



Ending Child Poverty within the EU?

**A review of the 2006-08 national reports on strategies for
social protection and social inclusion**

2nd Edition

Updated in May 2007 to include a review of all 27 Member States

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Eurochild would like to thank Paula Evans of Children in Scotland for her work in writing this report, and Anne Williams, Consultant on Children's Issues in Europe, for her advice and support in preparing and collecting the country analyses. Eurochild are also grateful to all those who helped to prepare the country analyses that form the basis of this report:

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This Report has been produced with the financial support of the European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Commission.

Ending Child Poverty within the EU?

A review of the 2006-08 national reports on strategies for social protection and social inclusion

The fight against child poverty and social exclusion is at the core of Eurochild's work programme. A key element of this is the monitoring of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPs/Incl) from a children's rights perspective. This report is a synthesis of the country analyses produced by NGOs and national experts of Member States' national action plans for social inclusion.

Key policy messages

Most of the national reports on strategies for social protection and social inclusion identify child poverty as a priority. This is an increasing and welcome focus on child poverty, creating an opportunity for mutual learning and to develop new policies for action and change. This heightened status has the potential to effect a real impact upon Member States' social and economic policies.

- ✓ *Eurochild calls on Member States and the EU to translate this commitment into concrete quantifiable targets to reduce the number of children living in income poverty, with a requirement to report on incremental progress towards this goal.*

Disappointingly, few Member States have referenced children's rights within the context of the NAP/Incl. There was also a lack of commitment shown to including children and young people in the policy development of the national plans as a 'relevant actor'. Even those Member States with young people's rights enshrined by law and policy memorandums on children's rights didn't consult with children and young people on the NAP/Incl.

- ✓ *Member States should tackle child poverty within the framework of their commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopting a child rights' approach to policy development is key to recognising the position of children and young people in society – not as future adults and workers, but as citizens today.*

Single parent families, large families and children with special needs were identified in almost all cases as being at an increased risk of poverty and in need of targeted action. Children in care, disabled, Roma and unaccompanied immigrant children were noted in several reports as being particularly vulnerable groups in need of special attention.

- ✓ *Eurochild supports a targeted approach to tackling social exclusion among particular vulnerable groups of children. However, we regret that policies in many countries are failing to tackle discrimination and exclusion for example among immigrant or Roma children. Furthermore, street children are notable by their absence in the NAPs/incl despite their growing numbers in several Member States.*

There is a strong focus in many of the reports on early years' care and education, particularly in the frame of encouraging parents to return back to work and in gender equality employment policies. While efforts to increase provision of preschool services are necessary and welcome, the quality of those services must not be compromised.

- ✓ *Member States should ensure targets to increase early child care provision are accompanied by a clear framework for monitoring and regulating the quality of those services in terms of affordability, accessibility, pedagogical approach and qualifications.*

The reports also have a strong focus on education policies. Reducing school drop-outs and youth unemployment are key policy objectives of nearly all Member States. There is a clear emphasis on the need for training and employment-related education, and several member states promote non-formal education that focuses on social empowerment of young people.

- ✓ *Eurochild welcomes the emphasis on education as a key to preventing social exclusion. However several country analyses highlighted the gap between aspiration and implementation which must be addressed if a real impact is to be achieved.*

The need to support parents in their role as principal care givers and educators of children is addressed within many NAPs/Incl. Efforts to alleviate the multiple challenges faced by families living in poverty are very welcome. However, there is a growing tendency to focus on perceived deficiencies in parenting.

- ✓ *Member States should focus on empowering and supporting families and tackling structural barriers to inclusion, as opposed to increasing the burden on parents.*

Most Member States present a balanced policy mix to tackle child poverty. Monetary benefits are crucial, and it is worrying that, in some Member States, these are falling in value or failing to meet real need. In the areas of access to health and housing, several Member States are giving particular focus to families living in poverty.

- ✓ *Eurochild supports the move towards a more balanced focus on services provision in addition to family income. However, adequate cash transfers must be at the heart of any policy strategy to tackle poverty.*

Key recommendations on the OMC

In the context of the future development of the Open Method of Coordination on social inclusion, Eurochild has the following recommendations:

1/ Eurochild welcome the attention being given at EU level to the issue of child poverty. Through the facilitation of mutual learning, peer review and governance mechanisms, the OMC is, potentially, a powerful instrument for change. However, to fulfil its potential there must be greater awareness among, and coordination between, the different levels and departments of government.

2/ Stronger links must be forged between the monitoring and implementation of the UNCRC and efforts to tackle child poverty. Such an approach is supported by the recent EU Communication “*Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child*”¹, which calls for the mainstreaming of children’s rights throughout all EU policies, strategies and programmes that have an impact on children. A child rights’ approach would ensure more positive outcomes for children across all policies and would ensure the rights of children and young people are heard. In that line Eurochild advocates a reinforcement of the coordination between relevant policies, so as to develop more effective cross-sectoral strategies to prevent poverty and social exclusion.

3/ Eurochild welcome the initiative to develop a primary indicator that better reflects children’s well-being. Eurochild has long called for an indicator or set of indicators that is non-income related, is specific to children and young people, and is informed by their perceptions of need.

4/ Children’s NGOs need to be made more aware of the relevance of the OMC to their work and encouraged to proactively participate in the creation, monitoring and implementation of NAPs/Incl.

¹ COM (2006) 367, Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, 4 July 2004

Introduction

The fight against child poverty and social exclusion is at the core of Eurochild's work programme. A key element of this is the monitoring of the National Action Plans on Social Exclusion (NAPs/Inclusion) from a children's rights perspective.

In 2004, Eurochild's programme focused on the visibility of children and young people in the NAPs/Inclusion planning process across the EU25 member states. In 2005, we focused primarily on the former EU15 MS, in view of the implementation reporting requirements placed on these MS. Our assessments centred on the implementation and impact of the plans on child poverty, as a contribution to the review of the OMC from a children's rights perspective. We were particularly concerned about highlighting the potential of the NAPs/Inclusion as a powerful instrument of change in the fight against child poverty and social exclusion. The process involved invaluable input from our members, who were able to draw on the experience of extensive national networks.

Following the streamlining of the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC), member states (MS) are required to translate the new Common Objectives into National Plans for each of the three areas of social inclusion: pensions, health and long-term care. The new National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPs/Incl.) are the social inclusion pillar of the National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The plans cover the period from 2006-2008.

This report is a synthesis of the country analyses produced by NGOs and national experts of 27 member states' national action plans for social inclusion (NAP/Incl). Thirteen of the analyses have been carried out by our member organisations or partners at national level. The remainder have been prepared internally within Eurochild and wherever possible checked by organisations within each country.

In assessing the NAP/Incl, Eurochild was to identify whether and to what extent:

- Child poverty is prioritised by member states
- Member states take a child's rights perspective on child poverty
- Children, young people and children's organisations were consulted and included in formulating the NAP/Incl
- Member states are planning and/or taking policy action in order to address the issues of social protection and social inclusion (e.g., in relation to income, participation and access to services)

Where possible our assessment is illustrated by examples of good practices that emerge from the NAP/incl.

PART I : OVERVIEW

1. Situation Analysis

One in five children live at risk of poverty within the EU...

And this rises to almost one in three in Slovakia

Stats on relative income poverty should be treated with caution

The EU 'at-risk-of-poverty' rate refers to individuals living in households where the income is below the threshold of 60% of the national median income. Within these EU average measures, the instance of child poverty recorded by Eurostat has seen only a marginal improvement over the last 6 years. The latest figures show that in 2004, 20% of children aged 0 -15 were at risk of poverty in the EU 25 compared to 16% of the wider population².

Variations across Member States are more striking. For instance, 30% those aged 0-15 in Slovakia - and 24% in Spain - were at risk of poverty in 2004, while the comparable figures stand at 14%, 10% and 9% in France, Finland and Denmark respectively. The data are not fully inclusive of the situation throughout Europe; for example, Malta has no child-specific statistical data available³ (but is now working with Eurostat to resolve the situation).

However, while current Eurostat statistics on child poverty are helpful in assessing the relative income poverty in Europe, they are open to several criticisms:

First, the threshold of 60% is somewhat arbitrary and open to challenge. UNICEF, for example, has chosen to use the threshold figure of 50%. The statistical profile of a country, therefore, can be misleading. The Czech Republic country analysis is an example - while the national poverty rate is below the EU average, a high number of people live just above the 'at risk' threshold - resulting in a deceptively positive picture that understates poverty in the Czech Republic.

Second, the cost of housing is not accommodated. This alone can compromise the validity of this definition as an internal, as well as a cross-national, measure of poverty. For example, in the UK, 2004 statistics show that 2.4 million children were living in low-income families (before housing costs were taken into account) – but the number soared to 3.4 million poor children once housing costs were included⁴. The cost of housing varies as a percentage of income within, and across, countries. This, in turn, has a significant effect on the at-risk-of-poverty rates.

Third, 'dissavings' and borrowings are not included in the measure of income poverty, giving an incomplete picture of the economic situation for many. Relatively easy access to credit and borrowings throughout the EU leaves the worst off more vulnerable to financial crisis.

Bradshaw et al⁵ argue that in addition to a (revised) measure of income, statisticians should add a subjective measure of poverty and a measure of deprivation. A subjective measure of poverty aims to reflect whether a household finds it difficult to 'make ends meet' regardless of income. Such a measure could better reflect reality.

For example, in Latvia the poverty threshold set by government (105Euro/month) is far below the '*real existence minimum income*' proposed by Latvian NGOs (170Euro/month). According to their calculations, 80% of families are living under the subsistence minimum, while the official figure is 19%⁶.

² Eurostat 'at-risk-of poverty after transfers' 2006

³ Malta NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006

⁴ UK NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006

⁵ Bradshaw, J. & Ritakallio, V. in Heikkilä et al. (Oct. 2006), Poverty policies, structures & outcomes in the EU25

⁶ Latvia NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006

The official poverty threshold doesn't always reflect what people need to live

Adding a measure of deprivation, as suggested by Bradshaw et al, gives another perspective of poverty. The author suggests that if 2 or more of 'essential' goods (such as housing, heating, and clothing) are unaffordable, then a household is deprived. Using this measure, 40% of the population in Portugal and Greece are 'deprived', compared to under 10% of the population in the Netherlands, Denmark and Finland.

Comparisons of relative monetary poverty therefore give very little information about differences in standards of living, and so their ability to satisfactorily reflect the situation in new MS is questionable. For example the percentage of people lacking an indoor flushing toilet in Baltic countries is around 20%, more than 3 times that of Portugal, the most deprived EU15 MS.

We need new comparative indicators that better reflect children's well-being

In previous analyses of the National Action Plans on social inclusion, Eurochild has called for the European Commission to develop "a new *Primary Indicator that is specific to children and young people and informed by their perceptions of need*"⁷. We consider that measuring family household income as the sole indicator of child poverty is wholly inadequate. There are many circumstances where family income may not benefit the child – for example, in cases of child maltreatment or domestic violence⁸. It is also the case that income is just one aspect of poverty and exclusion.

The argument for indicator(s) that better reflect children's well-being is gaining credence among policy makers at both EU and national level⁹. This growing recognition of the need to assess children's present, holistically-conceived well-being, as well as the financial status of their household is highly welcomed.

Nonetheless, measuring family household income is still a useful tool for monitoring, understanding and reducing poverty throughout the EU. Denmark, for example, has been criticised for not addressing the issue of income poverty in its NAP/Inclusion¹⁰. Relative income poverty can also be a useful indicator of emerging inequalities in traditional social welfare states, such as Finland and Denmark.

Quality must not be compromised in efforts to increase early childcare provision

Many member states couple direct references to child poverty (and low income families with children) with a strategic emphasis on educational targets and dropout rates. Education in this context refers to early years provision, pre-school, primary school and secondary school. The emphasis on early intervention, pre-school and childcare is welcome and has a direct bearing both on the life chances of the child and the income of the family.

Early school leavers are more likely to be, and remain, low skilled workers or unemployed. The early school leavers and school dropout rates are also an indicator of education performance within and across member states. The EU average for early school leavers was 15.2% in 2005, down from 17.7 % in 2000¹¹. The figure varies hugely between Member States with Spain at 30.8% and Poland at 5.5%. Interestingly, the EU15 average is higher than that of the EU25 at 17.2%.

⁷ National Action Plans on Social Inclusion, Assessing the Impact on Child Poverty and Social Exclusion, November 2005, Eurochild

⁸ Czech Republic NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006

⁹ The European Commission has set up an Indicators sub-group mandated with coming up with a set of concrete recommendations for a common framework for analysing and monitoring child poverty and social exclusion at EU level. This initiative builds on the on-going experience within many member states to develop indicators that reflect children's well-being.

¹⁰ Denmark NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006

¹¹ Eurostat 'Early school leavers %' 2006

The emphasis on encouraging women into the workplace - and also into high skilled jobs - has directed government attention to gender equality in the workplace and issues surrounding a work/life balance. The Barcelona Council targets on childcare support these objectives¹². Eurochild welcomes the emphasis on increasing childcare provision to enable parents back into work, but *only if the early years care and education is of a high standard for the children themselves*. Monitoring the availability and quality of these services is crucial.

2. Value of the OMC in tackling child poverty

The OMC has helped focus attention on child poverty

The Open Method of Coordination has the potential to improve policy outcomes on a number of levels. It acts as a catalyst for national governments to assess all types of policies and issues, forcing administrations to investigate and comment on aspects of policy which may not otherwise be taken into account. The Czech Republic country analysis indicated that resources allocated to children's policies increased as a result of the attention focused on them through the NAP and OMC processes. The Estonian respondents also stated that the OMC has motivated and obligated the government to focus more on the social, as well as economic, development of the state.

But there's a risk that governments see the OMC principally as a reporting process

The OMC allows governments to learn from each other and to share the good practice that they develop to tackle the issue of poverty. This encourages a more coordinated and cohesive policy framework across the EU. Discussion and coordination is more likely to occur internally, as well as across governments, due to the OMC. For instance, the Latvian country analysis noted the increase in strength and visibility of NGOs as a result of the OMC process.

The OMC also ensures that EU-level networking and peer review is commonplace. This has the added bonus of raising the political profile of certain issues. Child poverty is a good example of this effect¹³. In the last 6 years, child poverty has moved from being buried deep within the general poverty agenda to its current position as a growing political priority for many – but not all – member states.

Several country reports also noted the importance of linking the priorities set within the strategies on social inclusion and social protection with the EU Structural Funds and in particular, the European Social Fund.

The strength of the OMC and the usefulness of the NAPs can be undermined by political processes in Member States. Elections can, and do, affect the standard and ambitiousness of the NAPs. Yet, even in these circumstances, the OMC can still influence the development of thought around a certain policy agenda. For example, the Finnish country analysis explained that (with an election due) the government was developing a limited number of new policies on poverty, but had not prioritised child poverty. However, it was also noted that the growth in debates, reports and seminars on child poverty in Finland seems to be having an effect. It is expected that, after the election, commitments may be more forthcoming on the issue. The Netherlands analysis is more sceptical, pointing out that the national elections (November 2006) had made the implementation and completion of anti-poverty measures uncertain.

¹² The Barcelona agreement set targets of childcare provision for 90% of children 3-6 and 33% of those under 3 by 2010.

¹³ Atkinson, A.B, Cantillon, B, Marlier, E and Nolan, B, (2005) Taking forward the EU Social Inclusion Process, Final Report. (Government of Luxemburg, Luxemburg)

There is still concern within Eurochild that some member states still see the OMC as an EU 'reporting' process, rather than as a live means of developing cohesive European policies that build on best practice. This is often reflected by a lack of awareness among the different government ministries responsible for implementation of different aspects of the strategy of the OMC and the NAPs/inclusion.

PART II : A Policy Review

Prioritising child poverty

Many – but not all - of the national country reports identify child poverty as a priority. Of those countries that do identify child poverty as a priority target, there is a distinction to be made between targeting low-income families with children and targeting child poverty. This reflects the different political perspectives on, and definitions of, poverty. A focus on family takes an income-only approach, while a focus on child poverty normally takes a more holistic, child-centred approach.

*The **UK** Government set an ambitious, but clear and measurable, target to end child poverty by 2020. As a result the number of children living in absolute low income has decreased by 1.8 million (before housing costs) and by 2.4 million (after housing costs) between 1997 and 2005. Although this fell short of the 2005 target of reducing child poverty by 25%, the Government recommitted itself to reaching its 2010 target of reducing child poverty by 50% from the 1999 baseline. It is currently developing a strategy to reach this goal. The first measures on its deprivation measure will be produced in February 2007.*

***Hungary** has developed an ambitious national action plan against child poverty. It aims to reduce the poverty rate (below 60% of the median income) of the age group 0 to 15 from 17% (2003) to 12% by 2013. A Child Programme Office was established in November 2005 and the so-called 'Short Programme' (2006-2008) was adopted in June 2006. A long-term 25-year plan is expected to be adopted in 2007. However, the failure of the government to commit adequate financial resources threatens to undermine the plan.*

Eurochild welcomes the fact that, in line with the Barcelona Targets (encouraging Member States to set targets in their National Action Plans to significantly reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2010¹⁴), the European Council (March 2006) asked Member States to “take necessary steps to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities regardless of their background”.

However, Eurochild would like to see that these commitments are transferred into quantitative targets of poverty reduction at EU and national level, with a requirement to report on incremental progress towards this goal.

Addressing specific target groups

Single parent families, large families, and children with special needs were identified in almost all cases as being at an increased risk of poverty and in need of targeted action. In Latvia, for example, there had been a marked increase between 2003 and 2004 in the number and percentage of single parent families at risk of poverty.

Children in care, disabled, Roma and unaccompanied immigrant children were noted in several of the reports (especially UK, Latvia, Sweden and Malta) as being particularly vulnerable groups in need of special attention. Some mention was made of groups such as children with substance-misusing parents and children with parents who had been institutionalised¹⁵. Financial crisis was also mentioned as a risk factor contributing to child poverty¹⁶, as were other crisis situations that resulted in children being taken into care¹⁷.

¹⁴ Presidency Conclusions – Barcelona 15 and 16 March 2002

¹⁵ For example Sweden and the Czech Republic

¹⁶ UK NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006

¹⁷ Czech Republic NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006. It was also noted that in some cases evictions due to financial crisis were a government policy that resulted in the homelessness of children. In other circumstances, children in poor families are taken into care by the State. In Lithuania, data from the municipal Children's Rights Protection Offices, reveal that most children from 'families at social risk' due to poverty are taken into child care. (3209 guardianships were recognised in 2005).

The integration of migrant families and particularly the promotion of educational opportunities for children and young people of migrant background is highlighted in many of the country reports. For example, in Germany, the youth migration services, with 360 offices throughout the country, are being restructured so as to offer individual, youth-specific integration support to young new immigrants who are too old for school.

Many national country reports outline initiatives to address educational disadvantage among immigrant children who do not speak the national language. Several refer to the provision of language assistants in schools and pre-school (e.g. Austria, Germany, Ireland). However the analysis of the Netherlands NAP/incl cautions against focusing too heavily on language knowledge, when the causes of social exclusion of children and young people are far more complex.

The country analyses also highlighted several groups of children and young people, who, despite their vulnerability to child poverty and social exclusion, were either not mentioned by the NAP or were not addressed sufficiently. In Slovenia, Sweden and the Czech Republic, although issues relating to Roma children are recognised in the NAP/Incl., the analyses are critical of the extent to which the policies identified are failing to make an impact. The Czech Republic and Lithuanian analyses identified street children and children without families as key groups of children and young people who were not noted by the NAPs. The Maltese country analysis pointed out the lack of attention given to unaccompanied immigrant children and children with disabilities.

Inclusion and Education

There was a strong focus on education policies within all of the NAP/Incl. Early years' care/education, early school leavers and youth employment were key target areas for nearly all of the Member States. There are clear examples of good practice here.

Early years care and education

There is a healthy recognition of the importance of high quality early years care and education across the Member States. Policies range from providing various degrees of subsidised pre-school services¹⁸, to commitments to improve the quality both of the workforce and the service provided¹⁹. Fewer Member States made the link between provision of preschool services and the quality of those services. Greater emphasis should be placed on monitoring and improving this sector, as parents are encouraged to return back to the workplace.

The Flemish community (Belgium) is in the process of raising capacity of child day care and trying to address the exclusion mechanisms that prevent certain parents, those living in poverty or at risk of poverty, from having access to day care for very young children. They aim to increase the attendance of infants in pre-school education through raising awareness among parents. They emphasize the importance of early participation of children.

Work/life balance

Early years care and education cannot be encouraged without provisions for a flexible means of achieving work/life balances within the family. In line with the Barcelona Targets,

¹⁸ Estonia has committed to creating opportunities for every child to participate in preschool learning for at least one year prior to starting school. In Slovenia, children can no longer be excluded from preschool if their parents don't make payments. Spain has set an ambitious target of providing free school education to all 3-6 year olds by 2010. In Sweden, all children are offered free preschool from the age of 4. Lithuania has 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.

¹⁹ Sweden NAP/Incl. Country Analysis 2006

early years care and education should be prioritised with clear targets, at the same time as being joined up with gender equality employment policies. Malta showed a joined-up approach to targeting educational social exclusion by focusing on ‘upskilling’ mothers and lone parents to support children’s learning²⁰.

Several country reports mention the move towards extended school hours and care services for children out of school hours to meet the needs of working parents.

Luxembourg aims to extend and improve its network of “Maisons Relais pour enfants” (MR-Childcare Centres). Such MR facilities have extended opening hours 06:00-20:00 Monday to Saturday and offer integrated services of support for parents, activities for children and links between families and schools. In 2005, there were 87 “Maisons Relais pour enfants” (Childcare Centres) with 178 local or district branches and 8,000 places.

Attainment and early school leavers

Education policies also focus on the future employability and inclusion of young people when they make their transitions to adulthood and employment. Many of the NAP/Incls comment on high dropout rates, low achievement and the active inclusion of vulnerable groups -- such as Roma children or children with special needs. Education of Roma Children is particular priority in the Czech Republic – however, the implementation of this policy is questionable due to the opposition of leading Czech educators to integrated education. The Latvian analysis pointed out that Latvian statistics on early school leavers and school dropout rates were misleadingly positive, given that many children in Latvia do not even register for school.

Cyprus has introduced Educational Priority Zones which aim to reduce inequalities for pupils attending schools in disadvantaged areas with an increased proportion of immigrants. There are currently three EPZ in operation covering 17 school units. These seem to have worked well, where there is additional and constant support from NGOs.

The Netherlands also set targets to reduce early school leavers by 50% between 2000 and 2010, while Hungary placed a policy focus on preventing drop-out among 14-18 year olds. Denmark set a target for 85% of youths to complete youth education by 2010 and 95% by 2015 -- but it should also be noted that Denmark was criticised in the country analysis for its tendency to focus on childhood in very instrumental (economic and employment) terms.

The German government reports on a new pilot programme “*Second Chance for Truants*” which supports innovation aimed at the reintegration of school dropouts in schools and supports them beyond their school leaving qualification. A range of new programmes at regional level, especially in East-Germany is also focusing on early prevention.

The emphasis on education certainly is welcome and applauded by Eurochild. However, better resourcing and closing the gap between aspiration and implementation are challenges underlined in several country analyses.

Youth unemployment

Educational attainment was a clear priority for Member States. It was also recognised that training and employment-related education are needed for young people too. For example, Estonia has increased the budget for vocational education and several Member States were making provision for youth work opportunities.²¹ The Netherlands importantly also

²⁰ See ‘Ghazza’ programme in the Maltese NAP/Incl. country analysis

²¹ Including the UK, Malta, Hungary, Finland, and Sweden.

focused on creating jobs fit for young people²². Germany is using funds from the European Social Fund to mainstream the successful programme “*Competence agency*”, a comprehensive service that provides tailor-made guidance especially to long-term unemployed young persons. Furthermore, Germany seeks to offer young unemployed persons a job or training programme within 3 months of becoming unemployed.

Non-formal and informal learning

A few of the country reports emphasise the importance of non-formal education opportunities as a means of combating social exclusion among children and young people. Finland, for example, sets strategic targets that include supporting young people’s growth and independence as well as promoting their active citizenship. In Estonia, so called ‘hobby education’ is part of the Estonian education system and is regulated through the Hobby Education Schools Act. Malta refers to several initiatives included within its National Youth Policy 2003.

In Finland, the new Youth Act covering the children and young people 0 – 29 years of age includes a target on social empowerment of young people, with measures aimed at young people to improve their life skills and prevent social exclusion.

Family support

The need to support parents in their role as principal care givers and educators of children is addressed within many NAPs/Incl. The Czech Republic, for example, adopted a national concept for family policy in 2004, which sets out a comprehensive set of government measures to be applied in support of families. They plan to map service provision across the country to help address regional differences, and to carry out a study that will identify the needs of families at risk of poverty and the best ways to address them. Germany also draw attention to the various programmes being launched in the *Länder* including the following: ‘Families and children have priority’, ‘Strengthening parents’ and ‘Help for women and families’.

In Flanders (Belgium) an initiative has been set up to train people who have experienced poverty to work with social workers and to help them better understand the needs of the poor and how to develop their capacities. This is important since it starts from the principle of empowerment and recognition that the people experiencing poverty know best how to address the difficulties they face.

Efforts to alleviate the multiple challenges faced by families living in poverty are very welcome. However, some of the analyses revealed a concern that the approaches adopted in government policies increasingly focus on perceived behavioural problems, placing all the responsibility on parents rather than addressing structural problems. This is particularly evident in Denmark, where poverty is being addressed principally by encouraging parents to return back to work through the use of economic incentives. Where parents are unable to work, this will have the effect of further marginalising their children, both economically and socially.

²² The Netherlands were also criticised for their lack of intergovernmental joined up working in relation to their youth policies.

Resourcing policies

A distinction should be made between those countries that make a *political* commitment to tackle child poverty (and specific target groups of children and families) and those that make a significant *resource* commitment. Hungary, for instance, has a strong policy intent to eradicate child poverty, but is starved for resources with which to turn this policy into a reality. This is reflected by the absence of a time frame. Likewise, Malta and Latvia noted the discrepancy between goals set and resources allocated.

Income

The reports confirmed a general focus on increasing income and the redistribution of wealth. However, these policies were often deemed insufficient. For example, despite increasing maintenance allowances, childcare and child disability allowances, the benefit levels in Finland have not regained the real value of their 1994 payments. According to the study carried out by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, the actual value of the family allowance has dropped 19 euros between 1994 and 2004.

Spain is an example of a country that has increased its spending on children by 6% in the last year, but was coming from a low baseline of 0.15% of the national budget. Moreover, the Lithuanian report underlines the importance of increasing private investment, rather than State investment, to meet their poverty-reduction objectives. In Cyprus, although the government claims in the NAP/Incl to be increasing the state subsidies for care programmes that help women enter or re-enter the labour market, this hides a more worrying trend towards an overall decrease in the total budget for social support over recent years.

The Irish NAP/Incl specifies that €2.65 billion will be allocated to the National Childcare Strategy (2006- 2010) which focuses on early childhood development and care. They intend to fund an additional 50,000 child care places over that period. The NAP/Incl also refers to the allocation of approximately €2.75 billion in 2006 for total income support payable in respect of children.

In terms of income-based policies, both the Netherlands and the UK country analyses were critical of some major omissions. In the UK, this related to the complete absence of mention of children and families in fuel poverty. This omission occurred despite the adverse impact of major energy price rises over the last 3 years. Without discussion of the issue, no governmental commitment has been made in the UK either to raise incomes to address fuel poverty affecting children or otherwise secure access to cheaper energy for poor and vulnerable children.

Services

Attention was given across the NAPs reviewed to securing access to such core services as health and housing. Notably, Estonia in its housing policy strategy 2007-2013, outlines several measures to improve the living conditions of families with children, and Hungary has a specific objective to reduce regional and housing disadvantage, with a particular focus on disadvantaged families.

In France, the Ministry of Public Health adopted an action programme in December 2005 focusing on the health of children and young people. It includes the development of preventative measures, and facilitating access to medical consultations for children from families living in poverty.

There also was a concentration of effort around access to, and provision of education services as the means of breaking the intergenerational link in poverty. NAPs/Incl referred to the extension of provision to pre-school services, as well as various methods to prevent

young people from dropping out of school. Latvia was the only country to overtly connect health and education by calling for free school meals (as implemented by its neighbour Estonia). Few countries make the connection between family health and child poverty.

Participation in social, cultural & leisure activities

The resourcing of participation was given the least amount of attention. Denmark seemed to be the only country to increase direct finance to youth work and provide funds for participation in social and cultural activities²³. Other measures included short-term provision of access to sports facilities.

A rights-based approach to poverty and social inclusion

Using income-based indicators for poverty has the side effect of focusing anti-poverty measures on increasing families' immediate economic position and children's potential for higher earnings through better education. While the focus on education is crucial, it encapsulates the tendency of Member State's policy to view children in terms of the economic potential of their future selves, rather than as people with meaningful whole lives in the here and now. This clash between present and future life needs to be reconciled to improve the reality of childhood today at the same time as improving life chances of children.

This view is linked to the belief that children have certain rights now, as well as in the future when they become adults. Accordingly, State policies must deal with the present experiences and circumstances of children, as well as viewing childhood as a good time to ensure the rights and prospects of future adults. A focus on the rights-based principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, survival and development, as well as participation and involvement are the framework around which indicators of child well-being, poverty and inclusion should be constructed. Therefore, dealing effectively with child poverty must include a greater focus on children's rights as recognised by all the EU Member States in their signing and ratifying of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Disappointingly, very few Member States have referenced children's rights within the context of the NAP/Incl. For those countries, such as Sweden, that have created action plans and developed policies on children's rights, there is a failure to mainstream this principle into the NAP/Incl. This is compounded by the lack of commitment shown to including children and young people in the policy development of the national plans as a 'relevant actor'²⁴. Even those Member States with Young People's Rights enshrined by law and policy memorandums on children's rights didn't consult with children and young people on the NAP/Incl²⁵.

This presents a twofold problem. Article 12 of the UNCRC is not being implemented fully by Member States²⁶ and where Member States have spent time developing a rights-based policy on children, they have failed to ensure joined-up policy provision by consulting each other at the EU level.

²³ The amount provided was criticised by the country analysis as being tokenistic and failing to identify and tackle the structural barriers to participation.

²⁴ See the Swedish NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006. Also note the section on participation that identifies Sweden as a good practice example.

²⁵ Hungary's NAP/Incl makes mention of children's rights and the implementation of the Hungarian Children's Rights Act. Estonia has a strategy for ensuring Children's Rights 2004 – 2008 and one of the objectives included is the reduction of child poverty.

²⁶ Spain has not included reference to, nor directly taken account of, the UNCRC in its NAP/Incl, despite a recommendation by the UNCRC Committee to integrate the general principles of the Convention into all relevant legislation, political, judicial and administrative decisions concerning children.

*In **Estonia**, there is a clear link between the National Strategy on Ensuring Child Rights and the NAP/Incl. The Strategy on Ensuring Child Rights includes objectives and measures to ensure child rights to every child living in Estonia (as outlined in the UNCRC) and tackling child poverty as well as with social exclusion are set as priorities. The NAP takes account of the objectives and measures of the Strategy on Ensuring Child Rights and includes the monitoring of its implementation as one part of the reporting process.*

Children's participation

Children and young people themselves are also relevant actors and stakeholders in national policies addressing child poverty. And yet, not one of the Member States consulted with children and young people when drafting their reports. There were some good practice examples of how children and young people had been involved in connected policy development such as Head Start²⁷ in the UK and the Swedish Minister's consultation group of 40 young people aged 13-18²⁸. Although, in the Swedish NAP/Incl, it is unclear as to whether this consultation tool has informed policy development.

Slovenia has also indicated that they want to establish a Council of Children as an advisory body to the Minister. Indeed, many of the countries²⁹ have children's and or youth parliaments. The establishment of these bodies does not, however, ensure that they will be consulted - and there is no reference to them having been involved in the development of the NAP/Incl.

*The **German** NAP/Incl refers to the Lander-wide participation workshop "Get involved" which aims at taking greater account of the needs of children and young people with few educational qualifications and including them in decision-making processes in order to permanently integrate them in community life.*

Children's participation and involvement in drafting government policies that will have an effect on their lives is central to the children's rights-based approach that Eurochild advocates. More needs to be done by the Commission, Member States and NGOs to fulfil the provisions of the UNCRC and to involve children and young people as relevant actors in the NAP/Incl.

One way to ensure that children, young people and children's organisations are consulted on policies that will affect children and young people is to systematically examine policies to better identify those that will have a major impact. *Child Impact Assessments*³⁰ are most effective when they are used during the consultation phase of any initiative. All policies should be assessed to establish whether, and to what extent, they are likely to have an impact upon children's lives. If it is shown that such legislation is likely to have a significant effect, be it positive or negative, then children's organisations and young people themselves should be invited to participate in the consultation process.

Consultation, monitoring & evaluation

Participation of stakeholders or 'relevant actors' is an accepted part of policy development. NGOs are widely accepted as being a 'relevant actor' in any policy agenda. And yet, a number of the NAP/Incl did not consult with children's NGOs. For

²⁷ UK NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006

²⁸ Sweden NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006

²⁹ For example, the UK, Ireland, Sweden and Lithuania

³⁰ For best practice see 'Children's Rights Impact Assessment: The SCCYP Model' Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People 2006

example, in Austria, the main children's NGO was unaware that a NAP/Incl was being produced and of its relevance to children and young people³¹.

This situation may be a reflection of government attitudes to involvement, participation and consultation. In Latvia, for example, NGOs were invited to participate in consultations on the NAP, but were not allocated resources to take part in the consultation. Without these resources, an 'invitation' may be meaningless. It may also be a reflection of ignorance and apathy in the NGO sector. More could be done to mainstream the poverty and inclusion agenda into the NGO psyche at the same time as mainstreaming children's rights into the NAP/Incl. More also needs to be done by the sector itself to promote knowledge of the NAP/Incl and to be proactive in requesting involvement in the policy formation and implementation stages.

One consequence of not involving children's NGOs is a lack of joined-up thinking and policy development within – and across - Member States. Many of the country analyses highlighted the fact that while National Action Plans on children or other child-focused policy papers exist, they were not included in the NAP/Incl³².

It is important to highlight that involvement of NGOs is not only important in policy development, but also in its monitoring and implementation. Eurochild welcomes the initiatives in several Member States to ensure NGO's participation in the implementation of the national inclusion strategies, such as the round table in Estonia involving NGOs, social partners and all levels of government, or the 'Supervising Committee' in Latvia. However, there is still much room for improvement in the level and quality of participation of NGOs, and in particular those working directly for and with children.

Coordinated policy making

Many Member States have National Action Plans, policies and legislation specifically for children and young people. However, these were not always mentioned within the NAPs/incl³³. Joined-up policy making by Member States means that any overlapping policies affecting child poverty and social inclusion are, at the very least, mentioned in the NAP/Incl.

There are examples of good practice of how this might be achieved in a number of the reports³⁴. In Finland, for instance, a multi-professional approach to dealing with children and young people issues is being promoted, which will encourage cooperation between different administrative sectors. The UK government has developed the Child Poverty Accord, which encourages joined-up working by bringing national agencies and local authorities together. A Joint Partnership Board engages with NGOs. However, these examples are few and far between and more needs to be done to ensure that each NAP/Incl reflects children's policies already developed in Member States. Again, Child Impact Assessments would be a useful way of moving towards a joined-up approach.

³¹ Austrian Kinderfreunde were involved in the national action plan on children's rights which includes actions linked to tackling child poverty. They were not aware of the NAP/Incl.

³² Slovenia NAP/Incl Country Analysis 2006

³³ Sweden, Netherlands, Finland, UK, etc.

³⁴ Estonia and Latvia for example.

Part III : Conclusions and recommendations

Have Member State's policies made a difference?

The OMC and the NAP/Incl clearly are appreciated as a means and a method for bringing about social, as well as economic policy development. There is an increasing and welcome focus on child poverty, creating real targets and implementing policies for action and change. Child poverty increasingly is a political priority. This heightened status has had a real impact upon Member States' social and economic policies.

The question remains, however, as to whether these policies are making a difference to the existence and the seeming intractability of child poverty and the social exclusion of certain groups of children and young people. The causes of poverty and social exclusion are complex. Addressing these issues is never going to be easy and there will be no quick fix. In keeping with this reality, the results appear to be mixed but encouraging.

Absolute poverty in Estonia, for instance, has been nearly halved over the last 8 years. Unemployment among young people is down and benefits have increased, but there is no change in the number of school dropouts. In the UK, progress has been made in relation to 11 of the 20 overarching indicators. Crucially, the UK has succeeded in moving 800,000 children out of poverty since 1996/1997. In addition, the proportion of early school leavers has fallen by 14% in 2005 and youth unemployment has decreased from 13.1% in 1998 to 12.9% in 2005. However, UK government policies and programmes have had little effect on those children experiencing severe and persistent poverty.

As this report shows, there is a significant amount of good practice being developed alongside equally significant room for improvement. Eurochild has a number of recommendations to improve the OMC system, as well as Member State's NAPs. These recommendations can be split among Member States, the Commission and NGOs, but are summarised below.

Eurochild Recommendations

The EC should take a clear lead on the OMC by advising Member States to:

- Set clear quantitative targets on reducing child poverty and exclusion
- Consult with children and young people
- Include reference to the UNCRC and in particular Article 12
- Involve children's NGOs in the development, implementation and evaluation of the NAP/Incl
- Indicate how they will implement and evaluate the NAP/Incl
- Mainstream children's rights into poverty and inclusion policies, strategies and evaluations. Child Impact Assessments should be considered and increasingly used in Member States and the EU.
- Strategies to reduce the adverse effects of child poverty must include diverse elements (such as eliminating fuel poverty and improving child health and nutrition) in addition to simply increasing monetary benefits
- Better statistical formulae should be developed for measuring child poverty, which move away from income-only analysis to child well-being indicators
- NGOs need to be made more aware of the relevance of NAP/Incl to their work and encouraged to proactively participate in the creation/modification of NAPs.

The European Commission

With support from EU member states, the European Commission needs to re-assess the indicators it uses to define and calculate child poverty. Eurochild believes that by taking a more holistic child-centred approach to defining child poverty, a more accurate comparative analysis of the extent of the problem can be made – and more effective poverty-reduction strategies can be created and implemented. This would also go some way to embedding children's rights in the OMC and ensuring that childhood is recognised as having meaning and importance itself, rather than merely as a means to an adult, economic-oriented end.

Eurochild also recommends that the Commission takes the lead in relation to child participation. The Commission should actively encourage member states to engage children and young people in developing every NAP/Incl. This should be clear in the Commission's guidance on the NAP. Ideally, the Commission should lead by example and, along with member states and NGOs, consult with children and young people about the measure of a good childhood, the meaning of well-being and the crucial steps toward eradicating the ill effects of child poverty.

Eurochild also recommends that to complement the stronger emphasis on consultation and participation - both with children and young people and with children-centred NGOs - the Commission make provision for consultation budgets to be available for those Member States with particular need.

Member States

Eurochild recommends that all EU member states make the eradication of child poverty a top public policy priority. It is also recommended that the policy focus should be on child poverty, rather than on families with low incomes – and that a holistic, child-centred, multidimensional view of child poverty be used throughout the EU.

There is much good practice in terms of developing children's rights-based policies in the Member States. But, good practice needs to be mainstreamed into all policies if it is to be meaningful. One way to ensure that this happens is to develop and use detailed, serious Child Impact Assessments for proposed legislation, policies and programmes. The core requirement for implementing a children's rights approach is the consultation with, and involvement of, children and young people themselves. Current participation of children and young people in the development of NAP/Incl is woefully inadequate. Good practice on how best to do this should be shared (for ex. see reports by: UK, Sweden & Slovenia).

The content within member state NAP/Incl is varied. The emphasis given to income, access to services and participation is weighted towards income-based policies, but again varies. Although Eurochild would like to see more emphasis on child well-being in addition to income, it is crucial that whatever commitments are made and targets set must be appropriately funded and effectively implemented.

It is recommended that member states place more emphasis on illustrating how their targets will be met – and, equally important, how progress towards those targets will be measured and monitored. Any monitoring and evaluation of policies as well as the NAP/Incl should be done through consultation and involvement with children, young people and children-centred NGOs.

NGOs

Eurochild recognises that the children's NGO sector needs to be more aware of, and more active in, the development of each Member State's NAP/Incl. Better promotion of the development process is necessary. NGOs should be encouraged to request involvement in the drafting of the NAP/Incl and should make every effort themselves to consult with children and young people as part of their contribution to the plans.

COUNTRY ANNEXES

Austria

1/ Situation analysis

The poverty risk of children and youth (till age 15) is **15%**. In 2005, **6%** of those aged 0 to 17 years lived in jobless households. The NAP highlights the link between poverty and social exclusion in adulthood and disadvantages and discrimination suffered in childhood.

The share of “early school leavers” in 2005 was **9%**.

The number of children in pre-school day care has risen by **70%** in five years. Still there is a need for roughly 18,000 additional childcare places (not including Vienna).

2/ Policy responses

Regarding the objective of OMC to enhance social cohesion, Austria is pursuing two strategic priorities: more opportunities for children and youth, especially of migrant background; and more participation options for people with disabilities.

Austria aims to reduce the poverty risk families with children to 10% within the next ten years. The federal government has made available money for testing innovative projects such as flexible care hours, inter-age and inter-community care, inter-generational forms of care. Debt prevention among school students is an important consumer policy objective.

In the healthcare policy the focus is made on health promotion and preventative healthcare. Long-term care should be affordable for those in need of such care and must not result in financial dependence and poverty.

Austria’s labour market policy is guided by the principal of preventing long-term unemployment (LTU) by intervening as early as possible. New apprentices have been increased by 7.3% compared with Dec 2004.

The government’s actions on combating child poverty and social exclusion include:

- organising effective interaction between the various strategies
- establishing a framework necessary to provide equal opportunities to disabled people
- improving parent’s participation in the labour market (particularly mothers)
- reducing the number of defaulting fathers (equal parenting)
- introducing suitable support for foster parents
- upgrading the quality of care assistance by youth welfare authorities to crisis-prone families
- extension of care centres for children that will further improve the framework for reconciling work and family life

The third priority of providing “**enhanced participation of people with disabilities**” includes policies and targets set to prove opportunities in early childhood, at school, in training, in particular:

- establishing of a task force for long term care provision (*Arbeitskreis für Pflegevorsorge*)
- providing early assistance to children with retarded development and disabilities
- raising the number of students in need of special therapeutic support in integration classes by more than 60%
- extending medical check-up up to a young person’s 18th year

The NAP identifies the following key actions in the **educational policy**:

- increasing the number of children attending childcare facilities away from home
- introducing additional labour market policy funds for more apprenticeship and training to young people

- adoption of two educational policy packages to improve chances of children from at-risk-poverty households
- launching the “fit for reading” campaign (*Lesefit*) and initiative called “Promote reading!” (*Lesen fördern*) to strengthen the reading skills

The federal government currently provides more than 1,600 compulsory school teachers as tutors in kindergartens and elementary schools for the integration of children who do not understand the teaching language.

3/ Government critique

Child’s rights have moved more to centre-stage within policy measures. Notably, the Austrian national report refers to the National Action Plan for the Rights of Children and Young People adopted in 2004 by the federal government – which recognises girls and boys as rights holders and aims to heighten their involvement in decision-making processes.

However, according to the UNCRC Committee and report from the NGO coalition³⁵ there is still urgent need for improvement in several child rights areas, such as: treatment of child refugees, juveniles in conflict of the law, (risk of) child poverty; prevention of violence and abuse. Particular concerns raised include:

- lack of dissemination in respect to the CRC
- problematic law-making process
- inefficiencies in resource allocation
- the variety of privately-owned social and family pedagogic and therapeutical institutions
- lack of support for adolescents after 16
- present situation of minor aliens (age limitation, annual residence permit quotas within the framework of reunification; unaccompanied minors deprived of special protection)

Stakeholder participation

The national report refers to a consultation process involving meetings and written exchanges between various actors including NGOs and service providers for children and youth. However, there was no direct consultation or participation of children and young people themselves and even the key children rights NGOs were not informed of the preparation of this report.

4/ Key documents

Social inclusion and poverty

- National Action Plan for the Rights of Child and Young People 2004
- Austria’s structural healthcare plan (*Österreichischer Strukturplan Gesundheit*) is a new and binding basis for an integrated planning of national healthcare delivery
- The Federal Act on the Quality of Healthcare Services (*Bundesgesetz zur Qualität von Gesundheitsleistungen*)
- Strategy for Growth and Jobs (part of Austria’s National Reform Programme)
- Unternehmen Arbeitsplatz (job creation programme)
- “Give youth a chance” (*Der Jugend eine Chance*) aims to eliminate long-term youth unemployment
- “Clearing” programme should provide needs-compliant apprenticeship places, employment relationships, AMS measures or continuing education to disabled youth (N° of participants in 2005: 3400)
- Federal Disability Equality Act (B-BGG) supported by new disability equality law
- Parent Child Relation Amendment Act (*Kindschaftsrechtsänderungsgesetz*)

Access to education

- School Organisation Act
- Young Training Consolidation Act (JASG)

5/ Acknowledgements

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³⁵ Summary record of the 1008th meeting: Austria 24/01/2005, Committee on the rights of the child. Supplementary report of the national coalition on the Second Report of the Federal Republic of Austria pursuant to Article 44 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (January 2004)
[http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.38/Austria_ngo_report\(E\).pdf](http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.38/Austria_ngo_report(E).pdf)

Belgium

1/ Situation analysis

Although the poverty risk among children (under 16) is slightly lower than EU25-average (17% compared to 19%) this masks pockets of very high rates of poverty particularly among single parent families (36%), and among children living in jobless families (70%).

According to ATD Quart Monde, poverty among children and families persists in Belgium and is even getting worse. It continues to affect all areas of life and children's access to their rights. Lack of access to housing for families on particularly low incomes sometimes results in family breakdown or the child being placed out of the home.

Many children living in poverty are still more likely to drop out of school – and many are still sent to special schools. The number of illiterate children and young people with out any schooling is still significant. And the majority of children living in poverty do not have access to out-of-school clubs or cultural or leisure activities. They have few opportunities to participate and are rarely consulted on issues that concern them.

2/ Policy responses

The national report on strategies for social inclusion and social protection does give priority to tackling poverty among families with children. The following specific measures are outlined:

1. Family income and housing cost

A school premium to alleviate school costs at the beginning of the school year was launched in August 2006. It is accessible for all children between the age of 6 and 18. Although welcome this does not specifically tackle persistent and deep poverty experienced by particular target groups.

2. Stimulating social participation from an early age

The Flemish community is in the process of raising capacity of child day care and trying to address the exclusion mechanisms that prevent certain parents, those living in poverty or at risk of poverty, from having access to day care for very young children. They aim to increase the attendance of infants in pre-school education through raising awareness among parents. Both measures emphasise the importance of early participation of children.

A specific project has been set up to address begging mothers and convince them to let their children go to school rather than take them out begging.

The French speaking community is focusing on staff increases for schools catering for children up to the age of 10. Furthermore, programmes for early school leavers and for closing the technology gap are being developed. Projects are being set up in areas such as sports, culture and homework assistance targeted at youngsters living in poverty and at risk of exclusion.

It should be noted that each of the regions in Belgium has slightly different emphases according to their macro-economic circumstances, political choice and other regional differences.

3. Reducing education costs and stimulating equal opportunities

Both sides of the country focus on limiting the extra curricular cost of attending school and on stimulating training for professional skills needed on the labour market (so called *knelpuntberoepen*) through for example financial incentives. Both 'education for newcomers' and 'after school homework classes' projects are developed and evaluated in Flanders.

After school homework classes are also recognized and subsidized in the French speaking Community thanks to a new Decree. However, they do not reach out to the poorest families and they are far from having enough resources to reach the most needy children.

Education is a 'core business' for combating child poverty, but in its effort to cater to the economic values of society, its institutions and policies overlook the tremendous need to enhance skills leading up to behavioural, not profession related, competencies.

4. Supporting the parents in their role as educators

Within the Flemish community, the CLB's (*center for pupil guidance*) are offering training to enable people with experience of poverty to work with social workers to understand better how to meet the needs of the poor and develop their capacities. This is an important measure because the CLB is the key structure to reach out to the whole family and empowering them, including the children, to have a positive attitude towards learning and being part of a school as a 'society'.

Other measures are:

- subsidies for 'supporting families' in the triple P project
- projects on training parental educational skills (often in a school setting, while children attend class)

Within the French speaking community there are several new initiatives targeted at parental support such as a new telephone line for parents and a call for projects.

5. Avoiding placing children out-of-the-home and promoting alternative solutions

One of the target groups identified is 'unaccompanied minors' because as refugees they are subject to federal policies and as minors subject to regional policies.

There's an ongoing dialogue between the different levels of government to come to an agreement about organising residential care for 'unaccompanied minors'.

The Flemish global plan for youth care aims to increase residential youth care capacity by 14%, coinciding with efforts of early detection, prevention and risk-screening at home level. This measure is an illustration how Flanders has a long standing tradition of residential care facilities, that represent a large number of workers and therefore has an endless appetite for government funding. But this measure seems to be in obvious contradiction to the intended effect of reducing the need for residential care.

Though the need for the larger capacity is there, it would be preferable to reach out to projects that help to empower youngsters rather than enlarging more traditional facilities that often bring about a 'trained helplessness' with the youngsters.

In the French speaking community, ATD Quart Monde notes that children continue to be placed in out-of-home care due to poverty within the family and the lack of support for families in financial crisis.

The challenges have been documented by the *Groupe Agora* – a group that brings together the two key associations fighting against poverty (ATD Quart Monde and LST-Luttes Solidarites Travail), together with the youth services and public administrations. On 17 October 2005 (International day of the fight against poverty) they adopted their report on the reflections on the first contact between a family and the child/youth support services. http://www.mouvement-lst.org/atelier_famille.html

3/ Government critique

Policy approach

All of these measures are welcome but there are a number of deficiencies:

1. Policy making is still too 'compartmentalized'. There is a lack of a joined-up, holistic approach to supporting children's development. Measures are too often dependent on local initiatives without a long-term vision. There is also too little monitoring and evaluation with respect to the impact on the target group.
2. **Child poverty is reduced to only the financial poverty of the parents which is a weak approach to tackling the issues of child poverty and social exclusion.** The only indicators proposed are those linked 'financial poverty and material deprivation', namely 'children (under 16) living in families living

under the poverty threshold' and 'children (under 18) living in household without paid work'. These indicators are very relevant to the overall goal of fighting poverty, but have little bearing on the children and their ability to empower themselves as they fight their inherited poverty, not so much in its financial dimension but in all other dimensions.

For example, housing standards are extremely important. Many children living in poverty have sub-standard housing conditions and limited living space. A clear indicator in this area would strengthen policy development.

3. There is no mention at all about the participation of children living in poverty in the process of developing policies nor the need for a structured and permanent dialogue which would allow children's voices to be heard. Although the report recognizes the fact that the children's perspective can lead to new ways of combating the reproduction of poverty, it doesn't provide any measures or resources to do this. Measures taken to tackle child poverty, particularly 'soft tools' like communication, awareness raising, education and training of behavioural skills.
4. There is a need to gather a 'common understanding' with the targeted groups as a pre-condition for successful implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

4/ Key documents

« *Rapport sur les droits de l'enfant au Parlement de la Communauté française - novembre 2005* » Report to the Parliament of the French Community on the implementation of the UNCRC. This report is produced every 3 years, as set out in the Decree 28 January 2004

<http://www.oejaj.cfwb.be/>

<http://www.kinderrechten.be/>

5/ Acknowledgements

Lucie Evers, Toekan www.toekan.be³⁶
Dominique Visée, ATD Quart Monde Wallonie-Bruxelles
Régis De Muylder, ATD Quart Monde Belgique
www.atd-quartmonde.org³⁷

³⁶ **Toekan/ChangeTout** aims at accompanying young disadvantaged persons who have been brought up in residential care, to help them integrate into society and lead an autonomous life.

³⁷ **ATD Fourth World** works with poor families in eight European countries, Northern and Central America, and several countries in Africa and Asia.

Bulgaria

In line with the new streamlined framework, the government of Bulgaria submitted the first National Report on the Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion by 15th September 2006.

1/ Situation analysis

In 2005, the rate of children at risk of poverty (0-15) was 17.8%. For adolescents (15-24), the rate was 16.4%. The overall rate decreased from 15.3% in 2004 to 14.2% in 2005. Children were noted among the three groups with a greater risk of poverty, along with unemployed persons or employed persons with low wages, as well as elderly persons. Children living in lone-parents households (25.1%), multi-member households (31.5%) and children from vulnerable ethnic minorities (in particular from Roma and Turkish communities) have a particularly high risk of living in poverty. Measures aimed at reducing the number of early school leavers have resulted in a fall in the drop-out rate of 1.99% during the school year 2004/2005. The percentage of early school leavers was 20% in 2005. Infant mortality rates continue to be very high – 10.4%, which is above the average rate in Europe. The rate of the child prenatal and neonatal mortality is also high, e.g. it is 12 % and 6.2 % for 2005.

2/ Policy responses

The Bulgarian NAP for social inclusion mentions four main policy objectives:

- 1) Equal labour market participation of the groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion
- 2) Ensuring equal access to services aiming at the prevention of social exclusion and overcoming its consequences
- 3) Social inclusion of the most vulnerable ethnic minorities
- 4) Poverty reduction among groups 'beyond working age'

In order to achieve these objectives, the Report cites 60 various measures. However, they are not financially secured and it is unclear which approach will be used for implementing these measures.

Objective 1: Equal labour market participation of the groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion

Although there is no special mention of children, there are programmes specifically designed for disadvantaged groups, including young people without work experience, education, profession, as well as orphans.

Objective 2: Ensuring equal access to services aiming at prevention of social exclusion and overcoming its consequences

There are various policies implemented in relation to this objective that include programmes directed to children and their families such as:

- Programmes for child protection, particularly in relation to the guarantees for their rights and the decrease in the number of children living in specialized institutions;
- Programmes and measures for better inclusion of children in the educational system, as well as for integrated education of children with special educational needs;
- Programmes of financial support for children with disabilities and their families;
- Programmes for the improvement of housing conditions for low-income families and families from the Roma community.

In addition, the NAP outlines some measures to be implemented in the future, most of which are education programmes:

- Provision of quality education for all persons with special educational needs;
- Increasing the literacy level of persons whose native language is not Bulgarian;
- Development and introduction of innovative programmes and specialised educational software for the education and training of persons with special educational needs;
- Initiatives to promote intercultural education, tolerance and solidarity among the participants in the educational and training process;
- Ensuring conditions for the development of the all-day organisation of the educational process in the level of primary and lower secondary education;
- Expansion of social measures such as free provision for textbooks, school equipment, free transportation, etc.;

- Activities directed towards teachers, parents and local communities aimed at increasing the number of children attending school and reducing school drop-outs;
- Enabling children from rural areas to study at schools close to their places of residence and increasing the level of education in rural schools.

Measures in this area do not specify which methods and approaches will be applied to strengthen the capacity of the system at the local and municipal level for the protection of children. The Report fails to mention how the process of decentralisation of the specialised institutions for children will be implemented. Additionally, emphasis is missing on questions relating to the methods and approaches needed to activate the social services market with regard to children.

It is necessary to continue reforms that target decentralizing specialized institutions for children and especially the homes for accommodating children ages 0 to 3. It is also necessary to continue the efforts related to the recently decentralised homes for children between the ages of 3 to 18, which were previously within the educational system, and served to provide the municipalities with resource support and assistance for restructuring these homes.

Some wider problems associated with the education system reform include the quality of education in rural regions due to the lower quality of the available educational infrastructure and human resources. As a result of the decreasing number of children, practices such as teaching children from different grades in one class, were introduced. As the optimisation of the school network continues to develop, such practices have begun to disappear.

This system of special schools is a vehicle for segregation in education for a number of reasons. In most cases these schools are geographically located in remote areas or in the outskirts of cities effecting the physical isolation of children. Additionally, most of the special schools are boarding-schools.

Objective 3: Social inclusion of the most vulnerable ethnic minorities

Under this objective most measures are directed to Roma communities. Many of them concern the integration of Roma children into the Bulgarian education system, for example:

- Programmes aimed at reducing the number of early school leavers among Roma children;
- Training of social workers and teachers to work in a multi-ethnic environment;
- Desegregation of kindergartens and schools in the isolated Roma neighbourhoods;
- Development of one year plans for educational integration of children from ethnic minorities;
- Integration of schoolchildren living in isolated Roma neighbourhoods into the mainstream schools located outside these neighbourhoods;
- Appointment of teacher assistants supporting the educational integration of the Roma children into mainstream schools.

Work still needs to be done in the following areas:

- Conditions for raising and educating children and schoolchildren of various ethnic origin together in the state and municipal kindergartens, schools and service units;
- Provision of additional pedagogical work with children lagging behind in the school process;
- Activities stimulating school drop-outs to return to school and to improve their educational results;
- Development and introduction into kindergartens and schools of upbringing and training methods which are in line with the cultures of different ethnic minorities;
- Implementation of qualification and training activities for teachers;
- Research work related to the inter-ethnic integration of children and schoolchildren through education;
- Training of parents for the implementation of the educational integration of children and schoolchildren;
- Measures aimed to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates and other measures related to the improvement of health care among vulnerable ethnic minorities.

The integrated efforts for combating child poverty in the Roma community should not remain isolated at the Governmental policy making level. These efforts should be targeted at developing the capacity building of NGOs in order to support their work in Roma neighbourhoods and provide extra educational and mediatory activities. A more appropriate approach may be identified through a broader dialogue and targeted work among the various stakeholders. A new mechanism for delegating more resources, rights and responsibilities to the Roma community should be introduced to promote building community social capital in order to raise the living standard of the most vulnerable families.

Objective 4: Poverty reduction among the groups 'beyond working age'

Two target groups are identified: children and elderly people. The NAP mentions that there are few studies about the scope of child poverty but a large-scale study is underway. Several projects are undertaken for the prevention of poverty among the children from vulnerable families, such as:

- Provision of pedagogical, psychological and legal aid, consultation, assistance and information for children and their parents;
- Provision of community-based social services, including to prevent child abandoning and children living on the street, as well as for the reintegration of those children in the family;
- Improvement of the living conditions in the specialised institutions for children, as well as advances in the process of deinstitutionalisation;
- Assistance to the educational integration of children from vulnerable families;
- Provision of social investments aimed at a successful social integration of children;
- Ensuring access to health care;
- Protection against all forms of violence, abuse and other forms of exploitation;
- Special protection of the children with disabilities;
- Strengthening the capacity of the child protection bodies;
- Introduction of a system for monitoring the rights of the children.

In the future, efforts will be done in the following areas:

- Statutory approval of an official poverty line;
- Development and expansion of the scope of social services for children;
- Provision of more purposeful support for the vulnerable families by means of programmes for employment, social and family assistance and social services;
- Enhancement of the model of social investments for children;
- Strengthening the monitoring system of children's rights;
- Improving the system of withdrawal and reintegration of victims of trafficking and child labour;
- Establishment of a system for monitoring of child poverty;
- Strengthening the system of child protection at both district and municipal level.

Overall the capacity of municipal authorities for developing social services remains poor and to a great extent, this is also applicable to non-governmental organizations. The latter group, however, has a major advantage compared to the municipal administrations. NGOs compete and improve their professional performance levels in order to provide better and higher-quality social services for children and families. The governmental efforts should concentrate on professionalising NGOs and building the capacity of the local authorities for monitoring and exercising control on the quality of social services.

Generally, social services are still underdeveloped in spite of governmental efforts and the introduced legislative amendments. The human and material capacity of the Child Protection Departments (CPDs) remains an open issue, particularly in the field of re-integration, de-institutionalisation, adoption, foster care, etc. It is necessary to provide more training opportunities, methodological support to the local authorities and non-governmental organisations in order to develop the social services market in Bulgaria.

3/ Critical Assessment of the Government's Progress

Poverty is a crucial problem in Bulgaria, especially among rural households and families with multiple children. The Roma community, comprising up to 7 percent of the population as a realistic estimate³⁸, is reported to be 10 times poorer than other groups (World Bank 2001)³⁹. Without fail, all assessments that have been made over the last 10 years in Bulgaria show that there is a high level of poverty among the Roma communities and the families living in rural areas. In Bulgaria, as is the case in many former-communist countries, children living in larger households are at a higher risk of poverty. In countries where the average share of children in the population is low, high percentages of children are concentrated at the lowest income levels, rather than being spread evenly throughout the population, i.e. children tend to live in poor households rather than richer ones. In Bulgaria the lowest income bracket contains 17% of all children in Bulgaria.⁴⁰

³⁸ Differences in the Roma headcount are due to the method of identification used. Many Roma do not report themselves as Roma but as Turks or Bulgarians.

³⁹ Lilia Dimova, Bulgaria: Gender Aspects of Poverty and Inequality in the Family and the Labour Market (Research and Policy Recommendations), The World Bank, Sofia 2001.

⁴⁰ Innocenti Social Monitor 2006, p. 3, p. 26.

Three quantifiable objectives are set that are directly related to children:

- 1) Decrease the number of drop-out children at mandatory school age by 10% compared to the 2005 rate (20%);
- 2) Increase of the number of children with special educational needs integrated into the mainstream and professional schools by 15%;
- 3) Increase the number of schoolchildren of Roma origin brought out from segregated schools by 10%.

It is regrettable that there is no quantifiable objective set for the reduction of child poverty. The report specifically mentions that there is a lack of reliable information on the scope of poverty among children. A 2001 Working paper from the UNICEF *Innocenti* Research Centre also emphasised the need for the Bulgarian government to develop more research on child welfare in order to better identify the needs of children. This lack of information could be a serious obstacle to the formulation of policies and to their implementation. Therefore, it is desirable that the large-scale study referred to in the report bears its fruit and that a progressive development of monitoring instruments is pursued.

For the eradication of child poverty, the emphasis lies on more and better social services, particularly education and health. There is no mention of an increase in financial contributions, such as child benefits. There is evidence of a wider rights-based approach, as the report mentions the protection of children against all forms of violence or abuse, the strengthening of child protection bodies and the introduction of a system of the monitoring of child poverty. However, no reference is made to the UNCRC.

There is very little said about the involvement of NGOs in the development, implementation and evaluation of the NAP/Incl. Only under the objective of ensuring equal access to services, the report mentions that cooperation and interaction with non-governmental organisations, as well as with local authorities should be improved. The NAP further refers to the establishment in 2005 of the National Council for the Coordination of the Policies and Programmes to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, a body that involves representatives of all the ministries and agencies involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as representatives of the social partners, the National Association of Municipalities and scientific institutes. The National Council has a consultative role to the Minister of Labour and Social Policy in view of the policy for the fight against poverty and promotion of social inclusion, a role that the Bulgarian government wants to enforce.

The lack of fundamental measures concerning child welfare down-scales the quality of the report to a great extent. The measures listed in the report do not include important issues on the decentralization of specialised institutions for children. Also measures for encouraging the social service market are neither mentioned nor discussed. The NAP report does not point out which responsibilities were assumed by the Ministry of Health in relation to the problem of decentralisation. Hence, the problem of decentralisation could be regarded as not clearly identified by those institutions. The absence of such measures puts the quality of life of the children living in these institutions in great danger, and supports the tendency to preserve the status quo. However, it is necessary to make a re-assessment of the whole policy of the Ministry of Health in respect of its attitude towards the Homes for Medical and Social Care in order to guarantee the interests of children, rather than the interests of the personnel working in these specialised institutions. These homes have acquired a certain social function and for that reason it is obligatory to make radical changes like restructuring, closing down or reforming these institutions an important issue. This reform must be conducted according to the new legal provisions and standards envisaged in the legislation on child protection in Bulgaria.

As a whole, the measures and resource allocations are not comprehensive. Some of the measures do not have a clear focus and the application for a loan from the World Bank is not accurately described in the report nor is it discussed which activities will be funded with that loan and which other budgetary resources will be allocated.

4/ Key documents

Gantcheva, R, Kolev, A., "Children in Bulgaria: growing impoverishment and equal opportunities", UNICEF Innocenti Working paper No 84, January 2001, 69p

5/ Acknowledgements

Karen Del Biondo & Meghaen Anderson, Eurochild interns
George Bogdanov, Social Activities & Practices Institute Bulgaria

1/ Situation analysis

The at-risk-of poverty rate, as measured against the threshold of 60% of net equivalised median income, declined from 16.3% in 1996/97 to 15.3% in 2003. The at-risk-of poverty rate among children (aged 0-15) was 11% in 2003. The risk of poverty for single-parent families fell from 41% in 1996/97 to 22% in 2003. The risk of poverty for two adults with one dependent child was 10% and with at least three dependent children was 15% in 2003. Infant mortality (number of deaths/1,000 births) was 5.6 in 2000 and 3.5 in 2004.

Education

The rate of early school leaving reached 18.2% in 2005 (not including Cypriots studying abroad and persons aged 18-20 years serving in the National Guard). Including these two groups, and excluding foreign workers in Cyprus, the overall rate was 9.8%.

During the school year 2005-2006, for pre-primary education, there were 433 classes in public kindergartens in 244 school units.

The institution of the voluntary All-Day School in primary education has expanded during the school year 2005-2006 to 150 primary schools and 9 kindergartens.

Children with special needs

During the school year 2005-2006, 2,941 pupils with special needs were attending public primary education schools, supported by 495 specially trained teachers. Another 1,019 pupils with special needs attended state Secondary Education Schools and were supported by 211 teachers.

2/ Policy responses

The Cyprus **National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAP)** has set three policy objectives.

- 1) Reducing the risk of poverty
- 2) Integrating vulnerable groups into the labour market
- 3) Preventing social exclusion for children

Priority 1) Reducing the risk of poverty

The target is to reduce the risk of poverty to 14% (from 15%) by 2010.

Public Assistance

Public assistance allowances increased by 6.6% between July 2003 and July 2005. The basic public assistance allowance will continue to be indexed under the existing arrangement for the period covered in the NAP.

The current annual rate of allowance for basic need is:

- for the recipient (head of household) CY£2.678 (€4.634)
- for every dependant aged 14+ CY£1.339 (€2.317)
- for every dependent aged <14 CY£709 (€1.227)

Under the revised Public Assistance and Services Law (95(I)/2006), the following changes were made: Monthly income from work, which is not taken into account in calculating the amount of public assistance, increased as follows:

- for a disabled recipient, from CY£100 to CY£ 300 (€175 to €519)
- for a single parent, from CY£ 100 to CY£ 150 (€175 to €260)

Other changes in benefits under the new Law include:

- The lump sum grant for vocational training and purchase of tools and equipment increased from CY£ 500 to CY£ 1.000 (€865 to €1.730).
- The right to public assistance was extended to male single parents, who were previously excluded.
- The lump sum payment for house repairs was increased from CY£ 500 to CY£1.000 (€865 to €1.730). An amount of CY£ 750 (€1.298) may be paid for repairs to a rented house.

Child benefit

A basic child benefit is payable to families with children irrespective of number and without any means test.

- Families with low incomes receive additional benefit.
- For families with four or more children the child benefit is higher than for other families.
- The amount of child benefit is indexed to the consumer price index.

During 2006-2008, the possibility of reforming the scheme will be examined with a view to providing more selective support and making it more effective in reducing the risk of poverty.

Priority 2) Integrating vulnerable groups into the labour market

Target Group: Young persons

Apprenticeship Scheme

The objective regarding the Apprenticeship Scheme is:

- to introduce improvements to the Scheme in its present form;
- to promote reform of the Apprenticeship Scheme into a New Modern Apprenticeship, that will constitute an alternative way both to meet the educational and training needs of young persons, who leave formal education early and to satisfy the needs of the labour market.

The **New Modern Apprenticeship** aims at attracting a greater number of young women and at broadening the eligibility age group and the range of skills.

Schemes for promoting Employability of Young Persons

The schemes include:

- Recruitment incentives;
- Specialised services for vocational guidance and placement to employment as well as programmes of work experience;
- A special web-site to provide information for young persons.

A Programme for Enhancing Youth Entrepreneurship aims to promote activities for fostering youth entrepreneurship through specific incentives and to promote equality of opportunities for young persons to develop entrepreneurial activities.

Scheme Providing Financial Assistance for the Re-integration of People with Addiction Problems

Within the framework of ad-hoc measures, a scheme has been prepared providing financial assistance for the reintegration of people with addiction problems who are in the course of treatment for drug dependency.

Target Group: Women

Care for children and other dependent persons

To encourage women to enter or re-enter the labour market:

- 10 new programmes for the **care of dependent family members** are mentioned as having been implemented during period 2004-2006. It is expected that 2,500 women will seek employment and 60 new jobs will be created from these new programmes.
⇒ *However, according to the PCCPWC⁴¹, there is no evidence to show these programmes have been implemented. The scale of these programmes is therefore likely to be much lower than that indicated in the NAP/incl.*
- State subsidies for care programmes will continue to increase at a rate of 3% per year during 2006-2008.
⇒ *According to the PCCPWC, this statement in the NAP is misleading. In fact the total budget for social support has decreased over recent years, and reference to just a number of programmes gives an incomplete picture.*

Priority 3) Preventing social exclusion for children

Following programmes have been developed to fight against social exclusion for children:

- **Educational Priority Zones:** aims at reducing inequalities for pupils attending schools in disadvantaged areas with an increased proportion of immigrants. Currently three EPZ are in operation covering 17 school units.
⇒ *(PCCPWC) These have worked quite well, but with the additional and constant support from NGO's.*
- **Supportive Teaching Programme:** aims at helping pupils to acquire the reading skills that will lead to further school success.

⁴¹ Pancyriot Coordinating Committee on the Protection and Welfare of Children

- **Literacy Programmes:** invest in developing the basic literacy skills of secondary education pupils.
⇒ *PCCWCP and other NGOs have raised concerns about the need for such programmes after six years of public schooling provision in primary education. It clearly raises questions over the adequacy of primary school education.*
- **Support for Children with Special Needs:** As from the school year 2006-2007, pilot Special Units for pupils with special needs will be established in Lyceums and Technical Schools (upper secondary school) for pre-vocational and vocational training. At the same time, the programme for upgrading the material and technological infrastructure of schools receiving children with special needs will continue.
⇒ *(PCCPWC) There is no evidence that this measure has been implemented in this school year.*
- **Communication and Information Technologies:** The Cyprus Educational system has accepted “e-literacy”, as one of the core pillars of “integrated literacy”, with the ultimate objective of an effective and qualitatively upgraded education. The analytical courses in information technology have been upgraded to European levels during the last three years.
⇒ *According to PCCPWC, Cyprus lags behind other EU countries on this issue, and government investment of time and resources are insufficient to make a real difference.*
- **Pre-primary Education:** Expanding pre-primary education services is a priority that arises out of the extension of compulsory education to children aged 4 years and 8 months to 5 years and 8 months.
- **All-Day School:** Plans are under way for the operation of 9 primary schools as joint all-day schools (compulsory for all pupils in all forms) on a pilot basis, as from the school year 2006-2007.
- **Multicultural Education:** aims at the smooth integration of foreign-language speaking children into the educational system of Cyprus and not at their absorption. Moreover, the Pedagogical Institute, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture, implements further education programmes for educationists, with the aim of reducing discrimination and racism in education.
- **Preventing the risk of drug dependency:** Its main responsibility is the formulation and promotion of preventive programmes within the school environment for the prevention of the risk of narcotic substances. In 2006, the Mental Health Services will introduce a programme for under aged users on the basis of a study carried out in 2005.
- The Pancyprian Volunteerism Coordinating Council, in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Culture, has been implementing, since 2005, programmes of voluntary work, titled “**Youth and Voluntary work**”, with the active participation of pupils in primary, secondary and technical education.

3/ Government critique

In the NAP, there is a specific priority combating social exclusion of children. Other main policy objectives also acknowledge children and young people in poverty and social exclusion. However, as noted by PCCPWC, not all policy measures are translated into action, leaving a real implementation gap.

The NAP report has an appendix which lists stakeholders who participated in the process of preparing the NAP, including the Ministry of Education and Culture, Youth Board of Cyprus, Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children, Cyprus Family Planning Association etc. However there was **no direct children’s participation**.

Mainstreaming social inclusion into all relevant public policies (economic, employment, education, social, cultural and environment) is promoted though the National Reform Programme 2005-2008.

There is no mention of the Convention of the Rights of the Child nor any link made with the monitoring and reporting process under UN CRC.

The UNCRC committee report in 2003 identified a number of key issues that are not sufficiently addressed in the NAP, including:

- Inadequate recognition of the UN CRC;
- Certain factors linked to discriminatory attitudes in particular those related to acquisition of nationality, children born out of wedlock and Cypriot children of Turkish origin;
- Certain legislation which does not apply equally to girls and boys;
- A problem of violence within the family. This is an issue not adequately addressed, even though legislation exists since 1994. There are no provisions within the NAP/incl for tackling this problem.

4/ Acknowledgements

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Czech Republic

1/ Situation analysis

Using the EU methodology, the relative poverty rate in the Czech Republic in 2002 was **8%**. However, in comparison with other EU Member States, the Czech Republic had a high concentration of persons just above the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. The poverty rate among families with children is also much higher than the national average. **15%** of children up to the age of 15 lived in poor households. So-called "child poverty" is most marked amongst single-parent families with dependent children. In 2002, **30%** of people from these households were poor. The national report identifies those groups most at risk of poverty: single-parent families with at least one dependent child (**30%** of people from this group, primarily single or divorced women or single women with children) and households with three or more children (**20%** of people from these households).

There is no accessible data on health and education attainment specific to children.

2/ Policy responses

Although not explicitly mentioned as a priority, child poverty is included under the Policy Objective 2 - *strengthening the cohesion of the family and awareness of its importance and strengthening awareness of intergenerational solidarity and the rights of the child.*

This Objective is targeted at families with children, children in one-parent families, children of underage parents, children with serious disabilities, children of parents with a low educational attainment, children of parents under criminal prosecution, children in alcoholics' and drug addicts' families, children in institutional care, children of foreigners unaccompanied by a statutory representative, etc.

Targets mentioned in NAP/Incl:

- To strengthen and support services in the area of support for the family focused on children and families at risk of social exclusion for various reasons;
- To reduce the poverty of one-parent families with at least one dependent child;
- To support intergenerational solidarity;
- To increase awareness of the rights of the child;
- To prevent pathological phenomena in the family;
- To develop a system of foster care, services for dealing with family problems;
- To increase the effectiveness of co-operation when arranging foster care.

Specific short term goals identified include:

- An independent concept of caring for at risk children and children living outside their own families will be submitted to the Czech Government in September 2006, which will set targets for matters related to care for at risk children and children living outside a family.
- A mapping of the availability and quality of services for families to overcome region disadvantages in access to social services. As part of the mapping, demand will be monitored for individual types of services in different regions of the CR.
- A study on suitable forms of support for families at risk of poverty will be drafted by the end of 2007 to map the needs of such families and to propose tools to satisfy such needs (out-of-school activities, reimbursement for services, contributions to babysitting, and tax allowances) and analyse their impact on the state budget.

In the longer term, the CR Government intends to extend its family support services, in particular focusing on:

- preventing social exclusion of parents caring for children on maternal/parental leave;
- increasing parenting skills;
- the reconciliation of family and professional roles, i.e. increasing child care and information on the rights and duties of working parents,
- preventing family break-down dealing with problems in partnership and familial cohabitation, helping families bring up and care for children,
- facilitating care for older persons,
- social activation services targeted at families,
- services provided as a part of field social work.

Other services to be developed in the long-term include:

- Family mediation services, in particular dealing with post-divorce care for children.

- Prevention of criminality and the abuse of alcohol and addictive substances, with emphasis on parents' roles.
- A programme focused on increasing awareness of the rights of the child targeted at children, professionals working with children, children's statutory representatives and those responsible for bringing children up.
- Efforts to promote the forms and conditions of foster care will be increased, with the aim of limiting the length of time a child spends in institutional care.
- A monitoring system to assess when children are ready to leave a facility will be created.
- Foster families will be provided with comprehensive counselling and social assistance services both during the preparatory period, and throughout the whole period a child is cared for. Attention will be focused on making the preparation of applicants for adoption and foster care more effective.

Among existing policies a National Concept for Family Policy was adopted in 2004 and is currently being implemented. It sets out a comprehensive set of government measures to be applied in support of families. It focuses in particular on financial support of families, the compatibility of work and family roles, the services available to the family and the family policies that exist in our municipalities and regions.

In the area of family support, a set of legislative measures were introduced in tax policies. Effective from 2005, a system was put in place in which tax is calculated based on the joint incomes of spouses. As from January 1st 2005, the non-taxable portion of the taxable income for a dependent child has been replaced by a new instrument – "*tax benefits for a dependent child living in the taxpayer's household*". Also deductions for the spouse (tax credit) were introduced. In addition the childbirth allowance has been increase - with effect from 1st April 2006, the allowance is CZK 17,500 (627 Euro) – ten times the minimum subsistence level for children's personal needs.

Concerning the compatibility of family and working life, there have been several changes in the parental allowance since 2004. Parents are allowed to engage in unlimited earning activities while drawing this benefit and the criteria for eligibility has been expanded. In the future, the size of this allowance will increase substantially.

The measures proposed in the new Act on Disability Insurance should also contribute to the reconciliation of work and family life (the Act is scheduled to come into effect on 1st January 2007). The new legislation introduces certain changes in eligibility for disability insurance benefits. These include the option for the child's mother and father (or mother's husband) to take turns in caring for the child – with eligibility for maternity allowance based on a written agreement between them. So, maternity allowance can be transferred to the husband/father (the insured party under the disability insurance scheme) seven weeks after the birth of the child - provided he qualifies for this allowance and is eligible for its payment.

With regards to the protection against domestic violence a new bill was passed on 14 April 2006 to amend existing legislation. As of 1 January 2007, the police will have new powers: If they are called to a domestic violence incident, they may order the perpetrator to leave the shared household for 10 days. The victim can ask for an extension of this measure by court order and also increase it through a restraining order prohibiting the perpetrator from approaching and/or contacting the victim. The law also provides for the establishment of intervention centres in each region. These centres will provide acute psychological and social work aid to the victims, either as shelters or clinics, and will also arrange for further forms of aid to be provided to the victims longer-term. However, there is insufficient attention given to the financial and social situation of the victims and the social situation of their children.

With regards to access to education, the NAP/Incl. refers to several policy developments:

- A comprehensive system of preschool care for socially disadvantaged groups is planned. Support will also be provided to programmes that enable pupils to transfer to secondary schools. Those who, for whatever reason, do not complete their compulsory school attendance will be able to take courses to obtain a primary education.
- To increase the availability of education for children and young people with disabilities and to support their integration, inter-regional differences will be gradually levelled-out regarding the range of education options and counselling services available for this group of children, pupils and students. Schools established independently for pupils with disabilities will, in addition to their educational function, perform the function of integrated support centres, verifying new working methods and providing methodological and counselling support to mainstream schools on the education of children and young people with disabilities, as well as counselling services for parents and other interested institutions.
- To eliminate disadvantage in access to education for children from socially and culturally disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular Roma children, preparatory classes and teachers' assistants have been introduced, as well as grant programs of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech

Republic. These measures are intended to increase the chances of children from socially and culturally disadvantaged backgrounds of successfully completing school and going on to secondary school.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT) has prepared "Conception of early care for children with socio-cultural disadvantaged backgrounds", adopted on 11 May 2005 (by decision of the Government no. 564). According to this decision the MSMT will implement programmes and measures:

- to increase number of children from socially or culturally disadvantaged backgrounds, attending pre-school education or special preparation classes
- to ensure higher-education or life-long learning opportunities for professionals working in the field of pre-school education for disadvantaged children between the age of 3 and the age of compulsory school attendance
- to pilot approaches of early care for disadvantaged children and establish early care at kindergartens or preparatory courses in elementary schools
- to develop long-term courses for parents and children with social cultural handicap from the age 3 to the age of compulsory school attendance
- in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health Care, to develop common social and pedagogical-psychological diagnosis of the problems of children at risk and to develop common programmes and measure to help parents take greater responsibility their children's development.

A report on the outcomes of the measures adopted in a course of the conception will be submitted to the Government by 28 March 2008.

Another policy document prepared by the CR Government is the "Conception of Roma Integration 2005", which includes chapter on education. Alongside the range of measures already outlined, the measures include: the use of teacher assistants from the Roma community; introduction of a compulsory component on the multicultural aspect in education and the Roma community in teacher training courses; and measures to facilitate the participation of Roma parents in school activities.

3/ Government critique

Access to education

Since the new Schools Act No. 531/2004 Coll., the previously defined position of "Romani assistant" has ceased to exist. Instead the broader concept of "teachers' assistant" is referred to, and this concept is insufficiently regulated. The "Romani assistants" previously played an important role in communication with Romani families, and their specific function *vis-a-vis* the Romani community is no longer legislated. School directors decide at their own discretion whether or not to establish a position of "teacher's assistant" and such assistants are funded from regional budgets. There are insufficient funds in the regional budgets to supply teacher assistants to all classrooms that need them.

The Schools Act replaces so-called "special schools" with basic schools with specific educational programmes for different populations of children. There will still be schools for children with special educational needs, but they are no longer called "special" schools. This change may be desirable, but it does not guarantee a fundamental change in the chances of Romani children receiving an education that corresponds to their abilities. Without further measures explicitly designed to desegregate Czech schools, these measures will be ineffective.

The Act has introduced a category of "pupils with special educational needs" – these are children with disabilities (mental, physical, visual or hearing handicap, defects of speech, multiple disabilities, autism or developmental defects of learning or behaviour), health disadvantages (health problems, long-term illness, or minor health defects leading to defects of learning or behaviour which must be considered when educating the child) and children with a "social" disadvantage, which is most applicable to Roma children, and indeed is the standard form of coding for "Roma".

It is not clear who is responsible for identifying children with special educational needs. Neither the Act nor the implementing regulation state how to deal with children with social disadvantage. There is no obligation on the authorities to transfer the children with social disadvantage into regular schools or classes.

The alleged "radical reform" of the system of special education, therefore, has consisted in changing the designation of the special schools to that of elementary schools or "elementary special" schools. In the new elementary (special) schools, children are still taught according to the old curriculum (used until now in special schools or special classes) and the children who have a right to education in the elementary schools without

additional labelling are still placed into inferior schools of a second category or into special classes hidden inside “normal” elementary schools.

As a result of deeply entrenched hostility on the part of Czech educators to the idea of integrated education, and because of the institutional cultures in Central Europe in which acts are undertaken only if set out in positive law, it is evident that the systemic under-education of Roma – including Romani girls – in various forms of separate, segregated classes and schools will not be remedied unless positive law measures are adopted, specifying desegregation measures and elaborating the responsibilities of all relevant authorities in the desegregation process.

Significant segments of the Romani community live in poverty or extreme poverty and many Romani families do not enrol their children in nursery school due to the cost. Although the final year of nursery school is now provided free-of-charge (policy Regulation nm. 72/2005 Coll.) and specific preparatory classes are provided, many Romani families are not aware of this possibility or have not yet been persuaded of the value of enrolling their children in such classes. This is due to insufficient work of the Education Counselling Centres and social workers with Roma families. Furthermore, approximately one third of the preliminary schools are established in special schools that tend to be situated in areas with a high number of Roma. Romani parents frequently consent to the enrolment of their children directly from these preparatory classes into remedial special schools or classes reinforcing segregated education.

Child poverty

Although different groups of children are identified as targets, the policies and measures of NAP are mostly targeted towards families with children, without their attention to the needs of specific groups of children. Furthermore, the NAP/Incl fails to target the most vulnerable groups of children:

(1) Street children

While there is no statistical data on street children, according to the NGO “Projekt Sance” there are about 2000 street children in Prague during the summer season. Repressive police measures often break-up communities set up by these children – essential for mutual support, and disperse them, presenting a real obstacle to social work, aid and prevention. As a consequence children often mix with drug-addicts and criminals. Social assistance provided by NGOs is insufficient and many street children are victims of commercial sexual abuse or engage in criminal activities. Two thirds of children abuse alcohol, drug or are gamblers. According to the “Projekt Sance”, up to 70% of the street children have escaped from an institution. Rehabilitative and reconciliation programmes for these children are totally lacking. Although these children are exposed to the risk of serious diseases such as venereal diseases, HIV/AIDS, jaundice, they have no access to healthcare, or health insurance. They have no access to education.

(2) Poverty of children in families with domestic violence

Most victims of domestic violence are mothers with young children. The financial situation of the victim is almost always significantly worse after leaving the perpetrator, which means also the social situation of the child is very poor. Divorce proceedings take a long time usually leaving the victim in a precarious housing and financial situation. Furthermore, enforcement is broadly lacking in cases in which alimony payments are in arrears (there must have been failure to pay alimony for six months before criminal prosecution can be undertaken). If the perpetrator has debts the victim (if married) has joint liability. Social support benefits are usually not enough to cover the perpetrator’s debts, and the victim cannot dispose of any joint assets without the consent of the perpetrator.

(3) Families in sudden financial crisis

The social net provides no lump-sum benefit for families in sudden financial crisis due to an unexpected financial burden. Act 117/1995 Coll. provides that the landlord may become special recipient of social benefits. The aim of this institute is to prevent poor families getting into debt. However, this institute is not used in practice, Agencies of Social Protection of Children (OSPOD) do not suggest families should use this institute, although they are aware about their debts on rent and utilities. Children are then placed into institutional care ONLY because of inadequate housing. Parents are not able to pay for the rent and instead of that designation of special recipient of the benefits, families are expelled from their housing by court order due to debts on rent. The landlord (often a local authority) is relieved from inconvenient tenants and children end up into institution. The chance of their return to the families is very low.

4/ Acknowledgements

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1/ Situation analysis

The number of children in low income families is around 9%, which is actually lower than the general distribution of low income in society as a whole (10%). In 2005, 85% of 1-2 year olds use public day-care facilities, and some 95% of 3-5 year olds.

Almost all young people start youth education, but there are still too many drop-outs. The drop-out rate is especially high in the vocational training programmes, among young immigrants and descendants of immigrants.

In 2005, a total of 4,062 young people below 15 were involved in crime. According to the latest survey in 2002, the crime frequency among young people of immigrant back-grounds, aged between 15 and 19, is 72% higher than for all young people in the same age group,

2/ Policy responses

The issue of children and young people are included in the Policy Objective – *Breaking the vicious circle of deprivation* – in the Danish **National Action Plan on Social exclusion 2006-2008 (NAP)**.

The 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.

The NAP considers that parents are the main reason of preventing children from these opportunities. *“Misuse or mental disease prevents parents from having the reserves needed to give their children the necessary support, or because the parents fail to understand the supporting role they play to their children, the reason being that in their own upbringing they never found out what it means to be a parent.”*

A reform, called the **Fostercare reform** is:

- to strengthen early preventive activities for disadvantaged children and young people and their families, while also improving casework in local authorities.
- to put a sharper focus on the school attendance of children and young people in care, thus contributing to breaking the vicious circle of deprivation.

A comprehensive strategy: **Equal opportunities for all children and young people – the Government’s strategy to break the vicious circle of deprivation** aims:

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

Day-care facilities

The government has allocated a total of DKK 2bn (approx. 268M€) over a four-year period in order to improve activities for disadvantaged children in day-care facilities. Furthermore, translating the DKK 2bn into offers could, for instance, take the shape of:

- 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 administration.
- 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.

Schooling

The Welfare agreement focuses on ensuring more people complete training or education.

- Local authorities must be clearly responsible for ensuring that all young people complete a youth education programme
- Young people should get on the right track and not receive passive income support
- Targeting of teaching after 9th grade
- Vocational training programmes must consider the needs of all students
- More practical training places
- Improved education guarantee

The target is that at least 85% of each year group of young people must complete their education in 2010 and at least 95% in 2015.

The strategy: **Equal opportunities for all children and young people** is launching the following three sub-projects:

1. A project on cooperation between schools and social authorities, including on tuition of children and young people placed in care. The project aims to determine and communicate methods and systems/processes supporting dialogue and cooperation between school and social authorities.
2. A project about children receiving no education. A survey will be launched to procure certain knowledge on the scope and character of the problem. Additionally, the survey must highlight the cause(s) of the problem and subsequently communicate methods or good experience that may help alleviate the problem.
3. A project on parental counselling. The aim is to ensure good dialogue between school partners and thus create the optimum framework for children's schooling in terms of learning and welfare.

Children and young people of immigrant background

The government's comprehensive strategy, '**A new chance for everyone**' includes language screening material for assessing pre-school children's linguistic development when their needs for language stimulation are being determined and at the time they enter school.

In addition, initiatives will be launched concerning: Homework assistance, Participation in sports, Special efforts aimed at strengthening young new Danes' choice of education and profession

Parental responsibility

Under a new act on parental responsibility, local authorities can instruct parents to perform certain actions in relation to their children. This measure is supplemented with parental programmes designed as courses aimed at supporting insecure and resource-weak parents in taking responsibility as parents and thus preventing their children from developing inappropriately.

Conventional community activities

A pilot project on **leisure-time passports** aims to ensure that disadvantaged children not normally participating in leisure-time activities improve their chances of doing so.

Violence and abuse in families

Action plan for combating men's domestic violence against women and children 2005-2008: the funds must primarily be used to finance development projects, digital child networks, where children in the same situation can communicate.

In the period 2006-2009, DKK 8m (approx. 1M€) will be spent on a pilot project for children exposed to violence or witnessing domestic violence.

Crime

A project has started targeting 10-14-year-olds who have committed other offences than minor ones. The project aims to determine whether young people and problems requiring action can be identified earlier.

Several projects have been launched, aimed at preventing crime among young people of immigrant backgrounds. Experience from these projects will be communicated to all local authorities and publicised on the Internet as inspiration for activities aimed at preventing crime among very young people.

3/ Government critique

Policy approach

The Danish National Action Plan (NAP) addresses child poverty and social exclusion, however, the measures it describes are mainly temporary administrative initiatives for which there is no guarantee or political consensus that they will become permanent policy.

For some policy issues e.g. the Government Programme: Common Responsibility – II, the national report reflects government policy, which has not yet been decided in the political system.

In the NAP, the government has taken the position that the major challenge in Denmark concerning child poverty should be seen in terms of lack of support from the family, not as lack of general welfare. Several NGOs take issue to this assumption. They initiated a survey of the National Institute of Social Welfare, which estimated that around 90,000 children in Denmark are experiencing poverty and cultural deprivation, which affects their every day life.

It is assumed that children's lack of participation in education and cultural life is caused by lack of support to the children by the parents. The responsibility is put on the parents alone and not on structural issues.

Income poverty is addressed as a parental problem, which should primarily be solved through achieving a working income. The NAP does not address the income poverty that many children suffer from i.e. children in families with:

- unemployed parents
- parents on social welfare or social pension
- parents seeking asylum (on very low social welfare)
- single parents in the low income group

As a new policy measure some (but not all) of these children will now be offered 1000 DKK (134€) per year, meant as a means of paying for membership in sports clubs, scout leagues or other activities. However, the amount is – in a Danish context – too small to be considered sufficient, as most sport activities will require far more money per year. This kind of 'social welfare service' has a shine of public charity and does not seriously address the poverty issue.

The psychiatric healthcare for children and young people severely suffers from a lack of resources. As a result, young refugees may have to wait until adulthood to receive treatment for their traumas.

The NAP shows a strong tendency to focus on childhood as a learning period leading to future employment. In one of the initiatives described in the NAP the government emphasizes the use of individual 'learning plans', as a measure for regulating inequality. The first evaluation of this programme is not very encouraging.

The NAP does identify specific groups of vulnerable children and addresses to some extent their special needs. However, as mentioned above, there is a tendency to place a lot of responsibility with the parents, and thereby minimizing or ignoring the public responsibilities. Many of the public efforts to force or motivate adults to find work and become self-supported includes elements of economic sanctions. If the parents in spite of being cut down on social welfare are unable to join the working force, their children will inevitably pay the price and risk economic as well as participation poverty.

The NAP mentions a lot of different means and methods for evaluating different strategies and smaller projects. But there are no specific plans for following up on the NAP itself, and indicators specific to children and young people are only used in programs and projects specifically aimed at childhood.

The NAP does not link in any direct way to the monitoring and reporting process attached to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The NAP does not illustrate how other policies in other areas are contributing to the fight against child poverty and social exclusion

The NAP does not take the Children's Right approach to tackling child poverty and social exclusion.

Governance

In Denmark it is a general policy that new legislation and national policy papers are submitted for public hearing within relevant organisations. This way some children organisations (NGOs) generally has commented on the plan, but they are not a part of the implementation, evaluation etc. Children and young people themselves *have not* been involved.

4/ Acknowledgements

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⁴³ The Joint Council for Child Issues is a Danish umbrella organisation comprising 14 national organisations which together take care fully or partly of more than 200,000 children and young people in Denmark.

1/ Situation analysis

As a result of growth in the Estonian economy (increased employment, decreased unemployment, growth in salaries and pensions) and in the real income of the country's citizens, the number of people living below the absolute poverty line has decreased year on year.

The proportion of families living in absolute poverty has decreased by almost two times (14.2% in 2004), wherein the proportions of both adults and children living below the absolute poverty line have significantly fallen: from 32.8% in 1998 to 17.0% in 2004 and from 40.4% in 1998 to 25.3% in 2004, respectively.

The relative poverty risk limit (the EU relative poverty line) has increased slightly over the last two years – 19.3% of the population living off income in 2004 that was below 60% of the median income (the EU average in the same period being 16%).

Poverty still continues to affect a large number of children. The rate of poverty among families with children is noticeably higher than among those without children. And although poverty has decreased among families with children, the proportion of children living below the poverty line is much larger than for the rest of the population. According to 2004 data the rate of poverty for children differed from that for adults by 8.3%.

While at the beginning of the decade it was families with large numbers of children who were threatened by poverty, there is no longer as much of a clear connection between the number of children and the poverty risk. 19.2% of families with one child and 20.5% of families with at least three children live in relative poverty. However, poverty among families with three or more children has seen a greater relative decrease than that of families with one or two children.

The probability of living in poverty is greatest among children whose parents do not work. Also influencing the situation within a family are the education, sex and age of the head of the family. The number of children living in jobless households has steadily fallen during the last five years, reaching 9.1% in 2005, but this remains somewhat higher than the number of adults living in jobless households.

It is increasingly evident that higher education provides protection from poverty – in families where the head of the family has higher education the rate of poverty decreased over the five years from 13% to 5%. The level of poverty among families where the head of the family only had basic education was 21% in 2001, while for those with secondary and tertiary education the figures were 19% and 9%, respectively.

As a consequence of this, a serious challenge in the prevention of poverty and exclusion is the high dropout rate among basic education students (numbering 1,500 in the 2003/2004 academic year, 80% of them boys). The suspension of education is of greatest threat to children living in families with financial difficulties, but also to children who, due to special needs or for other reasons, require a more individual approach and more flexible learning opportunities.

Statistics in 2004

Poverty risk rate %

- 0-15 years total 20.2 (boys 19.7; girls 20.7)
- 16-24 years total 23.5 (men 23.7; women 23.2)

Youth dropout from education and vocational education system %:

- In 2004 total 13.7 (men 20.15; women?)
- In 2005 total 14.0 (men 17.4; women 10.7)

Individuals living in out-of-work families %

- Children (0-17 years) in 2004 9.6%, in 2005 9.1%

2/ Policy responses

The Estonian **National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAP)** has been set two main goals:

- 1) Prevention and reduction of long-term unemployment and exclusion from the labour market;
- 2) **Prevention and alleviation of poverty and social exclusion among families with children.**

In terms of child poverty the NAP report establishes the prevention and alleviation of poverty and exclusion among families with children as its top priority for 2006-2008. The specific objectives that have been set are as follows:

- a 2% decrease in the number of children living below the relative poverty line compared with 2005;
- the difference between the poverty of children (0-15) and that of total population is 7,9%
- an increase in the number of child protection workers – with a ratio of 1 child protection worker for every 1,000 children (1,340 in 2005);
- increased participation of children with special needs in kindergartens or preschool classes (no indicators, numbers are given)

The NAP report identifies specific target groups: children in families with low income; children without parental care; children with disabilities; children with behavioural problems; migrant and refugees children.

Measures

From the point of view of reducing poverty among children, the NAP considers all measures that support the employment of parents to be very important. Financial support also has a significant role to play, as do measures that support raising and educating children and those that take into account the special needs of children.

Of these, the main measures are:

- the provision of financial support to families with children and welfare services that are appropriate to their needs;
- improving the living conditions of families with children;
- the creation of equal opportunities for obtaining a quality education;
- the creation of better development opportunities for children that take into account their special needs (including disabled children and those that live in particular poverty); the prevention of children being removed from their families.

The measures that have been planned are far-reaching, and implementing each of them will require the introduction of a wide range of other activities, which are also described in the report.

The provision of financial support to families with children and welfare services that are appropriate to their needs.

- Payment of parental benefit has been extended in 2006 by 90 days. Benefit payments are now issued up to the 455th day after the start of pregnancy and maternity leave. This enables parents to be compensated for the income they would have earned had they not temporarily suspended their work in connection with caring for their newborn. The benefit helps working parents to combine their work and family lives and guarantees income for non-working child-rearing parents. The amount of the parental benefit payment is 100% of an individual's average income for the previous calendar year (with the upper limit being three times the average national salary from the year before last). Parents who were not previously in employment are paid benefits at the benefit rate (158.50 EUR in 2006).
- From 1 July 2007 child allowance will be raised from 300 to 900 Estonian kroons (from 19 to 57 Euro) from the third child in the family.
- In 2006 the birth grant and adoption allowance has been increased to 5000 Estonian kroons (320 EUR) for every child born or adopted. The previous amount of this benefit was 3750 kroons (240 EUR) for the first child and 3000 kroons (192 EUR) for each subsequent child.
- Rehabilitation plans have been drawn up for all children with disabilities, which will enable the provision of services to these children that meet their individual requirements.
- A method of calculating the costs of raising a child was developed in 2004 that is used in courts in establishing maintenance payments as well as in formulating the prices of welfare services.
- Personal assistant and support person services for family have been developed.
- An online system has been created for children requiring assistance: the 1345 information line has been established, enabling children and families in trouble to be reached more quickly.
- National rehabilitation services have been extended to include not only children with disabilities but also children sent to juvenile committees.
- Emphasis has been placed on developing the network surrounding the child and the family, and training has been carried out in this regard, for example in the recognition of and providing assistance to abused (including sexually abused) children.
- The numbers of child welfare workers employed by local governments has been increased in order to be able to provide children with professional assistance as quickly as possible.

Improvement of the living conditions

The government is in the process of developing housing policy strategy 2007-2013, which outlines several measures to improve the living conditions of families with children:

- Improving the housing conditions of risk groups by offering them the opportunity to rent a subsidised municipal housing
- Improving the opportunities of renting municipal housing in local governments
- Making the subsistence benefit system more efficient by determining precisely the classification of housing costs and bringing the operating of local government social registers to joint ground

The creation of equal opportunities for obtaining a quality education

The priority areas are as follows:

- increasing the quality and flexibility of studies;
 - creating possibilities for life-long learning;
 - improving the quality and availability of youth work;
 - the individualisation of studies;
 - the detection of students' special educational needs as early as during their preschool years.
- a) Creating opportunities for every child to participate in preschool learning for at least the year prior to starting school
 - b) Increasing the efficiency of the early detection of special developmental needs of children
 - c) Supporting children acquiring general education via the family support system:
 - From 1 September 2007 the list of individuals who qualify for child allowance is to be extended. According to current legislation, every child up to the age of 16 and every child aged between 16 and 19 obtaining general education in form of daily studies has the right to obtain child allowance. Family benefits will now also be paid to students obtaining general education in forms other than daytime studies – e.g. through evening courses or distance learning. These changes guarantee preservation of the right to family benefits regardless of the format of learning, allowing students to make flexible choices regarding the continuation of their studies. The objective behind these changes is to support obtaining general education, which in turn is the prerequisite for young people to be able to successfully enter – and remain in – the job market.
 - d) Expanding state support in order to ensure financial access to studies: free school lunch for every basic school student and students in vocational schools; and support for the acquisition of school supplies, including free school supplies for families with low incomes
 - e) In 2006 the educational expenses budget in vocational education has increased by almost 120 million kroons (7,669,397 EUR).
 - f) Support for boarding school facility places - In 2006 places have been created in boarding school facilities connected to 30 municipal schools for 500 children from families that have difficulty in coping.
 - g) Amendment Act for Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools, Private Schools, Vocational Educational Institutions and Preschool Childcare Institutions. This legislative amendment sets out the objectives and procedures for internal assessment and counselling. Internal assessment has been obligatory for these educational institutions since 1 September 2006. The objective of internal assessment is to guarantee conditions that support the development of students and the continuous development of educational institutions.
 - h) 2006 has seen the opening of new local counselling and information centres for young people, and the 'NIP' - youth information portal - is currently under development.
 - i) Two operational programmes have been prepared by the Ministry of Education and Research of which the first covers activities related to life-long learning, research and development, higher education, the labour market and enterprise. The second programme covers investments in vocational schools, schools for children with special educational needs and public youth centres.
 - j) Implementing the (draft) **2006-2010 Development Plan for General Education**, which involves the following measures (among others):
 - Consideration of student's individual needs in schooling and educational activities and implementation of support services for students with special learning needs to prevent them from dropping out of school
 - Opportunities for developing extended study time
 - Additional support services to ensure that disabled children have access to education (including physical access), customisation of learning environments for students with special educational needs, and working out auxiliary materials to support the implementation of the simplified national curricula of basic school

- Development of an integrated counselling model and of a study, vocational and career guidance system
- Implementation of action designed to integrate immigrants and refugees into the education system and funding of the necessary support systems

In 2007 a gradual transfer to partial Estonian-language studies in Russian-language state and municipal high schools is planned to begin. To achieve this Estonian-language subject studies and studies of Estonian will be expanded in Russian-language basic schools, teachers will be trained for the implementation of bilingual studies and curricula and guidance materials will be prepared.

The creation of better development opportunities for children that take into account their special needs

The most important objectives to meet the special needs of children are as follows:

- the inclusion of children living in poverty and disabled children in society;
- the creation of equal opportunities for children with special behavioural needs for participation in society;
- the integration of children who are part of national minorities and/or other minority groups;
- the provision of the necessary assistance and support to children without parental care; and
- the prevention of child abuse and the provision of comprehensive assistance to abused children.

According to the report the following activities will be implemented during 2006-2008:

- Supporting children in guardianship or in foster families. In 2007 the benefit for children in guardianship or in foster families will be raised from 900 kroons (58 EUR) to 1500 kroons (96 EUR) per month in order to encourage the raising of a child without parental care within a family. All of the other family benefits will also be paid to children in guardianship or in foster care to which the child or the family is entitled, as well as a survivor's pension should the right exist to receive it. Children without parental care who have instead been in guardianship or in foster family, will now be paid an one-off independent life grant of 6000 kroons (383 EUR) when they begin living on their own, as do children who leave child care institution.
- Recreational opportunities for children and young people will be increased along with their availability (supporting holidays in youth and project camps that are beneficial to their health and development).
- The availability of youth information will be improved as well as the opportunities for young people to participate via supporting the activities of counselling centres and youth associations.
- The help system for abused children will be developed.
- The public, including children and young people, will be informed about violence against children and on topics of child prostitution and sexual exploitation, and the skills and knowledge of specialists dealing with children will be improved in these topics.
- Intervention strategies for school bullying will be developed.
- The inclusion of young people with disabilities in the labour market will be promoted. To implement this, customised work places will be created for disabled youth, job integration opportunities via work and vocational rehabilitation, and vocational rehabilitation services will also be developed.
- E-learning opportunities will be developed, utilised and promoted to make the learning process more flexible and individual and to promote life-long learning.

Non-formal education

The national report refers to youth work and to increasing the recreational opportunities of young people through support for running youth camps. Measures in terms of the development of hobby education have not been added. At the same time, hobby education is a part of the Estonian education system.

Hobby education is an activity that takes place on the basis of the national curriculum or that of the individual institute in order to facilitate the multi-faceted development of students. There are a total of 300 hobby education schools with education licences in Estonia (160 of them municipal and 140 private) with a student base of around 48,000, approximately 13,300 of which study in music and art schools, 13,400 in sports schools and 21,300 in schools focussing on other interests.

The Hobby Education Schools Act regulates the activities of hobby education schools. Hobby education tends to be primarily financed from local government budgets and support is granted to children and young people attending both municipal and private hobby education schools.

Leisure time activities are organised via schools, public youth centres, interest group centres, youth associations and non-profit organisations. In terms of the availability of hobby education, it should be pointed out that this depends to a certain extent on location – in larger towns and cities and in municipal centres there is a wider selection of hobby schools and clubs and public transport connections are guaranteed. In smaller towns and villages and in less densely populated regions where there are few or no opportunities to obtain hobby education, the sparseness or lack of public transport services represents a problem if parents have neither their own means of transport nor the funds to use it.

3/ Government critique

Participation

The NAP report does not indicate whether or to what extent children were consulted in its development. The opinions of children and young people are instead represented by social partners and non-governmental organisations who are active in the promotion of children's rights and who provide services for families with children.

As the involvement of children and young people would require greater time resources and different approaches to that of the involvement of adults, these may have been obstacles to their participation in the development of the report.

Child rights

There is a clear link between the **National Strategy on Ensuring Child Rights** and the NAP. The Strategy on Ensuring Child Rights includes objectives and measures to ensure child rights to every child living in Estonia and tackling with child poverty as well as with social exclusion are set as priorities. The NAP takes account of the objectives and measures of the Strategy on Ensuring Child Rights. Monitoring the implementation of the Strategy on Ensuring Child Rights is one part of the reporting process as it measures the extent to which the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are being implemented in Estonia.

The NAP recognises child's right to a family environment and sets measures to ensure it. The state support for families and development of services for families with children are set as prioritised measures in order to reduce child poverty and prevent exclusion of families with coping problems.

The principle of non-discrimination is followed, as the NAP determines measures to create equal opportunities for obtaining a quality education for every child as well as to create better opportunities for development taking child's special needs into account.

Resources

The preface to the national report states that the strategic courses of action of social protection and inclusion are supported by the National Budget Strategy for 2007-2013. Of course, the actual guaranteeing of appropriate financial resources depends on annual budgets and political agreements. Neither the National Report on NAP/Inclusion nor its annexes include references to the budget amounts. As a result, it is difficult to evaluate whether the financial resources are sufficient. Appropriation of the necessary sums can be observed via the state's annual budgets.

Results

No assessment is provided in the NAP report as to the effectiveness of the measures that have already been taken. It could generally be said that the number of children living in absolute poverty decreased from 40.4% in 1998 to 25.3% in 2004. However, the basic school dropout rate remains a problem and no significant results have been achieved in decreasing this.

Children living in single-parent families are at higher risk of falling into poverty than children living with both parents. In Estonia a single mother, whose child's birth certificate does not include data about father are entitled to get a single parent benefit. This benefit is very small (19 Euro). Even if it were to be raised, other supporting measures must also be discussed.

In Estonia the number of cases where a parent leaves the family and child (children) is increasing. Often parents living away do not fulfil their responsibilities towards child maintenance and there is a need to discuss what kind supportive measures should be taken by the state in this situation.

The financing of services for disabled children is insufficient. Financing covers mainly the planning of individual rehabilitation programs, but implementation of these plans is rather poor because of the lack of money.

The national report highlights the decrease of the unemployment level among young people over the last five years, with the figure dropping from 23.9% in 2000 to 15.9% in 2005. However, there has been no noticeable decrease in the numbers of students dropping out of school, and in fact the numbers for 2005 were slightly higher than those for 2004: 2004 – 13.7 %; 2005 – 14.0%.

Availability of supporting services for basic school students with behavioural problems is insufficient. Often local municipalities are not able (especially in rural areas) to provide these services because of the lack of specialists. Progress in reorganisation of special schools for students with behavioural problems as well as in improvement of the quality of education is slow.

The influence of the activities that were implemented in 2005 and that have been implemented so far in 2006 is not covered, as it is difficult to evaluate at this point.

Monitoring and evaluation

The NAP report incorporates the objectives and associated planned activities established within the strategic documents from a number of different sectors. The Ministry of Social Affairs carries overall responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the NAP. However, all ministries are responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of their own action plans. In addition to this, the ministry for each sector and its working groups are responsible for the involvement of interest groups. In order to involve local governments in the formation of a range of policy areas a cooperative assembly of ministries and local governments has been established.

The Ministry of Social Affairs plans to convene a permanent round table that would comprise primarily the members of the round table of non-profit organisations who were brought together to produce the national report as well as members of the management committee and social partners. The tasks of the members of the round table would be the monitoring and facilitation of the compilation process of strategies and development plans within their sectors for the coordination and integration of social inclusion policy in all appropriate policy areas and at all levels of government (local, regional and national).

Reports on the implementation of strategy documents are also periodically produced within the Ministry of Social Affairs.

EU dimension

Alongside general economic development the EU dimension motivates and obligates us to make more of a contribution to regionally balanced social development within the state. At that it is highly positive to obtain experience and to learn from other member states as well as to contribute to the cooperation. What is important is that such cooperation also encourages connections between the measures in different policy areas within the state – the economy, education, employment, social protection, health care and housing. Putting the national report together means setting concrete, quantifiable goals; the monitoring of whose fulfilment will enable us to see whether the courses of action in the longer term will bring about positive changes in terms of indicators, i.e. whether the situation of children according to their individual needs will change for the better. Monitoring the fulfilment of the action plan will provide us with an opportunity to raise awareness of poverty and exclusion and their multi-faceted nature among different parties. The EU dimension also represents the chance to apply for financing through the EU Structural Funds and EQUAL programme for the promotion of social protection and inclusion within a member state.

4/Acknowledgements

Prepared by the Estonian Union for Child Welfare (www.lastekaitseliit.ee)

1/ Situation analysis

In Finland, the level of relative poverty, which refers to the proportion of the population with a low income, is still low compared with equivalent figures for most other EU countries. However, the level of poverty has risen since the mid-1990s.

Low income is most common among single people and single parents. In the past few years, low income levels have also increased among young families with children. Households whose reference person is a student, unemployed, or on a full state pension are at the greatest risk of poverty. Those aged 16 to 24 are at the greatest risk of poverty.

In 2003, for the first time, child poverty level was higher than the level of poverty among the entire population.

The risks of social exclusion seem to have increased recently, especially among children and young people, as well as among substance abusers. The number of children and young people subject to child protection measures has risen alarmingly.

The population's level of education has risen rapidly in the past few decades. At the end of 2004, 38% had an upper secondary qualification and one fourth of those aged 15 or over had a higher education qualification. Finland has a regionally extensive and free school system, including higher education.

In 2004, 95% of school-leavers were placed in general upper secondary education, vocational training, or voluntary additional basic education immediately in the year they left school.

2/ Policy responses

Preventing of social exclusion and reducing poverty and marginalisation are among the strategic goals of the national long-term strategies of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. However, the Finnish Government emphasises that actions against poverty and social exclusion must be seen as measures complementing the social protection system that covers the entire population, not as measures replacing it. The National Report acknowledges the challenges posed by ageing of the population as well as globalisation and the need to create and utilise social innovations. Therefore the social protection is and will be examined increasingly from the point of life phases, with particular attention being paid to childhood.

In the Overall Strategic Approach of the report, it is clearly noted that the reduction of poverty and social exclusion of families with children is a key political challenge. Reference is made to those parts of the social protection systems (social benefits and services) that are especially targeted at children and at families with children, and that are grounded in the legislation as equal rights to all. It is also stated that the government has already implemented reforms that aim to improve the conditions of the most deprived.

Among the key objectives of the NAP/Incl 2006 – 2008 is prevention of social problems and social risks with particular attention to early intervention in the problems of children, young people and families with children. According to the report since the recession in the 1990s, one of the most important projects with regard to the reduction of social exclusion has been early intervention.

In the report the cycle of social exclusion is clearly linked not only to the unemployment but to the decreased time with the family that may result in disturbed behaviour among children and young people. Also the number of children and young people subject to child protection measures has risen alarmingly – that is mainly due to growing substance abuse. Particular attention will be paid to the prevention of alcohol and drug experimentation and use among children and young people. With regards to young people, difficulties they face in entering the labour market are seen as a particular threat.

The five strategic targets to be followed in the different policy sectors are:

- Income security
- Development of the service system
- Employment and the labour market policy
- Housing policy
- Education and youth policy

With regards to income security, the 2007 budget proposal includes that:

- the child maintenance allowance is raised with approximately 6 euros/month/child
- the special child care allowance and child disability allowance are raised with 15 euros.

Note: According to the study carried out by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, the actual value of the family allowance has dropped 19 Euros between 1994 and 2004.

Families with children and young people under the threat of social exclusion are identified as one of the “Risk Groups Requiring Special Measures” in the NAP/Incl. It underlines the necessity of preventive work to be based on a comprehensive examination of the situation of the life in the family as a whole.

Schooling

In general, strong emphasis is placed on education as a means of combating social exclusion and poverty. It is being linked to employment that in turn is being linked to youth policy as one way to meet the strategic targets.

Under the theme of education and youth policy there are separate strategic targets set which include supporting young people’s growth and independence as well as promoting their active citizenship.

The NAP/Incl indicates that the level of education has risen in the past few decades, and young people have received “considerably” more education than members of older generations. The new, separate provisions for pupil and student welfare, which are part of the Finnish legislation on education, are described in more detail than in 2003, when the new provisions came into force. In addition to the targets for learning, the law also addresses the holistic welfare of children and young people, the safety of the school community, and the obligation for co-operation between administrators.

School drop-outs are given a special attention in the Report, and they are seen as a risk to social exclusion.

The new Youth Act covering the children and young people 0 – 29 years of age includes a target on social empowerment of young people, with measures aimed at young people to improve their life skills and prevent social exclusion. The Ministry of Education is preparing a development programme for a national youth policy in co-operation with other ministries with a joint interest. Also other key actors (eg child welfare NGOs) are being consulted in the process.

The policy entitled “Social Guarantee for Young People” is given as an example of good practice in the NAP/Incl.

3/ Government critique

Policy approach

The Finnish approach continues to be based on a comprehensive social protection system, including extensive social security benefits and services to meet the challenges created by various social risks. However, the measures described in the NAP/Incl have already been launched by the current government - based on the 2003 Government Programme - and the strategic targets of this Programme have been presented in the previous Finnish NAP/Inclusion to the Commission for 2003 – 2005. The strategic outlines of the Government Programme have since 2003 been supplemented and specified by different administrative sectors’ own strategies and sector-specific targets.

In practice this means that the overall strategic approach to the fight against poverty and social exclusion for 2006 – 2008 is mainly dependent on the outlines of the objectives and measures against poverty and social exclusion launched already in 2003. The parliamentary elections in March 2007 are likely to have a great impact on the priorities, strategic objectives, target groups and the outlines of measures taken from mid 2007 on.

“it is not possible or necessary to set new political goals in the area of social protection and social inclusion in 2006; attention is being focused on bringing the policies specified in the Government Programme (from 2003) to a conclusion.” (page 7)

Increasing attention is being given to child poverty and poor families. This is reflected in a growing number of seminars on the theme, plus studies and reports. The government responded to an interpellation from the

opposition party on child poverty in October 2006. Therefore it is very likely that child poverty and the situation of families with children living in poverty will be addressed in the programme of the next government for 2007 – 2011.

However it is important to recognise that:

1) Despite some positive reforms made by the government, the income rate of families with children has fallen behind when compared to other groups. The income transfers to the families with children are still at least 10% lower than 10 years ago before the recession in the early 1990s. The current Finnish government has improved the level of direct financial support for families. However, the income transfers directed to the families with children have not been indexed to inflation. This has decreased the actual value of the above mentioned benefits. The latest statistics show that the number of children living in poverty has tripled during the last decade.

2) In the Supplementary Report on the Implementation of the CRC to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Central Union for Child Welfare paid particular attention to service provision in Finland. The report says that:

“The social environment in which decisions are made has become more complicated in Finland. Factors which complicate the supervision and control of service systems include the segmentation of administration, increased influence of specialised knowledge, internationalization, and the blurring of the borderline between private and public sectors. This has led to inequality between the municipalities and, above all, between the citizens. The State is no longer able, through legislative means and the distribution of resources and information, to direct functions at the municipal level. Not all of the municipalities have sufficient resources for the production of basic and special services, which increases the regional inequality of the inhabitants.”

The recent Concluding Observations to Finland by the Committee on CRC in September 2005 then include following:

“11. The Committee shares the State party’s concerns that, owing to the fact that local authorities have extensive powers of self-governance and autonomy, changes are needed to ensure the equality of resources for children and the availability of services throughout the country.

12. The Committee recommends that the State party undertake a study to assess and analyse the resources provided for children and continue to take, where necessary, effective measures to ensure equal access to and availability of services for all children, irrespective of the municipality in which they live.”

3) Regarding coordination between local, regional and national level, the supplementary report to the UNCRC notes that by 2006 child policy programmes had been set up in 107 municipalities by 2006. These programmes aim to define clear municipal objectives for enhancing the wellbeing of children, young people and families. Therefore in 2006, 83% of Finnish children live in a municipality where there are clear objectives for the improved wellbeing of children, young people, and families. The work on municipal child policy programmes started in 1995 on the initiative of Kuntaliitto (hereafter, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities) (Eläköön lapset [Long live children] - document). The work on municipal level is extremely important as it recognises children as inhabitants of a municipality and as autonomous agents.

However, there are large differences in the quality of the programmes and, at present, there is no coordinated monitoring of their practical implementation and effects. Although programmes made at the municipal level are important from the viewpoint of the rights of the child, the Central Union believes that attention should be drawn to the fact that child policy is an integral part of municipal total planning, implying that children as a segment of the population should be taken into account in all municipal planning and budgeting. Secondly, the preparation of programmes does not suffice in itself. Care must be taken that programmes are also implemented and monitored properly.

The National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion for 2006 – 2008 however makes no reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or to the Concluding Observations.

School drop-outs are given a special attention in NAP and they are seen as a risk to social exclusion. However the high drop-out rate among Roma children is not referred in NAP as well as their difficulties in accessing education and the lack of teachers and materials in the Roma language. This is a concern for the Committee on the Right of Children in its Concluding Observation.

Consultation

Children and young people are recognised as “relevant actors” in the NAP. However they have not been consulted in the preparation of the report.

The right of children and youth under 29 to be heard on all matters concerning them, at both local and national level, is clearly stated in the recently adopted Youth Act. However, how this participation is carried out still very much depends on expertise and experience within municipalities or other public administrations.

Although still in its infancy, good practices of involving children in issues already exist, and methods to hear and involve a child have been developed for child welfare purposes as well. However dissemination of the existing practices or methods has been limited. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is currently working on a National Development Program for Child Welfare that will include concrete proposals on participation especially in child protection.

It should also be recognised that the NAP/Incl does recognise the importance of participation of young people. On the page 33 under “Families with children and young people under the threat of social exclusion” (as one of the risk group) it is stated that

“The objective is to promote --- the active participation of young people in the activities of society as well as training.”

The child welfare and youth NGOs have been consulted during the preparation process. However the hearing was based on the principle of inviting representatives from different NGOs and the Church. Central Union for Child Welfare hasn't been among the invited. The report places strong emphasis on the principle of good governance. It also recognises the value of the work of NGOs eg in policy co-ordination.

4/ Key documents

“A Finland Fit for Children”– based on the UN document “A World Fit For Children” exists. This is a general strategy paper geared towards international compliance with the UNCRC.

5/ Acknowledgements

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⁴⁴ The *Central Union for Child Welfare* is the Finnish umbrella organisation comprising 85 NGOs and 34 municipalities. Its main activities are in the areas of Information, Training, Research, Publications and Lobbying.

France

1/ Situation analysis

According to a report published in February 2004 by the Council for Employment, Income & Social Cohesion (CERC) around **1 million children** in France live below the poverty threshold. It is possible that some tens of thousands of children in poverty do not figure in the statistics, because the research does not mention France's overseas territories & departments, homeless people and those living in collective accommodation.

Child poverty particularly affects children in lone-parent families (**23%** of poor children are in this situation) and in families of 4 or more children as well as families headed by immigrants (**25.9%**). A key matter of concern in France is the growing number of jobless households.

The total expenditure for social protection in 2004 was approximately 29% of GDP. The Social Inclusion Policy document refers to an investment of a total of 33 billion for the period 2006-2007.

2/ Policy responses

Most of the measures set out in the NAP focus on improving access of young people to the labour market. However, the plan does propose a wide range of social and cultural measures directed to fight child poverty. The key priorities of the NAP are defined by actual challenges in the French social policy, they are the following:

- *Difficulties in providing professional training (apprentissage) to pupils at risk of dropping-out of school*
- *Difficulties experienced by young people while entering labour market*
- *Social integration of migrants*
- *Low number of public housing offers*

Since 2005 the Plan of social cohesion was developed and implemented. It assembles state services, local departments, social partners and associations around 3 main issues: employment, social housing and equal opportunities.

A new statute for maternal assistance took effect in 2006. The number of kindergartens has increased significantly. The proportion of one parent families receiving single parent allowance is growing continuously: +3.8% in 2005, +3.3% in 2004, +3.6% in 2003.

Other actions to fight poverty and social exclusion:

- redistribution of taxes and system for social protection
- contract of insertion in the social life (CIVIS)
- construction of more than 250,000 housing units
- prevention health care measures for children in school

The following measures are designed to improve quality of education by of providing greater access to school:

- project for creating common foundation of knowledge (*socle commun des connaissances*)
- 5-year personalised programme for educational progress (*programme personnalisé de réussite éducative*)
- public service for professional orientation
- the allocation for student housing (ALINE, 2007)
- civil volunteer service ("*Cadets de la République*" and "*Défence-deuxième chance*")
- introducing "*contrats de professionnalisation*"

The development of apprenticeship is one of the key points in the programme for social cohesion. Particular attention will be paid to teenagers who have difficulties in school.

In the area of public health, the Ministry of Public Health adopted an action programme in December 2005 "*Stratégie d'action santé des enfants et des jeunes*". It focuses on:

- intensifying educational dialogue between professionals in healthcare and children
- generalising dental examination of children from 6 to 12 years old
- developing prevention measures
- facilitating access to medical consultations for 12-13 year old children coming from poor families
- increasing the benefit for children with special needs.

The Social Cohesion Fund (*Fonds de cohésion sociale*) guarantees to allocate 73 million euros for micro-credits. The Fund aims to help young people, aged 18-25, particularly in finding housing.

The National Consultative Commission for Roma People was created in March 2006. It studies specific problems of Roma people and presents annual report to Prime Minister. The law of 5 July 2000 provides measures for integrating Roma people in the society.

3/ Government critique

The French social model is characterised by a high labour market participation of women and high fertility rate – **1.9** children for each woman compared to **1.5** EU average. Such demographic situation is mostly due to extensive social help to families with children. However, in recent years France has suffered from a relatively high unemployment rate that is the main cause of poverty. The level of unemployment among young people (15-25) remains 2.5 higher than among the rest of population. 81% of unemployed, receiving the API (*Allocation Parent Isolé*) justify unemployment with the need to care for their children.

The Committee on the Rights of Children in its concluding observations for France notes inadequate measures taken to improve the position of poor families with children (lack of public housing, restrictions on access to family allocations). It also notes the possible inequalities in health care and services among various regions. The CERC report highlights the threat of “reproduction” of child poverty, i.e. of being locked into a condition of poverty. Such a risk of reproducing poverty is strained by the high level of educational failure among low-income families. At the age of 17, **18%** of children in families with the lowest income have left school, compared with only **1%** for those in the higher income bracket.

Despite the variety of actors in the field of education, the UNCRC Committee is concerned about the lack of coordination between them. Every year around 150 000 pupils (6%) leave the educational system without obtaining minimal qualifications. The NAP mentions the so called **Sensitive Urban Zones** (*Zones Urbaines Sensibles*) where the lag in secondary school is more than 10 points above national average. The Committee also raised concerns over the length of family reunification procedures for recognised refugees and the increasing number of unaccompanied minors. They also urged the government to pay more attention to Overseas Territories and Departments.

4/ Key documents

- The Concluding Observations by the Committee on the Rights of Children
- (CRC/C/15/Add.240), 2004
- *Les enfants pauvres en France*, CERC, *La documentation française*, Paris, 2004

Social exclusion and poverty

- **The law against social exclusion (July 2004)** that focuses on exclusion, access to fundamental rights and housing of persons in difficulties
- **Contract for receiving and integration** allows migrant teenagers to continue their studies in French school or they are offered a job straight away, if so desired
- **National Engagement for housing (*Pacte national pour le logement*)**
- ***Plans départementaux d'action pour le logement des personnes défavorisées***
- **The law on the equality of chances**, March 31 2006, has established the contract of parents' responsibility (*contrat de responsabilité parentale*).
- ***Les Opérations Programmées d'Amélioration de l'Habitat***
- ***Résidences sociales, Maisons relais***
- ***Stratégie d'action santé des enfants et des jeunes*** indicates prevention measures as main priority

Access to education

- **Plan for renewal of the education priority** (*Plan de réanimation de l'éducation prioritaire*)
- ***Ambition réussite*** creates conditions for acquisition of basic knowledge and positive orientation towards academic results.

Children's participation

- **Young Initiatives** and **Envie d'agir!** intend to encourage young people to create their own enterprises

5/ Acknowledgements

Alexandra Nekrasova, Eurochild Intern

Germany

1/ Situation analysis

The overall poverty risk rate has risen slightly from 12.1% (1998) to **13.5%** (2003) using the new OECD scale.

The poverty risk rate of children of **15%** (new OECD scale) or 18.6% (old OECD scale) is slightly above the average for the population. Children under the age of 15 have a much higher social assistance rate of 8.1% (end of 2004) in comparison to the population as a whole (3.5%).

In 2003 single parents had an unchanged high poverty risk rate of **35.4%**.

The poverty risk of people with an immigrant background rose from 19.6% to **24%** between 1998 and 2003.

Education and care

9% of each year group of young people do not attain any school-leaving qualifications.

In 2004, 32.3% of German boys and 23.8% of German girls left school after attaining their general secondary school leaving qualifications as compared to 45.3% of boys and 41.2% of girls with an immigrant background. Young people with an immigrant background are also less likely to have vocational qualifications (the training rate of foreign young people was only 25.2% in 2004).

In March 2004 the rate of under-3s cared for in child day care facilities was **11.0%**.

2/ Policy responses

The German **National Action Plan on Social Integration 2006-2008 (NAP)** has set 6 policy priorities:

- 1) Increasing participation in the labour market
- 2) Removal of disadvantages in education and training
- 3) Elements of a modern child and family policy taking particular account of eradicating child poverty
- 4) Strengthening the integration of immigrants
- 5) Eradicating discrimination and strengthening integration of disabled people
- 6) Strengthening social services and involvement in civil society

1) Increasing participation in the labour market

The aim is to further increase the efficiency of the system which encourages the sustainable integration of the unemployed in the labour market.

Measures have been designed to improve the training and employment opportunities of young people and further reduce unemployment, including:

- Giving advice and placement by the employment agencies;
- Implementation of the new basic security for jobseekers;
- Providing comprehensive active benefits for encouraging work and basic security;
- Providing priority placements in training to those who have no vocational training;
- Providing a personal contact who offers intensive mentoring during integration in training or employment and comprehensive assistance;
- Looking for accommodation and offering debt and addiction counselling.

2) Removal of Disadvantages in Education and Training

Childcare and all day education

All-day education and care for children of all age groups is at the centre of the initiatives.

- a) **The Day Care Expansion Act** [*Tagesbetreuungsausbaugesetz (TAG) 2005*] specified the expansion of the offer structure for care for children under the age of three and strengthened the requirement for encouragement in the early phase of care. The aim is to provide 230,000 additional places for the under-3s by 2010.
- b) There are a number of measures to strengthen the educational obligations of child day care centres in order to improve language skills, especially of children from an immigrant background, at pre-school age and during their school years:

- comprehensive education guidelines have been developed;
- the care and education of children in child day care centres is to be based on this guidelines in future;
- Two programmes, **language encouragement at kindergarten age** and **pre-school courses**: it has developed a comprehensive pre-school offer, in which kindergarten teachers are trained to become language teachers for kindergarten-age children with an inadequate knowledge of German.

c) The programme **Future, Education and Care**: the investment funds are used for: (1) setting up new all-day schools, (2) creating additional places in existing all-day schools and (3) qualitative further development of existing all-day schools.

Language skills

The Federal Government-*Länder* programme **Encouraging children and young people from immigrant backgrounds–FörMig**, aims at better language encouragement on the basis of individual language level identification and consistent language encouragement from kindergarten to the start of vocational training.

Apprenticeship

- **Promoting Skills –Vocational training for target groups with a special need of support** is designed to achieve a distribution of transferable results that is as comprehensive as possible.
- The Federal Government is planning another programme, designed to open up individual and flexible routes to qualification.
- **The National Pact for training and the next generation of skilled workers** concluded with the top representatives of business in 2004.
- **The Special Programme for the basic qualification of young**
- The new structural programme **Job starter** aims at the structural strengthening of company offers in the regions by 2010.
- **Training Programme East** ensures the provision of additional training places in the new *Länder* that are close to companies.

Early school-leaving

The programme **Second Chance for Truants** aims at the reintegration of truants in schools and supports them beyond school leaving qualification to integration in work, especially by means of company or supra-company training.

Lifelong learning is also identified as one of key priorities.

3) Elements of a modern child and family policy taking particular account of eradicating child poverty

Income support

- New parental benefit will be introduced from 2007. It is designed to effectively prevent a fall in income, so as to encourage the economic independence of both parents, and to give parents (including single parents) child care choices
- Child bonus for families with low incomes will be improved by simplification of the application process and instrument being made more flexible.
- Benefits for families at risk will better enable parents to combine family and work, and give their children better educational opportunities
- Together with the *Länder* and local authorities, the Federal Government will seek ways of realising the fee exemptions for kindergarten nationwide.
- The project **Early support for parents and children/social early warning systems** has launched to support children in fragile situations, children with social and health risks.
- Some own programmes to encourage families and eradicate child poverty are being created in the *Länder* including: programmes **Families and children have Priority**, **Strengthening parents** and **Help for women and families**.

Integration and participation

- The **Expertise Agencies** model programme is for social integration of particularly disadvantaged young people in socially deprived areas by setting up expertise agencies across the country.
- Since dealing with new media has become a key element of social integration and participation in society, 18 **service points** –internet cafés with educational support– have also been set up in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

- The *Land*-wide participation workshop **Get involved** aims at taking greater account of the needs of children and young people with few educational qualifications and including them in decision-making processes in order to permanently integrate them in community life.
- The Bavarian promotion programme **Youth Social Work in Schools** has proved to be an especially successful way towards social and work integration of disadvantaged young people.
- In 1999 the Federal Government and *Länder* set up the programme **Neighbourhoods with a Special Need for Development – the Social City** as part of urban construction promotion.

4) Strengthening the Integration of Immigrants

The Immigration Act (2005) creates the framework of allowing a comprehensive, equal participation in social, political and economic life for immigrants intending to stay, that is in line with their individual circumstances and willingness.

The nationwide 360 youth migration services are being restructured so that, as part of youth social work, they offer individual, youth-specific integration support to young new immigrants who are too old for school.

3/ Government critique

In the NAP, children in poverty and social inclusion are acknowledged as a one of key priorities.

A “Permanent Group of Advisers for Social Integration” has now been established, in which a total of 25 associations – from NGOs (charitable associations, self-help initiatives, National Poverty Conference, etc.), employers, trades unions, churches, *Länder* and local authorities– are represented. However there is no evidence of children’s participation.

There is no mention of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and monitoring and reporting process under UNCRC in the NAP.

The UNCRC committee report in 2004 identified a number of key issues that are not sufficiently addressed in the NAP including:

- Inadequate recognition of the UNCRC;
- No central independent mechanism for a comprehensive monitoring of the Convention of the Rights of the Child which is empowered to receive and address individual complaints of children at the *Länder* and federal levels;
- The *de facto* discrimination against foreign children and incidents of racial hatred and xenophobia that have a negative effect on the development of children;
- Disparities in the enjoyment by children of their rights;
- Various forms of violence in the State party, in particular, sexual abuse and the growing problem of violence at school;
- Widespread abuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco among children; and the high incidence of infants born with the foetal alcohol syndrome;
- Very high incidence of suicide among children and adolescents;
- Increasing number of street children in the country, as well as the high percentage of foreign children among them.

4/ Key documents

The Concluding Observations by the Committee on the Rights of Children (CRC/C/15/Add.226), 2004

5/ Acknowledgements

Hiromi Amano, Eurochild Intern

1/ Situation analysis

Poverty risk in Greece is falling, albeit only slightly. The rate of individuals below poverty line was 19.6% in 2005 against 20.7% in 2003. At-risk-of poverty rate of children (aged 0-17) was 20.5% in 2005.

At-risk-of poverty rate among immigrant children was 17.4% in 2005, compared to 12.7% among the immigrant population as a whole.

Single parent families led by a woman (35.1%) and large families (30.5%) present high poverty risk. Poverty is particularly persistent in jobless households: 52% of those with dependent children are at risk of poverty.

School drop out rates in Greece are lower than the EU average and are steadily declining. (EU-25 15.2%, Greece 13.3% in 2005)

For low income families with children in compulsory education, 7.2 million € was spent in 2005 on school allowances, from the State budget.

2/ Policy responses

The Greek **National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAP)** has set 4 priority objectives.

Priority 1: Boosting employment, particularly for women, young people, long term unemployed and vulnerable population groups;

Priority 2: Dealing with individuals' and groups' disadvantaged position in education and training;

Priority 3: Support to families and the elderly;

Priority 4: Social inclusion of disabled individuals, immigrants and individuals/groups with cultural/religious particularities.

Priority 1

The main objective is to improve active policies effectiveness for 'vulnerable' population group employment. Although young people are prioritised in Priority 1, there are no programmes designed specifically for them.

Priority 2

The main objective is an education and training system which equips individuals to actively participate in the society and be integrated in the labour market.

Access to qualitative education with emphasis on its first grades

(a) Fight against school drop-out in primary and secondary education.

(b) More attention will be attached to the first grades of education (preschool, primary and secondary) through the following measures:

- Horizontal link between special and common schools and disabled people's inclusion in the common schools;
- A new law will be drafted on special education issues in order to update the institutional framework and codify the existing provisions;
- Prompt diagnosis mechanisms of students' educational needs and parents' briefing and support.

(c) In higher education, Law 3374/2005 institutionalised a **quality assurance system**:

- to regularly evaluate higher education institutes' work (teaching, research, administrative);
- to make the necessary remedy interventions and to inform the interested parties (candidate students, enterprises and social agents) on the Institutes' work quality and effectiveness).

(d) The International University operation in Greece is scheduled for September 2007 aimed to approach and smoothly integrated foreign students in the contemporary Greek reality.

Vocational training

Special emphasis is given to reforming the vocational training system to reflect qualifications transparency (Europass), to formal and non-formal learning and life long learning certification, and to upgrading the career guidance system.

Priority 3

The main focus is boosting employment levels to combat poverty and social inequalities. These employment-oriented policies constitute the main mechanism for preventing child poverty.

Social care structures expansion and upgrading

Supportive structures that enable parents to be available for employment, will be expanded and upgraded, such as day schools and pre-school education and other structures (Nursery Schools, Children's Creative Activities Centre, Social care Units etc).

Income support

Measures include:

- Continued Income support for low income families whose children are in compulsory education, to disabled individuals and their families, and to large families;
- A better institutional framework for assisted human reproduction;
- Special programmes for single parent families as well as housing assistance programmes for families at risk of social exclusion.

Psycho-social support and legal protection

In order to secure the fundamental rights of families especially women and children:

- The immediate social help call line (197) is operating under the National Centre for Direct Social Help offering psychosocial support and consulting to victims of abuse.
- The 'Network for the prevention and elimination of corporal punishment in children' has been launched (October 2005) (uniting Governmental and NGOs representatives).

Other actions

With respect to child poverty, a study is already under way by the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection. The purpose of the study is to define the appropriate actions to support the families and combat child poverty.

Policy measures statistical monitoring and evaluation

To develop updated indicators mentioning the number of social care structures and the number of people benefiting from these structures, per category (nursery schools, kindergarten, Children's Creative Activities Centre, Disabled people's Children Creative Activities Centre, Rehabilitation Centres for the Elderly, Hospitality Centres for the Elderly, 'Home Help Service') depending on the target group (children/disabled people/elderly).

Priority 4

Social inclusion and equal treatment of specific groups (disabled individuals, immigrants and individuals/groups with cultural/religious particularities) constitutes a major challenge for the State. The main focus of interventions is to involve these vulnerable groups in actions destined for the general population. Prior to any integration in general programmes, focused actions shall be applied when deemed necessary to provide special support.

Actions designed for disabled children and for children of immigrant background include:

- A Children's Unit and Rehabilitation Centre for Children with disabilities in Voula Athens.
- Special care will be taken of particularly vulnerable young people such as refugees, trafficking victims etc.
- Actions geared towards second generation young immigrants are envisaged.

3/ Government critique

In the NAP, child poverty is not acknowledged as a key priority. However, there is no evidence of a child–rights approach. The policy measures are mainly geared towards labour market activation rather than improving children’s well being.

In general; the issues of children can be found as future workers or within the family context. Children are highlighted only in the issue of domestic violence and disability. As for social inclusion of the vulnerable groups, there are few actions for children and youth, moreover, those existing actions lack clear measures.

There are Indicators such as ‘**Lack of care for children and other dependents**’ (*Source*: EU-LFS starting in 2006) and ‘**Provision of childcare facilities**’ (*Source*: EUSILC since 2004). However, there is no evidence of link with the monitoring and reporting process under UNCRC.

The UNCRC Committee report in 2002 identified a number of key issues that are not sufficiently addressed in the NAP including:

- Inadequate recognition of the UNCRC;
- Insufficient consideration of children’s opinions in the context of judicial or administrative decisions;
- Children living in very poor conditions;
- Roma children who are particularly exposed to substandard living conditions, including inadequate housing, poor sanitation and waste disposal, and no running water;
- No legislation against xenophobia and hate speech and reports of xenophobia among teachers and students;
- Low family income allowance, which are not provided to children themselves but rather to mothers, irrespective of whether they are caring for their children;
- The fact that many Roma families do not receive these allowances at all;
- Inadequate foster and institutional care including as a result of inadequate funding and insufficient staffing;
- The number of children working and/or living on the street.

4/ Key documents

The Concluding Observations by the Committee on the Rights of Children (CRC/C/15/Add.170) 2002

5/ Acknowledgements

Hiromi Amano, Eurochild Intern

Hungary

1/ Situation analysis

Approximately **25%** of children live in households where the income per capita does not reach 60% of the median income. The poverty rate increases with the size of the family - families with three or more children experience particularly high rates of poverty.

Child poverty is particularly prevalent in disadvantaged regions, for example, in the North-Hungarian region. The Central-Hungarian region has the highest number of single parents – whose children are more likely to be living in poverty. In the Western Trans-Danube region, as compared to 1989, the number of children at risk has increased more than 17 times.

Child poverty is a complex phenomenon, mostly influenced by the labour market activity of the parents as well as housing and geographical disadvantages. In addition, the selection mechanisms of the education and training system do not mitigate, but rather strengthen the impact of the family background on the performance of children.

In Hungary, only **12.3%** of people aged 18-24 had no upper-secondary qualification or were not in school in 2005, which is lower than the 14.9% average of the EU-25. However, the drop-out rate is highest in vocational schools not offering a school leaving examination, at almost **15%**. About one-fifth of each age-group still leaves education with a low level of schooling.

Approximately **20%** of young Roma persons do not even finish the eight grades of the primary school, another **20%** of them finish the eight grades late, and an additional 40-50% either does not continue the studies after finishing the primary school, or become drop-outs.

According to the shadow report on the 2nd UNCRC periodic report on Hungary, prepared by Family, Child, Youth Association (August 2005):

- more than 10% of families in Hungary live in households where nutritious food is not available because of financial problems and more and more children show symptoms of malnutrition.
- 150,000 are malnourished and 20,000 to 50,000 are starving.

2/ Policy responses

Combating child poverty is a one of priority objectives in the Hungarian **National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2006-2008 (NAP)**.

Targets:

- *Poverty rate (below 60% of the median income) of the age group 0 to 15 to decrease to 12% by 2013 (2003: 17.0%)*
- *6% capacity increase in institutions providing care to children aged 0 to 3 by 2008.*

1. Promoting the employment of parents:

- by strengthening the measures related to the fight against inactivity,
- by improving the reconciliation of family life and work.

2. Ensuring equal opportunity in the system of education and training:

- by improving access of 0 to 6 year olds to support institutions / services, ensuring the preparation and development of abilities of disadvantaged children,
- by ensuring equal opportunities in basic education, elimination of selection and segregation mechanisms, as well as promoting integrated education for Roma children and those with specific education requirements,
- by decreasing the ratio of those classified as having special education needs within the scope of students with multiple disadvantages,

- by decreasing drop-out in secondary level education, primarily in vocational schools, as well as the increased caring for the talents of disadvantaged students, and providing incentives to disadvantaged students to participate in forms of A-level training,
- by ensuring equal opportunities and free tuition for disadvantaged students in higher education.

3. Improving income situation of families with children:

- by maintaining the value of family support benefits and related benefits in kind.

4. Strengthening child welfare and child protection services:

- by making access to child welfare services possible in small settlements, also for those living in areas where services are lacking,
- by the gradual improvement of the quality of specialised care and temporary care,
- by strengthening legal and institutional tools of the fight against domestic violence,
- by ensuring good quality developmental and recreational programs.

5. Health protection of children and young people:

- by implementing the National Infant and Child Health-care Program,
- by fighting addictions, with special focus on drug addictions regarding young people,
- by providing incentives for an active and healthy lifestyle,
- by strengthening youth services and developing young communities, and providing incentives for active citizenship.

Priority Objective 3 is *Reducing regional and housing disadvantage*. Some objectives are aimed to improve the housing situation of families with children by:

- fighting over-indebtedness;
- measures helping to gain access to housing (young couples with children/ families living in disadvantaged situation);
- the social integration of those living in slums, slum-like environments, and city ghettos (Roma families);
- measures aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness (homeless families).

The NAP/Incl coincides with the implementation of the Short Programme of the National Action Plan against child poverty (NAP/child poverty).

On 15 October 2005, at the first meeting of Hungarian Network against Poverty, the Hungarian Prime Minister declared his Government's commitment to ending child poverty. An academic, Zsuzsa Ferge, was requested to work with the government to draw up the NAP/child poverty. The Child Programme Office was established in November 2005 in the Hungarian Scientific Academy, and the so-called 'Short Programme' (2006-2008) was adopted in June 2006. Over the next year a long-term 25-year plan (called the Generation Plan) will be developed together with a Strategic Plan that will be discussed and (hopefully) voted by the Parliament.

The main goals of the NAP/child poverty are to:

- radically reduce the poverty rate among children and their families within one generation,
- eliminate the social exclusion of children and extreme forms of deep-poverty,
- reform the mechanisms and institutions which reproduce the poverty and social exclusion; in particular to ensure health living conditions from early childhood; to develop abilities / capacities from early childhood; to reduce regional and ethnical inequalities and discriminations; to support that children growing up in safe environment and reduce the risk factors of deviant behaviour.

The NAP/child poverty is ambitious and takes good account of the multi-dimensional nature of child poverty. The overall objective (to reduce the poverty and social exclusion of children and their families) is entirely consistent with the 'vertical' objectives (to develop educational, health and social sector, etc.) and with 'horizontal' objectives (to reduce geographical, ethnical inequalities, to develop the living conditions of disabled children, etc.).

Table 1: The priorities together with objectives

	Employment of parents	Develop, educate children	Social services	Better health conditions of children	Develop living conditions
Roma (gypsy) children	Reduce the rate and deep of poverty				
Disabled children					
Reduce the negative effects of underdeveloped, rural areas					
Develop social services					
Enforce child rights	Reduce the rate of poverty and enforce the rights and participation				
co-operation (inter-sectoral, among institutions)					
Participation (children, citizens)					
Dissemination					

Table 2: The targets for the short, medium and long term

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2030
Short Programme	Immediate actions, Programs for short period (3 years) Preparing long-term programs								
National Plan for Development									
Generation Programme	To introduce long-term programmes / influence structures, long-term procedures /monitoring, evaluation, feedbacks								

Despite the Prime Minister's original commitment to include the NAP/child poverty in their four-year plan⁴⁵, no measures have yet been taken. Formally the NAP/child poverty is an key political objective; practically the economic convergence programme and the doubtful economical, financial situation of Hungary means there is no available budget to implement it. According to Zsuzsa Ferge (the academic behind the plan) a minimum investment of 80Million Forint (approx. 334.000Euros) is required – and this is not available. So far the only outputs of the NAP/child poverty are the research studies and a PILOT Program (on multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral co-operation in a small, deprived village, Szécsény).

A number of research studies / papers prepared by the experts such as Ferge, Tausz, Darvas give a higher profile to child poverty and also include an overview of relevant European documents, actions and best practices.

Education

The NAP/child poverty recognizes the role of education in tackling social exclusion and the inter-generational inheritance of poverty.

First of all the NAP/child poverty covers the whole spectrum of education from the Early Years provision to transition from crèche to work. The Short Programme deals with Sure Start Project. This project (for 0-3 years old children), is committed to providing the highest quality preschool education. Sure Start is dedicated to providing comprehensive services in the areas of education, health, social services, and family involvement and it means close collaboration between families, schools, and the community.

The NAP/child poverty also emphasises the importance of:

- New legal instruments and regulations to ensure deprived children have access to crèche and kindergartens;
- Monitoring standards;
- The financial framework of crèche (based on space instead of presence);
- Developing family-based forms of child care;
- Supporting to establish local possibilities (kindergarten if there are more than 20 children (between the age of 4 and 6) at the settlement);
- optimise the size of kindergarten groups (max. 20 children);
- ensure the priorities in enrolment for disabled children and children in risk;

⁴⁵ The government was re-elected in June 2006

- flexible (longer) opening hours;
- educated, trained professionals;
- develop inter-sectoral co-operation in the framework of child protection (mandatory reporting) system.

Within primary education (6-14 years) the NAP/child poverty stresses the importance of integrated education and the need to prevent marginalization of disadvantaged groups in education system. The measures proposed include: the development of local education opportunities (if at least 40 children live in a settlement), special rehabilitation programmes for disabled children, and administrative reforms and development of local infrastructure to reduce school-segregation (model of '*Ethnic School Colouration*'). The introduction of free lunches is also a priority for pre-school and primary education system (by degrees – of course).

For 14-18 years old children, the NAP focuses on preventing school drop-outs. This includes:

- personal monitoring,
- developing learning conditions,
- supporting families,
- evaluating and monitoring the present scholarship-systems,
- enlarge the net of dormitories / improve the standards,
- develop the vocational training system,
- organized free-time activities (sport, clubs, etc.),
- trainings for teachers, social workers, psychologists, child protection professionals working with children,
- develop of co-operation, networking with other actors of child protection system (mandatory reporting system) – specially focus on child welfare agencies.

Outside the NAP/child poverty, the Child Rights Act (No.1997:31) established a close-cooperation between: child welfare agencies, family support centres, health visitors, different authorities (e.g.: guardianship courts), police departments, judges, public prosecutors, pedagogues, kindergarten teachers, social workers working in the health, social or educational sector, refugee camps, parents, children and neighbours, etc.

In theory there is a mandatory reporting system to ensure co-operation, information flow and inter-sectoral networking on children's well-being / welfare and especially against child abuse and neglect. In practice there are several problems:

- lack / small proportion of reports by pedagogues, paediatricians;
- lack of definitions [e.g.: data protection, children at risk, financial indicators among risk factors, etc.];
- poor handling of inter-sectoral problems [e.g.: child delinquents under the age of criminal liability];
- lack of trainings, qualified professionals / experts;
- financial pitfalls [e.g.: inadequate financial protocols, lack of correct working conditions, etc.

3/ Government critique

Despite the good intentions, the NAP/child poverty remains a so-called 'soft governmental instrument' without any concrete obligations, responsibilities, consequences, state actors. The clear, specific targets for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion are not quantified in the whole NAP and there are some areas where the planned outcomes do not reflect reality. The NAP does not contain any alternative financial resource (new money).

Another criticism is the failure to deal adequately with children's participation. In NAP/child poverty only parents and local experts / professionals are recognised as 'relevant actors'. Although the Short Programmes identifies the need for participation, co-operation, networking and mutual learning, there is no instrument or recommendation how the relevant actors' participation will be facilitated.

4/ Key documents

- The second periodic report of Hungary (CRC/C/70/Add.25), 2005
- The Concluding Observations by the Committee on the Rights of Children (CRC/C/HUN/CO2), 2006.

5/ Acknowledgements

Szilvia Gyurko, Family, Child, Youth Priority Non-Profit Association⁴⁶, www.csagyi.ngo.hu
Hiromi Amano, Eurochild Intern

⁴⁶ **Family, Child, Youth Priority Non-Profit Association** provides services for child protection professionals as well as families and children in need.

Ireland

1/ Situation analysis

9.5% of persons under 15 years were experiencing consistent poverty⁴⁷ in 2004, which is a significant reduction from 12.2% in 2003.

21.2% of children in households are at risk of poverty⁴⁸ in 2004, which slightly increased from 21% in 2003.

In 2003, there were 52,200 early school leavers (classified as those aged 18 to 24 years whose highest level of education is lower secondary or below). 65.1% of them were young men.

2/ Policy responses

The Irish **National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2006-2008 (NAP)** has set 4 policy objectives:

- I. *Child poverty*
- II. *Access to quality work and learning opportunities*
- III. *Integration of immigrants*
- IV. *Access to quality services*

I. Child poverty

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy in 2002 set a target to reduce the number of those who are consistently poor below 2% and if possible, eliminate consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.

The National Development Plan funds programmes which target 25 urban centres and 20 provincial towns with the greatest concentration of disadvantage for priority.

The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School (DEIS) is an action plan for educational inclusion, which supports schools in disadvantaged areas and their communities, to meet the educational needs of children and young people.

Early childhood development and care

- Part of DEIS will concentrate on early education for children who will subsequently attend urban primary schools serving the most disadvantaged communities.
- Early childhood development and care will be achieved through policy measures contained in the **National Childcare Strategy, 2006- 2010**.
- **The National Childcare Investment Programme 2006- 2010** will fund the provision of an additional 50,000 childcare places over that period.

Improving Health Outcomes for Children

Continued efforts will be made to improve the health outcomes for children over the ten- year social partnership timeframe. This will involve addressing a range of issues including, prevention, early intervention and treatment services within the health sector, food, the environment and lifestyle related risk factors.

Income Support

- **Child benefit** has been increased to €150 per month for each of the first two children to €185 per month for subsequent children.
- **Family Income Supplement** provides support for employees on low income families. Substantial increases in the income thresholds ranging from €19 to €282 were introduced in January 2006.
- **An Early Childcare Supplement** of €1000 per child per annum was introduced from September 2006. It is targeted to pre-school children up to 6 years and is specifically designed to assist with child care costs.

⁴⁷ **Consistent poverty** is defined as living in a household with an income below 60% of the national median income and experiencing enforced basic deprivation (measured basic life-style deprivation indicators).

⁴⁸ **At risk of poverty** is defined as living with an income below 60% of the national median income.

Children and their Families

A key priority is to strengthen the system of supports available to families with children through the following:

- The development and delivery of family support initiatives to strengthen child welfare and protection services
- strengthen services under the **Teen Parent Support Initiative**, which supports teen age parents during pregnancy until their child reaches two years of age
- Implementing the **Youth Homelessness Strategy** with the objective of reducing and, if possible, eliminating youth homelessness through preventative strategies
- Accelerating implementation of the **Child Act 2001**, which will strengthen the function of **High Support Unit**, **Special Residential Services** and the **Health Services Executive**.

Governance

Special arrangements are being put in place to respond to emerging needs with new, more integrated ways of designing and delivering services for children, as follows:

- Office for the Minister for Children
- Irish Youth Justice Service
- Integrated Services and Interventions for Children at Local Level

Gender Perspective and Wider Equal Opportunities

A much higher proportion of boys (14.9%) leave school earlier than girls (9.6%). This is reflected later in relation to low educational attainment, where the rates for males are higher across all age groups than for females.

The NAP report says "*This (gender difference) is fully taken into account in the policies for early childhood education*". However no concrete measure is demonstrated in its report, to show how this gender issue is being with in the policies.

Resources Allocation

€2.65 billion between 2006- 2010 for the National Childcare Strategy;

Approximately €2.75 billion in 2006 for total income support payable in respect of children; Further funding outline and programme will be decided later in 2006.

II. Access to quality work and learning opportunities

A recent government discussion paper, ***Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents***, proposes the implementation of an integrated programme to provide lone parents with more options to balance caring and working, including support to move into quality employment on a progressive basis.

This includes reforms to the income support system, access to other services, inclusion in the Employment Action Plan, and expansion of the range of education and training opportunities available to them.

III. Integration of immigrants

The main objective is to facilitate and promote the integration of immigrants.

A range of supports has been made available to schools, based upon the number of pupils from a non Irish background, including a total of more than 800 language support teachers in 2006, at primary and post-primary level.

IV. Access to quality services

Health and Care

Rates of premature mortality show that for all main causes of death, mortality rates in the lowest occupational class were between 100 and 200 % higher than the rates in the highest occupational class.

Reducing inequalities in health outcomes is therefore a major priority, the following measures were designed to achieve this goal:

- Improving the information and research base in respect of the health status and service access of the socially excluded
- Improving access to health and personal social services for those who are socially excluded, particularly through increasing thresholds for access to medical cards (passport to health services free of charge).

Housing

- **The Housing Policy Framework-Building Sustainable Community**, published in December 2005, outlines key priorities in providing high quality, integrated sustainable communities.
- Social housing options are to be expanded significantly. In the period of 2007- 2009, the needs of 60,000 households will be met through the various social and affordable housing schemes.
- Provision of short-term emergency accommodation for homeless families will be developed further, through implementation of recommendation of the **Homeless Strategies** and the **Government Strategy**.
- The second Traveller accommodation programme by local authorities covers the period 2005- 2008.

Transport

Since accessibility of transport for vulnerable groups is vital in terms of accessing health services, social networks and for remaining active, the **Rural Transport Initiative (RTI)**, in operation on a pilot basis since 2002, addresses the particular transport needs of rural areas.

Further improvement and development of RTI has been taken into consideration as a policy objective.

3/ Government critique

Participation

There is no evidence of children's participation in the preparation of the NAP

However, according to the report from the 2nd periodic report of Ireland to the UNCRC, there are several provisions, regulations, and programmes established to ensure children's views are heard in matters affecting them. For instance, Comhairle na nÓg (youth council) and Dáil na nÓg (youth parliament) have been established. These institutions are meant for giving children and young people a voice at local and national level, and an opportunity to influence public policy and planning.

Monitoring

Children up to age 15 are identified as a group in relation to the main poverty indicators and progress in reducing child poverty will be regularly monitored. Other indicators used will include those on early school leavers, literacy and educational attainment. Monitoring will be the responsibility of the Office of the Minister for Children, in liaison with the Office for Social Inclusion. However, there is no mention of monitoring and reporting process under UN CRC.

According to the report from Children's Rights Alliance:

- 100,000 children under 18 years were living in consistent poverty in 2004;
- 230,000 children were experiencing relative poverty;
- 1,405 children in families who were homeless in 2002;
- 170 children from 99 families were living in B&Bs in 2004.

Ireland has a two-tier health system based on ability to pay for both general and specialist services. Families on a low income who do not have a medical card (a means-tested entitlement which gives access free of charge to all medical services) may find themselves unable to afford basic medical or dental care.

As for the education system, despite the fact that there are no fees for public primary and second level schools, the cost of education to families is significant since families must pay for books, uniforms, school cost such as art materials, music classes etc. Many schools require parents to pay a 'voluntary contribution' to supplement the state funding provided.

4/ Key documents

- Second periodic reports of Ireland to the UNCRC (CRC/C/IRL/2), 2005
- Children's Rights Alliance, From Rhetoric to Rights, 2nd Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, March 2006

5/ Acknowledgements

Hiromi Amano, Eurochild Intern

1/ Situation analysis

According to a report from the ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics) published in October 2005, 13% of the population is living below the poverty threshold. The percentage of children at risk of poverty is among the highest in the European Union: 26% of the children between 0 and 15 years old is at risk of poverty, while the rate of children living in families where both parents are jobless is one of the lowest in the EU (5.6%). This indicates that, to avoid child poverty, both parents need to be employed, which is problematic in a country with an activity rate that is among the lowest in the EU.

There is a vast difference between the North and the South of the country: in the Southern regions, the poverty rate is five times higher than in the Northern regions. Moreover, 79% of the population living below the threshold of poverty is located in the South.

The report also states that only 20% of children pursue their studies after secondary school and that they perform below the European average according to the PISA test.⁴⁹ 25% of the students fail the elementary reading comprehension test, compared to a European average of 20%. The quality of instruction is particularly low in southern Italy.

2/ Policy responses

The eradication of poverty in families with children is among the priorities of the NAP. The strategy adopted includes a reform of the distribution system and the adoption of measures for income support (tax measures, monetary transfers, etc.).

Concerning governance, there is a commitment to better coordination between the central Government and the various regions, which is a basic element of the good functioning of welfare policies because, in fact, social services are Regions' function. In addition, at the end of May, Firenze hosted an important three-day National Conference on the Family organised by the Ministry of the Family.

Concerning the labour market, the government aims to increase employment among women and young adults by:

- Taking measures to make it easier for mothers to reconcile family and work (maternity leave...)
- Stimulating employment of women in southern Italy (reduction of labour costs)
- Introducing new flexible work possibilities (part-time jobs...)

Other measures to eradicate child poverty and social exclusion include:

- Promoting equal rights for children
- Promoting support actions for youth autonomy (children get a contribution on their day of birth but they are only allowed to access it when they turn 18)
- Preventing school absenteeism
- Preventing abuses of child labour and illegal child labour

The government has developed several measures aimed at integrating immigrants, minorities (the Roma) and in particular the children of immigrants. In 2005, immigrants made up about 5% of the Italian population, one child out of 10 having a foreign parent. The actions to reach this objective are:

- The creation of a fund to finance projects of schools situated in an "area at risk"(area with a high density of immigrants), to which €53,159,060 has already been allocated;
- Municipalities have to provide reception, health care and scholarships to unaccompanied children;
- The government will hold a forum with Roma associations to make up an action plan for the inclusion of Roma children.

The government wants to improve education by:

- Ensuring the training of teachers;
- Ensuring the training of adults;

⁴⁹ The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) test is an international study that measures the performances of 15-year-olds in comprehensive reading, mathematics and science, as well as a wider range of educational outcomes that include students' motivation to learn, their beliefs about themselves and their learning strategies.

- Changing the school system by creating an alternating school-work programme so that children will come into contact with the labour market at an early age;
- Allocating more scholarships.

With the help of the Department for Technological Innovation, the government started the @URORA project (*AU*silio per il *Recupero*, *l'Orientamento ed il Reinserimento degli Adolescenti del penale*, Aid for the Recovery, Orientation and Reinsertion of Adolescents judged by criminal law). This project helps children that come out of youth prisons by giving them a professional training in informatics, using the latest technologies.

3/ Government critique

The overarching centre-left approach brought in by the political change in the Government is very clear in the Report: it asserts a professed attention to social policy - together with economic reforms and economic development.

The eradication of child poverty is among the priorities of the NAP. However, the strategy taken is primarily based on increasing monetary benefits and so risks being insufficient. On the other hand, the NAP refers to children's rights as related to child poverty, and includes measures for equal rights for children, the strengthening of youth autonomy and the prevention of child labour and school absenteeism in its programme to reduce child poverty. However, only one reference was made to the UNCRC, namely to the principle of non-discrimination that lies at the basis of the Italian policy for the promotion of the rights of children from ethnic minorities.

An overarching principle of the Italian strategy is targeted intervention, immigrants being the most important target group. To combat the social exclusion of children and youth, the government policy focuses on improving education and increasing participation in employment.

The need for a policy for families has recently become a political priority, as illustrated by the recent three-day national conference on the family, organised by the Ministry of the Family at the end of May 2007. However, the issue has also raised many ideological questions and potential conflicts between the Government and the Catholic Church. For example, the Vatican showed fierce opposition to a new governmental proposal to extend family rights to co-habiting couples. As a result, the government has been under pressure to visibly demonstrate that it is doing something to support families that confirm to the traditional model. This issue must be addressed to ensure that all children and families in need are supported regardless of their marital status.

The NAP mentions the participation of social partners and civil society as an important element of governance. The involvement of the *Osservatorio nazionale per l'Infanzia ed Adolescenza* (National Observatory for Children and Adolescents) is given as an example of an important instrument for the representation of social partners. This body, presided by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, provides coordination between central administrations, regions, local entities, associations, professional organizations and nongovernmental organisations that work on child and youth issues. Its main function is to give direction to and promote policies that are related to children and adolescents.

The National Observatory is also responsible for drawing up the bi-annual National Plan of Action for Children, required under Law 451/97. The plan aims to set priorities and coordinate all actions regarding children. This proved to be a good tool during the government up to 2001, but under Berlusconi's administration, was neglected due to a lower interest in social policies. Currently there is an impasse, since the National Observatory on Children has not yet been nominated.

The National Observatory is also involved in the formulation of the reports submitted to the UN Committee on Children's Rights on the implementation of the UNCRC. Although this indicates a willingness of the government to involve non-governmental organisations, the UN Committee on Children's Rights notes in its Concluding Observations (2003) that there is still a lack of structured coordination with non-governmental organisations, especially on the local level. Moreover, it stresses that participation of children in the activities of the National Observatory should be encouraged.

Further, the Committee raises certain points of concern that are not addressed in the NAP:

- The lack of a central independent mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Convention, empowered to receive individual complaints of children;
- Data collection has been improved but is still obtained on the basis of a family-centred approach rather than an approach in which the child is considered as a human being;

- The high number of children who are placed in institutions for social protection purposes, as well as the long period of stay in institutions, the fact that contact with the family is not always guaranteed and that 19.5 per cent of these institutions do not have proper authorisations;
- Low use of health services among vulnerable groups;
- High prevalence of psychological disorders and high incidence of abortions among adolescents, notably of foreign origin;
- High drop-out rate in upper secondary education and lack of consideration of the views of children within education;
- Despite the commitments of the Italian government, special protection measures are still often insufficient, notably for unaccompanied minors and children belonging to minority groups.

Overall, we can detect a growing interest and willingness of Government to address issues of child and family poverty and exclusion. There are a set of programmes and measures to which the government is committed. These include for example: early years childcare services where they aim to extend coverage and reduce differences in provision between the Regions; fiscal measures to benefit families with children; efforts to prevent school drop outs (especially of foreign students); and efforts to fight against child work and child labour (especially among non-accompanied foreign children).

In Autumn 2008, the government plans to organise a "Conference for Children" under the direction of the Undersecretary Franca Donaggio.

4/ Key documents

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration on reports submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention, Concluding observations. CRC/C/15/Add. 199, 18 March 2003.

5/ Acknowledgements

Elodie Boddez, Karen Del Biondo & Meghaen Anderson - Eurochild interns
 Tony Compagno, Istituto degli Innocenti, www.istitutodegliinnocenti.it

1/ Situation analysis

According to official data for 2004, **21%** of families with children aged 0-15 and 16-24 are at risk of poverty. Single-parent families are particularly vulnerable. The disposable income of these families was by **30%** lower than the average in all households and compared to 2003, the risk of poverty for single-parent families has increased by 6%, reaching **41%**.

For large families the risk of poverty remains high - at **32%** in 2004. The risk of poverty has grown by 4% also for families with two children, reaching **17%** in 2004 (NAP p.15).

But there are important questions to be raised about the poverty thresholds used. According to the official self-assessment of material situation of households, **33.7%** of families in Latvia consider themselves poor or living on the threshold of poverty. If the adequate existence minimum of the "old" EU-15 is taken as the threshold – **85%** of all children up to eighteen years are living in poverty.

According to Latvian Save the Children (LSC) although reforms and EU integration have positively improved the development of the Latvian economy (with one of the highest growth rates of the EU), there are significant differences between regions and between urban and rural areas. In the capital the incomes are at least 2, 5 times higher than in rural areas. The average purchasing ability in accordance to GDP per capita was 47,1% lower than the EU average in 2005.

SCL also disputes the official poverty line, set at 105 Euro per capita in 2004. They (and the trade Unions and other NGOs) would rather set the real existence minimum at 170 Euro per capita per month after taxes. 170 Euro is necessary per capita to cover the costs of basic needs - rent, heating, electricity, food, clothing, etc. Using these criteria over **80%** of families with children are living below the subsistence minimum. SCL urges the government to recognise the real situation and define true and adequate standards of the real existence minimum.

The situation in Latvia is reflected in the following statistics:

- The mortality rate is increasing, reaching the highest level in 2005 -14, 2 promilas.
- Mortality from HIV/AIDS in 2005 increased by 100% compared to 2004;
- Incidence of TB is decreasing, but still is the highest in the EU (53, 8 cases per 100,000 inhabitants).
- The state allocated healthcare budget is the lowest in the EU – 3,43% from GDP in 2005.
- The unemployment rate in 2005 was 7,4% (decreasing by 1% since 2004).
- In 2005 26,2% of the active population were long-term unemployed, 14% of them were young people.
- Rates of unemployment still reflect huge gender inequalities: 63,5% of women are unemployed, compared to 38,7% of men.

A survey conducted by SCL of 1200 school children revealed that:

- 51% of children feel humiliated due to the social reasons;
- 52% of children are short of sufficient or quality nourishment;
- 44% of children either have no electricity or no heating at home, or lack the necessary domestic articles or there is no water at home at all;
- 39% of children have not sufficiently available medical aid;
- 52% of children are not able to obtain quality medication for treatment;
- 63% of children have no possibility to attend events they prefer;
- 55% of children have no possibility to go in for the groups of interests they would like to;
- 80% of adults often use alcohol.

This lack of basic everyday goods and services should to be recognised and addressed by government – such as through the provision of free school lunches or free school books.

Child protection system

A new Ministry for Children and Family Affairs was established in 2004 thanks in part to the work of Latvian Save the Children reporting to the UN Children Rights Committee what led to a UN recommendation that the Latvian government must strengthen its child rights protection system.

As result of these recommendations the ministry has increased social support for the handicapped, foster children, adopted children, newborns, and salaries for young mothers taking care of children, developed playgrounds in most rural areas, established emergency telephone line for children and many other good initiatives.

The Latvian National Human Rights Office (www.vcb.lv) has established Childs Rights Protection Division which is trying to play the role of ombudsman for children. There's still no real ombudsman and no "Law on Ombudsman".

2/ Policy responses

The Latvian National Action Plan for social inclusion 2006-2008 (NAP/Incl) sets 3 strategic objectives:

1. *To improve the access of children and youth, at risk of poverty and social exclusion, to education and employment services*
2. *To improve the accessibility of resources and services for families, especially large families and single-parent families.*
3. *To improve accessibility of resources and services for pensioners at the risk of poverty (in Latvia there are tens of thousands of pensioners who are bringing up their own or other children - foster families or guardianship).*

Targets mentioned in NAP/Incl.:

- To reduce taxes and to increase different benefits for families with children
- To increase accessibility of living space for families with children
- To improve alternative care possibilities
- To promote involvement into labour market of unemployed youth and unemployed handicapped from 15 to 18 years of age
- To promote employment of imprisoned and released from prisons youth
- To improve income of children and youth in case of death of parents
- To promote integration in society (drug and other addicts, victims of violence)
- To promote health condition (advertise a healthy way of life, inform the society about healthy food, and the negative impact of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, etc.)
- To improve access to housing for families with children

With respect to objective 1 - improving the accessibility of educational and employment services for children and youth at risk of poverty and social exclusion – the NAP/Incl highlights children with special needs, young convicts, Roma children, youth from different risk group as well as school children in general. It proposes:

- Introduction of correction and mediating programs for children with learning difficulties.
- Providing the schools with sufficient number of personal computers and knowledge of usage of informatics technologies.
- Provision of educational system for children with special needs integrated into comprehensive schools and adjustment of comprehensive schools for pupils with movement difficulties.
- Education of pedagogues enabling them to work with children at risk of social exclusion.
- Reinforcing capabilities for cultural education system to diminish social exclusion of children with vision problems.
- Elaboration of professional educational methodology for children with mental disorders, vision problems to enable their integration in labour market.
- Provision of access to comprehensive education for imprisoned youth including those with low level of knowledge and learning difficulties.
- Integration of Roma children into general system of comprehensive education. Creation of integrative preschool groups for Roma children and education of teachers for work within these groups.
- Supporting of risk and poor families covering expenses of living in student hostels.
- Increased scholarships for students of professional schools.
- Provision of working possibilities during summer holidays
- Consultations on professional orientation, establishment of the institution of carrier choice.

Some of the positive developments reported on in the NAP/Incl include:

- The steady increase in the birth benefit to its currently level of 421€. Also since January 2005 one parent of the newborn is entitled to receive state benefit reaching 70% of his/her medium wage over the course

of 12 months. This decision of government has resulted in a significant increase in the birth rate in Latvia, for the first time since regaining independence.

- Benefit for handicapped children has been increased for 40%.
- Benefit for foster families has also been increased and as a result the number of these families has increased too.
- Benefit for adopted children (paid once) was introduced.
- From January 2006 the government introduced a benefit for the care of disabled children (71€ per month) paid to non-working parents of very sick children. Carers of very disabled children are therefore entitled to two payments: state benefit for the disabled child and child care benefit. Together this amounts to 145€ per month.
- The mortality rates of mothers and infants have decreased - by 9 and 2 promilas respectively
- The number of TB incidence has decreased by 10% (2005 compared to 2003).
- State support for alternative care has resulted in a shift away from residential care towards adoption (from 29 adoption cases in 2003 to 71 in 2005) and foster homes (from 20 children taken to foster families in 2003 to 49 in 2005).
- The National Minorities School Reform in Latvia, which was undertaken in order to integrate mainly Russian speaking children into Latvian society, has lead to around 60% of subjects now being taught in Latvian – thereby increasing the chances of the national minorities into the labour market.
- Under strong pressure from NGOs, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has raised an issue of violence in schools and has undertaken important activities such as the establishment of a State Children Rights Inspection and state maintained emergency telephone line for children (in 2006).

There is no evidence in the NAP report of children's participation in the preparation of NAP/ Incl. However, there are good practice examples of how children and young people's participation is being facilitated:

- Children Forums have been organised several times by the state;
- Opinion of children and youth is represented to a great extent by several NGO's united in Latvian Youth Council;
- Through the Children's Rights Network (led by SCL) young people's views are heard in different working commissions of ministries and the parliament; These organisations were invited to give proposals for the National Action Plan "Latvia Fit for Children" as well as NAP/Incl.

Many of NGO proposals were more or less included in NAP (to increase benefits for vulnerable groups, to support purchase of living space for families with children, to cover school lunches from state budget, to increase number of day care centres etc.).

3/ Government critique

According to Latvian Save the Children the three main strategic objectives in NAP/Incl are appropriate, but the targets will not be met unless the State recognises the true and real situation concerning poverty and living standards.

It is particularly worrying that (in contrast to Estonia) child poverty, school drop out rates and the number of teenage pregnancies show no signs of decreasing.

It should also be noted that the budget for education is too low to cover ambitious plans of NAP/Incl.

- Teachers' salaries are still inadequate, there's a significant lack of staff in most of educational institutions.
- High level of education is provided mostly in central schools of the capital and only in part of rural areas in few really excellent schools.
- Scholarships for students of professional schools will be many times lower than is necessary to cover the existence minimum.
- Regular access to information and communication technologies is not available to most of the students in rural areas.
- 44% of school children questioned by LSC mentioned that they have experienced lack of following – either items for school or clothes or food or house hold items, or water, heating or electricity.

As more then two thirds of families with children are living under the real existence minimum, they need support from the state to purchase educational items. In NAP/Incl. the State plans to pay some benefit for this purpose (e.g. free lunch to children of primary school age). Unfortunately these plans are not adequately covered by the State budget.

Most of positive measures have been taken by NGOs. Insufficient attention is given by government on the education of the children with special need. There is still nothing done by state to improve access to education of hyperactive children (from 5 to 9 % of all children). In that respect there is no screening in preschool, no epidemiological research, no treatment, no programme for social inclusion.

The number of school drop-outs is not reflected accurately by official figures. The national indicator suggests 1000-2000 children are not attending school. NGOs estimate the figure to be more in the region of 15,000 to 17,000. This figure is easy to check by comparing the number of children registered in the official birth Register and those registered in educational institutions. There is no realistic plan in the NAP/Incl on how to deal with this problem.

Under strong pressure of NGO's Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has raised an issue of violence in schools and has undertaken such important activities as establishment of State Children Rights Inspection and state maintained emergency telephone line for children (in 2006). However the impact of these actions is not yet evident in the reduced bullying or improved race relations or better school attendance. No state financing has yet been confirmed for the emergency telephone line, run without state support from 1993 till 2004 by LSC.

Another worrying development is the rising number of crimes committed by under 18's, despite the fact that time the total number of children and youth sentenced by Latvian courts significantly decreased in 2005 compared to 2004.

According to the report from the 2nd periodic report of Latvia to the UNCRC, evictions from residence are a serious problem in Latvia. The Committee on the Right of Children also expresses concern that assistance to families is not sufficient to prevent the circumstances related to evictions of families with children from their homes by court order. However, this issue is not mentioned in NAP/ Incl.

4/ Key documents

The second periodic report of Latvia (CRC/C/83/ADD.16), 2005

The Concluding Observations by the Committee on the Rights of Children (CRC/C/LVA/CO/2) 2006

National Action Plan "Latvia Fit for Children till 2010"

The Alternative Report to UN Prepared by Latvian "Save the Children" & NGO Children Rights Network, 2006.

Latvian Children Report to UN, 2006.

5/ Acknowledgements

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⁵⁰ **Save the Children Latvia's** is based in Riga, its aim is to strengthen the NGO Network in Latvia and to expand awareness on the rights of children.

1/ Situation analysis

According to the Department of Statistics almost 37,000 children were raised in families within the social risk group – i.e. **4.4 %** of all children residing in Lithuania.

The percentage at-risk-poverty rate is the following:

- **16.4 %** among households with children under 18
- **34.4 %** in one parent families
- **21.2 %** in households with 3 or more children

The largest number of children in poverty are aged between 3-5 years as families with children aged 0 to 3 years are entitled to more state support. Families with children aged 3-6 are granted the universal lump sum benefit – 50 Litas/month (approx 14.5€/month).

Social benefit paid to families with many children accounts for 26% of their income.

Family benefits and child grants make up 16% of this income. The major reason for poverty in Lithuania is lack of income due to unemployment.

2/ Policy responses

Actions against child poverty and support to families have been identified as the **third priority** in the National Action Plan. Particular concerns are the decreasing birth rate and the increasing number of neglected children – this has increased by 24% in the last 5 years. Extreme poverty is seen as the main challenge to overcome and the government aims to significantly reduce relative poverty and social exclusion over the next decade. Inclusion of local authorities into this process and proper coordination of all activities are identified as particularly crucial factors of the policy.

A key priority of the plan is to strengthen the support systems available to families with children and to assist parents to return to work more easily. The following measures are foreseen:

- *Creating an effective system of social services covering children in need of care and other family services*
- *Stimulating quality and safe employment*
- *Improving the efficiency of providing legal services*
- *Implementing benefits to every child under 18 and longer if they study at full day time comprehensive school*

The provision of social services will be ensured by implementing the **2007-2009 Social Services Infrastructure Development Programme**.

Implementing the **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. Special attention is given to the establishment and development of such centres in rural areas.

Two initiatives identified within the NAP in order to provide high quality accommodation are the **Development of the Social Housing Fund** as well as revision of the **Law on State Support in the acquisition of accommodation**.

Further efforts will be made to develop the immunisation of children and to improve public health, especially among children and young people.

A key priority of the NAP is to ensure that the state benefits granted to support children are used properly. Municipal authorities will be empowered to decide the use 2% of the allocated budget for social assistance according to the specific needs of their inhabitants.

At policy making level mainstreaming of social exclusion and poverty is proposed through the assessment of all draft laws according to their potential impact on social exclusion and poverty.

The State Educational Strategy for the years 2003-2012 outlines key priorities in educational policy in Lithuania such as:

- Ensure the efficiency of further development of human resources
- Develop further pre-school and pre-primary education, giving special attention to children from families in social exclusion and social risk
- Ensure social assistance to the needy schoolchildren and students
- Form and educate civic society by training and involving participants into active actions in combating poverty and social exclusion
- Implementing the reform of scholarships and loans for studies
- Adapting the best EU practices with the programme **Education and Training 2010**
- Increasing funding for informal education and training to 10 million Litass (approximately 2.9M€)

3/ Government critique

The implementation of the Strategy should be questioned since expected results and indicators of measurement are not defined in the Strategy. The formulation of the measures sounds rather as objectives. The budget is not indicated as well.

Child rights based approach

Although in overall strategic approach there is a statement that social policy shall be revised in order to ensure unconditionally the essential rights of children and young persons for versatile life and quality of education (p.6) the rest of the document do not discuss children's issues against the Convention of the Rights of the Child. There is a risk that implementation of the Strategy will not observe the best interest of the child.

This disregard for the child's best interest is evident in the way boarding schools have been reorganized. No assessment of the individual child's needs has been done. As a result of reorganization, boarding schools have been re-labelled as hostels. Children without parental care live in a hostel during the week and travel to a child care institution at the weekend. This is explained by the fact that the hostels do not provide care, despite the fact that they provide child-only accommodation.

Children in poverty

The official statistics show only the number of households in poverty, and as such do not represent the actual number of children in poverty or the number of children with unemployed or single parents.

The EU relative poverty line presented in the Strategy does not present a real situation. This indicator is more relevant to countries with lower income differentiation. In case of Lithuania absolute poverty demonstrates higher numbers (see the strategy of Estonia).

The strategy does not discuss financial support, which discriminate children from poor and single parent families. Existing legislation should be reviewed from the perspective of children's rights. The law of Child Allowances introduced allowances for every child below 18. However, children from poor and single mother families are discriminated against by this law. The money of the child is included into the family budget when parents apply for social benefits. In this way a child is not entitled to his /her money and is punished for the difficult economic situation of his/her parents. A single mother who wishes to apply for social benefits must identify the biological father of the child. Not all women are able to do that. Furthermore, the right of the child to grow up in his/her family is violated as well. According to statistical data the number of children taken into state care from single mother/father families in 2003 was around 60%, in 2000 this number was 46%.

Children in institutions

Lithuania has the highest rate of children in institutional care among the 27 post-communist countries. In 2004, the rate of children was 1,376.8 per 100,000 population aged 0-17. The higher rate was only in Russia 1408.6 in comparison Bulgaria 795.9 and Romania 740.3. (TransMONEE 2006 Database, UNICEF IRC, Florence).

The previous Action Plan stated an aim to reduce number of children in institutions by 20%. However no steps have been taken to reorganize system of child care.

Early Childhood Education

There are two concepts: pre-school and pre-primary education. Pre-school education concerns children 1-5 and pre-primary education 6 year of age. The statistics of pre-school education are not presented in the Strategy.

After the fall of the Communist regime Lithuania as well as other Central and Eastern European countries switched to a policy, which supported mother's stay-at-home parenting. Priority was given for bringing up children at home in the family environment. Kindergartens and crèches were closed down. Consequently Lithuania is among the countries with low enrolment of children in public day care.

The shift from the state responsibility for day care to the family and reliance on the market supply for day care services have resulted in deprivation of children of working parents to their right to childcare. Moreover, the emphasis on education has oriented the day care policy towards child preparation for school rather than the child's need for day care as a result of working parents.

To fill the demand for childcare, market supply was introduced as an alternative. Licenses for the non-state child day care were issued in 1993. However, the services of private day care institutions are too expensive for most parents, if the price of their services is not subsidized by the state. Consequently the expectations from market supply stated in the strategy should be questioned (p.25).

4/ Key documents

Social exclusion and poverty

- **The Action Plan for 2005-2012 on Child Welfare** aims to contribute to the protection of infants
- **National Reform Programme** encourages investments in human sector
- **The National Programme on Support to Orphaned and Abandoned Children and Their Integration into the Society 2005-2008**
- **Strategy for Restructurisation of Institutional Child Care** aiming at decentralization of services for children is now under way
- **Aliens and Citizens of Lithuania**
- **Support for the Effective and Coordinated Promotion of Young People's Health and Development in Lithuania**
- **Law on Financial Social Support to Low-income** was introduced in order to increase subsidies for single mothers

Access to education

- **The Programme on socialisation of children and young persons** is a complex of measures aimed to prevent children from early school-leaving
- **Strategy of Public Education 2003-2012** defines main steps in implementing preventive measures against non-attendance of school
- **World Bank Programme on the Improvement of Schools** will fund the renovation and school supply with teaching aids
- The **Programme on the Renovation of student's hostels at High Educational Establishments** will directly address the needs of students
- **The 2006-2008 Investment Programme** on the provision of yellow school buses
- **The 2005-2008 Programme "The Yellow Bus"** on transportation of school children with special needs

5/ Acknowledgements

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Luxembourg

1/ Situation analysis

Luxembourg compares well to the EU average. In a context in which the at-risk-of poverty threshold is the highest in the EU, the relative poverty risk is **11%** compared to the EU average of **16%**, and relative median gap (reflecting the intensity of poverty) is **17%** compared to an EU average of **23%**.

However, the risk of exposure to poverty is particularly high for lone-parent families (21%), large families (18%), households of working age with few occupational income providers (28%), jobseekers (46%), tenants (23%) and children aged 0 to 15 (18%).

In 2005, the average rate of early school leavers was **13.3%** (men: 17% women 9.6%). Youth unemployment rate was 6.9% in 1998 and **13.8%** in 2005. Infant mortality was 5.6% in 1995 and **3.9%** in 2003. In 2005, there were 87 “*Maisons Relais pour enfants*” (Childcare Centres) with 178 local or district branches and 8,000 places.

2/ Policy responses

The Luxembourg **National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2006-2008 (NAP)** has set 4 policy objectives:

1. *Returning to full employment,*
2. *Preventing failure at school and increasing skill levels,*
3. *Reconciling family and working life,*
4. *Access to housing.*

1. Returning to full employment

Employment policy aims to activate jobseekers as early as possible and to prevent unemployment.

Better activation of young people

- The **Administration de L'Emploi** will be under a statutory obligation to offer an active employment measures to all young people, in keeping with their education and skills, by at least the end of their sixth month of registration and preferably by the end of their third month of registration.
- The spirit of enterprise will be encouraged and developed among young people.
- Young people's integration into the labour market will be supported by the measures discussed under policy objective 2 (Preventing failure at school and increasing skill levels).

2. Preventing failure at school and increasing skill levels

A preventive approach

- The paradigm in Luxembourg is changing from an education based on the reproduction of rote knowledge to an education based on the acquisition of skills.
- In the system preparing for technical secondary education, French, German and mathematics learning modules are being reformed.
- More detailed advancement criteria, follow-up and guidance measures and remedial measures for students who repeat years have been introduced.
- The “Cycle Inférieur” (Lower Cycle) pilot project is intended to reform curricula, improve student monitoring, and to provide more detailed evaluation and more effective guidance in year 9.
- The “Neie Lycée” (New Lycée) pilot project, students from all streams of post-primary education will be able attend classes for eight hours a day, and the focus will be on interdisciplinary learning and assessment of education.
- Core competences will be decided for various levels of primary and secondary education. In primary education, the notion of competences will be implemented at the same time as schools are organised by learning cycles as provided for by the reform of the schools law.
- A new “Profile for Luxembourg's language policy in education” is being prepared. Its differentiated approach will make it possible to target the highest level of language competence for each student, although students not reaching this level will still be able to enter vocational training.

Early screening and help for students at risk

The following measures are intended to help young people to return to education and training:

- relay classes making it possible to keep students with behavioural problems in a school environment and prepare them to return to normal classes,

- more extensive supervision, more appropriate curricula and broader training prospects are to be introduced into the preparatory scheme,
- teaching models aiming to develop bridging classes paving the way for qualifying training will be enhanced,
- schools will inform the *Action Locale pour Jeunes* (ALJ – Local Action for Young People) of students who leave school during the academic year.

Helping young people at risk by implementing the voluntary guidance services project

The aim of this project is to provide young people with stability, to give them back confidence and to help them to make the most of an experience which encourages them to return to education and training or to find a job.

Re-integration and remedial measures

The supply of qualifying and vocational integration training schemes will be increased:

- vocational re-integration classes will be offered by several technical lycées and the national continuing vocational training centre,
- vocational induction training, in the form of an apprenticeship contract leading to a recognised certificate, will be revised to cover more trades/families of trades.

A draft law tabled in the Chamber of Deputies on 29 June 2006:

- redefines the objectives and organisation of vocational guidance and induction (COIP) courses for unemployed young people aged 15-18 who have no learning opportunities,
- introduces training aid for minors and a training allowance for adults aged under 25,
- introduces a training bonus system rewarding young people who have successfully met the objectives set for COIP courses and who have been under apprenticeship/employment contracts for at least six months after the conclusion of the apprenticeship/employment contract.

Gender mainstreaming

In the Luxembourg education and training system, students' gender is a factor generating disparities and that early school leavers are predominantly male

3. Reconciling family and working life

It is aimed to develop a family policy geared towards supporting families and an ongoing extension of the supply of child-minding facilities.

Childcare

The key measure here is the new concept of care for schoolchildren outside school hours in facilities known as "Maisons Relais pour enfants" (MR-Childcare Centres). Efforts to improve the supply of MR facilities will be pursued and intensified.

The main distinctive features of the MR concept are as follows:

- a) extended and flexible opening times (between 06:00 and 20:00 from Monday to Saturday) to take account of the various problems faced by parents,
- b) participation in the life of the local communities hosting the MR, promoting the social, linguistic and cultural integration of children and families,
- c) close cooperation between families and schools paving the way for synergies,
- d) integration into a single facility of various mandatory and ancillary services such as:
 - catering at midday and refreshments at other times
 - supervision of recreational services and other socio-educational activities
 - supervision of school homework
 - socio-educational support
 - minding of children who are sick either in the MR facility or at home
 - social-educational, instructive or cultural activities for children and families
 - parental training sessions,
- e) slimmed-down administrative procedures for approval and the possibility of outsourcing some services to external providers,
- f) a twofold aim of help for families and support for employment.

The "child care in people's homes" measure, with its two strands, will also help to achieve this priority:

- "*Daageselteren*" (*Parental assistants*): accommodate from four to seven children during the day and/or night and relations between the state and bodies working in the social, family and therapeutic fields, are subject to approval by the Ministry of the Family and Integration;

- *Care in cooperation with a “Service de placement familial” (SFP – Family Placement Service):* in 2005, 588 children were receiving care in people’s homes. 84% of approved parental assistants work with a family placement service. In order to create a genuine network and further improve the quality of this care, the Ministry of the Family and Integration tabled a draft law in the Chamber of Deputies on 17 November 2005 regulating parental assistance work.

Gender mainstreaming

Family burdens, in particular child minding, continue to be shouldered largely by women. With a view to equal opportunities, measures to promote reconciliation should therefore allow mothers in particular to make the most of their employment potential.

4. Access to housing

The aim of the “housing” plan of October 2005 is to reverse adverse trends in the housing market and to combat the housing-related exclusion of people on low incomes and/or socially disadvantaged people.

3/ Government critique

In the NAP, children and young people in poverty are acknowledged but not as a key priority. There is no evidence of a child–rights approach.

All the players, the ministries concerned, the social partners and non-governmental organisations, took part in the process to draw up the NAP. The views of people living in poverty were brought to the attention of the “NAP-Inclusion Group” following a round table organised on 23 March 2006 by EAPN-Lëtzebuerg, with the support of the Ministry of the Family and Integration. It is not clear that there was children’s participation.

There is no mention of a link with the monitoring and reporting process under UNCRC.

The report of UNCRC committee in 2005 identified a number of key issues that are not sufficiently addressed in the NAP, including:

- Further effort to generate recognition of the UNCRC;
- Lack of a general national plan of action for children and/or a comprehensive policy on children;
- Lack of sufficient resources for Luxembourg Committee on the rights of the child called “Ombuds-Comité” as an independent monitoring system;
- Insufficient statistical data are available on the situation of children, especially those belonging to the most vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied and separated refugee and asylum-seeking children;
- Discriminatory attitudes and the emergence of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance towards the Muslim community and other minorities and at their impact on children belonging to these groups;
- No legislation explicitly prohibiting corporal punishment within the family and that this practice seems to be largely accepted in the society;
- Insufficient quality and capacity of child and juvenile psychiatry in the country, paying special attention to mental health provisions, both preventive and interventional;
- The fact that many children attend schools in neighbouring countries, apparently due to shortcomings in the school system in Luxembourg;
- Information that educational facilities for children with behavioural problems and/or learning disabilities are limited in Luxembourg and that, in some cases, these children have been excluded from regular schools and located in facilities for mentally and physically disabled children;
- A large number of foreign children (more than 40 per cent of the school population) who are often disadvantaged by the educational programme and teaching methods in Luxembourg, including language problems;
- lack of foster care, specialised reception centres and qualified personnel working for asylum-seeking children.

4/ Key documents

The Concluding Observations by the Committee on the Rights of Children (CRC/C/15/Add.250), 2005

5/ Acknowledgements

Hiroimi Amano, Eurochild Intern

1/ Situation analysis

- The share of children (0-17 years of age) living in jobless households was at 8.9% in 2005.
- The unemployment rate of young people has been recorded in 2005 (a decline of 2.2% from 19.0% in 2004).
- Early school leaving has decreased from 54.2% in 2000 to 41.2% in 2005.
- Infant mortality rate is 5.9% in 2004 (EU25: 4.5% in 2004)

2/ Policy responses

The key groups considered to be at greatest risk of poverty and social exclusion are: children in single parent families, children residing in residential care/leaving care, child suffering abuse and child whose parents are residing in institutional care.

The strategies identified in the Malta report address their overall development namely: psychosocial, educational and health. The strategy is intended to put these children on a par with other children who are exposed to a stimulating environment. Furthermore, there are other strategies that focus on the enhancement and consolidation of other existing services namely: Child Protection Services, Looked After Children Services (Children in Care), Fostering Services, Supervised Access Visits, Supportline 179, the Adolescent Outreach Programme and Homestart.

The Maltese **National Action Plan on social inclusion (NAP)** identifies four major and over-arching policy priorities:

1. *Empowering social cohesion*
2. *Building stronger communities*
3. *Strengthening the voluntary sector*
4. *Networking the social welfare sector*

The issues of child poverty and social inclusion are acknowledged in the NAP, particularly in the policy objective *Empowering social cohesion*.

Schooling

Education has been identified as an important factor within the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The main strategy targeting child poverty and social exclusion focuses on the decrease in school absenteeism by 25%.

Although Malta already provides universal free and compulsory schooling, this is not enough to effectively cater for emerging realities. A reform in education has therefore been undertaken with a view to: (a) effectively address early school leaving; (b) reduce illiteracy rates; and (c) enhance inclusive and quality education for all.

During 2006-2008 Malta shall seek to:

- further reduce early school leaving and illiteracy rates
- enhance the link between academic education/lifelong learning and employability

Other initiatives include:

- Projects to help women gain the necessary skills to support their children's learning and training tailored to the specific individual needs of lone parents
- A programme "**Ghozza**" which aims to contribute to the prevention of schools drop out by addressing young mothers who are still at school. Support to single parents and pregnant young mothers has been considered as important contribution for these children to attain formal learning and qualifications. However, this programme also addresses their other needs through non-formal learning so as to ensure that they attain skills, which they will need in view of child rearing.
- Programme **Hilti** and **NWAR** have been developed with the aim of enhancing literacy skills especially amongst children and youths at risk of social exclusion. The programme is a community-based initiative involving teachers, students and parents who collaborate to address the difficulties that the

children may be facing and ensuring that children acquire adequate literacy skills that are necessary for their future particularly for their prospects in the labour market.

Non-formal learning

Effective education requires both formal and informal/non-formal learning. **Malta's National Youth Policy** (2003) includes the following initiatives:

- **Youth empowerment centres** have set up by various local authorities in collaboration with government in different localities. Professionals trained in youth work run these services, which aim is to provide an ambience that helps develop their potential and caters for their needs and tastes.
- **The Youth Support Programme** has been introduced. Youth organisations are awarded grants providing youth organisations opportunities whereby their members can participate in performing and visual arts.
- Facilitate the use of **culture as an agent for social transformation** by strengthening the relevant structures and creating space for plurality of expression and tolerance of cultural diversity;
- **Minimise the exploitation** (financial or otherwise) of young people through profit-making youth-oriented leisure services aimed principally at promoting consumption.

Access to labour market

Various programmes are designed specifically for young people to enhance the employability prospects:

- **Job Club** designed for young persons who leave formal education with low basic skills or no skills at all; and
- **Supported Employment Schemes** which are specifically designed for young people with special needs with a view to enhance their capabilities to integrate in the labour market.

In addition to this:

- The Housing Authority and the Employment and Training Corporation launched **Head Start**. The aim of the project is to support young people leaving care. The support is twofold: training on the job and subsidised accommodation.
- The **Youth @ Risk Project** is targeting young persons in disadvantage areas to secure employment and access to social services.

Well-being

- Malta provides a comprehensive and free health service for residents of all ages. Existing health services will be consolidated with particular focus on those services that cater for children and young people with mental health difficulties.
- There are a number of strategies in place to promote adequate and affordable housing with particular reference to households with children. The government will seek to increasingly provide affordable and quality housing in order to enhance the well-being of vulnerable children and young people.
- Existing social welfare services that focus on children and young people are being reviewed and restructured to effectively addressing emerging needs.

Safeguarding the rights of children and young persons

During 2006-2008, to enhance the effectiveness of its juvenile justice system, Malta shall actively consider the:

- development of primary prevention programmes targeting homophobia and promoting social diversity;
- the institution of secondary prevention and "diversionary" services;
- strengthening of the Probation Service Unit and other services ancillary to the juvenile justice system;
- introduction of victim-offender reconciliation, parole and prison aftercare systems particularly in relation to youth offenders.

3/ Government critique

In the NAP, child poverty is acknowledged, but not as a key priority.

Strategies and initiatives for children and young people in the NAP are valuable components in the fight against poverty and social exclusion but these must also target other vulnerable groups namely: disabled children and unaccompanied minor irregular immigrants. It has been rather difficult to identify the short, medium and long-term targets. No time frames have been stipulated within these documents.

Participation

Within the NAP, the children and young persons have been identified as relevant actors in the sense that their issues have been considered. On the other hand, their voices in the development of the National Action Plan were not heard due to organisational and time constraints. The Action Plan was developed in consultation with various professionals working directly with children but children's participation was not facilitated. The involvement of children in policy development and services is in its infancy. In fact, this has been highly advocated by the Children's Commissioner who took office at the end of 2003.

Indicators and monitoring

There are no national indicators specific to children and young people. Nonetheless, it is worth stressing that the National Statistics Office has been collaborating with Eurostat to develop national indicators including indicators on child poverty and social exclusion.

EU Dimension

Definitely the dimension of the EU is a bonus to the initiatives that aim to address the fight against poverty and social exclusion. However, locally, the NAP has not contributed to a higher profile for child poverty, in setting minimum standards and the experience in mutual learning. On the other hand, the development of some projects addressing children at risk has occurred as a direct result of EU funding. An example is the National Hotline on Child Pornography over the Internet. Moreover, the EU has also contributed through the European Social Fund in supporting the development of childcare services.

Policies

The policy measures identified focus on the following:

- The provision of vocational education, training and lifelong learning and to increase the number of the respective students in order to promote employability and favour better jobs.
- To reinforce the welfare of disabled person in their access to education and training.

Both are policies measure, which do not directly address the needs of children and there is no specific mention to child poverty and social exclusion.

Resource allocation

The increase of resources both financial and human resource have contributed to addressing the needs that exist by ensuring service delivery. However, the demand is higher than the supply and thus the resources are not adequate in the current situation.

What is definitely clear is that all measures are being undertaken and the current resources are adequately positioned to address early school leaving and life long learning. Moreover, an increase in the coordination between the education and economic sector will impact and ensure that demands are met and an improvement in the adaptability and employability of workers results.

Measures

Throughout the past two years the strategic measures, which have implemented are:

- The Initial Response service has been set up and is tackling child neglect cases whilst the child protection services have specialised on severe cases whereby children are most likely to be at higher risks.

- The Children and Young Persons Care Order's Act has been amended to reflect the emerging needs in view of child protection cases.
- In addition, the children who are in care are monitored by the looked after services.
- A weekend monitoring service has been set up during 2004 to follow up children who visit their family of origin during the weekend and need monitoring to ensure their safety.
- In addition, High Support Service, a service-addressing children in care who present challenging behaviours has been consolidated with further recruitment of staff and training to child carers.
- An agreement was also signed between the APPOGG (government funded social welfare agency) and the Residential Homes (Ufficju Ejjew Ghandi) regarding the admission procedure and streamlining of assessments of children admitted to residential care.
- Employees working in both the Child Protection Services and the Looked After services have received intensive training to ensure enhancement of social work skills. Thus the consolidation of such services has occurred by means of skills enhancement.
- Additional staff has been recruited within the fostering services and lately a working group has been set up to work on the fostering legislation,
- Moreover another working group has been set up to analyse the quality of services delivered to children residing in residential and foster care.
- The National Hotline on Child Pornography over the Internet has been launched. This project, which is partly funded by the EU, is an important milestone in the protection of children at risk.
- The Supervised Access Visits have undergone an increase in budget to ensure that other children having contact with their family of origin are supervised.
- The consolidation of the Adolescent Outreach programme has occurred and will continue to occur with the increase of new staff. This service aims to address the needs of youths who are also at risk of delinquent behaviour amongst others and it aims to provide an alternative socialisation sources to these youths.
- At the latter part of 2005, the Homestart project was launched. This project aims to support women at risk of poverty and social exclusion with children under 5's to acquire skills in supporting the development of their children.

Apart from development and consolidation of services, the Children's Commissioner has been actively involved together with the other stakeholders in the launch of the **Children's Rights Campaign**, which stresses the needs of children and their rights to education amongst others.

4/ Acknowledgements

Olivia Galea Seychell, Charmaine Sant, and Joe Gerada, Foundation for Social Welfare Services⁵¹, www.appogg.gov.mt

⁵¹ The Foundation for Social Welfare Services is a government funded agency. Appogg (a part of the Foundation) provides over 25 specialised and generic social welfare services, and is known as the central national agency for children and families in need.

The Netherlands

1/ Situation analysis

According to the EU indicators of risks of poverty and social exclusion,

- the percentage of children at the risk of poverty and social exclusion (aged 0-17) was 8.0% in 2000 and **6.9%** in 2005;
- early school-leavers was 15.5% in 2000, **13.6%** in 2005.

According to a UNICEF report on child poverty in rich countries, the child poverty rate in the Netherlands is **9.8%**, higher than the overall EU average.

Of all households with a minimum income in 2004, **19%** were single-parent families. The majority of lone parents are women.

The percentage of unemployed working population is:

- Native Dutch: 2.9% in 2001, 5.2% in 2005;
- Non-Western immigrants: 8.9% in 2001, 16.1% in 2005.

2/ Policy responses

Tackling poverty and promoting participation among children and young people is one of Policy Objectives in the Dutch **National Action Plan to combat poverty and promote participation 2006-2008 (NAP)**

In order to prevent poverty being passed on to future generations, **early policy interventions** in the life cycle is vital. The **income position of families with children** is another important factor.

Intervention in problematic families	
<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
improving the cooperation among involved care agencies	reach of families at risk

Participation of children and young people	
<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
create possibilities for children & young people of disadvantaged families to be involved in free time activities that contribute to their personal development	in 2010 the disadvantage in sport participation by migrant young people has disappeared

Tackling educational disadvantage and early school leaving	
<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
To lower the language deficit of 'weighted' children by 5% in 2008 compared to 'non-weighted' children ⁵²	Reference are the scores on language exams (PRIMA cohort research 2006), Bringing down the number of secondary pupils performing below the OECD PISA reading scale 1 from 11 to 10%
Reducing the number of early school leavers with 50% between 2000 and 2010	Percentage 18 -24 that is not in school and has not a higher secondary school diploma (EU definition)

Combat youth unemployment	
<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Reduce youth unemployment	Percentage unemployed youth (15 – 22)
In 2007 40.000 extra jobs fit for young people have been created	number of 'youth' jobs

Income support for low income families with children	
<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Equal income development with specific attention for low income families with children	Purchasing power of low income families compared to other groups

⁵² Educational policy in the Netherlands is based on the so-called 'pupil weighting system'. Each pupil is assigned a 'weighting', dependent on the education level of the parents. In the past, the ethnic background of the parent(s) was taken into consideration, but in the present system only the education level of both parents.

3/ Government critique

There is a specific priority combating the poverty of children and young people. However, what is mentioned under this priority is still describing already existing policies and measures.

One of the problems is that there will be national elections in November 2006 and the follow-up of finishing measures, such as Operation **Young and the Task Force Youth Unemployment** are uncertain.

The NAP argues that this objective adds to the Dutch implementation of the **European Youth Pact**. This seems to be a very weak reference and there seems to be very little contact between the different ministries involved in the youth agenda on these particular subjects.

The government's definition of educational disadvantage seems to be '*know enough of the Dutch language*'. However, the situation of child poverty is much more complex than just knowing the language.

It needs, first and foremost, to acknowledge that poverty of children and young people is also a serious social problem in the Netherlands and to address improving the situation of children right here at this moment and not just for their future development.

In the preparation phase of the NAP, consultation meetings have been organised, where relevant organisations could make suggestions for issues and specific target groups to be taken up in the national action plans. However, children have not been part of the consultation process of this national action plan. The Dutch Youth Council was invited, but it is not clear if they have participated.

It is to be welcomed that participation is mentioned as a specific priority but the outcome and indicator that have been defined are very disappointing. It only mentions programmes for migrant young people (mentioned as an indicator) and the community – sports programme that is a temporary incentive programme only implemented in a very limited number of municipalities.

A present law change, replacing the Welfare Act by the Social Support Act, will have a very serious implication on the legal base for general youth work at the local level. It will be up to the municipal governments to decide if, what and how there will be budget available for these services. This devolution of powers may widen differences of access and quality between municipalities.

There is no mention of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and children's rights to participate anywhere in the NAP.

4/ Acknowledgements

Caroline Vink, National Institute for Care and Welfare (NIZW)⁵³, www.nizw.nl

⁵³ The **Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare** (NIZW) is an independent organisation dedicated to quality and innovation in the care and welfare sector. NIZW combines research & development with the project implementation. They offer advice, support for change processes, training courses, conferences, publications, websites, videos and an information help line. In 2007 the NIZW will be split into three new organisations. The activities in the field of youth will be continued in the Netherlands Youth Institute, including the international tasks.

1/ Situation analysis

The threat of poverty was the highest in case of children and youth aged 0-15 in 2003, **20%** of this group were below 60% of the equivalent income median.

Children, mainly from large families and living in rural areas, are in the most difficult situation. While the overall education level of young Poles is improving, the difference in access to quality education is a key determinant of a child's future change. Family and children receive **4.7%** of social protection benefit of total benefits, while the average of EU25 countries is 8.0%.

In 2004, the extent of poverty among families in the case of a married couple with 3 children was equalled **21.4%** based on the minimum subsistence level⁵⁴ and **35.6%** for the relative poverty threshold. The situation of single parents is also more difficult than average (15.2% of people living below the minimum subsistence level and 23.8% - below the relative poverty threshold).

Schooling

The rates of early school-leavers from upper secondary education (% of the total population aged 18-24) are 5.7% in 2004 and 5.5% in 2005. In 2002, almost 70% of people living in rural areas aged 13 and over had only primary or basic vocational education.

Day-care facilities

The network of crèches and kindergartens is far from meeting actual demand. Non-public forms of care for children of different ages are appearing, but they are not available to many families due to geographical or financial limitations.

Children in alternative care

In 2005, almost 51,000 children were living in care institutions. Compared to 2004, the total number of daily care centres decreased, while the number of charges increased. In 2005, almost 60,000 children were staying at 42,000 foster families.

Health care

In general, the health status of the Polish population is improving, although it still remains worse than in other countries of the European Union. The reasons for this situation include, insufficient level of awareness and knowledge of a healthy lifestyle. The examples show a low interest among youth in sports (except for physical education at school, only 1/3 of the population aged 10-14 goes in for sports) and high consumption of tobacco and alcohol.

When disability referred to at least one child with legally confirmed disability, risk of poverty increased (and equalled 19% and 31.7% respectively).

2/ Policy responses

The Polish **National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAP)** has set three policy objectives:

- I. **Support for families with children,**
- II. *Inclusion by activation,*
- III. *Mobilisation and partnership.*

I. Support for families with children

Action 1: Development of the integrated family support system

(1) Family support programme before and after childbirth

- **The national programme supporting parents before and after childbirth** is aimed at integrating social services provided by central and local government units.

⁵⁴ Minimum subsistence level – estimated on the basis of a basket of goods and services which ensures meeting of only the most basic needs: modest food, housing expenses for a very small flat, replacement of the most basic household items and underwear, medical drugs and items required for obligatory school attendance. Because the minimum subsistence level, defined in this way, covers only the needs which must be met immediately and cannot be deferred, and for which consumption below the specified level leads to biological deterioration, the minimum subsistence level has been accepted as the line of extreme poverty. (NAP p. 74)

- **The National Disabled Children Support Programme** is a continuation of the governmental programme – Pilot 2005-2007 “*Early, multi-specialised, complex, co-ordinated, and permanent aid to children threatened with disability, or disabled children, and their families*”.

(2) *Development of action supporting families in care and education issues*

- organising daily support care and education centres, e.g. local youth clubs, socio-therapeutic centres, care centres offering professional psychological and pedagogical support of children & their families;
- carrying out family therapy understood as psychological, pedagogical and sociological activities aimed at restoring the family’s ability to perform its tasks;
- development of different forms of foster family care.

These actions will be supported by the following Governmental programmes:

- **Recreation room – internship – socio-therapy in the rural environment;**
- **Programme for preventing social mal-adaptation and crime among the children and young people programme**, coordinated by the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration.

(3) *Development of social housing*

- Work on draft legal solutions aimed at developing social housing, night shelters and homeless shelters is currently in progress.
- Under the **Act on financial support of housing for the poorest**; the government supported municipal governments in building about 5 thousand of flats and about 500 places at night shelters and homeless shelters
- System solutions will come into force at the beginning of 2007, supported by the departmental **Protection Programme for counteracting social exclusion of the homeless and people at risk of homelessness**, coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and implemented by NGOs and local government units.

(4) *Development of civic and family counselling*

- From 2006 to 2009, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy will support the development of services related to civic counselling in order to ensure information points for citizens in all municipalities in Poland, in accordance with provisions of the National Strategy on Social Inclusion.
- Providing support of the development of psycho-social, family and psychological counselling helping to solve problems arising at different stage of the family life.

Action 2: Development of the income support system

(1) *System of family benefit*

From September 2006, the level of family benefits will change with a preferential increase in benefits for families with many children and a change in family benefit depending on the age of the child.

(2) *Scholarship system*

- The governmental programme **Activation and support for local government units and non-governmental organisations in respect to providing financial educational support of pupils** helps local projects involving the development of extramural courses, such as for developing interests, talents, psychological and pedagogical activities and shaping entrepreneurship etc.
- The governmental programme **Equalising educational opportunities of pupils from families of former employees of national farms** supporting youth from rural areas.

The governmental programme **School Layette** will also be continued, which includes a free- textbooks from primary school upwards.

(3) *System of housing benefits*

An analysis of the housing benefit system will be carried out in 2007.

(4) *Food support*

A long-term programme **State food support** will be implemented 2006-2009. It includes providing extra meals for children and ensuring meals for people in need, especially for people from areas.

(5) *Changes in tax system*

The Minister of Finance in consultation with the Minister of Labour and Social Policy will analyse the tax system in view of potential support for families with children.

Action 3: Supporting reconciling work and family life

(1) Improvement of the social security of employees after childbirth

Gradual extension of the childbirth leave as a part of amendments to the **Act – Labour Code** will be analysed. In 2007, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy will discuss possible amendments:

- option to flexibly use the period of childbirth and childcare leave;
- gradual increase in the income criterion to allow additional benefit during the childcare leave;
- the possibility of alternative financing of childbirth benefits or family costs of childcare.

(2) Development of care services

- A programme **Support of local government units in the development of the local system for care of child and family**: This programme will extend the range of services for families experiencing problems in performing their care and education duties and the children from these families.
- **The Human Capital Operational Programme** aims to develop pre-school centres, including alternative forms of pre-school education.
- A programme **Social support for people with mental disorders**: includes projects related to organisation and functioning of the social support network for people with mental disorders.
- For the development of a care system for older, sick and disabled family members, by 2007, the Ministry of Health will prepare a bill on nursing care insurance, integrating activities of the social welfare and healthcare systems.

(3) Promotion of flexible forms of employment for parents and guardians

Promotional campaigns addressed to employers and employees aims at promoting available forms of flexible employment, allowing the combination of professional and family life.

II. Inclusion by activation

Although children in poverty and social exclusion are not a main priority in the policy objective of **Inclusion by activation**, some initiatives are targeted at children and young people.

Instruments for active inclusion

The range of active inclusion instruments will be defined. These instruments are going to include the following areas:

- *educational activation* – understood as educational courses related to supplementing general education on the primary & secondary level; organising & supporting activities for children education;
- *social activation* – participation in daily support centres, youth centres and clubs; participation in cultural, sport or tourist events arranged as a part of local activation programmes.

3/ Government critique

Children are one of the priorities defined in the Polish NAP, however their needs are solely defined within the family context. Other vulnerable groups are not highlighted, such as children in alternative care, children from minority groups, unaccompanied minor irregular immigrants, street children etc. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has developed appropriate indicators to evaluate the implementation of actions planned. The monitoring systems will be based on Laeken indicators as well as on available national data.

However, there is evidence of neither children's participation nor link with the monitoring and reporting process under UNCRC. There is no mention of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and children's rights approach in the NAP. The UNCRC Committee report in 2002 identified a number of key issues that are not sufficiently addressed in the NAP including:

- Inadequate recognition of the UNCRC;
- Strengthen protection of particularly vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors and minority groups, and ensure their participation in society;
- Inadequate application of the principle of non-discrimination, regarding certain vulnerable groups of children, including children of the Roma and other ethnic minorities, children living in institutions, children with disabilities, children of poor families and children with HIV/AIDS;
- Lack of sufficient resources for the Office of the Ombudsman for Children as an independent monitoring system.

4/ Key documents

The Concluding Observations by the Committee on the Rights of Children (CRC/C15/Add.194) 2002

5/Acknowledgements

Hiroimi Amano, Eurochild Intern

1/ Situation analysis

In 2004, about **23%** of children lived in poverty (compared to 21% of the total population). Children are also more likely to experience persistent poverty: about 22% of the children lived below the poverty line in 2001 and in at least two of the preceding three years (compared to 15% of the total population). The incidence of poverty is higher in particular household types: **30%** of single-parent families with at least one dependent child, **25%** of the households with two adults and two children and **34%** of the households with two adults and three or more children were living in poverty in 2004. The child mortality rate fell from figures above 20% in 1980 to about **4%** in 2003. Similar to most member states, youth unemployment (16.1%) is double the national average, revealing a steady increase over recent years. Nonetheless it is still below the EU average (18.5%).

Access to education

The percentage of young people integrated in the educational system has more than doubled from 30% to 62% between 1991 and 2001. However, in 2005 **73.8%** of the total population between 25-64 years had a schooling level below that of compulsory schooling (secondary level), which can be partly attributed to the high level of early school leavers (38.8% in 2005) and the weak participation of workers in training courses. In 2004, **79.9%** of the children aged four were attending pre-school education (compared to 85.8% in the EU), representing an increase of about 47% compared to 1995.

Health care services

The national strategy on health and long term care is focused on facilitating access to health care services and to the provision of preventive, curative and physiotherapy care. Particular emphasis is given to schools as the main health promoting environment for children and their families. Restructuring Health Centres, with an emphasis on the creation of small family units, ensuring better access and a personalised health care service, is one of the priority policies to grant access to health care.

Migrants

Migrants are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion due to the difficulties in the support services, the absence of family networks, and difficulties in accessing housing. Children with a migrant background are also more likely to drop-out of school: 10% from primary education compared to 3.1% of national students, and 42.6% from secondary school compared to 13.2% of the national students.

2/ Policy responses

The national strategy for social inclusion 2006-2008 highlights 3 main priorities:

- 1. To combat child and elderly poverty, through measures which ensure their basic rights of citizenship*
- 2. To correct the disadvantages in education and training/qualification*
- 3. To overcome the discriminations by re-enforcing the integration of people with disabilities and immigrants.*

The NAP identifies main risks that characterise the evolution of Portuguese social system, four of which concern childhood: child poverty and elderly poverty, failure and early school leaving, low qualifications, inequality and discrimination of people with disabilities and immigrants in the access to their rights.

Priority 1

The specific targets that have been set in order to combat child poverty are as follows to:

- increase in 50% the installed capacity in child care centres
- promote the deinstitutionalization of 25% of the children and young people by 2009
- reinforce social protection for single parents, covering 200,000 families entitled to family allowance.

The NAP admits that social protection provided to families plays an essential role in the well-being of children.

The active policy measures defined to achieve the targets are the following:

- bonus in the allowance granted to single parent households
- programme for families with institutionalized children and young people
- programme of intervention with families of children and youth covered by protection measures
- project in Early Intervention and Parental Skills
- Pilot project "Bairros Criticos" (Deprived neighbourhoods)
- Social Integration Income (subsidy from the solidarity subsystem)

Priority 2

In the fight against child poverty, special emphasis is given to the measures within the educational system, namely at pre-school level and conditions for compulsory schooling. The main targets are to:

- cover ensure 100% of 5-year olds are in pre-school education and 90% of children aged 3-4 by 2009.
- reduce the early school leaving of young people between 18 and 24 by 25% in 2009.
- reduce school failure by 50% by 2009 (19.7% in 2004/05).

The government is implementing a range of measures designed to ensure greater access of children to pre-school education and to offer of curriculum alternatives to school students with learning disabilities. These measures include:

- Establishing educational areas of priority intervention
- Developing the network for pre-school equipment
- Creating a curriculum for alternative pathways
- Developing of the Programa Escolhas (Choices Programme)

The low school levels, qualifications and weak participation in training by a significant group of young Portuguese and a high number of working adults, is reflected also in the difficulty to use new technologies. The government therefore proposes to promote access to the Internet and to information and communication technologies, through the use of broadband all over the territory and make available free public space to access the Internet, by 2008.

Priority 3

The NAP declares four main targets concerning young migrants and children with special needs:

- to place 4,000 special education teachers in schools covering 26,000 children with disability by 2008
- to include 46,000 people with disability in training by 2008
- to include 140,000 beneficiaries in the new benefit system in case of disability by 2009
- provide school with autonomy to respond adequately to the 80,000 foreign students, whose mother tongue is not Portuguese.

3/ Government critique

The Portuguese NAP/incl lists an impressive array of policy measures linked to their priority objective of combating child and elderly poverty by ensuring their basic rights of citizenship. Each policy measure is backed up by a set of indicators and indication of the financial resources allocated over the target period. It is an important challenge for organisations working in the field of child poverty and social exclusion to hold the government accountable to implementing its commitments.

The last Committee report on the UNCRC in 2001 stressed in its Concluding Observations that poverty, poor housing, unemployment, non-contractual work and the high incidence of alcoholism among parents have a negative impact on respect for children's rights. The report also noted the:

- lack of a comprehensive national strategy on the implementation of the Convention
- lack of information indicating that priority is given to the implementation of children's social rights in the budgets of the State party
- uneven distribution of resources for special education of children with disabilities
- lack of legislation prohibiting corporal punishment
- lack of sufficient free pre-school care services
- de facto discrimination in context of child rights & families living in poverty and against Roma children
- absence of specific refugee status determination procedure for minor asylum-seekers
- high number of street children
- extremely high number of accidents of which children are victims.

While the Committee noted the significant progress made in increasing the number of children completing secondary education, the low numbers of children going on to tertiary education remained a the matter of concern. The school level of the Portuguese population is extremely low. Two main factors related to this situation are high **incidence in failure and early school leaving** and **weak participation in vocational training courses**. The school level of LTU (long term unemployed) is also very worrying: 4% had no school education at all.

4/ Key documents

Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, (CRC/C/15/Add.162), 2001

5/ Acknowledgements

Alexandra Nekrasova, Eurochild Intern

1/ Situation analysis

In Romania, the overall at-risk-of poverty-rate is steadily declining. While in 2004 the rate was 18.8%, in 2005 it was 18.2%. Single parent families and families with three or more children are particularly vulnerable to poverty, 27.2% and 43.6% respectively. No figures are given for the rate of children at risk of poverty.

In the school year 2004/2005, the number of students had declined by almost 3.5%, compared to the 2000/2001 school year. The number of students registered for primary and secondary education declined by 11.0% and 22.3% respectively in the same period; in both cases the urban areas suffered the greatest decline in numbers. By contrast, for high-school, professional technical and university education, the number of students increased by 12.5%, 20.5% and 22% respectively. The number of school drop-outs is high and increased from 22.4 % in 1999-2000 to 23.4 % in 2004-2005. Children who live in poor households have 2.3 times higher chances of dropping out of school, compared to children who live in households which are not poor. This statistic is 3.1 times higher in households affected by severe poverty.

2/ Policy responses

The overall objective of the NAP is to “create an inclusive society in order to ensure, for all citizens, the resources and the means for a better living standard”. Within this the main priorities are:

- 1) To increase the population's standard of living and to increase income levels by facilitating employment and promoting inclusive policies
- 2) To facilitate the access of citizens - especially for the disadvantaged groups - to resources, social rights and services
- 3) To improve the standards of living of Roma communities

Priority 1: To increase the population's living standards and to stimulate the obtaining of income through labour

Proposals include incentives to both young people and employers, in order to encourage youth employment.

Priority 2: To facilitate citizens access - especially for the disadvantaged groups - to resources, social rights and services.

The policies to be developed under this priority are multidimensional, and cover many areas, touching also the life of children and their families. For example, they include the development of integrated policies in favour of families and the consolidation of institutional structures able to help children with their development and care; as well as the development of programmes for prevention of early school leaving. The NAP further promises to raise the amount of family benefits, taking into account the inflation rate; and to increase the percentage of the family benefits expenditures within the total social protection expenditures. It also sets the objective of a decrease of the early school leavers' rate by 5%.

Priority 3: To improve the life conditions of Roma communities.

Several measures are specifically directed at Roma children, including programmes aimed to ensure the participation of Roma children in preschool, compulsory and vocational education; and training programs for social mediators selected from the Roma youth for the local communities with significant Roma population. The increase of Roma children's school participation rate in all educational levels is pursued.

3/ Government critique

The eradication of child poverty does not figure among the priority objectives of the NAP. The only commitment made is an increase of family benefits. The report does pay a lot of attention to reducing the school drop-out rate. The quantifiable objective of a 5% decrease is set and Annex 2 of the report gives a detailed description of a programme aimed at preventing school abandonment and vagrancy among impoverished children as well as helping mothers to find and keep jobs in order to enable them to raise their children. Also, some measures are directed at Roma children, particularly regarding their integration in the educational system. Some efforts are also being made to reduce youth unemployment. No reference is made

to the UNCRC nor is there evidence of the involvement of NGOs or the participation of children. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its concluding observations on the reports submitted by Romania under Article 44 of the UNCRC (2003) did mention that good relations were established between the government and civil society.

The Committee also noted that the implementation of the Convention was severely impeded by the consequences of the transition of the Romanian economy into a market economy. High unemployment, growing poverty, coupled with deterioration in primary health care and other services, negatively affect families with children. In addition, implementation is often inefficient due to insufficient allocation of resources, a lack of a comprehensive, human rights-based action plan and poor coordination. Further, the Committee identified the following points of concern that are not addressed in the NAP:

- Continuing low budget allocation for health and education and persisting regional disparities (children in rural areas often disadvantaged);
- A family policy that is insufficient to deal with persistent poverty among families, particularly urban households with many children;
- Low development and availability of alternative care, as well as low quality of institutional care;
- Poor quality and accessibility of health care services and a high infant mortality rate, particularly in rural areas;
- A high number of suicides, teenage mothers, sexually transmitted diseases and drug abuse among adolescents;
- Insufficient action to enhance the disadvantaged situation of children with disabilities;
- Insufficient efforts to protect certain vulnerable groups, such as children subjected to child labour, sexual exploitation or human trafficking, street children or juvenile delinquents.

4/ Key documents

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration on reports submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention, Concluding observations. CRC/C/15/Add. 199, 18 March 2003.

5/ Acknowledgements

Karen Del Biondo, Eurochild intern

1/ Situation analysis

According to data from 2004, the unemployment rate of young people (15-24) was 30.1%, compared to 18.5% in the EU. 5.8% of young people abandoned school prematurely (5.7% females and 6.0% males). The drop-out rate is particularly high among children from Roma communities: 35% of Roma above 25 have not finished primary school, 36.6% finished their education after basic school. Only 24.3% continued their education after basic school attendance. As few as 15.4% of the Roma population finished high school or higher education.

The overall poverty risk rate was 13.3% in 2004. The risk of poverty is particularly high among single-parent families (31.7%) and families with three or more children (24.0%). The rate of child poverty is 18.7% (children under 17). For young people (18-24), the poverty risk rate is 16.3%. In addition, Slovakia has a serious problem of intergenerational reproduction of poverty. For example, PISA outputs have indicated that the performance of Slovakian children at school is highly connected to the social and economic environments they live in. One factor of major influence in this regard is unemployment (at a rate of 37.6% in 2004). As many as 75% of households that have dependent children but no employed member, were endangered by poverty in 2004. This number drops to 38.1% for households where employed members work less than 6 months a year and 8.9% in the case of households with fully employed members.

The NAP also mentions an increase in drug consumption by under 15s.

2/ Policy responses

The Slovakian National Action Plan of Social Inclusion 2006-2008 (NAP/Incl) identifies 4 priority objectives:

- 1) To reduce child poverty and to resolve the inter-generation reproduction of poverty by preventive measures and by support of families with children
- 2) To increase the inclusion and to fight against discrimination of vulnerable population groups by supporting the availability of public services, developing local solutions and increasing the participation of excluded groups in the life of society
- 3) To improve access to labour market and to increase employment and employability of the population groups threatened with exclusion
- 4) To strengthen management, implementation and monitoring of political measures accepted at national, regional and local levels

Priority objective 1: To reduce poverty of children and to resolve the inter-generation reproduction of poverty

In the field of education policy, the Slovakian NAP aims to ensure equality of opportunities in access to high-quality education, regardless of the socio-economic background of the child. This will be achieved by adjusting education policies and implementing supportive measures during the education process. The draft new law on upbringing and education, to be elaborated and approved in the year 2007, is noted as a future new legislative instrument in this regard. In addition, financial support programmes (e.g. contributions and subsidies to support children from low-income families' access to education) and instruments and programmes for the integration of children from groups at risk of exclusion (e.g. a teacher's assistant, preparative courses...) will further contribute to this objective.

Furthermore, in 2006 and 2007, increased support for families will be provided through direct financial contributions within the system of state social benefits. For example, a gradual increase in the child benefit is envisaged.

The NAP also foresees a review of (1) the subsistence minimum and (2) the benefits and contributions required to meet basic needs.

In the area of family support, the Slovak Republic (SR) promises improvements in the implementation of new legislation in the field of child protection, guardianship and related legislation. Also, the SR proposes measures to improve the quality and quantity of social work, in particular to support and strengthen the biological family.

The NAP aims to reduce the number of children in institutional care. Also, a system of assistance to women in specific situations (e.g. victims of violence) will be put into practice. In addition, public services for families will be widened to include also pre-school and out-of-school facilities, parental centres, community centres, etc.

Priority objective 2: To increase the inclusion and to fight against discrimination of vulnerable population groups

In the area of social inclusion of exclusion-threatened population groups, the Slovak Republic will take a decentralised approach, supporting community work and micro-projects. Another key aspect is the development of human resources through high-quality professional education. Other measures are directed at improving the housing facilities of exclusion-threatened population groups, such as the Roma communities. The lease of flats to families with dependent children will be particularly protected. The “State fund of housing development” supports the construction of flats by offering loans at favourable terms. In the field of health care, access to health care and prevention for pregnant women or parents with children younger than 1 year is supported by the introduction of a special benefit.

Priority objective 3: To improve access to labour market and to increase employment and employability of the population groups threatened with exclusion

Labour market activation programmes are planned, particularly targeting young people, single parents, marginalised population groups such as the Roma, substance abusers, etc. The programmes include education and training, job creation and contributions to employers and applicants. Two quantifiable objectives specifically affect children: (1) attaining a drop in the unemployment rate of young people (15-24) by 3.5% and (2) reducing the ratio of children (0-17) living in unemployed households.

Priority objective 4: To strengthen management, implementation and monitoring of political measures accepted at national, regional and local levels

The NAP aims at a coordinated approach, through horizontal and vertical cooperation and the mainstreaming of social inclusion activities. Cooperation with the non-governmental sector will be further developed. A special workgroup was established for the preparation of the National Report on the Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, which included representatives from non-governmental organisations, including NGO's that represent excluded groups. Activities will continue toward the creation and development of several partnerships. The NAP further indicates the intention to establish a Council of Ministers for children and young people, in order to reach an effective system of protection and assurance of rights and interests of children in compliance with the Convention on children's rights. In addition, institutional structures will be created in support of equal opportunities of men and women. For example, the SR government has already emphasized its interest to establish the site of the European institute for gender equality in the country.

3/ Government critique

It is encouraging that the reduction of child poverty and the prevention of intergenerational reproduction of poverty are noted as priority objectives. Also, the NAP/Incl identifies clear quantitative targets concerning child poverty:

- 1) Reduce the poverty risk of children by 3% by 2008
- 2) Bring the poverty risk rate of single-parent families into line with the average of the V4 countries⁵⁵
- 3) Reduce the difference of the poverty risk rate of households with children and the risk rate of childless households
- 4) Ensure the access to education for children from low-income families
- 5) Increase the integration of Roma children in standard primary and secondary schools
- 6) Reduce the proportion of children in institutional care compared to the total number of children in out-of-home care by 6% by the year 2008

Moreover, the NAP/Incl clearly addresses certain vulnerable groups, such as children from the Roma communities, children from single-parent families and children from large families. However, this targeted approach is only evident within education policies.

To tackle child poverty, the Slovak government appears to focus primarily on education and employment policies. The focus on other services is less well developed – for example health and housing. However, at

⁵⁵ V4 refers to the Visegrad group; the regional cooperation between the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia

the municipal level, there are some projects in these areas that directly focus on children or families. For example, in Banská Bystrica city, there is a crisis intervention programme in place since 1994, directed at 3 groups: (1) families with children, (2) independently living persons and couples at productive age and (3) independently living persons and couples at post-productive age.⁵⁶

The NAP falls short of giving a clear explication about its implementation. Only in the field of education, there is a more or less clear description of how the NAP regarding the eradication of child poverty will be implemented. However, more detailed information about both the implementation and the evaluation of the NAP can be found in Annex 2.2. This document includes a table in which, for each objective, information is given on the tasks, target groups, the implementation of the task and the evaluation of the indicators, and the indicators. The NAP specifically mentions the absence of high-quality and reliable data as an obstacle to the implementation and evaluation of the programme. However, the Slovak government is willing to resolve this problem.

There is one reference to the UNCRC in the NAP. The SR indicates a desire to establish an “effective system of protection and assurance of rights and interests of children *in compliance with the [Convention] on children’s rights*”, by means of the establishment of a Council of Ministers for children and young people. This rights-based approach should be encouraged and extended. The will to establish such a Council deserves special mention, as it indicates the importance given to the children’s rights issue. However, there is no clear evidence of the involvement of children, young people and children’s organisations in the elaboration of the NAP. It should be ensured that in the future, these groups are represented in the special workgroup for the preparation of the National Report on the Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

The emphasis put on a coordinated approach should be noted as another positive aspect of the report. The NAP specifically mentions the measures in the fight against child poverty as an example of the “*linking and strengthening of mutual effects of the measures of the social policy and the employment policy*” as they “*create a complete system that harmonises the approach of the employment policy, the state family and social support and the tax policy*”.

Furthermore, there is a clear will by the Slovak government to increase participation with NGOs. Although there is no specific mention of the involvement of children’s NGOs, the UNCRC consideration of the reports submitted by Slovakia under article 44 does confirm cooperation with national and international NGOs in the drafting of strategies, action plans and legal acts, as well as in their implementation.

4/ Key documents

UNCRC, Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Article 44 of the Convention, 21 September 2006, CRC/C/SVK/2.

5/ Acknowledgements

Karen Del Biondo, Eurochild intern

⁵⁶ For a detailed description of this programme, see Annex 2.1. of the NAP, Example 3.

1/ Situation analysis

According to Eurostat, in 2005, children (0-14) represented 14.2% of the Slovenian population. The latest data shows that in 2003 the poverty rate for children with families was 10%. The percentage of children under 16 who live in poor households was 9%.

The infant mortality rate is among the lowest in Europe - 3.7% (in 2004). The age dependence coefficient of young people decreased by 38.7% in the last 20 years and now averages 20.3.

In the 2004/2005 academic year, 60.8 % of children received preschool education. In 2004, the rate of primary school children with subsidised meals was 33.4% (23% in the period from September to December 2003)

The social protection expenditure (% of GDP) was 25.2% in 2000, and 24.8% in 2003. The social protection expenditure for Family/ children programme (% of GDP) was 2.3% in 2000 and 2.1% in 2003. When including tax savings and tax relief, the GDP dedicated to children/young people raises dramatically to become 7.2%.

2/ Policy responses

The Slovenian **National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAP)** has set four policy priorities.

- 1) *Increase activity of the beneficiaries of social transfers, raise the level of education and offer more employment possibilities;*
- 2) *Provide housing to vulnerable groups;*
- 3) *Fight against discrimination and integrate migrants into society;*
- 4) *Ensure care for the elderly.*

1) Increase activity of the beneficiaries of social transfers, raise the level of education and offer more employment possibilities

Raising the level of education

- Emphasis will be placed on the position of young people and on better access to employment throughout the active period.
- The objectives and indicators will focus on monitoring activities in the field of social inclusion and the fight against discrimination for vulnerable groups within the labour market, schools and elsewhere within education systems.
- In Slovenia, the education expenditure was 6%. Children and young people are entitled to free education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

3) Fight against discrimination and integrate migrants in society

- Education is provided to refugees, including courses in the Slovenian language, Slovenian culture, history and constitutional order;
- The amended legislation (law on asylum) devotes special attention and focuses positive discrimination on vulnerable groups of refugees, particularly children, unaccompanied children, disabled persons, the elderly, pregnant women, single parents with children and victims of violence.
- Primary concerns include accommodation capacities, health care and other types of care tailored to the specific needs of the vulnerable groups.

3/ Government critique

In the NAP, children in poverty are not acknowledged as a key priority. There are few measures designed for children and young people.

One of the basic reasons for setting policy priorities 1 and 2 is to promote the situation of the vulnerable groups. Although children and young people are included in these groups, there is no measure designed specifically for them.

Social inclusion has become an element of various area strategies which identify the need for improvements in the coordination of activities – horizontal linking and promoting the attainment of the OMC common objectives. Two examples of such documents are the National Programme for Children and Youth and those pertaining to structural funds.

A special evaluation group is planned. When established, it will consist of all participants in the OMC process. Unfortunately, there is no mention of the Convention on the Rights of the Child or the monitoring/reporting process under UNCRC. Furthermore, there is no evidence of children's participation.

The UNCRC committee report in 2004 identified a number of key issues that are not sufficiently addressed in the NAP, including:

- Inadequate recognition of the UNCRC;
- Lack of opportunities to present views when children are in contact with public institutions and social services, including Social Work Centres;
- The incidence of poverty in the State party, particularly among Roma and single-parent families;
- Prejudices and discrimination against the Roma and other minorities in the State party, including Serbs, Bosnians, Albanians and Croats;
- High number of Roma children attending classes for children with special needs;
- Lack of regulations in respect to adoption and national adoption register;
- Wide spread child abuse within the family and institutions;
- Relatively poor health situation of some children, particularly those belonging to the Roma community, as well as a relatively high maternal mortality rate
- High school dropout rate in secondary education

The principal focus of the Slovenian NAP is employment policy. There is less emphasis on child's poverty or children rights. However, the **Development Strategy of Slovenia (2007-2013)** includes a number of measures which are closely related to social protection and social inclusion for children. Within the five priorities of the Development Strategy, two are closely related to social protection and social inclusion – 'more efficient and inexpensive state' and 'modern social state and higher employment'. Within this Strategy, many statutory acts and programmes have been adopted with the intention of implementing civil, political and social rights of children. It references the **National Plan of Action for Children for 2003-2013** which aims to contribute to the social protection of infants and school-age children and to fight poverty among children.

4/ Key documents

The Concluding Observations by the Committee on the Rights of Children (CRC/C/15/Add.230), 2004

5/ Acknowledgements

Hiroimi Amano & Alexandra Nekrasova, Eurochild Interns

1/ Situation analysis

Despite rapid economic growth in Spain throughout the 90s, there has been no reduction in poverty levels. Relative poverty among families with children under 16 is estimated to have increased over the period of 1993 to 2004 from 18% to **24%**.

Single parent families are particularly vulnerable to poverty as are immigrant families and ethnic minorities.

Spain has particularly high levels of school drop-outs compared to the EU average: **30.8%** compared to 14.9% in the EU-25.

The economic investment of the Spanish government for social inclusion policies is about **0.15%** of the GDP, much lower than the European average. The budget targeted at children is estimated to have increased by approximately **6%** from last year.

2/ Policy responses

The national report on strategies for social inclusion and social protection (NAP IV) does not identify child poverty as a strategic priority.

However, childhood is mentioned within one of the five objectives: **to achieve equal access to education**. Four measures are proposed in order to achieve this goal:

- 1- To extend and improve the Spanish education system in the frame of the European objectives 2010: increase the number of public child care places for 0-3 years by 2% to reach 27% coverage by 2008, reduce the *school drop out rate* to 20% by 2008 and to 15% by 2010, and increase the *suitability rate*⁵⁷ to 95%.
- 2- To develop the *Ley Organica de Educaci3n (Framework law on education)*: developing the *curricular diversification programmes*, and fixing the criteria of student admission at the educative centres.
- 3- To reach equal and free education, ensuring free schooling for all 3-6 year old children by 2010, and increasing the quantity and quality of scholarships.
- 4- To facilitate the success of all students: supporting programmes for special-needs students, increasing subsidies for new technologies, enforcing the professional training programs, and improving school libraries.

Aside from the five strategic priorities, the NAP identifies key actions to ensure equal access to resources, rights and services necessary for participation in society. Specific actions are outlined with regards to people particularly vulnerable to social exclusion including young people, children and families. With respect to children it identifies the following key actions:

- Ensure follow-up of the II National Action Plan against Sexual Exploitation of Childhood 2006-2009
- Develop pilot programmes for the prevention, detection, care and rehabilitation of child exploitation and maltreatment
- Strengthen the Observatory on children
- Develop ways to improve practice in adoption and fostering children
- Develop programmes of alternative sanctions for young offenders and children at risk
- Develop strategies for improving quality of life for children, particularly in rural areas
- Support actions proposed in the II National Action Plan against the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents 2006-2009

The government also plans to support a study on child poverty in Spain.

A national council of NGOs for Social Action was established in December 1999 with the aim of improving dialogue between policy makers and social NGOs. This council is expected to play a role in implementation, follow-up and evaluation of the NAP IV.

Aside from the targets linked to education highlighted above, the NAP IV proposes to:

- Reduce youth unemployment to 18.6%
- Increase minimum wage to 600Euro/month by 2008
- Develop the national system of care for dependents – to reach 100% coverage by 2015

¹% of students doing the academic year that corresponds to their age, that is, without having repeated any year

3/ Government critique

The fact that child poverty is not taken as a specific priority of the Spanish social inclusion strategy reflects the lack of a holistic approach to tackling child poverty and social exclusion. The focus on equal access to education, whilst welcome, focuses on children's potential economic contribution as future employees, rather than considering the rights and welfare of children in the present.

The plan does not take account of the UNCRC nor of the monitoring and reporting procedures linked to its implementation in Spain. The UNCRC Committee report in 2002 identified a number of key issues that are not sufficiently addressed in the NAP IV including:

- Inadequate recognition of the UNCRC;
- The need to improve coordination between national, regional (Autonomous Community) and local level, and to strengthen links between the different policy sectors;
- Unbalanced distribution of resources allocated to social policy at central, regional and local level;
- Lack of standardized data collection between the different Autonomous Communities
- Inadequate application of the principle of non-discrimination
- Need to tackle school absenteeism, as well as providing free-time and cultural activities;
- Strengthen protection of particularly vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors and minority groups, and ensure their participation in society.

With regards to methods of governance in drawing up the NAP IV, it should be noted that while the Platform of Children's Organizations welcomed the invitation to contribute, with other social organizations, to the review of the NAP III and elaboration of the NAP IV (in the framework of the National Council of NGOs for Social Action),

the time invested in following-up this consultation was minimal. No effort has been made to consult directly with children or adolescents in the development of this plan.

The NAP itself is clearly not seen as a key element in the fight against social exclusion and child poverty at all levels. One can observe a lack of multi-dimensional intervention and coordination across government (national administration, autonomous communities and local administrations) and NGOs and citizens.

It is clear therefore that children's rights have not been mainstreamed into this social inclusion strategy. There is no reference to the UNCRC and the strategy does not present a clear vision of the indivisibility, interdependence and universality of children's rights or the need to facilitate the participation of children and young people as key stakeholders in the fight against social exclusion and poverty.

4/ Key documents

The Concluding Observations by the Committee on the Rights of Children (CRC/C/15/Add.185), 2002

Social exclusion and poverty

- Plan Interministerial de Juventud 2005-2008 (Interministerial Plan on Youth 2005-08)
- Plan Estratégico Nacional de Infancia y Adolescencia 2006-2009 (National strategic plan on children and youth 2006-2009)
- II National Action Plan against Sexual Exploitation of Childhood 2006-2009
- Proyecto de Ley de Promoción de la Autonomía Personal y Atención a las Personas en Situación de Dependencia

Access to education

- Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación (Framework law on education)

5/ Acknowledgements

Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia⁵⁸, www.plataformadeinfancia.org

Marc Guitart, Eurochild volunteer

⁵⁸ Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia -The Spanish Child Rights Coalition- works for the promotion, protection and defence of children's rights, having the UNCRC as framework. Established in 1997, there are currently 42 organisations that belong to the network.

1/ Situation analysis

The economic situation of Swedish children is stated as being comparatively good. In 2003, **11%** of children (aged 0-15) in Sweden are estimated to be at risk of poverty. The principal cause of low income is unemployment. Two groups are said to be particularly vulnerable: single parent families and families with at least one parent born outside Sweden. Children of single parent families are three times more likely to be living in poverty than two-parent families.

According to a report by Save the Children Sweden ("*Different growth conditions*") published in 2006, the poverty risk has decreased by **7%** among children of single parents and by **2%** for children whose parents live together. However, despite this *relative* reduction in poverty risk among single parents, the absolute number of children living in poverty has increased by 11,000, from 105,000 children to 116,000. This is due to an increase in the total number of children in Sweden increasing as well as the proportion of children that live in single parent families. Almost all children living at risk of poverty are based in the biggest cities.

The number of people without permanent housing has risen in recent years and in 2005 totalled around 17,800 (0.2% of the population). Three-quarters of the homeless are men and a quarter are women, a third are parents of children below the age of 18. Juveniles, refugee families and the homeless have greatest difficulty in having their housing needs met.

The vast majority of those aged 18-24 have completed at least upper secondary education or are studying. Only 8.6% have no education beyond compulsory primary and lower secondary school.

2/ Policy responses

Sweden's universal welfare policy is said to be its main strategy for decreasing the number of persons/children running the risk of social and economic exclusion.

The Swedish **National Action Plan for social inclusion (NAP)** identifies four key priorities:

1. *Promote work and education for all*
2. *Increase integration*
3. *Ensure/Provide good housing and fight against homelessness*
4. *Strengthen groups in particularly vulnerable situations*

The following targets are set by the NAP:

- Reducing the proportion of people in families with children, irrespective of ethnic background, whose income is under 60 per cent of the median income
- Reducing the school drop-out rate of boys and girls, irrespective of ethnic background
- Reducing the proportion of girls and boys, irrespective of ethnic background, experimenting with drugs, using alcohol or smoking

The first target is clearly aimed at decreasing child poverty. Furthermore, under the priority of increased integration, it is clearly stated that children in families with parents are born outside Sweden are at higher risk of poverty. The second target acknowledges the importance of education in fighting young people's exclusion. The third one is an important indicator related to young people's health & possibilities to participate in society.

Priority 1: Promote work and education for all

Work and education are considered to be the foundations for social participation. The foundation for work or higher education is pre-school, school, after-school care, and upper secondary school. The government has set a target that 50% of people from any given year should go to university.

In Sweden, all children are offered free pre-school from the age of four. There are maximum fees, in order to make pre-school available to everyone. The NAP also refers to the following measures:

- Schools with a great number of students that are not reaching the education targets will have extra funding during a period of 4 years.
- For older children, vocational training will be developed in the municipalities where the school drop-out rate is high

Priority 2: Increase integration

The government adopted a **national action plan for human rights 2006 – 2009** that focuses on non-discrimination. It also focuses on the rights of the disabled, the rights of the child, national minorities and the indigenous Saami people, violence by men against women, the right to work, housing, health and education, issues relating to legal certainty and asylum and migration issues.

Other measures in this priority area include:

- Vocational training in upper secondary school
- Extra money for municipalities to employ 1,000 extra staff with special language qualifications. These extra staff will provide teaching support.
- Extra money for municipalities to adapt public venues for young people's culture and leisure activities.

Priority 3: Ensure/Provide good housing and fight against homelessness

Measures to tackle homelessness will take specific account of the needs of families with children.

Strengthen groups in particularly vulnerable situations

In addition to addressing the problem of children in low income households, the government identifies several other groups of children in particularly vulnerable situations: children growing up in homes with physical or mental abuse, neglected children, children suffering from sexual abuse, children of abusers and children of mentally ill persons.

The measures proposed include:

- The National Board for Health and Welfare has initiated a project to implement the documentation system "**Children's Needs in Focus**", which will strengthen the position of children and young people in the Social Child care
- A **national action plan for child protection and youth care** is expected in 2006, with objectives for children's participation, development of preventive work, etc.
- A three-year project has been launched to test a strengthened care chain for young people who put their health or development at risk through substance abuse, criminality, or other socially degrading behaviour
- Measures to strengthen the support given to women suffering from violence.

3/ Government critique

In the NAP, child poverty is acknowledged, but not as a key priority.

The NAP describes and identifies several groups with special needs. It highlights that families with parents born outside Sweden are particularly at risk and stresses the need for stronger integration of migrants. It also highlights that not all schools have the same prerequisites to give a good education to all students.

The NAP mainly focuses education in all ages and no special attention to critical points in children's development, a life-cycle approach, are focused in the Swedish NAP.

Monitoring and evaluation

The following indicators have been identified as specific for children and young people:

- Cramped housing accommodation
- Disaggregated data by age and gender on people dependent on financial assistance for longer periods
- Crimes of violence against women reported to the police

Looking at other Government reports, it is clear that there are on-going processes to develop specific indicators to monitor the impact of policies affecting children. However, the indicators described in the NAP are not specifically adapted to children and young people.

The majority of political initiatives presented in the plan are carried out by state authorities. These measures will be monitored by the evaluation instruments already in use, performed by the departments in charge, and by the annual reports. However, there is no overarching report about the measures identified in the NAP. The same is true for the measures that are taken on a local scale in the municipalities.

Children's rights approach

In the Government report 2005/06 "**A Sweden for children - Review of the Swedish government's children policy**", a review is made of the government's children policy and strategic work to realise the children's rights convention. The purpose of this report is to describe the Government's strategic work in order to realise the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

In this report there are several parts dealing with children's right to a good living standard, and child poverty in Sweden is clearly described. The report also clearly describes new forms of parent support, support for young people at risk etc. The report is extensive and contains analyses of children's physical and mental health.

Considering this thorough analysis, it is surprising that the NAP does not focus more clearly on children's rights. There is no reference to this report in the NAP.

Participation

The preparation of this plan has been closely followed by the 'Network against social exclusion' comprising NGOs, trade unions and religious organisations. However, it is not clear from the report as to which organisations are participating. Neither is it stated if and how this network will participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the plan. The plan does not seem to include any participation from professionals working with children, organisations protecting children's rights, or children and young people themselves.

In "**A Sweden for children - Review of the Swedish government's children policy**" it is said that the Minister for social affairs has a reference group with about 40 girls and boys aged 13 – 18 years, forming a forum for dialogue between children, the Minister and civil servants within the Government Offices of Sweden. This group has discussed the issue of economic vulnerability. This work is not mentioned in the NAP.

Contribution from other policies

In the NAP it is said that the Government is trying to gather all participants in the fight against economic and social exclusion. The Government wants to encourage the creation of local processes aimed at increasing social participation, in partnership between municipalities, authorities and organisations. Such an initiative is considered to be very important, but there are few concrete examples of this in the municipalities. In the Örebro region, the biggest municipality Örebro has introduced cooperation with a number of NGOs.

Measures and proposals intending to increase social participation touch many different policy areas: social policy, education policy, employment policy, etc. The new political initiatives described in the strategy plan will be taken by national authorities within these areas. The government will describe the authorities' missions in their annual budget documents, or in special government decisions. Feedback from the authorities will be given in their annual reports.

Measures

On a local level, there is a need for developing methods in school, in order to work with vulnerable groups. There is also a need for more and better cooperation between child protection, the school and the health care.

Maximum fees for pre-schools and after-school care were introduced in 2002. All Swedish municipalities apply to this system, which aims to create better opportunities to combine work and family life.

In 2001, special grants to municipalities were introduced with the purpose to improve quality increase the workforce in pre-school and in school. Other measures are being made to improve the quality in pre-school and school, for instance the implementation of a national test system. Measures are taken to decrease the differences between schools, in order to give the same opportunities to a good education for all students.

4/ Acknowledgements

Marie Gustafsson, Magnus Persson, Örebro County Regional Development Council⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The Örebro County Regional Development Council was set up in January 2006 by the Örebro County Council, Regional Development and the Association of Local Authorities Örebro County, together with all 12 municipalities in the county. It aims to gather the county's resources in regional politics into an effective, democratically controlled organisation with the purpose and task of improving conditions for sustainable growth and to contribute to the best possible quality of life throughout the whole of Örebro County.

United Kingdom

1/ Situation analysis

According to the UK government, in 2004/05 there were 2.4 million children living in relative low income (before housing costs) and 3.4 million (after housing costs), a decrease of 700,000 and 800,000 respectively since 96/97. The number of children living in absolute low income has decreased by 1.8 million (before housing costs) and by 2.4 million (after housing costs) over the same period. The rates of child poverty have therefore decreased from 27% 1997/98 to **22%** in 2004/05, which is approaching the EU average of 20%. However, the report confirms that “children continue to be at greater risk of poverty than other age groups”. Around **67%** of children in workless households live in lone parent households. Since 1997/98 the at-risk-of-poverty rate for lone parents has fallen from 49% to **38%** in 2004/05, closer to the EU-25 average of 34% in the same year.

The NAP analysis notes the youth unemployment rate has decreased from 13.1% in 1998 to **12.9%** in 2005 – lower than the EU-25 average of 18.5% in 2005. Young males are more likely to be unemployed than young females 14.5% compared to 11.1% in 2005. In the UK, the proportion of early school leavers not in education or training has fallen. Since 1999, the proportion of early school leavers has fallen by 5.7 % to 14% in 2005, closer to the Lisbon target of halving the number of 14 to 24 year olds not in further education by 2010. The number of homeless families with dependent children in temporary accommodation in England rose by 3% between March 2004 and March 2005, compared to a 15% increase between March 2003 and March 2004. Chapter 2 of the report presents the indicators used to support its strategy against social exclusion. These following are specifically relevant to children and young people:

Primary indicator

- At risk of poverty rate
- At risk of poverty threshold
- Persistent at risk of poverty rate
- Relative median poverty risk gap
- Early school leavers not in education or training
- Child well being - yet to be developed

Secondary indicators

- Poverty risk by household type
- Dispersion around the at risk of poverty threshold
- Low reading literacy performance of pupils [not available for the UK]

Tertiary indicators

- Relative low income rate
- Persistence of low income
- Homeless families with dependant children
- The proportion of 16 year olds without any GCSE's or equivalent
- The proportion of 16 year olds with five GCSE's grade a to c or equivalent
- Schools achievement key stage 2 for literacy and numeric
- Educational attainment of young people leaving care
- Rate of conception for those aged under 18
- Rate of births to mothers aged under 18
- Infant mortality rates by social groups

2/ Policy responses

Eliminating child poverty is a one of policy objectives in the UK **National Action Plan for Social inclusion 2006-2008 (NAP)**.

The UK target to end child poverty by 2020 was introduced in 1999. As part of the process it introduced intermediate targets for 2005 and 2010. Additional targets introduced in 2005 include:

- *Reducing the proportion of children living in workless households by 5% between spring 2005 and spring 2008*
- *Increasing the proportion of parents with care on Income Support and Income based jobseekers allowance who receive maintenance for their children to 65% by March 2008*

The key elements of the Child Poverty Strategy are identified as:

- Supporting and promoting financial security for poor families in and out of work and increasing incomes through participation in the labour market
- Breaking cycles of deprivation through early years support and education
- Supporting parents in providing better outcomes for their children

In terms of measuring progress the UK government introduced a tiered measurement approach in 2002/2003. Whilst it narrowly missed its 2005 target of reducing child poverty by 25% in 2005 it has recently recommitted itself to reaching its 2010 target of reducing child poverty by 50% from the 1999 baseline. It is currently developing a strategy to reach this goal. The first measures on its deprivation measure will be produced in February 2007. It continues to measure progress against the absolute low income figure.

The National Action Plan on social inclusion dedicates one chapter to the objective of eliminating child poverty. It identifies a number of key issues which need improved policy solutions to affect the child poverty rates. These include:

- Helping parents gain and retain jobs which will provide a regular family income
- Increasing the educational attainment of children and young people from deprived backgrounds
- Supporting the transition to adulthood for young people
- Access to childcare especially for parents of disabled children
- Improving the delivery of tax credits

A number of other policy solutions are then presented, including:

- Child Tax Credit and Working Families Tax credit
- Increases in child benefit Rates and introduction of child trust funds
- Improvements in Child support arrangement
- Targeted public services opportunities for poorer children
- Improvements in early years and childcare services
- Development of children's centres

Lone parents

The report argues that most non-working lone parents are poor and that their best route out of poverty is through employment. It argues that the lone parent employment route has significantly improved over the last few years. It argues interestingly that 90% of lone workers are women and includes a specific strategy on how lone parent families can move out of poverty.

Some new policy solutions which target getting lone parents into work identified within the NAP include:

- Changes to the work focussed interview regime. The government aims to begin the first of these - work focused interviews at six monthly intervals for all claimants with a youngest child aged 13 or below in April 2007
- Piloting the payment of a premium on top of income support to lone parents whose children are all aged at least 11, in return for undertaking work related activity
- Looking at new ways of supporting more lone parents to stay in work
- Introducing in October 2006 a notional earnings rule to help more people to take part in some training programmes
- Working with employers to develop 'work taster' programmes for lone parents

Schooling

The report provides some analysis of key issues concerning children & young peoples education including:

- Raising standards in education especially for those children and young people who perform least well in school
- Closing the UK's skills gap
- Supporting parents to be engaged in their children's education
- Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, training or employment
- Monitoring the achievements of particular ethnic and social groups, pupils with special educational needs and disabled pupils

Outside England strategies are discussed which have been recently introduced (Scotland) to effect the co-ordination of support plans for each child/young person with enduring complex or multiple needs or (Wales) a targeted 0-3 programme in disadvantaged areas called Flying Start.

Key targets for educational achievement have also been introduced including:

- At age 11: Raising standards in English and maths so that A) by 2006 85% of 11 year olds achieve level 4 or above with this level of performance sustained to 2008 B) by 2008, the proportion of schools in which fewer than 65% of pupils achieve level 4 or above is reduced by 40%.
- At age 14: Raise standards in English, maths, ICT and science in secondary education so that A) by 2007 85% of 14 year olds achieve level 5 or above in English, maths and ICT (80% in science) nationally, with this level of performance sustained to 2008 and B) by 2008, in all schools at least 50% of pupils achieve level 5 or above in English, maths and science.
- At age 16: By 2008, 60% of those aged 16 to achieve the equivalent of 5 GCSE's at grades A* to C and in all schools at least 20% of pupils to achieve this standard by 2004, rising to 25% by 2006 and 30% by 2008.

The Child Poverty Accord is an example of good practice

This accord is concerned how government agencies and local authorities work together to tackle child poverty. This accord is based upon a 2002 shared priority which is concerned with 'improving the quality of life for children, young people and families at risk, by tackling child poverty.' The objectives of the priority are to:

- Promote the UK national strategy for eradicating child poverty and the role that local authorities and services can play in supporting it
- Support the take up of their entitlements to tax credits and benefits by poor families and work to remove any barriers impeding take up
- Improve employment rates
- Work together to narrow inequalities of opportunities and increase outcomes for poor children particularly educational outcomes and opportunities
- Share research and evaluation evidence which bears on the eradication of child poverty and jointly to implement changes which are backed by evidence

To support this process a joint partnership board has been regularly meeting since 2004. This board has been able to provide regular 'feedback' from organisations which work directly with people experiencing poverty.

Participation

Chapter 6 of the national report refers to the UK government's approach to preparation of the NAP and involvement of stakeholders. The aim of this work is:

- To raise awareness of the NAP process & in particular to encourage its shared ownership
- To ensure that there is a shared understanding of the issues which people facing social exclusion are experiencing and of the strategy to tackle these issues
- To identify what is going well -and what is not going so well -so as to inform future developments in the strategy and the policies and services that support it

They stress, the development of *Get Heard* has been the key to this process. The Get Heard initiative has established to promote the NAP process and to get direct feedback on government policies etc. Since 1995, 146 groups have been held which included some young people's groups using the get heard materials.

3/ Government critique

It is clear that child poverty receives a high priority in the NAP and much analysis appears in the report on the progress to date. Where it is weak, however, is that it uses current policy solutions which will not target the most severe and persistent poverty for children and young people in the UK. There are obvious policy solutions such as an increase in child benefit, parity of child benefit for all children, and targeted interventions for families with a disabled child or large families which it does not discuss. All of these policy solutions have much popular support currently in the UK. As it gets nearer to the 2010 target it will be interesting to see what new policy solutions the UK government introduces. It is therefore hoped that the 2010 target will continue to act as a catalyst in reducing child poverty within the UK. Despite the progress made to involve people experiencing poverty, children and young people have not been involved in this process directly. They are represented only indirectly through involvement of organisations which represent people living in poverty.

4/ Further information

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>

5/ Acknowledgements

Mike Lewis, Policy Director, Children in Wales⁶⁰, www.childreninwales.org.uk

⁶⁰ *Children in Wales* is the national umbrella organisation for children's organisations in Wales that is committed to working towards the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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