

***Who cares?
Roadmap for a Recommendation
to fight child poverty***

**Report on
Belgian EU Presidency Conference
2 - 3 September 2010**



Who cares? Roadmap for a Recommendation to fight child poverty.

Report on Belgian EU Presidency Conference

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The conference has been requested by Philippe Courard, Secretary of state for the fight against poverty, in collaboration with the King Baudouin Foundation, UNICEF, Eurochild, and the European Commission. Its aims were to stimulate discussion around a future EU Recommendation on child poverty and child well-being. The discussions were based on the background paper entitled 'Call for an EU Recommendation on Child poverty and Child Well-being – June 2010'. The results will feed into planned actions of the European Commission, notably a Communication on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and a Staff Working Document on Child Poverty and Well-Being which should result in a Recommendation from the Commission.

We are extremely grateful to each person and organization having contributed to the writing of this paper.

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Combating Child Poverty

Philippe Courard,
Belgian Secretary of State
for Social Integration and the Fight Against Poverty

Nowadays, Europe has over 100 million people under the age of 18. Of these, around 20% are at risk of poverty. Eradicating child poverty and social exclusion must be considered a fundamental human right. The only way of preventing future generations of poor and disadvantaged adults is to give their children a better chance in life now. Adequate housing and family income, quality health care and family support are all necessary to ensure our children's security and give them hope for a better future.

Therefore, it could not be more timely that the Belgian Presidency of the European Union has put child poverty at the top of its agenda. On 2-3 September a conference gathering experts, decision makers and social workers dealing with childcare and child well-being took place in Marche-en-Famenne in Belgium. Its aim was to step up commitments to tackling child poverty and promoting the well-being of all children.

The conference marked a significant milestone in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The Belgian Presidency initiated this conference which concluded that the adoption of a recommendation aimed at tackling child poverty and promoting the well-being of all children would advance the common objective of reducing poverty.

Participants fed in the working document used as a basis for discussions during the event. They very much improved the initial recommendations prepared by UNICEF, Eurochild, the King Baudouin Foundation, the European Commission and the PPS Social Integration. This conference also ended by a joint declaration signed by the trio of presidencies -Spain, Belgium and Hungary- concerning the necessity to fight child poverty at EU level. The present report gathers the conference's achievements together.

In the framework of the EU 2020 strategy, Europe is taking action on the political, legislative and financial fronts. For the next decade, a target was set to lift at least 20 million Europeans out of poverty by 2020. This objective is based upon the genuine commitment of all EU Member States to a more just and inclusive Europe. Tackling child poverty is at the heart of this endeavour.

Therefore I truly believe the time has come to make the Member States commit towards the fight against child poverty. European Commissioner for Social Affairs L. Andor engaged himself to support the adoption of an EC Recommendation on child poverty and well-being. We hope the outcomes of our conference will help the Commission in its drafting work of a Recommendation to fight child poverty.



Introduction and summary of key findings

Introduction

The Belgian Presidency of the European Union (EU) held a major conference on child poverty, *Who Cares? Roadmap for a Recommendation to fight child poverty*, in Marche-en-Famenne on 2nd and 3rd September 2010. The conference was organised by the Presidency in collaboration with the King Baudouin Foundation, UNICEF, Eurochild and the European Commission. It was attended by some 300 participants from around Europe active in the field of child poverty and child well-being. They included European, national, regional and local policy makers, practitioners and experts on child poverty, NGOs, the social partners and academics and researchers. In addition there were video inputs from children on the issues under discussion.

The aim of the conference was to commit each Member State to take into account the problems of children living in poverty and to find solutions to reduce this level of child poverty. In particular the aim was to contribute ideas for the preparation of a European Commission Recommendation on combating child poverty which will then provide the framework for advancing work on child poverty in the context of the *Europe 2020* agenda. This overall objective was stressed in the opening and closing sessions of the conference by the Belgian Presidency both by the conference chairperson, Julien Van Geertsom, President of the Belgian Public Planning Service on Social Integration, and by Philippe Courard, Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty. It was also strongly endorsed by representatives of the EU Trio Presidency from Spain, Juan Carlos Mato Gomez, Director General for Social Policy, Families and Childhood, Ministry of Health and Social Policy and from Hungary, Zoltan Balog, Hungarian Secretary of State in charge of Child Poverty.

The timeliness and relevance of the conference was underlined in the opening session in a speech by the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Laszlo Andor, on child poverty in the Europe 2020 strategy. In particular he gave a commitment to prepare a European Commission Recommendation on Child Poverty during 2011 and indicated that the outcomes of the conference would directly contribute to the preparation of this document. The importance of the EU further enhancing its role in promoting child poverty and well being was reinforced in an opening speech by Hugh Frazer on why the EU should be focussing on this issue.

The importance of the conference was underlined by the attendance of Her Royal Highness Princess Astrid of Belgium for the opening session and a speech by Her Royal Highness Princess Mathilde of Belgium in the closing session. In addition, at the end of the conference representatives of the EU Presidency Trio from Spain, Belgium and Hungary signed a joint declaration calling on Member States and the European Council, in close collaboration with the Commission to make the reduction of child poverty and the promotion of child well-being a central part of the Europe 2020 efforts to reduce poverty (see Annex 1).

The conference was highly participative. It was organised in accordance with a concept of active participation, known as “Town Hall”. The participants were divided into groups of ten people around tables managed by professional facilitators and every participant was encouraged to engage in the discussions. The findings from the various tables were then fed into a central group of experts who grouped and organised the points made under a series of headings. Thus the findings of the event reflect a process of genuinely shared work.

The discussions at the tables were built around three principal themes: access to adequate resources, access to services and opportunities and children’s participation. The basis for the discussions on each of these issues was a background report, *Call for an EU Recommendation on Child Poverty and Well-being*, which had been specially prepared for the conference.¹ For each theme the background report proposed a set of specific recommendations. Each table was asked to discuss if the set of recommendations were the right ones to address child poverty and if not what other key recommendations they would suggest. They were then asked to identify political obstacles to the adoption of the recommendations and to ensuring a coordinated approach with other sectors to tackling them. Finally they were asked to identify how the obstacles could be overcome.

This report follows the structure of the conference. It draws together the many inputs from the table discussions into an overall synthesis of the main findings of the conference. The recommendations from the background document are summarised at the beginning of each section.

¹ The background paper was finalised by the Belgium Presidency in collaboration with UNICEF, Eurochild and the European Commission. It was based on an original draft by Sandy Ruxton, an independent expert on children’s rights and also drew heavily on a chapter on child poverty in *A social inclusion roadmap for Europe 2020*, which was prepared at the request of the 2010 Belgian EU Presidency.

Summary of key findings

As will be seen in the following chapters the conference inspired a rich tapestry of comments and suggestions based on the participants' extensive expertise and experience. However, the overriding message is that the conference overwhelmingly endorsed the three policy areas identified in the background paper on an EU Recommendation on child poverty and well-being as being the most important areas for future action. Participants, while adding much important additional detail and specificity, also strongly endorsed the set of recommendations for each of the themes. There were only a few important areas in which additional recommendations were suggested. The following appear to be the 3 most significant:

- i. Develop a comprehensive approach to income support for children. This should set child benefit within the broader framework of an adequate income for all based on a combination of an effective social transfer system for adults and children, an adequate income from work and a child and family friendly tax system.
- ii. Promote an active inclusion approach which integrates access to enabling services, adequate income support and access to employment so that they are mutually reinforcing.
- iii. Develop a children's rights approach which applies to all children regardless of their background or legal status, including undocumented children.

In relation to obstacles and ways of overcoming them it was striking that a number of themes recurred across the different policy areas. There are 7 which are particularly striking:

1. There is often insufficient recognition of children being citizens in their own right and a lack of awareness of children's rights. There is thus a need to foster a new culture of children's rights that is based on respecting and listening to the views of children.
2. There is a lack of political priority given to children in many countries and a lack of understanding of the effects of child poverty and social exclusion. This emphasises the urgent need to systematically highlight the benefits that accrue to children, the wider society and the economy of investing in policies to support children and at the same time to highlight the costs of not doing so.
3. There is a lack of understanding of the minimum standards that are necessary if children's rights are to be met. This suggests that the EU could do much more to work with Member States (in the framework of *Europe 2020*) to agree and monitor the implementation of minimum standards in key areas such as income support, access to services and children's participation.
4. There is quite limited knowledge of the extensive body of good practice which is available in most policy areas. This underscores the need for a much extensive and systematic process of mutual learning across the EU and a much more effective integration of the good practice lessons into the training of those working with children.
5. Lack of funding is a major barrier to making progress. This emphasises that Member States need to be convinced of the benefits of increased investment in services for children and the EU needs to amend the Structural Funds' regulations so that they can contribute more to initiatives to promote child well-being.
6. Too often there is a lack of good data, regular monitoring and open reporting on child poverty and well-being. This underlines the need to improve data collection, indicators, monitoring, evaluation and reporting across all policy areas affecting children in order to ensure that policy making becomes more evidence based, more accountable and transparent and that there is greater learning about what works.

7. The lack of coordination between different policy areas, the fragmented delivery of services and the often poor communication and cooperation between different levels of governance are recurring challenges. This reinforces the need for every Member State to develop a coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the needs of children in a holistic manner, to involve all stakeholders including children in this process and to mainstream a concern with child poverty and child well-being across all relevant policy areas.

The rest of this report elaborates in much greater detail on the points summarised here. It also documents the wide range of suggestions that were made for deepening and strengthening the recommendations made in the background document. Annex 3 contains a revised version of the recommendations taking account of the many suggestions made at the conference.

Introduction et résumé des principales observations

Introduction

La Présidence belge de l'Union européenne (UE) a tenu une Conférence sur la pauvreté infantile, *Who Cares ? Roadmap for a Recommendation to fight child poverty*, à Marche-en-Famenne les 2 et 3 septembre 2010. La conférence, organisée par la Présidence en collaboration avec la Fondation Roi Baudouin, l'UNICEF, Eurochild et la Commission européenne, a rassemblé quelque 300 participants en provenance de toute l'Europe, actifs dans le domaine de la pauvreté et du bien-être des enfants : des décideurs politiques locaux, régionaux, nationaux et européens, des travailleurs de terrain et des experts en matière de pauvreté infantile, des représentants d'ONG, des partenaires sociaux, des universitaires et des chercheurs. Des enfants se sont également fait entendre par le biais de messages vidéo sur les sujets débattus.

La conférence avait pour but d'engager chaque État membre à prendre en considération la problématique des enfants en situation de pauvreté et à trouver des solutions pour réduire le taux de pauvreté infantile. Elle entendait plus particulièrement contribuer à la préparation d'une Recommandation de la Commission européenne sur la lutte contre la pauvreté infantile, qui servira de cadre pour faire progresser la lutte contre la pauvreté infantile dans le contexte de l'agenda *Europe 2020*. Cet objectif global a été souligné lors des sessions d'ouverture et de clôture de la conférence de la Présidence belge par le Président de la conférence, Julien Van Geertsom, Président du Service Public de Programmation Intégration sociale, et par Philippe Courard, Secrétaire d'État à l'Intégration sociale et à la Lutte contre la Pauvreté. Il a également été approuvé par des représentants du Trio des Présidences européennes : Juan Carlos Mato Gomez, Directeur Général de la Politique sociale, des Familles et de l'Enfance, Ministère de la Santé et des Politiques sociales (Espagne) et Zoltan Balog, Secrétaire d'État hongrois en charge de la Pauvreté infantile.

L'opportunité et l'intérêt de la conférence ont été soulignés lors de la séance d'ouverture dans un discours prononcé par le Commissaire européen pour l'Emploi, les Affaires sociales et l'Égalité des chances, Laszlo Andor, sur la pauvreté infantile dans la stratégie EU 2020. Il a notamment pris l'engagement de préparer une Recommandation de la Commission européenne sur la Pauvreté infantile dans le courant de 2011 et a indiqué que les résultats de la Conférence contribueraient directement à la préparation de ce document. L'importance du rôle de l'UE dans la lutte contre la pauvreté infantile et la promotion du bien-être des enfants a été renforcée dans un discours d'ouverture prononcé par Hugh Frazer sur les raisons pour lesquelles l'UE doit se concentrer sur cette problématique.

L'importance de la conférence a été soulignée par la présence de Son Altesse Royale la Princesse Astrid de Belgique lors de la séance d'ouverture et par une déclaration de Son Altesse Royale la Princesse Mathilde de Belgique lors de la séance de clôture. En outre, à la fin de la conférence, des représentants du Trio des Présidences (Espagne, Belgique et Hongrie) ont signé une déclaration commune invitant les États membres et le Conseil européen, en collaboration étroite avec la Commission, à faire de la réduction de la pauvreté infantile et de la promotion du bien-être des enfants un élément essentiel des efforts de l'Europe 2020 pour réduire la pauvreté (cf. Annexe 1).

La conférence a été organisée selon un concept de participation active, dit 'Town Hall'. Les participants ont été répartis en groupes de dix personnes autour de tables gérées par des facilitateurs professionnels. Chaque participant était encouragé à prendre part aux discussions. Les résultats des différentes tables ont été confiés à un groupe central d'experts qui les ont rassemblés et organisés sous une série de rubriques. Les conclusions de cet événement reflètent donc un véritable travail commun.

Les débats se sont articulés autour de trois thèmes principaux : l'accès aux ressources adéquates, l'accès aux services et opportunités et la participation des enfants. Un document de travail *Appel à une Recommandation de l'UE sur la Pauvreté et le Bien-être des enfants*, préparé spécialement pour la conférence, a servi de base aux discussions.² Cette note préparatoire proposait pour chaque thème une série de recommandations spécifiques. Chaque table a été exhortée à débattre du contenu des recommandations visant à lutter contre la pauvreté infantile et de l'opportunité d'ajouter d'autres recommandations. Les participants ont ensuite été invités à identifier les obstacles politiques à l'adoption des recommandations et à l'implémentation d'une approche coordonnée avec d'autres secteurs. Enfin, ils ont été invités à identifier des moyens de surmonter les obstacles.

Ce rapport respecte la structure de la conférence. Il rassemble les nombreux apports en table en une synthèse générale des principaux résultats de la conférence. Les recommandations de la note préparatoire sont résumées au début de chaque section.

² La note préparatoire a été finalisée par la Présidence belge, en collaboration avec l'UNICEF, Eurochild et la Commission européenne. Elle se basait sur un document original rédigé par Sandy Ruxton, expert indépendant en droits des enfants, et s'inspirait aussi largement d'un chapitre sur la pauvreté infantile dans *A social inclusion roadmap for Europe 2020*, un document préparé à la demande de la Présidence belge de l'UE 2010.

Résumé des principales observations

Comme on le verra dans les prochains chapitres, la conférence a inspiré un riche éventail de commentaires et de suggestions se basant sur l'expertise et l'expérience des participants. Le message prédominant est toutefois que la conférence a largement avalisé les trois domaines politiques identifiés dans la note préparatoire à une Recommandation sur la pauvreté et le bien-être des enfants comme étant les domaines les plus importants pour une action future. Les participants ont également souscrit à la série de recommandations formulées pour chacun des thèmes, même s'ils leur ont ajouté des détails et spécificités importants. Ils ont suggéré des recommandations supplémentaires dans l'un ou l'autre domaine important. Voici les trois plus significatives :

- i. Développer une approche globale en matière de soutien financier pour les enfants. Les allocations familiales devraient s'inscrire dans le cadre plus vaste d'un revenu adéquat pour tous, basé sur un système de transfert social efficace pour les adultes et les enfants, combiné à un revenu adéquat du travail et à un régime fiscal favorable à l'enfant et à la famille.
- ii. Promouvoir une approche d'inclusion active intégrant l'accès aux services de base, un soutien financier adéquat et l'accès à l'emploi, de sorte qu'ils se renforcent mutuellement.
- iii. Développer une approche des droits de l'enfant qui s'applique à tous les enfants, quel que soit leur origine ou statut légal, y compris les enfants sans papiers.

Concernant les obstacles et les manières de les surmonter, la récurrence de plusieurs thèmes au travers des différents domaines politiques est évidente. En voici sept particulièrement frappants :

1. On ne reconnaît pas assez que les enfants sont des citoyens à part entière et on ne prend pas assez conscience de leurs droits. Il convient donc de favoriser une nouvelle culture des droits de l'enfant basée sur le respect et l'écoute de la voix des enfants.
2. De nombreux pays n'accordent pas de priorité politique aux enfants et ne comprennent pas les effets de la pauvreté infantile et de l'exclusion sociale. Il est dès lors urgent de mettre systématiquement en exergue les bénéfices qui échoient aux enfants, à la société plus large et l'économie réalisée quand on investit dans des politiques de soutien aux enfants tout en attirant l'attention sur les coûts si on le fait pas.
3. On ne connaît pas assez les normes minimales nécessaires pour rencontrer les droits des enfants. Autrement dit, l'UE pourrait inciter davantage les États membres (dans le cadre de *Europe 2020*) à ratifier et à suivre l'implémentation de normes minimales dans des domaines clés tels que le soutien financier, l'accès aux services et la participation des enfants.
4. Les connaissances relatives au vaste éventail de bonnes pratiques disponibles dans la plupart des domaines politiques sont limitées. Ce phénomène souligne la nécessité d'un processus plus vaste et plus systématique d'apprentissage mutuel dans toute l'UE et d'une intégration plus efficace des leçons des bonnes pratiques dans la formation des personnes qui travaillent avec des enfants.
5. Le manque de financement est un obstacle majeur aux progrès. Les États membres doivent être convaincus des bénéfices résultant d'un investissement accru dans les services pour enfants ; l'UE doit amender les règles régissant les Fonds structurels, afin qu'ils puissent contribuer davantage aux initiatives visant à promouvoir le bien-être des enfants.
6. La pauvreté et le bien-être des enfants pâtissent d'un manque de données adéquates, d'évaluations régulières et de comptes-rendus ouverts. Il convient d'améliorer la collecte de données, les indicateurs, le suivi, l'évaluation et le rapportage dans tous les domaines politiques touchant les enfants, afin d'assurer que l'élaboration de politique repose davantage sur des preuves, qu'elle soit transparente et tenue de rendre des comptes, et qu'on échange davantage sur ce qui fonctionne.

7. Le manque de coordination entre les différents domaines politiques, l'offre fragmentée de services, la communication et la coopération souvent insuffisantes entre les différents niveaux de gouvernance sont des défis récurrents. Il faut donc que chaque État membre développe une approche coordonnée et intégrée pour répondre aux besoins des enfants de manière holistique, qu'il implique tous les acteurs, y compris les enfants, dans ce processus et intègre la problématique de la pauvreté et du bien-être des enfants dans tous les domaines politiques concernés.

La suite de ce rapport se penche en détail sur les points résumés ici. Il s'attarde également sur le vaste éventail de suggestions qui ont été faites pour approfondir et renforcer les recommandations formulées dans le document de travail. L'annexe 3 contient une version révisée des recommandations qui tient compte des nombreuses suggestions faites à la conférence.

Inleiding en samenvatting van de belangrijkste bevindingen

Inleiding

Op 2 en 3 september 2010 hield het Belgische voorzitterschap van de Europese Unie (EU) in Marche-en-Famenne een belangrijke conferentie over kinderarmoede met de titel *Who Cares? Roadmap for a Recommendation to fight child poverty*. De conferentie werd georganiseerd door het voorzitterschap in samenwerking met de Koning Boudewijnstichting, UNICEF, Eurochild en de Europese Commissie. Er waren ongeveer 300 deelnemers uit heel Europa die actief zijn op het vlak van kinderarmoede en kindermwelzijn: Europese, nationale, regionale en lokale beleids mensen, veldwerkers en deskundigen op het vlak van kinderarmoede, ngo's, de sociale partners en academici en onderzoekers. Bovendien waren er ook videobijdragen van kinderen over de thema's van de conferentie.

De conferentie was bedoeld om elke lidstaat ertoe aan te zetten rekening te houden met de problemen van kinderen in armoede en om oplossingen te vinden om het niveau van de kinderarmoede te verlagen. Meer bepaald was het ook de bedoeling om ideeën aan te brengen voor de voorbereiding van een aanbeveling van de Europese Commissie over de strijd tegen kinderarmoede, die dan het kader moet vormen voor het bevorderen van de werkzaamheden in verband met kinderarmoede in de context van de *Europa 2020*-agenda. Die algemene doelstelling kwam ook aan bod tijdens de openings- en slotzitting van de conferentie in de toespraken van de vertegenwoordigers van het Belgische voorzitterschap: conferentievoorzitter Julien Van Geertsom, Voorzitter van de Belgische Programmatorische Overheidsdienst voor Maatschappelijke Integratie, en Philippe Courard, Belgisch Staatssecretaris voor Maatschappelijke Integratie en Armoedebestrijding. De doelstelling kon ook rekenen op de steun van de andere vertegenwoordigers van het EU-Trio-voorzitterschap uit Spanje, Juan Carlos Mato Gomez, Algemeen Directeur voor Sociaal Beleid, Gezin en Kinderen van het Ministerie van Gezondheid en Sociaal Beleid en uit Hongarije, Zoltan Balog, Hongaars Staatssecretaris bevoegd voor kinderarmoede.

Tijdens de openingszitting wees de Europees Commissaris voor Werkgelegenheid, Sociale Zaken en Gelijke Kansen Laszlo Andor in zijn toespraak over kinderarmoede in de Europa 2020-strategie op de passende timing en het uitzonderlijk belang van de conferentie. Hij beloofde meer bepaald om in 2011 een aanbeveling van de Europese Commissie over kinderarmoede voor te bereiden en wees erop dat de resultaten van de conferentie rechtstreeks zouden bijdragen aan de voorbereiding van die tekst. Ook Hugh Frazer beklemtoonde in zijn openingstoespraak dat het belangrijk is dat de EU een grotere rol gaat spelen bij het bevorderen van de strijd tegen kinderarmoede en voor kindermwelzijn.

Het belang van de conferentie bleek ook uit de aanwezigheid van Hare Koninklijke Hoogheid Prinses Astrid van België bij de openingszitting en een toespraak door Hare Koninklijke Hoogheid Prinses Mathilde van België tijdens de slotzitting. Aan het einde van de conferentie ondertekenden vertegenwoordigers van het EU-voorzitterschapstrio uit Spanje, België en Hongarije ook nog een gezamenlijke verklaring die de lidstaten en de Europese Raad oproept om in nauwe samenwerking met de Commissie het terugdringen van de kinderarmoede en de bevordering van het kindermwzijn een centrale rol te laten spelen in de inspanningen tot armoedevermindering in het kader van Europa 2020 (zie bijlage 1).

De conferentie had een sterk participatieve inslag. Zij werd georganiseerd volgens een concept van actieve betrokkenheid dat bekend staat als “Town Hall”. De deelnemers werden verdeeld in groepjes van tien personen rond tafels onder leiding van een professionele moderator en elke deelnemer werd aangemoedigd om deel te nemen aan de discussie. De bevindingen van de verschillende tafels werden dan doorgegeven aan een centrale groep van deskundigen die de aangehaalde punten groepeerde en rangschikte onder een aantal rubrieken. Op die manier vormen de bevindingen van de conferentie de afspiegeling van een echt gezamenlijk werkproces.

De discussies aan de tafels waren opgebouwd rond drie hoofdthema's: toegang tot voldoende middelen, toegang tot diensten en kansen en participatie van kinderen. De basis voor de discussies over elk van deze onderwerpen was een achtergrondnota, *Oproep tot een EU-aanbeveling inzake kinderarmoede en kindermwzijn*, dat speciaal voor de conferentie was voorbereid.³ Voor elk thema stelde de achtergrondnota een aantal specifieke aanbevelingen voor. Elke tafel werd gevraagd om na te gaan of die aanbevelingen geschikt waren om kindermwmoede aan te pakken en indien niet, welke andere belangrijke aanbevelingen zij zouden voorstellen. Vervolgens werd hen gevraagd welke politieke belemmeringen volgens hen de goedkeuring van de aanbevelingen en een gecoördineerde aanpak met andere sectoren in de weg zouden kunnen staan. En ten slotte moesten zij ook aangeven hoe die belemmeringen volgens hen kunnen worden overwonnen.

Dit verslag is opgebouwd volgens de structuur van de conferentie. Het brengt de vele bijdragen uit de discussies aan de tafels bijeen tot een algemene samenvatting van de belangrijkste bevindingen van de conferentie. De aanbevelingen uit de achtergrondnota staan telkens samengevat aan het begin van elk deel.

³ De achtergrondnota werd afgewerkt door het Belgisch voorzitterschap in samenwerking met UNICEF, Eurochild en de Europese Commissie. Zij was gebaseerd op een oorspronkelijk ontwerp van Sandy Ruxton, een onafhankelijk deskundige op het vlak van kinderrechten, en haalde ook veel inspiratie uit een hoofdstuk over kindermwmoede in *A social inclusion roadmap for Europe 2020*, voorbereid op verzoek van het Belgisch EU-Voorzitterschap 2010.

Samenvatting van de belangrijkste bevindingen

Zoals we in de volgende hoofdstukken zullen zien, leverde de conferentie dankzij de uitgebreide deskundigheid en ervaringen van de deelnemers inspiratie voor een rijk geschakeerd aanbod aan opmerkingen en suggesties. De allerbelangrijkste boodschap is evenwel dat de conferentie er op overweldigende wijze mee instemde dat de drie beleidsterreinen die de achtergrondnota over een EU-aanbeveling inzake kinderarmoede en kindermwelzijn had geïdentificeerd, inderdaad de belangrijkste terreinen voor toekomstige actie zijn. De deelnemers betoonden ook hun sterke steun voor de aanbevelingen over elk van de thema's, al brachten zij ook veel belangrijke bijkomende details en specifieke gegevens aan. Slechts voor enkele belangrijke domeinen werden bijkomende aanbevelingen voorgesteld. Daarvan lijken de volgende drie de belangrijkste te zijn:

- i. De ontwikkeling van een uitgebreide benadering van inkomenssteun voor kinderen. Dit moet de kinderbijslag in het ruimere kader plaatsen van een toereikend inkomen voor iedereen op basis van een combinatie van een doeltreffend systeem van sociale uitkeringen voor volwassenen en kinderen, een toereikend inkomen uit werk en een kind- en gezinsvriendelijk belastingsysteem.
- ii. De bevordering van een benadering van actieve inclusie die de toegang tot dienstverlening, voldoende inkomenssteun en toegang tot werkgelegenheid met elkaar combineert, zodat die elkaar wederzijds kunnen versterken.
- iii. De ontwikkeling van een kinderrechtenbenadering die geldt voor alle kinderen, ongeacht hun achtergrond of juridisch statuut, en dus ook voor kinderen zonder papieren.

In verband met de belemmeringen en de mogelijkheden om die op te heffen, viel het op dat een aantal thema's terugkwam voor de verschillende beleidsterreinen. Zeven daarvan zijn bijzonder opvallend:

1. Vaak wordt onvoldoende erkend dat kinderen volwaardige burgers zijn en is er een gebrek aan bewustzijn van de kinderrechten. Het is dan ook nodig om een nieuwe cultuur van kinderrechten aan te moedigen, die gebaseerd is op het respecteren van en het luisteren naar de standpunten van kinderen.
2. In veel landen krijgen kinderen te weinig politieke prioriteit en er is ook te weinig begrip voor de gevolgen van kinderarmoede en sociale uitsluiting. Dit bewijst dat het dringend nodig is om systematisch te wijzen op de voordelen die ontstaan voor kinderen, de ruimere samenleving en de economie wanneer wordt geïnvesteerd in een beleid dat kinderen ondersteunt. Tegelijk moet ook worden gewezen op de kosten die ontstaan wanneer dit niet gebeurt.
3. Er is een gebrek aan inzicht in de minimumnormen die nodig zijn om te voldoen aan de kinderrechten. Dit suggereert dat de EU veel meer zou kunnen doen om samen met de lidstaten (in het kader van *Europa 2020*) afspraken te maken over minimumnormen op belangrijke terreinen als inkomenssteun, toegang tot diensten en participatie van kinderen en om de naleving daarvan op te volgen.
4. Er is een vrij beperkte kennis van de uitgebreide schat aan goede praktijkvoorbeelden die beschikbaar zijn voor de meeste beleidsterreinen. Dit onderstreept de nood aan een veel uitgebreider en meer systematisch proces van wederzijds leren in de hele EU en een veel doeltreffender integratie van de lessen uit die goede praktijken in de opleiding van de mensen die met kinderen werken.
5. Een gebrek aan middelen vormt een belangrijke belemmering om vooruitgang te boeken. Dit wijst erop dat de lidstaten moeten worden overtuigd van de voordelen van meer investeringen in diensten voor kinderen en de EU moet de regelgeving voor de Structuurfondsen wijzigen, zodat die meer kunnen bijdragen tot initiatieven om het welzijn van kinderen te bevorderen.

6. Het ontbreekt te vaak aan goede gegevens, regelmatige controle en open verslaggeving over kinderarmoede en kindermwelzijn. Dit bewijst dat er nood is aan een betere inzameling van gegevens, aan betere indicatoren, monitoring, evaluatie en verslaggeving voor alle beleidsterreinen die van belang zijn voor kinderen, om ervoor te zorgen dat het beleid meer tot stand komt op basis van gegevens, met meer aandacht voor aansprakelijkheid en transparantie en dat er meer wordt geleerd van wat goed werkt.
7. Het gebrek aan coördinatie tussen de verschillende beleidsterreinen, de gefragmenteerde dienstverlening en de vaak slechte communicatie en samenwerking tussen de verschillende bestuursniveaus zijn voortdurende uitdagingen. Daardoor moet elke lidstaat een gecoördineerde en geïntegreerde benadering ontwikkelen om op een holistische wijze te voldoen aan de behoeften van kinderen, om alle betrokkenen en ook de kinderen zelf bij dit proces te betrekken en de aandacht voor kinderarmoede en kindermwelzijn transversaal op te nemen in alle relevante beleidsterreinen.

De rest van dit verslag gaat veel gedetailleerder in op de punten die hier staan samengevat. Het verslag geeft ook de ruime keuze aan suggesties weer die zijn geformuleerd om de aanbevelingen uit de informatienota te verdiepen en te versterken. Bijlage 3 bevat een herziene versie van de aanbevelingen, rekening houdend met de vele suggesties die tijdens de conferentie zijn gegeven.



1. Access to adequate resources

1.1 Income and Benefits

Recommendations for discussion

- › *Countries which spend most on social benefits (excluding pensions) tend to have lowest child poverty levels. Government should improve child benefits as an expression of intergenerational solidarity, recognition of the inherent value of childhood and an investment in Europe's future.*
- › *Universal child benefits are the most effective way of providing income support to families with children. They should be received automatically and coupled with targeted benefits for those most in need.*
- › *Child sensitive income support also includes benefits targeted directly at children such as government provided child-trust funds, free books and education materials, free school meals, free access to leisure and cultural activities etc.*

1.1.1 *Additions and changes to recommendations*

Need for a broader approach based on adequacy

While there was support for the proposed recommendations on child income support there was a widespread feeling that they do not go far enough and are too narrowly focused on child benefit. An adequate child benefit is very important but it is only one of the measures that is necessary to ensure that all children grow up with access to adequate resources. Child income support should not be treated in isolation from other income distribution measures. Recommendations on income and benefits should be set within the framework of guaranteeing an overall adequate minimum income for all children. This means taking into account the income of the whole household, parents as well as children. The recommendations should stress that the social transfer system as a whole (social protection plus child payments) should be adequate.

The importance of resources other than transfers should also be highlighted. Parents' income from work is particularly important for preventing child poverty but only if wages are adequate. In this context several participants highlighted the problem of in-work poverty. Thus a recommendation on adequate minimum wage legislation and ensuring "decent" work needs to be added. In addition the importance of tax relief for low income families with children was stressed. It was suggested that this broader approach to ensuring an adequate income for children could be enhanced by setting it within the context of active inclusion as this recognizes the need to look at employment, income support and services in an integrated way.

A recurring emphasis when discussing the different types of income support was the importance of adequacy. It is not enough just to have income transfers in favour of children. What is important is to ensure that these transfers when combined with other measures (income from work, tax relief, free services and supports in kind) are sufficient to prevent children growing up in poverty. Thus all recommendations in relation to income should include the word "adequacy". To make this a reality income support policies for families and children need to be based on a clear understanding of the costs of a child including costs such as housing, heating and other utilities. Thus the recommendations could usefully include a proposal that Member States and the Commission should agree EU standards or at least establish an agreed methodology (for instance the use of budget standards methodologies) for determining the costs of a child and for defining adequate resources.

Elaborate on universal versus targeted

There was a fairly extensive discussion of the respective merits of universal and targeted approaches to providing benefits. On balance most participants favoured the approach proposed of combining an overall universal benefit with more targeted benefits for vulnerable children facing particular difficulties. A number of suggestions were put forward for elaborating on the proposed recommendations to reflect the complexity of this issue. For instance, in relation to universal benefits it was suggested that it is necessary to acknowledge that the stage of economic development of a country has to be taken into account in deciding on the extent and generosity of such benefits. In weaker economies and at times of economic crisis it may be necessary to put more emphasis on targeted benefits so that scarce resources are not going disproportionately to people who need them less. It also needs to be stressed that universal benefits must be truly universal and reach all children, especially those who are in very vulnerable situations such as undocumented children or Roma and other traveling children. In relation to targeted benefits stress that they must be delivered in ways that avoid stigmatization, differentiate between children's needs and facilitate easy take-up.

Stress importance of non financial measures

The emphasis in the third recommendation on measures that go beyond income support (e.g. free books and education materials, free school meals, extra curriculum activities, free access to leisure and cultural activities) was welcomed. However, this needs to be reworded so it is a recommendation not just a statement. Some additional detail was also proposed. For instance it could be useful to highlight the value of subsidizing essential necessities such as housing, heating and other utilities and transport and to stress the value of providing after-school care for children.

Limit conditionality

Member States should be urged to use great care when increasing conditionality and using sanctions in their benefit systems so as to avoid penalizing children and leaving them without the necessary resources. A few delegates suggested that conditionality could sometimes be used in a positive way. For instance, part of the resources being paid to a family could be made conditional on children attending school and thus act as an incentive for parents to ensure children's attendance. There were also some suggestions that it is important to encourage parents to take responsibility and to ensure that as far as possible benefits intended for children are paid to the primary carer and are used in ways that benefit children.

Improve policy coordination

The importance of effective coordination between the different levels of government (national, regional and local) and between different service providers in the delivery of measures to ensure adequate resources for children is essential. In particular it is important that in countries with devolved administrations there is effective sharing of responsibility between national, regional and local levels to ensure adequate resources for all children. This must take into account the different levels of needs in different areas, including between urban and rural areas. Allocation of resources must recognize this as expecting municipalities to deliver policies without ensuring that they have adequate resources to do so undermines effective policy delivery and creates inequalities between different areas of a country.

Emphasise monitoring and evaluation

There is a need to introduce a recommendation on the importance of putting in place effective mechanisms for monitoring the impact of measures to ensure that all children have access to adequate resources. This should be linked to the importance of evidence based policy making.

1.1.2 Political obstacles to adoption and implementation of recommendations

Lack of political and public awareness and commitment

The main barrier to the adoption of the recommendations identified by participants was the lack of both public and political awareness about child poverty. This is reinforced by limited media coverage, by little awareness of children's rights, by short-term thinking and lack of a long-term vision and by preoccupation with short-term electoral gains (young people are not voters). In many countries it is not part of the political culture to focus on children or to see a child as a whole person.

Lack of understanding that pro-child policies are an investment

In many countries a dominant liberal ideology means that social well-being is seen mainly as condition of economic growth and there is little understanding that investing in the social well-being of children is a condition of sustainable economic growth. There is not enough awareness of the positive effective of income support measures for the development of all children and an excessive fear of creating dependency and poverty traps. Also, the increasing tendency to privatize services can undermine services for children. This liberalization tendency is also reinforced at European level by encouraging deregulation of employment without balancing this by developing a framework of standards to ensure that everyone has a living wage. Also the EU lacks sufficient competency to promote the importance of social issues.

Limited resources

The constraints on national (and regional/local) budgets leads to strong competition for public funds and policies favouring families and children are often seen as a low priority. The poorer Member States lack the resources to develop extensive universal measures for children. Financial constraints have been exacerbated by the financial crisis and the impact of the EU stability pact.

Discrimination

Discrimination and prejudice against some groups, particularly the Roma and other ethnic minorities, migrants (especially the undocumented and those without legal status) and the homeless can be a barrier to developing sufficiently inclusive measures for children.

Inadequate coordination and delivery mechanisms

Complex and inefficient bureaucracies and lack of coordination between different parts of administrative systems can undermine the timely and coordinated delivery of measures. In many cases the capacity to identify and reach out to those children and families most at risk is restricted. There is often a lack of a holistic approach to children's needs and a fragmented administrative system limits the ability policies in an integrated way. There is limited ability to support families to ensure that resources allocated for children are used in the intended ways. There is also a fear that bureaucratic systems may lack the sensitivity to develop non stigmatizing ways of delivering targeted benefits. An additional barrier can be the lack of coordination and sharing of responsibility between different levels of government (i.e. national, regional and local). Delivery of benefits can also be limited by poor local infrastructure such as lack of banks (especially in rural areas).

1.1.3 Overcoming obstacles

Use evidence to raise awareness and commitment

To overcome the lack of public and political awareness and commitment it is necessary to use the evidence which exists to demonstrate that the recommendations work and make sense. Develop arguments showing the real economic returns from “investing” in children’s well-being and calculate and publicise the social and economic costs of not doing so. Work with the media to highlight findings and to develop a less negative public opinion.

Use indicators, targets and monitoring to increase transparency and political commitment and accountability

Use child-focused indicators in statistics, develop clear objectives and targets and then monitor and report on the impact and outcomes of measures so as to create greater transparency and increase the pressure on politicians to deliver on policies. Make sure that the recommendations are measurable. The EU’s renewed Social OMC can provide the context for developing such an approach.

Strengthen the EU level

Use the new context of the *Europe2020* agenda and the agreement of a high-level poverty target to build a stronger EU competence on social issues. In doing so work to develop EU minimum standards in social areas such as minimum wage, minimum income and social services. In the immediate future make greater use of EU Structural Funds to support measures in weaker Member States. Also when providing EU financial support to some Member States to overcome the crisis attach conditions on developing (not cutting) social protection systems. In the longer term it was suggested that to develop a really social Europe it will be necessary to develop an EU-tax system to ensure more effective redistribution.

Foster mainstreaming, multidimensional and participatory approaches

There is a need to create mechanisms within administrations that will mainstream children’s issues across different policy area and will ensure coordination between policy areas. Appointing Ministers for Children and Children’s ombudspersons can assist in ensuring this. Also, creating mechanisms for involving and coordinating all stakeholders and for involving children in policy development and delivery can contribute to this. At EU level there could be much stronger coordination between directorates (e.g. employment, health, justice, education and culture, energy and environment) on children’s issues, particularly in the framework of the EU’s strategy on children’s rights.

Create local coordinating arrangements to improve delivery

Use EU social process to encourage mutual learning between Member States on how to develop more effective delivery mechanisms. Use good examples in some countries of effective coordinated delivery of measures to reach out to vulnerable children and families. Make sure that children and people living in poverty are involved in the development of these services. Also make greater use of schools as key points for reaching children and meeting their needs in a holistic manner.

1.2 Reconciliation of Work and Family Life

Recommendations for discussion

- › *Quality work for parents is crucial. Flexible working arrangements should be provided to enable parents to balance work and family commitments. Work arrangements should accommodate increasingly diverse household compositions.*
- › *Leave arrangements for parents should be paid, universally accessible and offer flexibility to allow parents to respond best to their children's needs over the course of their childhood. Leave arrangements should respect and support increasingly diverse household compositions.*
- › *Parents should have access to affordable, accessible and high quality services to support them and their children. Services should accommodate the increasingly diverse work patterns of parents.*

1.2.1 Additions and changes to proposed recommendations

There was a broad agreement with the general thrust of the recommendations. However, they tend to be rather general and in particular not sufficiently focused on children and families experiencing poverty. Also some important elements were missing. Thus a number of suggestions were made for developing the recommendations further.

Emphasise the needs of children

The most frequently made suggestion was to emphasise more clearly that childcare provision should be focused on the needs of children and that it should not be overly driven by a labour market perspective or the needs of parents. Stress clearly the quality of childcare and the importance it plays in stimulating child development. Children should have access to such services whether or not their parents are in work.

Enable parents to access employment

Reconciling work and family life is important but the first step must be to enable parents to access jobs and these need to generate an income high enough to lift families out of poverty. This can often be more difficult for women from disadvantaged backgrounds and other groups such as migrants. Thus add an additional recommendation on supporting parents, especially those living in poverty, to access jobs. It is also important to stress the importance of supporting parents going back to work after a long period of parental leave and helping them to reintegrate into work.

Stress the need for a multidimensional approach

The recommendations need to take more into account all the other stakeholders who contribute to child care (e.g. education providers, local community initiatives, grand parents etc.) and to stress the need for a multidimensional and integrated approach involving all the services which support children and their families.

Promote gender equality

Leave arrangements should take into account gender issues. Thus the recommendations should stress the importance of encouraging fathers to take parental leave and of fostering a fairer sharing of caring and work roles between men and women.

1.2.2 Political obstacles to adoption and implementation of recommendations

Persistent gender inequalities

Many employers still tend to see that it is men's role to work and women's to provide care at home and this leads to unequal gender treatment. There is not enough awareness of the need to promote gender equality and to do more to encourage fathers to play a more active role in the home and in sharing caring responsibilities.

Businesses not engaged

There is insufficient involvement and engagement of the private sector in the development of policies to promote reconciliation of work and family life. Too many still see this as a cost without recognizing the long term gains.

Lack of quality services and limited coordination and monitoring

The lack of sufficient children's services is a block to implementing effective policies in some countries, particularly child care services. This can be compounded by a lack of sufficiently trained personnel. A further problem can be the limited coordination between different services and levels of government. Limited monitoring of services and of outcomes also undermines effective provision in this area.

Lack of political commitment and resources

Politicians often fail to understand the needs of children and parents and thus to actively promote reconciliation of work and family life. This can be reinforced by an overemphasis on individual responsibility and a lack of focus on supporting social solidarity. As a result they often fail to invest sufficient resources in the services that are necessary to make reconciliation possible, particularly for those earning low incomes.

Lack of skills and low paid jobs

Many of those parents who do not have a job lack the skills and training to get a well-paid job and there is often not enough emphasis on raising their skill levels. Working part-time in a low paid job is often not sufficient to ensure an adequate income so for many flexible working is not a realistic option.

1.2.3 Overcoming obstacles

Promote greater awareness among and involvement of businesses

There is a need for systematic campaigns to raise awareness amongst businesses of the importance of promoting the reconciliation of work and family life. In particular there is a need to focus more on smaller businesses and not just on the large employers. Awareness raising campaigns and indeed the development of policies in this area needs to be developed in conjunction with employers and to involve other stakeholders. The views of children and parents need to be part of this.

Monitor outcomes and exchange best practices

Increased monitoring of outcomes and impacts can help to valorize good practice. This can then be used to promote mutual learning and exchange between Member States. Information about existing good practices in some countries should be disseminated widely and can be used to develop guidelines for policy development.

Put families with children at heart of policy making

If Member States put the needs of children and their families at the heart of policy making then the needs of children will be the main concern not just the needs of employees and this will help to encourage greater investment in services for children and families.



2. Access to services and opportunities

The importance of access to services and opportunities was strongly endorsed by participants. While for practical purposes the discussion was sub-divided into a number of separate policy areas a recurring theme was that children's needs must be met in a holistic manner. Thus it is vital to stress that services must be provided in a multi-dimensional and integrated manner and that effective coordination between service providers for children is essential.

2.1 Early childhood

Recommendations for discussion

- › *Early childhood should be recognized as a crucial stage in children's education, development and social integration, requiring public investment in services that are accessible to all, regardless of parent's labour market situation.*
- › *Clear quality criteria should be set for early childhood services including professional qualifications, recognition, training, staff/child ratio, educational philosophy and values.*

2.1.1 Additions and changes to proposed recommendations

Elaborate and reinforce the recommendations

The emphasis on early childhood was strongly endorsed. However, there is a need to make the recommendations stronger and more elaborated and specific. In particular:

- stress that early childhood is not "a" but "the" crucial stage in children's development and education;
- emphasise that childcare is about the stimulation of children and is much more than daycare;
- reinforce the critical role of childcare in tackling child poverty and breaking the cycle of poverty;
- stress that early childhood covers 0 to school age;

- emphasise that all children should have access to early childhood services as a right and on an equal basis and that such services should take into account diversity and different needs and be delivered in ways that avoid stigmatization;
- highlight that early childhood service can play an important role in integrating minorities.

Develop minimum standards for quality criteria

In the second recommendation stress not only that clear quality criteria should be set but also that minimum standards should be established in accordance with the developmental needs of children and that these should be regularly monitored.

Improve coordination, integration and outreach of services and involve all stakeholders

Add to the recommendations a clear requirement that it is essential to provide integrated early childhood services and that these must develop specific strategies to include socially excluded families. Stress that all stakeholders (business as well as the public sector and civil society) have a responsibility for the development and delivery of such services. Also emphasise that the employment of more people from minorities and different ethnic backgrounds can be important in increasing access for some excluded groups.

Encourage family support services and the involvement of parents

Emphasise the importance of providing accessible family support services which start during pregnancy. This is particularly important for parents and children experiencing poverty and social exclusion, not because poor people are poor parents (they are not) but because they face extra pressures such as living on a low income, poor housing and environmental conditions and poor access to services. Accessible family support services can support them in overcoming these problems. Also it is important that parents are involved in the development of early childhood services and family support services can support them in this.

2.1.2 Political obstacles to adoption and implementation of recommendations

Lack of understanding and lack of political will

Too often society as a whole and policy makers in particular do not understand and value the crucially important role that early childhood services play in child development. Thus they do not understand the positive long-term benefits that accrue from investing in such services both for children and for the labour market. Alternatively they view child care just as a way of “parking” children and enabling women to work (and so earn increased income for their families) without realizing that the quality of services is vital to a child’s development. The quality of childhood services can also be adversely affected when childcare workers are not valued and have a low status.

Cultural barriers

In some more traditional cultures there is a view that bringing up children is the largely the responsibility of parents. There is insufficient understanding that parents’ role and children’s development can be enhanced with the support of appropriate services and opportunities. This can also lead to tensions between policies that promote increased female participation in the labour force and policies encouraging women to stay at home to look after children.

Lack of policy coherence and coordination

Too often there is a lack of a long term vision and investment and a rather fragmented approach to the development of early childhood services. This results in the lack of a coordinated and holistic approach. Also in some countries (especially the New Member States) a centralized and top down tradition of service provision can mean that local partners and parents are not sufficiently involved

Lack of monitoring

Insufficient data and monitoring can mean that there is insufficient information on problems of access to or quality of early childhood services.

Costs can hinder access and increase inequalities

High costs can mean that poor families can not afford to access child care services or, if systems are too market driven, inequalities in the quality of provision can develop between private and state-based services.

2.1.3 Overcoming obstacles

Foster greater clarity about definitions and targets

There is a need to foster greater clarity about what constitutes quality early childhood services and to set and monitor clear targets for their provision. The Barcelona child care targets can be helpful in this regard. At EU level the *Europe 2020* process can provide a framework within which to set and monitor targets and progress by Member States.

Promote greater awareness

Much greater use could be made of existing evidence to demonstrate the benefits of early childhood services and to highlight the costs of not investing in early childhood. This evidence could promote greater public, media and, ultimately, political awareness and debate about the importance of early childhood services both for the development of children and for the wider society and economy. Stress that such investment is a win-win situation.

Focus on improving quality

There are a number of ways in which the quality of services could be improved. These include:

- developing clear national and local strategies with concrete targets and regularly monitoring and reporting on progress;
- involving children, parents and different stakeholders in the development and delivery of services and especially making sure that the views of those living in poverty are taken into account;
- emphasising that services should be based on a children's rights approach and thus that the needs of the child come before issues of employment and the labour market;
- building on existing good practice to encourage mutual learning and also using this to develop quality criteria;
- enhancing the training and support of workers in particular in understanding the realities of experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
- encouraging innovation and experimentation;
- emphasising the importance of small-scale and bottom-up initiatives which enhance the knowledge, skills and self-confidence of parents.

2.2 Education

Recommendations for discussion

- › *Every child (including Roma children and other children at risk) should have access to quality inclusive education for all children that promotes child well-being and the emotional, social and physical development of the child in addition to academic achievement.*
- › *The role of education in preventing and breaking the poverty cycle should be strengthened by removing all financial barriers to education, ensuring equal opportunities, and by providing necessary additional support to compensate for any disadvantage in the home and community that might make it difficult for children to fully learn and develop.*
- › *Efforts should be strengthened to ensure children complete compulsory education and to prevent early school leaving by encouraging parental support for school completion, and by providing appropriate pathways for continued education and/or vocational skills, reflecting the diversity of children's learning patterns and aspirations.*

2.2.1 Additions and changes to proposed recommendations

Move beyond access

The direction of the recommendations was endorsed. However, it was stressed that there is a need to go beyond creating access to education to ensuring that all children are required to attend school and have real opportunities to learn. There should be more elaboration on ways of overcoming barriers which stop children experiencing poverty attending school and learning. Suggestions included:

- Education should be made more interesting and relevant to children from disadvantaged backgrounds so that it becomes more attractive and they can see why they are learning.
- There should be more outreach to children and parents and real efforts to encourage parents to link with schools and to value and participate in their children's learning. Thus the third recommendation should go beyond "encouraging parental support" to "including parents in school education".
- More focus should be put on monitoring outcomes so as to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve equal outcomes.
- Schools must become truly inclusive and develop a clear vision on how to reach out to and include groups such as Roma children and children with special needs.

Extend beyond education beyond school to link to training and businesses

In the context of addressing early school leaving there is a need to add a reference to the importance of education extending to cover training and work assignments and to the need to develop the entrepreneurial skills of children. Greater support for education from the business sector could help in this regard.

2.2.2 Political obstacles to adoption and implementation of recommendations

Lack of vision, strategies coordination and methodologies

At a policy level there is often a lack of long-term vision and strategy for promoting the inclusion of children experiencing social exclusion. As a result effective and comprehensive strategies are missing and there is often a lack of coordination between policies and between central policy and local provision. This also means that there is no systematic transfer of expertise and successful initiatives at local level are often not disseminated and built on throughout the system.

Too dominant middle class perspective

Education is often too dominated by middle class perspectives and reflects and reinforces wider inequalities in society. Teachers often lack understanding of or training in the diverse situations experienced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Education policy does not focus sufficiently on developing life skills and skills that seem relevant to the experience of children from disadvantaged situations or to getting a job.

Lack of resources

Limited national resources can be a real barrier to developing more inclusive schools and the lack of availability of EU Structural Funds to support long-term funding of education compounds this further. Additional problems can be created with the decentralization of responsibility to the local level when this is not adequately supported with resources. This can be especially evident in rural schools. Lack of resources can mean that, while in theory there are no financial barriers to education, in practice parents are expected to contribute to additional costs for various activities. This can be a real barrier to the inclusion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Lack of resources can often lead to larger schools and larger classes. This increases the difficulty that parents can have in communicating with the school as bigger schools become increasingly complex and bureaucratic.

2.2.3 Overcoming obstacles

Make the training of teachers more relevant and develop the capacity of schools to respond

Develop the skills of teachers to include and reach out to children from disadvantaged backgrounds by ensuring that their training involves anti-racism and inter-cultural training. Also develop in-service training on poverty and social exclusion issues so that they can better understand the lifestyle and background of children they are teaching. At the same time schools need to develop their capacity to respond to the needs of these children in flexible and imaginative ways, to better understand the lifestyles of different children (e.g. Roma children), to adopt flexible approaches adapted to particular needs and to promote intercultural dialogue and celebrate the richness and variety that diversity brings. Such dialogue can help better off parents to understand the gains from a greater social mix. Resourcing schools in disadvantaged areas to employ specialist workers such as social workers and child psychologists can help them be more responsive to children's needs.

Strengthen school-community-parent links

Focussing on developing relationships between schools, parents and the local community can be key in increasing parental involvement and in making schools more attractive to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In this regard resourcing schools to develop such links and to develop outreach programmes through employing school mediators or outreach workers is important. Schools can also foster links with other organisations in the community such as youth clubs to ensure that the broader needs of children and different minorities are being met and also to develop informal education opportunities.

Develop systematic policies and targets to promote inclusion and support this with more resources

At a policy level there could be a greater focus on developing a shared vision of inclusive education and a consistent approach to promoting equal opportunities and interculturalism as well increasing support for training on poverty and social exclusion issues. This could be reinforced by identifying specific barriers facing specific target groups (e.g. Roma children, Traveller children, migrant children, children with a disability) and then developing more specific actions to promote their inclusion. Anti-discrimination measures and standards in schools could be promoted by the EU to ensure the integration of groups like Roma children. The EU could also help to promote inclusion by setting standards or norms in areas such as the number of children in a class. Perhaps the EU could use its Structural Funds to provide more assistance to educational initiatives which promote greater inclusion as well as encouraging Member States to invest more in developing inclusive education systems.

Develop more relevant educational content

More could be done to adapt ways of teaching and the content to make it more relevant. This could include focussing not only intellectual development but also on broader development issues (such as emotional and social development, discussions on issues like bullying, intercultural education) and the development of practical skills. Educational materials should better reflect these issues. Community education on issues such as nutrition, sexual education, drugs, etc. should complement formal academic education.

Promote mutual learning and innovation

The EU could play a lead role in documenting and promoting mutual learning on best practices in including children at risk. It could combine high level recommendations on what Member States need to do to ensure greater inclusion with a lot of examples of good practice to inspire different countries to build a clearer vision of inclusive education. In relation to school drop outs more extensive monitoring and analysis of drop-out rates and more research into the reasons could lead to increased understanding and more focussed efforts to reduce drop out rates amongst different target groups.⁴

⁴ While not specifically referred to in the discussions it is worth noting that the new *Europe 2020* target on reducing school drop out rates could be important in inspiring progress in this area.

2.3 Health Care

Recommendations for discussion

- › *Children should be specifically targeted within broader efforts to reduce health inequalities and to achieve universal access to health care for poor and socially excluded groups, including by ensuring universal coverage of health insurance.*
- › *Recognising that childhood is a crucial period for children's physical, mental and emotional development, all children should be assured access to health promotion and prevention programmes.*
- › *Recognising the higher prevalence of mental health problems among socially deprived groups and the growing number of children who suffer from mental health problems, mental health services should be expanded and made available to more children requiring support.*

2.3.1 Additions and changes to proposed recommendations

Reinforce universal access to health care by tackling inequalities

The emphasis in the first recommendation on ensuring universal health care was strongly welcomed. It should emphasise access for all children living in a country regardless of nationality. In this context the need to prioritise tackling inequality in access to health services for different groups was reinforced and elaborated to also emphasise the need to ensure equal treatment and to ensure affordable sustainable and quality services regardless of geographical location.⁵

Elaborate on specific groups

The second recommendation on health promotion and prevention should emphasise that, while such programmes should be available to all children and their families whatever their social situation, there is a need to particularly target and give special attention to socially excluded children such as undocumented children, some ethnic minority children such as Roma children, children living in jobless households, children affected by addiction, homeless children, children with disabilities, children with mental health problems, children with HIV and also pregnant women. It is also important to emphasise and promote the role of parents in health prevention.

Emphasise training of health providers

There is a need to stress that the training of health care providers should better take into account the contextual factors which affect children from disadvantaged backgrounds, should stress more the importance of early discovery and prevention of diseases and should stress the importance of good communication with families.

⁵ It was suggested that a specific reference to the conclusions of the EPSCO Council of 8th June 2010 should be inserted as the Council adopted conclusions on "Equity and Health in All Policies: Solidarity in Health" (9947/10), setting out a framework for action by the Commission and the Member States.

Elaborate on mental health services

The importance of developing mental health services (third recommendation) was endorsed and some further elaboration was suggested. This included making reference to suicide risks among children and emphasizing that more resources will be needed if services are to be expanded and ongoing support is to be given to all children.

2.3.2 Political obstacles to adoption and implementation of recommendations

Difficult to control costs

Controlling costs of medicines and services is a problem and liberal medical systems can be very expensive. Also the costs of health prevention such as buying healthy food can mean that poor people cannot afford to do so.

Inadequate governance

Inadequate governance arrangements can limit efforts to improve health care. For instance:

- lack of long-term planning by governments;
- lack of coordination and harmonization of services between countries;
- complexity and bureaucracy of health care systems;
- poor communication to poor people on what is available.

Access difficulties

Accessing health services can often be particularly difficult for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. For instance there can be a lack of mobile units providing flexible consultation for children. Access for undocumented children can be limited only to urgent health care needs. Language barriers can limit access for some ethnic minorities. Lack of family and child friendly hospital environments can discourage access.

2.3.3 Overcoming obstacles

Improve governance

Much could be done to improve the governance of health services for children. Suggestions included:

- ensuring better cooperation and coordination between Member States;
- improving horizontal policy coordination of services for children and allocating responsibility to a specific department to ensure such coordination;
- enhancing the integration of services on the ground to help children with multidimensional problems;
- simplifying procedures and increasing transparency of services.

Make universal access a reality

Several suggestions were made as to how universal access to health care for children from disadvantaged backgrounds could be made a reality. These included: ensuring free access to services for all children; ensuring that there is no discrimination against minorities, especially undocumented children; developing mobile units which would reach children who are afraid to go to hospitals; providing incentives (such as additional benefits) to access prevention programmes and to attend for vaccinations; employing mediators to provide a bridge between health service provider and disadvantaged groups and to help to overcome cultural and language barriers; developing more child and family friendly hospitals (including through better training of professionals); involving local actors (e.g. neighbours, family, teachers etc.) more in the early identification of problems and in alerting health care providers.

Reduce costs

A number of ways in which costs could be reduced were highlighted such as: developing research on cost effectiveness of approaches; improving national tender process; and providing medicines in appropriate amounts.

Increase regulation

Health prevention programmes could be reinforced by more emphasis on regulating unhealthy goods. For instance stopping publicity for unhealthy food or putting higher taxes on unhealthy products could encourage people to adopt more healthy options.

2.4 Housing and Environment

Recommendations for discussion

- › *Consideration of children's best interest should be integrated into city and territorial planning. Particular attention should be given to healthy and safe environments for children in the home and in their neighbourhood that respect children's right to play and study.*
- › *Ensure affordable and quality housing for families with children which provide long-term solutions and avoid unnecessary moves and school changes.*

2.4.1 Additions and changes to proposed recommendations

The importance of housing and environment for the well-being of children was strongly endorsed but there was a strong feeling that the recommendations needed to be more specific and detailed.

Specify different needs

Emphasise that children's needs vary depending on age and family background and that they are very diverse over the life of a child. Highlight that provision needs to take account of different family situations including the effects of family breakdown. The specific needs of children with disabilities and the additional costs that this causes should be specified. In territorial planning taking account of mobility is very important as access to services and opportunities is critical for children's autonomy. Particular difficulties can face children in areas of multiple disadvantage and in rural areas.

Emphasise the importance of social mix

While it can be difficult to achieve, the importance of avoiding ghettoisation of children experiencing poverty and social exclusion and promoting a social mix in housing is critical and needs to be highlighted. Stress that this is wider than just a housing and environment issue as it also affects social inclusion in other areas such as education.

Promote community involvement in decision making

Add to the first recommendation the importance of involving local communities including children themselves in planning decisions and in the development of safe environments.

Emphasise the importance of sustainable planning and housing

The importance of ensuring that planning and housing policies focus on sustainable development should be emphasized. In this regard investing in reducing energy consumption and costs through conservation measures is especially important for poorer families as it will also help to reduce fuel poverty providing it also combined with ensuring adequate income and with efforts to control costs.

2.4.2 Political obstacles to adoption and implementation of recommendations

Lack of political will

The lack of political and societal willingness to focus on children and families in housing policies is a major barrier to making progress. Also, housing policy often tends to focus too much on encouraging the private sector and does not do enough to regulate rented housing or to develop social housing, both of which are often more important for children in poor families. Also there is no political interest in addressing the housing needs of undocumented families.

Lack of coordination

Lack of coordination between policies and services (e.g. housing, transport, social services, police) means that children's needs are not looked at in a holistic manner. This also limits the ability to develop prevention systems to avoid children and their families losing housing in crisis situations.

Market failure

Too much dependence is placed on the market to find solutions but it is often not efficient in this regard as there is often too much speculation and little interest in providing cheaper housing. As a result good quality affordable private housing is just not available for poor families.

Lack of alternatives to institutions

There are not sufficient healthy alternatives to institutional care for children who are taken out of families in crisis situation.

2.4.3 Overcoming obstacles

Set minimum standards

It would be helpful if minimum EU standards were established for housing for children, for instance minimum standards could be used to combat families with children being evicted and to prevent children being put into emergency shelters on a long-term basis. This approach should be based on the primacy of children's rights. For instance, in relation to undocumented children children's right to housing should prevail over migration laws.

Increase state intervention and promote stakeholder involvement

Member States should, at the appropriate level of government, develop a long-term vision and strategy for housing families and children with a particular emphasis on those experiencing social exclusion. This should be developed by bringing together all relevant stakeholders (e.g. national, regional and local authorities, private sector, social housing organizations and children and families experiencing poverty). A key part of strategies should be to develop a strong social housing sector and to ensure social mix. Ensuring adequate standards, for instance in relation to insulation, will be important. Also, through encouraging increased participation more innovative solutions can be developed that are adapted to the particular needs of different disadvantaged groups.

2.5 Child Protection and Social Services

Recommendations for discussion

- › *Child protection and social services should be strengthened to provide early intervention and prevention services that support and empower families most at-risk and avoid escalation of problems that may push children further into poverty and risky situations.*
- › *Ensure that children are not removed from their families due to families' lack of resources to care for children. Instead families must be supported to care for their children themselves, provided this is in the best interest of the child and efforts should be made to facilitate the de-institutionalisation of children.*
- › *Promote the inclusion in society of all children who are not living in families (street children, those living in institutional care, unaccompanied minors, those living in temporary accommodation) by ensuring they are given appropriate quality support and care and have access to mainstream services including education, health, etc.*

2.5.1 Additions and changes to proposed recommendations

The importance of developing effective child protection and social services was strongly endorsed. However quite a lot of suggestions were made to further develop the recommendations.

Be more specific about groups needing support

Specific groups needing support should be highlighted more clearly such as children with disabilities in institutions, children left behind when parents migrate for economic reasons or who are left behind when parents return to their home country, abandoned children from migrants ("migration orphans"), children leaving institutions, undocumented and/or unaccompanied migrant children, children with disabilities, girls facing specific problems such as early/forced marriage or pregnancies and children whose parents have mental health problems.

Emphasise the importance of child protection services and the need for quality services

Child protection services should be stressed as the most important part of social services for children. Thus it should be stressed that these services need to be of a high quality and have the ability and resources to ensure early intervention when children are facing problems. The development of quality standards for child protection services will be important.

Improve governance

The need to improve the governance of child protection and social services should be stressed. In particular stress the importance of:

- improving coordination and cooperation between different levels of government, between different sectors and services and between government and NGO services;
- developing flexible management of social services while ensuring real accountability;
- ensuring links with other services especially income support services;
- increasing the emphasis on prevention and early intervention and not just protection;
- fostering links between services and families.

2.5.2 Political obstacles to adoption and implementation of recommendations

Lack of political will and understanding of children's rights

There is a lack of political will to prioritise children's issues in general and child protection issues in particular. This is compounded by a reluctance to extend children's rights to some children (e.g. immigrants and undocumented children) coupled with political and cultural indifference to their situation. Because children's rights are often only conventions and not embedded in national laws they are not taken very seriously. Also, EU competence to promote and enforce children's rights has been limited. In addition there is a lack of understanding that poverty and social exclusion leads to family break down and thus to children needing out of home care and that the cost of this could be prevented by tackling family poverty. Furthermore there is little understanding of the long-term value of investing in children's services and a predominance of short-term thinking.

Resistance to deinstitutionalisation

In relation to the second recommendation there is a problem that people working in institutions are afraid that they will lose their jobs if the goal is to move children out of institutions and to focus on care in the community. They thus lobby against change. In addition there is a lack of belief in the capacities of certain parents and thus policy makers are reluctant to invest in supporting vulnerable families.

Insufficient, badly coordinated, underresourced and poorly monitored services

In some countries child protection services are under resourced and poorly run and those they aim to help have little confidence in them. There is often insufficient monitoring of children's services and a lack of transparency and openness. Services are often poorly administered with little coordination and cooperation between different levels of government, lack of coordination between institutions and insufficient links between social and educational services.

2.5.3 Overcoming obstacles

Raise political priority

Every country should make working with children and young people at risk an absolute priority in all their plans to combat poverty. The EU should develop its social policy competence and take action to support and encourage Member States to develop child care systems based on integrated family and community based support services. In this area the EU should move from a Recommendation to a Directive that is enforceable. The EU should also change the remit of the Structural Funds to include support for child protection and children's services and should support training of practitioners.

Strengthen governance arrangements

Efforts should be made to improve governance of child protection and social services in particular by:

- overcoming fragmentation of services and to improving coordination at policy level and between professionals;
- setting and monitoring quality standards for services, especially for children in alternative care;
- clarifying definitions and improving the collection of comparable data;
- improving transparency, openness and accountability of services including by establishing a children's ombudsperson in every country.

Improve standards of practice

A number of practical suggestions for improving standards of practice were proposed. These included:

- giving a voice to, listening to and involving children and especially those in alternative care;
- involving and listening to parents and to organizations working with vulnerable families and children;
- enhancing the training and sensitization of professionals working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- developing a more holistic approach to identifying and supporting the needs of families and building on families' own resources.

3. Children's Participation

3.1 Children's Right to be Heard

Recommendations for discussion

- › *Governments should adopt necessary laws and policies that recognize the child's right to be heard and participate in all decisions that affect them, and provide specific opportunities for participation in policy making.*
- › *Ensure policies addressed at tackling child poverty and social exclusion reflect the views and suggestions of children themselves, including those most marginalized.*
- › *Ensure all those working with and for children understand the impact of poverty and social exclusion and the need to listen and to take account of the views of children.*

3.1.1 Additions and changes to proposed recommendations

There was strong support for the overall approach but more detail needs to be added to the recommendations and some additional recommendations were suggested. It was also stressed that the participation of children must not only be limited to specific policies to address poverty and social exclusion but must cover all areas that effect their well-being.

Involve children in the whole process and make processes accountable

Involvement of children must cover the whole process from beginning to end. Children must not only be involved in the design and development of policies but that they also must be involved in their monitoring and evaluation. Accountability must also be built in so children should receive feed back on how their views are integrated into policies and decisions.

Specify the path to implement recommendations

In order to make the recommendations concrete a clear path spelling out what means are necessary to implement them should be added. The first recommendation should spell out not only that governments should adopt the necessary laws but that they should ensure that they are implemented by providing the necessary resources. Politicians must invest financial and human resources in developing representative structures for children especially at local government level. They must also ensure that sufficient time is allowed to enable real participation. Each Member State should put in place the necessary infrastructural support to champion the voice of children in policy making such as ombudspersons for children.

Emphasise reaching out to and listening to the voices of the most marginalised children

Too often structures for involving children are dominated by middle-class children. The recommendations need to spell out more specifically the importance of ensuring that children living in poverty and particularly the most marginalised (such as children in institutions, refugee and migrant children, children with a disability) are listened to. Stress that proactive efforts should be made to reach out to and involve these children on an ongoing basis.

Develop methodologies and standards and promote awareness and training

There is a need to include a specific recommendation that the Commission and Member States should draw on existing best practice to develop standards and a code of good practice for involving children. This should emphasise the importance of developing methods and skills for involving children that are adapted to different ages, different situations and different cultural backgrounds. These standards should then be used as a basis for training workers, policymakers and children themselves in the skills necessary to facilitate participation.

Foster a cultural shift in attitudes to children

Laws and policies on their own are not enough to ensure that children are heard. Thus stress the importance of fostering a culture of participation which emphasises that children's voices are important and bring something new. Children must not only be heard but also listened to, understood and valued. This cultural shift in relation to involving and listening to children must also be part of a wider commitment to involve and listen to all those experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Involve parents and families

Some participants stressed the need to include a reference in the third recommendation to involving parents and families in the process of participation. Two dimensions are important. First, as participation starts in the family, there is a need to provide support and encouragement to parents to help them to better understand children's need to participate. Secondly, it is important to involve families in the development of policies that affect them.

3.1.2 Political obstacles to adoption and implementation of recommendations

Fear and lack of understanding

There is a lack of understanding among adults about children's capacities and children's rights and a tendency to think that adults know what is best. Also adults are often afraid of the consequences of creating opportunities for children to participate. Politicians often lack knowledge about the benefits of enabling children's participation. They think it is too time consuming and doesn't lead to results. Civil society organizations do not do enough to raise awareness in society and among policy makers. As a result participation is seen as a secondary issue – i.e. something nice to have but not a priority.

Lack of funding

The lack of political will translates into a lack of funding of long term processes to support children's participation. The financial crisis is leading to cut backs in budgets making progress even more difficult. Cuts, particularly in school budgets, reduce human resources and thus the time that people have to support the participation of children.

Inadequate structures

Because children can't vote they tend not to be seen as citizens and thus to be marginalized by the policy making process. In many countries few structures have been established to enable them to have a voice. This is especially the case for younger children. Often when structures have been created it has been by adults without the involvement of children and then children are fitted into them. This can alienate children from becoming involved. In addition structures to promote the involvement of children (e.g. youth councils and children's parliaments) are often too dominated by middle class children and insufficient attention is given to involving children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Lack of expertise and weak implementation

There is a lack of experience and knowledge about effective methods and structures for promoting the participation of children living in poverty. The good practice that does exist in this area is not widely disseminated or understood. Too often adults working with children lack the understanding, training or time to encourage the participation of children. Too often the emphasis is on occupation (i.e. keeping children busy) rather than on their participation. When there is some consultation with children there is often a lack of feed back as to how their views have been taken into account. This lack of accountability means that children are not really empowered and as a result they often do not trust participation.

3.1.3 Overcoming obstacles

Raise awareness

There need to be systematic efforts to raise awareness of the benefits that ensue from promoting the participation of children both in terms of raising self-esteem and self-confidence children personally and in terms of developing better policies and measures. Existing examples can be used to convince politicians and civil servants that children's participation is worthwhile. Also the media could be encouraged to give more airtime to children so as to ensure that their voices are heard. This will begin to change public perceptions and to build a new culture of participation. This should be linked to systematic efforts to promote awareness of children's rights and to encourage an understanding that children are important as citizens now not just a citizens in the future. The EU can contribute to promoting this change of culture (e.g. through EU whitebook on children). Within Member States ombudspersons for children are well placed to play a key role in promoting greater awareness.

Build on existing experience to develop methods and capacities

The many creative and imaginative ways that are being used to involve children experiencing poverty and disadvantage could be much more widely documented and promoted. This knowledge together with education on children's rights could then be built into the training of the many different professionals who engage with children (e.g. teachers, social workers, youth workers, judges, national and local decision makers) and could inform the culture of organisations working with children (e.g. schools, institutions, youth organisations, local government etc.) Training and support for parents on how to help their children to participate and to be heard will also be important.

Increase resources

The EU could do more to encourage Member States to allocate resources to support the participation of children, for instance in the context of the Social OMC. Resources could also be provided to foster the participation of children at EU level (c.f. the funding of the Annual European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty) and this could help to inspire Member States to do more in this area. More could be done within Member States to make resources which facilitate participation such as IT and transport available to children

3.2 Participation in social, recreational, cultural sporting and civic activities

Recommendations for discussion

- › *Recognising the importance of culture, youth work and sports activities in the inclusion and well-being of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, specific targeted actions should be supported to reach out to these groups.*
- › *Schools should promote more and better quality after- and outside school activities that give all children to access cultural, recreational, sporting activities that build self-esteem, reduce frustration and support overall learning and well-being.*

3.2.1 Additions and changes to proposed recommendations

The importance of enabling participation in social, recreational, cultural, sporting and civic activities was strongly endorsed. Several suggestions were made for broadening and further strengthening the recommendations.

Stress importance of proactive approach reaching out to most disadvantaged

The first recommendation needs to go beyond recognizing the importance of participation in activities. Member States should proactively reach out and provide incentives to young people from different disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. children with a disability, youngsters involved in anti-social behaviour) to participate in such activities and should actively seek to remove barriers (e.g. costs, access and cultural differences) to their doing so. Participation for all children in such activities from a very young age is important. To achieve this a flexible approach which takes into account the different situations of children and gives children choices is needed. The recommendation should also stress that children should not just be enabled to participate in activities but should be involved in making decisions about their development and implementation.

Broaden responsibility beyond schools

While it was recognized that schools play a key role in organizing after and outside school activities that give all children to access cultural, recreational, sporting activities the second recommendation should be broadened to include other actors active in the local community as not all disadvantaged children have a good experience of school. Greater cooperation between schools and the wider society, including youth organizations, should be encouraged.

3.2.2 Political obstacles to adoption and implementation of recommendations

Lack of long-term funding

The lack of sufficient and long-term funding, particularly at local level is often the main barrier to creating opportunities for children to participate in social, recreational, cultural, sporting and civic activities. Too often such activities are not a political priority and are seen as a luxury. They are not sufficiently recognized as a key element in children's development and well-being. In particular there is often a lack of additional resources to enable outreach work to children experiencing social exclusion and some areas such as rural areas can be very under resourced. Also limited budgets mean that organizations charge fees that exclude children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Administrative complexities and other practical barriers

Administrative complexities can discourage parents and other experienced people from assisting in developing opportunities for children. Also, practical problems like lack of insurance can limit what can be offered to children.

Lack of knowledge about child participation

There is often a lack of knowledge and training amongst workers as to how best involve and empower children in the running of activities.

3.2.3 Overcoming obstacles

Reduce costs of after/out-of-school activities

More authorities could ensure that access to cultural, youth work and sports activities is free for children or at least offer free access to children on low incomes. They could also develop more consistent and long-term funding programmes to allow organizations to develop opportunities for children in a more sustainable way.

Increase cooperation and coordination

Increased cooperation and coordination between schools and other community resources (e.g. transport, libraries, museums) could lead to more efficient use of resources and greater provision for children.

Provide more training

Ensuring that those working in cultural, youth and sports organizations are trained in ways of encouraging the participation of children, especially those from a disadvantaged backgrounds, can encourage new and more participative ways of operating as can documenting and providing opportunities to learn from existing good practice examples. Also providing more training and support to parents and other volunteers can increase their involvement in developing activities.

Annex 1

Conference Programme

Conference on child poverty:

Who Cares? roadmap for a recommendation to fight child poverty

September 2nd & 3rd, 2010

WEX – Wallonie Expo

Rue des Deux Provinces, 1 B-6900 Marche-en-Famenne

Agenda

DAY 1: 2 September 2010

9.00 – 9.40	Welcome – Coffee	
	<i>Opening session in attendance of Her Royal Highness Princess Astrid of Belgium</i>	
10: 00	Opening by Chair person (Julien Van Geertsom, President of the Belgian Public Planning Service on Social Integration)	
10: 05	Children’s Voices	
10.10	Breaking the vicious circle of poverty	Philippe Courard, Belgian Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty
10.25	Child Poverty and the <i>eu trio</i> presidency	Juan Carlos Mato Gomez, Director General for Social Policy, Families and Childhood, Ministry of Health and Social Policy (Spain) (tbc)
10.35	Overview of aims, objectives and proceedings	Lead Facilitator, Natasha Walker
10.40	Facilitated introduction of participants at tables	
10.50	Background Input: Why should the EU be focussing on child poverty and well-being? What is different about child poverty?	Reporter, Hugh Frazer, Independent Expert

First Session	Access to Adequate Resources	
11.05	Children's Voices	
11.10	Why we need to act? Recommendations to provide children in Europe with adequate resources	Jana Hainsworth, Secretary-general Eurochild
11.20	Introduction on adequate resources	Ilda Figueiredo, Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (tbc)
11.30	Introduction to the Round Table Discussion	Lead Facilitators
11.40	First Round Table Discussion: How can we ensure that families are able to meet their essential needs?	
13.00	Lunch	
14.30	Child poverty in the EU2020 strategy	Lászlo Andor, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission
14.45	Synthesis of first Round Table Discussion (Ce n'est pas écrit dans les versions FR et NL)	Reporter, Hugh Frazer, Independent expert
Second Session	Access to Services and Opportunities	
15.00	Children's Voices	
15.05	Why we need to act? Recommendations to provide children in Europe with access to services and opportunities	Françoise Pissart, Director the King Baudouin Foundation
15.12	Access to quality services	Mr. Zoltán Balog, Hungarian Secretary of State in charge of Child Poverty
15.20	Introduction to the Round Table Discussion	Lead Facilitators
15.25	Second Round Table Discussion: How can we help children access essential and relevant services and opportunities?	
17.30	Outlook and open comments in plenary	
17.50	Closing and Invitation to evening reception	Philippe Courard, Belgian Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty
18.00	Closure	
20.00	Gala Banquet at the "Château de Deulin"	

DAY 2: 3 September 2010

Re-Opening		
9.00	Welcome	Julien Van Geertsom, President of the Belgian Public Planning Service on Social Integration
9.10	Synthesis of 2 nd round table discussions	Reporter, Hugh Frazer, Independent expert
Third Session		
9.35	Children's Voices	
9.40	Why we need to act? Recommendations to encourage children's participation in Europe	Margaret Wachenfeld, UNICEF
9.50	Introduction on child participation	Maria Kaisa Aula, Ombudsman for Children, Finland
10.00	Introduction to the Round Table Discussion	Lead Facilitators
10.10	Third Round Table Discussion: How can we help children voices to be heard on issues affecting them?	
11.30	Coffee Break	
12.00	Synthesis of third Round Table Discussion	Reporter, Hugh Frazer
12.15	<i>Speech by Her Royal Highness Princess Mathilde of Belgium</i>	
12.25	Closing Panel "Moving Ahead": Implementing, governing and monitoring action towards improving children's lives in Europe	Philippe Courard, Belgian Secretary of State for Social Integration Mr. Zoltán Balog, Hungarian Secretary of State in charge of Child Poverty
13.05	Closing Speech	Julien Van Geertsom, President of the Belgian Public Planning Service on Social Integration
13.20	Lunch	
15.00	Closure	

Annex 2

Trio (Spain, Belgium, Hungary) Declaration of the EU Belgian Presidency Conference: Roadmap for a Recommendation on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being

Marche-en-Famenne, 2-3 September 2010

1. There are over 100 million children and young people in Europe and at least 20 million of them are at risk of poverty, with risk of further deepening of the transmission of poverty to the next generation of children. Specific steps must be taken in the context of the crisis response and recovery to safeguard and promote critical investments and effective policy interventions for children and young people. An inclusive, open and confident Europe will not be achieved unless and until child poverty is eliminated in our times.
2. The Belgian EU Presidency Conference: Child Poverty and Well-Being on 2-3 September 2010 in Marche-en-Famenne brought together the Trio Presidencies of Spain, Belgium and Hungary, the Member States, regional and local authorities, the European Commission, international organisations, NGOs, child poverty experts and academics and members of civil society to discuss the contents of a future Recommendation to Fight Child Poverty and Ensure the Well-Being of Children. The Conference addressed three main topics: ensuring adequate resources, and in particular, income and benefits and reconciling employment and family life; guaranteeing access to quality services, in particular education, across the life cycle of childhood, especially for the most vulnerable; and ensuring active participation and inclusion of children and young people and ensuring their voices are heard in shaping policies that affect their lives. The Conference underlined that progress is possible and concrete actions are within reach.
3. The Conference has been building on the commitments in the Treaty to combat social exclusion and discrimination, to promote solidarity between generations, and to protect children's rights, and also on the EU 2020 Strategy for developing a Europe that is "smart", "green" and "inclusive".
4. As a conclusion of the Conference, building on the legacy of the European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, and paving the way towards the adoption of a **Recommendation to Fight Child Poverty and Promote Child Well-Being**, the three Presidencies of Spain, Belgium and Hungary call upon Member States and the European Council, in close collaboration with the Commission, to:
 - Set **clear, quantified sub-targets for the reduction of child poverty** in order to meet the EU 2020 poverty target of lifting at least 20 million out of poverty, taking into account the specifics of each Member State;
 - Include the fight against child poverty and the promotion of child well-being as key priorities of the **EU 2020 Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion**;

- Ensure **children's well-being is mainstreamed** across all policy areas both at national and European level in an integrated and coherent manner with a view to addressing the multidimensional nature of the problem;
- Make the link with the work on the **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child**;
- Give specific focus to children in **extreme poverty**, especially the most marginalised and those subject to discrimination, such as migrant children, including undocumented children, and children from minority backgrounds, in particular the Roma, and children with disabilities;
- Promote the **involvement of children and young people in all decisions that affect their lives** and to strengthen the involvement of all stakeholders defending children rights.

Annex 3

Changes and Additions to Policy Recommendations

Introduction

This annex contains some suggestions for developing the Policy Recommendations contained in the background document for the Marche-en-Famenne conference (*Call for an EU Recommendation on Child Poverty and Well-being*). The suggestions reflect the main discussions and proposals which were made by participants at the conference and which are documented in the body of this report. Section 0 contains new recommendations which draw on points made at the conference which cut across the three thematic areas addressed in the original recommendations. They also take into account many of the points made during discussions on political obstacles to the adoption of the recommendations and suggestions on how these obstacles could be overcome. They particularly emphasise the importance of a child rights approach and the need for improved governance arrangements. Sections 1 to 3 then systematically address the three conference themes (access to adequate resources, access to services and opportunities and children's participation). In the light of the suggestions made at the conference, they propose some additions and changes to the original recommendations.

0. New Overarching Recommendations

0.1 Strengthening Children's Rights

- The European Commission and Member States should develop a children's rights approach to tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being. Such an approach should:
 - apply to all children regardless of their background or legal status, including undocumented children;
 - be based on respecting and listening to the views of children and should put children's interests at the centre of decision-making rather than as a secondary consideration;
 - should be multi-dimensional so as to address the range of children's rights and needs and thus lead to an integrated and coordinated approach to promoting children's well-being.
- In the context of the EU's Strategy on the Rights of the Child the European Commission and Member States should work together to promote a greater recognition of children being citizens in their own right and to foster a new culture of children's rights.

0.2 Raise Awareness and Promote Better Governance in the Context of the Europe 2020 Strategy

- The European Commission and Member States, in the context of the Social Protection Committee and in cooperation with organisations active in the field of child poverty and well-being, should promote and publicise research which documents the benefits that accrue to children, the wider society and the economy of investing in policies to support children and at the same time highlights the costs of not doing so.
- In the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the commitment of Member States to set overall national poverty reduction targets Member States should be encouraged to set sub targets for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion.
- In the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy the Social Protection Committee should continue efforts to improve data collection, indicators, monitoring, evaluation and reporting across all policy areas affecting children at EU and (sub) national levels and should produce a regular EU scorecard on progress in order to ensure that policy making becomes more evidence based, more accountable and transparent and that there is greater learning about what works.
- In the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy (including the new EU target on reducing poverty and social exclusion, the European Platform Against Poverty and the preparation of National Reform Programmes and National Strategy Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion) every Member State should: develop a coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the needs of children in a holistic manner; involve all stakeholders including children in this process; and mainstream a concern with child poverty and child well-being across all relevant policy areas. To ensure an integrated and comprehensive approach Member States should adopt an active inclusion approach which combines access to quality services, adequate income support and access to employment in a mutually reinforcing way.
- In the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the increased emphasis on achieving synergies between policy areas the European Commission should ensure that arrangements are in place that require all EU policies to be systematically proofed for their potential impact on child poverty and social exclusion as part of the European Commission's Impact Assessment process;
- In the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the intention to create greater synergies between policy areas the European Commission and Member States should develop more regular and systematic links between policy areas with a high relevance to the social inclusion and well-being of children. These might include policies and initiatives in the area of social protection and social inclusion, immigration, discrimination, gender equality, active inclusion, flexible working, housing, health and education (especially early education).
- In the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy the European Commission and Member States should agree and monitor the implementation of minimum standards in key areas affecting children such as income support, access to services and children's participation.
- The European Commission and Member States should review the EU Structural Funds' regulations so that they can contribute more to initiatives to tackle child poverty and to promote child well-being.
- The European Commission and Member States should develop a more extensive and systematic process of mutual learning on child poverty and well-being across the EU and a much more effective integration of good practice lessons into the training of those working with children.

1. Access to Adequate Resources

1.1. Income and Benefits⁶

- **Develop a comprehensive approach to income support for children which sets child benefit within the broader framework of an adequate income for all based on a combination of an effective social transfer system for adults and children, an adequate income from work and a child and family friendly tax system. The social transfer system as a whole (social protection plus child payments) should guarantee an adequate income for all children.**
 - **As a step towards achieving this Member States and the Commission should agree EU standards or at least establish agreed criteria or methodologies (for instance the use of budget standards methodologies) for determining the costs of a child and for defining adequate resources.**
 - **Given the importance of all social transfers for preventing child poverty Member States should avoid introducing conditionality and using sanctions in their benefit systems in ways which will penalize children and leave them without the necessary resources.**
- Countries which spend most on social benefits (excluding pensions) tend to have lowest child poverty levels. Governments should improve child benefits as an expression of intergenerational solidarity, recognition of the inherent value of childhood and an investment in Europe's future **and work towards guaranteeing an adequate income for all children.**
- Universal child benefits are the most effective way of providing income support to families with children. They should be received automatically and coupled with targeted benefits for those most in need.
 - **Care must be taken to ensure that universal benefits reach all children, especially those who are in very vulnerable situations such as undocumented children or Roma and other travelling children. Targeted benefits for those most in need must be delivered in ways that avoid stigmatization, differentiate between children's needs and facilitate easy take-up.**
- **Parents' income from work is particularly important for preventing child poverty. Member States should ensure that income from work is adequate to lift families out of poverty through a combination of minimum wage provisions and tax reliefs for low income families with children.**
- Child sensitive income support **should** also include benefits targeted directly at children such as government provided child-trust funds, free books and education materials, free school meals, free access to leisure and cultural activities, **after-school care for children, etc. and subsidies for essential necessities such as housing, heating and other utilities and transport.**

⁶ In sections 1-3 the changes and additions to the original recommendations have been highlighted in bold so as to differentiate them from the original text. This is intended to assist readers to differentiate between the original and new text. The headings and sub-headings (which are in bold) have not been changed.

1.2. Reconciliation of Work and Family Life

- **Supporting parents, especially those living in poverty, to access decent quality jobs and to increase the work intensity of households is an essential first step to lifting families with children out of poverty and to promoting the reconciliation of work and family life. This also includes supporting parents going back to work after a long period of parental leave and helping them to reintegrate into work.**
- Quality work for parents is crucial. Flexible working arrangements should be provided to enable parents to balance work and family commitments. Work arrangements should accommodate increasingly diverse household compositions **and should promote equality between men and women in meeting their family responsibilities.**
- Leave arrangements for parents should be paid, universally accessible and offer flexibility to allow parents to respond best to their children's needs over the course of their childhood. Leave arrangements should respect and support increasingly diverse household compositions.
- Parents should have access to affordable, accessible and high quality services to support them and their children. Services should accommodate the increasingly diverse work patterns of parents.
 - **Affordable, accessible and high quality child care in line with Recommendation 2.1 is essential to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life however childcare provision should primarily be focused on the needs of children.**

2. Access to Services and Opportunities

2.1 Early Childhood

- Early childhood **from conception to school age** should be recognized as **the** crucial stage in children's education, development and social integration, requiring public investment in services **which** are accessible to all **on all equal basis and** regardless of parents' labour market situation **or background and which take into account diversity and different needs and are delivered in ways that avoid stigmatization and involve the most excluded children and their families;**
- **As early childhood education and care is above all about children's development and as it plays a critical role in tackling child poverty and breaking the cycle of poverty** clear quality criteria **and minimum standards** should be set for early childhood services including professional qualifications, recognition, training, staff/child ratio, educational philosophy and **these should be regularly monitored.**

2.2 Education

- Every child (including Roma children and other children at risk) should **attend** quality inclusive education that promotes child well-being and the emotional, social and physical development of the child in addition to academic achievement. **To ensure this specific efforts should be made to make schools truly inclusive and to reach out to and involve parents and local communities in order to overcome barriers which stop children experiencing poverty attending school. Outcomes should then be monitored so as to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are achieving equal outcomes.**
- The role of education in preventing and breaking the poverty cycle should be strengthened by removing all financial barriers to education, ensuring equal opportunities, and by providing necessary additional support to compensate for any disadvantage in the home and community that might make it difficult for children to fully learn and develop.

- Efforts should be strengthened to ensure children complete compulsory education and to prevent early school leaving by encouraging parental support for school completion, and by providing appropriate pathways for continued education and/or vocational skills, reflecting the diversity of children's learning patterns and aspirations.

2.3 Health Care

- Children **living in a country regardless of nationality** should be specifically targeted within broader efforts to reduce health inequalities and to achieve universal access to health care for **all** poor and socially excluded groups, including by ensuring universal coverage of health insurance.
- Recognising that childhood is a crucial period for children's physical, mental and emotional development, all children should be assured access to health promotion and prevention programmes **and in this regard there is a need to particularly target and give special attention to socially excluded children such as undocumented children, some ethnic minority children such as Roma children, children living in jobless households, children affected by addiction, homeless children, children with disabilities, children with mental health problems, children with HIV and also pregnant women.**
 - **In order to improve access of children the training of health care providers should better take into account the contextual factors which affect children from disadvantaged backgrounds, should stress more the importance of early detection of risk factors and preventative action and should stress the importance of good communication with families.**
- Recognising the higher prevalence of mental health problems among socially deprived groups and the growing number of children who suffer from mental health problems **including the higher risk of suicide**, mental health services should be expanded **and resourced so that they can be** made available to more children requiring **ongoing** support.

2.4 Housing and Environment

- Consideration of children's best interest should be integrated into city and territorial planning **and reinforced by including children themselves and their families and communities in planning.** Particular attention should be given to healthy and safe environments for children in the home and in their neighbourhood that respect children's right to play and study.
 - **As access to services and opportunities is critical for children's autonomy special efforts should be made to enhance mobility, particularly for children living in areas of multiple disadvantage and in rural areas.**
 - **Every effort should be made to avoid the ghettoisation of children experiencing poverty and social exclusion and to promote a social mix in housing.**
- Ensure affordable, quality **and sustainable** housing for families with children which provide long-term solutions and avoid unnecessary moves and school changes, **which take account of different family situations including the effects of family breakdown and specific needs such those of children with disabilities and which reduce energy consumption and costs through conservation measures.**

2.5 Child Protection and Social Services

- Child protection and social services should be strengthened to **ensure** early intervention **when children are facing problems** and **to provide** prevention services that support and empower families most at-risk and **thus** avoid **the** escalation of problems that may push children further into poverty and risky situations. **High quality services are vital thus quality standards should be established for child protection services.** Also in developing services special efforts should be made to identify specific groups at risk such as children with disabilities in institutions, children left behind when parents migrate for economic reasons or who are left behind when parents return to their home country, abandoned children from migrants (“migration orphans”), children leaving institutions, undocumented and/or unaccompanied minors to include other actors active in the local community as not all disadvantaged children have a good experience of school. Greater cooperation between schools and the wider society, including youth organizations, should be encouraged.
- The governance of child protection and social services should be enhanced by improving coordination and cooperation between different levels of government, between different sectors and services and between government and NGO services, by developing flexible management of social services while ensuring real accountability, by ensuring links with other services especially income support services, and by fostering links between services and families.
- Ensure that children are not removed from their families due to families’ lack of resources to care for children. Instead families must be supported to care for their children themselves, provided this is in the best interest of the child and efforts should be made to facilitate the de-institutionalisation of children.
- Promote the inclusion in society of all children who are not living in families (street children, those living in institutional care, unaccompanied minors, those living in temporary accommodation) by ensuring they are given appropriate quality support and care and have access to mainstream services including education, health, etc.

3. Children’s Participation

3.1 Children’s Right to be Heard

- Governments should adopt **the** necessary laws and policies that recognize the child’s right to be heard and participate in all decisions that affect them, and provide specific opportunities **and the necessary financial and human resources** for **their** participation in policy making. **They should also put in place the necessary infrastructural support to champion the voice of children in policy making such as ombudspersons for children.**
- **Governments should ensure that** policies addressed at tackling child poverty and social exclusion reflect the views and suggestions of children themselves, including those **of children living in poverty, especially the most marginalised (such as children in institutions, refugee and migrant children, children with a disability), that children receive feed back on how their views are integrated into policies and decisions and that they are involved in the monitoring and evaluation of policies as well as their design.**
- The Commission and Member States should draw on existing best practice to develop standards and a code of good practice for involving children. This should emphasise the importance of developing methods and skills for involving children that are adapted to different ages, different situations and different cultural backgrounds. These standards should then be used as a basis for training workers, policymakers and children themselves in the skills necessary to facilitate participation.

- Ensure all those working with and for children understand the impact of poverty and social exclusion and the need to listen and to take account of the views of children **on all areas that affect their well-being.**

3.2 Participation of children in social, recreational, cultural, sporting and civic activities

- Recognising the importance of **participation in** culture, youth work and sports activities in the inclusion and well-being of children from disadvantaged backgrounds **such as children with a disability or youngsters involved in anti-social behaviour**, specific targeted actions should be supported to reach out to **encourage the participation of such groups and to remove barriers to their doing so such as costs, access and cultural differences.**
- Schools **and other community organisations** should **work together to** promote more and better quality after- and outside school activities that give *all* children access **to** cultural, recreational, sporting activities that build self-esteem, reduce frustration and support overall learning and well-being.

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