

## **Ending child poverty within the EU?**

The number of children living in households with less than 60% of the national median income remains shockingly high in the European Union. The latest figures from 2004 indicate 20% of children live in relative poverty across the EU, compared to 16% of the wider population. The figure hides significant variation, with child poverty reaching 30% and 24% of children under 15 in Slovakia and Spain respectively. Perhaps even more worrying is that child poverty is on the increase in several countries. The latest figures from Ireland show consistent poverty among children under 15 years has increased from 9.5% in 2004 to 10.2% in 2005 – and this during a year of exceptional economic growth.

At least the EU can claim some credit for getting the issue of child poverty higher on the political agenda. In March last year, the European Council asked Member States "*to take necessary steps to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background*". The latest round of national reports on strategies for social inclusion and social protection – prepared as part of the Member States commitment to the Open Method of Coordination - seem to have taken this commitment on board as most reports identify child poverty as a specific policy priority. However, Eurochild's analysis raises several questions both on the effectiveness of policy being developed and its implementation within the EU Member States.

Take targets for example. Very few Member States have actually set concrete targets for reducing child poverty. In the UK, the targets set to cut child poverty by 50% by 2010 have undoubtedly served to focus attention and mobilise resources. Although the UK fell short of its 2006 target of 25% a cut, an estimated 1.8 million children have been lifted out of poverty (before housing costs) since 1997. Few other Member States have been so ambitious, and where they have (for example in Hungary), the resources allocated to reach the targets set are far too meagre to be effective.

Another criticism raised by many of Eurochild members is the failure of most Member States to make the link between policy responses to child poverty and their obligations to the UNCRC. In fact, most of the responses have more to do with getting parents back into the labour market and the balance between work and family life than the rights and welfare of children. This is reflected, for example, in the issue of child care. Many Member States anticipate increasing provision of subsidised pre-school services. Fewer countries give emphasis to improving and monitoring the quality of those services.

By failing to acknowledge children's rights in their agendas to tackle child poverty, Member States are still not recognising the contribution of children themselves have to make in policy development and implementation. No country consulted directly with children and young people themselves in the preparation of their national reports, despite the emphasis on good governance and participation of people experiencing poverty. We are still lacking a policy-making approach that places children at the centre. It means the children are too often viewed as future workers, rather than as citizens today.

A copy of the synthesis report and country annexes are available on the Eurochild's website: [www.eurochild.org](http://www.eurochild.org)