

ROUND TABLE REPORT 7 MAY 2013

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

Family and parenting support in challenging times



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The views expressed by Eurochild do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

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SUMMARY

Family and parenting support is not a luxury for times of plenty. Investment in all families, complemented by targeted support for the most vulnerable families at risk of exclusion, is a fundamental building block of cohesive societies. Interventions such as parent support, education, training, strengthening family and community networks and peer support can help build parents' self-esteem and skills, improve parents' long-term employability, and enhance children's well-being and development.

The round table debate on 'Family and parenting support in challenging times' organised by Eurochild and UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre focused on promoting a wider understanding at EU level of what family and parenting support is. We were happy that we could position the round table's discussion into a clear policy context and direction of the EU. Through its recent Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage' the European Commission has taken on board a real balanced approach – ie. labour market integration to be balanced with care responsibilities; a focus on early childhood education and care (ECEC) to work with parents as "main educators of their children"; developing parenting skills in a non-stigmatising way; strengthening links between schools and parents. This provides leverage for policy reform and investment at Member State level, particularly through the structural funds.

The round table debate also served as an opportunity to raise our concerns about the strong focus within the EU on 'evidence-base' as an underpinning principle for investment and transferability of good practice – which is particularly relevant for services providing family and parenting support. Discussions were built on the work of Eurochild Thematic Working Group on Family and Parenting Support over the last 5 years of exchange and mutual learning. The event (and our follow-up meeting with the thematic working group on family and parenting support) enabled us to go deeper into the issues and the concerns members have regarding commissioning and evaluating services.

This report is divided into two main sections, following the structure of the round table: 1) *Evidence-based practice in family and parenting support* and 2) *Round table discussion – Institutional reflections*. The programme is included as annex. The presentations delivered at the round table are available on Eurochild's website: <http://www.eurochild.org>.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

JANA HAINSWORTH, EUROCHILD SECRETARY GENERAL, CHAIR OF THE ROUND TABLE

Jana Hainsworth opened the round table debate by expressing her gratitude to the European Commission for enabling Eurochild to host this event to the Fourth Demographic Forum which focused on investing for Europe's demographic future.

She briefly presented Eurochild and its work in the field of family and parenting support. Eurochild has very early on acknowledged that promoting children's rights is about engagement with parents and families. The Thematic Working Group on Family and Parenting Support (FPS TWG) was born in 2007 with a members' exchange seminar in Belfast. This group has grown and extended its work since then. On 26-30 April 2010 Eurochild organised a study visit to Sweden and Denmark aiming to exchange of good practice in family and parenting support and explore how policies and practice can most effectively contribute to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty and promote better outcomes for children. The next stepping stones in the work of the TWG were the round table on 'The role of local authorities in parenting support' in Eindhoven in 2011, the Peer Review in Belfast in 2012, and the Compendium of Inspiring Practices on Early Intervention and Prevention in Family and Parenting Support published in October 2012. Also in the context of this TWG, on 24 April 2013 Eurochild organised a round table debate on "Grandparents as carers - Trends and support services in Europe" with AGE Platform Europe, preceding the European Day of Solidarity between Generations.

Today families are facing many challenges due to the crisis, the austerity measures, and budget cuts. There have been rising inequalities and worrying political discourse in many EU countries, and therefore there is a rising need of tackling poverty and supporting families and children. In order to do that the public authorities need to have evidence of outcomes / impact of their work.

Eurochild was delighted to be able to co-host this event with UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre. They are recently doing some interesting work to really dig underneath the rhetoric of evidence base practices. This round table event also aimed to drill down into these issues, because we want more equality in our societies, we want children to grow up in nurturing environments where they are able to realise their full potential, and we are convinced that support to family and parents will make a difference. In order to achieve that we need to think critically, we need to examine what works, how it works, how we can keep on doing more of it.

PAT DOLAN, UNESCO CHAIR AND DIRECTOR CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre undertakes research, education and training in the area of Family Support and Youth Development with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention for children and young people experiencing adversity. They are also focused on knowledge creation around 'what works' in the real world of practice and on utilising community based approaches to working with and for young people. With the support of UNESCO they work on a range of international collaborations in relation to education programmes and policy initiatives.

Pat Dolan also highlighted the strong policy context which can help the work to support families. He emphasised that UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre was happy to be partner with Eurochild and he was looking forward to a fruitful conversation.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE, JULIET RAMAGE, ACTION FOR CHILDREN, EXTERNAL EXPERT

Juliet Ramage has been a qualified social worker for 30 years and over the years she has worked with children and young people, foster carers and families in both Local Authority and Voluntary Sector settings in the UK. She manages internal improvement work in the children's charity Action for Children. Examples of recent work include the conduct of Social Return on Investment (SROI) analyses, evaluation of the evidence base and strategy around delivery of parenting programmes and the development of a manualised evidence based programme to provide early support to families where children are at risk of neglect.

Ms Ramage also carries out consultancy work for external commissioners. Her work has included the development of a social care case audit tool for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland and a report and toolkit produced for Equality and Human Rights Commission on supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to minimise the effects of the economic downturn on child poverty. She has just completed work on a two year project funded by the Department of Education in England which has promoted evidence informed practice in early intervention. The project included the development of a good practice advice store, knowledge reviews about effective early intervention, workshops to share better practice and the development of outcomes based training modules for the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Her presentation focused on the work she has been involved in alongside Eurochild members on evidence-based policy and practice and she presented some messages emerging from a recent scoping paper commissioned by Eurochild to input into the work of its Family and Parenting Support Thematic Working Group.

There is a strong demand for evidence-based policy and practice at EU level. But what does it mean for the future of family and children's services in Europe? At a time when resources are limited, we acknowledge that services and interventions need to demonstrate their effectiveness in addressing social challenges. There is a need to constantly adapt to new social demands, as well as to develop innovative solutions to long-standing problems. However, in the strive for effectiveness, the tendency to adopt programmed or 'manualised' interventions proven in specific contexts has the potential to devalue the important role of practice wisdom and expertise in meeting the needs of families. Achieving a balance between these two positions is important.

One of the key developments of the work of Eurochild's Family and Parenting Support Thematic Working Group has been the Compendium of Inspiring Practices on Early Intervention and Prevention in Family and Parenting Support. It presents 12 case studies based on five years of exchange across EU Member States, which offer a small sample of services that have delivered positive impacts for children and families.

Also in the context of its TWG, Eurochild organised a Peer Review Seminar 30 May – 1 June 2012 in Northern Ireland. Four member organisations (from Northern Ireland, Bulgaria, Poland and Wales) participated in the review and presented inspiring practices in prevention and early intervention that show what works in Europe to improve outcomes for children. A workshop organised by the European Commission in November 2012 also placed a great emphasis on the different methodologies to evaluate good practice.

The case studies presented at the Peer Review differ significantly in terms of the social, cultural and political context in which they operated. However they are all underpinned by shared common principles about what works. Parenting support should be part of a broader strategy to tackle the causes of poverty. Family and parenting support services should be empowering and based on child-rights approaches. They demonstrate inter-service collaboration, as a way of engaging and developing relationships with families, building their resilience and empowering them. Family and parenting support has to aim to work with parents, families and communities to promote a positive environment in which children and young people can grow and thrive; demonstrate the need to intervene with appropriate, timely measures when children, their parents or families are in a vulnerable situation. Family and parenting support services are underpinned by key principles such as a non-judgemental and non-stigmatising orientation, participatory, inclusive and strengths-based approach, needs-led accessible services for all and early intervention services for the most vulnerable.

The funding challenges presented in the case studies presented at the Peer Review highlighted real concerns for sustainable NGO activity at a time of budgetary constraints. Therefore, Peer Review participants acknowledged the need to respond to the changing culture in Europe and the steer from the European Commission on social innovation, mutual learning and replication of practice.

Evidence of effectiveness in early intervention and prevention in family support can come from a range of sources.

Members at the Peer Review acknowledged challenges in measuring the effectiveness of outcomes when working in partnership with other agencies, as well as the challenges when a single agency is offering a range of interventions to a family to know which activity has the most or least impact or an understanding of the interplay between the different elements in a package of support.

However, there was concern at an over reliance on social policy experimentation and randomised controlled trial (RCT) methodology as the way forward in allocating resources and validating evidence of what works in early intervention and prevention.

Although this makes things simpler to measure, the 'blueprint' single programme approach doesn't address holistic, multi- agency delivery of practice. It doesn't give sufficient attention to engagement, relationship and implementation issues which form the critical but hidden backdrop to assessment of an intervention's effectiveness. Highly prescribed structures and process have the potential to negate relationship based working, good questioning in the interests of the child. The consensus at the Peer Review Seminar therefore was that the randomised controlled trial was not the 'gold standard' for research.

Eurochild has used its Peer Review Process and development of the Compendium of Inspiring Practice to enhance learning and to explore and address challenges in defining the evidence base. Juliet is currently working on the scoping study on evidence-based practice. A final report will be completed in June 2013 to incorporate the input of the TWG members.

This scoping report aims to broaden understanding of what is happening across Europe in relation to the development of evidence-based practice; and to explore risks and consequences of narrowly defining evidence as that which has been subject to social policy experimentation (RCT). Another objective is to explore whether there are indicators of effectiveness from existing evaluated practice which would support the development of an evaluation framework that offers an alternative to, or is wider than, the model being proposed by the EU.

This evaluation framework differs from the European Commission's Evaluation Framework - EAF/EPIC 'Practices that Work' - that relies on RCT methodology for inclusion with criteria on the 3 areas of Evidence of Effectiveness, Transferability and Sustainability. Eurochild's concern is that effective and innovative practice using different methodologies of evaluation will be excluded from the new evaluation framework.

The categorisation process (according to social challenge) allows for meaningful comparative analysis, enhances peer learning and considers wider application of an approach. Some case studies will have more robust evidence than others but by making links, projects can work together to develop core standards and approaches to evaluation.

We were able to define the 'social challenge' categories that will be used to locate case studies. For example, our members have identified teenage parents, fathers, parents with disabilities and Roma families as amongst the more vulnerable and marginalised groups whose needs are not best met. Bringing together projects focusing on any one of these groups would lend itself to an exploration of relationship-based working. Bringing together 'like' projects allows for different kinds of evidence to be weighted in different kinds of ways that are commensurate with the specific kind of activity.

There is no single European view about the relevance and appropriateness of social policy experimentation (RCT methodology) or on the development and uptake of evidence base programmes. Some policy makers and countries embrace and promote the development of evidence based programmes, others have little knowledge or resource to make them a reality. There are differences in the views of those close to practice in their countries and those held by researchers and policy makers. There are also views that their development will be problematic due to the ethical issues connected with RCT methodology and the unwillingness of politicians to act on what social scientists tell them.

However, over the last ten years, many family and parenting support programmes have been developed in European countries. They provide an alternative to our import culture where we bring in programmes from USA. They have potential to capture share and benefit from learning that comes from European programmes.

RCT methodology is found to be deficient on many levels. It is a clinical scientific model. It stifles innovation. There are concerns about the expenses of conducting RCTs and running programmes with fidelity, as well as about the lack of follow up studies and lack of objectivity in research. Other concerns about RCT methodology are the fact that they are mainly imports of models from USA or Australia; the ethics of using control groups, the challenges of attribution; proportionality; and that it doesn't focus on the root causes of poverty. Parenting Support

should be part of a broader strategy to tackle child poverty - not the delivery of a single, short term programme. Another risk of RCT Methodology is that it hinders the capacity of NGOs to deliver family support in a way that embraces underpinning principles of effective early intervention – empowerment and based on child- rights approaches.

We can acknowledge that it is simplistic to believe that one research approach can provide all the necessary information about what works and what should be funded. The limitations of RCT methodology are well known yet the call to recognise the validity of other research designs is ignored because in times of scarce resources, interventions without an RCT evidence base are an easy target for cuts and/or decisions not to invest.

Our aim is to build up a bank of outcomes and indicators that are relevant to the different social challenges in Europe; encouraging learning and co-operation between members and building Eurochild's capacity to campaign and influence for improvements in the quality of life of children and young people.

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF PRACTITIONERS IN PARENT SUPPORT IN IRELAND, LIAM COEN, UNESCO CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE

Liam Coen is a researcher in the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway. His particular research interests include policy and service provision for parents and families, and the role of administrative and organisational processes in such provision. He has published on these issues in journals including the Journal of Family Issues, Child and Family Social Work, and Children and Society. He is guest co-editor of a forthcoming special issue of Evidence & Policy which focuses on implementing evidence-informed policy and practice in challenging times, and is currently finalising his Doctoral thesis on 'The Role of Practitioners in implementing ambiguous policies: the case of Parent Support in Ireland'.

The presentation aimed to 1) briefly introduce the research about the role of practitioners, and 2) present some of the findings.

One of the reasons behind the selected topic of this research is the growing interest in the area of parent support as a policy concept. It is also part of a wider UNESCO CFRC agenda of evidence-informing policy. Parent support in Ireland is a nebulous policy concept, although there are plenty of service activities across the state and in the community/voluntary sector. The research aimed to analyse 1) the behaviour of practitioners in implementation where policies are ambiguous, 2) what influence their work, and 3) the role of organisational factors in framing what workers do when delivering parent support.

The methodology of the research builds on the concept of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980¹; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003²) and organisations (Jewell and Glazer, 2006³), and the researches on parent support as social support (Heath, 2004; Quinton, 2004⁴).

The major 'Worker-related Factors' which influence the work of practitioners in the field of parent support are: 1) 'Role expectation'; and 2) 'Practitioner Resources'. In terms of role expectation, the research identified the lack of awareness of parent support as a practice concept (or policy concept); role tension between supporting parenting and doing the parenting, and the influence of family support principles (especially empowerment). As regards to practitioner resources, it has been seen that practitioners draw on a range of different skills in parenting support such as different influences in practice; good supervision process as a central element in supporting parents and families; outcome-orientated and strengths-based service process; and referring to and working with other services – with certain limits.

The most important 'User-related Factors' revealed during the research are: 1) Authority; and 2) Workload. Authority means the scope and extent of activity of the practitioners, which is strongly influenced by the family they are working with. Working towards outcomes and developing a good worker-family relationship can support the efficient work. There has also been recognition of the importance of meeting needs of parents as individuals themselves, not just as caregivers. Narrowing support for families due to austere times and restricted budgets can also be a major factor influencing the need of the family and the work of the practitioner. Regarding the workload

¹ Lipsky M., *Street-level Bureaucracy; Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, 1980.

² Maynard-Moody S. and Musheno M., *Cops, Teachers, Counselors: Stories from the Front Lines of Public Service*, University of Michigan Press, 2003.

³ Jewell C. and Glaser B., *Towards a General Analytic Framework: Organizational Settings, Policy Goals and Street-Level Behavior*, *Administration & Society* 38(3): 1-31, 2006.

⁴ Quinton D., *Supporting Parents: Messages from Research*, Publisher: Jessica Kingsley, 2004.

the research found that there has to be an increased focus on planning work to meet the goals. There has been a recognition by parents of the limits of the work practitioner can/should do compared to their own role. Parent support has to be co-produced between parents and practitioner. There is also an increased need to work with other professionals.

There have been potential lessons learned, such as the need to increase awareness of parent support as a policy and practice concept. Parent support is a multi-faceted activity. Workers draw on a range of skills and theoretical approaches in doing parent support, they do a multitude of different things. The research showed the importance of engaging families meaningfully throughout the process, which was self-directed through agenda-setting and delivery; and the challenge to develop processes for meaningful inclusion in development and implementation. Parent support can be empowering, strengthening, when co-produced, not simply passively delivered. Besides supporting parents in their parenting role, and as parents, various other forms of support can be required. Many parents need financial or short-term help. Another lesson learned is that working collaboratively - in particular with schools, but also with other services - is vital. With respect to the organisational processes it can be concluded that developing and implementing goal/outcome orientated working processes is important; as well as to provide support for workers to engage meaningfully with families; and the role of good supervision as central resource can also contribute to achieving the picked goals.

USING EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE TO IMPROVE CHILD POLICY, STIJN HOORENS, RAND EUROPE

Stijn Hoorens is an associate director of RAND Europe and the head of RAND's Brussels Office. He is also a faculty member at the Pardee RAND Graduate School in Santa Monica, CA. Having been at RAND for over ten years, he has extensive experience designing and leading evidence-based policy studies. Mr Hoorens's broad research interests cover range population ageing, reproductive decision-making, and labour markets and employment. He received an M.Sc. in systems engineering, policy analysis, and management from Delft University of Technology.

RAND Europe has been working with the European Commission to support the European Alliance for Families (EAF) and subsequently the European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC). These are interactive platforms for the exchange of experiences on family-and child-friendly practices across EU Member States. As a key aspect of its work on EPIC, RAND has developed and implemented an evaluation framework for the identification of effective, robust and transferable practices in Europe.

The presentation aimed to 1) define evidence-based practice and explain its role in social policy, 2) introduce EPIC and its Evaluation Framework, and 3) emphasise the benefits of engaging with EBP platforms.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is an approach that considers the '*conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individuals*'. This is the most commonly cited definition of EBP, which comes from the medical field.

There is much less of a consensus in social services than in medicine as to what constitutes EBP. This is in part due to the fact that 'evidence' is more difficult to establish outside the laboratory. Human interactions are complicated and external conditions are difficult to control for. Beyond that, there are resource constraints and practical constraints that limit the amount of evidence available in certain social service fields. Given all of this, we need to be a little more inclusive as to how we define evidence. Many efforts to operationalize assessing EBP in social fields share common elements with programme evaluation. Most of them rely on whether the evaluation meets certain criteria: Was the evaluation designed to maximize likelihood that impacts are due to programme itself? Did it have sufficient sample size? Did it show effects that are statistically and practically significant? Did it utilise outcome measures that make sense?

There is an emerging role for Evidence-Based Practice Platforms in Europe. They support mutual learning and sharing of best practices between Member States, align with the principles of the Open Method of Coordination; promote a culture of evaluation and evidence-based policy, and they are offering value for money in times of austerity. The Commission introduced the Social Investment Package (SIP) to modernise welfare systems in response to Europe's common challenges. SIP also provides guidance on how to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. The European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC) - formerly known as European Alliance for Families (EAF) - aims to share best practices, and to foster cooperation and mutual learning on child focused policies and practices. In addition to a dedicated website, EPIC will bring EU and government representatives together in thematic seminars.

The policy objectives of EPIC are to 1) support parents' participation in the labour market; 2) invest in early childhood education and care; 3) provide for adequate living standards through a combination of benefits; 4) support children's right to participate in play, culture and decision-making; and 5) enhance family support and the quality of alternative care settings.

The website of EPIC contains 'Practices that work', in two separate sections:

1) The 'Practice User Registry' is a resource for sharing ideas and lessons learned. Users submit content on child focused practices that they are developing or implementing in order to share knowledge with other users. If documented evaluations are available, they will be subjected to the evaluation framework in order to examine if they can be included as evidence-based practices.

2) The section 'Evidence-Based Practices' highlights practices that have proven to be robust in at least one domain. Evidence-based practices on the website are assigned to one of three evidence levels: either 'emerging', 'promising', or 'best practice'. Criteria to determine the evidence level are organized according to three categories, 'evidence of effectiveness,' 'transferability,' and 'enduring impact'. A 'best practice' has achieved at least a positive score ('+') in each of the three evidence categories. A 'promising practice' has achieved at least a positive score ('+') in 'evidence of effectiveness' and a positive score ('+') in at least one of the other two categories. An 'emergent practice' has achieved at least a positive score ('+') in 'evidence of effectiveness'.

'Practices that work' on the website are either initially drawn from the European Alliance for Families website, or they have been identified through a combination of literature review, suggestions from the expert panel, reaching out to stakeholders, and Member State correspondents. 8 practices have so far been approved for the evidence-based practices section, 7 additional practices are currently under review, and there are 19 back-logged practices which need review. There are 83 practices currently posted in the Family Practice User Registry.

RAND Europe encourages the different stakeholders to engage with EBP Platforms, because if a practice is known to be effective, sharing that information can help improve outcomes for a wider population. Furthermore, in times of austerity, the imperative to spend public money efficiently is even higher. EBPs provide confidence that limited resources have been allocated to practices known to be effective. In addition to that, EBP platforms can help the practices gain recognition, and in some cases, help to ensure continued funding. Finally, the sharing of new and untested practices, through the User Registry, can help new ideas to gain momentum and scale.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

The following issues were debated and emphasised:

- Working without sufficient amount of evidence can be a waste of time and energy and therefore we should think of using resources more effectively.
- If we want to develop an alternative framework first we should ask ourselves and be clear about the purposes behind it.
- Mutual learning and its benefits have been highlighted. There is a lot to learn from other European countries, in particular in relation to good evaluation. We must challenge ourselves to develop appropriate evaluation methodologies.
- EPIC's Family Practice Registry is important to promote the presence and value of other evaluated forms of practice.
- A particular focus should be given to how parenting practitioners are selected and to their training and support.
- Clients' values and preferences are fundamental and should not be neglected.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION – INSTITUTIONAL REFLECTIONS

EGBERT HOLTHIUS, EUROPEAN COMMISSION, DG EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND INCLUSION

Egbert Holthius has the Dutch nationality and has Masters degrees in Business Administration and Geography. Before joining the European Commission in 1993 he worked respectively in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Dutch Organisation for Applied Scientific Research TNO. He started his career working for the European Commission in the Commission's Delegation in Chad as an economic counsellor. Upon joining DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion in 2004 he was involved in analysing the employment and social situation of the European Union (e.g. in the Employment Analysis Unit) as well as in coordinating and monitoring national employment policies in the context of the Lisbon and the European Employment strategy (in the Employment Policy Unit). Mr Holthius is now heading the Unit "Social policy, Innovation and Governance". This Unit monitors progress towards the headline target for the reduction of poverty and exclusion, coordinates the implementation of the Social Investment Package and supports the coordination of EU Member States' policies in the social policy field in the context set by the Europe 2020 Strategy on smart sustainable and inclusive growth.

He gave a brief overview of the European Commission's work and commitment related to family and parenting support. The Social Investment Package as an integrated policy framework for policy reforms to enhance social protection, invest in people's skills and capabilities, and support people as required throughout their lives, and the Recommendation '*Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*', which provides helpful guidance to Member States on how to tackle child poverty and promote children's well-being are important parts of the response to the crisis and show this above mentioned commitment of the European Commission.

Now it is time for the implementation of the Recommendation, so the European Commission urges the Member States to invest in children and their families with child- and family-friendly policies. Mr Holthius stressed that the Social Investment Package recognises the importance of the involvement at national level of civil society organisations, and he welcomed the fact that there have been many organisations participating in the preparation of the Recommendation.

He expressed his gratitude to the Irish Presidency for putting social inclusion on the agenda, and emphasised that all the EU Institutions, as well as the European Economic and Social Committee are working on issues which are important for families and children. He mentioned other useful instruments which can help strengthen family support policies, such as the European Semester and the Country Specific Recommendations.

The European Commission will continue to work on closing the gender gap, and it is also essential to look at family and parental supporting, as well as to provide effective and quality care services for all families.

One of the biggest challenges is how we disseminate information, and therefore the purpose is to have a knowledge bank of good practices. The work of the civil society in this respect can complement the work of the European Commission and therefore it is much appreciated.

DOMINIC RICHARDSON, OECD

Dominic Richardson joined the OECD in May 2007, where his work has focused on issues of family and child well-being, in particular by reviewing family policy packages, comparing variations in social expenditure across the child's lifecycle, and developing policy-amenable indicators of child well-being outcomes. Mr Richardson is a co-author of the OECD's *Doing Better for Children* and *Doing Better for Families* reports. He has also contributed to the background research for UNICEF Innocenti Report Cards 7 and 9 on child well-being in rich countries, and has recently completed a joint EC / OECD project that evaluates large international surveys used to compare child and family outcomes in developed countries.

In his presentation he drew from the above mentioned reports and his present work which includes an evaluative report of the efficiency and effectiveness of cash versus in-kind benefits for family and child outcomes, and a comparative report on integrated social service policies for vulnerable populations, including vulnerable families, across OECD countries.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international economic organisation of 34 countries founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade. The OECD publishes books, reports, working papers, reference materials and comparable statistics on a wide number of subjects.

In view of the strong demand for cross-national indicators on the situation of families and children, the OECD Family database has been developed to provide cross-national indicators on family outcomes and family policies across the OECD countries, its enhanced engagement partners and EU Member States. The database brings together information from various national and international databases, both within the OECD and external organisations. The database currently (version December 2012) includes 67 indicators under four main dimensions: 1) structure of families; 2) labour market position of families; 3) public policies for families and children; and 4) child outcomes.⁵

Public support to families with children can be in different forms. OECD Family Database distinguishes three types of spending: 1) child-related cash transfers to families with children; 2) financial support for families provided through the tax system; and 3) public expenditures on services for families with children. The mix of these support measures varies greatly across OECD countries. The first figure of the presentation compared the level of public spending on families with children in early years, between 2003 and 2009 in Denmark, the United Kingdom, Hungary, and in the OECD countries on average, comparing cash and in-kind spending.

The effectiveness of the different policies in reducing child poverty has been the subject of many studies. The second figure showed the two-stage effect of public childcare provision on poverty reduction in the different OECD countries. The last two figures showed 1) the regression lines of child poverty on family in-kind spending as a function of in-kind benefit structures; and 2) the regression lines of child poverty on family cash spending as a function cash benefit structures.

Mr Richardson emphasized the need for universally-provided services based on the needs of children and their families, as well as the need for integrated family support services for the vulnerable groups, and he also highlighted the importance of prevention of poverty and social exclusion. Finally he stressed that it is needed to think harder about how family support fits into the broader social context.

JASMINE BYRNE, UNICEF INNOCENTI RESEARCH CENTRE

Jasmina Byrne is child protection specialist working in UNICEF Office of Research- Innocenti, Florence, Italy. She has more than 15 years of global experience in managing complex child protection programmes, including research, policy development, programme design and evaluation in South East Asia, Europe and Southern Africa both within the UN and the civil society sector. Ms Byrne has been with UNICEF for 7 years, and prior to joining Innocenti she was head of child protection in UNICEF Indonesia. Her current portfolio includes research on effective strategies and interventions to address violence, exploitation and trafficking of children and child rights on the internet.

She gave a brief presentation on the family support and the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and UNICEF's understanding of family and parenting support in the context of social protection. She also talked about the importance of evidence base but also challenges related to transferability of evidence-based family support programmes.

The CRC sets out the independent rights of children, and states that the best interests of the child are usually served by supporting the child's family. States must '*render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children*' (article 18). States have an obligation to provide material assistance and support programmes (article 27). The child's right to protection from all forms of violence highlights the importance of establishing social programmes that provide support to children and families around prevention, identification and follow up of incidents of child maltreatment (article 19).

The relationship between the state and the family is thus of paramount importance in securing the realization of the rights of the child. These rights are universal and span across the life cycle of the child, but support can be particularly effective in early childhood and adolescence. Early childhood is the most critical time in a child's development, laying the foundation for physical, emotional, and intellectual wellbeing. Early life experiences, both positive and negative impact not only on the lifecycle of an individual but on society as whole. '*Young children have particular requirements for physical nurturance, emotional care and sensitive guidance as well as time and space for social play*'.⁶ Adolescence is another crucial cycle in a child's life. It is a period of intensive brain maturation process, a period of intense cognitive development but can also be characterized by risk taking

⁵ See more on the webpage: <http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/oecdfamilydatabase.htm>

⁶ CRC General Comments no 7.

behaviour. Parents have responsibility to provide direction and guidance to their adolescent children and to take their views into the account in accordance with their age and maturity⁷.

UNICEF places family and parenting support at the core of its social protection agenda. Social Protection in UNICEF is understood as 'a set of public and private policies and programmes aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty and deprivation'⁸.

There are 4 main components of social protection:

- 1) Social Transfers: Predictable direct cash transfers to individuals or households to protect them from the impacts of shocks and support the accumulation of human, productive and financial;
- 2) Programmes to ensure access services; Social protection interventions that reduce the financial and social barriers households face when accessing social services;
- 3) Social Support and care services: Human resource-intensive services that help identify and reduce vulnerability and exclusion, particularly at the child and household level; and
- 4) Legislation and Policies: Changes to policies/legislation in order to remove inequalities in access to services.

Family support services are activities to strengthen and preserve families, prevent family separation/breakdown and ensure early intervention in families deemed at risk. As a child protection instrument, family support services enhance capacity of families to care for children. Some activities may include: parenting education; family mediation; family legal advice; family /individual therapeutic support; and referral to services.

As a social protection instrument, family support and care services help strengthen families' resilience and capacity to cope with risks, poverty and social exclusion while linking families to basic social and other (protection, legal) services. For example home base care aims to provide care for those marginalized due to poverty, inability to access services or stigma; ensure access to basic services and linkages with legal support and livelihood opportunities. UNICEF promotes integrated social protection systems. Social, as well as economic vulnerabilities need to be addressed. Vulnerabilities are shaped by underlying structural social, political and economic factors. In order to have each one of the elements of the social protection framework effectively achieve its objectives, other elements need to be taken into account as well.

The evidence of effectiveness of family support programmes predominantly comes from high income countries. However, there is more evidence emerging on the impact of parenting programmes in the context of violence prevention and the impact of cash transfers on birth registration, child labour, child marriage and involuntary family separation. An outstanding issue is the extent to which violence against children or child abuse could be impacted by poverty reduction strategies, although existing data from lower income countries are poor and the evidence inconclusive⁹.

In terms of the transferability of the effective family support programmes, there are many challenges to face, such as striking the balance between the original evidence-based programme and cultural differences of the new setting; developing a relevant theory of change or logic model; and the rigorous testing of new models. Other things to consider include the high cost (both in terms of license purchase and implementation costs); differences in family structures and dynamics; as well as parenting practices and prevalence of orphan-hood or family separation due to migration in many lower income countries.

Implementation of parenting programmes will also depend on factors such as enabling legislative and policy framework, financial resources, inter-sectoral collaboration, leadership buy-in, existence or absence of professional workforce, and geography.

A UNICEF study from 3 countries in Eastern Europe examining the effectiveness of targeted social assistance programmes showed that barriers to access included the lack of awareness by families, the lack of transparency and fairness to access assistance, inadequate capacity of welfare staff, centre based and difficult to reach services, and lack of accessible and trusted complaint mechanisms¹⁰.

To sum up the above, UNICEF sees family support as a right-based, universal-targeted, life cycle approach that should have a particular focus on early intervention and provide equitable access to services. In order to have the desired outcomes (like child well-being, health, education, or prevention of violence, abuse, and separation), we

⁷ CRC General Comments no 4.

⁸ UNICEF (2012), Integrated Social Protection Systems: Enhancing Equity for Children. UNICEF Social Protection Strategic Framework.

⁹ For more information on the impact of social transfers see Barrientos A.J., Byrne J.M., Villa P. Peña (2013), 'Social Transfers and Child Protection', *Working Paper 2013-05*. UNICEF Office of Research, Florence. http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/iwp_2013_05.pdf

¹⁰ http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/2012_on_social_protection.pdf

have to think of the different factors influencing family support services, such as the poverty reduction goal; family policies and legislation; institutions and systems; the political will and the available budgets.

MONA SANDBÆK, COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Mona Sandbæk is Professor in Social Work and Head of Department for Social Work, Child Welfare and Social Policy at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. She has been a researcher at NOVA Norwegian Social Research for many years. Her research field covered child welfare services, children's rights, and child poverty. She worked at the Council of Europe from 2004 to 2007 and has later been involved in several activities on behalf of the Council of Europe (CoE).

Her presentation aimed to present in particular the work of the Council of Europe (CoE) in the field of family and parenting support and included EU's policy framework in the field. She also presented a Norwegian case study examining how income influences different aspects of children's lives.

The Council of Europe's Recommendation 2006 (19) on policy to support positive parenting (Recommendation) recommends that governments take all appropriate legislative, administrative, financial and other measures to create the necessary conditions for positive parenting in the best interests of the child. It urges the Member States to implement measures to support parents.

The Recommendation approach aims at enabling parents to bring up their children according to the UN convention, and exercise assertive but non-violent discipline. Positive parenting also means creating good relationships, structures and routines, attitudes and values, providing children with:

- 1) Nurture (Warmth, acceptance, involvement, support);
- 2) Structure (Guidance, standards, limits and reasons);
- 3) Recognition (Acknowledge child's experience and views); and
- 4) Empowerment (Enhance the evolving capacities of the child and its increasing sense of autonomy).

CoE's policies to support parents are non-judgemental and non-stigmatising, respecting parents' and children's experiences. They aim to ensure rights to material support by implementing universal measures through public transfers and taxation, as well as targeted measures; regulation to reconcile work and family life; and childcare facilities. Another objective is to ensure access to services.

Combating child poverty has to be based on a rights-based approach; ensuring the right to income, employment, housing, education and health. Particular attention must be given to ensure families at risk of social exclusion access to these rights. The European Commission Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage' is a key document in tackling child poverty. It shows a human rights approach and highlights the importance of prevention and integrated strategies.

A Norwegian longitudinal study of child poverty with children and parents as informants¹¹ tried to find out how children's well-fare relate to family income. The data used in this study were collected at three points in time over a seven-year period (2003, 2006 and 2009). More than 1300 children and 1300 parents participated each time. The sample was composed of two groups. The case group consisted of children from families living below 60% of the median income, while the control group was composed of children in families from the total income specter. This study – as well as other international studies - clearly showed that children's and parents' views can provide nuances and information about what it means to be poor. Children seem to have double strategies; they try to avoid exclusion and to protect their parents. Most parents give priority to their children – if they have the means to do so. It is important to follow the hard-to-reach in developed welfare states, and interestingly the same groups fall behind in all Europe: non-western immigrants, families outside the workforce and single mothers. The differences between the groups of children are in the disadvantage of low-income children.

Poverty has costs for children and parents and therefore public policies are needed to support families and children. We need universal policies and targeted measures, and we need to review measures from children's perspective, and provide free access to educational institutions and leisure activities. All EU institutions concluded that the overall principles of family support services are to apply a rights-based approach; respect children's and parents' potential and experiences; recognise different kind of families and parenting; address key players, and promote cooperation among professionals and between professionals and parents/children.

¹¹ This study 'Children's level of living – the impact of family incomes' was conducted by the Norwegian Social Research Institute (NOVA) and financed by NOVA and The Norwegian Women's Public Health Association (Norske Kvinners Sanitetsforening).

CoE's further work in the area of family and parenting support:

- Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the child (2012-2015)
- CoE Recommendation (2012) on the participation of children and young people
- Guidelines on child friendly justice and Rec (2011) 12 on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families
- Toolkit for professionals working with children in alternative care with SOS Children's Villages International
- A follow-up to the «Think Parents» conference (October 2012)

One of the main challenges is bridging the gap between existing standards and what happens in the field. The CoE therefore demands a focus on implementation of existing instruments, highlights the importance of co-operation, and supports the organisation of national events/seminars to promote positive parenting.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

The following issues were debated and emphasised:

- In many countries bullying in school is a serious problem which we should fight.
- The value of the work of the practitioners was highlighted. We have to support them with decent salaries and quality working conditions.
- Family support services should be universal but we must ensure that the families from vulnerable groups can also access them.
- It is not enough to build up family support services, but monitoring and providing access to them are also crucial aspects. The importance of building relationships based on trust was also highlighted.
- There is a need to support a wider concept of what constitutes evidence and generate different types of evaluations. It is also important to show bad experiences in order to avoid the same mistakes and make our work more efficient.

CONCLUDING REMARKS BY JANA HAINSWORTH, EUROCHILD SECRETARY GENERAL, CHAIR OF THE ROUND TABLE

Jana Hainsworth concluded the event by acknowledging the very fruitful and interesting debate, emphasising the need to see family and parenting support in the broader context of social policies. She expressed her gratitude for the work of the Council of Europe dedicated to supporting families and the fact that they adopted a strong strategy for the rights of the child which can underpin the work of the civil society. The issue of family support services is fundamental for Eurochild and its members. It is crucial for us to see where we are heading and to realise the lack of evidence based research and practices in many countries, as well as to look at the value of existing evidences.

APPENDIX 1 – PROGRAMME

Chair: Jana Hainsworth, Eurochild Secretary General

PROGRAMME

12:00	Registrations
12:30	Lunch Buffet
14.00-14.15	Opening Introduction by Jana Hainsworth , Eurochild Secretary General & Pat Dolan , UNESCO Chair and Director Child and Family Research Centre
14.15-15.30	Evidence-based practice in family and parenting support Juliet Ramage , Action for Children, External expert Liam Coen , UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre Stijn Hoorens , RAND Europe
15.30-15.50	Coffee break
15.50-16.50	Round table discussion Egbert Holthius , European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Dominic Richardson , OECD Jasmina Byrne , UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre Mona Sandbaek , Council of Europe
16.50-17.00	Concluding remarks by Jana Hainsworth , Eurochild Secretary General