Euronet, the European Children’s Network, is promoting as one of its core activities the active participation of children in European matters that affect them. The basis for the participation of children is Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that “the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has 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”. At the United Nations Special Session on Children in New York (May 2002) children from all over the world participated at the meetings and made valuable contributions. Euronet and its member organisations have build up experience in working with children on European subjects that affect them.

In 1999 Euronet carried out a project in which children from 5 European countries drafted an Agenda 2000 for Europe. After national consultations with children, representatives of the children met twice to discuss the issues that they wanted to bring on the European Agenda in a new decade. Finally, the Agenda 2000 was presented to members of the EU institutions.

Children have also been consulted on two specific subjects that Euronet has worked on: the discrimination of children and the social exclusion and poverty of children within Europe. In the area of social exclusion and child poverty, Euronet made specific recommendations on the need for participation of children who are affected by poverty and social exclusion. Euronet recommended that the EU and its Member States rethink of poverty and social exclusion from a child’s perspective. Children should also be involved in decision-making processes on issues which affect their lives and in particular efforts should be made to involve those children who are poor and excluded.

With regard to the European Constitution for Europe, Euronet organised consultations with children and young people from 11 countries across Europe. These consultations started in October 2002 and culminated in conference in April 2003. The leading actors in this project (member organisations of EURONET) worked with their national networks and groups of children and young people. In Greece this was the General Secretariat of Youth of the Ministry of Education and in Bulgaria this was the Children’s National Parliament. The networks used their expertise to mobilise a broad debate amongst children and young people within an average age group of 11-17.

Each national group came up with their own set of thematic subjects, which they chose to concentrate and focus their discussions on. These subjects included: trafficking in
children, children in institutions, poverty and social exclusion, education, environment, discrimination and as overall theme children's participation.

Each national consultation then produced a report with a set of key messages. As part of the consultation process, children elected a national delegation of around 4 members to come to Brussels and present their collective reports and key messages to a conference entitled "Children and the Future of Europe: children are European Citizens Too," organised by EURONET in April 2003.

Following the conference, the children met a group of high-level representatives of the European Convention, which was at that time drafting the text for a European Constitution. The Convention members assured the children and young people that they were keen on including their demands for real recognition of children as citizens in the text of the Constitutional Treaty.

These examples show that children are very capable of participating in and expressing their views on matters that affect them. This is important at local, regional, national and European level.

For more information or a copy of the conference report “Children and the Future of Europe” contact: Mieke Schuurman at Euronet, the European Children's Network, Rue Montoyer 39, B-1000 Brussels, tel: +32 2 5124500, email: mieke.schuurman@tiscali.nl
ISPCC CONTRIBUTION

Children’s Consultation/Participation in Ireland & the ISPCC’s Involvement

Children will be respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own - The National Children’s Strategy

The ISPCC Children’s Consultation Unit (CCU) was established in January 2002 with the role of advancing the first objective of the National Children’s Strategy (that children will have a voice in matters that affect them) through promoting and supporting the development of community-based children’s consultation mechanisms and developing a body of knowledge guiding the development of these initiatives.

The Children’s Consultation Unit provides advice, consultation and practical support to organisations wishing to develop children’s consultation and participation structures and mechanisms and also run nationwide training programmes on children’s consultation mechanisms.

At the moment the ISPCC’s Children’s Consultation Unit is the only unit in the country that is devoted to consulting with children and developing children’s consultation mechanisms and is the only service available to organisations to advise and support them on how to develop such initiatives.

Training:

The CCU has been developing a comprehensive training program on Children’s Consultation and Participation Mechanisms and this training has been carried out nationwide with City/County Development Board’s, Childcare Committees, Comhairlí na nÓg (Youth Councils at local level) members and other groups wishing to consult with young people. The CCU offers a wide range of training to adults and/or young people on a variety of topics all of which actively promote children’s consultation and participation rights.
Projects for/on behalf of the National Children’s Office (NCO):

A staff member from the Unit supported and facilitated the involvement of the young people who sit on the National Children’s Advisory Council (NCAC) and as a result of this involvement a number of recommendations has been made to the NCAC on how to further empower these young people to have a more active and participatory role on this committee.

The ISPCC has been calling for an Office of Ombudsman for Children for seven years and the CCU was delighted to be actively involved in supporting and facilitating the involvement of young people in the interview and recruitment process for this office. We successfully tendered for this project and our role (along with the Children’s Rights Alliance) was to facilitate the participation of young people in the recruitment of Ireland’s first Ombudsman for Children. This started with a group of 80 young people aged 8-18 years and then with an elected group of 15 from this 80 who went on to design the ad and person specification for the job, short listed CVs, and interviewed the candidates through role play, panel and combined adult/child panel. The young people then made three recommendations to the Minister for Children who appointed the Ombudsman for Children Emily Logan.

The unit organised and ran the “What about me?” Comhairle (council) event for children with special needs and/or from minority backgrounds on behalf of the NCO. The purpose of the event was to gain feedback on how the current structures of Comhairle and Dáil na Óg could be changed to make them more inclusive. The unit evaluated this event and presented a detailed report to the NCO on the findings. In summary it was clear that the children involved had very little insight/knowledge about the current structures of Comhairle and Dáil na nÓg and were therefore unable to comment on how they could be improved. Children were very clear that the whole structure as it exists at present needs to be publicised more.

Throughout 2003 and looking forward into 2004 the Unit has always focused on strengthening children’s participation initiatives both externally with other organisations, particularly the City/County Development Board’s, and internally within
the ISPCC itself. Internally this is reflected in our Junior Advisory Board (JAB) and Children's Advisory Committees (CAC's) whose involvement in the governance of the agency is recognised on page 7 of the agency's Memorandum and Articles of Association, which were revised and re-launched in 2003.

Throughout the last year the Children's Consultation Unit has worked to strengthen the agency's own consultation structures. The Junior Executive has been renamed the Junior Advisory Board and the Children's Advisory Committees have undergone a re-structure based on feedback from its members and with the staff who facilitate them. These committees advise the agency on our services and highlight activities in and needs specific to their own areas of the country. A representative of the National (Adult) Board sits on this Junior Advisory Board and feeds back their views to the other members of the Executive and vice versa.

We consulted with the members of our JAB on how the webpage should look and it was developed thus. Young people also submit music/movie reviews and articles of interest, which are put up on the web page, and we look forward to further expanding on this.

Research:

The Unit conducted a piece of national research on the views of Irish children with regard to the Irish Government's implementation of the UNCRC. This involved running seminars and focus groups around the country and consulting with aprx 600 children on this topic. An interim report on the results of this research was presented to the ISPCC in October and the finished work will be published in the first 6 months of 2004.

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