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Press Release

Important European Conference on policy and practice for
social inclusion of children and young people

***Eurochild^{AISBL} highlights the value of non-formal & informal learning
in fighting social exclusion of children and young people***

On the occasion of its European Conference “***Policy & practice for social inclusion of children and young people***“, taking place on 14-16 November 2006 in Berlin, Eurochild^{AISBL}, together with its German member organisation Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – AGJ, calls on policy makers to give greater recognition to non-formal and informal learning within education provision especially as a means of fighting social exclusion and ensuring equality of opportunity.

As stated by Beverly Hughes, Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families, UK, during the conference “*while it’s vital young people do well in their education, what happens outside the school gates – indeed before they are old enough to go to school – is just as important.*”

Since the European Commission White Paper “*A new impetus for European Youth*” in November 2001, the issue of better recognition of non-formal and informal learning and their complementarity with formal learning and training has been underlined in the conclusions of the Council Meeting of May 2004 and the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council of 23 March 2005.

During the Austrian Presidency of the EU, in April 2006, the Council of the European Union, adopted a resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field. It states that “*non-formal and informal learning activities within the youth field are complementary to the formal education and training system (...) such activities are particularly relevant to young people with fewer opportunities.*”

Eurochild welcomes the political attention now given to the issue of child poverty and social exclusion within the EU, recalling the commitment of Heads of State to “*take the necessary measures to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities regardless of their social background*” (European Council conclusions March 2006). We acknowledge the importance of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on social inclusion and social protection as an important tool for mutual learning and exchange of policies and practice.

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In their recent reports to the OMC on social inclusion, many Member States emphasise the fundamental role of education and training in tackling social exclusion and breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

“It is encouraging to see several Member States setting targets that reflect the broader goals of young people’s growth, independence and active citizenship within their education and youth policy,” says Jana Hainsworth, Secretary General of Eurochild.

The European conference aimed to bridge the artificial gap that exists between EU policy cooperation on youth policy and the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as to explore the interaction between national and European policy development. It gathered over 100 people, including policy makers, public administrations, academics and representatives of NGOs and other associations who are working with children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In six different workshops, the participants discussed and exchanged good practice in the area of social inclusion through education and participation of children and young people. The workshops focused on different target groups, including children from pre-school years up to support after leaving school, as well as children and youth at risk of offending or who already involved in the youth justice system.

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Note to the editors:

Eurochild^{AISBL} is an international network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to improve the quality of life of children and young people. Its work is underpinned by the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Eurochild is funded by the European Commission within the Community Action Programme to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.