



The impact of the economic crisis on children: lessons from the past experiences and future policies

The proceedings of the Child0NEurope Seminar on the Impact of the Economic Crisis on Children

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on the Impact of the Economic Crisis on Children

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Introduction

This publication contains the collection of papers related to the European Seminar on “The impact of the economic crisis on children: lessons from the past experiences and future policies” of the European Network of National Observatories on Childhood (ChildONEurope) held in Florence, Istituto degli Innocenti, on 9 June 2011. Through a decision of the ChildONEurope Assembly of June 2010 the partners of the inter-institutional network ChildONEurope turned their attention to the issue of the impact of the economic crisis on children. Therefore, the ChildONEurope Secretariat was entrusted with the organization of a European Seminar on one of the subjects that in recent years became a priority concern for the policy makers in different countries of the European Union.

The Seminar was organized in the context of network activities aimed at favouring the exchange of knowledge and information on childhood policies and interventions. Its main aim was to stimulate a wide-ranging discussion on the possible impacts of the crisis on children’s well-being, education, and protection, with special attention on national policy options able to address effectively the phenomenon.

The timing of this Seminar was particularly appropriate. A slowdown of the economic growth, the increasing widespread poverty and the rising unemployment rate are common aspects of the recent years in Europe. Government programs in education, health, and child protection are often the first to be cut due to budget constraints. Moreover, the global financial crisis is amplifying the effects of the increasing cost of the daily life, seriously challenging the abilities of families to cope and of children to thrive.

Therefore, the Seminar represents an attempt to place children at the centre of the economic debate, focussing attention on the social policies and protection systems most needed during times of crisis, and addressing essentially the following questions: how the current economic downturn affects the wellbeing of children? what can be done through social policies to mitigate the harm of these effects?

The four plenary papers are personal thoughts by experts on the effects of the crisis on children. Authors include: Leonardo Menchini, researcher of the Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, Tess Ridge, professor at the Department of Social and Policy Sciences, University of Bath, United Kingdom, Dominic Richardson, researcher of the Organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD), and Jana Hainsworth, Secretary General of Eurochild. These four main articles have a more topical focus and deal with issues related to the impact of the crisis on children, mechanisms that transmit global shocks to children in poor households, the risk of exclusion for children at the bottom of the well-being scale, the value of a child-centred social investment strategy in particular in the European context and the role of children and family policies in time of economic crisis. The concluding paper focuses on the role of children’s participation in fighting poverty and social exclusion.

The proceedings reproduced in this publication gather as well the working groups reports, focusing on preventing out-of-home child fostering through policies dedicated to child education and family income maintenance, the importance to invest in services dedicated to young children, child participation to the actions against poverty and social exclusion. In particular with reference to this latter issue, it was introduced by the speeches of national experts such as Eva Borissova (National Network of Children of Bulgaria) and Maria Corbett (Children’s Rights Alliance of Ireland).

Part 1

The international and European context: policies and strategies of intervention

1.1 Children at the bottom of the well-being scale and at risk of exclusion

Leonardo Menchini

The “Innocenti Report Cards” series is the only series of UNICEF publications entirely devoted to the living conditions and well-being of children in economically advanced countries. The report on *Inequality in child well-being in the world's rich countries*, published at the end of 2010, discusses and suggests new indicators that can improve our understanding of the risk of social exclusion and child poverty. 2010 was the European year for combating poverty and social exclusion: research efforts focused on the development of measures aimed at contributing to the debate about the definition of social exclusion and risk of early childhood poverty in economically advanced countries.

The Report Card series has reached its ninth edition. From the outset, it has focused on indicators that reflect early childhood conditions in wealthy countries through an international comparison directed to better understand the challenges that each country faces in securing equal rights for all children and the full realization of their potential. The first report (published in 2000) was built around an indicator of monetary poverty, the monetary poverty rate, referred to children, and also suggested a comparison between OECD countries.

What is child poverty in advanced countries and what is the meaning of the indicator used? The indicator that was suggested in the 2000 report (and that is also suggested in this report) is the relative poverty rate: this indicator does not reflect the absolute living standards of a society, rather the risk of exclusion of part of the population compared to the standards of living prevailing in the country of residence. The report and the debate that ensued in a number of countries has led to policies that specifically address childhood conditions - mainly redistributive policies - which, in certain cases, have produced a substantial reduction in poverty.

A turning point in the series took place starting with Report Card no. 6: while it deals with monetary poverty, this report also claims that income indicators alone are not sufficient to adequately understand child conditions, and that the economic and social policy indications that may be derived from these are limited. Report Card no. 7, for the first time in the series, suggests a multidimensional approach to understand child poverty and children's well-being, thus opening the way to new developments in the series. The current report (no. 9) on inequalities reflects said developments, as it adopts an approach based on the multidimensional nature of children's well-being in order to gain a better understanding of the areas in which policies can make a difference.

Report Card no. 8 dealt with early childhood services (an under-researched area with little internationally comparable data) and was presented last year during the ChildONEurope seminar.

The next report (expected for spring 2012) shall address multidimensional poverty. The report will especially focus on EU countries and will use data from the 2009 EU SILC survey, which for the first time introduced a specific child deprivation index.

After this brief digression on the series, let us return to the Report on inequality in child well-being. As was previously stated, the adopted approach does not concentrate on a single dimension of child well-being, rather it analyses several dimensions at the same time; likewise, it does not limit itself to analysing problems, but it attempts to increase comprehension of children's developmental potential.

The starting point is Report Card no. 7: for the first time, a multidimensional child well-being framework is proposed, which internationally compares 40 indicators grouped together in six dimensions (material well-being, education, health and safety, risky behaviours, family and peer relationships, subjective well-being), while also introducing the perception of the child's subjective well-being as a key underpinning element of early childhood.

In Report Card no. 7, the 40 statistical indicators and their data are processed to enable international comparison and ultimately to compile a league table of countries in terms of child well-being. All of the data used and processed in said report are expressed as rates and national averages: because of this, it was not possible to establish whether there was a part of the population that was

particularly disadvantaged or at risk. This distinct limit of Report Card no. 7 opened the way for the following research, which seeks to understand what lies beyond averages, as well as to establish if there is a part of the population that is particularly disadvantaged and risks being excluded from society's prevailing levels of well-being.

Are we able to develop measures that determine whether the most disadvantaged part of society is so far behind the prevailing levels of well-being to the point that said part of the population is at risk of social exclusion? Measuring the distance that separates the least advantaged part from the rest of the population is the task we have undertaken throughout the preparation of Report Card no. 9. A comparative approach makes it possible to establish whether there are countries that are more successful than others in limiting inequalities and the risk of social exclusion: if certain countries succeed in containing inequalities, it means that similarly developed countries could do the same for their less advantaged children. This is particularly important during periods of economic crisis, when there is a risk of social spending cuts by governments and policies supporting those least advantaged are in danger of being contested. This report goes beyond averages and focuses instead on the condition of children at the bottom-end of the well-being distribution: this research develops a measure of the gap between the central part and the most disadvantaged part of the distribution. Only 24 countries belonging to OECD had sufficient data enabling them to be included in this inequality comparison and therefore, the final comparison is limited to these countries alone (i.e. most EU countries, Canada and USA). The data mainly refer to the period preceding the 2008 economic and financial crisis, and hence to a period of economic growth.

The three dimensions considered in this analysis are material well-being, education and health. Compared to Report Card no. 7, less dimensions and indicators have been used, given that only a few indicators were suitable for the type of distributional analysis suggested. For each indicator, the object of measurement is the relative distance between the median (representing a 'normal' level of well-being in the society being considered) and the condition of those who are at the bottom-end of the distribution (in some cases at the 10th percentile, in other cases the average of the most disadvantaged half).

For the material well-being dimension, the analysed indicators were: household income, with regard to which the object of measurement considered for each country was the gap between the central part of the distribution (the median) and the people at the 10th percentile. The other indicators selected were access to basic educational resources (books, computer resources, a place to study) and an indicator of available housing living space.

Data analysis shows that there is a group of countries in which inequality at the bottom- end of the distribution is very limited. Among these countries, the Nordic countries dominate, together with Switzerland, Holland and France. There is also a group of countries that includes Belgium, Germany, the Czech Republic, Ireland and other Nordic countries with levels similar to the OECD average. Instead, the group formed by Slovakia, Great Britain, Greece, USA, Hungary, Poland, and Italy presents inequality levels that are much greater than the OECD average, and in these countries disadvantaged children are at risk of falling far behind the prevailing level of well-being and of being socially excluded within their own country.

The second dimension that was considered is education. In this case, the data were drawn from the PISA survey conducted by OECD, which measured educational proficiency in three different learning areas: reading, science and maths. For the indicators on educational proficiency, the object of measurement was the relative gap between the child in the middle (the median) and the children at the bottom-end of the distribution (even in this case, the 10th percentile). This analysis brings out a complex picture of the inequality situation, with some countries, mainly Finland and Canada, in which even the children with lower educational performance are not far from the child in the middle of the distribution, and hence are not at great risk of being excluded, rather they are quite close to the prevailing national standards. At the opposite end of the spectrum are Italy, Austria, France, and Belgium in which the difference is rather marked, thus indicating a risk of exclusion from the prevailing educational well-being levels. The data on education allow further analysis and open to the consideration of whether equality adversely affects academic excellence levels. The data confirm that

this is not true. Countries with lower inequality levels are those which achieve more median and high-end levels of performance. The highest levels of reading literacy are indeed in South Korea and Finland, countries that have the lowest inequality in educational well-being indicators. This analysis seems to show that the countries that invest in academic excellence are also those that keep inequality at its lowest levels.

The last series of indicators concerns the dimension of health. The source of this data is the HBSC survey (Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children), from which a number of health well-being indicators for teenagers have been developed. Said indicators address children's self-reported health problems, healthy eating and physical activity. The messages that the analysis of this dimension brings to light are less straightforward when compared to the previous dimensions, perhaps also on account of the heterogeneity of the indicators used. In the overall analysis of said dimension it appears that Norway, Holland and Portugal are the countries with the lowest levels of inequality at the bottom-end of the distribution. The countries in which the disparity between the median level and the least advantaged part of the distribution is more marked are USA, Italy and Hungary.

The results relating to the three dimensions were then jointly processed to create an overall league table of inequality in child well-being. The countries with inequality levels lower than the OECD average are Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, some Nordic countries and Ireland. The low-ranking countries are those which regularly have inequality levels higher than the OECD average, such as Italy, Greece, and USA.

The report highlights the social risks incurred by economically advanced countries should they fail to take action against wide inequality in child well-being and the risk of social exclusion. The research shows that the risks are high. The heaviest costs of inequality and exclusion are paid directly by children, yet there are significant costs shouldered also by society as a whole. If interventions targeting social exclusion are put into place promptly, they are more effective, specifically when they concern young children in their early childhood stages.

A practical example of how specific policies can mitigate inequalities and poverty is illustrated by a chart showing the 2007-2008 data on child poverty, before and after government intervention via taxes and income transfers to families. There are European countries with very low child poverty levels achieved through efficient assistance and monetary benefit policies for families, such as Finland: before government intervention, when poverty is measured on the basis of market income, the rate of child poverty is of about 15%; this percentage is then reduced by two thirds thanks to state intervention. The most significant mitigating results can be observed in Ireland and Hungary. There are then a number of countries, such as Italy, Portugal, Greece, and Spain in which poverty levels are higher and government intervention policies are only partially effective.

Policies are effective if they are specifically targeted. This applies to income policies, as well as to all other fields: an example of this is how Finland succeeded in mitigating educational inequality.

The equality goal must be incorporated in all policies to effectively guarantee that all children have adequate opportunities. In conclusion, the report confirms the importance of investing in equity so that all children can have the same opportunities of development.

Children are given only one opportunity to personal development: if this is lost, the consequences could last their entire lifetime. This report was released during a period of economic crisis, in which many governments were under pressure and contested for their social spending, and therefore it urges greater attention to the consequences borne by investment cuts in early childhood, even in terms of equity. International comparison is a powerful tool for increasing the understanding of the risks for society. Comparing countries at similar levels of development can help understand the challenges one's own nation is faced with.

The next report shall focus on multidimensionality and overlapping deprivation. For the first time, the European data on child well-being collected under the 2009 EU SILC survey will be used. The first part of the research already provides indications that confirm how the Nordic countries, despite the challenges of globalization, still continue to achieve high-ranking levels in the majority of social development indicators. The report will be presented in the spring of 2012 and we hope to spur further cooperation opportunities, so that we may present it during the next ChildONEurope seminar.

1.2 The importance of a child-centred social investment strategy in Europe

Tess Ridge

As countries across Europe struggle to restore economic stability and overcome the damaging effects of financial crisis, children in disadvantaged families will be experiencing increased financial insecurity and instability. Children's lives and well-being are intimately entwined with the financial security and well-being of their parent/s and for low-income families reliant on social assistance or employed in precarious labour market positions the impact of financial crises can be considerable. Children in these families are some of the most hidden victims of financial stress and their needs and concerns can easily be overlooked and obscured within the family.

This paper will explore the impact of recession and financial instability on children from a child-centred perspective which privileges the needs and concerns of children. It will look at how the state's welfare policies can play a vital role in addressing the needs of children in times of financial crisis; highlighting the potential gains to be made for children and for societies of developing an active reaction to child poverty through the implementation of child-centred social investment policies. The paper examines how we can identify children's needs and reveals significant areas of need and concern that low-income children themselves have identified in research. Children are key recipients of welfare services across a wide range of policy areas and their lives are considerably shaped by the type and quality of welfare services available to them. Therefore policy measures to address financial crises can have significant consequences for them. There is also a tension between policies that focus on children as future adults and the quality of life that they experience in childhood, this tension is explored, the value of such policies considered and the importance of maintaining a child-centred approach is advanced.

As recession and financial crisis spread across Europe increasing numbers of children will be experiencing poverty, financial insecurity and stress. The experiences of these children and their needs and concerns are easily overlooked in policy and practice. Children tend to be hidden within their families and their disproportionate vulnerability to poverty is rarely acknowledged and is often not adequately or comprehensively addressed. When childhood poverty is addressed, children who experience poverty are often seen as a homogenous group. Yet childhood presents many challenges for disadvantaged children and their lives will be shaped by a range of factors including their age, ethnicity, health, and gender. Their social and economic circumstances are also shaped by, among others, the citizenship status of their parents, whether they are working or not, their parental health and ethnicity, family structure and sibling size.

Poverty permeates every area of children's lives; it affects their well-being at school, in neighbourhoods and in towns and cities. It damages them economically, materially, socially, and on a deep personal level (Ridge, 2002). Poverty also has an impact both in childhood and in future adulthood, and policies need to address both the 'being' - the experience of being a child in poverty in childhood - and the 'becoming' - the outcomes of childhood poverty in adulthood. This is a key issue for policy intervention in disadvantaged children's lives; too much focus on the outcome of childhood poverty in adulthood can lead to policies which fail to address the deep and damaging experiences of children who are experiencing poverty on a day to day basis in childhood amongst their peers.

Economic crises and recession accelerate and exacerbate conditions of poverty. In countries experiencing recession and economic instability there is likely to be an increase in numbers of children living in poverty. This rise can be fuelled by increased unemployment and insecure employment, homelessness and family instability. As countries try to manage their budgets to address recession there is also likely to be budget cuts and reductions in welfare payments and services for families. In the UK for example budget cuts in an age of economic recession and increased austerity have resulted in severe budget cuts that have fallen disproportionately on women and children (UK Women's Budget Group, 2010). These cuts have resulted in a reduction of family and child support services, social services,

health and welfare provision and financial and social assistance. Children in general are key recipients of welfare services and rely on them for their present and future well-being. Cuts in provision whilst understandable in attempts to balance failing budgets can have a profound and potentially hidden effect on low-income children who are in most need of economic and social support.

To reveal the ways in which recession and financial crises can impact on children's lives we can draw on a growing body of research which has been conducted with low-income children, in particular child-centred¹ research which engages directly with children to explore their lives, experiences and the needs. In this section of the paper I have drawn on a body of qualitative research with low-income children² to highlight how recession and financial insecurity might affect children's lives.

One of the most damaging impacts of recession is unemployment and financial insecurity. For children in households affected by recession, labour market instability and the resulting effects of unemployment and insecure employment can have a profound impact on children. Research with children living in low-income working households shows that when working conditions are insecure and when reward from employment is inadequate, debt and stress are often present in the household, and children experience considerable anxiety about the economic well-being of their families, coupled with feelings of insecurity and ambivalence about the value of employment (Ridge, 2011). Apprehension and uncertainty about having enough money in the household to sustain family well-being and respond to children's own needs and wants is a frequent cause for concern of children who are impoverished (Ridge, 2002). Low-income children have a very keen sense of family well-being and as a consequence may moderate their needs and lower their horizons to take pressure off of their parent/s. Alongside the advent of increased income and employment insecurity resulting from recession is likely to come increased family instability. Parenting on a low-income is highly demanding and stress and financial pressure, coupled with vulnerability to poor parental health and added risks such as homeless and unemployment can impact adversely on some families already struggling to cope (Seaman et al, 2006). Reduced incomes can mean a reduction in opportunities and benefits for children as families go into social retreat and withdraw from social activities, for children this can mean a loss of previously valued peer group activities. Poverty also carried with it the risk of social stigma and shame, and research with disadvantaged children show that this is a real concern for children and can be highly damaging for children trying to develop social capital and secure social relationships.

Supporting children

In the face of evidence that shows from children's own accounts that financial crises are likely to have a severe impact on already challenging childhoods; how should we respond? First and foremost financial security through adequate social transfers is essential for addressing the needs of children and their families. Services are vital but families need secure economic resources if they are to meet their own needs. Alongside economic support is the need for 'child-centred' social investment policies. This means increased policy interest in the needs of children coupled with a commitment to increased resources to protect children from the severe impact in childhood of financial crisis. Increasing social investment in children produces a return for the state and society in future economic competitiveness, in this policy approach children are addressed not just as children but as future citizens and workers (Esping Anderson, 2002, Lister, 2003). However, although social investment policies often bring children's needs into the centre of policy making and produce a much needed boost in resources targeted at children, a focus on futurity can diminish the importance of childhood and the quality of childhood experience (Lister, 2003). Poverty for children is a profound and often damaging experience which permeates children's everyday lives affecting children on a deep social, emotional and material

¹ Child-centred research is research which puts children's accounts and experiences at the centre of the research process to gain an insight into childhood from the subjective accounts of children themselves.

² Ridge, 2002; Ridge, 2011.

level (Ridge, 2002). Furthermore social-investment policies are often focused predominantly on services and resources for very young children. Whilst resources for the early years are essential for secure growth and healthy transitions, this early years focus can obscure the needs of older children, especially children who are in their middle years.

Supporting children also means supporting families. Children cannot be abstracted out from their family settings. Time and timing of interventions and support can be crucial. Poverty is problematic and damaging for children not just through long durations, but also when children experience repeated spells of poverty and are unable to feel secure, or when children experience poverty at critical times of transition in their lives, for example movement between primary and junior schools.

Addressing children's needs

In economic crises it is vital to put in place successful robust social investment policies. To do so it is important to recognise children's needs and that children themselves can play a key role in identifying need. We already have a good indication of the key issues and concerns of low-income children through qualitative child-centred research. We know from children that they are highly anxious about money and adequacy of income in their families for their own and their family's needs. So addressing income security through social assistance programmes and ensuring adequacy and stability in family income is important. Children also identify a real need for social activities and peer group engagement. Sustaining friendships and belonging to the social groups to which you aspire is an important part of the development of secure social identities in childhood. Therefore policies which promote improved social inclusion through affordable and accessible leisure activities should clearly address children's expressed needs and concerns. To access activities and to develop and maintain friendships and social engagement children also need to be able to access safe, affordable and flexible transport. Unlike adults children are not independently mobile and transport can be extremely costly, especially transport in some rural areas, or areas poorly serviced by public transport systems. Disadvantaged children rarely go far beyond their immediate neighbourhoods and impoverished neighbourhoods can be dangerous, dirty and degraded. Children report concerns about the safety and suitability of their neighbourhoods which are rarely child friendly and often unsuitable for children to play and associate in (Ridge, 2011).

School is another key area where low-income children have expressed significant concerns about the quality of their learning experience and especially about feeling included and valued within the school setting. Children spend a large part of their day within a school environment and this is a key policy area where social investment in children can be of particular value. However, for disadvantaged children it is often the social aspects of school that concern them most and research has shown that there are many ways in which schools can improve children's everyday school experiences, however, there are also policies which can act to isolate and exclude children through welfare support that is badly delivered and stigmatised.

Stigma is a key issue for children who are poor. They are keenly aware of the social consequences of being identified as 'poor' or 'different' (Ridge, 2011). Disadvantaged children are key recipients of social and welfare services and the quality of care and service they receive is critical in ensuring improved welfare. These services need to be adequate, accessible and non-stigmatised if children and their families are to be supported through them.

Childcare is a vital element in welfare to work policies, and in times of economic crisis maintaining and developing good quality childcare is an essential element in supporting low-income working families. However, evidence from children in the UK shows that childcare can be problematic for children, especially where provision is stigmatised, 'boring' and poorly developed. Children need high quality, age appropriate childcare, and low-income children are especially in need of high quality services where the needs of children are the paramount consideration rather than the needs of parents, labour market and state.

This paper has focused on the needs of low-income children during times of economic crisis and has argued that a central tenet of support for children and their families lies with the development of 'child-centred' social investment policies. Such policies focus attention and resources on children, provide an opportunity for active intervention in children's lives; acknowledge that services like childcare are a public good as well as a private responsibility; save money in the present and the future and represent a recognition of children's value to society. Social investment policies alone focus too heavily on the future value of children to the state as citizens and workers, a 'child-centred' social investment strategy addresses children's needs in the immediacy of childhood amongst their peers, recognises children's right to be heard and encourages participation and involvement in policy and practice. Policies informed by children's expressed needs reduce the risk that intervention strategies and services may be poorly targeted and fail.

During times of economic crises and recession children's needs and concerns can slip into the margins and they may become hidden within their families. And yet it is at these times that children are most in need of well-targeted and appropriate welfare support. A child centred-policy process recognises the importance of childhood and the impact of poverty, recession and economic instability on children's lives. Appreciates that children are active social beings and engages with disadvantaged children in a meaningful way. Crucial to a successful child-centred policy regime is an understanding of both the intended and unintended impact of policies on children's lives and seeks to develop policies informed by children's needs. The aim of such an approach is to provide protection during periods of economic instability whilst promoting positive outcomes both in childhood *and* in future adulthood.

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1.3 Child poverty and family policies in a time of economic crisis^{*}

Dominic Richardson

Introduction

This paper explores changes to child poverty and family policies through periods of stimulus and austerity since the onset of the financial crisis and Great Recession in 2008. Changes to policies in advanced economies are discussed in the context of the broader economic and family developments, based on recent trends.

The paper begins with a summary of the presentations main findings, before going on to introduce the economic context in which these changes arise, and the changing poverty risks experienced by families with children over a generation. Following sections introduce in order, the variation in public spending on families and how these have broadly evolved, and how spending levels and types and employment intensity in households link to poverty. The main section of the paper looks at how stimulus and austerity moves were undertaken in Europe, before briefly assessing what these changes will mean for families and what other crisis factors might impact on family poverty. The paper concludes with some recommendations for research and policy arising from the discussions.

Main findings

Despite the family policy budget making up around 12% of the total social spending budget (OECD, 2011), and primarily delivered to support bringing up children, **family and child policies have been not been safeguarded from the crisis response strategies**. For example, in times of stimulus, the availability of families to work is important, and so childcare policies have been expanded. In times of austerity, in some cases, universal cash benefit policies (and so spent on all families, including those highest up the income distribution) have been deemed ‘unfair’ or wasteful, and changed to targeted benefits.

Despite increasing spending on family benefits, and particularly services, in many OECD countries in the past 20 years, both income inequality and child poverty have remained stubbornly hard to lower, and have even increased. **There are many vulnerable families still in need of public support** despite the increases in average family incomes in times of growth, and increases in investment by government. There are as least as many vulnerable families (based on poverty measures alone) as there were a generation ago.

The full range of austerity **changes in family policies, which have seen the direction of welfare change dramatically in some OECD countries**, has raised the question that - even though fiscal consolidation is clearly a necessity - was it necessary for family benefits to be affected, and when they were, was it necessary to close entire forms of support? Cutting back on a family policy may mean the reduction in a benefit over the short term, or the reduction in terms of those who receive it (means-testing), or the closure of the benefit. Examples of each are evident across OECD countries, yet decisions on how to cut create very different images about what the expectations are for post-crisis welfare provision, and the necessity and efficacy of the original policies that were subject to change.

^{*} This paper is a summary of a presentation given at the ChildONEurope meeting on “The impact of the economic crisis on children: lessons from the past experiences and future policies” on the 9 June 2011 at the Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence, Italy. The presentation drew from published articles and reports by the author (Richardson, 2010; Förster and Richardson, 2010; OECD, 2011). Specific citations taken from those papers are clearly referenced, and on a number of occasions, fuller data and explanation is available from those sources. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, and not of the OECD or OECD member countries.

An important question to address when making decisions about how to reduce the public family budget is: what works now, and what is cheaper to keep in the long term? To this end, there is **insufficient evaluation evidence on the costs and benefits of services versus cash benefits** to help those countries cutting benefits to decide which family policies deliver which family outcomes, and tailor changes to policy appropriately.

There also remains space for a discussion about efficiencies, or **how to amend current policies at the margins to make cost savings**. For instance, by delivering current complementary family services in an integrated way, money can be saved on fixed costs (co-location), or by reinvesting monies from one part of the child portfolio to another and investing more (or keeping) present early spending levels, there is a potential for long term efficiency savings (OECD, 2009; 2011).

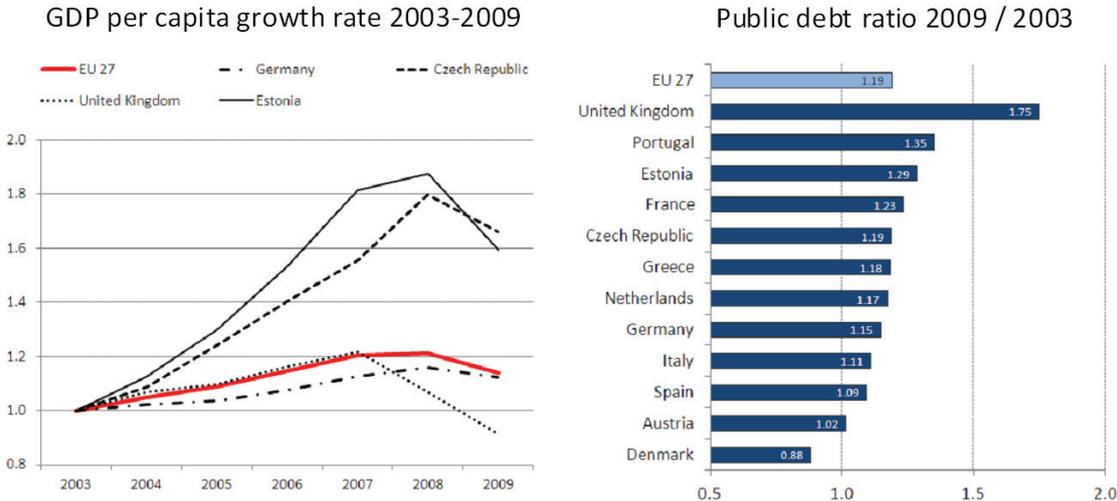
The upshot of the discussion is that policies for families in some countries have undergone a fast and reactive evolution, and inevitably these decisions will lead to reflections about the sustainability of austerity plans for family policies, or the efficacy of pre-crisis welfare packages in others. This is likely to change the face of family policies as understood in the pre-crisis years.

Background to the economic crisis

In order to make sense of the different policy changes in different advanced economies over this period, it is important to look at the varied pressures experienced by governments, and the varied contexts in which families live and decisions are made. Figure 1 below shows that as growth rose in the 5 years before the crisis, so did public debt in most countries. By 2009, average public debt in the EU 27 had increased by almost one fifth, yet gains in economic growth were beginning to fall. In some countries the contrast was extreme.

In the United Kingdom, public debt almost doubled at the same time as growth rates fell below 2003 levels.

Figure 1. Trends in growth and debt



Source: Richardson (2010).

These two key drivers of the affordability of welfare states had some unhappy company.

Not only was wealth creation down and public debt up, but negative social outcomes like child poverty and income inequality were increasing, the ability of families to work their way out of welfare dependency was also weakening with unemployment up and job vacancies down. There was also increasing demand for social assistance when public budgets could least afford it, and falling house prices in many countries diminished the equity available to families, and effectively cut into their

savings (see Richardson, 2010). Finally, and key to the ability of future generations to be productive, independent and build strong families, youth unemployment was also increasing from levels already high in some countries (Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010).

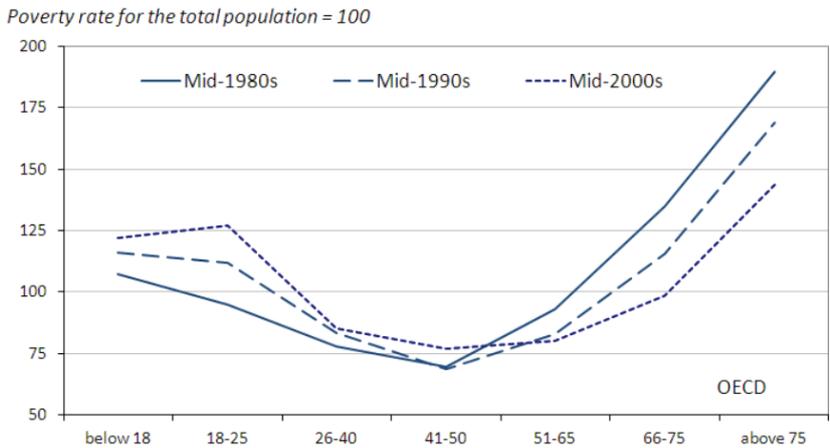
Child poverty in recent years

Another important aspect, when deciding whether countries can afford to pay for their welfare states, reflects on the future costs of underinvestment today. A case in point is underinvestment on families with children to support their care in the early years can lead to labour market exclusion or underemployment, and ultimately poverty.

Figure 2 shows the evolution of poverty risks by age in OECD countries over a generation of families. What is clearly evident is that the trend for children and youth to be at increasing risk of poverty, whilst pensioner poverty risks have fallen, and working age poverty risks have varied from slightly increasing for the younger generation and slightly falling for older workers. The shape of this curve will be partly explained by cohort effects, with the exception of the child cohort (unless poorer families are becoming more likely to be the child bearers), which fosters worrying conditions for families in the future.

Of particular concern, are the high rates of poverty in youth who will be bearing the families now in times of fiscal consolidation, uncertainty and weak labour markets. Couple this with high levels of youth unemployment, and it is very likely that demand on welfare services will increase further (and along with intergenerational transmission of opportunity) and will create a long term problem if not addressed before the children of these young adults leave school in the next 15 to 20 years.

Figure 2. Changing poverty risks



Source: OECD, 2008.

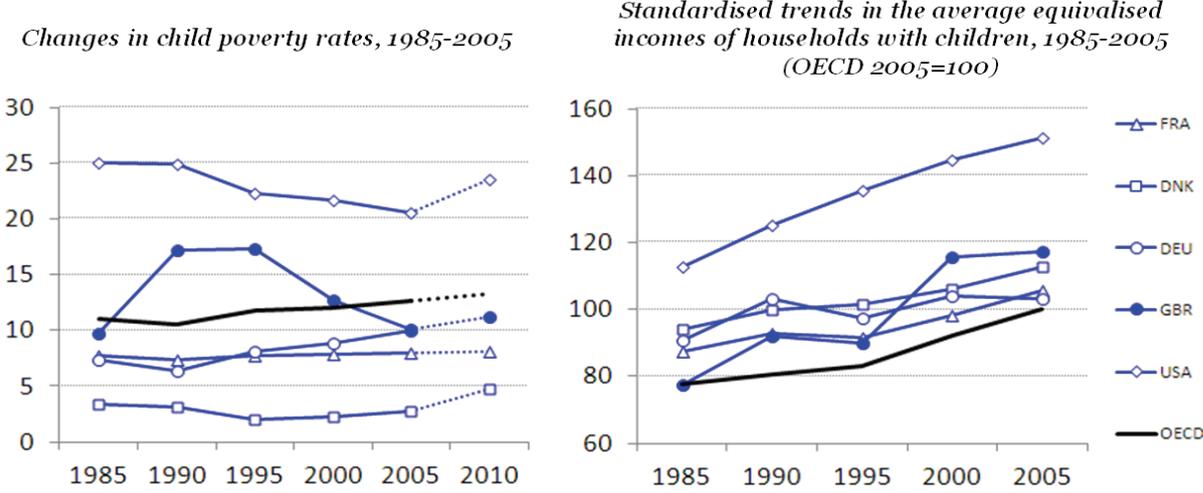
Looking at how the income poverty rates have been evolving country-by-country, Figure 3 shows five example poverty trends.¹ The OECD trend line shows that between 1985 and 2005 OECD poverty rates on average increased from around 11 per cent to 13 per cent (all data for 2005 to 2010 is estimated - for updates to the most recent data please see the OECD income distribution questionnaire, 2012). In Denmark and Germany - despite overall poverty levels being low - slight upward trends over the period can be seen. In the UK and the US until 2005, high rates of poverty

¹ Data for all OECD countries is available in *Doing Better for Families* (OECD, 2011). Income poverty rates in this paper are measured as the proportion of 0-17 year olds living in homes with less than 50% of the median household income (equivalised using the square root of the household size).

have shown improvement, but are predicted to have risen as a result of unemployment increases brought on by the financial crisis and Great Recession. Poverty rates in France have remained stable over the past 25 years, at around 8%.

At the same time income poverty was increasing average family incomes were increasing (right-hand panel), which suggests that only some families were taking advantage of the wealth opportunities pre-crisis.

Figure 3. Evolving family fortunes



Source: OECD, 2011.

There are three main conclusions to be drawn from the previous sections. First, effective family policies are needed to address increasing relative risks of poverty in families with children. Second, even after years of growth in family incomes, present systems have failed to reduce to any notable extent, experiences of family poverty. And third, in spite of the obvious need for government intervention to address these problems, fiscal consolidation is making present systems increasingly unaffordable under present circumstances.

Together these conclusions suggest a rethink in how family policies are delivered is to be expected for cost or benefit reasons, or both.

Family public investment

To understand why family policies have not escaped austerity moves and why poverty rates have been increasing in families, the first thing to explore is the size and structure of the family policy packages.

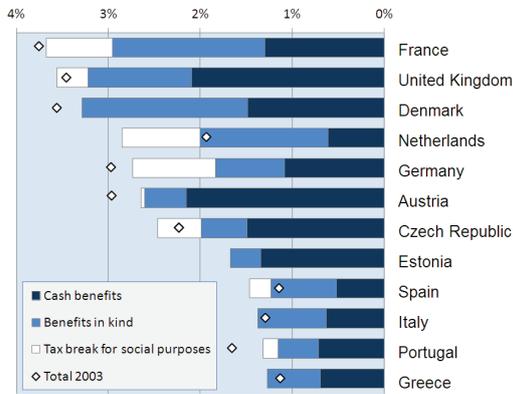
The two charts of Figure 4 show changes in spending amounts pre-crisis by country as a proportion of GDP, and the relative changes to trends in social expenditure on families since 1990. The left hand panel of Figure 4 shows that in the four year leading up to the financial crisis countries across the OECD were making changes to their family policy packages, both in terms of extensions and cuts. Importantly for the discussion of child poverty risks, the right hand panel shows the spending type which increased most over these years is benefits in kind (almost doubling between 1990 and 2007), cash benefit spending fell slightly, and a new form of assistance, delivered in the form of tax breaks and allowance to families with earned income, began to take off.

The charts of Figure 4 do not provide a detailed breakdown of the types of benefits involved in these trend changes. The aggregation also does not allow for an understanding of how the various benefit types are delivered (targeted / universal, to older children, younger children, larger families and

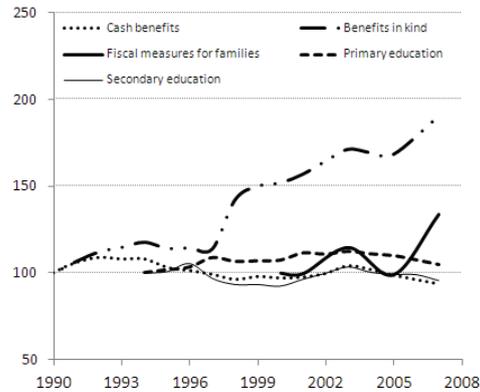
so on). Nonetheless, the increasing use of welfare to work type programs, including tax breaks, and enabling services such as childcare and after school care, is likely to have played a prominent role in this evolution of spending (OECD, 2011).

Figure 4. Changes to family spending by type, by country and on average, in recent years

The composition of family spending in 2007 (% of GDP), compared to total for 2003



Trends in social expenditure on families by type, 1990-2007



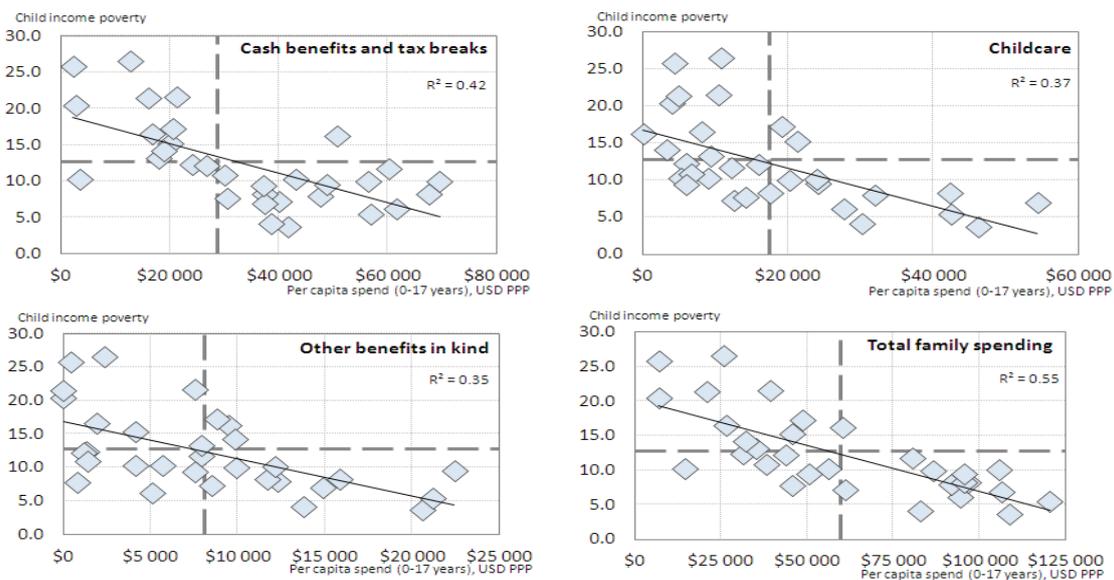
Source: OECD, 2011.

Public investment and poverty

What evidence is there that spending more makes more of a difference to the lives of children? Taking data from OECD (2011) analysis on age-spending profiles, it is possible to break down the spending on families to represent that which is spent on children aged 0-17 (to match poverty rates age group) by type (on cash, in kind, childcare and all together).

Figure 5 plots that data in terms of the average spend per head of population aged 0-17 against poverty rates in the child population. Results show that countries with higher average per child spending have lower poverty rates. The bottom left plot shows the total expenditure, where dotted lines represent the average on each scale, and that no country spending more than the OECD average amount per head has higher than average child poverty rates.

Figure 5. Associations between per capita spend (0-17 yrs) and child income poverty rates, circa 2007



Source: OECD, 2011.

Total spending associated most strongly with child poverty although when breaking this data down by type it is shown that cash and tax break spending, childcare and in-kind spending - in that order - also associate with lower poverty rates.

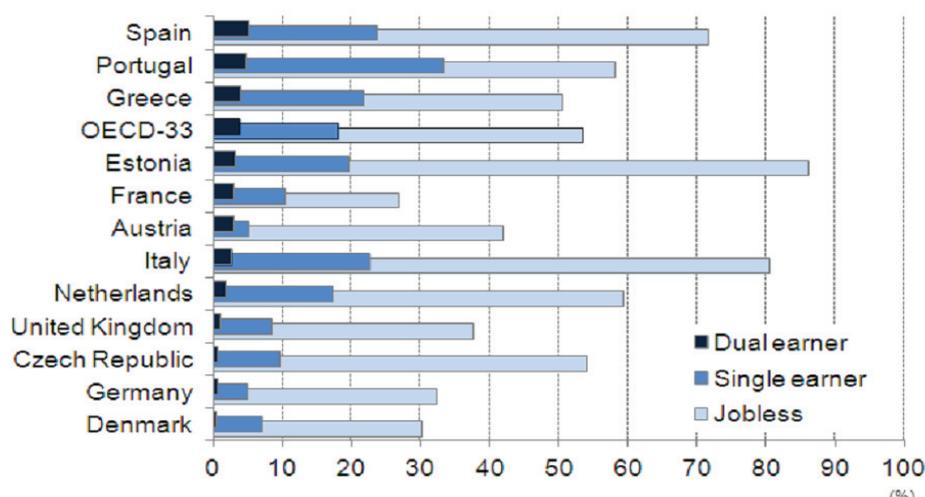
Lower poverty rates are not only driven by spending amounts, the timing of the spending is likely to matter as well as whether the money is spent on those most in need (though means-testing). It is important to note, however, that **these associations do not represent causality or say anything about the long term impact of the benefit types on poverty rates**, and so should be treated with caution. Moreover they do not indicate the extent to which these types of interventions can impact on other measures of living standards such as deprivation or subjective perceptions of poverty.

Lower poverty rates are not only driven by spending choices but also by the contexts in which this money is spent, such as employment rates.

Figure 6 shows, for a selection of countries, the poverty rates experienced by households that are either jobless, with one earner, or with two earners. In each country, jobless households have much higher rates of poverty than one earners families, and with the exception of Austria, one earner families have poverty rates much higher than two earner families. The success of policies promoting the ‘work out of poverty’ route will inevitably be defined by the extent to which employment protects families from poverty.

What is more, whether one or two parents have to work part/full time will also impact on the work family balance (and so other child well-being outcomes beyond poverty) in those countries.

Figure 6. Unemployment and poverty. Rates of poverty in couple households with children (0-17) by employment status, mid to late 2000s



Source: OECD, 2011.

Policy changes – stimulus then austerity

The background to the crisis, the evolution of poverty rates and the evolution of spending patterns, and the how spending efforts link to the final poverty outcomes sets a scene for the introduction of crisis related family policy changes, and importantly a reflection on their soundness. The following sections outline the findings of a summary of crisis change reviews, before going on to discuss what these changes might mean for families, and make some recommendations.

The annex of this paper reproduces the summary table taken from Richardson (2010), which shows changes to family policies in the periods of stimulus and austerity between 2008 and 2010 in the 27 European Union member states. The table builds on work done in this area by Gauthier (2010) and SPC EC (2009). The policies listed therein are not exhaustive, and detailed information on the changes to the benefits is not reported. Moreover the table does not: make reference to education budgets or health budgets, or tax changes that affect living standards in general; or policies not specifically targeted to families (but which may benefit families i.e. pensions or active labour market

policies); or child protection policies; or different benefit delivery methods that will impact on the overall effect of the changes (universal / targeted). For more information about the limitations with the table data see Richardson (2010).

Summary results show that changes to the amounts paid in cash benefits was the most commonly used direct intervention, and most often this involved child allowances (including tax allowances) or family allowances. Leave policies were involved more often in austerity measures than in the stimulus or expansion measures (Italy having the only example of the latter, where a lump sum birth grant for purchases for baby products was provided). Changes to housing benefits and supports for housing costs (including mortgage relief, help with utility bills, rent or home purchases), as indirect measures, were made more often than changes to social assistance benefits.

Starting with spending

Crisis responses involving family benefits started with spending. Temporary cash benefit increases to established family benefits in the form of one off payments made up the majority of crisis changes. This was the case in France, Germany, Hungary and Italy for example, with one-off payments for families in need or low-income families with school aged children. There were also examples of European countries expanding present policies via increasing eligibility (for instance, moving from means-testing to universal child benefits for the under 3s in Lithuania) or payments (United Kingdom).

Expansions to services, and particularly childcare services, were also used in stimulus measures via affordability (one-off service voucher in France) and via coverage (Irish free preschool year). One main reason behind these extensions of coverage was to reduce the costs of childcare, which can either free up parents to work or to look for work or lowers the effective marginal tax rate on second earners entering (or in) the labour market.

Closing with cuts

The second stage of crisis responses involved cuts to family benefits and reductions to coverage. Although many of the austerity measures, both to family allowances and parental leave policies, were temporary postponements or reduction to payments, some benefits were simply been closed. Closures mainly involved birth grants and bonds - the latest types of benefits to be introduced - in several countries including the Spanish Baby Cheque and the United Kingdom's Health in Pregnancy Grant, although Estonia's First Child Tax Relief was also abolished.

Examples of restrictions in eligibility of family cash allowances by age and by income (means-testing) as part of austerity moves were undertaken in Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Freezing rates of benefit payments was also a popular austerity move. A freeze on the inflation of family cash benefits prices for a set period was undertaken in Hungary, for instance, where the rates of payment for the universal Family Allowance were frozen.

The final, and possibly most cautious of austerity moves, was to postpone planned expansions of benefits. This was the case, for instance, in Estonia where plans for both paternity leave benefits and a free day care plan were suspended.

What does this mean for families?

So what do the crisis changes, both stimulus and austerity, mean for family outcomes in the short or long term? The answer to this question is, in short, we don't know (yet).

What is known, however, is what to look for. Whether the cuts achieved their purpose - to make gains in budgetary terms and to improve child and family outcomes (arguably in the short run in stimulus and in the long run in austerity) - can be tested as data from the crisis becomes available. Predictions can also be made, based on the evidence of spending rates and poverty and vulnerability to poverty by family type above (and additional evidence on poverty and unemployment in families by the

age of children), as to which families in which countries will come out of this period better or worse off.

What is also known is that underlying income inequality is playing a role (OECD, 2008), although family policies in the past 20 years seemingly have not done the job of reducing poverty risks they have had to become increasingly efficient just to stand still in the face of increasing market income poverty rates.

What is more, crisis changes were also made in many countries in the context of 'business as usual'. Gauthier (2010) stressed that policies not associated with the crisis, more often than not, have been put in place to expand family support in Europe.

Moreover, a number of other 'externalities' from the crisis changes might come about. Government policies might receive greater scrutiny, as an appreciation of short- and long-term solutions need to be found, in turn government's may experiment more and evaluate more (OECD, 2009). Added to this, some changes (for better and worse) might outlive the downturn, childcare expansions made in periods of stimulus would meet the pre-crisis goals of expanding spending on services, and increasing investment in the early years.

Altogether, the changes made and constraints acknowledged during the crisis point towards a rethink in the ways governments deliver policies to families.

What else matters for child poverty?

It would be inappropriate to suggest that the financial crisis can only affect child poverty through changes to those policies specifically labelled 'family policies'. So what else matters for child and family poverty? A number of indirect impacts are suggested below.

First, the shifting political debate brought about by competing demands may lead to family resources used elsewhere. In times of fiscal consolidation and competing interests, it is not unlikely that a repercussion of changes to family public spending and shifting priorities to job creation via employment subsidies or tax breaks for businesses may mean family benefits do not return to pre-crisis levels.

Second, child age-related payments, or payments based on family size of marital status, and household income in the family policy systems in many OECD countries will mean that the abolition of a policy, or a reduction in coverage, will not equally affect all family types. An upshot of these types of changes may be seen in other parts of the welfare system as different families become eligible for other benefits. Whether and how these changes increase poverty risks overall will become apparent over time.

Third, it is clear that a number of other complementary factors are needed for changes to family policies to have the desired (or limited negative) impact on family living standards. The most basic example is that for increased employment hours (or working adults per household) to make up for reductions in public support, job vacancies are needed (a difficult task in times of recession). Or, for instance, if childcare coverage is reduced, non-formal care opportunities are important for adults with young children to meet their work obligations.

Fourth, in some cases changes to employment conditions will also impact on family poverty. This may occur in cases where parents remain in employment but take pay cuts/pay freezes (as for those working in the public sectors) or have to work reduced hours, or relocate, in cases where business attempt to reduce fixed costs during times of restricted demand.

A final consideration for family poverty in a time of economic crisis is the potential for changes to banking and lending practice. Changes to banking and lending practises can impact on families living in mortgaged homes, or those paying back credit cards or loans, or making use of bank overdrafts for one-off payments or household purchases. When poorer families have to shorten periods of repayment, go without short term loans designed to free up cash flow, or default, these instances can result in the short-term lowering of living standards and longer term exclusion from credit purchases.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations and considerations can be drawn from this short discussion of the issues.

- **More research is needed on how the crisis is impacting on measures beyond income poverty.** This paper has concentrated solely on family policy and *income poverty* in the crisis. Over recent years there has been a sustained attempt to move beyond income poverty alone in measurements of living standards in the EU, OECD and UNICEF (Income distribution / material deprivation / well-being, etc.). Following calls for a more holistic interpretation of what makes for a good family/child life; more research is needed on how the crisis is impacting on these different measures. Even if the impact of crisis changes on different family outcomes is similar to that on income poverty, the reaction time and persistence of downturns across different living standards indicators are likely to differ.
- **Work should pay for both parents and all families.** Work is the main driver in the combat against child income poverty. To create good and secure job opportunities and make work pay for *all* families should be a priority in all countries. To make this happen, affordable, flexible and good quality childcare is needed, as are gender equitable family policies to ensure mothers (and single mothers) are not put at a disadvantage by child rearing, and can access equal opportunities in the labour market.
- **A debate remains to be had on the relative efficiencies of different benefit delivery methods.** In times of stimulus and austerity, as changes to family benefits have come thick and fast, should cuts to cash benefits be prioritised over in-kind cuts (depending on the prioritised outcome measure)? And when should universal benefits be protected when calls for targeted approaches get louder. OECD (2009) stresses the need for both equitable and efficient spending, and highlighted early, progressive, and integrated benefits as keys to achieving these goals: evidence from the crisis changes so far, have shown only partial agreement with this approach.
- **Policies should always protect vulnerable families and view investment in children as a public investment.** Whatever post crisis family policies evolve into, a continuation of increasing inequality and child poverty will only create long term problems for future governments. Vulnerable families should therefore be protected from falling too far behind, and for children, efforts should be made to break cycles of disadvantage, to encourage fairness in access and quality of public services, and to ensure sensible early public investment be made to avoid long-term costs associate with unfulfilled lives of benefit dependency and low productivity, and low social and personal well-being.

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Table 1. Policy changes by type in the European Union since the beginning of the financial crisis

Policies by type and by change						
		<i>New cash allowances, tax credits or tax breaks</i>	<i>Increases in present cash allowances, tax credits or tax breaks</i>	<i>New services for children</i>	<i>Extension to services for children / fees reduction</i>	
Expansions : Stimulus	Direct	<i>Family allowances / Child Benefits</i>	Austria (one off annual allowance); Bulgaria (family allowance); Germany (school allowance); France (one off payment for low income families with school-aged children)*; Lithuania (under 3 child benefit extended from means-tested to universal)*; United Kingdom (indexation of Tax Credits, child benefit increase)*.t.	Austria (childcare tax credit), Bulgaria (family allowance), Cyprus (CA), Finland (child benefit for larger families and index linked), DE (family size pay changes), Greece (extension of family allowance for large families until 3rd is 23), Netherlands (municipality budget to reduce child poverty), Poland (for the youngest child), Romania; Czech Republic *t; France (reduction in income, tax for low income families)*t; Germany (one off payment in CB)*t; Hungary (one off payment for families in need)*t; Italy (one off payment for families in need and increased family allowances)*t; United Kingdom (brought forward child benefit increases for the first child, increase in income tax threshold for low income families and increases in tax credits for low income families)*.		
		<i>Parental leave and income maintenance around birth</i>	Bulgaria (leave policies); Malta (tax break for mother returning to work); United Kingdom (health in pregnancy grant).	Germany (leave length, longer leave for grandparents), Greece (extensions for mothers in private sector), Finland (and index linked); Ireland (maternity), Slovak Republic; Italy (lump sum for nappies and milk purchases)*.t.		Netherlands; Sweden (leave for non-parents).
		<i>Child care policies</i>	Austria (tax break); Finland (home care allowance extended to entrepreneur).	Netherlands (for pre-schoolers); Poland (nursery allowance).	Italy (home-based care and at work); Romania (extensions in quality and coverage); Slovenia (free preschool for 2nd and subsequent children); Ireland (free preschool year - replaced the Early Childcare supplement)*.	Austria (free last preschool year compulsory) Finland (private day and home care allowance increased); Belgium; Bulgaria (formal and informal care); Greece (reconciliation of family and professional life), Hungary, Slovak Republic (for low income families); Cyprus*; France (one off service voucher)*.
Indirect	<i>Other direct policies</i>	Slovak Republic (for school children); Luxembourg (service voucher for 0-12 year olds)*; United Kingdom (funding package for organizations supporting families)*.t.	Estonia (tax breaks for larger families 2+ children); Finland (maintenance allowance and father months); Italy (card for household purchases for families with children under 3, trust funds for newborns) *t; Italy (tax allowance for kindergarten expenses)*.	Slovak Republic (free school meals for secondary school pupils).	Poland (school lunch budget); Lithuania (free school meals for 1st year pupils); Sweden (increase in educational content of preschoolers care at age 3).	
	<i>Housing benefits</i>	Cyprus, Italy (rent assistance); Romania (heating costs); Italy (utility costs for low income families)*; Poland (temporary mortgage relief payments for homeowners on Unemployment benefit)*; Romania (first home buying assistance)*; Slovak Republic (new housing loan)*; United Kingdom (stamp duty holiday)*.t.	Austria (heating allowance).			
	<i>Social Assistance</i>	Bulgaria.	United Kingdom (increase in Social Fund budget)*.t.			

Table 1. Policy changes by type in the European Union since the beginning of the financial crisis (cont).

		Removal of cash allowances, tax credits or tax breaks	Decreases in present cash allowances, tax credits or tax breaks	Removal of services for children	Reductions in services for children / fees increases	
Reductions: Austerity	Direct	Family allowances / Child Benefits	Estonia (first child tax relief)*.	Decreases in present cash allowances, tax credits or tax breaks Estonia (suspension of family allowance payments whilst in receipt of parental leave payments and reduction in care payments for under 12s)*; Hungary (freeze on universal Family allowance)*; Ireland (reduction in eligible age to 18, reduction in amount paid)*; Latvia (reduction in coverage and duration in Family allowance and changing it to taxable)*; Larvia (reduction in dependent tax relief)*; Netherlands (no increase in the child related budget and family allowance), and lowering of applicable income for receipt of child related budget)* United Kingdom (freeze in universal child benefit, reduction in the income test threshold for tax credits)*.		
		Parental leave and income maintenance around birth	Spain (baby cheque)*; United Kingdom (sure start maternity as of second child)*; United Kingdom (Health in Pregnancy grant)*.	Czech Republic (reduction in maternity allowance [t], and freeze on parental allowance)*; Estonia (paternity leave benefit suspended)*; Larvia (reduction in maternity, and restriction of parental leave coverage)*; Larvia (upper limit caps in parental leave -pending)*; Lithuania (maternity allowance and parental leave benefits)*;	Hungary (age of child from 3 to 2 in parental leave rights).	
		Child care policies		Hungary (increase in social insurance contribution period for receipt of childcare benefits); Netherlands (reduction in the maximum hourly rate for eligible childcare subsidy).	Finland (reduction in municipality day care budgets and restrictions of rules)*.	
	Indirect	Other direct policies	Estonia (study loans for parent of children under and annual school allowance)*.		Estonia (free day care plan suspended)*t.	
		Housing benefits	Hungary (heating).	Hungary (reduction in home creation support)*; Ireland (reduction in supplementary rent allowance)*; United Kingdom (caps in housing benefit payments, reduction for unused rooms, proposal to limit time of receipt)*.		
		Social Assistance		UK (lone parent work test)*.		

Sources: BBC (2010), Financial Times (2010), Gauthier (2010), HM Treasury (2010).

Note: Regular increases have not been included (such as increases in parental leave benefit payments in the UK), temporary changes marked with a (*). Services with a debatable categorization (such as the introduction of the Swedish childcare voucher) have not been included. The Czech Republic brought in (in part) a pro family package; Poland has also brought a family package in to law. All UK changes in the emergency budget have been treated as crisis focused measures.

1.4 The role of children's participation in fighting poverty and social exclusion. The experience of Eurochild members

Jana Hainsworth

Introduction

Eurochild¹ brings together over a hundred organisations and individuals from across Europe committed to promoting the rights and welfare of children and young people. We aim to ensure the interests of the organisations, and the children and families they work with, are represented in policy making at EU level, and also to support the exchange of knowledge and experience between member organisations. Our work is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ensuring the views and experiences of children and young people are heard is an important part of our work.

It is evident that children and families are being disproportionately affected by the on-going economic crisis. Rise in unemployment, coupled with increased living costs and reduced benefits and services are affecting many millions of families Europe-wide.² Many Eurochild members have to reduce services as a result of public spending cuts, despite a growing demand from children and families in difficulty. Eurochild's message during this difficult economic climate is clear: investment in children's well-being and the commitment to children's rights must not be compromised. Europe's long-term economic, political and social stability depends on its children growing up in healthy, loving environments. By contrast, not investing in children risks leaving future generations with a growing burden (and cost) associated with unemployment, crime, poor mental health and social breakdown. It is encouraging that this message is echoed across recent high level meetings including the OECD High-level Parliamentary Seminar - 'Addressing the Social Impact of the Crisis'³ and in the First Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion.⁴

The UN Convention on the rights of the child provides the legal framework for investment in children. Crucially it requires government not only to respect children's right to provision (e.g. services and financial support) and protection (e.g. against violence and abuse), but also to their **participation**. Participation rights include children's right to be heard in all decisions affecting them (Art. 12); the right to freedom of expression (Art. 13); the right to manifest a religion or belief (Art. 14); the right to association (Art. 15), and the right of access to information (Art. 17). Article 12 (the right to be heard) is one of four general principles of the Convention which must be considered in the interpretation and implementation of all other rights.⁵ It requires that all policies and practices that affect children take the views and opinions of children into consideration. There exist a wealth of experience on what processes and practices work best in involving children at different levels (local, regional, national or global) level. This article will explore some of the experiences of Eurochild members in involving children in research, service delivery and policy making.

However, meaningful participation of children, particularly children at risk of exclusion, requires investment. Against a backdrop of public spending cuts, it is essential to show why respect for children's participation makes a difference and to ensure governments fulfil their commitment to the UNCRC.

¹ www.eurochild.org

² Eurochild, *How the economic and financial crisis is affecting children and young people in Europe*, January 2011.

³ See speech of Angel Gurría, Secretary-General, OECD, which highlights the need to tackle growing inequalities and child poverty, 10 October 2011.

⁴ The Annual Convention is organized by the European Commission and the EU Presidency. The first Convention took place in Krakow (Poland) on 17-18 October 2011.

⁵ See General Comment 12 of the UNCRC Committee adopted June 2009.

Child poverty in Europe

Before the crisis hit, one in five children in the European Union was living at risk of poverty - that is approximately 20 million children.⁶ This statistic is based on the number of children living in households with an income less than 60% of the national median. With the exception of a few countries, children are more likely to live in poverty than the population as a whole. In Romania, almost one child out three lives in households below the poverty threshold, according to 2009 statistics.

However, the data has its limitations. Firstly, the time lag in data collection prevents real-time analysis of the current impact of the crisis. At-risk-of-poverty rates for all EU-27 member states are only available for 2009, although several countries which have data for 2010 show an increase in poverty (notably Germany, Spain and Latvia). Secondly, the indicator is a poor proxy for measuring and understanding children's overall well-being and the fulfilment of their rights. Children themselves, when asked what needs to be done to tackle poverty in their country, refer mostly to social exclusion and discrimination as the most important issues to address.⁷ Social exclusion is much broader term reflecting individuals' ability to fully participate in society. Lack of participation may be due to poverty but it can also be due to a lack of education, social competencies or poor access to services or community networks and activities.

A growing number of indicators are being used to measure different aspects of social inclusion - notably housing conditions, material deprivation, education levels, joblessness. Furthermore, the Social Protection Committee⁸ has committed to adopting a common indicator (or set of indicators) on child well-being. Eurochild, UNICEF and other actors are monitoring the process which we expect to be finalized over the course of 2012, together with the adoption of a Recommendation on child poverty and well-being (see below).

Clearly reliance on indicators alone gives an incomplete picture of poverty and its impacts. To have a snapshot of the situation across Europe, Eurochild regularly surveys its members. The report of January 2011 highlights how the economic crisis is impacting on children and families, as well as austerity measures introduced by governments to cope with the crisis⁹. The European network of independent experts on social inclusion also produced country reports on the social impact of the crisis in 2010¹⁰. Both paint a bleak picture and recent developments related to the Euro crisis are undoubtedly exacerbating the problem.

It is also crucial to understand the impact of poverty and social exclusion from a child-centred perspective. The intervention of Tess Ridge in this seminar provides an excellent insight to this. I would also highlight the importance of surveys and interviews conducted with children that experience poverty and social exclusion, such as the 'What do you think?' survey carried out by Unicef Belgium in 2010¹¹. The children and young people interviewed rarely associate their situation with one of living in poverty, nonetheless access to opportunities, the quality of their living environment and the influence of peer groups, play determinant roles in their overall well-being. It is also evident that young people give a high value to participating in out-of-school clubs and activities and the very fact of being treated as equals in discussions with adults increases their self-worth and confidence.

⁶ Eurostat (2010) *Combating poverty and social exclusion: A statistical portrait of the European Union 2010*.

⁷ See key messages from children & young people, Eurochild meeting July 2010.

⁸ The Social Protection Committee comprises representatives of each Member State and the Commission. It is supported by an Indicators sub-group (ISG). See: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/>

⁹ See Eurochild website for details: <http://www.eurochild.org/en/policy-action/impact-of-the-crisis>

¹⁰ Frazer, H., Marlier, E., February 2011, *Social Impact of the Crisis and Developments in the light of Fiscal Consolidation Measures. Main findings and suggestions of ways forward*, www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu

¹¹ August 2010, *What do you think ?*, www.unicef.be

An effective response to child poverty

Over the last decade political leaders across the EU have affirmed their commitment to tackle child poverty and social exclusion as a priority. It has been mentioned in successive EU Council Conclusions¹² and the Social Protection Committee elected to focus its first ‘*thematic year*’ on child poverty in 2007.¹³ Most recently Member States have agreed to work towards a Recommendation on Child Poverty and Well-being for adoption in 2012¹⁴ and the 2011 Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion on poverty gave particular attention to child poverty and social exclusion.¹⁵

There is wide consensus that policies to address child poverty must be multi-dimensional, and several actors proposed a “three-pillar” approach during the Belgian Presidency.¹⁶ This focuses on:

- Ensuring families have access to **adequate resources** including specific attention to social transfers such as family benefits, and ensuring parents can access quality jobs and that work pays. Family-friendly employment policies also play a key role;
- Ensuring all children and families have equal **access to quality services** including early childhood education and care, education, health care, good quality housing, a healthy environment, child protection services;
- Ensuring the **active participation of children and young people** including respect for children’s right to be heard, and participation of children in social, recreational, sporting, cultural and civic activities.

The ‘third-pillar’ is particularly relevant for this presentation and, in Eurochild’s view, crucial to a child rights approach to tackling child poverty and social exclusion. Based on the background paper prepared under the Belgian Presidency and the discussions at the policy conference,¹⁷ the policy recommendations linked to promoting the child’s right to be heard can be summarized as follows:-

- Governments should adopt the necessary laws and policies that recognise the child’s right to be heard and to participate in all decisions that affect them. They should invest in financial and human resources in developing representative structures especially at local level. ‘Champions’ of children’s voices (e.g. ombudsmen) should be supported.
- Policies aimed at tackling child poverty and social exclusion must reflect the views and suggestions of children themselves. In particular more effort should be made to reach out to the most marginalised.
- 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. Develop standards and codes of good practice and train professionals and policy makers.

In reality our experience shows that these policy messages are often not taken up by policy makers. A most recent report to the European Commission¹⁸ adapts this ‘three-pillar’ approach to replace the children’s participation pillar with a number of policy recommendations on ‘targeting children at high risk’. ‘Participation’ aspects are, on the other hand, reduced to promoting participation of children in social, sporting, recreational, cultural and civic activities and not children’s ‘right to be heard’. Notwithstanding the importance of developing policies that effectively target children at risk, it is

¹² Spring Council Conclusions 2005, 2006, 2007, and EPSCO Council Conclusions 2008.

¹³ See report of the Social Protection Committee, February 2008, *Child Poverty and Well-Being in the EU - Current status and way forward*.

¹⁴ See *Tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being*, adopted by the EPSCO Council 17 June 2011.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* footnote 3.

¹⁶ Call for an EU Recommendation on Child Poverty and Child Well-being, June 2010, PPS Social Integration, anti-Poverty Policy, Social Economy and Federal Urban Policy in cooperation with UNICEF and Eurochild.

¹⁷ Belgian Presidency Child Poverty Conference, 2-3 September 2010, <http://www.flythekite.eu/17/child-poverty-conference>.

¹⁸ EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, July 2011, *Policy Solutions for Fostering Inclusive Labour Markets and for Combating Child Poverty and Social Exclusion*, www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu

disappointing that efforts to ensure children's views and opinions are heard - in particular the voices of the most vulnerable children - are not given due attention. More worryingly we are witnessing trends that run counter to the recommendations highlighted above, such as the closure of children's ombudsmen offices (e.g. France) and the withdrawal of funds for projects designed to involve children and young people (e.g. local authority participation projects UK).

Perhaps a blockage in developing effective policies to support children's participation is a misunderstanding of what it means and the impact it can have. In an effort to bring concrete examples of children's participation and how it can contribute to combating poverty and social exclusion, Eurochild published a number of case studies illustrating examples of participation and its contribution to four dimensions of the fight against poverty: poverty research, improving services, policy development, and peer support.¹⁹ In the following section I explore the examples used to illustrate how participation contributes to policy development, as well as some of the potential benefits and pitfalls of children's involvement in policy processes.

Children's involvement in policy development

The two examples cited in the publication are institutionalized structures that enable sustained involvement of children in decision-making.

The Cyprus Children's Parliament involves children elected predominantly through the school system (although children not in the school system can also nominate themselves). The children meet regularly at district level and in plenary and set their own agenda. Their advocacy has led to school improvements to enhance disability access and change practice with regard to punishment in schools.

Funky Dragon in Wales provides an opportunity for 0-25 years old children and young people to get their voices heard on issues that affect them. It is entirely a young people led organisation. It enables young people in Wales to speak directly to the Welsh Assembly Government and other policy-makers. The young representatives are elected through four categories: the voluntary sector, e.g. scouts, local charities; the statutory sector, e.g. youth clubs, schools, social services; school councils - which are obligatory in all primary and secondary schools in Wales; and finally through special interest groups represented particularly vulnerable groups such as disabled children, ethnic minorities, gay, homeless, looked-after, etc. The institution contributed to establishing complaints mechanisms in schools, but importantly, it also had a profound impact on the children and young people involved, as one young person said "*being involved from the beginning has changed me as a person*".

Another example from the Eurochild network is the Participation Network²⁰ in Northern Ireland that trains policy makers to meaningfully engage children and young people in policy development and service design, and matches policy processes with relevant organisations that can support children's involvement. It was foreseen that the Child Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland adopted in March 2011²¹ would be based on a 9-month process involving children. In practice the consultation with children and young people was ineffective, which may reflect the strained resources and failure to accord children's participation the necessary priority.

At EU level, Eurochild has facilitated a number of child participation activities with the support of its member organisations. At its children's meeting on poverty and social exclusion in July 2010, young people from 10 different countries had the opportunity to meet with different members of the European Parliament, representatives of the EU institutions, and the Belgian Secretary of State on the fight against poverty and social exclusion representing the EU Presidency. The children value the fact that "*their opinions matter*"; policy makers also valued the direct dialogue with children. In December 2010, Eurochild facilitated a meeting of children with experience of being an unaccompanied minor, which contributed to the Annual Conference of the Fundamental Rights Agency on this topic. We also

¹⁹ Eurochild, September 2010, *Valuing Children's Potential - How children's participation contributes to fighting poverty and social exclusion*.

²⁰ www.participationnetwork.org.

²¹ *Improving Children's Life Chances - The Child Poverty Strategy*, March 2011 www.northernireland.gov.uk.

expect that Cyprus will give particular attention to the issue of participation during the tenure of the EU Presidency from July to December 2012, and involve children and young people directly in the relevant conference.

There are many benefits to be gained through involvement children and young people in policy and services development and delivery. First and foremost the children involved gain skills and knowledge. It is particularly valuable for children who have negative experiences of the formal school system or who are disadvantaged due to their background or a disability. Experience shows that children's involvement also impacts their immediate peer group.

Meaningful engagement with children can improve policy and service design. A concrete example is the involvement of children in recruitment and training for professionals working with particularly vulnerable groups.²² Evaluation of such projects shows that professionals are much more responsive and attentive to children's views and experiences when children who *'have been through the system'* share their perspective and expectations. It works best when children have had direct experience of the issues around which policies are designed. The process of their involvement must also directly benefit the children as a positive and fun learning experience, and avoid any manipulation or exploitation of children's input for adults gain.

However, we believe there is a wider value in engaging children and young people in policy debates even at levels when the actual potential impact on policy change may be limited. Eurochild's experience at EU level has proven to be successful, not just as a fun learning experience for the children involved, but also for the policy makers in understanding the contribution children and young people can make to policy debates. Children's engagement can also support a wider attitudinal shift that focuses on children's agency as opposed to their vulnerability or need for protection. It can also inspire the development of institutionalized structures at national and regional level that support children's participation on a sustainable basis.

Progress at EU level

I will briefly highlight developments in three policy areas at EU level which could potentially have an important impact on developing children's participation. The first, already introduced above, is the forthcoming Recommendation on child poverty and well-being. It is important that 'children's right to be heard' is retained as a clear policy message within this document and policy makers have clear information on how this can be achieved in practice.

Secondly, since adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, child rights are now an explicit objective the EU.²³ In order to put this commitment into operation, (DG Justice) launched a new children's rights agenda in February 2011²⁴ setting out its plan for mainstreaming children's rights across EU action and identifying a number of key priorities. It gives particular attention to child participation and awareness raising, highlighting that *"children must be given the chance to voice their opinions and participate in decisions that affect them"*. It is disappointing that none of the Forum on the Rights of the Child - designed to bring different stakeholders together annually to discuss different aspects of child rights - has not yet taken the step to directly involve children.

Finally the EU's youth policy agenda is perhaps leading the way on child and youth participation. 'Youth' in EU terms refers to young people from 13 to 30. Policy development in this area is based on 'structured dialogue' that involves regular meetings with 'organised youth' including national and regional youth councils or other institutionalized structures that give young people a voice. In reality the young people are rarely - if at all - under the age of 18, and it seems that the child rights and youth policy agendas have followed completely separate tracks at EU level (although an attempt has been made to bring these two policy agendas closer together by the Belgian government under their tenure

²² See case study of Gloucestershire participation project run by Action for Children (footnote 19).

²³ Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union explicitly requires the EU to promote the protection of the rights of the child.

²⁴ COM(2011) 60 final, 15 February 2011, *An EU Agenda for the rights of the child*.

of the EU Presidency in 2010).²⁵ The experience of youth participation in youth policies can provide valuable lessons for the development of more child participation - in particular given their strong focus on the involvement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are also lessons to be learnt from the 'dashboard' of key indicators to support the EU Youth Strategy that includes a number of indicators on youth participation.²⁶

Conclusion

In the context of the on-going economic crisis, a growing number of children and young people risk being exposed to poverty and social exclusion. Investment in their well-being must be a priority. Failure to do so will undoubtedly result in untold future costs associated with social breakdown and rising inequalities.

Participation and knowing their opinion counts play an important role in ensuring children's well-being, and this must be considered in the policy responses to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Institutionalised structures that support on-going children's participation, such as children's parliaments, are an important means through which children can engage in policy debates on an on-going basis. These should be developed where none exist so far - paying particular attention to the involvement of more marginalized groups of children. However, these are not the only means of children's participation. Children can be involved punctually around specific policy processes or to provide inputs to services design and improvement. Children's experiences of poverty and social exclusion must also be sought to ensure the policy responses are sensitive to children's needs and improve outcomes for children.

The EU policy context can make a difference by providing policy guidance and offering the opportunity for exchange of good practice and mutual learning. It is hoped that the forthcoming Recommendation on child poverty and well-being will give due attention to making 'children's rights to be heard' operational in policy development, so that this filters down into practice within member states. The EU's commitment to children's rights will also provide a crucial frame for promoting children's participation. The latest EU agenda on the rights of the child is an important first step but it does not go far enough in operationalizing children's right to be heard in EU policy development. Finally, the EU's youth policy agenda can provide important lessons for the development of child rights policy, particularly in the field of participation.

²⁵ Desmet, E., Children's Rights Knowledge Centre (www.keki.be), *The European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth and Children's Rights*. A Belgian EU Presidency-Youth Note.

²⁶ European Commission, Staff Working Document, 25 March 2011, EU indicators in the field of youth.

Part 2

Outcomes of the Working Groups

2.1 Working group 1

Child education and family income maintenance: preventing out-of-home child fostering

Synthesis by Leonardo Menchini

The discussion within the working group was rather difficult, mainly because the issues addressed is not exactly perceived *prima facie* as a problem, but we agreed that it could become as such in the near future as consequence of the reduction of the public funds dedicated to the governmental policies on education and family income maintenance.

Since the beginning of the discussion we discovered that the questions we posed were good and right in theory but very difficult to disentangle in practice. Indeed during the discussion there was a presentation of a series of country experiences in particular on foster care, on out of home fostering of children, but the key question we wanted to address in this group was about preventing out of home child fostering with intervention aiming at child education and in supporting family incomes.

Indeed we all agreed that the socio-economic conditions and education and parenting skills are all key determinants of child outcomes including also child protection problems and separation of the child from the family, but in general when a child is separated from the family it is not the economic conditions of the family which are stated to be the causes, there are other social problems, including violence against the child etc. Therefore, it was quite difficult to address the starting question because in practice in the functioning of the social services, education on positive parenting and family income maintenance are not directly addressed, essentially because children are not separated from the family for economic reasons. But we know that we should look at the underlying causes of the problem and indeed among the root causes very often there is the socioeconomic condition of families and prevention should be done in particular creating a more cohesive society, reducing inequalities, supporting family incomes, family employment, with child education, with parenting policies. All of that is part of preventing policies, but in practice they are not conceived as policies that prevent the separation of children from the family. Among the six points which have been then selected and proposed for further discussion, there is a lack of comparative analysis on foster care across countries and in particular there is a lack of understanding of the real determinant causes, not the immediate manifestation of the problems, which are leading to the separation of the child from the family. We also noted, in the country comparison, that the solutions for children deprived of parental care are different across countries. There are countries which are relying only on foster arrangement guardianship and foster care, other countries where institutional care is still key part of the solution. And indeed we also noted the different dynamics and the different functioning of the response to the problem in terms of duration of the separation of the child from the family, in what perspective the duration is taken into the policy, what are the kind of intervention which are put in place to facilitate the reunification of the child with the family.

The second point is the multifactorial problems and causes which are leading to the separation of the child from the family. It is not only the immediate manifestation (violence, alcoholism, and so on) but we have to understand better the broader social determinants which should be addressed with specific policies. The issue is difficult to identify in practice and more research and more understanding is needed.

Another point is that in some cases it was clear that when the child is separated from the family the policies are focusing more on the foster family than on the biological family. It's important to consider that if the perspective is the reunification with the original family you should not focus and support only the foster family, it's important also an investment on the biological family. Indeed in particular from an Italian pilot example, we noted there is a good practice of taking care of children but also of the families having both the child and the family included in the policy.

The last point which arrived at the very end of the discussion it's about how we measure the effectiveness of the measures. It's difficult. We don't have evaluation tools to understand the real impact of the policies and very often the most effective measures are difficult to understand and disentangle. In most of the cases the effects are long-term effects so cannot be measured effectively. In some cases we know that the policies work but there are not indicators which are helping us to understand that they are important in protecting the well-being of children and the family preventing the deterioration of the living conditions. This is a strong limitation. We have few tools and few indicators to understand the effectiveness and the impact of the measures. We also have few tools to support their importance and to defend these tools and the resources invested on them, in particular in a period of economic crisis. Some of these services are threatened by the crisis and it's difficult to continue to support them because in a context of budgetary cuts we have not the instruments to show that they are of key importance and they are at risk to be the first intervention to be sacrificed in a crisis context. One of the examples is support to parenting. The discussion was very rich with examples coming from different regions of Spain, Italy, Denmark, Slovenia, the Netherlands and Portugal. The issue is that from the beginning we understood the complexity and if it's clear that socioeconomic conditions and education are important for preventing children from being separated from the family, in the practice, other causes are understood to be the leading factors. And that's a limitation. So we should try to really improve prevention towards the construction of more cohesive societies where all individuals are recognised with the basic citizens' rights. Probably investing in childhood since the beginning with universal means can be really a preventing factor but indeed in the reality we know that social workers and politicians are facing different challenges.

2.2 Working group 2

The importance to invest in services dedicated to early childhood

Synthesis by Benoît Parmentier

1. The first months of life are fundamental for the well-being and the development of a child. A good beginning is also a guarantee of success both in school and then at professional level. Therefore, the quality of the socio-educational process set up from the birth of a child is important. It is reported the risk that in many and many situations of vulnerability (such as mono-parental family, divorce, problems of mental health, etc.) this conditions is not granted.
2. It is agreed about the economic relevance and interest in investing in services dedicated to early childhood. An American study showed that investing 1\$ in prevention policies would produce a saving of 8\$ in remediation policies. Prevention policies generate more economic development as such (in terms of job employ, facilities, etc.).
3. It is important for socio-educational services to pay attention not only to the harmonic growth of the child, but also that they invest in supporting parents activities. It is desirable in addition that they guarantee access to these services, without prejudices or stigmatisations, that they assure continuity in accompanying them in the course of time and that they give sufficient information about their existence and mission.
4. In order to avoid any kind of stigmatization it is necessary to organize a supply of services addressed to the whole population and to plan reinforced follow-up for the most disadvantaged people. It doesn't seem indicated to organize only services addressed to the poorest part of the population. It is therefore necessary to find the proper connection between the «general» right to services and a «specific» right considered as a positive differentiation and not as an exclusion.
5. Networking seems to be fundamental in the struggle against social inequalities, such as an integrated and transversal approach to the services to families and to early childhood, comprising educational and social perspective, health, handicap or employability.
6. Children, even those of young age, must have the possibility to contribute to the development process of care provision.

2.3 Working group 3

Child participation to the actions against poverty and social exclusion: some national experiences

Synthesis by Jana Hainsworth

Overview

The workshop involved 3 presentations from national network organizations that are engaged in promoting children's rights and children's participation:

Maria Corbett of the Children's Rights Alliance in Ireland highlighted their role in advocating for full implementation of the UNCRC in Ireland and bringing children's voices into national decision making. She described their work in relation to budget analysis from a child rights perspective, particularly important in the context of the Ireland's debt crisis and austerity measures imposed by the new government. There is real concern over escalating levels of child poverty and family debt coupled by under investment in crucial services and early intervention. Direct consultation and involvement of children is mainly carried out by CRA's member organizations, although Maria highlighted some good practices such as children's input to the UNCRC alternative report and the children's helpline.

Eva Borissova of the National Network for Children in Bulgaria gave some concrete examples of how their network is working directly with children to ensure their voices are heard. She prefixed these examples with some cautionary messages - especially relevant in countries with a recent Communist history: participation needs to be '*authentic*' meaning we need to be careful to avoid adult manipulation and imposing adult processes on children; there needs to be a balance between child protection and their right to be heard; it is important that children's participation has a purpose that is close to children's day-to-day reality and that really motivates and engages children. The three examples reflect these principles:

- A nationwide campaign for clean toilets in schools which mobilized thousands of children to discuss the condition and hygiene of toilets - the traditional squat toilet and standard western toilet.
- Open Space Technology and Famillathlon that engage children in their local communities
- The Golden Apple Award which included an award for a child or young person that is an inspiration to others.

Inete Ielite of Children's Forum of Latvia gave examples of their work in Latvia. Children were active partners during the 2010 European Year against Poverty. Children met with several politicians during the year and they gathered signatures for the campaign against child poverty. One of the national ambassadors selected for the year was a young singer that has won different international children's song contests. She highlighted the importance of empowering children in a country with exceptionally high levels of child poverty and where many children are left behind with family members when their parents migrate to work in Western Europe.

During the following discussion, workshop participants from Italy, Romania, Spain and Belgium shared their respective experiences on children's participation and the benefits and risks of children's contribution to political advocacy.

Outcomes

From the presentations and following discussion, 4 key messages can be drawn.

Children are not 'mini-adults'

It is important to tailor children's participation to children's age, needs and culture. Care must be taken not to manipulate children's participation for adult goals and to balance children's right to protection with their right to be heard. Techniques of children's participation need to motivate and engage children - for example, peer-to-peer activities often work well. It was stressed that children's rights advocates have a responsibility to ensure children's voices are heard, but this does not imply that children need to be physically present in meetings. The responsibility and role of adults in facilitating and acting on children's views and opinion must also be clear. Children's participation requires adults to learn to listen better and to distinguish between children's needs and wishes. The example of the mobile phone was given - children desire for a mobile phone may reflect their underlying need to socialize and connect with other children.

Participation starts with children making a difference in their day-to-day reality

When involving children it must be clear what difference their participation will make. Most workshop participants agreed that participation is most effective when addressing issues that are closest to children's reality, where they can see and experience the change resulting from their participation. The clean toilets campaign is a good example of this. In Belgium surveys on children's participation revealed that what matters most to children is their participation and feeling of being heard in school. It is felt that this is where it is most important to promote meaningful participation.

Participation is much more than consultation

Too often children's participation is reduced to punctual activities such as consultations with children. Whilst such projects can be extremely important and can gather useful information about the experience or opinions of children, in themselves they are not enough. Questions can also be raised concerning the actual impact of consultations with children on the actual policy making process, leading to an accusation of children and young people being "*over consulted and under listened to*". Consultations therefore require that children are provided with clear and appropriate information on the consultation topic, the expected impact and outcomes. As stated above the topic should also be relevant and meaningful for children. One example quoted was the safer internet forum - where children can provide real insight and creative suggestions on to make internet use safer for children.

Participation should be considered as a process. Professionals working with children should consider participation as an on-going element of their work. Workshop participants also emphasized the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of children's participation through evaluation.

More understanding of children's participation is needed among those working with/for children

Many workshop participants felt that there are still misconceptions about what children's participation is and how it should be carried out. Without a common basic understanding there is a risk that children's participation be misused for adult goals. It was emphasized that more use should be made of existing tools such as General Comment 12 of the UNCRC Committee on children's participation. The upcoming guidelines of the Council of Europe will also help to provide a common ground for children's participation.

Interventions of Eva Borissova and Maria Corbett

Children Participation - What's in it for Children? Our Key Challenges and Key Learnings

Eva Borissova

Without any doubt, Children Participation is a key element of a Child friendly world we all want to co-create. Different organizations are trying to involve children in a variety of initiatives and make children voices heard. More than ever in human history politicians and global leaders are seduced by the freshness of children's point of view.

But why in a world full of good intentions, so often children feel used and disappointed by their participation?

This is a key question for us in NNC to reflect upon while struggling to achieve our

- **Main Goal:**
 - To encourage children participation in decision making process, assuring partnership with organizations engaging children and young people.
- **The key challenge is very well described in the Preamble of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**
 - the child should be **fully prepared to live an individual life** in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity,
 - the child, by reason of **his physical and mental immaturity**, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.

Often when we talk about child participation we neglect the obvious fact that children are persons between 0 and 18 year of age. **The different age groups have completely different balance of autonomy and dependence. Consequently authentic child participation requires a very deep understanding of the psychological characteristics and physical abilities of the specific age, appropriate methodology, and most of all a clear vision of what's in it for children.**

- **Article 12**
 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the **right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child**, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Often as adults we either underestimate or overestimate child's capability of forming his or her on views on different topics. As a result of it very often we witness situations where children are asked for opinion on questions that are formulated in such an expert or abstract manner that the only choice children have is to keep silent or trying to give an answer they believe the adults would expect. Sometimes, deliberately or not, we rather ask children answers than questions.

The school system often violates the right of children to express their views freely by "preparing" them. Teachers are sometimes obsessed by the best possible performance of their students so they literally put the words in children's mouth.

- **Article 13**
 1. The child shall have the right to **freedom of expression**; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

In some cases children are sent to different types of events without even being informed what's it all about and why they should attend. The way children are invited to participate rarely include time, space and instruments so that they could really make informed choice.

– **Article 14**

1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to **freedom of thought, conscience and religion.**

Often adults fail to deal with young people the fact that freedom of thought, conscience and religion is about and not controversial to tolerance, being able and wanting to hear and understand other's point of view.

– **Article 15**

1. States Parties recognize the rights of the child to **freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.**

The role of supporting adults in children's associations is very delicate. One of the big temptations is to focus on results instead of focusing on the process. The main purpose of children associational life is to develop social skills. Supporting adults should help children with techniques and methods and should adhere to servant leadership principals.

The Scars of Communism - lessons learned.

Only 22 years after the fall of communism we all remember our own childhood with Pioneers' and Comsomols' organizations being inevitable part of it.

As children, we were honoured to meet the communist leaders, as adults, we found out that this was simply child abuse for political purposes.

As children we were fascinated to participate in different art festivals and competitions, as adult we found out that this was simply brainwash masked as child participation initiatives.

As children we were enjoying to go to a brigade instead of going to school, as adults we found out that obligatory "voluntary work" is the best way to kill any sense of belonging and free initiative in young people.

What did we learn out of communist type child participation?

- Authority instead Democracy,
- Careerism instead of Leadership,
- Arrogance instead of Empathy.

How do we work on child participation in National Network for Children?

By asking ourselves a few key questions:

1. Why should children participate?
2. What's in it for them?
3. What are children going to learn out of this?
4. How are they going to feel?
5. What they need to know in order to get the best result from their participation?
6. How to invite them?
7. What would be the best methodology and resources suitable for this age group?
8. How we address different needs?
9. What follow up would reinforce this experience?
10. How fair are we in our own intentions?

Our best practices:

1. Golden apple award - this is an award given by national Network for Children in different categories to honour people who contributed to improve children's lives in Bulgaria. Children can both nominate and be nominated. In the category - Fairy Tale Hero for 2010 - 2 out of 3 nominees were children themselves.

2. Children Have the Right of Clean School Toilets - advocacy campaign for improving the situation of school toilets.
3. Research on: What children think about school toilets, how they use them and what they feel about it?
4. My Steps to My City - Series of Open Space Technology seminars within the context of Child Friendly City initiative of UNICEF in Bulgaria aiming to empower young people to initiate their own project in their cities as well as to provide local authorities with feedback on how children see their cities and what's their vision for the future.

We support our members in child participation initiatives.

Famillathlon - open air sports festival for families, initiated in Bulgaria by Association Roditeli. Children had the possibility to try more than 30 types of sports and to choose to adhere to a sport club or to participate in a summer camp.

Parents were encouraged to share the experience with their children and to support them in making their choices.

Conclusion:

Children are the unique chance for every society to learn from the future as it emerges. We need to work actively in creating a vast opportunity for authentic child participation in the life of our families, our communities, our cities, our Europe, our World. To get the best of it for children and for us we need to be fully aware of the purpose but also of the process. And if there is one key question to guide us - let it be.

What's in it for children?

Child participation to the actions against poverty and social exclusion: some national experiences

Maria Corbett

Introduction

The Children's Rights Alliance is a national coalition of over 90 non-governmental organisations working to secure the rights of children in Ireland, by campaigning for the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A priority concern for the organisation is that the Government's response to the current economic recession is not sufficiently taking into account the rights of children. This short paper begins by setting out the 2011 context in Ireland, then explores how the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child links to budgetary decisions; and finally, provides two case studies on how the Alliance advocates for children's rights to be brought into national budgetary and policy decisions.

Ireland in 2011

Ireland is currently experiencing the worst economic crisis in its short independent history. The recession has resulted in increasing levels of unemployment, personal debt, emigration and high rates of poverty. In late 2010, Ireland entered into a Programme with the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to borrow over €67 billion to cover the national deficit. This Programme now has a significant influence on national budgetary decisions. The Government's National Recovery Plan sets out a combination of spending cuts and tax increases to be employed to reduce the deficit from over 11% in 2010 to 3% by 2014. The Plan does not list protecting children or supporting families among its goals. Despite a Government pledge to protect the most vulnerable in Irish society, their actions have focused heavily on economic policies at the expense of social policies.

Impact of the economic crisis on children

The recession is threatening to undermine - and indeed roll back on - progress made to-date in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ireland, in particular the realization of children's socio-economic rights. Children are being hit hardest by the economic crisis. Of deep concern is the long-term impact of the crisis on children and especially those who are already marginalised or disadvantaged.

The impact of the economic crisis on children is multi-fold, including:

- Cut backs to existing services and supports
- Rising rates of child poverty and social exclusion
- Rising rates of unemployment - increasing numbers of children live in families where no one is working
- Reallocation of money dedicated to children to general funds to support the struggling economy and banking system
- Lack of future investment in children's services, such as early intervention and prevention
- Children are negatively affected by their parents' emotional stress over money worries

Why children's rights matter even more in a recession?

Children's rights cannot be put aside during a recession. Indeed, the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child matter even more in an economic crisis and should underpin all decisions - including budgetary decisions - that affect children. Of critical importance are:

- Article 2: The rights set forth in the Convention apply to each child without discrimination of any kind.

- Article 3: The best interests of children should be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting the child.
- Article 12: The views of the child should be heard and given consideration in all decisions affecting the child.

Two articles explicitly link to the socio economic rights of a child.

- Article 4: State parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of rights recognised in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, State parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources, and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation.
- Article 27: State Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual and moral development.

The implementation of rights must be viewed as a legal obligation and not as a charitable act. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's has requested that States identify and analysis resources for children in national budgets as part of their periodic reporting.¹ The Committee has said that it is not possible to assess progress in implementing Article 4 unless the State can identify the proportion of national and other budgets allocated to the social sector, and within that to children, both directly and indirectly.²

In addition, there are a number of articles whose implementation requires State resourcing. Examples include:

- Article 23 - children with a disability (including special care and assistance, and access to education, health, recreation, training and rehabilitation services)
- Article 24 - health and health services (including enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and access to health care services)
- Article 26 - social security (right to benefit from social security, including social insurance)
- Article 28 - education (including compulsory primary education free for all children and, in case of second level education, offering financial assistance in the case of need)

Case Study 1 - Are children visible in Ireland's national budget?

Children are virtually invisible within the national budget of Ireland. To remedy this, the Children's Rights Alliance has begun an advocacy project to make children visible within budgetary decisions. Activities that have taken place to-date under this project include:

- Publication of in-depth research analysing the proportion of the annual Budget spent on children; where direct and indirect spend on children is allocated; and how spend on children aligns with stated Government policy priorities. Year-on-year monitoring of changes will be undertaken.
- Publication of an annual Pre-Budget Submission, which calls for certain measures to protect and support children's rights to be included in the budget.
- Publication of an annual Post-Budget Analysis, which examines budget decisions and their impact on children.
- Publication of a Budget Factsheet for non-governmental organisations to support them to understand and influence the budget process.
- Working as part of a non-governmental advocacy coalition - the End Child Poverty Coalition.

¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child (1996) General Guidelines Regarding the Form and Contents of Periodic Reports to be Submitted under Article 44, Paragraph 1(b), of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/58, 20 November 1996, para. 20.

² Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) General Comment No. 5 (2003) General Measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (arts. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6), CRC/GC/2003/5m 27 November 2003, para. 51.

- Utilisation of the media, including social media, to communicate our message.

Given the reduction in public funds, it is no longer possible as advocates to only call for additional monetary resources to 'fix' problems: better and more creative uses of public money are now required. The Alliance's work in this area is underpinned by its concept of 'Smart Budgeting for our Children's Future', which means taking policy decisions that are efficient in their use of resources and effective in their ability to improve outcomes for children. The focus has shifted from 'how much money is being spent' to 'is the money being spent having a positive impact on children's lives'.

Case Study 2 – Is the Government keeping its promises to children?

The Alliance has developed a monitoring tool to hold Government to account in relation to children's rights through the publication of an annual 'Report Card'. The Report Cards analyses performance against Government's own commitments to children, in the areas of education, health, material wellbeing and safeguarding childhood. The performance of the Government over the year is graded, on a scale from A (excellent) to F (fail), in progressing these commitments. The grading is validated by an independent panel of experts. The Report Cards highlights the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and includes case studies from local media to demonstrate the impact of Government policies on children.

The Alliance's vision is to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. To achieve this vision, children's rights must be integrated into national budgetary and policy decisions. Of particular importance are decisions made during the recession as these will have life-long consequences for children growing up in Ireland today.

Programme of the seminar



The impact of the economic crisis on children: lessons from the past experiences and future policies

SEMINAR • Florence, **ISTITUTO** degli **INNOCENTI** • 9 June 2011

AGENDA

- 9.00 **REGISTRATION**
- 9.30 **Welcome address. Opening of the working session**
ALESSANDRA MAGGI, Istituto degli Innocenti President
JOSÉ LUIS CASTELLANOS DELGADO, ChildONEurope Presidency
SIMONETTA MATONE, Italian National Childhood and Adolescence Documentation and Analysis Centre President
- 10.00–13.00 **FIRST SESSION** • Plenary Session
Chairperson: MARIE-PAULE MARTIN-BLACHAIS, ChildONEurope Vice-presidency
- Children at the bottom of the well-being scale and at risk of exclusion**,
LEONARDO MENCHINI, Unicef Innocenti Research Centre
- The importance of a child-centred social investment strategy in Europe**,
TESS RIDGE, Department of Social and Policy Sciences, University of Bath, United Kingdom
- 11.00–11.15 **COFFEE BREAK**
- Children and Family Policies in Time of Economic Crisis**, DOMINIC RICHARDSON, OECD
- The role of children's participation in fighting poverty and social exclusion. The experience of Eurochild members**, JANA HAINSWORTH, Eurochild
- The importance of a child-centred social investment strategy in Europe: the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion**, MARIE-ANNE PARASKEVAS, European Commission, DG Employment and social affairs
- 12.30 **Programmed interventions and debate**
- 13.00 **SECOND SESSION** • Introduction to Working Groups
- 13.15 **LUNCH**
- 14.30–16.30 **SECOND SESSION** • Working Groups
- 1. Child Education and family income maintenance: preventing out-of-home child fostering**
Expert: DOMINIC RICHARDSON • Coordinator: LEONARDO MENCHINI
- 2. The importance to invest in services dedicated to young children**
Expert: TESS RIDGE • Coordinator: BENOÎT PARMENTIER
- 3. Child participation to the actions against poverty and social exclusion: some national experiences**
Expert: INETE IELITE (Children's Forum of Latvia)
EVA BORISSOVA (National Network of Children of Bulgaria)
MARIA CORBETT (Children's Rights Alliance – Ireland)
Coordinator: JANA HAINSWORTH
- 16.30–18.00 **THIRD SESSION** • Panel discussion: results of Working Groups, debate and conclusions
Moderator: JOSÉ LUIS CASTELLANOS DELGADO, ChildONEurope Presidency

Bibliography

Introduction

This bibliography is edited by the **Biblioteca Innocenti Library “Alfredo Carlo Moro”**, a special library on children’s rights, established in 2001 as a cooperation effort between *Italian Government, Istituto degli Innocenti (IDI)* and the *UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre*.

Documents marked in bibliography can be found in the Library: the collection includes about 23.000 documents in various languages and formats.

The collection of the **IDI** focuses on the situation of children and adolescents in Italy, with a special emphasis on child welfare, child psychology, legal issues about children, and statistics on childhood. This collection was created in the 1990s under the auspices of the *Tuscany Region*, which also established, within IDI premises, the *Regional Centre for Childhood and Adolescence* (according to Italian Laws 25/90 and 31/00).

IDI collection has been further expanded when the Italian Government charged IDI with the management of the *Italian Documentation and Analysis Centre for Childhood and Adolescence* (as from Italian Laws 451/97 and 285/97). In addition to the bibliographic database, a set of specific databases (juridical, filmographic and statistical) have been developed. These databases can be consulted from the *Catalogo Unico*. Documentation of the *Italian Childhood and Adolescence Documentation and Analysis Centre* also includes special databases on projects promoted under Italian Law 285/97 and a database on foster care.

The **UNICEF IRC** collection focuses on the Convention on the rights of the child and its implementation. It includes large sections on the major issues regarding children: children in armed conflicts, child labour and exploitation, child abuse, child education, child health and nutrition. As it has been developed following the main research themes carried out at UNICEF IRC, it also owns documents on international cooperation, social welfare, human rights and women’s rights. In addition, the UNICEF collection gathers documentation produced by UNICEF Regional and Country offices, to offer a complete and updated overview of the situation of children in the world. In more than 15 years of activity, UNICEF IRC has also developed several information repositories (websites, databases) on specific topics: on the socio-economic situation of children of Eastern Europe (*The TransMONEE Database* <<http://www.unicef-irc.org/resources/transmonee.html>>), on Child labour (*Understanding children’s work*, in cooperation with ILO and World bank, <<http://www.ucw-project.org/>>), Child trafficking (*The child trafficking research Project* <<http://www.childtrafficking.org/>>), and on *Child friendly cities* (<www.childfriendlycities.org>).

Access to the Library’s electronic resources is available to library users and, off-site, by selected members.

Library also provides a reference service for the *Italian Childhood and Adolescence Documentation and Analysis Centre* and for the *Regional Childhood and Adolescence Documentation Centre*.

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The impact of the economic crisis on children's life: a critical filmography

This critical filmography is intended to focus on those movies and documentaries that have treated the issues concerned with economic crisis, both cyclic and structural, here and beyond the Atlantic during the last century. The breakdown criteria adopted is historical-chronological and geographic: the starting point are the last famines that touched Europe since the end of the XIX century going to the economic and financial crisis of these last years, passing through the historical phases of deeper and lower recession. We have taken into consideration both those documents in which appear children and adolescents experiencing the effects of the crisis for reasons concerned with the economic troubles of their families, both those documents in which the protagonists are young people who, due to their difficulty in finding a job, are not able to get independent from their patronymic families and therefore are not able to create their own.

The present filmography has been realized in the framework of the documentation filmographic activity of the *Italian Childhood and Adolescence Documentation and Analysis Centre* (<http://www.minori.it/>), that is in charge of exploring the condition of children and adolescents through the analysis of their representation given by the movies and audiovisuals.

The movies marked by the asterisk are available for vision and rent at the *Biblioteca Innocenti Library "Alfredo Carlo Moro"*, the international library specialized in children's and adolescents' rights, created in 2001 as a cooperation project between the *Istituto degli Innocenti* of Florence and the *Innocenti Research Centre* of Unicef, in agreement with the Italian Government (<http://www.biblioteca.istitutodeglinnocenti.it/index.jsf>).

Every movie is filled in with a critical sheet containing cast and credits information, synopsis, critical comment and teaching-training instruments, and can be consulted online in the one-Catalogue of the National Centre (<http://opac.minori.it/EOSWeb/OPAC/Index.asp>).

European crisis through XVIII and XIX Century

- Las Hurdes (Land Without Bread)* by Luis Buñuel (Spain 1932)
- Pelle Erobreren (Pelle the Conqueror)* by Bille August (Denmark 1987)*
- Angela's Ashes* by Alan Parker (USA, GB 1999)*
- Liam* by Stephen Frears (GB 2000)*

America in 1929

- The Grapes of Wrath* by John Ford (USA 1940)
- Splendor in the Grass* by Elia Kazan (USA 1961)*
- Souder* by Martin Ritt (USA 1972)
- Honkytonk Man* by Clint Eastwood (USA 1982)*
- Two Bits* by James Foley (USA 1995)*

Italy in the Second After war

- Paisà* by Roberto Rossellini (Italy 1946)*
- Sciuscià (Shoeshine)* by Vittorio De Sica (Italy 1946)*
- Proibito rubare (Guaglio)* by Luigi Comencini (Italy 1948)*
- Ladri di biciclette (Bicycle Thieves)* by Vittorio De Sica (Italy 1948)*
- Germania anno zero (Germany Year Zero)* by Roberto Rossellini (Italy 1948)*

The crisis in the Eastern Countries after the fall of the Wall and the emigration in the West

- Malen'kaja Vera (Little Vera)* by Vasilij Pičul (USSR 1988)*
- Kolya* by Jan Sverak (Italy/France, GB, CSI, Germany 1996)*
- Lilja 4-ever* by Lukas Modissov (Denmark, Sweden 2002)*
- Last Resort* by Pavel Pawlikovsky (GB 2002)*
- Il mondo addosso (With the World on His Shoulders)* by Costanza Quatriglio (Italy 2006, documentary)*
- Cover Boy – L'ultima rivoluzione (Cover Boy)* by Carmine Amoroso (Italy 2006)

Sognavo le nuvole colorate (I Dreamt of Colourful Clouds) by Mario Balsamo (Italy 2008)
Le silence de Lorna (Lorna's Silence) by Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne (Belgium, Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany 2008)

USA perspectives

Welfare by Frederick Wiseman (USA 1975, documentary)
Jack the Bear by Marshall Herskovitz (USA 1993)*
Slums of Beverly Hills by Tamara Jenkins (USA, 1998)*
Public Housing by Frederick Wiseman (USA 1997, documentary)
Gummo by Harmony Korine (USA 1997)*
In America by Jim Sheridan (Ireland, GB 2002)*
8 Mile by Curtis Hanson (Germany, USA 2002)*
The Pursuit of Happiness by Gabriele Muccino (USA 2005)*
Gran Torino by Clint Eastwood (USA 2008)*

Symptoms of the crisis in Europe

The Snapper by Stephen Frears (GB, Ireland 1993)*
La promesse by Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne (Belgium 1996)*
La vie rêvée des anges (The Daydreams of Angels) by Eric Zonca (France 1998)*
Ça commence aujourd'hui (It All Starts Today) by Bertrand Tavernier (France 1998)*
Rosetta by Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne (France 1999)*
Ratcatcher by Lynne Ramsey (GB 1999)*
Iedereen Beroemd (Everybody Famous!) by Dominique Deruddere (Belgium, France, The Netherlands 2000)*
Billy Elliot by Stephen Daldry (GB 2000)*
Millions by Danny Boyle (Great Britain, Usa, 2004)*
Lenfant (The Child) by Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne (France, Belgium 2005)*
It's a Free World by Ken Loach (GB, Italy, Germany, Spain 2007)

Italy, years 2000

Luomo flessibile (The Flexible Man) by Stefano Consiglio (Italy 2003, documentary)
Mi piace lavorare (Mobbing) [I Like to Work (Mobbing)] by Francesca Comencini (Italy 2004)*
Porca miseria (Goddamnit!) by Armando Ceste (Italy 2006, documentary)
Anche libero va bene [Libero (Along the Ridge)] by Kim Rossi Stuart (Italy 2006)*
Giorni e nuvole (Days and Clouds) by Silvio Soldini (Italy, Switzerland 2007)
Nelle tue mani (In Your Hands) by Peter Del Monte (Italy 2007)*
Generazione 1000 euro (The 1000-Euro Generation) by Massimo Venier (Italy 2008)
Fuga dal call center (Escape from the Call Centre) by Federico Rizzo (Italy 2008)
Tutta la vita davanti (Her Whole Life Ahead) by Paolo Virzì (Italy 2008)*
Debito d'ossigeno (In Lack of Oxygen) by Giovanni Calamari (Italy 2009, documentary)*
Foschia Pesci Africa Sonno Nausea Fantasia (Mist Fish Africa Dleep Nausea Fantasy) by Andrea De Sica e Daniele Vicari (Italy 2009, documentary)
La ballata dei precari (The Precarious Ballad) by Corrado Ceron, Giordano Ciccolini, Silvia Lombardo (Italy 2009)
Il sangue verde (The Green Blood) by Andrea Segre (Italy 2010, documentary)*

Focus on Argentina

Alambrado (Fenced In) by Marco Bechis (Italy/Argentina 1991)*
Un mundo menos peor (A Less Bad World) by Alejandro Agresti (Argentina 2004)*
Memoria del saqueo (Social Genocide) by Fernando A. Solanas (Argentina 2004, documentary)
La dignidad de los nadie (The Dignity of the Nobodies) by Fernando A. Solanas (Argentina 2005, documentary)
Chile 672 Pablo Bardaui, Franco Verdoia (Argentina 2006)
Francia (France) by Israel Adrián Caetano (Argentina 2006)
Tra due terre (Between Two Countries) by Michele Carrillo (Italy 2005, documentary)

Authors

Eva Borissova is Chairperson of the National Network for Children (NNC), an umbrella organisation of 48 civil organizations working with children and families.

The NNC was established in 2003 as an alliance of NGOs. In 2006 the Network became a non-for-profit NGO. As a member of the regional Network for Children supported by UNICEF the Network is facilitating and strengthening the cooperation between non-government organizations and all other stakeholders active in the area of child protection. The Network has managed to attract a number of NGOs and works on various projects.

The organization is a member of Eurochild, a European network of organizations and individuals working in and across Europe to promote the rights and welfare of children.

Maria Corbett is Policy Director at the Children's Rights Alliance, which is a coalition of over 90 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working to secure the rights and needs of children in Ireland, by campaigning for the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It aims to improve the lives of all children under 18, through securing the necessary changes in Ireland's laws (strengthening children's rights in the Constitution), policies and services. The Alliance was formally established in March 1995. Many of its member organisations are prominent in the children's sector- working directly with children on a daily basis across the country. The Alliance's policies, projects and activities are developed through ongoing collaboration and consultation with its member organisations.

Jana Hainsworth joined Eurochild as Secretary General in January 2006. She is responsible for the day-to-day running of the network, which brings together over 90 member organisations from across Europe to promote the rights and welfare of children. Eurochild is one of the key networks funded through the EU's PROGRESS Programme for employment and social solidarity (2007-2013). It plays a key role in monitoring and influencing the EU's social inclusion strategy and ensuring child poverty remains high on the agenda.

Jana previously worked in a Brussels-based communications consultancy, where she was project manager for a communications contract under the EU's Community Action Programme to combat

discrimination. Jana also managed a network of organisations promoting long-term voluntary service in the youth field and has worked for several years in a research and consultancy firm on different technical assistance contracts for the European Commission. She has a Master degree in environment, development and policy from Sussex University and an Honours degree in Natural Sciences from Durham University in the UK.

Leonardo Menchini is a researcher for the Social and Economic Policy Unit at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (Florence, Italy). He holds a PhD in Development Economics and conducts research on child poverty and well-being and social and economic policies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

He is also associated with the Innocenti Report Card series on the situation of children in economically advanced countries; in particular he is currently contributing to the Report Card No. 9 on inequalities in child well-being in rich countries. A key area of his current work is on increasing the visibility of children in administrative and survey statistics and on child indicators.

Benoît Parmentier, training social psychologist, is since 2008 General Administrator of the Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (Birth and Childhood Bureau, ONE), the Public Administration charged of policies for childhood for the French Community of Belgium.

Since 2000, he represents the Minister of Childhood of the French Community of Belgium's Government to the Permanent Group of l'Europe de l'Enfance. He is the former President of the Assembly of the European Network of National Childhood Observatories, ChildONEurope, that he has chaired from 2007 to June 2010. From 1999 to 2008 he has filled the role of Coordinator of the Observatoire de l'Enfance, de la Jeunesse et de l'Aide à la Jeunesse (Childhood, Adolescence and Juvenile Assistance) of the French Community of Belgium.

Dominic Richardson has been working at the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in Paris since May 2007. Dominic's work at the OECD has focused on issues of child well-being, in particular analysing child and family policies, and designing a framework through

which policy amenable indicators of child well-being can be compared. Dominic co-authored the OECD's first report on child well-being, and has contributed to work on child indicators for both the OECD Health at a Glance and Society at a Glance series. Prior to taking up post at the OECD Dominic worked in the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York where he contributed background research to the UNICEF Innocenti Report Card No: 7 on child well-being.

Tess Ridge is a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy and Director of Studies for four MRes programmes in the Department of Social and Policy Sciences of the Bath University: MRes in Social Policy, European Social Policy, Sociology and Social Work.

She is a member of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy (CASP), Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) - Policy group member, The European Sociological Association (ESA) and the ESA Sociology of Children and Childhood Research Network, Editorial Board of the Policy Press, the Higher Education Academy.

She has considerable experience in conducting research with children and young people, in particular:

- poverty and social exclusion especially childhood poverty and social exclusion
- children and family policy
- social security policy
- comparative social security especially support for children and families.

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