

European Parliament Public Hearing

Combating Child Poverty in the EU

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We know a lot more about what works as a result of the work of the EU Social Inclusion Process

- SPC Task Force Report *Child Poverty and Well Being in the EU*
- Assessments of MS's 2006-2008 NRSSPSI
- *Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion*
- 2007 reports of EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion
- Reports from EU Transnational exchange projects
- Reports from EU Networks like Eurochild, EAPN, ESN, FEANTSA, ATD
- Peer Reviews on social inclusion
- EU Round Table Conferences on Social Inclusion
- Report for UNICEF

A complex and multi-faceted issue

- Child poverty is linked to:
 - Inadequate income
 - Lack of work and inadequate income supports
 - Poor access to essential services
 - housing/environment, health care, child care, social services
 - Limited developmental and participation opportunities
 - education and sport/recreational/cultural activities
- And can be compounded by:
 - Discrimination and segregation
 - immigrant & some ethnic minorities (especially Roma), asylum seekers
 - children with disabilities
 - Gender inequality
 - Violence & exploitation
 - Domestic violence, homelessness, trafficking & sexual exploitation, child labour
 - Institutionalisation
 - Crime and drug/alcohol abuse
 - Indebtedness
 - Isolation (both rural isolation, urban ghettoisation)
- Interconnectedness of problems leading to multiple deprivation

A Multidimensional Approach

- There is no one solution
 - a multidimensional, comprehensive and joined-up policy approach and coordinated delivery is necessary to address the complexity of the issue
 - mainstream social inclusion of children across all policy domains
- 3 core objectives should inform the policy approach:
 - ensure all children grow up in families with adequate resources to meet needs
 - ensure all children have access to the services necessary for their well-being and to enable them to reach their full potential
 - ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in social, recreational, sporting and cultural life
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
 - a framework for a comprehensive approach based on rights not needs
 - puts the focus on the best interests of the child
 - promotes non discrimination
 - recognises the role of the family in promoting the well-being of the child
 - promotes respect for the views of the child and their participation

The Policy Framework -1

- **Ensuring an Adequate Income**

- increasing access of parents (especially women) to employment
 - reconciling work and family life – flexible working – targeted training and activation – incentives to employers
- making work pay for parents
 - minimum wage – retaining benefits on moving into work - in-work benefits – reducing employment traps – prioritising tax reliefs – reducing costs associated with employment - raising skills levels – reducing irregular employment
- providing adequate income support to families with children

- **Access to Services**

- ensuring decent housing and safe environment
- ensuring access to health and social services for all children
- ensuring affordable transport
- ensuring inclusive education systems which counter/prevent educational disadvantage (early education/preventing school drop out/integrating minorities/reducing financial barriers)
- ensuring affordable, high quality child care

The Policy Framework -2

- **Care and Protection**

- early intervention and support to vulnerable families
- effective child protection services for children at risk
- deinstitutionalisation and support in the community

- **Participation**

- opportunities to participate in social, cultural, sporting & recreational activities

“the countries achieving the best outcomes are those that perform well on all fronts, notably by combining strategies facilitating access to employment with enabling services (child care, etc.) and income support.” [*Child poverty and well-being in the EU*, SPC, 2008]

Intergenerational Inheritance: Costs of reproducing poverty - 1

- Intergenerational inheritance is a reality
 - EU-SILC 2005
 - people from disadvantaged families still face considerable obstacles in realizing their full potential and achieving better living standards for themselves and their children.
 - coming from a low-educational background represents a major obstacle to achieving a high level of education;
 - educational underachievement leads to unequal occupational opportunities
 - Irish research
 - the risks of experiencing sustained poverty and social exclusion in adulthood are related to childhood socio-economic environment, especially childhood poverty and social exclusion. The pathways through which such effects operate not only include the financial constraints on parental capacity to invest in their children's 'human capital', but also socio-economic status, parenting styles, home environment and role modelling. [Combat Poverty Agency (2006) *Day In, Day Out: Understanding the Dynamics of Child Poverty*]

Intergenerational Inheritance: Costs of reproducing poverty - 2

- Social costs
 - more demands on public services (health, social services, social services, employment services, housing supports)
 - more demands on welfare payments
 - less participation in social, sporting, cultural life
 - less social cohesion, more social instability and social problems (crime, drugs etc.)
- Economic costs
 - educational disadvantage and underdeveloped human capital
 - higher unemployment and less skilled workforce
 - lower economic activity and thus lower GDP
 - Lower tax revenues

So

- Break the intergenerational inheritance
 - Support parents who are poor
 - Early identification and intervention to help children from families at risk
 - The later the intervention the more costly and less effective

Means tested versus universal benefits - 1

- No simple answer – most countries combine family benefits to all with more targeted benefits for those at particular risk (e.g. lone parent and large families) and some means tested benefits for those at high risk – but very varied combinations
- Key issues are the overall level of expenditure and the overall ADEQUACY of payments
- 4 main reasons for family benefits
 - even out costs for parents with children
 - encourage families to have more children
 - support more parents into work
 - ensure adequate income for those who can't work

Means tested versus universal benefits and services- 2

- Advantages of predominantly universal approach
 - recognises additional costs of all children
 - efficient at preventing poverty and social exclusion but also contributes to alleviation
 - generates widespread political and public support for a generous system;
 - reduces inequality & provides equal opportunities regardless of social background
 - avoids stigma
 - easier (less costly) to deliver and ensures take up
 - avoids creating disincentives to taking up employment
- Some risks of relying on a predominantly universal approach:
 - low visibility (and lack of monitoring) at national policy level of specific groups of children growing up in poverty
 - insufficient attention to identifying and attacking pockets of child poverty or groups of children at high risk of poverty & exclusion
 - stretching resources too thinly (when everything is a priority nothing in fact is)

Means tested versus universal benefits and services- 3

- Some advantages of means tested benefits
 - targets those most at need
 - less costly
- Some risks of a means tested approach
 - becomes very complicated and reduces take up
 - focuses on meeting basic needs (minimum standards) and not on ensuring real equality and on prevention;
 - leads to an *ad hoc* and fragmented approach which tends to emphasise immediate problems instead of the development of more coherent, holistic and general strategies for preventing and combating child poverty;
 - targeting can lead to too narrow an approach focussing just on lack of resources

Universal and preventative policies v targeting and alleviation

- *“ . . . it would seem that the most successful Member States are those that adopt a predominantly universal approach based on a strong belief in preventing problems arising and in ensuring equal opportunities for all children backed up as necessary by targeted policies to address particular extreme situations – a sort of tailored universalism. While there may be pressure in Member States with the most severe problems to focus on alleviation it is nevertheless true that the structural nature of the phenomenon makes it urgent to combat poverty and social exclusion under a more preventative approach as well.” [Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children in the EU: Key lessons, 2007]*

Supporting parents – enhancing parental accountability - 1

- It is usually better for children to grow up in supportive families than in institutions

So

- Shared responsibility between state and parents based on best interests of the child
- Create right conditions for positive parenting by reducing pressures on parents
 - e.g. lack of income, poor environment, poor health, unemployment, social isolation
- Strengthening social and community networks
 - A community development approach: support to NGOs, self-help and community based groups, parents organisations,
- Supportive social and family services
 - based on empowerment and partnership
 - preventive work and early intervention strategies
 - parent support programmes for vulnerable children
 - promoting non violent parenting
 - good quality child care and family centres

Supporting parents – enhancing parental accountability - 2

- Build on good practice: e.g.
 - Eurochild on Positive Parenting
 - European Social Network on role of social services
 - EU exchange projects (e.g. Homestart International, ATD Fourth World, Children and Youngsters Protecting the Future, Lobby for children, EFCW Families under stress)

Involving children in decision making - 1

- At present little systematic involvement of children in developing policies on child poverty and social exclusion
- Why involve children
 - UNCRC 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 on all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”.]
 - Recognition of children as actors in their own right with a right to be heard
 - Provides ideas, experience and insights that improve adults understanding of problems and thus improves decision making
 - Reinforces a sense of children having rights
 - Promotes empowerment and personal development of the child
 - A way to counter abuse of power by adults

Involving children in decision making - 2

- Making it happen
 - Build consultative & participative opportunities from the bottom up
 - start in the family
 - from schools, youth organisations to children and young people's fora (e.g. Ireland), young people's parliaments (e.g. Cyprus, Portugal)
 - role of Ombudspersons
 - preparation of NAPs/inclusion (underdeveloped to date)
 - European networks (e.g. Eurochild/European Parliament receptions)
 - Surveying children's opinions
 - Participative research projects consulting children living in areas of high poverty
- [See Eurochild and Euronet for good practice guidelines on consultation and participation]

Ensuring inclusive education systems

- Educational level a key factor in poverty risk
 - reducing educational inequalities vital
- 4 key themes
 - Invest in early education
 - Vital to prevent subsequent educational disadvantage
 - A systematic and integrated approach to early childhood education and care based on a universal approach to access, especially for children in need of special support
 - Tackle school drop outs and educational disadvantage
 - early identification; whole child approach; integrated multi-level responses involving home, child, school, adult education, community and relevant services; pathways for reentry and pathways for progression
 - Integrate minorities (ethnic minorities, migrants, disabled)
 - end segregation - language support
 - Reduce costs and barriers