

LETTERS

Where are children's voices during this crisis?

Your article on Latvia ("Sinking deeper into depression", 2-8 July) rightly reflects how dramatic Latvia's plight is, but it makes little mention of how the deepening social crisis is affecting children.

High unemployment figures are just part of the picture. Studies show a strong link between the unemployment rate and child mortality. Latvia, this former 'Baltic tiger', already has the third-highest infant mortality rate in the EU (behind Bulgaria and Romania). Given the rise

in joblessness in Latvia, the prospects look ominous.

The bail-out plan from the International Monetary Fund offers little hope. Latvian Save the Children and other non-governmental organisations are calling for a government commitment to ensure the loan can at least assure Latvia's children a free school lunch and transport to and from school. The prospect of school closures and the dire economic situation of many families create the risk that many children may drop out of school pre-

maturely. How does that help Latvia's long-term economic prospects?

You mention that pension cuts are foreseen. Teachers can also expect to see their salaries cut by 50%. Those structural reforms risk undermining the fundamental value that society should place on education. That should not happen – the price will be paid well into the future.

Prior to the EU summit in June, Eurochild and its members called on heads of state not to forget children in their responses to the economic

crisis. Latvia may be an extreme example, but across the EU too little attention is being given to how the crisis is affecting children and too little awareness is being shown that investment into children's well-being and education is not just a moral imperative, but is also the only way to build a sustainable future.

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