

REPORT

JULY 2011

THE 2011 NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMMES (NRP) FROM A CHILD POVERTY AND WELL-BEING PERSPECTIVE

EUROCHILD'S REPOSENSE TO THE FIRST EUROPEAN SEMESTER OF EUROPE 2020



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 2011 Eurochild carried out an analysis of the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) of EU Member States with the help of its member organisations. Based on a framework document, respondents were requested to provide information about the extent to which National Reform Programmes take into account child poverty and well-being objectives under the poverty target and the education targets, based on Integrated Guidelines 10 and 9, respectively. The main findings were then discussed at a Eurochild Policy Forum on 23 June 2011. This report was then finalised taking account of these discussions and incorporating some additional feedback from members.

The compiled analysis of the responses provides an EU-wide overview of commitment to fight child poverty and social exclusion, as well as an important tool for future advocacy work at Eurochild, taking into account that governments produced NRPs for the first time under the Europe 2020 strategy.

The following observations and recommendations were drawn from the responses.

1. FIGHTING CHILD POVERTY IS ESSENTIAL TO ACHIEVING THE OVERALL EUROPE 2020 OBJECTIVES

Eurochild regrets that there is very limited recognition in the NRPs that measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion – and child poverty in particular – will also contribute to achieving other Europe 2020 headline targets (i.e. employment rate, investment in research and development, and energy and sustainable development) and ensure smart and sustainable as well as inclusive growth. Thus there needs to be greater understanding of the cost-benefit advantages of investing in tackling child poverty and social exclusion.

All Member States should recognise that child poverty and social exclusion is a key barrier to be overcome if they are to achieve their Europe 2020 targets in relation to employment rate, investment in research and development and energy and sustainable development.

It is clear that some of the measures included in the NRPs to achieve the other Europe 2020 headline targets can contribute – even if indirectly – to reducing child poverty and social exclusion. However this potential needs to be maximised and the risk of measures having a negative impact on child poverty and social exclusion needs to be taken into account so that it can be avoided. Therefore the impact that the measures striving for other Europe 2020 objectives have on child poverty and social exclusion should be regularly assessed.

2. THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY NEEDS TO BE BACKED UP BY SPECIFIC NATIONAL STRATEGIES ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

The novelty of the Europe 2020 process brought along uncertainty regarding the reporting cycle on social inclusion established under the Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC), and the links between the NRP and the OMC process, especially the NAPs/Inclusion. The NRPs have an all-encompassing structure but, as the responses show, in only a few countries do measures included in the NRP specifically build on the measures that were included in the previous NAPs/Inclusion.

To avoid a duplication of effort and the loss of valuable experience gained over the past ten years, clear guidelines are needed at EU level to ensure that the NRP process and a reinvigorated Social OMC are mutually reinforcing, particularly as regards issues of child poverty and social exclusion.¹ At national level, Member States should underpin their NRPs with specific national inclusion strategies. These should include a section on child poverty and social exclusion which fosters an integrated and rights-based approach to the inclusion of children. They should be backed up with clear implementation plans.

3. TARGETS ON POVERTY REDUCTION SHOULD BE STRENGTHENED AND SUPPLEMENTED BY SPECIFIC CHILD POVERTY TARGETS

Only a few countries have identified sub-targets to reduce child poverty in their NRPs under the national target to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Nonetheless, it can be expected that more Member States will address

¹ For further information please see [Eurochild Policy Position on a Renewed Social OMC](http://tinyurl.com/3uxufvc) (<http://tinyurl.com/3uxufvc>).

the issue, given that many of the 2011 NRPs acknowledge, to a greater or lesser extent, that child poverty and social exclusion are important issues that need to be tackled if the Europe 2020 objectives and targets are to be achieved. However, the extent of the coverage is often quite limited and indeed, in several cases, does not sufficiently acknowledge important initiatives that are already in place in a country.

Eurochild calls on all Member States to set sub-targets on child poverty as part of their overall target to contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 headline target on poverty and social exclusion. With regard to the education targets, Member States should also consider targets for children at particular risk of educational disadvantage such as children with special educational needs, children with disabilities, children from a migrant background and Roma children to complement the overall target-setting. The monitoring process on reducing child poverty and social exclusion should be an integral part of the annual monitoring of progress towards achieving the Europe 2020 poverty and social inclusion targets. Where necessary the European Commission should propose Country Specific Recommendations in relation to policies to reduce child poverty and social exclusion.

4. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH IS NEEDED TO FULLY TACKLE CHILD POVERTY

In only a limited number of Member States is it clear that the NRPs' social inclusion measures are supported by a clear national framework for tackling poverty and social exclusion in general and child poverty and social exclusion in particular. While several NRPs recognise that child poverty and social exclusion is an important obstacle to achieving the headline target on poverty and social exclusion, a significant number of Member States do not address child poverty and social exclusion in the NRP, which is of great concern to Eurochild members. Where Member States do acknowledge child poverty and social exclusion the tendency is to focus solely on labour market access and reducing the number of early school leavers, where the main drivers are employment and economic growth. Most of the other challenges that need to be addressed to structurally tackle child poverty are not mentioned.²

Member States should adopt a comprehensive and cross-governmental approach to addressing child poverty and social exclusion which not only focuses on increasing access of parents to the labour market and to reducing early school leaving but also focuses on income support, access to essential services (early education, health, social services, housing), child protection, family support and increasing participation in social, recreational, cultural and civic activities. Particular attention should also be given to targeting vulnerable groups of children such as Roma children, children from a migrant background, children with disabilities, children living in or leaving institutions etc.

5. MORE EMPHASIS SHOULD BE GIVEN TO HOW EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO POVERTY REDUCTION

Responses show that NRPs lack information as to how EU Structural Funds will be used to support measures to reduce child poverty and educational disadvantage. Unfortunately the link between applying EU structural funding to combat child poverty is extremely weak. Therefore the EU should encourage the use of EU Structural Funds to support measures that promote the social inclusion of children and to overcome educational disadvantage.

6. MEMBER STATES MUST SUPPORT MEANINGFUL STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

There was very limited public debate in the drafting period of NRPs in most countries, and children's organisations appear to have only been involved in the preparation of the NRPs to a very restricted extent or not at all in most countries. Also when there was consultation it was often very hurried and had little impact on the content of the NRPs. At the same time, several Eurochild members consider that the NRP process can bring added value to their work on promoting the rights and well-being of children. Eurochild members strongly support more meaningful stakeholder involvement particularly in the preparation and monitoring of the NRPs. EU Structural Funds should be used to support and provide resource to the involvement of stakeholders in the process. Also the Commission and Member States should encourage more public and political debates at national level on the NRPs and their role in promoting greater social inclusion.

² Eurochild identifies 12 policy challenges that need to be addressed to effectively tackle child poverty and social exclusion. The table on p. 23 shows the extent to which these have been addressed in the NRPs.

INTRODUCTION

The 2011 National Reform Programmes (NRPs) are intended to set out how Member States will achieve their national targets set in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy. In particular they are meant to explain how Member States intend to tackle obstacles to achieving the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 strategy and its Integrated Guidelines for the economic and employment policies of Member States. The most relevant guidelines from a child poverty and social inclusion perspective are Guidelines 10 (promoting social inclusion and combating poverty and 9 (Improving the quality and performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary or equivalent education).ⁱ

This report assesses to what extent child poverty and social exclusion have featured in the 2011 NRPs and how effective the policy actions/measures proposed are likely to be in reducing child poverty and social exclusion and in contributing to achieving the Europe 2020 targets. The report is based primarily on assessments by Eurochild members in 22 Member States: Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LV) Lithuania (LT), the Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE) and the United Kingdom (England (UKE), Northern Ireland (UKNI), Scotland (UKS) and Wales (UKW)).³ These assessments have been complemented with inputs from Eurochild's Secretariat staff. The report has been drafted for Eurochild by an independent consultant, Hugh Frazer.

In the light of the findings of this report Eurochild makes a series of recommendations to the European Commission and Member States on how the NRP process can be strengthened in the future to give greater attention to the social inclusion and well-being of children.

It should be noted that in this report, where the experience in one or more individual Member States is highlighted, this is either because the Eurochild members from these countries have emphasised the particular point or because they represent a good illustration of the issue under discussion. Consequently, the fact that a particular country is mentioned does not necessarily mean that the point being made does not apply to other countries.

³ In most cases members completed a questionnaire covering the key issues to be addressed in relation to child poverty and social exclusion in the NRPs. However, in three instances (BE, EL, LV) members just completed the summary table (Table 1).

2. TARGETS

2.1 CHILD POVERTY TARGETS

A few Member States set specific child poverty targets as part of their agreed national targets derived from the EU headline target on poverty even though many had previously set targets for reducing child poverty⁴. The UK specifically references the Child Poverty Act 2010 in its NRP that requires the UK Government to achieve the following set of income poverty targets by 2020:

- *Relative Poverty*: less than 10% of children living in relative low-income poverty
- *Material deprivation & low income*: less than 5% of children living in combined material deprivation and low-income households
- *Absolute low income*: reduce the proportion of children who live in absolute low income to less than 5%

In addition a further target level is to be set by 2015 covering *persistent poverty* (i.e. the percentage of children living in relative poverty for three out of four years)

Bulgaria set a sub-target for reducing the number of children aged 0-18, living in poverty, by 78,000, corresponding to 25% of the number of poor children in 2008.

Greece also sets a sub-target focusing on tackling child poverty, namely, reducing the number of children and young people (0-17) at risk of poverty by 100.000 until 2020, which is translated into a reduction of at-risk-of poverty rate for children (0-17) from 23% in 2008 to 18% in 2020.

Belgium announces that the next NRP will adopt a secondary target focused on child poverty and reports that already in Flanders the Flemish government has set its target for 2020 of “a 30% reduction in the case of the indicators (risk of poverty, severe material deprivation, low work intensity households) without double counting and a 50% cut in child poverty.”

Ireland gives a commitment to undertake a comprehensive review of the national target in 2011 and this creates the possibility of a child poverty target being introduced in the future.

Spain has adopted the objective of reducing by 1.4-1.5 million (in 2009-2019) the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion; and the aim is to reduce child poverty by a similar proportion of that of the general population.

However, even in some of the countries with child poverty targets there are warning signals that planned public expenditure reduction could undermine these ambitious targets.

Several Member States (e.g. DE, IE, PT, RO, SE, SI) who do not set specific child poverty targets do, to a greater or lesser extent recognise that tackling child poverty and promoting the well-being of children is an essential element in achieving the overall national poverty target. For instance:

- Belgium’s NRP recognises that the number of low work intensity households and children growing up in such households is a significant obstacle to social inclusion and that the higher risk of poverty for children and the comparatively high number of children in jobless households raises the problem of poverty being passed on from generation to generation.
- Ireland’s NRP recognises that tackling child poverty is an important element in achieving the overall national policy target. It emphasises a lifecycle approach to poverty reduction with children as one of the categories, names children as a “vulnerable” group with a high level of consistent poverty and

⁴ The Europe 2020 headline poverty and social exclusion target is to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion by 2020. This target is based on a combination of three indicators: the number of people at risk of poverty, the number of people “materially deprived” and the number of people aged 0-59 who live in “jobless” household.

notes a particular high level of risk for children in lone parent families. It highlights the new government's intention to introduce a new "area based" approach to break the cycle of poverty;

- Romania's NRP emphasises reforming the social protection system with one of the goals of the reform being to reduce social exclusion among children and young people and increase their quality of life;
- In Slovenia's NRP two indicators, in an indirect way, recognise child poverty and promote the well-being of children – child benefit and maintenance substitution;
- Sweden's NRP recognizes that many families with children (especially lone parent families) have a vulnerable financial situation and that the main determinant of children's financial vulnerability is generally that their parents lack work or education. Thus measures in these areas are of great importance in trying to prevent children from living in financially vulnerable circumstances.

Eurochild's overall assessment is that child poverty does not feature as fully as it should in Member States' NRPs. This is due in part to the limitations of the NRP process in reporting on poverty and social exclusion policies. For instance the German government argues that not all national strategies for combating poverty are able to be reflected in the Europe 2020 strategy structure. There would be a need to recognize further quantitative objectives and measures to be taken into consideration when assessing the German policy agenda. Several Eurochild members are critical of the failure of the NRP to reference significant efforts that are in place to combat child poverty and promote child well-being in their country. For instance in the UK (Wales and Northern Ireland) there is no explicit reference to the promotion of well-being as an essential element in addressing child poverty in the NRP, this despite the actual high level of activity being undertaken by the Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments to enhance the well-being of all children and young people.

2.2 EDUCATION TARGETS

In most countries the national education targets set to reduce school drop-out rates and increase the share of 30-34 years olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education are in line with the Europe 2020 targets on educational disadvantage.⁵ However, in many countries (e.g. DE, DK, IT, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, NL, SI, UKW) the targets set do not sufficiently take into account the position of those children who are particularly at risk of educational disadvantage.

For instance:

- in Ireland the targets set do not sufficiently take into account some children at particular risk such as children with special education needs and Traveller children;
- in Finland groups at risk of educational disadvantage include the Sámi and Roma children as well as children with disabilities;
- in France there is no mention of Roma children, children with disabilities, children from ethnic minorities and there are no prevention measures for young children;
- in Germany there are no specific targets set for special groups such as young people with migrant background or from socially disadvantaged areas who are known to be mostly exposed to school drop-out;
- in Hungary the issues of segregation and the need to support schools and teachers in disadvantaged circumstances is not mentioned and the interrelation between poverty, social exclusion, early years and later success or failure is not covered;
- in Lithuania none of the targets take into account such persons at risk of educational disadvantage as Roma children, ethnic minorities; disabled persons are not taken into account sufficiently either;

⁵ The Europe 2020 headline education targets are to improve education levels, in particular by aiming to reduce school drop-out rates to less than 10% and by increasing the share of 30-34 years olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40%.

- in Slovenia none of the NRP targets incorporate the issue of children at risk of educational disadvantage (e.g. Roma children and children with special needs) and there is no identification with child poverty and social exclusion in the NRP;
- The policy and programmes aimed at supporting some 'at risk' groups in the UK (Wales and Northern Ireland), notably children in the care system or those leaving care, in relation to educational attainment are not referenced in the NRP. In Wales there are no specific targets set despite existing measures and indicators to improve educational attainment and reduce the level of young people not in education, employment or training. The NRP fails to reference other indicators which the Welsh Government have in place to track the progress made by pupils at different stages in school and which form part of the wider child poverty indicator set.

There are, however, a few NRPs (e.g. RO, SE, UKS, UK) which specifically take into account the high risk of educational disadvantage faced by some children. For instance:

- in Romania the NRP highlights the *Law No. 1/ 2011 on national education* which provides equal opportunities for young people belonging to disadvantaged groups, remedial education for students with learning disabilities and state-subsidized costs associated with school attendance for students living in rural areas or belonging to socio-economic disadvantaged groups, as well as for those attending vocational schools;
- in Scotland in some local authorities 'Single Outcome Agreements' make specific mention of improving educational attainment and 'closing the gap' for children currently in the poorest performing group. Otherwise the only group specifically referred to are 'looked after' children (i.e. children in public care);
- the UK NRP recognises a very strong link between deprivation and underachievement and announces measures to ensure that the poorest children, wherever they live, and whatever their gender or ethnic group are able to receive additional support to help raise attainment.

3. OBSTACLES, CHALLENGES AND MEASURES

3.1 CHILD POVERTY

a) Key challenges and obstacles

It is encouraging that several NRPs (e.g. BE, DE, EL, ES, IE, PT, RO, SE, UKS, UKE, UKW, UKNI), when identifying key challenges and obstacles to achieving the agreed target(s) and objectives set in relation to poverty and social exclusion (Integrated Guideline 10), recognise that child poverty and social exclusion are important challenges to be addressed.

Among the challenges and obstacles that need to be addressed in order to tackle child poverty and exclusion which are highlighted in the NRPs are:

- ➔ reducing the percentage of children living in households below 60% of the median or experiencing material deprivation;
- ➔ improving the chances in education, reducing educational disadvantage and promoting the social integration of children and young people;
- ➔ reducing the number of children living in jobless households and addressing the increasing link between poverty and unemployment;
- ➔ addressing the impact of child poverty on childhood development and its legacy into adulthood;
- ➔ reducing the high levels of poverty among lone parent families;
- ➔ improving the position of vulnerable groups of children with multiple problems and often living in marginalized locations;
- ➔ reducing the poverty levels of workers and child poverty, namely targeting working families with children so as to lower the risk of poverty among people who work, declare their incomes to the state and have dependent children;
- ➔ meeting the demand for early childhood care and services and for dependent individuals requiring long-term care.

However, in a significant number of NRPs (e.g. BG, CZ, DK, FI, FR, DE, HU, LT, NL, PL, SI) addressing child poverty and social exclusion is not specifically highlighted as a priority and, even where it is, sometimes key aspects are not addressed (e.g. SE, UKW). Many Eurochild members detail specific challenges that they consider should have been mentioned in the NRP. The following are amongst the most frequently highlighted:

- the high risk of inequality and multi-dimensional poverty and social exclusion facing some groups of children such as: children from an ethnic minority or migrant background (both documented and undocumented and recent and third-generation migrants), Roma and Traveller children, disabled children, children from social risk families and children in or leaving state institutions, homeless children; children of parents who have no or limited access to the labour market;
- the poor access to education for multiply-disadvantaged children;
- the growing social divide between children living in better-off households compared to those worse-off;
- the high levels of poverty experienced by children living in single-parent households;
- intergenerational transmission of poverty;
- inadequate child care and lack of high quality early years provision;
- inadequate income support, coverage and financial exclusion;

- the need for community regeneration in areas of multiple deprivation;
- The involvement of civil society organisations to help raise awareness.

b) Key measures included in the NRPs

In several countries (e.g. BG, DE, FI, IE, RO, UKS) the key measures outlined in the NRP include some measures which will help to reduce child poverty and social exclusion. Amongst the interesting measures being implemented or announced are:

- measures to improve early education and early learning systems as well as to promote the educational and social participation of children and young people in poor living conditions (Bildungs- und Teilhabepaket); (DE)
- developing a Strategic Plan for Children and Adolescents 2010-2013; (ES)
- index-linking of basic and minimum security benefits including increase in parents' allowance, child allowance and support for home and private care; (FI)
- developing an area-based approach to tackling child poverty; (IE)
- increasing the employment rate and helping those who are excluded to enter labour market via the social economy; (PL)
- reforming the social assistance system to support the poorest families with children; (RO)
- developing active social inclusion measures as a means of assisting more people from vulnerable groups to access the labour market; (RO)
- developing an action plan to implement the Government Strategy on Roma Inclusion 2011-2020 which also covers education, health, child protection, housing, and Roma culture; (RO)
- improving the finances of families with children in the worst financial position by raising the special allowance for children found in the housing allowance as of 1 January 2012. An increase in the large family supplement in the child allowance came into effect on 1 July 2010; (SE)
- increasing the single parent family allowance; (PT)
- 'Citizen is Born Project' to register new-borns with health services and social security; (PT)
- alleviating the effects of rising energy prices especially for fuel poor families, including families with children under five and those with disabled children under 16; (UKS)
- reducing in-work poverty through a government public sector pay policy that ensures the lowest hourly pay rate for all bodies covered by this is above the living wage level, and the lowest rate for National Health Service workers is also above this level; (UKS)
- reducing the number of families in jobless households; (UKW, UKNI)
- improving the skills of parents and young people living in low income households; (UKW)
- reducing inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes of children and families by improving the outcomes of the poorest; (UKW)
- introducing an integrated system for supporting children and families; (BG)
- investment in integrated services for early childhood development for children aged 0-7 and deinstitutionalisation of childcare; (BG)

In only a few countries (e.g. CZ, PL) it is clear that the measures included in the NRP specifically build on the measures that were included in the previous NAPs/inclusion. For instance the Czech NRP, while not

specifically developing measures to address child poverty, refers to the National Action Plan for Transformation and Unification of the System of Care for Children at Risk 2009 – 2011 and also builds on the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2008 – 2010. While in Spain it seems to be the other way around: the NRP includes a set of measures aimed at social inclusion which are to be part of the next National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2011-2013, including reducing child poverty. The Polish NRP builds on the NAPs/inclusion to some extent as both documents emphasise that employment is a key to reduce poverty. In a few countries (e.g. IE) there seems to have been a shift of emphasis between the NAPs/inclusion and the NRP. For instance Ireland previously put more emphasis on child and family income support.

Poverty reduction, however, requires more than employment enhancing measures, which a number of Member States fail to recognise. Many Eurochild members (e.g. FI, FR, HU, IE, NL, PL, SE), when emphasising that the reduction of child poverty should be given a higher priority in the NRP, go on to identify other measures that they consider should have been included in the NRP. Amongst the most common mentioned are:

- ➔ specific measures for children that experience particular disadvantage e.g. Traveller children, children with disabilities, immigrant children and their families;
- ➔ more joined-up and multidimensional approach to supporting children;
- ➔ improve adequacy of social transfers and increase in financial support (income transfers) targeted at families with children and in particular improving support for single-parent families (maintenance allowance, child allowance for single-parent families);
- ➔ reducing taxation on families with children;
- ➔ targeted measures to combat unemployment of parents;
- ➔ improving basic services for families with children and guaranteeing equal access to them throughout the country and restoring cutbacks in services for children and families;
- ➔ keeping the housing costs for families with children low and ensuring access to good standard dwellings;
- ➔ ensuring affordable children's leisure time and after-school activities;
- ➔ improving access for vulnerable groups of families and children and controlling the costs of high quality early years education and care services;
- ➔ training and vocational training of the professionals working with children and families to raise awareness of the root causes of child poverty and routes out of poverty.

c) EU Structural Funds

There is very little evidence provided in the NRPs that EU Structural Funds will be used to support measures to reduce child poverty.

A few NRPs do indicate some projects that will be funded with Structural Funds support that will contribute to reducing child poverty. For instance:

- the German NRP indicates that the “Lokale Bündnisse für Familie” (local pacts for families) initiative receives ESF funding;
- the Hungarian NRP mentions using Structural Funds to increase the quality and quantity of day care and individual professional development;
- the UK Scotland NRP has a section on the use of structural funds but does not relate this to child poverty specifically. However, support for child care provision is referred to;
- the UK England and Wales NRP, while making no explicit link to how the funds will support measures to reduce child poverty, does contain items that are likely to contribute to this goal such as increasing employment opportunities to people at a disadvantage in the labour market.

3.2 EDUCATION

a) Key challenges and obstacles

In only a few cases (e.g. CZ, DE, RO, UKW) do Eurochild members consider that the NRPs sufficiently identify the key challenges and obstacles to achieving the objectives set in relation to education (Integrated Guideline 9). In particular most do not identify child poverty and social exclusion as an issue that needs to be addressed if the education targets are to be achieved.

The key challenges that are identified include:

- ➔ improving the quality and availability of preschool/early education;
- ➔ systematic quality improvement of education infrastructure and educational reform system in primary and secondary education;
- ➔ giving attention to young people who have not completed their basic education;
- ➔ improvement of educational chances of children and young people in situations of risks and social disadvantages;
- ➔ need to improve schools and reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training;
- ➔ strengthen social mobility of pupils, students and young people with special needs

The challenges and obstacles that need to be addressed in order to tackle educational disadvantage and which Eurochild members think should have been more frequently highlighted in the NRPs include:

- improving funding for public education and invest in reintegration of early-school leavers back into the education system; (BG)
- trans-generational poverty, differences between the regions and settlements, prejudice, segregation, exclusion, lack of access to basic services and provisions (transportation, professionals etc.); (HU)
- the economic situation and maintaining sufficient investment at all stages of the education cycle in that environment, specifically implementing the new National Literacy Strategy quickly and effectively and maintaining (and growing) investment in the free pre-school year in an era of cuts; (IE)
- the cost of school for families, and in poor families in particular; (IE)
- addressing educational disadvantage more broadly than just in designated disadvantaged schools; (IE)
- giving more attention to the provision of high quality early childhood education; (EE)
- bad accommodation; (FR)
- children of school age (6-18) at risk of educational disadvantage, such as Roma children, ethnic minorities, disabled children; (LT)
- reductions in pupil-teacher ratios and additional non-pay allocations for schools based on level of disadvantage and improved identification of disadvantage enabling resources to be targeted more effectively; (PL)
- improving early years education; (UKE, UKS, UKW)

b) Key measures included in NRPs

In some NRPs (e.g. BE, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FR, HU, IE, RO) some specific measures included are aimed at reducing educational disadvantage. In fact, most NRPs highlight specific measures to widen the scope of early years education and care, mostly with the aim to facilitate dual-earner households. For instance:

- in Belgium in Flanders a framework decree for child care is being introduced so as to ensure that all families in need of child care are able to assert their right of child care, vulnerable families in particular. In Wallonia efforts are being made to prompt a better balance between working and private life by boosting the provision of child-minding services, and personal assistance;
- Ireland emphasises the introduction of a universal, free pre-school year for every child one year before they attend primary school;
- the Czech Republic emphasises preparing preschool children and supporting disadvantaged households with children;
- in Greece it is announced that special programmes offering childcare services in cooperation with local authorities which were implemented in 2010 will continue in 2011 while four pilot programmes offering integrated services to children and their families will be launched in 2011. These services range from psychological support to families up to job support services to members of the household.
- Hungary plans to introduce compulsory kindergarten from age 3. However Eurochild's Hungarian member expresses concern that this risks being more about punishment than service provision as parents with children who are not attending school will have their family allowances suspended;
- Lithuania, in order to reduce the number of early school leavers (aged 18-24), seeks to improve access to pre-primary and pre-school education and raise its quality, and to include training and education support infrastructure for socially vulnerable groups, disabled individuals and people with special education needs;
- Romania aims to expand the application framework of early education reform through implementing programmes and specific activities related to this type of education.
- Portugal foresees some specific support policies to promote a more balanced distribution of working hours; to bring schedules of social facilities in line with working hours; to provide more information about parental rights; and increase social assistance to single parents.

Other interesting initiatives in the NRPs to counter educational disadvantage include:

- a national action plan for educational inclusion focused on 3-18 year olds in disadvantaged communities which includes a school completion programme directly targeting those in danger of dropping out of the education system through an integrated approach based on local strategies and the development of a single strategic approach (with the School Completion Programme) towards addressing early school leaving; (IE)
- a commitment to develop a plan to improve literacy and numeracy; (IE)
- CLAIR, second chance school, excellence boarding school; (FR)
- to allow a better school related, cultural and social participation of children and youngsters additional financial support is provided for activities i.e. participation in school activities, participation in sports clubs or cultural associations; (DE)
- the "Allianz für Bildung" (alliance for education) promotes networking at local level in order to ensure more educational justice;(DE)

- federal and regional states implement different measures to promote the successful completion of school or vocational education by disadvantaged young people through a close cooperation between schools, child and youth welfare institutions and the labour market system; (DE)
- measures to address education needs (e.g. special education, early years, better assessment of disability to avoid “*unnecessary classification of Roma children as mentally retarded*”⁶ “*build and promote tolerance between social classes*”, reading, writing, arithmetic and text comprehension skill building to avoid early school leaving); (HU)
- better coverage by kindergartens and crèches; (PL)
- a programme to reach disadvantaged families with an aim also to help children at risk of educational disadvantage, especially those living in a disadvantaged area; (PT)
- providing opportunities for consultations and additional activities supporting pupils in primary and secondary education with learning difficulties; (BG)
- the compulsory age of education will be raised to 18 with the aim to reduce drop-out rates, the number of low qualification and poor performance at school; (PT)
- a programme to reduce the early school leaving rate that includes a set of specific measures agreed upon with the regional authorities and aimed at students, families, teachers and schools in the areas and social groups where the school leaving rate is highest. Measures include strengthening the ‘Reinforcement, Guidance and Support Scheme’ that addresses needs associated with students’ sociocultural backgrounds, and grant policy; (ES)
- measures to address educational disadvantage such as 16+ Learning Choices, Curriculum for Excellence, and Education Maintenance Allowances are mentioned; (UKS)
- free school meals for children in low income households. (UKS)

On the other hand many Eurochild members suggest that there are other measures that should have been included in the NRP to prevent and tackle educational disadvantage. Examples proposed:

- ➔ specific measures to support under-represented groups at school (e.g. children with special educational needs, children with disabilities and Traveller children); (IE)
- ➔ measures to promote better inclusion for children with disabilities, Roma children, immigrant children; (FR)
- ➔ measures to develop early years education and care; (FR)
- ➔ measures to enhance informal education and improve cooperation between schools and non-governmental organisation working with vulnerable children;
- ➔ measures to develop child care, both as a resource for working families and a support to family capacity and good child development; (UKS)
- ➔ social policy measures should have been taken into account when addressing the educational targets, as a large part of the education disadvantage is due to inadequate social policies and unaffordable private costs; (BG)

c) EU Structural Funds

There is very little evidence in the NRPs that EU Structural Funds will be used to support measures to reduce educational disadvantage.

⁶ Quoting the English translation of the Hungarian National Reform Programme.

Some NRPs (e.g. BG, DE, HU) do indicate some projects that will be funded with Structural Funds support. For instance

- the German NRP indicates that the “Jugend Stärken” (Empower Youth) initiative receives ESF funding;
- according to the Bulgarian NRP, EU funds are expected to be spent on educational and childcare infrastructure.

3.3 MAINSTREAMING

a) Child poverty as an obstacle to achieving other Europe 2020 targets

Most NRPs (e.g. CZ, DE, FI, HU, IE, IT, LT, NL, UKS) do not identify child poverty and social exclusion as an obstacle or challenge to achieving other Europe 2020 headline targets (i.e. employment rate, investment in research and development, and energy and sustainable development). However the connection is recognised to some extent in a few NRPs. For instance, the Swedish NRP recognises that social exclusion amongst children and discrimination can lead to educational disadvantage and ultimately to a relatively weak foothold on the labour market; Portugal makes the link between increasing the number of early childcare facilities with increasing birth rates and conciliation between work and family life as a means of economic and social development; and Bulgaria states that the achievement of the poverty target is directly related to the achievement of the education and employment-related targets.

b) Contribution of other measures to reducing child poverty and social exclusion

Several Eurochild members (e.g. CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, NL, UKS, UKW) consider that some of the measures included in the NRP to achieve the other Europe 2020 headline targets (i.e. employment rate, investment in research and development, and energy and sustainable development) will also contribute, if sometimes indirectly, to reducing child poverty and social exclusion. For instance:

- increasing the employment rate and reducing the number of jobless households can partly contribute to reducing child poverty as children in families where one or both parents work are less likely to experience poverty;
- in terms of energy and sustainable development delivering savings on home heating bills and actions to address fuel poverty will be positive and will help to address the high cost of fuel and alleviate problems for families experiencing fuel poverty;
- the target and measures set for education which involve strengthening services and quality of early education and promoting educational justice do have an effect on reducing child poverty and social exclusion in the long run.

4. GOVERNANCE

4.1 COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

In only a limited number of Member States is it clear that the NRPs' social inclusion measures are underpinned by a clear national framework for tackling poverty and social exclusion in general and child poverty and social exclusion in particular. While in some countries (CZ, ES, FI, FR, IE) there is a link, it needs to be made more explicit in the NRP. For instance:

- in Finland the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is working on a report covering eradication of poverty and social inclusion in a framework of Europe 2020 which it plans to submit to the Commission, and in which poor families with children and in particular families with children at the risk of poverty are being mainstreamed throughout the measures. Since the NRP was submitted the new Finnish Government has indicated that it plans to work on an action programme to combat poverty and social exclusion during its 4-year-governmental period (2011 – 2015);
- in the French NRP the social inclusion measure for tackling poverty and social exclusion in general are linked with a national framework but this framework could be clearer and should include child poverty and social exclusion;
- in Scotland the Government has produced a Child Poverty Strategy;
- the Spanish NRP makes it clear that the Strategic Plan for Children and Adolescents 2010-2013 and the NAPs/inclusion are the two main strategies at national level which are to articulate the priority of fight against child poverty social exclusion in the next few years;
- the UK, Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments' commitment to tackle child poverty and social exclusion is made explicit in the NRP.

However, in many countries it appears that the links between the NRP and Social OMC process, especially NAPs/inclusion, is unclear or non-existent.

4.2 PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

Children's organisations appear to have only been involved in the preparation of the NRPs to a very limited extent or not at all in most countries. For instance in some cases only a very short time (e.g. 24 hours in France; 48 hours in Denmark) was allowed for making comments on the draft NRP.

There were however a few more positive experiences. The following are some interesting examples:

- in Ireland organisations involved in the Community and Voluntary Pillar of the social partnership were consulted on the NRP on two occasions in 2010 and provided a written submission in April 2011 responding to the second draft NRP document against a very tight timescale;
- in Estonia the involvement of citizens and NGOs was facilitated through a website and this was followed-up by analyses and discussions between ministries and partners (incl. Estonian Union for Child Welfare);
- in the Netherlands NGO's were consulted on the NRP. Defence for Children International gave an input (on behalf of the Dutch Coalition for Children's Rights) to the NRP but it was not involved in the final version of the NRP;
- In Spain civil society has been involved in drafting the NRP in the form of meetings with representatives of the Ministry for Health, Social Affairs and Equality. Although some of their proposals have been taken on board, the time-limit for such contributions were sometimes very short.

4.3 IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

In most Member States there appears to have been very little or no use of impact assessments and/or evaluations to assess the impact of all measures included in the NRP on the poverty and social exclusion of children. However, there are a few positive developments. For instance:

- in Ireland there is a commitment to continue poverty impact assessments of policies and programmes at both the design and review stages;
- in Germany, though there was no general impact assessment of the NRP, there is a range of assessments and evaluations related to the different existing programmes, pilot schemes etc.

4.4 PUBLIC DEBATE

There was very limited or no political or public debate on the preparation of the NRP in most countries though in a few countries (e.g. NL, UKE&W) the NRP was discussed in parliament and in a few (e.g. BG, SI) there was some media discussion.

4.5 ADDED VALUE OF NRP PROCESS

Several Eurochild members (e.g. DE, EE, ES, FI, IE, UKS, UKW) consider that the NRP process can bring added value to their work on promoting the rights and well-being of children. However, others (e.g. LT) consider that this can only become the case if there is a much greater involvement of civil society organisations, especially those concerned with human rights/ child rights, in the process and if the NRP adopts a broader approach that is not just oriented towards selected economic and financial aspects of state policy. The Netherlands member suggests that the lack of focus on children in the NRP is a trigger to undertake extra lobbying and research on child poverty and exclusion.

Reasons given by members as to why the NRP process can be helpful include:

- the NRP is a useful tool for engagement with Government departments, particularly those that do not generally consider child poverty and social exclusion to be a core part of their remit (departments of finance and prime minister);
- the fact that the NRP clearly states the targets that a country is required to meet at European level provides a useful hook for lobbying on child poverty which can be used at Budget time (particularly to oppose cuts to child income supports or to education);
- the NRP will help to ensure that long-term programmes on social inclusion are carried out;
- analysing the NRP for Eurochild is a good support and addition to national advocacy work on child poverty issues;
- the NRP process allows raising awareness on the rights and well-being of children among actors, who deal with policy at national level who are usually less concerned by children and youth policy (finance, economic, environment);
- it is useful to have another official document that identifies child poverty as a priority issue and commits to addressing it;
- when particular commitments to child well-being are mentioned in an NRP, they give ground to the NGOs to monitor their implementation, insist on their fulfilment, and argue for involvement in their preparation;

However, some NRPs do not provide a comprehensive overview of policies taking place to eradicate child poverty and tackle social exclusion, making others less optimistic. For instance in the case of Eurochild's Polish member the narrow focus of the NRP on growth from a macro-economy perspective is seen as a hindrance to efforts to counteract the negative impact on children.

Several members (DE, ES, IE, UKS, UKE&W) stress that that the process, by highlighting a government commitment to address child poverty and social exclusion, can, to some extent, be helpful in countering the

negative impact on children of measures to address the economic and financial crisis. However, some (e.g. EL) fear that the economic crisis which is very dominant in their society at the moment will hinder the planned efforts listed in the NRPs. Others (e.g. FI) warn that if child poverty is not kept as a high priority on the Commission agenda and in particular a key priority in the NRP process then it becomes more difficult to lobby for the eradication of child poverty at national level. Members' advocacy efforts are also seriously hindered if NRPs are developed without sufficient stakeholder involvement and consultation of social NGOs.

It is also clear that many NRPs do not report on some measures being taken in the context of fiscal consolidation that will have a negative impact on children. For instance, the French NRP does not mention that this year, more than 16 000 teachers are going into retirement and will not be replaced by new teachers. This has a direct impact on the quality of education with an increase in class sizes.

5. MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

Many of the 2011 NRPs acknowledge, to a greater or lesser extent, that child poverty and social exclusion are important issues that need to be tackled if the Europe 2020 objectives and targets are to be achieved. However, the extent of the coverage is often quite limited and indeed, in several cases, does not sufficiently acknowledge important initiatives that are already in place in a country.

Table 1 summarises the importance that Eurochild members attach to different policy challenges related to tackling child poverty. It also gives their assessment of how well these issues are addressed in the NRPs. The results are disappointing. On only 14 occasions has a country been deemed to have addressed a challenge “very well” and 75 times “somewhat” whereas in 83 instances challenges have been addressed “little/poorly” and in 104 instances “not at all”. From this one can conclude that child poverty and social exclusion are not adequately addressed in the 2011 round of the NRPs. Clearly much more needs to be done in future.

There are, however, some positive aspects to build on in future years to ensure that the issue of child poverty is properly taken into account in efforts to achieve the Europe 2020 poverty and social inclusion targets. Two of the challenges that are frequently assessed by Eurochild members as being either “very important” or “somewhat important” for addressing child poverty in their country “poor access to labour market for parents” and “high level of educational disadvantage; early school leaving and leaving with no/low qualifications” are the two issues most frequently assessed as being either “very well” (2 and 5 times respectively) or “somewhat” (15 and 11 times respectively) addressed in the NRP.

On the other hand, as can be seen from Table 1, the other challenges that many Eurochild members consider to be “very” or “somewhat” important receive little attention in most NRPs. These are: lack of adequate income support for families and children, particular groups of children facing severe disadvantage (e.g. Roma or migrant children), lack of affordable and good quality child care, poor access to social services and child protection, geographic concentrations of disadvantage, lack of an integrated policy framework, poor access to sport, leisure and cultural activities and poor access to housing and environment.

These findings suggest two things. First, the importance of tackling child poverty and social exclusion as a key barrier to achieving Europe 2020’s social inclusion objectives and targets but also as a roadblock to achieving its economic goals and in particular its targets in the other Europe 2020 policy domains (i.e. employment, research and development, education and energy and sustainable development) is not sufficiently understood in Member States. Secondly, even where the need to tackle child poverty and social exclusion is acknowledged, far too often the approach adopted in the NRPs is too narrow. Thus there is a need for either a more detailed coverage of child well-being in future NRPs, or else for the NRPs to be underpinned by clear and comprehensive strategies to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, and for much clearer and more explicit links to be made between these and the NRPs.

See table next page

Table 1 - Eurochild's members' views on the key challenges related to child poverty and social exclusion and how they are addressed in the 2011 NRPs

KEY POLICY CHALLENGES FOR ADDRESSING CHILD POVERTY	How important is it for addressing child poverty in your country?				How well is it addressed in your country's NRP?			
	Very	Somewhat	Little	Not at all	Very well	Somewhat	little/poorly	Not at all
<i>Lack of adequate income support for families and children</i>	BG, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IT, LV, PL, UKNI, UKS, UKW,	BE, IE, LT, NL, PT, RO, SE, UKE	SI,			BE, CZ, FI, FR, IT, PT, RO, SE, SI, UKS	DE, EE, EL, HU, LV, NL, PL, UKW, UKE, UKNI	BG, DK, LT,
<i>Poor access to labour market for parents</i>	CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LV, PL, PT, SE, SI, UKW, UKNI, UKE	BG, IT, RO, UKS	BE, NL,		CZ, DE,	BE, EE, EL, FI, FR, IT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, UKE, UKW, UKNI, UKS	BG, HU, LT, LV,	DK
<i>Lack of affordable and good quality child care</i>	DK, EE, EL, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, NL, PL, PT, UKW, UKNI, UKE	BG, CZ, FI, UKS	BE, DE, RO	SE, SI,	BE, DE,	CZ, EL, HU, PT, UKE	EE, FI, FR, LT, LV, PL, RO, UKS	BG, DK, IT, NL, SE, SI, UKW, UKNI
<i>Lack of early childhood support and intervention</i>	BG, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IT, LV, PL, PT, UKE, UKNI, UKS, UKW	CZ, DE, IE, LT, NL, SE,	BE	RO, SI,		BE, BG, CZ, HU, NL, PT,	EE, EL, IT, LT, PL, RO, UKW, UKNI, UKE	DE, DK, FI, FR, LV, SE, SI, UKS
<i>High level of educational disadvantage: early school leaving & leaving with no/low qualifications</i>	BG, CZ, DK, EL, FR, HU, PL, PT, SE, UKW, UKNI, UKE	DE, IE, IT, LV, UKS	BE, EE, FI, LT, RO	RO, SI,	CZ, DE, FI, PT, RO	BE, BG, FR, HU, IT, LT, SE, UKW, UKE, UKS, UKNI	EL, LV, RO, SI,	DE, DK, PL,

Poor access to services/opportunities:	How important is it for addressing child poverty in your country?				How well is it addressed in your country's NRP?			
	Very	Somewhat	Little	Not at all	Very well	Somewhat	Little/poorly	Not at all
- Health	BG, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IT, LV, PL, PT, UKNI, UKW	IE, RO, UKE	BE, CZ, DE, LT, NL, UKS	DK, SE, SI,	BE, HU	EE, EL, IT, LT, PT, SI,	CZ, PL, RO, UKW, UKE, UKNI	BG, DE, DK, FI, FR, LV, NL, UKS
- Social services and child protection	BG, CZ, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT	BE, NL, SE, UKE, UKNI, UKS, UKW	DE, RO	DK, SI,		BE, CZ, HU, PT, SE,	BG, EE, EL, IT, LV, NL, RO, SI,	DE, DK, FI, FR, LT, PL, UKW, UKNI, UKS, UKE
- Housing and environment	BE, BG, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, IT, HU, LV, PL, PT, UKNI	CZ, IE, UKE, UKW	LT, NL, RO, SI, UKS	DE,	CZ,	EE, FR, PT	BE, EL, HU, IT, PL, RO, UKW, UKE, UKS, UKNI	BG, DE, DK, FI, LT, LV, NL, SI,
- Sport, leisure and cultural activities	BE, DE, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, LV, PL,	CZ, IE, IT, NL, PT, UKE, UKNI, UKS, UKW	BG, LT, RO	SI,		DE, HU	BE, CZ, EE, IT, NL, SI,	BG, DK, EL, FI, FR, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO, UKW, UKNI, UKS, UKE
Geographic concentrations of disadvantage (e.g. urban ghettos or isolated rural communities)	BE, BG, CZ, EL, FI, FR, HU, IT, NL, PL, PT, UKNI, UKS	IE, LT, LV, SE, SI, UKE, UKW	EE, RO	DE, DK		CZ, HU, UKS	BE, IT, LT, PT, RO	BG, DE, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, UKW, UKNI, UKE
Particular groups of children facing severe disadvantage (e.g. Roma children, children in or leaving institutions) – Please specify¹	BE, BG, CZ, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, UKNI, UKS	EE, UKE, UKW	RO	DE, DK	CZ, SE,	RO	BE, DE, EL, HU, UKW, UKE, UKNI, UKS	DK, EE, FI, FR, IT, LT, LV, NL, PL, PT, SI,
Lack of integrated policy framework for addressing child poverty and social exclusion	BG, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, NL, PL, PT, UKNI, UKS, UKW	BE, CZ, SI, UKE	DE, RO			BG, RO, UKW, UKE, UKNI, UKS	CZ, DE, EL, PT	BE, DK, EE, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, LV, NL, PL, SI,

<i>Other challenges: (please specify)</i>	How important is it for addressing child poverty in your country?				How well is it addressed in your country's NRP?			
	Very	Somewhat	Little	Not at all	Very well	Somewhat	Little/poorly	Not at all
<i>Child neglect</i>	LT,							LT
<i>Empowerment of children at risk</i>	NL							NL
<i>Intergenerational transmission of poverty</i>	HU						HU	
<i>Lack of training for professionals on poverty and social exclusion issues; and lack of public awareness</i>	HU							HU

1. Roma/Traveller children, children in institutions, children leaving institutions or in care, migrant children, children with parents born in other countries, children from lone parent families disabled children, children with a parent in prison, children caring for an adult (Young Carers)

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of this analysis of the 2011 NRPs Eurochild makes the following recommendations to the European Commission and Member States with a view to ensuring that future rounds of the NRP process deals with the issue of child poverty and social exclusion more effectively and consistently. Eurochild believes that unless such improvements are made, child poverty and social exclusion will continue to hamper Europe's long term social and economic development as set out in the Europe 2020 strategy.

A comprehensive approach

- ➔ Member States should adopt a comprehensive and cross-governmental approach to addressing child poverty and social exclusion in the NRPs which not only focuses on increasing access of parents to the labour market and reducing early school leaving but also focuses on income support, access to essential services (early education, health, social services, housing), child protection, family support and increasing participation in social, recreational, cultural and civic activities. Particular attention should also be given to targeting vulnerable groups of children such as Roma children, children from a migrant background, children with disabilities, children living in or leaving institutions etc.

National strategies on social inclusion

- ➔ All Member States should underpin their NRPs with specific national inclusion strategies which are backed up with clear implementation plans. These strategies should include a section on child poverty and social exclusion which fosters an integrated and rights based approach to the inclusion of children. The main measures of these strategies should then be referenced in the NRP. They should be supported by a reinvigorated Social OMC with a clear reporting process.⁷
- ➔ To avoid a duplication of effort and loss of valuable experience gained over the past ten years, clear guidelines are needed at EU level to ensure that the NRP process and a reinvigorated Social OMC are mutually reinforcing, particularly as regards to issues of child poverty and social exclusion.

⁷ For further information please see [Eurochild Policy Position on a Renewed Social OMC](http://tinyurl.com/3uxufvc) (http://tinyurl.com/3uxufvc). The [SPC opinion on the Future of the Social Open Method of Coordination](http://tinyurl.com/3goduq9) (http://tinyurl.com/3goduq9), adopted by the EPSCO Council, endorses a stronger Social OMC

Targets and monitoring

- ➔ All Member States who have not already done so should set subsidiary child poverty targets as part of their overall target to contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 headline target on poverty and social exclusion.
- ➔ In addition to setting overall education targets Member States should set sub-targets for children at particular risk of educational disadvantage such as children with special educational needs, children with disabilities, children from a migrant background and Roma children.
- ➔ Monitoring progress on reducing child poverty and social exclusion should be an integral part of the annual monitoring process towards achieving the Europe 2020 poverty and social inclusion targets. Where necessary the European Commission should propose Country Specific Recommendations in relation to policies to reduce child poverty and social exclusion,

Mainstreaming

- ➔ All Member States should recognise that child poverty and social exclusion is a key barrier to achieving their Europe 2020 objectives and targets in relation to employment rate, investment in research and development, and energy and sustainable development.
- ➔ All Member States should ensure that the other policy areas covered in the NRP are proofed to assess their potential impact on child poverty and social exclusion so that their positive contribution to tackling child poverty and social exclusion can be maximised and the risk of their having a negative impact can be avoided.

EU Structural Funds

- ➔ The EU should encourage the use of EU Structural Funds to support measures that promote the social inclusion of children and to overcome educational disadvantage.

Stakeholder involvement

- ➔ Eurochild members strongly support more meaningful consultation with civil society representatives including children's organisations particularly in the preparation and monitoring of the NRPs. EU Structural Funds should be used to support and provide resource to the involvement of stakeholders, including children, in the process.
- ➔ Member States should be encouraged to foster public and political debate on the NRP and in particular to ensure that it is debated in national (and sub-national) parliaments.

i Guideline 9: Improving the quality and performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary or equivalent education

In order to ensure access to quality education and training for all and to improve educational outcomes, Member States should invest efficiently in education and training systems notably to raise the skill level of the EU's workforce, allowing it to meet the rapidly changing needs of modern labour markets and society at large. In line with the lifelong learning principles, action should cover all sectors (from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training, as well as adult learning) taking into account also learning in informal and non-formal contexts. Reforms should aim to ensure the acquisition of the key competencies that every individual needs for success in a knowledge-based economy, notably in terms of employability in line with the priorities mentioned in guideline 4. International mobility for learners and teachers should be encouraged. Steps should also be taken to ensure that learning mobility for young people and teachers becomes the norm. Member States should improve the openness and relevance of education and training systems, particularly by implementing national qualification frameworks enabling flexible learning pathways, and by developing partnerships between the worlds of education/training and work. The teaching profession should be made more attractive and attention should be paid

to the initial education and the continuous professional development of teachers. Higher education should become more open to non-traditional learners and participation in tertiary or equivalent education should be increased. With a view to reducing the number of young people not in employment, education, or training, Member States should take all necessary steps to prevent early school leaving.

The EU headline target, on the basis of which Member States will set their national targets, taking into account their relative starting positions and national circumstances, will aim to reduce drop out rates to less than 10 %, and increase the share of 30-34 year-olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40 % [1].

Guideline 10: Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty

The extension of employment opportunities is an essential aspect of Member States' integrated strategies to prevent and reduce poverty and to promote full participation in society and economy. Appropriate use of the European Social Fund and other EU funds should be made to that end. Efforts should concentrate on ensuring equal opportunities, including through access for all to high quality, affordable, and sustainable services, in particular in the social field. Public services (including online services, in line with guideline 4) play an important role in this respect. Member States should put in place effective anti-discrimination measures. Empowering people and promoting labour market participation for those furthest away from the labour market while preventing in-work poverty will help fight social exclusion. This would require enhancing social protection systems, lifelong learning and comprehensive active inclusion policies to create opportunities at different stages of people's lives and shield them from the risk of exclusion, with special attention to women. Social protection systems, including pensions and access to healthcare, should be modernised and fully deployed to ensure adequate income support and services — thus providing social cohesion — whilst remaining financially sustainable and encouraging participation in society and in the labour market.

Benefit systems should focus on ensuring income security during transitions and reducing poverty, in particular among groups most at risk from social exclusion, such as one-parent families, minorities including the Roma, people with disabilities, children and young people, elderly women and men, legal migrants and the homeless. Member States should also actively promote the social economy and social innovation in support of the most vulnerable. All measures should also aim at promoting gender equality.

The EU headline target, on the basis of which Member States will set their national targets, taking into account their relative starting conditions and national circumstances, will aim at promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion [2].

[1] The European Council emphasises the competence of Member States to define and implement quantitative targets in the field of education.

[2] The population is defined as the number of persons who are at risk of poverty and exclusion according to three indicators (at risk of poverty; material deprivation; jobless household), leaving Member States free to set their national targets on the basis of the most appropriate indicators, taking into account their national circumstances and priorities.