

## EU leadership on child poverty now more important than ever

One in every five children lives in poverty in the EU according to latest figures; in Romania it's one in three<sup>1</sup>. These figures are based on pre-crisis data from 2007 and the situation is worsening: according to Eurochild members, demand for children's services is increasing, whilst budget cuts in some countries are having a disproportionately negative impact on children<sup>2</sup>.

### The time is now

Government representatives, NGOs, regional authorities, cities, trade unions and employers are meeting from 15 to 16 October in Stockholm<sup>3</sup> to reinforce the EU's commitment to social inclusion in times of recession. It is a crucial time: 2010 will be the European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion and it will be the year the EU has to adopt a new vision for 2020. Meanwhile there is a deepening social crisis the effects of which will be felt long after future economic recovery.

### Don't compromise the necessary investments in children

Short term savings mean long term costs, both in terms of reduced tax earnings and costs linked to preventable social problems like criminality, substance abuse, domestic violence, obesity etc. Prevention is always better than cure, but it requires bold efforts to reduce structural inequalities: to provide affordable, accessible and high quality services for all – in particular early years care and education and to introduce progressive family policies including well-paid parental leaves and flexible working hours<sup>4</sup>.

### The EU should strengthen its leadership

Successive European Council conclusions have already identified child poverty and child well-being as a top priority for member states, and important recommendations were agreed by all member states in 2008<sup>5</sup>. But according to Eurochild members, there is still a huge gap between aspiration and reality and the current crisis risks undermining any past commitments<sup>6</sup>.

That is why in this Round Table on poverty and social exclusion, **Eurochild is calling on member states to reinforce EU action<sup>7</sup>** by moving towards an EU recommendation which would include the following key action:

- clear poverty reduction targets,
- an annual scoreboard on child poverty and child social inclusion,
- better monitoring and reporting on member States progress,
- more stakeholder participation,
- stronger mutual learning, and
- a clear link between the fight against child poverty and fulfilment of children rights.

### Learning from one another

There are some good initiatives from which we can draw lessons. In his speech to the Round Table workshop, **Brian Gibbons** Welsh Assembly Member and Minister for Social Justice and Local Government refers to legislative proposals that place a duty on all devolved public bodies in Wales and local government to fight child poverty<sup>8</sup>. But as he stressed, there are no quick fixes. *"What has taken decades and generations to put in place, will not be easily eradicated"*, he said.

As stated by **Jana Hainsworth**, Eurochild Secretary General, *"levels of child poverty in Europe today are completely unacceptable. They are a denial of children's rights and a waste of human potential. We cannot wait for action. Investment now will save money in the future. It will also create a fairer society for all where every child can fulfil their true potential."*

Jana Hainsworth, Secretary General

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat, At-risk-of-poverty rate (by age group), [Eurostat website](#)

<sup>2</sup> Overview of members analysis see [www.eurochild.org](http://www.eurochild.org). According to a UK survey of 2,000 primary school, pre-school, nursery and health professionals in regular contact with children and young people, one in 10 have seen an increase in cases of suspected child neglect over the past year. 15% felt the recession was partly responsible; [Action for Children - website](#). In Ireland almost one quarter of proposed budget cuts (€1.28 billion) will directly impact on children and those in disadvantaged families including changes to the child benefit system, charges to access health services, cuts in education and the youth justice system; [Children's Rights Alliance - website](#)

<sup>3</sup> [8th European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion](#), 15-16 October, Stockholm

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis of the economic case for investment in prevention and universal services for children: [Action for Children - website](#); A recent OECD report also confirmed that investing in young children is critical: [OECD report \(2009\), Doing Better for Children](#)

<sup>5</sup> Social Protection Committee report: [Child Poverty and Well-Being in the EU Current status and way forward](#), 2008

<sup>6</sup> Ending child poverty in the EU, Eurochild Synthesis Report, February 2009

<sup>7</sup> Eurochild Position Paper: [Eurochild calls for action on Child Poverty and Well-Being](#), October 2009

<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government website: [Children and Young People](#)

<sup>9</sup> Eurochild is a network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to promote children's rights and improve the quality of life of children and young people. Eurochild's work is underpinned by the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

