

ACCESS: Cottonera Community Resource Centre

Karen Del Biondo & Meghaen Anderson
Eurochild^{AISBL}

Introduction

This short assessment has been prepared by Eurochild^{AISBL}, which is an active network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to 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. Eurochild AISBL is funded by the European Commission within the Community Action Programme to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The association aims to promote the welfare and rights of children and young people by:

- producing, developing and sharing information on policy and practice;
- monitoring and influencing policy development at the European level;
- developing interest groups and partnerships between members in European countries;
- developing partnerships with other European associations that share common goals;
- influencing and making recommendations to international institutions such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the United Nations;
- supporting and developing the capacity of members;
- empowering children and young people to make their views heard.

At the heart of Eurochild's activities is the Child Poverty Work Programme. A key element of this Programme is the assessment of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPs/Inclusion) from the perspective of children and young people as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Eurochild welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this Peer Review on the Cottonera Community Resource Centre Malta.

Why is it so important?

Children living in deprived neighbourhoods are more likely to suffer ill-health

2006 British research¹ found that the mortality rate in deprived areas in England and Scotland was 1.7 times (males) and 1.5 times (females) higher than the national average. The relationship between mortality rate and deprivation was more acute at younger ages than for all age groups. Children have the right to good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment (Article 24 of the UNCRC). This right is still being denied across many deprived areas in the EU.

¹ Romeri, E., Baker, A., Griffiths, C., "Mortality by deprivation and cause of death in England and Wales, 1993-2004". In: *Health Statistics Quarterly*, n°32, Winter 2006, pp. 19-34

Childcare services are still woefully inadequate

The Barcelona childcare targets (90% of children aged 3 up to school age and 33% of under 3s by 2010) are still far from being met across the EU. Only five countries meet the target for the younger age group and ten of 27 countries for the older age group². Children living in poverty, in particular, can benefit from an early start in quality child care, but availability, affordability and the quality of child care are critical. In reality, there is evidence that in some countries, inequalities in the provision and quality of child care is in fact contributing to the reproduction of poverty³. All efforts that promote the provision of high-quality affordable early years child care services in deprived areas must therefore be encouraged.

Low income neighbourhoods can 'lock' children into a cycle of deprivation

Research by McCulloch and Joshi⁴ indicates that residence in low income neighbourhoods has negative effects on developmental outcomes in the first 4 to 5 years of children's lives and is also associated with higher rates of high-school dropouts and teen parenthood. Part of this can be attributed to the fact that high poverty neighbourhoods lack role models that help promote education, employment and family stability. In addition, children living in unsafe neighbourhoods face greater risks of developing behavioural problems such as hyperactivity, aggression.

Eurochild recommendations

- The child's best interest needs to be placed at the heart of such Community Services
- There needs to be better data collection and monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes for children of such services
- Services need to be free for low income families, regardless of if they are working or not
- There needs to be much greater recognition of the professional role and responsibilities of professionals that work with children under-school age (linked to the provision of sufficient training, qualifications and salaries)
- Integration of parental support with early years care and education. Parenting support – that is based on empowerment and partnership - needs to be given much greater investment and recognition

Eurochild takes a broader look at geographical deprivation and how it affects children's rights and future opportunities. We call on EU Member States to have better monitoring systems, such as the 'Kid's Count' data set collected in the Netherlands, to help measure children's well-being and to ensure services are best adapted to children's needs and provide the best possible outcomes for children. We then follow with other examples of good practice from across the EU that illustrate different successful approaches to ensuring equal opportunities for all children and to breaking the intergenerational inheritance of poverty.

² Child care provision, PES Discussion Paper May 2007

³ Vanderbroeck, M.et.al, "Mothers' search for infant child care: the dynamic relation between availability and desirability in a continental European welfare state". Proposal to the *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 2007

⁴ McCulloch, A., Joshi, H., "Neighbourhood and family influences on the cognitive ability of children in the British National child development study". In: *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 53, n°5, Sep. 2001, pp. 579-591.

1. The Community Resource Centre for Cottonera

1.1 Description

The Community Resource Centre for Cottonera (ACCESS) is designed to strengthen the community's resources by offering family-centred networked services. It operates in an area, encompassing the cities of Vittoriosa, Senglea, Cospicua and Kalkara in Malta, that have historically faced several challenges including poor quality housing, economic decline and high population density. The Centre works mainly with people within the Cottonera community, to encourage and empower them towards a better and healthier life. The services provided include family and youth counselling, community based social work, parenting skills, children and education groups. The Centre also provides advice on social housing issues and comprises branches of the Social Security Department and the Employment and Training Corporation, an Adult Training Centre for Persons with Disability, and SmartKids - a Day Centre for Children.

1.2 The Strengths of Cottonera and its Relevance to other EU countries

The primary strength of the ACCESS programme is the fact that several services for families are provided and accessible under one roof. These services include:

- a Family and Child Care Centre
- Housing Authority
- Social Security Department
- Adult Training Centre
- Employment and Training Corporation
- Community Team

By providing all services in one building, the Community Service Centre improves their accessibility, especially to the more vulnerable groups. It also makes it easier for professionals to cooperate with one another to ensure that services for both children and the parents are interwoven.

The services of the Child Care Centre also have specific advantages for children. The SmartKids Child and Family Support Centre provided quality child care to children between the age of 3 months and 3 years. The service also facilitates parental skills courses. Not only does this centre working to diminish the risks of intergenerational inherited poverty, but it also improves the lives of the parents, and present a holistic approach to solving the poverty problem.

2. Transferability

2.1 A brief assessment of the potential transferability of the policy (as a whole or in part) to other EU countries and the likely conditions for its application or of the likely kinds of obstacles which would make it impossible to put in practice

There is huge potential for application of the "Community Resource Centre" model to be adapted to other deprived communities across Europe. Its particular strengths are that it recognises the importance of quality early years care services for breaking the inter-generational inheritance of poverty and the importance of providing a holistic services to families. All communities suffering from a high concentration of poverty and deprivation could benefit from such services.

For obstacles see 2.3

2.2 Weaknesses: potential non-transferability of the Cottonera Model

Malta is a small country, (with a population of about 404,333 including foreigners living / working in Malta). It may not be easy to replicate the model such a comprehensive operation in countries and regions with much higher populations. Malta also benefits from a high population density and short distances, making it easy for families to reach the Centre. This is not the case for dispersed communities, for example in deprived rural areas in the EU. The approach is therefore most suited to inner city deprived areas.

Malta is a centralized welfare state making it easier to delegate a more unified policy towards such projects. This would be harder to manage under a decentralized structure. All of this considered, Deven still asserts that this model will it still provides an interesting study for other countries to consider for methods of social and governmental cooperation in which to model their own policies⁵. Depending on the governmental / welfare structure of a given state, this type of project may necessitate modification to work more effectively.

In terms of the project itself, it was given a very limited budget (a 23,000 Lm in 2005, approximately 53,575 €), leaving it unclear how ACCESS can finance its operations.⁶ This may become a serious obstacle to its sustainability and its ability to deliver its services.

In measuring success, it is unclear of the longer-term outcome being that the Centre has only been in effect for about 4 years; therefore, it is too early to measure the longer-term impact on the community and individuals.

2.3 Potential Obstacles

- *Financial resources:* Implementation of such projects on a wider scale requires considerable financial commitment – usually from the regional or local government. The ability and willingness of different levels of government to invest will to a large extent determine the success or otherwise of such initiatives.
- *Lack of qualified, motivated staff:* The early years' services, in particular, require highly qualified, motivated staff. To date in Europe, professionals working with under school age children tend to be under-valued, poorly paid and have a lower level of qualification than teachers. This fails to recognise the complexity of the work with young children. Professionals need to be qualified to work in a pedagogical way with children from birth, and not only to work with children but also with their families and the wider Community. 'Rolling' out of a pioneering project such as the Community Resource Centre, requires parallel development of training and qualifications for professionals working with young children.
- *A free service:* Families on low-incomes must have access to free services whether in work or not. However, services may be open to paying families as well. Services must ensure that they reach out to the poorest families, while avoiding any stigmatisation. To a certain extent "success" will hinge on the willingness of parents to participate in the centres and the actual resources and capability of the staff to reach out to those most in need and the least aware of the available resources.

⁵ Deven, Fred (Thematic Expert) *Peer Review Access- Cottonera Community Resource Centre, Malta 2007*, p. 4-6

⁶ Deven, Fred (Thematic Expert) *Peer Review Access- Cottonera Community Resource Centre, Malta 2007*, p. 10

2.4 Other good practice examples where holistic approaches has succeeded

2.4.1 UK, London borough of Southwark: Southwark Childcare Support Scheme

The Southwark Childcare Support Scheme is directed to parents in education, training and employment with a low income, including lone, teenage and refugee or asylum seeking parents. The programme, set up in 2004, offers childcare advice and support to these parents. In order to enable parents to cover the costs of childcare, the Childcare Support Scheme provides full or part contribution to the costs of childcare or offers advice in finding financial support. Furthermore, the scheme helps parents in education, training or employment to find childcare suited to their needs. The programme also supports parents in finding the training or employment best suited for them. The project is part of the London Development Agency and Neighbourhood Renewal Funded programme, which aims to provide advice and support to those vulnerable persons that are not in education, training or employment.

2.4.2 Germany, Gelsenkirchen, Bismarck, Schalken-Nord districts

As a result of former dependence of steel and coal industry, the Bismarck and Schalken-Nord districts of Gelsenkirchen are characterised by an extremely high unemployment rate. Furthermore, the area has a great lack of social infrastructure and health care. Unemployment and a lack of social services have resulted in a reduction in purchasing power which in turn, further negatively affects the local economy. The housing situation is also problematic. These districts have a severe lack of housing areas and the existing areas are in need for modernisation and repair.

To help get the region back on track, an integrated action programme was implemented in 1994. A key element of this action plan was to set up a district office, used by various associations and initiative in the districts and in this way allowing for lively co-operative interaction between the various users. District offices are also the contact point of associations and inhabitants and bring them in touch with the government. The approach was to implement short-term projects and bring them together to create the overall programme. Among these projects, the following child and family related programmes have been implemented since 1995:

- the new construction of an evangelical comprehensive school in Bismarck as a multicultural and ecological district school with public recreational grounds (district centre) and surrounding district park;
- re-utilisation and conversion of the Lahrs Manor (former mine building) as a day care centre for children and also a health department. The health department is used for district-related health care (consultancy, courses, etc.). The former stalls of the Lahrs Manor have been converted for use by the Youth Employment Support Centre;
- conversion of the former public emergency shelter Adams Manor into council housing;
- construction of a community centre in Bickernstrasse Primary School;
- construction of the Haverkamp Community Centre, which has been used for local associations' activities and training courses;
- remodelling six school yards to have more natural environments;
- in 1999, a playground programme was initiated to create more nature-friendly conversion of playgrounds in the districts.

2.4.3 UK, Glasgow, Easterhouse

The area of Easterhouse (in Glasgow) is amongst the most deprived areas in the UK. In 1991, 9.6% of the households were identified as "multiply deprived", and 0.8% as "seriously deprived". The

unemployment rate was 17.1%, compared to a Scotland average of 7.1%. 67.8 per cent of children received free meals in Easterhouse, compared to only 22.8% for Scotland as a whole. Easterhouse also has a large number of single-parent households: 41.2% (16.1% in Scotland). Only 3% of children go on to higher education, while in Scotland this figure is 27%.

Two programmes apply to the area of Easterhouse. One of them is aimed at regenerating Glasgow as a whole, the other is specifically addressed to Easterhouse. The general Glasgow programme includes a childcare tax credit to make childcare affordable. £91 million has been made available for local authorities to support partnerships for childcare. It also includes a Tenant Participation Working Group, to ensure that tenants are involved in determining their future.

The specific programme for Easterhouse includes the largest Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) fund in Scotland. SIPs are partnerships between the local authority and other public agencies such as local health boards and voluntary and private sectors. Easterhouse also has support from the New Deal for Communities (NDC), a programme that aims to tackle multiple deprivation in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Via the NDC, young people and the long-term unemployed can apply for funding to help them find a job or training. The neighbourhood of Cranhill/Ruchazie was also eligible for one of the pilot projects of the 'Communities that Care' programme. This programme tries to identify some influential risk factors that increase the chances that children develop health or behavioural problems. On the basis of this research, Communities that Care hopes to develop an effective strategy to reduce these risk factors.

In addition, Working for communities Scotland established its earliest projects in Greater Easterhouse, in 1998. This programme aims to deliver local services to excluded communities, adapted to their local needs and priorities. The programme will allow best practices to be developed and rolled forward to other areas. A community health shop has been set up to improve the quality of and access to local health care services. Also, community planning groups try to better involve the local community in deciding how services like community safety, garden maintenance and housing management should be run.

2.4.4 UK, Sure Start

Sure Start Children's Centers are places where children under 5 years old and their families can receive holistically integrated services and information, and where they can access help from multi-disciplinary teams of professionals. Local authorities have been given strategic responsibility for the delivery of the children's centres. They are planning the location and development of centers to meet children's central targets, by consultation with parents, the private, voluntary and independent sector, Primary Care Trusts, JobCentre Plus and other key partners. Currently, more than one million children enjoy the services of Sure Start from the 1,250 centres that are established. The UK government has committed itself to establish one centre for each community (3,500 in total).⁷ The 524 Sure Start local programs, directed to deprived neighborhoods are the foundation of the Sure Start Children's Centers.⁸

2.4.5 Multi-generational centres in Germany

Multi-generational centres offer a full range of intergenerational services. The aim of the programme is to promote cooperation and mutual support among generations and to establish a local market for services that respond to the real needs of people of all ages. In this way, multigenerational centres help to nurture and educate children, advise families, activate civic commitment, provide older persons with

⁷ <http://www.surestart.gov.uk/surestartservices/settings/surestartchildrenscentres/>

⁸ <http://www.surestart.gov.uk/surestartservices/settings/surestartlocalprogrammes/>

meaningful tasks and develop and broker family-based and intergenerational services. Examples range from day-care for children to a night café where dementia patients with sleeping problems can spend time. In 2006, the first multi-generational centre was opened in Salzgitter. Subsequently, 200 multi-generational centres were established, and 380 additional will follow. The centres are diverse and multi-faceted in their organisation, as well as in the services they provide.

2.4.6 The concept of the “community school” and its practice in the Netherlands

A “community school” is a co-operation between several institutions that work with children. One of the partners is always the school, which is at the centre of the project. The other participating institutions can be various: day care centres, sport clubs, cultural centres, the library, community centres, etc. A community school is mostly developed at a local level because it has a greater knowledge of the particular needs of the area.

Although community schools are in principle directed to all children, most of them are aimed in particular to enhance opportunities for disadvantaged children and their families (including migrant children, children with disabilities, children with learning difficulties, etc.). The concept of the community schools is spreading fast among primary schools and their partners, and is slowly being also being introduced in secondary schools.

In the Netherlands, the first community schools were set up in the mid-90s in Rotterdam and Groningen, after these communities had decided to assign a crucial role to the school in the policy towards disadvantaged persons. In 2005, there were 600 extended schools operational in 289 different communities. 62% of communities are working on realising community schools, compared to 54% in 2003.

One example is the multi-functional centre of “Meander” in Beesel, a small town in the South East of the Netherlands with only 13,000 inhabitants. Apart from the elementary school Offenbeek, Meander includes a day care centre, the section youth health care of the Green Cross, a playgroup for children 2.5 – 4 years old, a consultation bureau, the project “Opstapje”⁹ and the section youth health care of the GGD (Municipal health service). All these services are based in the same building, which was built in 1999. One of the reasons why Beesel was chosen was the social economic score of the pupil population in this community (Beesel is home to many Spanish and Moroccan immigrants who have worked in the industry there).

The partnerships that are formed within the context of community schools are generally seen as enriching. However, the cooperation between the various sectors is not free of problems often attributed to differences in the professional culture of education and other areas. Another explanation is the high demand for communication and consultation skills that are not met by the teachers. In addition, it is difficult to come to a common strategy between the different partners, each of them having different visions and different priorities. But more and more they are working on a comprehensive curriculum during school and after school in which children have a chance to learn in real-life scenarios as much as possible. This is a great benefit for all children but especially for children from low-income/educated parents.

As to the assets for children, there has not been scientific evidence establishing a direct link to cognitive performances. However, in day-to-day practice, important results on the level of motivation, consent, concentration, participation, better relation with the school, less socio-economic problems and a better

⁹ The project « Opstapje » is a nationally recognised effective home-based parenting support and training programme targeted at parents with children aged 2 to 4.

school atmosphere have been observed. Furthermore, self-confidence, self-control and independence among children have been found to improve, as well as sense of responsibility, initiative, and the fervour to learn has increased. Finally, community school activities have given the children a feeling of togetherness.

It is clear that poverty has a strong territorial dimension. Certain neighbourhoods, particularly for example in large cities are characterised by high levels of deprivation. They have a disproportionately high representation of groups living in poverty. The neighbourhood itself can fuel the “poverty trap”: fewer opportunities for education and training, inadequate preparation for labour market participation, fewer job opportunities, low incomes, and less availability of good housing. If we look at the situation of children living in disadvantaged areas from a children’s rights perspective, we see that many of these children see their rights affected.

2.4.7 Monitoring techniques and territorially based poverty in the Netherlands

Kinderen in Tel

The situation and well-being of children must be monitored in a systematic and comparable way to detect regional differences and to improve policy making. One good example of data collection is “Kinderen in Tel” (Kids’ Count) - a Dutch research initiative between various national and international children’s organisations that investigates each year the situation of children and young people in the different areas of the Netherlands. It is based on the ‘Kids Count’ initiative that was set up in the United States to compare the situation and well-being of children in the different States.

Kinderen in Tel is a project where data is collected on a national, regional and community level to track the status of children in the Netherland. By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child-well-being, KIT seeks to enrich local, and provincial and national discussions, concerning ways to secure better futures for all children. The data book uses 12 key measures of child well-being to rank jurisdictions within the Netherlands. These measures give useful information for the different youth interest groups which are united in Kids Count. With the Dutch Kids Count there is a new instrument which activates and clusters organizations trying to influence the Dutch local and national government.

From their 2006 data, Kinderen in Tel concluded that, in the four largest cities of the Netherlands (Rotterdam, Utrecht, Den Haag and Amsterdam), the figure of children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods was up to four times higher than in other cities. For example, in Amsterdam or Rotterdam, more than 60% of children live in disadvantaged areas, compared to the national advantage of 16%. Not surprisingly, Rotterdam and Amsterdam also show a high figure of children living in poverty, 27.3% and 18.4% respectively, while the national advantage is 6.7%. In addition, in the four largest cities of the Netherlands, young people are 2.5 times more likely to commit a crime than in other cities, but this trend is not geographically limited to large cities. Kinderen in Tel 2007 identified some communities in the Northern provinces of Friesland en Groningen, like Pekela, Reiderland or Bolsward as “one big disadvantaged neighbourhood”, while other communities may not have any. This presents a huge gap between communities in the Netherlands in terms of poverty levels which is widening: the number of children living in disadvantaged areas has risen 20,000 more in 2005 as compared to figures in 2004.²

The first two data books have been published in 2006 and 2007. The data show great differences in areas in the status of children. The results has lead to lot of discussion with the local and national politicians, municipal official, people working with children, like youth workers and last but not least the citizens themselves. The methodology has been very effective with politicians to use the ranking

methods for regions and indicators etc; which has precipitated a great response especially those who are unhappy with their ranking.

The aim of Kinderen in Tel is not collecting the data, but improving kids lives and improving youth policies that affect kids and families within the Netherlands. Therefore, the releasing of the Kinderen in Tel data book is a part of a larger publicity campaign of data dissemination, communication and policy advocacy. The aim of Kinderen in Tel is a data based advocacy. Kinderen in Tel is an initiative of several Child advocacy organisations in the Netherlands. They use the data to raise public awareness and accountability for the condition of kids and families by:

- 1) measuring and reporting on the status of children, and
- 2) using that information creatively to inform public debate and strengthen public action on behalf of children and families within the communities of provinces.

Some unique aspects of Kinderen in Tel that have contributed to its success are that it is an initiative of several Child advocacy organizations; it is funded by non governmental organisations, like UNICEF or Child's help; and it is based on international children's rights enunciated in the UNCRC.¹⁰

For more information please see <http://www.kinderenintel.nl/>

3. Important questions being raised and debated in stakeholders' organisations

- **Best interest of the child must take priority**

The strength of this project (& similar Community based resource centres) is the quality of the services for early years. In particular the services take particular account of a child's circumstances and work with families so as to take a holistic view of the child's welfare and educational development. This must remain at the heart of the model. In some local contexts, there is a real risk that other priorities – such as promoting labour market integration of parents – would take precedent over the best interest of the child. This would have very negative consequences for the quality of the service and the ability of the professional staff to ensure the best outcomes for children.

- **Such services must reach out to the "hardest-to-reach"**

It is also a concern whether these projects have the capacity to those children and families that are the hardest to reach. Experience has shown, that for a number of factors, these projects have been relatively unable to make their services accessible to those living in severe poverty. Rather they tend to be most used by families living just above or below the poverty line.

For example, despite the success of the Sure Start program, their results have shown that those children and families who are at the most risk to social exclusion were in fact unaffected by the programme for a several reasons such as willingness, accessibility, and social isolation.

¹⁰ Dr. Majone Steketee, Verwey-Jonker Institute, the Netherlands, "Kinderen in Tel: International Rights of the child as basis for local youth policy."

Such Community Resource Centres should therefore be accompanied by out-reach work. There are good examples of how this can be done in a non-stigmatising way (eg. Home Start¹¹), and these initiatives should be further supported and replicated.

4. Contributions to such policies through National Strategy Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion

There are many countries that give priority to policies that target families and children.

Denmark focuses one of their policy priorities on “*Breaking the vicious circle of deprivation*”. They set out a comprehensive strategy to promote equal opportunities for children and young people with provisions that aim to:

- to determine which activities have the best effect for each individual child,
- to strengthen activities aimed at combating deprivation across the professional and sectoral borders
- to develop tools aimed at early detection of children and young people needing help.

The overall “*goal is that all children and young people have real opportunities to access public services and therefore enjoy an active and developmentally sound childhood and adolescence.*”¹²

One of the proposed areas of work that will particularly benefit from exchange of experience with the Community Resource Centres is the proposal of “day-care facilities”.

The government expects to allocate a total of DKK 2bn (approx. 268M€) over a four-year period to improve activities for disadvantaged children in day-care facilities. This would include:

- establishing cooperation between day-care facilities and women’s shelter on activities in day-care facilities for children at shelters
- developing the cooperation between day-care facilities and social services
- enhancing staff competences massively in day-care facilities so that staff can play more active roles in identifying children in need of special support and the type of support needed

This approach of using early years’ services to detect and intervene early in cases where children are showing signs of deprivation or low educational development¹³ is useful also in the case of Community Resource Centres in deprived areas. However, we insist on the importance of having properly trained and qualified experienced not only with a pedagogical approach to care, but also equipped to work with parents, social workers and other service providers.

Lithuania sets tackling child poverty and support for families as its third priority. Within this priority area the government aims to strengthen the support systems available to families with children and to assist parents to return to work more easily. In particular they have begun to implement a National Programme on Children Day Care Centres (started in 2002) aimed at establishing community based child day care centres for children from socially at-risk families and also aimed at giving parents the possibility to visit such centres for informal education.

¹¹ HomeStart exists in Malta, however at the moment it has only 9 volunteers and with such limited resources it is not equipped to reach out to all families in need, See www.appogg.gov.mt (News and Events, April 19)

¹² *Ending Child Poverty in the EU? A Review of the 2006-2008 National Reports on Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion.*” Country Annexes: Denmark, p. 35

¹³ Jensen, B., Social Pedagogical Work with Socially Endangered Children and Youths – Efforts and Effects, Danish University of Education

Such a policy can learn from the experiences of other countries, such as Malta and Denmark, to ensure these centres give priority to the child's best interest and provide holistic services to families.

5. Key issues and main questions proposed for debate at the review meeting

▪ **Monitoring & evaluation of outcomes?**

It is critical that better data collection mechanisms be developed in member states to measure outcomes for children. Good models exist, such as those developed by national governments in the UK linked to their children's strategies or, as noted above, Kinderen Tel in the Netherlands that gives a clear picture as to how different cities are performing in ensuring child well-being and education development. It is important that such monitoring and reporting mechanisms use the UNCRC as the basis for developing their outcomes measurements.

Connected to this – what is the link to the developing EU indicators on child well-being?

▪ **Training and qualifications for professionals working with under school-age children?**

There is growing recognition of the importance of investing in early years care and education to break the intergenerational inheritance of poverty and to promote equality of opportunity. With this recognition must come investment in development of career paths for professionals in this area. All professionals need certain common skills: to think critically, to make contextualised judgements, to work with both individuals and groups, to border cross, and to listen, communicate and work democratically. Indeed, Children in Europe calls for professional workers to be equal with teachers in the compulsory school system, with respect to the level of initial qualification and continuing professional development (continuous education), pay and other employment conditions¹⁴.

▪ **Recognition and investment in parental support services?**

Many Member States focus their priority on supporting parents in their role as principle care givers and educators of their children. This is evident also in the Cottonera project. Efforts to alleviate the multiple challenges faced by families living in poverty are very welcome. However, this is a tendency to focus on perceived deficiencies in parenting and to move towards punitive approaches or conditionality on benefits. Eurochild are concerned that policies focus on empowering and supporting families and first and foremost tackle the root causes of poverty and disadvantage in society. But we also want to stress the need for *“greater recognition of the need to support parents in the parenting tasks at the European level and all levels of national governance; parenting cannot be regarded as something which comes naturally and left to chance”*¹⁵.

Eurochild^{AISBL}

Avenue des Arts 1-2

B – 1210 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)2 511 70 83 Fax: +32 (0)2 511 72 98

e-mail : contact@eurochild.org Internet: www.eurochild.org

¹⁴ Young children and their services: developing a European Approach
http://www.childrenineurope.org/docs/eng_discpaper.pdf, p. 15

¹⁵ Key Messages from a Eurochild members' exchange seminar, April 2007
http://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Key_Messages_PS_Seminar_Belfast.pdf