2010
European year to combat poverty and social exclusion

EUROCHILD KEY MESSAGES

End child poverty through…

- empowering children
- universal access to quality services
- equal opportunities for all
- prevention & early intervention
- supporting vulnerable children
- strengthening families
- more accountability
- sufficient resource allocation
- multidimensional policies
In the European Union today 20% of children live at risk of poverty\(^1\). Poverty is a denial of children’s rights and can prevent them from realising their full potential. Child poverty impacts negatively on the whole of society, both in the present and in the future.

Poverty is much more than material deprivation. Poverty can also mean poor quality health care, education, housing and environment. A children’s rights perspective takes all these factors into account. It explores all the influences over a child’s well-being, both inside and outside the family. We cannot make a decisive impact on child poverty without addressing children’s rights.

Eurochild key messages provide policy recommendations for ending child poverty.

\[\text{Art.12 CRC: children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have their opinions taken into account.}\]

\[\text{(1) Eurostat, 2010.}\]

* «Children are not mini-persons with mini-human rights.»
  Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

**Empowering children through participation**

*why?*

Because every child has the right to be heard

Children’s right to be heard is a cornerstone of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Policy design and implementation need to take account of the views and experiences of children themselves. Involving children benefits them and leads to better decisions. This is true for all children, but is even more relevant for children experiencing poverty or social exclusion. All children should have access to appropriate information and dialogue processes that enable them to share their views and experiences. Their opinions must be given due weight.

*In the EU 81% of young people said being consulted before any public decision concerning them is taken would help them to be more active citizens in society\(^2\).*

*A Belgian survey concluded that whereas most children seem to be listened to in their family, only a small fraction of them have the opportunity to be active participants in the school context\(^3\).*

\[\text{(2) Looking behind the figures. The main results of the Eurobarometer 2007 survey on youth. European Commission, Education and Culture DG.}\]

\[\text{(3) Enquête sur la participation des enfants et des jeunes de 10 à 18 ans, Observatoire de l’enfance, de la jeunesse et de l’aide à la jeunesse, 2007.}\]

**Universal access to quality services**

*why?*

Because every child should be able to access the services they need

Universally accessible services are a pre-condition to ensuring everybody enjoys equal rights. However, access needs to be coupled with quality. Services provided must be efficient, respond to the needs of users and be offered by qualified staff. Service delivery must be focussed on respect, empowerment and participation of children and their families. High quality, inclusive education is the basis of social integration and mobility. It should promote equality of opportunity and be founded on a holistic view of child development.

*Investing in universal services for children and adequate parental leaves in addition to effective targeted interventions would save the UK government £486 billion over the next 20 years\(^4\).*

\[\text{(4) Backing the Future: why investing in children is good for us all, Action for Children & New Economics Foundation, 2009.}\]

\[\text{Art. 24 & 28 CRC: children have the right to good quality health care, to clean water, a clean environment and the right to an education.}\]
Poverty is both a cause and an effect of discrimination. All children should be given the same opportunities to fully develop their capacities and enjoy their rights. Policies must be anchored in the principles of the UNCRC and particularly take into account the primary consideration of children’s best interest.

Poverty is amongst the factors hampering Roma children attending pre-school\(^5\). In Romania, only 20% of Roma children are going to kindergartens and benefitting from preschool education. 30% of the children aged 3-10 years suffer from illnesses that have long been eradicated in the developing world (including tuberculosis)\(^6\).

Research conducted in the UK found widespread evidence of children being unfairly refused entry to public services such as libraries, leisure centers, museums and art galleries\(^7\).

An estimated 10% of the world’s population - approximately 650 million people, of which 200 million are children - experience some form of disability. Disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. Poverty limits access to health and rehabilitation services\(^8\).

The seeds of poverty and social exclusion are sown early in life. Families with young children, and in particular those facing poverty and social exclusion, must receive the necessary support and encouragement to address potential problems at the earliest possible stage. Intervention before problems occur is less costly and produces long-term benefits to society. High quality, accessible and affordable early years’ education and care for all children can contribute to reducing future educational inequality and disadvantage.

Art. 27 CRC: Children have a right to a standard of living that is adequate to meet their physical and mental needs. Governments should help families who cannot afford to provide this.

Art. 7 CRPD\(^9\): State Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.

Art. 2 CRC: the CRC applies to all children whatever their race, religion, abilities, opinions, or type of family they come from.

Art. 18 CRC: governments shall take measures to ensure children of working parents can benefit from child-care services and facilities.

Because every child should have the same chance in life

Because prevention is better than cure

The average public spending by OECD countries up to age six accounts for only a quarter of all spending on children; but it is in the first six years that spending can have the greatest impact. Governments should invest more money in children during the first six years of their lives to reduce social inequality and help all children, especially the most vulnerable, to live happier lives\(^{10}\).

Children’s health is a potentially valuable economic investment. It can result in better educated and more productive adults, set in motion favourable demographic changes, and help to break the inter-generational transmission of poverty\(^{11}\).

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(6) Roma children’s rights protection: the right to equal chances – non-discrimination, Save the Children Romania, 2010
(7) Young Equals: Making the case: why children should be protected from age discrimination and how it can be done, Children’s Rights Alliance for England, 2009.
(8) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”
Some children, due to specific situations (like children living in institutions, separated from parents, leaving care, caring for sick or disabled parents), or characteristics (such as children with disabilities, ethnic minority children, children with a migrant background) face greater risk of poverty and exclusion. Universal services must be combined with specific targeted interventions to meet the specific needs of the most vulnerable children.

**Despite the lack of data, it can be roughly estimated that around 1% of children are taken into public care across the EU**\(^{(12)}\). Countries which spend less on public health and social services are more likely to have higher numbers of children in institutional care\(^{(13)}\).

Universal services, such as schools and health care, have a role to play in supporting young carers alongside more specialist provision. Universal service providers need to be more alert to the specific needs of these carers and find ways to deliver their particular service to them\(^{(14)}\).

**Art. 3.3 CRC:** governments shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children maintain high standards, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

**Art. 23 CRC:** children who have any kind of disability should have special care and support, so that they can lead full and independent lives.

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Supporting vulnerable children

**Because some children need extra help to be included**

Children do best when they grow up in a positive family environment. Governments’ priority must be to support families cope with the challenges of raising children. In addition to material resources, families facing poverty or social exclusion need support that is non-judgmental and empowering in its approach; such as access to public services and measures that help reconcile family and working life\(^{(15)}\).

**Financial benefits have a significant impact on poverty levels among children in the European Union.** Across the EU social transfers reduce the at-risk of poverty rate among households with children by 39%. But this ranges from 65% in Finland to only 15% in Greece\(^{(16)}\).

Parents themselves feel that poverty affects their ability to care for their children. Living on a low income makes good family functioning more difficult and can affect the quality of parent-child relationships\(^{(17)}\).

**Art.18 CRC:** both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for each child. Governments should help parents and legal guardians in their child-rearing responsibilities and provide services to support them.
Governments at national and regional level must be held accountable for their commitment to fight social exclusion and poverty. Targets and monitoring and evaluation tools are necessary to appraise progress, assess impact and design effective policy measures. Other stakeholders must be able to access and use information to fully hold governments to account.

**In the UK, a combination of welfare to work measures and generous tax credits has helped to reverse a historic trend which saw low-income families with children falling ever further behind. This progress fell short of the target reduction of one quarter, but was welcome nonetheless. The Government has recognised the need to extend its efforts in order to achieve its target of reducing child poverty to half the 1999 level by 2010, and to close to zero by 2020.**

10 EU countries have set national quantified targets to reduce child poverty.

Endi child poverty will require investment, but it is money well spent. Where governments invest in universally accessible early years services, family support, measures to reconcile family and working life, targeted support for the vulnerable, and universal and high quality services, the benefits of those investments are felt in all areas of the economy and society over the long-term.

**UNICEF (2008) and OECD (2006) statistics suggest that countries have the potential to reduce child poverty rates to below 10% without a significant increase in overall social spending, through redistribution policies.**

A NESF cost-benefit analysis in 2005 showed that for every €1 invested in ECCE in Ireland, a return of up to €7.10 could be expected. International research demonstrates that early intervention programmes are effective in reducing criminal behaviour, promoting social skills, and integrating disadvantaged children into mainstream society.

**Art. 44 CRC: governments need to report regularly on the measures adopted to give effect to the rights contained in the CRC and on progress made on the enjoyment of those rights.**

**Art. 26 CRC: every child has the right to benefit from social security. Benefits should take into account the resources and the circumstances of the child and his/her family or legal guardians.**
Fighting against poverty and social exclusion requires joined-up thinking and an integrated approach across different policy areas. Coordination between and within ministries, as well as at local and regional level need to be enhanced, and gaps bridged between the measures taken at national and international level, namely with regard to the use of EU structural funds.

A 2009 UNESCO report suggests there is a clear correlation between societal inequality and performance in education. Government spending on family and social benefits – through cash benefits or through investment in services – is in turn strongly correlated with a reduction in child poverty rates (22).

A child mainstreaming approach, i.e. integrating a concern with the well-being and social inclusion of children into all relevant areas of policy-making, appears as the most successful way to adequately respond to the EU political commitment to tackle child poverty and social exclusion (23).