Dear Readers,

This is our last newsletter for 2006. It has been an eventful year for children’s rights in the European Union. The first ever European Communication towards a strategy on children’s rights was launched this summer by the European Commission and is very much welcomed by the European Children’s Network.

In November EURONET organised, in cooperation with UNICEF Brussels office, a meeting hosted by the UNICEF Innocenti Center in Florence. The meeting was based on four studies made by different organisations on the implementation of the UN CRC. The first day focussed on the Communication towards a strategy on children’s rights, with, among others, the involvement of Commission civil servants from different departments. On the second day a regional consultation on the World Fit for Children after five years, took place. At the end of the meeting EURONET and UNICEF adopted a Florence Call for Action directed at the EU Institutions and the Member States. A report of the Florence meeting is given in this newsletter.

Activities of the Finnish EU Presidency relating to children’s rights and to the Round Table on Social Exclusion are reported in this newsletter by our members that attended these meetings on behalf of EURONET.

I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Please contact Tiffany Baird if you have any questions in relation to the newsletter: europeanchildrenetwork@skynet.be

Editorial by the Secretary General, Mieke Schuurman

Extraordinary Issue 29, December 2006

Contents

- UN-EURONET conference
- Florence Call for Action
- L’Europe de l’enfance
- SP-Commission meet
- SC Web-cast
- Child Rights Course
- Finnish Appeal
- Poverty & Social Exclusion
- Fundamental Rights Agency
- Events & Publications

EURONET-UNICEF Florence Conference

On 13-14 November 2006 UNICEF and the European Children’s Network hosted the 2nd Annual UN-European Children’s Network meeting to discuss the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Europe, EU implementation of the Commission Communication Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and European follow-up to the World Fit for Children +5 review in the UN General Assembly.

The conference was well attended, with representatives from EURONET member organisations, UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, European and national children’s rights NGOs, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The aim of the meeting was to analyse progress on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) in Europe and how to progress further, particularly as a result of the European Commission’s new Communication Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Within the context of the upcoming anniversary of the UN CRC, the recent launch of the UN Study on Violence against Children, and specifically within Europe: the European convention on action against trafficking, and the Guidance on children in armed conflict, the following objectives were identified:

(Continued on page 2)

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...UN-EURONET Conference

- Promote the rights of the child;
- Build on the adoption of the Commission’s Communication: Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child;
- Promote the UN CRC;
- Identify the best possible strategy and instigate speedier changes;
- Build on European actions to form a more consistent process to move forward with;
- Learn from the experience and reflections of all the participants.

Four key studies were presented,
- UNICEF’s Study on the Impact of the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- Council of Europe programme Building a Europe for and with Children,
- ChildONEurope’s Survey on the Committee’s Concluding Observations on the Last EU Countries’ Reports,
- EU Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Rights Thematic Comment No.4: Implementing the Rights of the Child in the European Union

During the first day three working groups discussed the role of the European Forum for the rights of the child, and mainstreaming children’s rights in both internal and external EU policies and legislation.

The second day focussed on analysing the European response to the World Fit for Children +5, with working groups discussing European innovations and good practices in regional structures and in interpretations and applications of the UNCRC.

During the final plenary session the participants adopted recommendations for further action entitled the Florence Call for Action.

FLORENCE CALL FOR ACTION

The Florence Call for Action calls on European Union Member States to safeguard the inclusion of children’s rights in a European Constitutional Treaty and to adopt and support the full implementation of the Commission Communication Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

It calls on the EU Institutions to clarify the mandate and provide appropriate resources to the Commissioner responsible for children’s rights, to the Commission Interservice Group that will guide implementation of the Communication and to the children’s rights unit and coordinator that will support work on children’s rights across the Commission Directorate Generals.

It calls on the European Forum for the Rights of the Child to provide expert advice, to contribute to the development of all EU strategies, policies, legislation, and activities affecting children inside and outside the EU and to monitor the effect of EU actions on children.

It asks for the provision of strategic advice on issues to be addressed at the EU level and for the Forum to act as an independent expert body with the mandate and resources for further research.

It asks that the EU adopt a comprehensive approach when developing the EU Children’s Rights Strategy based on expert advice, including from stakeholders and consultations with children. It should be sufficiently resourced and based on the planned assessment of the effectiveness of existing action. In addition it calls for the EU institutions and Member States to:
- Support the commitment to include children’s rights in both internal and external actions of the EU with a robust approach to “mainstreaming” children’s rights into EU actions, policies and legislation, by developing relevant tools,

(Continued on page 3)

UNICEF INNOCENTI CENTRE

Following the conference, the remaining participants were kindly offered a tour of UNICEF’s Innocenti Research centre and the historical Istituto degli Innocenti in the heart of Florence (pictured to the right).

For information on the centre visit: http://www.unicef-icdc.org/aboutIRC/
training and legislative screening in consultation with the European Forum and other experts on children’s rights.

- Establish genuine mechanisms for meaningful child participation in EC decisions, including the suggested website and further opportunities for dialogue.
- Encourage EUROSTAT to draw on lessons learned collecting, promoting and disseminating data to inform policy development.

In regard to specific actions, the document calls for EU institutions and Member States to:

- Deliver on these actions according to the timeline in the Communication.
- Use a wide, multifunctional definition of child poverty, set time-bound goals and use all available resources to accelerate the elimination of child poverty.
- Ensure follow-up action on the recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children both within the EU’s internal and external policies, and by supporting the appointment of a special representative for violence against children.
- To ensure that all children in the EU, regardless of their nationality or status, benefit from actions and policies to realise children’s rights.
- Any actions and policies affecting stateless, asylum-seeking, refugee and more generally migrant children should be based on the UN CRC, including the principles of non discrimination and the best interests of the child.

The Call for Action reminds governments in Europe and Central Asia of their commitments in the World Fit for Children UN General Assembly Resolution S-27/2 and to note that while action has been taken to deliver on these commitments, robust follow-up is still required. It urges Governments to:

- Put in place effective national legislation, policies and action plans and allocation of resources to fulfil and protect the rights of the child; to develop national monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of policy actions on children; and to strengthen national bodies for the promotion and protection of children’s rights, including, when they do not yet exist, National Commissioners or Ombudspersons for children’s rights who should be independent and responsible for monitoring the implementation of the UN CRC within the Member States.
- Ensure access to quality education for all children without discrimination;
- Promote access to highest standards of health care for all children whether in or out of hospital;
- Take measures to protect children from the effects of HIV/AIDS;
- Promote a Europe wide ban on all forms of violence against children.

It encourages the promotion of genuine children’s participation in decisions that affect them, ensuring that children and young people are provided information about their rights in a child friendly manner.

Finally, it urges the EU and UN institutions to promote an on-going exchange of information and reports on their actions on children’s rights, with a view to ensuring enhanced coordination and effectiveness in the region. This enhanced cooperation should help support the implementation of the EC Communication while at the same time building the regional integration called for in the World Fit for Children resolution.

For more information contact: Mieke Schuurman,
Secretary General, EURONET
Tel: + 32 (0)2 512 45 00
mieke.schuurman@tiscali.nl

The Florence call for Action is available in full at: http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=11416

All documents from the conference will be posted on the European Children’s Network new website in the New Year.
L'Europe de l'Enfance Update

On 21 November, the Finnish EU Presidency organised a L'Europe de L'Enfance meeting in Helsinki. This meeting coincided with an all-day seminar on early childhood and care, organised by the Finnish Early Childhood Education Advisory Board. Sointu Möller (Save the Children Finland) participated in this seminar on behalf of the European Children’s Network.

30 L’Europe de L’Enfance delegates participated in the seminar, discussing projects by the OECD and ChildONEurope. Dr. John Bennet, project manager of the OECD Starting Strong Project, presented the findings from the OECD Education Committee’s reviews from 1998 to 2004. He focussed on the 6 most important elements for the well-being of children in services: context, administration, financing, child: staff ratios, professional qualifications and pedagogical approaches. Early childhood education was found to be the most developed in countries with strong gender equality and low child poverty. There were also large discrepancies with respect to the role and content of early childhood education. Bennet pointed out that systems which divide child care and early education should be avoided. He posed two important questions when choosing the pedagogical approach to children’s education: (1) Do we begin at three years to educate young children for future economic competition with focus on early literacy, math and scientific knowledge? Or (2) is there a time for childhood, for children to grow at their own pace, to follow their own interests, and learn the important arts of life?

Joseph Moyerson and Erika Bernachii, from the ChildONEurope Secretariat, presented the survey on the CRC Committee’s concluding observations on the last EU countries’ reports. The study had three aims: to identify the issues most frequently examined by the CRC Committee; to identify points of strength and weakness in the EU Countries CRC implementation; and to point out the issues on which EU countries can improve policies of intervention. Issues analysed included: general principles, civic rights and freedom, education, family environment, basic health and welfare, and special measures of protection.

The study concluded with the CRC Committee’s indications:
- Definition of early childhood: all young children below 8 years
- State parties are urged to adopt comprehensive and coordinated plans and services for early childhood within a rights-based framework
- An increase in human and financial resource allocations is required
- The state has an obligation to monitor the quality of services produced by the private sector
- Decentralizing services shouldn’t be to the disadvantage of young children

- Work with young children should be properly paid and valued

Systematic child rights training for children, parents and professionals should be realised.

For more information about this survey, please visit ChildONEurope’s website. Sointu Möller, Save the Children Finland

Biannual SP-Commission Meeting

On 14 November, the Social Platform, of which EURONET is a member, held its Bi-Annual meeting with the Commission in Brussels. Speakers included Patrick Trousson (EU Coordinator for Children’s Rights) and David-Pascal Dion (DG Education and Culture).

Trousson discussed key points from the Commission’s Communication. Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, including the inter-service group, the European Forum, and the issue of transparency. Simon Wilson (Director, Social Platform) spoke of the value of children’s rights regarding the issue of coordination on social inclusion and social protection, the need to leverage the limited or nonexistent competence on children’s rights to create a European-wide strategy, and the issue of poverty as a violation of children’s rights. Other points included the training of EU officials, and the participation of children and L’Europe de L’Enfance in the European Forum, and creating a website accessible to children.

Dion spoke about the Commission’s September 2006 Communication on efficiency and equity in European education and training systems. He discussed 5 core themes in his speech: (1) the culture of evaluation within a life-long learning perspective, (2) pre-primary education, (3) schools’ early tracking, autonomy, and accountability, (4) higher education and (5) vocational education and training needing clear pathways and stakeholder participation.

Pre-primary education has been found to have the greatest social and personal returns on investment, particularly for disadvantaged children, with benefits lasting into working life. Evidence shows that early tracking in schools reinforces socioeconomic disadvantages and does not improve efficiency. Efficiency and equity can be improved by focusing on teacher quality and recruitment in disadvantaged areas, with inequalities offset by an autonomous and accountable school system design.
HAVE YOUR SAY! Web cast with Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström

On 20 November, marking Universal Children’s Day, children and young people from across Europe participated in a one hour online web chat with Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström to discuss the future of, and children’s involvement with, the European Union. The children and young people had the opportunity to discuss, in their own language, various issues with their peers, as well as pose questions directly to the Commissioner. Questions came from all over Europe, including Italy, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, and Spain, among others.

Additionally, 5 young people from Finland, Lithuania, Romania, the UK, and Spain participated in a live debate at the European Commission during the web cast with Commissioner Wallström. They debated a variety of issues, including the environment, discrimination, poverty, access to information, violence, children in institutions, and participation.

At the end of the web chat, Commissioner Wallström discussed the importance of the viewpoints and questions that had been raised, and promised to take them to her colleagues in the European institutions.

For more information on the web chat, please visit Save the Children Brussels website.

To listen to the debate in one of the EU languages, please visit:
http://www.managenergy.tv/me_portal/com/vi_wm_300_en/dg_comm_webcast_november_2006

International Interdisciplinary Course on Children’s Rights

The children’s rights course which took place at the Ghent University Children’s Rights Centre in November 2006, was attended by EURONET and some of its member organisations. The course provides education for professionals, agencies, organisation and communities working with and for children and will take place in a different region of the world each year.

EURONET Involvement in Child Rights Course

Mieke Schuurman, Secretary-General EURONET, took part in a panel discussion with the Flemish Children’s Ombudsperson Ankie Vandenberghe at the Ghent University Children’s Rights Course. Participants from all over the world discussed the role of ombudsmen for children in the implementation of the UN CRC and the role of parliamentary bodies and the EU in the implementation of the UN CRC. The role of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child was also brought up in the panel discussion.

Member Input for the Children’s Rights Course

Thank you to Esperance Kana, from Save the Children Brussels, who gave her impression of the course:

I enjoyed the course because it talked about children’s rights from various angles and perspectives, with views from very different backgrounds. I was impressed with the wide variety of participants including government officials, university professors, consultants, individual researchers, representatives from NGOs, UNESCO and UNICEF, with people coming from as far as New Zealand to attend the course.

Academic lectures giving theory in terms of rights, law and historical perspectives were well balanced with working groups where people working on children’s rights or with children discussed their practical experiences.

The main topic which came out of the course as a whole was children’s participation, including the requirements of child protection training for those working directly with children, as well as the logistics and challenges.

The course broadened my views on the work we are doing at the Save the Children office, enriching and giving us a global view of what is being done on children’s rights.
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Finnish Government Appeal

On 22 November, Save the Children Finland organised an international conference on the child victims of sexual abuse on the Internet. As a follow-up to this conference, on 7 December, Save the Children Finland issued an appeal to the Finnish Presidency to take action and improve the identification and protection of children who have been abused for the production of child abuse images on the Internet, both in Finland and internationally. Such action could have an impact beyond the current Finnish Presidency and into the upcoming 2007 German and Portuguese presidencies.

This action encompasses 7 demands:
1. Political commitment and priority to victim identification on child abuse images distributed through electronic media;
2. Well coordinated international and national policies on victim identification through improved inter-agency cooperation;
3. Allocated resources and staff for victim identification;
4. Clear mandates, structures and ownership of investigations at national and international level, including cases where geographical origin/location of crime, perpetrator and/or victim cannot be identified;
5. Focus on child protection and improved support services for identified children;
6. Training for child protection professionals on victim identification and the consequences of being abused for the production of child abuse images;
7. Updated statistics and academic research undertaken on the extent and consequences of internet-related sexual abuse of children. Information courtesy of Save the Children Finland

Poverty & Social Exclusion

The 5th and final EU Roundtable on Poverty and Social Inclusion took place in Tampere, Finland on the 16-17th October, coinciding with the International Day against Poverty. Trine Eriksen of Child Helpline International attended the event on behalf of the European Children’s Network. This Europe-wide roundtable provided over 300 politicians and representatives from NGOs, national, regional, and local governments and European institutions from 30 countries with a forum to exchange views and learn from each other's approaches. The roundtable was the last to be organized under the EU’s Social Exclusion Programme 2003-2006, but will be followed by the forthcoming seven year PROGRESS action programme 2007-2013.

With the overall objective of reviewing the different policies, strategies and approaches in the EU and Member States in eradicating poverty and social exclusion and identifying new approaches to creating more efficient policies, the conference split into working groups. These groups emphasised the need for attention to be given to the implementation of decisions and not just planning and running programmes.

The labour force working group identified the need for active employment policies and for employers’ and labour market organisations to focus on the needs of individuals, families and employees.

The social services working group emphasised the importance of realising social participation. Social services ensure consistency but are also an investment in economic sustainability, employment and social development. The working group noted that not enough emphasis is given to social impacts in different policy sectors. Overall, these and other working groups affirmed that the national action plans will help assure the realisation of standards of employee social rights in the EU.

For more information: http://www.stm.fi/Resource.phx/eng/subjt/inter/ eu2006/round/round1.htx

EU Fundamental Rights Agency to open January 2007

The EU Fundamental Right Agency, formally adopted in December, is set to start work on January 1st 2007. The agency will monitor respect for fundamental rights in Member States, but will not have the power to investigate treatment of prisoners or police cooperation in criminal cases.

It's objectives will be to collect reliable, objective and comparable data on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU, based on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. It will share that information with the EU institutions and Member States and will also be tasked with providing advice on request. The agency will be limited to the area of Community law such as domestic violence, or discrimination but will have no authority on police matters such as legal cooperation in criminal cases, a point argued against by civil society. This issue will be re-examined in 2009 when the possibility of extending the scope of the agency will be aired.

The agency takes over from the current European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, with an expanded mandate and a starting budget of €13 million, rising to €30 million by 2013.

For more information: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/home/fsi/rights/fsi_rights_agency_en.htm
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Events to look out for


Brussels, 2 February 2007, ACA Seminar: “What’s New in Brussels 2007 – Recent Developments in European Policies”. This seminar will examine the Lifelong Learning Programme, Erasmus Mundus and enhancing the attractiveness of European higher education, and European higher education reform (Bologna and Lisbon Processes), among other issues. Registration for this seminar has closed, but there is a waitlist. For more information, contact the ACA Secretariat at info@aca-secretariat.be.

Tiffany has been frantically uploading documents and member descriptions onto the new website. Her heroic work will soon be rewarded as we hope to celebrate the New Year with the launch of our new website in the New Year!

Season’s Greetings!

Member’s Corner

If you have any stories, facts, figures, events or publications you would like to publish on the Euronet newsletter do not hesitate to contact me at europeanchildrenetwork@skynet.be.

Recent Publications

UNICEF-EURONET Florence Call for Action, November 2006

Prof. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, UN, World Report on Violence Against Children, November 2006


In November 2006, NSPCC launched the first electronic issue of their Newsletter for European Policy Makers entitled ChildCentred Europe which briefs on European developments affecting children and highlights some of NSPCC’s activities at EU and UK level.

Member Spotlight

EACH, the umbrella organisation for member associations involved in the welfare of all children before, during or after a hospital stay. The member associations of EACH aim to incorporate the principles of the EACH Charter in health laws, regulations and guidelines in each European country. The activities are adapted to the needs of each particular country and are basically oriented: to advise, inform and support families/carers of sick children, regardless of their illness or handicap, before during and after a stay in hospital; to promote the welfare of sick children amongst doctors, nurses and other professionals; to negotiate with governmental authorities to improve the care of children in health care services. The rights mentioned in the EACH Charter apply to all sick children, regardless of their illness or age or disability, their origin or their social or cultural background, or of any possible reason for treatment or forms or places of treatment, whether as in-patients or out-patients. Implementing the EACH Charter means at the same time implementation of the UN CRC.

EACH, Römerstrasse 11
CH-4114 Hofstetten
Switzerland

Tel: +41 61 733 93 73
Fax: +41 61 733 93 70

www.each-for-sick-children.org

To remove your name from our mailing list, please click here.

Questions or comments? E-mail us at europeanchildrenetwork@skynet.be