best interest plays a central role in family policies.

With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the protection of children's rights, combating social exclusion and discrimination and promoting solidarity between generations have become objectives of the European Union. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which explicitly promotes children's rights, is recognised by the Lisbon Treaty, thereby reinforcing the grounds for further EU action. Moreover, 2011 is the first year that the Europe 2020 Strategy, setting the EU's political vision for the next ten years, starts implementing the 'smart', 'green' and 'inclusive' growth model. The flagship initiative on a European Platform against poverty and social exclusion, and the specific target to reduce poverty by 20 million people in Europe, represent the social dimension of Europe 2020. This 'inclusive' pillar, together with a reinforced Social Open Method of Coordination, provide an important opportunity to adopt a systematic, comprehensive EU approach to tackling child poverty and child well-being as a key political priority for the Union. A comprehensive EU 'Recommendation on Child Poverty and Well-being' – to be adopted in 2012 by the European Commission – will undoubtedly reinforce this work by setting out common principles, supporting common objectives and monitoring frameworks, facilitating mutual learning and exchange.

Acknowledging that family policies are still strong national competences of EU Member States, there is nonetheless a substantial legal EU base to focus on child poverty through a rights-based approach. Beyond these arguments lies the importance of realising that **child poverty cannot be addressed without tackling family poverty. At the same time, we cannot reduce child poverty by tackling family poverty alone. Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and therefore policies and practices must address all aspects of poverty.**

Without prejudice to the large volume of work available that provides guidance and clarification on EU policies on child poverty and family poverty: Eurochild attempts to spell out in this paper **the relationship between the concepts of tackling child poverty and family poverty and how they are translated into policy measures in the EU.** Firstly, the paper will look at policies targeting families that contribute to the fight against child poverty; then at the child-rights approach to addressing child poverty, based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the existing legal base of the European Union. Finally, we will list policies that are targeted only at children and provide recommendations.

THE DIMENSIONS OF ADDRESSING CHILD POVERTY THROUGH FAMILY POVERTY

There are undoubtedly complementarities between family policies and child poverty policies, as the Council also reiterates that Member States have *"to bear in mind that the fight against child poverty cannot be separated from*

² OECD, Doing Better for Families, April 2011.

³ Social Protection Committee, Child Poverty and Well-Being in the EU Current status and way forward, 2008.

*the situation of families: decent employment opportunities for parents, adequate family benefits and income support, arrangements for reconciling work and family life, and parenting support services are crucial.*⁴

Moreover, we believe that the current Trio Presidency (Poland, Denmark and Cyprus) will have to exploit this positive correlation, given their projected priorities. The Polish Presidency focuses on demography from the perspective of the reconciliation of work and family life.⁵ This policy objective is usually coupled with the aim of strengthening early childhood education and care services to facilitate the second bread-earners' (usually mothers') entry into the labour market. The Danish Presidency is planning to focus a lot of its efforts on employment, and is likely to approach poverty from this aspect as well.⁶ Ensuring the employment of parents is the best safeguard against poverty for all members of the family including children. The well-being of children is based on a balanced reconciliation of work and family life for parents, requiring quality employment.⁷ These policies are all crucial for breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty. During their EU Presidency in 2012, Cyprus is likely to focus on children's participation, which is an important pillar to approaching child well-being from a child rights' perspective, distinct from income support.

However, all the above-mentioned aspects and policy objectives need to be seen as part of a bigger picture, because even within the family context there are other important dimensions and additional services for children that can improve their well-being and reduce child poverty. A comprehensive approach to tackling child poverty as laid out in the paper prepared for the EU Presidency Conference 'Child Poverty and Child Well-Being', to which Eurochild made a major contribution⁸ is crucial.

THE ELEMENTS OF A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ADDRESSING CHILD POVERTY AND WELL-BEING

Adopting a child rights approach to child poverty does not undermine the rights of parents. The majority of children will realise many of the rights laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in a family environment.

The UNCRC provides an overall framework to guide policy interventions with and for children, and has been ratified by all EU Member States. It clearly states that parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child, which they should carry out in the best interests of the child.⁹

The preamble of the Convention recognises that *"the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community"*.

The UNCRC reiterates the role of parents in the child's development when stating that *"States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention."*¹⁰ Additionally, **Article 27 gives parents the primary responsibility of ensuring their child has a right to a standard of living adequate for the child's development.**

4 Council conclusions on Tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being, Luxembourg, 17 June 2011.

5 Programme of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union:

http://pl2011.eu/sites/default/files/users/shared/o_prezydencja/programme_of_the_polish_presidency_of_the_council_of_the_eu.pdf

6 Provisional priorities of the Danish Presidency: <http://um.dk/en/politics-and-diplomacy/denmark-in-the-eu/the-danish-eu-presidency-2012/the-priorities-of-the-danish-eu-presidency/>.

7 COFACE position on "The role of family-friendly policies for the prevention of child poverty and the realisation of child wellbeing" 16 May 2011.

8 See Background Paper to the EU Presidency Conference: Child Poverty and Child Well-Being, 2-3 September 2010.

9 UNCRC Article 18.1

10 UNCRC Article 5.

The UNCRC not only emphasises **the importance of parental responsibility and support for the child's development, but also clearly states the responsibility of the state**, which has to provide *“appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children”*.¹¹ Similarly, the Council of Europe, when defining positive parenting¹² gives a significant role to governments which have to ensure that family policies give due regard to the fundamental rights and dignity of children and implement pro-active policies.

Giving the responsibility to governments to support parents and to give parents the role as guardians and promoters of children's rights implies that the state has to involve parents as active partners. **Working with parents to improve family life is more efficient than introducing compensatory measures to overcome socio-economic disadvantage.**

Eurochild supports the notion that both parents and children hold rights through the UNCRC and that parents' have the key role - with the state as final guarantor - as guardians and advocates of their children's rights. This vision of fundamental rights is also reflected in the commitment of the European Union, which not only lists the fight against social exclusion as one of its aims,¹³ but with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, for the first time in the EU's history, it includes the promotion of the rights of the child amongst the EU objectives.¹⁴

However, we emphasise that children should not just be seen as 'the adults of the future' who need only to be addressed through health and education policies. **Families have a responsibility to ensure the development of their children in a manner that responds to their rights and needs.** Investment in the child's development therefore requires addressing the circumstances that have an impact on the psychological and social dimensions of the child's well-being, all of which is in fact economically beneficial for the state.¹⁵

The Treaty on European Union specifically lays out the EU's commitment to protect the rights of the child, along with combatting social exclusion and discrimination.¹⁶ The Lisbon Treaty also incorporates the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights making it a binding instrument for most Member States. The Charter has an article dedicated to children, recognising the principle of the best interest of the child and the right of children to participation.¹⁷

The European Union has, in recent years, repeatedly put child poverty on its political agenda. Heads of state and government agreed to prioritise child poverty in three consecutive years, in 2005, 2006 and 2007. In 2007 child poverty was selected as the thematic priority for the EU's work on social inclusion and social protection and **the Council has recently confirmed its commitment to adopt a Recommendation on child poverty and well-being** by adopting Conclusions on child poverty and well-being in June 2011.¹⁸ The examples referred to above clearly underline the EU's commitment to children's rights as laid out in the UNCRC.

PUTTING THE CHILD AT THE CENTRE: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Eurochild believes that the best way to tackle child poverty and social exclusion is to focus on a multi-dimensional approach based on three pillars, to which the Trio Presidency of Spain, Belgium and Hungary committed itself in a declaration signed at the conference "Who cares? Roadmap for a Recommendation to fight child poverty" in September 2010 and which has been endorsed in Council conclusions.¹⁹

11 UNCRC Article 18.2

12 Definition in the Council of Europe Recommendation (2006)19 on positive parenting "refers to parental behaviour based on the best interests of the child that is nurturing, empowering, non-violent and provides recognition and guidance which involves setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child".

13 Article 9 of the treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the so-called Horizontal Social Clause.

14 Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty (TEU) .

15 Action for Children: Backing the Future: why investing in children is good for us all, September 2009.

16 TEU, Article 3.

17 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 24.

18 Council conclusions on Tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being, Luxembourg, 17 June 2011.

19 See Report from the EU Presidency Conference: Child Poverty and Child Well-Being, 2-3 September 2010.

Key policy areas:

Access to adequate resources	Access to quality services and opportunities	Children's participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Income and benefits, including income support for families with children• Reconciliation of work and family life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early childhood education and care• Education & training• Health care• Housing and environment• Child protection and social services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children's right to be heard• Participation of children in social, recreational, cultural, sporting and civic activities

Keeping in mind the parental responsibilities and the individual rights of children established in the UNCRC, the edge of the policy overlap between family and child poverty policies becomes visible. **The extra dimensions of considering children as independent social actors outside and within the family are the ones that make the difference between addressing family poverty and child poverty.**

Translating principles into policy:

I. Access to adequate resources

Income poverty is one of the most visible signs of social deprivation, and affects children in different ways than adults. The employment situation of parents and access to adequate financial resources for the family are closely linked to child poverty. It has to be added, however, that employment in a household does not guarantee living above the poverty threshold. There is a large number of working poor families, where despite having one or even two bread-earners in the family, their living standards do not improve. 13% of children live under the poverty threshold despite living in households where a family member has earning from employment.²⁰

Ensuring adequate wages and social transfers are fundamental but not sufficient in itself. **In order to address income poverty, employment has to be accompanied by measures that ensure adequate working conditions, protection from precarious work and working hours, underpaid and socially exploited conditions, and promote the reconciliation of work and family life.**

There is a threefold challenge governments and families face: to support successful participation on the labour market, while at the same time reducing child poverty and improving child outcomes, all three of which are essential for a prosperous society on the long term.²¹ Reconciliation measures allowing parents to have flexibility in work arrangements increase children's quality of life and feeling of security. Although related more to services, affordable and high-quality child care services are the key to reconciling work and family life. Early childhood education and care facilities have to be accessible to all, not only for children of parents who work. In addition to childcare, the need for after-school care services (home-work clubs, etc.) is in greater demand. Families in difficult situation, e.g. lone-parent families, need the support of after-school services to facilitate the progress of children's social behaviour. Without these services they could be storing-up youth behavioural challenges and stresses, to the detriment of activation policies and practices.

Family and income benefits and other public social transfers can reduce the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children considerably, even though there are big differences between countries.²² In order to bridge the gap between the most disadvantaged households and those who can make ends meet, universal provisions must be complemented with more targeted income support and services for families with children in vulnerable situation (e.g. single parent families, families with more than two children, families with a migrant background, families with

20 Social Protection Committee, Child poverty and well-being in the EU, current status and way forward, 2008.

21 OECD, Doing Better for Families, April 2011.

22 Caritas Europa: Poverty in Europe, paper on child and family poverty, October 2010.

children suffering from a long-term disease or having a disability, Roma families etc.) and ensure that children's basic needs are covered.

Lifting families out of poverty cannot be achieved by focusing on income alone.²³ A variety of policy interventions are needed to guarantee that children do not have fewer opportunities or do not experience disadvantages as a result of the lack of financial means. Child related support needs to be part of a range of social policy measures. COFACE has argued for universal child benefits that fully cover all basic needs of children and that should be conceived as a right for all children. In this sense each child would give his/her parents entitlement to receive child benefits which should cover children's basic needs (food, housing, clothes, health, education) and should be adjusted according to the child's age and the number of children.²⁴

Poverty needs to be viewed as being deprived of opportunities to access finance, services and chances for children and youth to make progress. Financial exclusion has to be tackled through encouragement of full take-up of state benefits, providing advice and support on efficient and intelligent use of resources, as well as by increasing the number of cost efficient bank accounts and access to affordable credit for people in need.

In order to deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people we need to address not only material poverty but also emotional and intellectual poverty. Indeed there is a risk that, by focusing exclusively on moving families out of material poverty through promoting parents' active participation in the labour market, children's emotional and intellectual poverty can be deepened. Thus to avoid increasing emotional and intellectual poverty policies to lift families out of material poverty must be developed in conjunction with policies to promote and support children's emotional and intellectual development and in ways that reconcile work and family life so that **children have the opportunity to grow up in a secure family**. Promoting participation in work should not be developed in isolation from other supporting policies, and without family friendly work policies that help to reconcile work and family life.

In other words, **family policies have to evolve to recognise the fundamental rights of children, and not just the employment prospects of the family members of working age**. In order to tackle income poverty, **it is crucial to take a child rights perspective when referring to children as the 'future generation' and in developing family policies targeted at families experiencing poverty and social exclusion**.

II. Access to services and opportunities

There are many services and resources that promote the development of the child and contribute to the welfare of the family and vice versa. **Early childhood education and care (ECEC)** for instance contributes to the social and personal development of the child, while providing opportunities for parents to enter the labour market. **Accessible, affordable and good quality childcare can help parents improve their potential on the labour market**. It is also important to keep in mind that the state has to ensure that children can benefit from such services. The Council of the European Union states in its conclusions that *"complementing the central role of the family, ECEC lays the essential foundations for language acquisition, successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and employability."*²⁵

The Social Protection Committee supports the role of **education and life-long learning policies** in the fight against poverty, and states that more efforts should be in place to ensure that education systems break, rather than reinforce, the cycle of disadvantage.²⁶ Education and care services should foster the social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual development of the child, removing financial barriers to ensure equal

²³ Action for Children: Tackling Child Poverty and Improving Life Chances: Consulting on a New Approach, February 2011.

²⁴ COFACE recommendations on active inclusion, a tool for fighting family poverty, 16 March 2009.

²⁵ Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow, Brussels, 6 May 2011.

²⁶ The Social Dimension of the Europe 2020 Strategy, A report of the Social Protection Committee, 2011.

opportunities for all children of the same age. Parental support has to be encouraged to prevent early school leaving and the necessary additional support provided to compensate for any disadvantage in the home and community that might make it difficult for children to learn and fully develop.²⁷ The crucial role of informal and non-formal learning must be recognised, particularly for helping children to develop coping skills that might not be acquired solely through formal education.

Appropriate **housing conditions** have to be ensured for families with children that provide long-term solutions and offer a safe environment to grow up in. Social housing has to be available for families from all socio-economic backgrounds.²⁸ Access to decent housing and **quality health care** will stimulate children, contributing to their success in school. By contrast, overcrowded accommodation in a disadvantaged neighbourhood will almost certainly contribute to poor health, low educational attainment, and early school drop-out.²⁹

Early intervention support and prevention services for families need to be provided for parents to develop better coping strategies and understand the importance and value of good parenting. These are important services that contribute to the upbringing of children and guarantee them equal opportunities. Preventive measures also have to be put in place to strengthen parental responsibility and to target families at risk, including services for parents of older children such as teenagers.

Consideration and further research needs to be given to **affordability of transport and energy costs** and highlighting these expenditures and consumptions as vital components and influences on household budgets. Consideration also needs to be given to digital inclusion since access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services provides economic advantage.

The role of high quality services is even more crucial for those living outside the family context. **Children growing up outside a family environment** require adequate high-quality care and support that is tailored to the individual needs of each child.³⁰

Addressing children who are in a vulnerable situation, and most at risk of poverty (for example children with migrant or ethnic minority background, unaccompanied minors, children of Roma origin, children and young people living in or leaving institutional care, children of single parents, etc.) need additional targeted services, for instance regarding:

- **Access to quality healthcare services**, taking due account of children with severe health problems, children with disabilities, children living on the street. There is a lack of awareness and policies on health inequalities. Poverty and inequality at a young age can increase mental health problems for children.³¹ In case of children with disabilities, self-determination and vulnerability are particular issues. Sometimes the needs of children with disabilities (who are much more at risk of poverty) become subsumed within the needs of other family members. Children in care are clearly more exposed to poverty risk and their issues are not the same as for their families.
- **Child protection systems and social services**: There is a need to provide a high level of protection for children who have been exposed to exploitation, abuse, discrimination, drugs and alcohol, mental health problems or separation from their families, living in care, on the streets or as unaccompanied children, as they are more exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

27 Eurochild policy position on Family Policies, November 2010.

28 COFACE position on "The role of family-friendly policies for the prevention of child poverty and the realisation of child wellbeing", 16 May 2011.

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

30 Eurochild Policy Position on Quality of Alternative Care for Children Deprived of Parental Care, March 2010.

31 Background paper to the EU Presidency Conference: Child Poverty and Child Well-Being, 2-3 September 2010.

Children's right to well-being and to develop and achieve their full potential depends both on a supportive and nurturing family environment and on their access to education and to supportive and high quality public services. Thus **the role of education, life-long learning, care and child protection measures must be recognised as contributing to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty and disadvantage.**

Also, equal access to good quality services has to be ensured for all children. Poor quality or lack of services can have a detrimental effect on children's development. Services have to aim at providing children a high level of protection, protect and promote their rights. The quality and accessibility of services has to be reinforced by coordinating with actions that professionalise the workforce, integrate children from various social, cultural and language backgrounds, and evaluate and monitor progress.

Policy makers must recognise the key role played by services in supporting the most vulnerable children. The role of high quality services is even more important for those **children living outside the family as they require particular support and care to overcome more than only material deprivation.**

III. Participation in society

Respecting children's right to be heard and ensuring that the views and experiences of children are taken into account in the development of services and policies that affect them leads to an inclusive society. The active involvement and participation of children starts within the family, which is an important place to encourage the voice and individual recognition of children. Children need to be encouraged to participate and feel involved in society.

To achieve that, it is important to educate parents and other professionals working with and for children about the need to have children's voices heard and to encourage them to participate in decisions that affect them. Parents should also be involved as partners in decision-making processes when policies are designed to support them in their parenting tasks, building on their strengths in a manner that empowers them.³²

Until the home becomes a positive place for the whole family parents do not engage in other roles within society very successfully. Children's well-being will also suffer if parents do not have a supportive and consistent approach in the parenting they offer. When it comes to parenting practices, both parenting competence and confidence have an important impact on child behaviour.³³

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds often feel discriminated against as a result of failure to engage in society, even though their experiences and views are valuable contributions. Many children in poverty also face a 'double exclusion' because of other attributes, such as their disability, lack of a stable home, being in care or from a migrant background. **It is crucial that children living in poverty have their voices heard, for the development of policies that promote their well-being in the best way possible.**

Participation starts within the family with the individual recognition of children and encouragement to be heard but extends beyond the family to participation as individuals in school, in civil society, in cultural and recreational activities. These are important steps in a child's personal development throughout an active life that helps them become confident citizens. Children's participation in their communities can indeed be facilitated by making cultural, social, recreational and sport activities available and affordable. The inability of parents to cope with the correlated expenses (including the transport costs) often results in the withdrawal or exclusion of children from extra-curricular activities and hobbies that might be very beneficial for their personal development and for their participation in society. It can also prevent children from maintaining friendships and peer relationships.

32 ATD Fourth World, Valuing children, valuing parents – Focus on family in the fight against child poverty in Europe, July 2004.

33 Morawska A. and Sanders M.R., Concurrent predictors of dysfunctional parenting and maternal confidence: implications for parenting interventions, *Child: Care, Health and Development*, Volume 33, Issue 6, p. 757–767, November 2007.

Families play a key role in promoting children's participation but so do all the organisations that are essential to children's development such as schools, youth organisations, sports groups and cultural organisations. Thus children's participation has to be recognised in both family settings, in schools, public authorities, communities, and amongst other professionals working with and for children. It is therefore crucial that this form of dialogue receives adequate resources from the institutions and authorities, and that those working with children understand the impact of poverty and social exclusion and are able to take their views fully into account. **Resources and services must be able to cover cultural, social, recreational and sport activities/hobbies, to support children's development and participation in society.**

A final comment

'Europe's future economic, social and political development depends on the extent to which its children grow up happy, healthy, well-educated, safe and self-confident. Childhood is short but nonetheless the most influential period of the human life-cycle. Children who have missed school, lacked good health and nutrition, or lacked a supportive, protective environment may be relegated to the margins of Europe's society for the rest of their lives. By investing in children and families, governments can help break the cycle that traps children in the same poverty their parents' experience. Breaking that chain in childhood means Europe can achieve an overall reduction in poverty in society by preventing a new, upcoming generation of poor and disadvantaged' (Ex. Background paper to the EU Presidency Conference: Child Poverty and Child Well-Being, 2-3 September 2010).



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***Eurochild** is a network of organisations and individuals promoting the rights and welfare of children and young people in Europe. The network currently has 90 members in 32 European countries. Our work is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

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The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries. PROGRESS mission is to strengthen the EU contribution in support of Member States' commitments and efforts to create more and better jobs and to build a more cohesive society. To that effect, PROGRESS will be instrumental in: 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.