Ms SINNOTT Kathy MEP  
European Parliament  
Rue Wiertz  
Brussels 1047

8th May 2008

Dear Ms Sinnott,


Thank you for asking the European Children’s Network (EURONET) to comment on this draft report. As you are aware, EURONET is a coalition of networks and organisations campaigning for the interests and rights of children (defined in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as all persons under 18 years of age). EURONET's members share a common concern that children's rights should be taken into account in all EU legislation, policies and programmes which have an impact on children's rights.

You have asked EURONET to comment specifically on the issue of the link between child poverty, and violence against children. Many of EURONET’s members are active in the field of combating violence against children, for example on sexual exploitation, trafficking, child maltreatment and corporal punishment. Besides, many of our members also work on issues related to child poverty in EU Member States, including supporting children affected by poverty and social exclusion.¹

EURONET welcomes the fact that the Employment and Social Affairs Committee has considered the important subject of eradicating child poverty in the European Parliament (EP) draft report on promoting social inclusion and combating poverty and has acknowledged the importance of a child rights-based approach, entrenched in the normative framework and principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), when tackling it.

The harmful effects of poverty on children are well documented:

- From a children’s rights perspective, poverty can prevent children being able to reach their full potential. It can have an impact on their health,

their well-being, their chance to enjoy and achieve, their opportunity to be a positive contribution to society.
- There is an established association between poverty and parental and infant mortality, malnutrition and ill-health. This disadvantage is very often reinforced across generations.
- It can prevent children having access to the opportunities available to other children in areas such as health, education, employment and housing.

EURONET supports the recommendation that the European Commission should consider child poverty and social exclusion in a broader context of EU policy (Art.11 of Zimmer Report) and it is pleased by the call on Member States to achieve the target of reducing child poverty by 50% by 2012, as a step towards eradicating child poverty.

We also draw your attention to the fact that the European Parliament has previously stressed the urgency to combat child poverty and violence against children in the adopted European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2008: Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the child (2007/2093(INI)).

**The relationship child poverty and child maltreatment***

Evidence and experience of EURONET members shows that children living in poverty are at a higher risk of maltreatment. We would like to stress that it is a complex issue and the majority of families in poverty do not maltreat their children. Moreover, abuse may contribute to poverty, as well as vice versa.

At the international level, the landmark 2006 UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against children recognises economic inequalities and social exclusion among the risk factors for child maltreatment. The third recommendation of the UN Secretary General Study on Violence against Children calls on States to allocate adequate resources to address the root causes of violence, by taking “economic and social policies aiming at combating poverty, gender and other forms of inequality, income gaps, unemployment, urban overcrowding, and other factors.”

Research on child maltreatment has shown that factors such as concentrated poverty, high residential mobility and unemployment, overcrowding and low

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2 For the purpose of this paper, we adopt the general definition of child abuse or maltreatment agreed by the experts participating in the WHO Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention in 1999. That definition reads “child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill- treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.”
3 UN Secretary General Study on Violence against Children A/61/299, 29 August 2006. The Study was commissioned following a recommendation from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to carry out an international in-depth study leading to the development of strategies aimed at effectively preventing and combating all forms of violence against children, outlining steps to be taken at the international level and by States to provide effective prevention, protection, intervention, treatment, recovery and reintegration” (A/56/488, annex).
4 UN Secretary General Study on Violence against Children, §99.
levels of social capital all appear to increase the risk factors of child maltreatment.⁶

A study⁷ investigating the experiences of families living on a low income in England, conducted by one of EURONET’s members, concludes that the challenges for these families are often aggravated by experiences of abuse, domestic violence, relationship breakdown, bereavement, mental health problems and feeling unsafe. This report shows that in the low income families sample children's behaviour problems were often related to trauma (including exposure to domestic violence, sexual abuse, loss of a parent or absence of care) or stress.⁸ Besides, bullying was often clearly related to poverty for children from low income families living in affluent areas. Children in deprived areas had the additional stress of a more violent local culture, including gangs using weapons in schools and the community.⁹

As well as the need for more radical action to combat child poverty and social exclusion, this research points to the need for greater awareness among policy-makers and service providers of the impacts of poverty and other sources of adversity. The debate about child poverty must include practical developments in social policy that reduce the risk of child maltreatment by focusing on the known risk factors.

There are clear policies and practical issues in how services are delivered to socially excluded families that could increase protective factors and reduce risk factors. Free and accessible services for low-income families and activities for their children need attention, such as addressing housing needs, advice on benefits, information about specialist help and support, and therapeutic services to help children and parents overcome the impacts of traumatic experiences.

Proposed amendments to the draft European Parliament report

EURONET would suggest a number of amendments, including some addressing links between child poverty and child maltreatment. We are happy to provide more detailed comments on possible amendments upon request.

On the preamble of the report

EURONET encourages introducing the following references in the preamble of the report:

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⁷ Living with hardship 24/7: the diverse experiences of families in Poverty in England, by Carol Ann Hooper, Sarah Gorin, Christie Cabral and Claire Dyson, the University of York and NSPCC, Summary, p.8.
⁹ Living with hardship 24/7: the diverse experiences of families in Poverty in England, by Carol Ann Hooper, Sarah Gorin, Christie Cabral and Claire Dyson, the University of York and NSPCC, Summary, p.4. According to the 2006 UN Study on Violence against Children, §51 and §72, bullying tends to be more common in urban areas characterized by lack of employment, education and social amenities and low standards of housing.

- having regard to Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which specifically refers to the Rights of the Child,

- having regard to the findings and recommendations contained in the landmark 2006 UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against children, according to which economic inequalities and social exclusion are among the risk factors for child maltreatment, (adopted in the preamble)


- Whereas there is a complex relationship between poverty, parenting and children’s well-being in diverse social circumstances, including the protection of children from abuse, (adopted in the preamble, para. j)

On “Eradicating child poverty: from analysis to target policies and implementation”

EURONET asks you to put forward the following amendments under this section:

(The European Parliament)

11. Calls on the Commission to consider child poverty and social exclusion in a broader context of EU policy making including issues such as immigration, discrimination, risks of child maltreatment and abuse, gender equality, active inclusion, early years care and education, life-long learning and the reconciliation of work and non-work life;

12. Urges the Member States to reduce child poverty by 50% by 2012 as a first commitment towards the eradication of child poverty in the EU and allocate sufficient resources in order to achieve this goal (adopted- para 61 report)

ADD new articles:

- Calls on Member States to ensure that all children and families, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, have access to high quality social care services which have a clear understanding of the impact of poverty on families, including the increased risks of, and impact of, child abuse and maltreatment (adopted para 37-report)
• Calls on Member States to ensure that child helplines are sufficiently resourced to be able to respond to every child who needs help and advice (adopted para. 66 report)

• Calls on the European Commission to support a meaningful and safe participation of children in all matters affecting them, ensuring that all children have an equal opportunity to be involved. (adopted para 33 and 26)

We thank you for taking these amendments into account in the Zimmer report. We would be happy to provide more detailed information on specific amendments if required.

Yours sincerely,

Mieke Schuurman
Secretary-General
The European Children’s Network (EURONET)