



Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children in the EU

Key lessons

Synthesis Report

Independent overview based on the 2007 first semester national reports of national independent experts on social inclusion

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Preface

This report is produced in the context of the European Union (EU) Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (OMC). The OMC covers three main strands (social inclusion, pensions and healthcare and long-term care), and also addresses “making work pay” issues. In 2006, the three processes that were progressively implemented under the OMC (one process for each strand) were *streamlined* into one single “Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process”.¹

The OMC represents the social dimension of the EU Lisbon Strategy, which was established in 2000 and reviewed and revised in 2005. Under the Lisbon Strategy there is intended to be mutually reinforcing feedback between economic, employment and social policies (“feeding-in” and “feeding-out”). This intention was reaffirmed by EU Heads of State and Governments in their Spring 2007 meeting, when they stressed in their Conclusions that “the common social objectives of Member States should be better taken into account within the Lisbon agenda”.

As part of the OMC process Member States produce *National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NRSSPSIs)* on a regular basis. The first such reports, covering the three main strands of the OMC for the period 2006-2008 (and “making work pay” issues), were submitted to the European Commission in September 2006. Member States and the Commission agreed that, in the “light” years, when countries are not producing NRSSPSIs, they would give more attention to looking in depth at key issues within the different strands. In terms of the social inclusion strand it was decided that for 2007 the key issue which would be examined in depth would be child poverty and the social inclusion and well-being of children.

Two important instruments which are used to support the social inclusion strand of the OMC are the peer reviews of good practices and the regular reports drafted by a Network of non-governmental experts. These reports are intended to support the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission in its task of assessing independently the implementation of the Social Inclusion Process². The Network consists of independent experts from each of the 27 Member States and from Turkey. This report presents an independent overview of the reports on child poverty and social exclusion that the independent experts produced in April 2007. It covers all EU-27 countries. Drawing on the 27 expert’s reports, it provides information on tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children across the EU. Throughout the report, where the experience in one or more individual Member States is highlighted, this is either because these national experts have emphasised the particular point or because they represent a good illustration of the issue under discussion. Consequently, the fact that particular Member States are mentioned does not necessarily mean that the point being made does not apply to other Member States. In producing their reports experts cite various different sources and reports in support of their analysis. These have not been included in this report. Readers wishing to follow up the original source should go to the individual experts’ reports which are available on the *Peer Review and Assessment in Social Inclusion* web site.³

¹ For information on the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process and in particular on the social inclusion strand, see the European Commission’s web site: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/index_en.htm

² For more information on the Commission’s programme on “Peer Review and Assessment in Social Inclusion”, including the list of independent experts, see: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/>.

³ <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/policy-assessment-activities/reports/first-semester-2007/>

This report follows and complements a synthesis report produced for the first half of 2006 in which the special topic was active inclusion and minimum resources⁴ and a synthesis report finalised in May 2007 which dealt with two issues: 'feeding-in' and 'feeding-out' between social inclusion and the National Reform Programme on growth and jobs (drawing on the Implementation Reports submitted by Member States in October 2006) and an overview of national policies on the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities⁵. All three synthesis reports drew on the individual country reports prepared by the Network of national social inclusion experts.

⁴ <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/policy-assessment-activities/reports/first-semester-2006/synthesis-report-2006-1/>

⁵ <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/policy-assessment-activities/reports/second-semester-2006/synthesis-report-2006-2/>

1. Summary and Key Conclusions

1.1 Summary

Extent and key challenges

It is clear from the evidence from the national experts' reports that child poverty and social exclusion is a common and shared problem affecting all Member States and that in most countries children are at a greater risk of poverty and social exclusion than adults. However, there are also significant differences in the extent and intensity of the problem both between Member States as well as between different regions and between urban and rural areas within Member States. There are also important variations in the composition of child poverty and social exclusion. Member States where the proportion of children at risk of income poverty is highest also tend to be the countries where the problem is most severe and where urgent action is most needed. All this means that there is no one simple solution to child poverty and social exclusion. Countries are at very different levels of development and need to develop *policy packages* which take account of these different policy challenges.

Although there are significant differences between Member States there are also a number of factors which, while not occurring in the same degree in all countries, recur frequently in a significant number of Member States. They will need to be addressed if a decisive impact is to be made in the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion. These include:

- the high number of poor and socially excluded children living in jobless households or households with a low work intensity;
- the high risk of poverty and social exclusion faced by children growing up in lone-parent families and in larger families with three or more children;
- the significant number of children living in households where one or both parents is in work but the income is insufficient to lift the family out of income poverty (in-work poverty);
- the continuing impact of gender inequalities in terms of access to employment, levels of remuneration and the sharing of caring responsibilities;
- the low level of income support for families with children in some countries;
- the high risk of poverty and social exclusion faced by many immigrant children and by children belonging to some ethnic minorities (e.g. Roma children);
- the particularly high risk of extreme poverty and social exclusion faced by some groups of children such as children growing up in institutions, children with a disability, children who are victims of violence, abuse and trafficking, children who are unaccompanied migrants;
- the high levels of early school leaving and school failure amongst children growing up in poor and socially excluded families;
- the multi-dimensional nature of child poverty and social exclusion, which shows that income poverty and lack of resources are also frequently associated with having poor health, living in inadequate housing and a dangerous environment and/or having poor access to key services such as health services, social services and child care services;
- the significant intergenerational inheritance of disadvantage, in particular educational disadvantage;
- the lack of opportunities for many children growing up in poverty and social exclusion to participate fully in society and in particular in normal social, cultural and sporting activities.

Overall policy approaches

It is clear from the experts' reports that child poverty and social exclusion have become a more important political priority across Member States in recent years and this is leading to a strengthening of the overall policy framework in many countries, particularly in several countries where child poverty and social exclusion is a significant problem. This increased focus seems to be prompted predominantly by two things: first, the implications of demographic change, especially ageing populations, declining birth rates and changes in family structures; and, secondly, the impact of the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process and the political priority now being given to the issue of child poverty and social exclusion. However, countries are at very different stages of policy development in promoting the social inclusion of children.

There remain a significant number of Member States where child poverty and social exclusion is a major problem who, although they may have singled it out in the social inclusion strand of their National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, have yet to establish a strong political priority on child poverty and social exclusion which is backed up by a coherent strategy. However, some of these countries address the issue indirectly through an increased emphasis on support for families. There are also a significant number of Member States with high levels of child poverty and social exclusion who, while they may have made the issue a priority, have not established clear overall objectives and quantified targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion. Their approach too often lacks specific objectives in key policy domains or in relation to particular disadvantaged groups of children. They also often lack objectives for strengthening the institutional framework necessary to develop effective policies for promoting the inclusion of children. However, across the EU there is a significant and growing body of good practice in other Member States on which they can draw to help them do so.

Most Member States seem to combine both universal and preventative policies with more targeted policies aimed at alleviating poverty and social exclusion. While the balance between the two changes depending on the situation in different countries it would seem that the most successful Member States are those that adopt a predominantly universal approach based on a strong belief in preventing problems arising and in ensuring equal opportunities for all children backed up as necessary by targeted policies to address particular extreme situations – a sort of *tailored universalism*. While there may be pressure in Member States with the most severe problems to focus on alleviation it is nevertheless true that the structural nature of the phenomenon makes it urgent to combat poverty and social exclusion under a more preventative approach as well.

There appears to be a broad recognition that a multi-dimensional approach integrating efforts across different policy domains is necessary to promote the social inclusion of children, particularly at regional and local levels. However, in many countries this remains less evident in practice. For instance, while important progress is being made in several countries in mainstreaming and coordinating policies to promote the inclusion of children, in many mainstreaming is still at an early stage or not yet evident and coordination across government and between the different levels remains weak. Again there is a growing body of good practice on which Member States with less developed arrangements for mainstreaming and coordinating policies can draw.

It is striking that in a growing number of Member States links are being made between the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the development of policies to promote the inclusion of children. However, too often the two processes still seem to exist in parallel

without sufficiently informing each other. There remains a widespread absence of arrangements to involve children in the development of policies and programmes to promote their greater social inclusion.

Policy mix

Looking across Member States one can identify three objectives which recur in the reports of most national experts and seem to be at the heart of the development of most policies to prevent and alleviate child poverty and social exclusion. The first is to ensure that children grow up in families with sufficient resources to meet their essential needs. The second is to make sure that children, while growing up, have access to the services and opportunities that will enhance their present and future well-being and enable them to reach their full potential, and to make sure that children in vulnerable situations are protected. The third objective, though less extensively articulated, is to promote the participation of children in society and in particular in social, recreational, sporting and cultural life.

While the details and emphasis varies significantly from country to country and in some countries from region to region, there are four groups of policies which are used to achieve the three objectives outlined in the previous paragraph and which recur across most Member States. The first group involves developing employment, tax and social protection policies so as to ensure an adequate income. The second group involves improving access to services (especially child care, education, health, and housing). The third group involves developing social services and child protection services to ensure the rights of children in vulnerable situations. The fourth, and less developed group, involves policies to promote the involvement of children in social, recreational, sporting and cultural activities.

Within these different policy groupings two issues above all receive attention: increasing access to employment of parents, and tackling and preventing educational disadvantage. Also, in developing policies two themes emerge which cut across most policy areas. These are first, the importance of early intervention and ensuring that children have a good start to their lives; and, secondly, the need to improve delivery of policies at regional and local levels.

Evaluation and monitoring

It is clear from the national experts' reports that a few countries have developed both effective arrangements for monitoring and evaluating policies and systematic assessments of the impact of policies; and some are in the process of doing so. Their experience provides a good basis for mutual learning and transnational exchange between Member States. This is very necessary as in the majority of countries monitoring and evaluation remain very weak or non-existent. This is in part because of weaknesses in data collection and analysis but more especially reflects a lack of clear objectives which are essential for developing effective monitoring and evaluation systems and a lack of political commitment and urgency.

In terms of data a key weakness evident from the experts' reports is the lack of data on child poverty and child well-being over time, and also on the duration and persistence of child poverty and social exclusion (longitudinal/ panel data). There is also often a lack of data and analysis on the situation of children at high risk such as children with a disability, Roma children, children in institutions, migrant children and street children. Similarly, most countries appear to lack information and analysis on the interconnections between different aspects of poverty and social exclusion such as income poverty, poor housing and environmental conditions, poor health, educational disadvantage and access to social,

sporting and cultural activities. This is significant as it can lead to too narrow a focus and the lack of a multi-dimensional analysis of the problem. The data that is available is mainly collected and analysed at the household level and the intra-household dimension is neglected. More data and analysis is also needed on gender and age differences in poverty and social exclusion among children. In several countries there is also a need for more data and analysis by region and more examination of differences between children living in urban and rural areas.

In many countries the development of effective monitoring arrangements are undermined by the lack of clarity about objectives and targets and the absence of set of agreed range of indicators that go beyond measuring income or employment and cover the broader well-being of children. There also seems to be a serious lack of experience or capacity in most countries in developing effective evaluation systems for assessing the impact of policies to prevent and tackle child poverty and social exclusion.

1.2 Key conclusions

In the course of preparing the synthesis report we have identified many different and valuable lessons. On the basis of these we have distilled the following key conclusions which we hope will be of assistance to those responsible for the further development of the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process as regards tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children. These are as follows:

1. The evidence of the high level of poverty and social exclusion experienced by children across the EU demonstrates the need for a continuing priority to be given to this issue over several years if a decisive impact is to be made on eradicating child poverty and social exclusion amongst children. It is unlikely that significant progress at EU level will be made unless the Member States who are currently lagging behind develop and implement a more strategic and focussed approach to preventing and eliminating child poverty and social exclusion.
2. While there is a growing awareness of and commitment to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, a significant number of Member States who are facing the biggest challenge still have not mainstreamed this issue in national policy making. If they are to make progress they will need to develop and implement strategic and comprehensive strategies for both preventing and alleviating child poverty and social exclusion. To be effective these will need to be based on clear policy objectives and related quantified targets as well as on systematically coordinated and implemented policies at all levels - national, regional and local.
3. Given the multi-dimensional nature of the problem no single policy is sufficient to ensure the social inclusion of children. The statistical evidence shows that the Member States who are most successful at preventing child poverty and social exclusion are those that develop policy frameworks which combine increasing access to adequately paid work for parents at risk of poverty, ensuring effective income support schemes for all families with children and increasing access to key services, particularly child care, education, housing, health and social services and services which support their active participation in social, recreational, cultural and sporting life. This emphasises the need for countries to develop close and effective links between social, employment and growth policies, and especially between the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process and the EU Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs, in the area of child poverty and social exclusion. The mainstreaming and coordination of child inclusion policies at

national and sub-national levels would be greatly strengthened if such links were significantly enhanced.

4. Looking at the reports of the national experts as a whole it is striking that many of the issues they raise which are central to overcoming child poverty and social exclusion are relevant not only to the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process but also cut across other important EU level policy areas and concerns. Thus it is important that the issue of child poverty and social exclusion is fully taken into account in a broad range of EU level policy making including policies and initiatives in the area of immigration, discrimination, gender equality, active inclusion, flexible working and early education.
5. An issue of growing concern for some experts is the increasing risk of child poverty and social exclusion due to the negative impact of current development patterns on the availability of and accessibility to natural resources. This is an important point and highlights the importance in future of Member States developing close links between their strategies against child poverty and social exclusion, and their policies to promote sustainable development. This is consistent with the emphasis in the EU current approach to sustainable development which stresses the need to promote social inclusion, especially of children.
6. The evidence from those countries with the lowest levels of poverty and social exclusion is that the most effective approach over time involves developing effective policies for all children backed up by more specific policies targeted at children at high risk who face particular difficulties (such as Roma children, children living in institutions or children at risk of violence and abuse). Given the structural nature of the phenomenon it is important that, even in the countries with the most urgent problems, it is addressed through an approach which combines both measures aimed at preventing poverty and social exclusion and measures aimed at alleviating more extreme situations.
7. Breaking the recurring cycle of poverty and social exclusion requires early intervention to support children at risk and their families at the earliest opportunity. Such interventions appear to work best when they are delivered at a local level, in a comprehensive and integrated manner, and to involve a wide range of actors. Social services can play a key role in ensuring and coordinating such *holistic* provision.
8. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides an important framework for developing a multi-dimensional approach to child poverty and social exclusion. Many Member States still need to develop synergies between their approach to promoting the rights of children and their approach to promoting their social inclusion. Close cooperation between the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process and the implementation of the July 2006 European Commission Communication on the Rights of the Child⁶ can help to ensure this, particularly by developing a common approach to the issue of indicators and data in both fields. Giving attention to the views of children themselves is an important element in a children's rights approach but this aspect remains very underdeveloped in most Member States. A key challenge for several countries will be to move beyond a formal acknowledgment of and commitment to children's rights to a focus on their active implementation.

⁶ European Commission (2006), "Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child", Communication from the Commission, COM(2006) 367 final, Brussels.

9. Limitations in data as well as in both qualitative and quantitative analysis hinder the development and monitoring of policies in many countries, and all Member States need to ensure that they have developed effective strategies for filling gaps in this respect. In particular they need to ensure that they develop non-monetary indicators which can be combined with existing income poverty indicators to give a deeper understanding of child well-being. More attention also needs to be given to researching the persistence and duration of child poverty and social exclusion (requiring longitudinal/ panel analysis) and to investigating the situation of children at high risk.
10. The weakness in many Member States when it comes to monitoring and evaluation highlights the need for more guidance and assistance in this area. This reinforces the importance of the work of the Social Protection Committee (SPC) ISG *Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being* which will propose to the SPC guidelines on monitoring and assessment which can inform Member States at national and sub-national levels. Equally, the Task-Force remit of developing a stronger framework for EU level monitoring and assessment of progress on child poverty and social exclusion should do much to encourage progress at the national and sub-national levels. The Task Force's analytical review can provide a *base line* against which future progress can be measured as it is evident from the experts' reports that up to now such a baseline has been missing.
11. The experts' reports show that the increased attention being given to and reporting on child poverty at EU level has contributed to an increased political momentum on child poverty within many Member States. The evidence suggests that this is likely to be maintained and enhanced if regular reporting is ensured on the progress that countries are making in this area. Such reporting, in connection with the established reporting cycle of the OMC, will also help to identify more clearly the areas in which individual countries need to make progress. The lack of quantified targets in many Member States remains to be addressed. Indeed it is apparent that many countries could benefit from more guidance in deciding on appropriate targets. For instance, one idea that might be worth exploring is to encourage Member States to set the goal of moving towards the performance of the three best Member States in each relevant policy domain. It is clear from the experts' reports that this would involve all Member States having to make progress in at least one domain and many in several.
12. The experts' reports highlight the lack of involvement of children and other actors defending children's needs, such as NGOs, in the policy-making process. Such involvement is important in order both to reflect their needs appropriately and to stimulate bottom-up benchmarking processes which could help to enhance political commitment at all levels of governance (local, regional, national and international) to the agenda of child poverty and child well-being.
13. There is a considerable body of good practice and many examples of successful policies to promote the social inclusion of children in various fields, which provide a sound basis for an ongoing exchange of learning between Member States and involving all relevant actors. Further structuring of and encouraging such exchanges can greatly enhance the efforts of Member States, particularly where child poverty and social exclusion is a relatively new policy concern. The different strands of the new Community Action Programme, PROGRESS⁷, can continue to play an important role in this regard. The information contained in the national experts' reports

⁷ Detailed information on PROGRESS can be found at the following address:
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.htm.

can provide a very useful source of information when developing exchanges of learning and good practice.

2. Introduction

As indicated in the Preface a key priority for the EU streamlined Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process during 2007 is to examine in more depth the issue of poverty and social exclusion among children. In the light of this, a priority task for the Commission Network of independent national experts on social inclusion throughout the year is to contribute to this examination of policies on poverty and social exclusion amongst children. To this end, in their first semester of 2007, members of the Network prepared national reports on tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children.⁸ These reports examine the nature and extent of child poverty in each expert's country, describe and assess the overall policy framework for coordinating and developing policies for preventing and alleviating child poverty, analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the main policies, assess national arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the impact of policies and provide an extensive bibliography of available studies and reports on this issue. This synthesis report is based on those national experts' reports and summarises key learning points emerging from them.

This report is part of a wider body of work initiated by Member States and the Commission on the issue of child poverty and social exclusion. The other elements of work taking place during 2007 include the following. First, there is the work of a *Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being* which has been established under the Social Protection Committee's (SPC) Indicators Sub-Group. This Task-Force is currently preparing a report which will consist of an in-depth evaluative review of ways of measuring child poverty and social exclusion among a number of EU countries⁹ and a set of concrete recommendations for a common framework for analysing and monitoring child poverty and social exclusion at EU level as well as at national and sub-national levels¹⁰. Secondly, the SPC has sent a questionnaire to Member States in April 2007, *Questionnaire on poverty and social exclusion of children in the EU Member States*, which is gathering detailed information on the policies being developed by Member States to prevent child poverty and social exclusion. National responses to the SPC questionnaire will be analysed by the Commission, with an input from the Network of national experts and the *Network Core Team* in charge of coordinating Network activities. Thirdly, as well as the work being undertaken by the Commission, the Task-Force, Member States and the national experts, many of the European Networks active on social inclusion issues and supported under the Community Action Programme on social inclusion (such as EAPN, EUROCHILD, the European Social Network and FEANTSA), are also giving particular attention during the year to the issue of child poverty and social exclusion and are preparing reports on the issue. Fourthly, all these various reports, including the present synthesis report, will feed into and inform an SPC Peer Review on child poverty in October 2007. These various reports and the October peer review will also inform the preparation of the 2008 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

Chapter 3 of this synthesis report examines the extent and nature of child poverty and well-being across the Member States. It examines the extent of the problem, key trends, the main groups at risk as well as groups of children at risk of extreme poverty. It also discusses the intergenerational inheritance of disadvantage and the multi-dimensional nature of child poverty and social exclusion. It identifies gaps in data and analysis. It concludes by identifying a number of recurring challenges facing Member States.

⁸ These reports can be found on the aforementioned *Peer Review and Assessment in Social Inclusion* website.

⁹ This review will largely draw on the newly implemented EU statistical instrument "EU-SILC", i.e. the *Community Statistics on Income and Living Conditions*. This instrument has now become the EU reference data source for statistics on income distribution, poverty and various aspects of living conditions.

¹⁰ These recommendations will be based on the responses to a questionnaire on monitoring and assessment issues, which was prepared by the Task-Force and sent to all Member States in November 2006.

Chapter 4 examines the overall policy approaches being adopted by Member States and discusses issues such as the setting of objectives and targets, the extent of mainstreaming and coordination of policies, the balance between universal and targeted approaches and the potential contribution played by a children's rights perspective.

Chapter 5 looks at the overall mix of policies used by Member States and identifies key approaches in different policy domains. These include employment, income support, access to key services such as education, child care, housing and environment, health, social services and child protection. It also looks at the participation of children in social, cultural and recreational and sporting activities.

Chapter 6 looks at the strengths and weaknesses of arrangements in place in Member States to monitor and assess the impact of policies to promote the greater social inclusion of children, including the involvement of stakeholders in the process.

3. Extent and Nature of Child Poverty and Well-Being

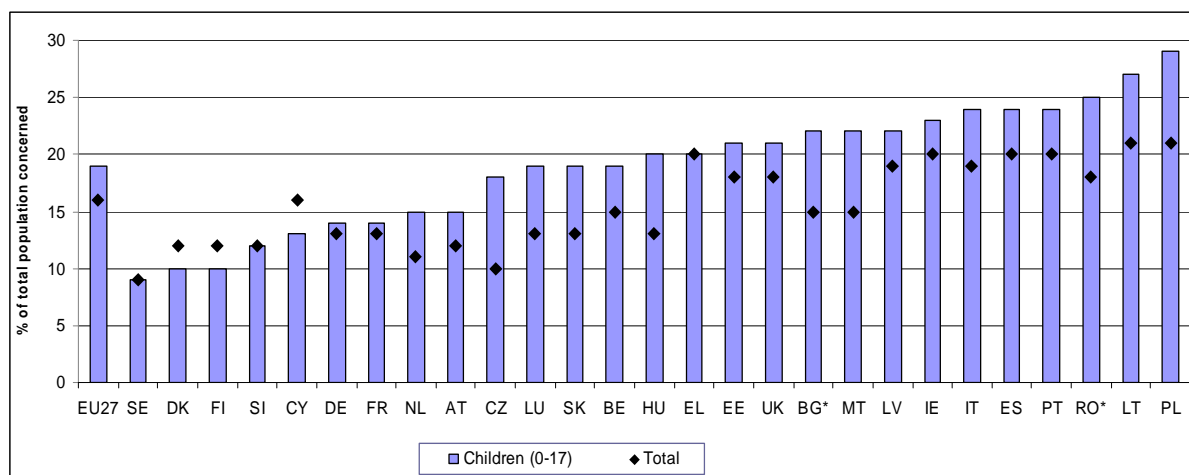
3.1 Extent

The reports from the national experts reinforce the view that tackling child poverty and social exclusion are major challenges across the European Union. However, the extent and severity varies widely from country to country and indeed in many countries from region to region. Also the picture that can be painted is quite patchy as research and data availability is very uneven and in some countries there are serious gaps.

At-risk-of-poverty

Most experts use as their starting point the data from EU-SILC¹¹ and the EU commonly agreed relative income at-risk-of-poverty indicator. This shows that in 2005 19% of children (i.e. 19 million children) in the EU-27 were at risk of poverty as compared to 16% of the total population (see Figure 3.1)¹². Indeed, in all countries except for the Nordic countries, Cyprus, Greece and Slovenia children are at greater risk of poverty than the rest of the population. While the overall difference between children and the EU population as a whole is 3 percentage points, it is much larger in some countries with the highest differences being in Czech Republic and Poland at 8 points, Bulgaria, Hungary, Malta and Romania at 7 points, and Lithuania, Luxembourg and Slovakia at 6 points.

Figure 3.1 At-risk-of-poverty rate in the EU (%), total and children, 2005



Source: Eurostat; EU-SILC 2005 - income year 2004 (income year 2005 for IE and the UK); except for BG and RO - estimates based on the 2005 national Household Budget Survey

However, it is clear from many of the experts' reports that relying just on the risk-of-poverty indicator gives an incomplete and potentially misleading picture of the actual situation of children in their

¹¹ In order to be as up to date and consistent as possible, most of the poverty risk figures presented in this chapter are based on the 2005 wave of EU-SILC (see Chapter 2). Some of these figures can be downloaded, free of charge, from the Eurostat web-site. Others (Tables 3.2 and 3.4 as well as Figure 3.4) have been computed, on the same data-set (2005 EU-SILC data), by the Task-Force on "Child Poverty and Child Well-Being" which has been established under the Indicators Sub-Group of the EU Social Protection Committee (hereafter: *EU Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being*).

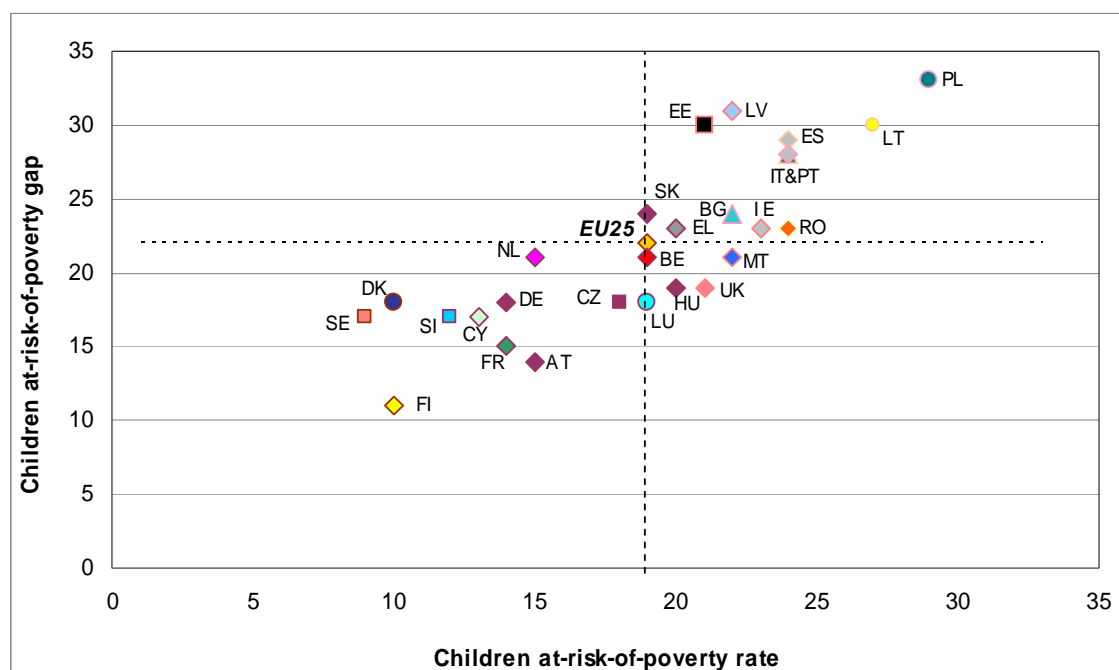
¹² EU averages provided in this report are calculated as a population-weighted average of the available national values.

countries. It is necessary also to take into account the actual value of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold in each country¹³ and also to look at the severity of income poverty and at other measurements such as deprivation indicators (see below), subjective views on poverty and social exclusion and also areas such as health, housing and education. For instance, the UK experts point out that there is evidence from comparative analysis of the ECHP¹⁴ that the UK has a comparatively higher child poverty rate in terms of income than it does on subjective poverty, deprivation, persistent poverty and poverty gaps.

Depth/Intensity

Several experts make use of the EU indicator of the relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap behind the overall figure on risk of poverty in order to give some idea of the severity of income poverty (see Figure 3.2). Again there is quite a wide variation across the EU as a whole ranging from 11% in Finland to 33% in Poland and an EU overall figure of 22%. When one looks across the EU as a whole it is striking that in most cases where there are a large proportion of children at risk the level of poverty also tends to be more severe. This seems to be especially the case in several “new” Member States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland) and Southern Member States (Italy, Spain and Portugal).

Figure 3.2: Relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap of children vs. at-risk-of-poverty rate for children (%), 2005



Source: Eurostat; EU-SILC 2005 - income year 2004 (income year 2005 for IE and the UK); except for BG and RO - estimates based on the 2005 national Household Budget Survey

Looking at the income poverty gap thus reinforces the importance of going behind overall poverty figures to identify different degrees of income poverty.

¹³ The fact that the value of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold should always accompany the indicator of those at risk of poverty had already been emphasised in the EU list of commonly agreed indicators for social inclusion endorsed by the 2001 Laeken European Council.

¹⁴ Ritakallio, V-M. and Bradshaw, J. (2006) ‘Family poverty in the European Union’, in Bradshaw, J. and Hatland, A. (eds) *Social Policy, Family Change and Employment in Comparative Perspective*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Poverty risk threshold

It is also clear from the national reports that an important element that needs to be factored in when looking at at-risk-of-poverty figures across the EU is the actual value of the poverty risk threshold given the very wide range across the EU (see Table 3.1). The average of the three countries with the highest value expressed in Purchasing Power Standards¹⁵ is in the region of 6 times that of the average of the three lowest.

Table 3.1: Monthly at-risk-of-poverty threshold (illustrative values) for a household with 2 adults and 2 children, EUR and PPS, 2005

	BE	BG*	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT
EUR	1726	153	444	2323	1798	313	1965	989	1111	1673	1511	1382	231	216
PPS	1647	356	816	1677	1731	502	1576	1141	1231	1526	1446	1538	420	410
	LU	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO*	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	
EUR	2990	362	816	1783	1889	266	752	98	924	297	1828	1817	1956	
PPS	2866	591	1137	1695	1848	503	874	226	1233	546	1488	1502	1864	

Source: Eurostat; EU-SILC 2005 - income year 2004 (income year 2005 for IE and the UK); except for BG and RO - estimates based on the (2005) national Household Budget Survey

Material deprivation and hardship

In seeking to give a deeper impression of the nature and extent of poverty and social exclusion several experts have gone beyond income and given a deeper picture of disadvantage by examining the extent of deprivation experienced by people living in poverty and experiencing social exclusion. For example, the Austrian expert highlights an approach by the Austrian statistical office which distinguishes between five different forms of disadvantage. However, as she points out, it is still generally families with three or more children or single parent families who are most affected by low income and deprivation. This is equally evident in Spain where the expert highlights research showing how households with children, especially those with 3+ children and lone parent households have a much higher proportion unable to afford goods and services or durable goods, experiencing accommodation problems and environmental problems and having financial difficulties.

In Hungary too the expert highlights that there have been a number of studies going beyond income poverty which have shown that about 5-8% of the population experience lasting and profound poverty and social exclusion, which goes beyond poverty of income into consumption deprivation, a poor place of residence and housing conditions, and a subjective view of impoverishment as cumulative poverty. It is estimated that there are about 100,000-200,000 people between the ages of 0 and 18 living in deep deprivation in Hungary. The Italian expert outlines a measurement of absolute poverty which concerns the expenditure capacity to meet basic needs such as food, housing and other indispensable goods and services. Italian research also shows that households with many children, particularly in the South, face hardships in their daily life and are generally affected by a series of problems with a higher intensity compared to the average population such as economic strain, lack of key tools, poor housing, environment and social contexts.

¹⁵ On the basis of Purchasing Power Parities (PPP), Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) convert amounts expressed in a national currency to an artificial common currency that equalises the purchasing power of different national currencies (including those countries that share a common currency).

The Irish expert highlights the “consistent” poverty measure used by the Irish government, which is based on an amalgam of financial poverty and lack of access to basic resources – 10.2% of Irish children were living in consistent poverty compared to 21.2% at-risk-of-poverty in 2005 in Ireland. Of the different deprivations studied, the most widely experienced by families with children were debt problems arising from ordinary living expenses followed by being unable to afford new clothes and then having to make do without heating at some stage in the past year is the third.

The Portuguese expert reports on a recent study showing that, based on the creation of an aggregate index of deprivation (including dimensions such as housing, social networks, durables, basic needs, financial capacity, labour market, education and training), the level of deprivation among families registered a sustainable improvement between 1995 and 2001. However, the incidence of deprivation situations among Portuguese families increased between 1996 and 2000. Similarly the Polish expert reports that a measure of extreme poverty and social exclusion, which is defined by a basket of goods and services which only cover basic needs whose satisfaction cannot be delayed, showed a slight increase between 2003 and 2005 for households with children.

However, it is evident from the reports that evidence of the extent of national information on deprivation is quite varied across the EU. However, several experts do highlight studies that help to give a more comparative dimension. For instance the Danish expert points out that while Denmark scores low on deprivation index, a recent 2006-study of deprivation in the enlarged European Union points to the fact, that deprivation is not really comparable between rich and poor countries. Even the ‘poorest’ of the ‘rich’ countries face a lower deprivation than the ‘richest’ in ‘poor’ countries.¹⁶

Many experts use both the recent studies by Bradshaw, Hoelscher and Richardson¹⁷ (see Figure 3.3) and by UNICEF¹⁸ to compare the well-being of children in their country with other countries. While some questions are raised about the composite method of ranking and the timeliness of some of the data used generally it is felt that the range of different domains covered are very useful in giving a better indication of the position of children than narrow income approaches.

¹⁶ See Guio, A.-C. and Museux, J.-M. (2006), “The situation of children in the EU: Comparisons between income poverty and material deprivation approaches”, Paper presented at the 29th General Conference of I.A.R.I.W., Joensuu, Finland, August 2006 available at http://www.iariw.org/papers/2006/Museux_childrenEU.pdf.

¹⁷ See Bradshaw, J., Hoelscher, P. and Richardson, D. (2007), “An index of child well-being in the European Union”, *Social Indicators Research*, 80, 133-77.

¹⁸ See, in particular:

- UNICEF (2005), *Child Poverty in Rich Countries*, Innocenti Report Card No. 6, Innocenti Research Centre, Florence;
- UNICEF (2007), *Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries*, Innocenti Report Card No. 7, Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.

Figure 3.3: Rank order of child well-being in the European Union

Country	AVERAGE RANK	HEALTH	SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING	CHILDRENS RELATIONSHIPS	MATERIAL	RISK AND SAFETY	EDUCATION	CIVIC PARTICIPATION	HOUSING
Cyprus	4.6	5			1	2		1	14
Netherlands	4.9	2	1	5	10	5	6		5
Sweden	5.9	1	6	15	2	3	2	14	4
Denmark	6.4	3	9	10	6	15	3	4	1
Spain	8.7	13	3	9	8	1	15		12
Finland	9.8	7	12	17	3	7	4	18	10
Germany	9.9	10	7	12	12	12	9	10	7
Belgium	10.4	20	15	6	18	16	1	5	2
Slovenia	10.7	15	8	4	4	18		13	13
Ireland	12.1	18	5	8	19	20	7		8
Italy	12.3	16	11	2	15	6	19	11	18
Luxembourg	12.4	11	20	19	5	9	20		3
Greece	12.5	25	4	11	17	8	16	2	17
Austria	12.6	21	2	16	7	19	17		6
Portugal	12.9	9	16	3	13	17	18	7	20
Hungary	13.0	22	10	7	14	14	12	3	22
Poland	13.0	6	19	13	23	11	5	6	21
France	13.0	14	13	14	11	10	14		15
Malta	13.5	24	17	1	24	4			11
Czech Republic	14.1	4	14	22	9	21	10	17	16
Slovak Republic	16.6	17	22		25	13	11	9	19
United Kingdom	17.0	23	18	23	20	22	13	8	9
Latvia	17.6	19	21	18	16	23	8	12	24
Estonia	19.9	12	23	21	21	24		15	23
Lithuania	20.0	8	24	20	22	25		16	25

Source: Bradshaw, Hoelscher and Richardson, 2007

Duration and persistence

Another important element in understanding the reality of poverty and social exclusion amongst children is information on the duration and persistence of poverty and social exclusion. Unfortunately, it is clear from the national reports that recent data on the duration and persistence of poverty and social exclusion (longitudinal/ panel data) is quite limited in most countries. This situation has been worsened in the short-term with the termination of the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) and its replacement with EU-SILC. However, in a few countries important evidence is available. For example the Irish expert reports on important recent research on the duration of child income poverty which found that, despite mobility in the child poverty population, almost one in five Irish children live in income poverty for five years or more and that children in lone-parent households spend substantially more time in poverty than do those being raised in two-parent households. Also, having three or more children in the household results in a particularly marked increase in the persistence of child income poverty. Other important factors that increase persistence of poverty and social exclusion for children include a high level of welfare dependence and living in a household where parents are unemployed or inactive. The Belgian expert highlights that there seem to be longer income poverty spells among jobless households and single parents appear to be faced by a higher risk of persistent income poverty than other families with children. Similarly the Polish expert reports on research which suggests that poverty becomes a persistent feature, with every second person living in extreme poverty in 2001 also living in extreme poverty in 2003 and relates this particularly to unemployment and to size of household but also to living

in a rural area. The Danish expert also points to the persistence of poverty appearing to be a problem. The longer a child has been living in poverty, the more likely it is that this child will continue to live in poverty. Children who have been living in poverty for one year have a 45% risk of living in poverty the year after. A child with a four-year history of poverty has a 70% risk of living in poverty the year after. However, in the Netherlands the expert reports that the persistence of poverty is decreasing even if, in 2004, still one in eight to nine one-parent families had to live with a low income for at least 4 years, which is three times more than the national average.

Regional and spatial differences

A further important dimension that needs to be taken into account when looking at the picture in different countries is the geographic distribution of child poverty. It is clear from many of the reports that where you live is a significant factor in the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Regional and urban-rural differences are highlighted by the experts in several Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden). For example in Belgium the expert points out that the risk of income poverty for children is almost twice as high in Wallonia as in Flanders. The German experts stress differences between East and West Germany and the Italian expert points to the very significant difference between North and South. Similarly the Danish expert points to research showing a very uneven distribution of child income poverty. Hence, children, living in the municipalities with the highest income poverty rates (14.7-15.9%), have a five times higher risk of living in poverty than children in municipalities with low poverty rates (3.1-3.7%). The Greek expert notes that in three regions (East Macedonia and Thrace, Western Greece and Southern Aegean) child income poverty rates are much higher than the mean national: these percentages were found to be between 35% and 37% in comparison to 23% national average. The Swedish expert highlights that there is a substantial spatial segregation and that it is closely related to ethnic segregation – in some of the most extreme districts in the three largest cities around 90% of all children have foreign backgrounds and around 60% of the children in these areas suffer from economic hardship.

In several countries it is striking that poverty is higher in rural areas. For instance, in Poland the expert points out that there is a higher risk of persistent extreme poverty and social exclusion in rural areas and that living in rural areas increases the risk of poverty more than two times. The Romanian expert shows that an analysis of the poverty rate of children, according to the occupation of the head of the household (based on a 2004 household budget survey) indicates that families from rural areas whose head of household has no legal working status (which for statistical reasons are categorised as subsistence farmers or “self-employed in agriculture”) are the most at risk of severe poverty and social exclusion. Similarly in France the expert notes that poor children live more frequently in disadvantaged geographical zones. In particular children in isolated rural areas and in overseas departments face very severe poverty and social exclusion. The Lithuanian expert likewise stresses that concentrations of disadvantage are particularly evident in rural areas and that it appears that rural children live in worse conditions than urban children. Also in Hungary the expert notes that many of the most vulnerable households with children live in certain low employment regions, predominantly in rural areas.

Age and gender differences

The importance of taking into account differences in poverty and social exclusion levels by age and gender is highlighted in several countries. As regards age it is clear that the pattern varies across Member States. For instance in some countries such as Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece and Germany the at-risk-of-poverty rate increases with age. However, this is not always the case. In Denmark for instance the expert notes that 10% of infants (aged 0-1) live in income poverty – the same is the case for only 5% of the 16-17 years old. In Sweden the income poverty rate is especially high for small children 0-5 years old. In Bulgaria children under 6 are more at risk than other children. As the Bulgarian expert points out, in international perspective this again is found to correlate with the low share of children in the population. Another explanation suggested by the Bulgarian expert is that with the new cohorts the situation with child poverty and social exclusion is growing worse, probably due to the fact that low-income families keep having higher birth rates but also that low-income families are becoming more deprived of equitable access to key public goods.

As regards gender the pattern again varies. For instance, the Estonian expert points to a risk of poverty rate that is higher for males rather than females at all ages and especially for 15-17s but the intensity of income poverty rate is higher for females (except for 10-14 year olds). On the other hand in Spain the expert notes that income poverty level of girls is 3% higher than for boys. In considering gender differences it is important to recognise that it is not only a question of the different levels of poverty. It should be noted that the reasons for these gender differences in income poverty when poverty is measured at household level are not immediately apparent and would merit further investigation¹⁹. There are also differences in how poverty and social exclusion affects boys and girls and how they cope with it. This is well described in the German experts' report (see Box 3.1).

Box 3.1

Impact of Gender Differences in Germany

Gender plays an important role in all elements of exclusion, although this does not lead to a particularly large difference for instance with regard to the poverty risk quotas or the drawing of social assistance. As a rule, girls in Germany have higher secondary school qualifications than boys; in particular, the rate of pupils who fail to complete secondary modern school is much lower among girls than among boys. Nonetheless, when it then comes to searching for apprenticeship trades and to secondary qualifications in the tertiary education sector, selection filters are taking effect which, all in all, gives female youths a worse perspective on the labour market. Another example is the health sector: Girls are more often feeling unwell than boys. Quite obviously, they assimilate their social exclusion much more introspectively than boys who rather draw attention to their situation by way of protesting behaviour. And finally, male youths - before all when they are socially excluded - try more to team up in cliques, whereas young women rather look for individual "protection" by a partner.

Source: German experts' report

¹⁹ Indeed, considering that no normative value (at least in the EU) can be attached to breakdowns by gender of the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children, the SPC Indicators Sub-Group has decided not to publish such breakdowns.

3.2 Trends

The change from ECHP to EU-SILC has resulted in a discontinuity in data which in many Member States makes it difficult to identify recent trends in income poverty. However, in most countries there appears to be little evidence of any recent significant change in overall levels of poverty and social exclusion of children either because there have been no significant change in the data or because data are not available. However, in some countries experts do note changes in the composition and severity of poverty and social exclusion, though different national indicators are often used.

There are, however a few countries, where the experts note that child poverty and social exclusion rates are increasing. These include the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Malta and Spain. In Germany, so too is the depth or intensity of poverty while in Spain there is an increasing or steady child poverty and social exclusion rate in spite of economic growth and entries into poverty and social exclusion are higher and exits lower.

On the other hand, some experts note that over the past decade some countries have seen improvements, though these are often from a rather low base (Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, UK) even if in some cases the most recent data point to a slightly negative trend (Portugal, UK). The Estonian expert notes that the share of households with children among the subjective poor dropped to 18% in 2004 (from 27% in 2000) and the number of children being raised in such households decreased in five years from 13,900 to 7,100 (among these ca 1,400 children less than 3-year-old), which is partly an effect of the parental benefit introduced in 2004. In Ireland although there has been little change in the high level of children at-risk-of-poverty there has been a fairly significant fall in “consistent” poverty.

3.3 Main groups at risk

The structure of the family, the family’s financial situation and its ethnic origin and/or migratory status are the recurring factors in most countries in determining the main groups of children at risk of poverty. Virtually all experts highlight the high risk of poverty facing children in large families (3+ children) and lone parent families. EU-SILC is the main source of data used by experts in identifying these as the main groups of children at risk of poverty. However, two other aspects that receive nearly as much attention are the very high risk of poverty facing both children in jobless households and children from migrant and ethnic minority families.

Lone parent families and large families

Virtually all experts report a high poverty risk for children in lone parent families. However, just as there is for income poverty in general, there is still a very wide variation across the EU for the level of risk faced by these families, ranging from 20% to 57% with an EU average of 35% (see Table 3.2). Interestingly, the French expert points out that while the level of income poverty may vary by household structure the intensity of poverty remains fairly stable whatever the composition of the family, including for lone parent households.

Table 3.2: At-risk-of-poverty rates of children (%) by type of households, EU-25, 2005

Household type	All children	lone parent	couple 1 child	couple 2 children	couple 3+ children	complex with children
EU-25	19	35	12	14	25	20
SE	9	20	4	4	9	23
FI	10	21	7	5	12	13
DK	10	23	5	4	15	10
SI	12	26	9	11	18	8
CY	13	42	9	10	15	11
DE	14	33	10	7	14	7
FR	14	28	8	9	20	18
AT	15	28	9	12	21	9
NL	15	31	9	10	21	9
CZ	18	47	10	12	24	16
SK	19	37	14	17	24	16
BE	19	40	8	10	22	21
LU	19	36	12	17	22	19
HU	20	33	15	16	28	13
EL	20	46	13	18	33	32
UK	21	38	9	12	27	15
EE	21	44	13	13	26	16
MT	22	54	11	16	35	13
LV	22	31	13	18	39	17
IE	23	50	12	13	27	13
ES	24	42	13	23	39	23
IT	24	38	15	22	35	24
PT	24	41	16	25	40	20
LT	27	57	14	18	44	16
PL	29	46	17	23	47	26

Source: Eurostat; EU-SILC 2005 - income year 2004 (income year 2005 for IE and the UK) – Calculation by the EU Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being

A key factor explaining the high level of income poverty amongst single parents and their children is their low employment rate. As is evident from the Belgian expert's report the employment rate decreases most when the age of the youngest child is low and the number of children is high and is very influenced by the availability of affordable child care. Also, as is clear in the Finnish report, the financial situation of working single mothers is not very good because they usually work at low-paid jobs. Similarly the Slovenian expert notes that the main identified risk factors of poverty and deprivation of lone parents are education, employment and unsolved housing problem. Social circumstances and social security of lone parents very much depend on their inclusion into the labour market. However, employment itself does not necessarily guarantee sufficient income, particularly if combined with low

education. It is important to note that though the risk of child poverty among lone parent families may be consistent their contribution to aggregate child poverty varies significantly from country to country (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Distribution of poor children by type of households, %, 2005

Household type	lone parent (%)	couple 1 child	couple 2 children	couple 3+ children	complex with children	Total
EU-25	23	10	28	27	11	100
SE	41	5	17	28	9	100
FI	27	11	17	40	5	100
DK	38	7	17	36	3	100
SI	15	10	37	26	13	100
CY	18	8	35	28	11	100
DE	48	11	18	20	3	100
FR	23	9	29	33	6	100
AT	18	11	29	34	9	100
NL	18	8	27	44	3	100
CZ	28	10	32	19	11	100
SK	11	9	32	28	20	100
BE	30	6	16	39	9	100
LU	13	10	32	36	10	100
HU	19	12	25	32	12	100
EL	11	11	56	9	13	100
UK	44	6	19	26	5	100
EE	37	11	17	22	13	100
MT	16	7	28	38	10	100
LV	22	11	23	24	21	100
IE	34	5	15	37	8	100
ES	7	11	41	25	16	100
IT	11	12	41	22	14	100
PT	10	16	36	21	17	100
LT	30	9	22	29	9	100
PL	8	9	24	34	25	100

Source: Eurostat; EU-SILC 2005 - income year 2004 (income year 2005 for IE and the UK) – Calculation by the EU Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being

Most experts emphasise that children living in larger families (i.e. 2 adults and 3+ children) are at a high risk of income poverty. However, there is a wide variation in the degree of risk ranging from 9% to 47% with an overall EU average of 25% (see Table 3.2). Again, the overall significance of this varies depending on the proportion of children in a country living in this type of family (see Table 3.3). There is

also a lot of evidence in the different reports highlighting the decline in the birth rate and thus in the number of large families. Just as with lone parent households a key factor that emerges as a cause of the higher income poverty rate of larger families is a lower employment rate. For example the Polish expert highlights research which shows that the work intensity of adult persons is lower in the households with children than in the households without children. It clearly drops in the case of households with three or more children.

It is worth emphasising that the poverty risk for children in lone-parent families and for children in large families are both very high and quite close to one another in the three Southern Member States: Italy (38% for lone parent families vs. 35% for large families; see Table 3.2), Spain (42% vs. 39%), and Portugal (41% vs. 40%). A similar pattern is also found in Poland (46% vs. 47%). Finally, Latvia is the sole Member State where the poverty risk for children in large families (39%) is –significantly– higher than that for children in lone-parent families (31%).

Jobless households

Many experts (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia, UK) particularly highlight the high risk of poverty for children living in households where no one works or where there is a very low work intensity. For example, the Slovak expert refers to a study highlighting the material deprivation faced by children growing up in jobless households. Similarly, in Bulgaria the expert notes that children are disproportionately placed in jobless households. In 2006 14.5% of the people aged 0-17 lived in jobless households, compared to 11.6% of the adults. From the national Labour Force Surveys results (spring 2006), as provided by Eurostat, this situation of a share of those living in jobless households that is higher among children than among adults is not exceptional in the new Member States (it is indeed observed in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, Malta, Romania and Slovakia); in the old Member States, this is the case only in the UK and Ireland. The Czech expert points out that if there is no economically active parent in the household, the risk of poverty rate can mount up to 90%.

The importance of employment as a key means of preventing child poverty and social exclusion is certainly evident from much of the research highlighted in the national reports. As the Polish expert comments the results of research indirectly point out the importance of employment policies to counteract child poverty and social exclusion: both policies to reduce unemployment and policies which would mitigate the conflict between the occupation and family responsibilities. The results also indicate that the activation policies must be supported by adequately directed income support policies. This applies in particular to the need to support families with three or more children, where the income effect of an increase of the work intensity of households is the lowest. Rather similarly the Belgian expert points out that the link between child poverty and jobless households is “an indication that the disposable package of family and child benefits alone is not sufficient to reduce the poverty risk and that paid work is an important buffer against poverty.”

Child care

The absence of sufficient and affordable child care emerges as an important factor in the level of child poverty and social exclusion in several countries (Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland) and is closely linked to the issue of work intensity. As the Italian expert notes “Nurseries and crèches play a relevant role both for the children educational career and for women to facilitate their employability while improving the reconciliation of work and family life.” It emerges clearly that one of the key factors that

has a strong negative influence on the employment possibilities, particularly for women with large families and single parents, is the limited availability of childcare services. The Polish expert comments “The access to the institutional small child care is treated not only as a tool of equalisation of children’s opportunities but also as a basic instrument of social policy oriented on supporting women in reconciliation of work and family life. Difficulties related to such a reconciliation lead to an increased economic inactivity of women, who bring up small children, and difficulties with their re-entry into the labour market. An improvement of availability of child care is a prerequisite for the improvement of women situation in the labour market, an increase in their employment, and thus the improvement of financial condition of families with children.” In Greece, the expert stresses that affordable childcare services are still not widely available for pre-school children (0 to compulsory school age and especially for infants). Moreover, only employed women tend to have access to them, thus increasing the difficulties for unemployed women to seek for a job. For some population groups, in particular, such as lone parents, this non availability of child care facilities and services makes it increasingly difficult to reconcile their family responsibilities with a paid job. Various empirical findings suggest that there is an acute “welfare deficit” in terms of the services provided to children and families in difficulty. The German experts state that it is evident that fewer children from the lower social strata, and especially those with a migration background, are attending a day care centre, especially among the group of three-year-old and four-year-old children.

In-work poverty and low work intensity households

However, lack of work is not the only explanation of child poverty. Several experts point to the high proportion of poor children living in households with one or both parents in employment. As the Portuguese expert points out, 81% of poor children in Portugal are living in households where at least one person is working. Similarly the UK experts point out that “57% of poor children have a parent in employment – they are poor because they are relying on only one wage and because their earnings and the child benefit package are too low to lift them to the income poverty threshold”. In Spain the expert notes that while the risk is greatest for lone parent households, households with three and more children, and for children in households with unemployed persons, inactive or with bad quality jobs, however the majority of children are in nuclear households where at least one of the parents work. Some recent research in Spain shows that 17% of extremely poor children live in working family households where one of the main characteristics is that the main breadwinner has a fixed term contract, and that this type of contract has grown. In the Czech Republic the expert highlights that even the full labour market participation is not a guarantee against income poverty working status, since the same number of children exposed to income poverty live in households entirely not working as in households fully working. Among children exposed to poverty living in fully working households, only 18% are in single-parent families and 25% in double-parent families with 3 and more children. The rest are “small” families of couples with 1-2 children, in most cases with an intermediate level of education (at least one adult member has secondary education). In fully working families exposed to income poverty, the share of social transfers in total disposable income is 33% (against 75% in households rather not working and 93% in not working at all. In Greece the expert notes that the great majority of poor households’ heads are employed: out of a total of 240.000 poor households’ heads, it was found that more than 193.000 were employed. As the Greek expert concludes “employment by its own is not enough to eradicate child poverty and social exclusion if it is not accompanied by proper salaries or financial revenues for employed persons with children.” In the Netherlands the experts stress that more than half of lone parents have a paid job, but this is of insufficient volume or level to make a living, or to gain more than the minimum income benefit.

Part of the explanation of in-work income poverty is clearly that many parents are employed in low paid and low quality jobs. However, another crucial factor is work intensity. As the Austrian expert points out “the majority of households (60%) with three or more children had only partial employment intensity, which helps to explain their high at-risk-of-poverty rate”. Similarly, the Polish expert also notes that the work intensity of households is a critical factor and stresses the major difference that exists between households where all adults work and where there are one or more adult household members economically inactive. It is important to note that the policy implications of in-work income poverty are quite different depending on which cause is the most common in a particular country. As emphasised by many experts, access to child care is a critical factor in enabling employment.

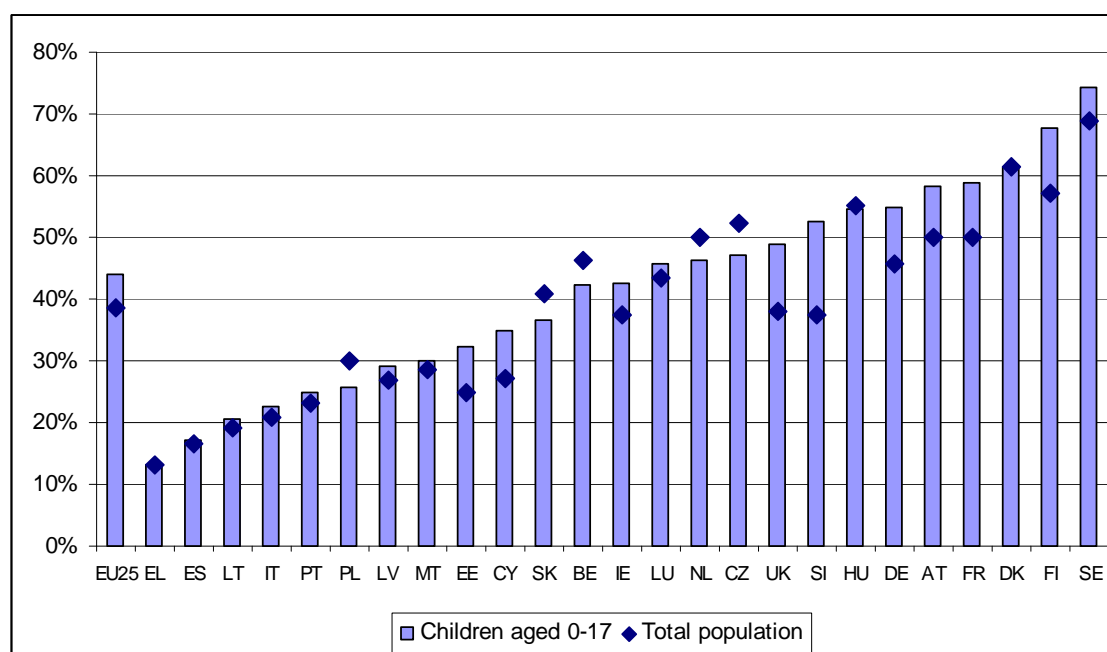
There is, not surprisingly, often an important gender dimension and it is often the employment rate of mothers where this is most evident. As the Austrian expert points out “the poverty risk of households with children is largely determined by whether or not mothers are in paid employment.” She underlines “the importance of employment of both fathers and mothers as a protective shield against poverty and manifest poverty in Austria”.

It should be noted however, that the significance of in-work poverty for child income poverty varies widely across Member States. In some Member States it is very low or confined to particular groups. For instance, the Danish expert points out that it only affects single parents with many children and self employed entrepreneurs, particularly if they are immigrants.

Effectiveness of public transfers

There is also important evidence from several experts that the tax and welfare system has a significant impact on the level of income poverty and that this is more efficient in some countries than others. For instance, the Spanish experts cite recent studies that have shown that public transfers to households with children have had much less effect on reducing the poverty and social exclusion of children than other age groups and concludes that this highlights the weak re-distribution impact of the tax-benefit system and the lack of specific benefits aimed at children (most benefits are income support for adults). The main source of data for experts on the impact of transfers is again EU-SILC (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: At-risk-of-poverty rate before and after social transfers: impact of social transfers (excluding pensions) on poverty risk for children and for the overall population (in % of the poverty risk including all social transfers), 2005



Source: Eurostat; EU-SILC 2005 - income year 2004 (income year 2005 for IE and the UK) – Calculation by the EU Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being

Immigrant and ethnic minority families

Several experts particularly highlight the high risk of poverty and social exclusion faced by immigrant families and some ethnic minorities (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, UK). This appears to be an issue of growing concern in the older Member States. For instance, in Belgium the experts quote recent research which shows very high poverty and social exclusion rates among immigrant households; given that these families have more children than Belgians, it is likely that child poverty and social exclusion among migrant children is higher as well. Also in Belgium, unaccompanied minors and children of asylum seekers are very vulnerable. A particular concern is the detention of children accompanied by their parents in closed centres.

The Austrian expert notes that 31% of all poor children live in households with at least one migrant household member (including households of former migrants who have obtained the Austrian citizenship since). In Germany the experts point out that the at-risk-of-poverty figures for foreign inhabitants and hence also for foreign children and youths are particularly high. Studies show that even children of the third generation are not integrated any better than their parents and grand-parents. The main cause among children and youths of Turkish origin are language problems. The risk of poverty of many foreigners is compounded by (non-)attendance of pre-school child care facilities, the late date of school enrolment etc. In addition to the ethnic components, there are also religious, family-related and other elements closely connected to the various ethnic groups. Similarly, the UK experts refer to recent research which highlights stark differences in poverty rates by ethnic group, with Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Black Africans having the highest risk – over half of the children in these families are growing up in poverty. Educational qualifications, employment sector, labour market experience, discrimination, location, disability, ill-health and family form and structure all contribute to explaining the differences. The Italian expert notes that migrant children face greater difficulties in education and

training, as well as their households experience problems in employment (e.g. precarious, dirty, dangerous and low-skilled jobs), inconvenient housing, social and care services, cultural issues and so on.

In Denmark a special concern highlighted by the expert is that children from immigrant and refugee families seem to have a higher degree of poverty and related problems than the rest of the population. In the Netherlands the experts note that of the children with non-western background 37% live in a low income household. A low income touches these children 4 times more than other children living in the Netherlands. The Spanish expert reports that immigrant families have a high probability of three or more children and lack access to adequate and affordable housing; and Roma children are likely to be in households with all the characteristics for a high risk of poverty. The Portuguese expert highlights the particular problem of educational disadvantage faced both by the children of immigrants from African Portuguese speaking countries and second and third generation immigrant children.

However, in some Member States immigrants do not face extreme poverty and social exclusion. For instance, in the Czech Republic the expert notes that most non-European immigrants (particularly the Vietnamese) work in the Czech Republic on the basis of business licenses, while many immigrants from Eastern Europe have been able to integrate economically through working in the construction and related sectors. Unlike the Roma, there is yet no evidence of large numbers of immigrants living in impoverished or ghetto-like conditions.

Gender differences

The overall evidence from the experts as to who are the main groups at risk of poverty serves to highlight the important role that gender plays in child poverty. The gendered nature of the labour market and its rewards, particularly the lower pay of women is one aspect. The fact that lone parent families are overwhelmingly female is another. Also significant is that in many countries caring responsibilities are not shared equally and that women still carry a greater share of the responsibility. Women also still tend to be perceived as the “second earners” in couple households and often have worse access to fulltime and decently paid employment. This suggests that improving the position of women and increasing gender equality is an important aspect of addressing child poverty.

3.4 Groups at high risk of severe poverty and exclusion

Two groups of children stand out in a significant number of countries as being at very high risk and of experiencing severe poverty and social exclusion: children living in or leaving institutions and Roma children. However, there are also a number of other situations that are highlighted quite often: children drawn into child labour; children who are victims of violence, sexual abuse, trafficking, addiction and are involved in crime; children with a disability; unaccompanied minors; children in homeless families and street children.

Institutions

In several countries (Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania) experts highlight the continuing high number of children being brought up in institutions such as large orphanages and the limited availability of foster families and other forms of care. The Bulgarian report highlights that over-reliance on institutional care has been typical for the first 10 years of transition, leaving many children out of the family environment. Poverty and social exclusion in this case can be defined both in terms of institutions poorly supplied with resources and in terms of lack of basic life skills due to institutionalisation, which further reduces chances for earning a decent income. The expert quotes recent research covering the December 2004 to September 2005 period which indicates that the daily subsistence allowances for children in different institutions are less than enough and result in food shortages and dressing children in inadequate clothes and shoes. Similarly in Poland the expert notes that an excessive number of children are placed in large centres and that educational conditions in such centres are inadequate. Likewise the Lithuanian expert reports that in 2005, more than thirteen thousands children (or 1.8%) were deprived from parental care and were in foster care. The majority of them were living in institutional settings.

However, in many of the countries where institutionalisation has been a major problem (Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania) there does seem to be a decline in the use of institutional care and a move towards care in a family environment and/or from larger to smaller institutions. For instance, in Hungary, it is reported that the number of 0-17 year-olds in institutional facilities declined dynamically in the past 20-30 years (though not recently) and the number placed in foster homes increased significantly. In addition the large institutional dormitories have been reduced to smaller children's homes (maximum 40 children) and a rising number of children being placed in small group-homes with a family atmosphere. In Romania, since the year 2000, the number of children in placement centres is reported to have decreased considerably while the number of children placed with substitute families has risen. This was partially achieved by increasing the number of professional foster carers. Of particular concern are the almost 7,000 young people that have reached 18 years of age and should leave the institutions, but typically lack the skills required for independent living. Also of particular concern is the position of disabled children in institutions. The expert highlights a recent report by UNICEF and the Centre of Judicial Resources in Bucharest which found that many disabled children living in Romania's state shelters are having their rights breached. Poorly prepared personnel are working with the children and many institutions do not comply with minimum compulsory standards for such services. Two-thirds of the institutions visited, provide hosting conditions below minimum standards, in some cases providing "inhuman and degrading" treatment. The Portuguese expert notes a study by the Institute for Social Security conducted in 2005 which identifies poverty and social exclusion as the major factor leading to this institutionalisation need, namely through its impact on the lack of family structuring and on the effects it has on reducing parental skills. Neglect – which according to the study is the main reason leading to institutionalisation – is very often linked to the absence of social and economic conditions of the family to ensure the child's development. In Denmark the expert notes that children who are placed in care have a much lower chance of achieving a good educational level, full time employment and a high income compared to their peers. In general, the risk of crime and violence in adolescence is significantly higher for children placed in care than for others. In Malta it is reported that one of the main groups at risk of poverty are children residing in residential care when leaving care.

The Czech expert reports that there is striking evidence that a large proportion of homeless people (30-40%) have had experience with children's institutions. There are approximately 20,000 children under 18 years old in children's homes. He notes that the Ministry of Education (which runs these facilities) estimated that 1,208 children are to leave these facilities from October 2006-September 2007 as they

reach the age of 18. Children who leave these facilities struggle to become economically independent, and only a fraction of the children can find accommodation in half way houses intended for youth aged 18-25, since such facilities can accommodate less than 500 applicants. There is no systematic government programme for the prevention of homelessness for this at-risk group, as cases are addressed individually and on an ad hoc basis.

Roma children

In several countries (e.g., Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain) Roma, Sinti and Traveller children experience a very high risk of extreme poverty and social exclusion. For example, in Bulgaria the expert quotes a World Bank report which has estimated that the Roma community are 10 times poorer than the Bulgarian ethnic group. Roma children have a mortality rate six times that of other children. Many live in segregated regions and in poor neighbourhoods with bad sanitary conditions. Many are enrolled in segregated schools and they have the highest percentage of school drop out. They experience discrimination in education, employment and access to public and health services. In the Czech Republic the expert notes that many Roma children live in communities experiencing multiple forms of exclusion and long-term unemployment. Also, in the Czech Republic, many Roma struggle to pay their rent and as a result face forced evictions – most often by municipal governments themselves which forces them to stay in shelters, boarding-houses and other alternative housing. Many of those alternative housing facilities are in poor technical condition, lack adequate infrastructure, and are isolated from other populated areas. The Greek expert quotes a recent study on their educational situation, the findings of which show that only a minority of Roma children reach mandatory secondary-level school, while 60% are illiterate. In Ireland the expert notes that children from the Travelling community have significantly poorer outcomes than children in the general population. Likewise in France the Traveller children are reported by the expert as facing severe difficulties.

Child labour

The issue of child labour is highlighted by a number of experts (Italy, Greece, Portugal, Romania). For instance, in Romania the expert highlights a 2003 survey on children's activities, from the Romania's National Statistics Institute, which found that many children were involved in activities identified as “the worst forms of child labour”, including begging, drug dealing, stealing, prostitution, and being victims of child trafficking. In Portugal, the expert notes that while there has been a sharp decrease in child labour it is still a serious issue and has to some extent become invisible with children working at home. It is, in the words of the expert, “seen as a structural phenomenon, directly linked to persistent poverty and not to temporary situations of poverty.” In Italy the expert reports that child labour flourishes in the hidden or black economy and, depending on the different studies, between 147,300 and 400,000 children are involved. Similarly the Greek expert highlights that poor 12-17 year-olds are forced to be engaged in employment to a greater extent than non poor children.

Victims of violence, sexual abuse, crime, trafficking, addiction

Many experts mention children who are victims of violence, sexual abuse, trafficking or addiction and children who are involved in crime. However, hard data on the numbers is very variable and even where it does exist there are only very infrequently correlations with indicators of poverty and social exclusion.

Several experts (Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Portugal) highlight the problem of violence and abuse against children and that children from poor backgrounds are at greater risk. For instance the Latvian expert reports on a study which highlights that there is a correlation between violence mentioned by pupils and the assessment of the material welfare of their families. Similarly the Irish expert reports that a recent qualitative study found that children in poor households face a range of external pressures and negative experiences, such as peer pressure and bullying. The Portuguese expert highlights a connection between child abuse involving child neglect, lack of hygiene, lack of adequate nutrition and accidents caused by lack of surveillance on the one hand and the impact of the persistence of high levels of poverty and social exclusion and lack of well-being among Portuguese children and their families on the other. She quotes a recent study in Portugal which concludes that “physical violence, leading to visible body damaging, serious neglect regarding health, school and nutrition are more frequently found among children coming from underprivileged social environments, whereas emotional neglect is more often among privileged classes.”

Hard evidence on the extent of trafficking and prostitution involving young people is limited. However the issue is highlighted by experts in a number of countries (Estonia, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Spain).

In many countries there is concern about the involvement of children and young people in crime. Although research on the link between children living poverty and social exclusion and children involved in crime is rare there is some evidence reported. For example, the Latvian expert notes that every third crime is committed by minors who neither work nor study and the social exclusion risk of juvenile convicts is augmented also by the fact that their educational level is low. The Dutch experts note that studies show indeed a strong relation between the extent to which children show rule breaching or delinquent behaviour, and the extent of their deprivation at home. This applies to almost all forms of rule breaching behaviour, independent of the method used to determine the deprivation. Some experts (e.g. Germany) also highlight connections between, on the one hand, involvement in crime and alcohol and drug abuse and, on the other hand, a high risk of social exclusion. Also in Germany research shows that circles of organised crime sometimes misuse children and youths from South Eastern Europe systematically for burglaries. In addition, there are also gangs and groups resident in Germany who systematically steal, threaten and partially extort money. Here again, they very often are the victims of adults who take advantage of their difficult situation.

Disabled

The connection between child poverty and exclusion and disability is only mentioned by experts in relation to a minority of countries (Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia) or just in relation to education or living in institutions. In Hungary the expert notes that there is evidence that children with a household member with a disability – either a parent of a child – are in a difficult situation.

Unaccompanied minors

In several countries (Belgium, France, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden) the high level of vulnerability of unaccompanied minors is noted by experts. In Italy the expert reports that it is estimated that there are 15,000 unaccompanied minors without legal documents. The Swedish expert notes that the number of lone refugee children has increased rather dramatically.

Children with parents working abroad

An emerging issue is the number of children with a parent working abroad. In Romania the expert quotes data from the National Authority for the protection of Children's Rights issued in December 2006 which highlight the large number of children in Romania whose parents were working abroad, though she points out that not all of these children are poor or socially excluded. Out of these 2,707 are registered with the special protection system (with foster parents, child placement centres, or with relatives or other persons). In Lithuania, the expert reports that due to economic migration at least twenty thousand children are growing up without one of the parents or even separately from both parents. Some of them are left without guardianship, i.e. without legal representatives. The Bulgarian expert points out that the social workers from the Child Protection Departments are facing the same problem with children whose parents are working abroad. There seems to be neither official nor unofficial data on the issue but the problem is quite visible in schools and in the committees dealing with children with behavioural problems.

Street children

Children on the streets is seen as an issue by experts in several countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Romania) though evidence of the numbers of children who live on the street and those who still live partially at home is scarce. In Romania, the expert highlights that while many children deprived of parental care end up being placed in institutions this is not necessarily the outcome and it can result in abandonment, severe neglect and homelessness (as in the case of street children). In Romania some families simply cannot afford to keep themselves housed and end up living on the streets with their children or in improvised shelters, abandoned buildings, etc. Temporary shelter for a family with children is almost non-existent. Many of these families in extreme poverty and social exclusion use their children to help gain an income, either by begging, stealing or a variety of forms of occasional, black market work.

3.5 Intergenerational inheritance of disadvantage

While information is patchy there is clear evidence in several countries of the intergenerational inheritance of poverty and social exclusion. For instance, in Luxembourg the expert quotes recent research, conducted by the CEPS/INSTEAD Research Institute, which has demonstrated the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion. The analysis shows that frequent financial difficulties during adolescence seem to be linked to difficulties in access to training of a high level and thus to integration into the labour market, once the individual has become an adult. Income poverty is thus increased and health status is more often of a lesser quality. In other words, poverty and social exclusion have a clear tendency to reproduce themselves from generation to generation. Similarly, in Ireland the expert notes recent research that shows that the risks of experiencing sustained

poverty and social exclusion in adulthood are related to childhood socio-economic environment, especially childhood poverty and social exclusion. The pathways through which such effects operate not only include the financial constraints on parental capacity to invest in their children's 'human capital', but also socio-economic status, parenting styles, home environment and role modelling. The effects of social origins work through two rather different mechanisms, the first involving family conditions and parental stimulation in early childhood in particular, the other reflecting the decisions people make at crucial transition points in the education system and labour market. The Lithuanian expert reports that poverty and social exclusion experienced in childhood and adolescence is seen as a risk factor in experiencing poverty and social exclusion in adulthood. The at-risk-of-poverty rate of adults who always experienced poverty in their childhood is almost twice as high as the rate for those who never experienced poverty and social exclusion in their youth. The Maltese expert notes that there is a significant difference in intergenerational unemployment between poor and non poor.

In a number of countries the intergenerational transmission is particularly evident in relation to education (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland) and this appears to be true in countries with both high and low levels of child poverty and social exclusion. For instance, in Bulgaria the expert notes that low level of parents' education seems to be in direct correlation with poor child well-being. First of all, poorly educated parents tend to be poor in monetary terms and in consumption terms, which increases the risk for children of suffering material deprivation. Second, poorly educated parents have less capacity to secure access to basic services necessary for the child well-being – education, healthcare, leisure, infrastructure etc. In Poland the expert reports that single parents and couples with families with three or more dependent children have, on average, a lower educational level than in the total population and lone parenthood is strongly related to fairly substantial risk of educational disadvantage. Similarly in Cyprus the expert notes that children living in households headed by a low educated person are among those highlighted as being at risk with 20% of children in income poverty living in households whose head is illiterate or has only primary school education. In Italy the expert comments that among the most vulnerable households are those where the educational level of the parents is low. Also in Italy there is a transmission of poverty and social exclusion risk within similar social groups. The Estonian expert points to recent research which shows that while one cannot speak of inheriting a clearly developed inequality from parents there are risks of transmitting inequality and the biggest risks arise from the differentiation of the educational system. In France, the expert notes that the educational level of the parents and also their age influences the level of poverty and social exclusion – in terms of age the risk is highest for children of the youngest (under 30) and oldest (over 45) parents. The Hungarian expert reports that in 86% of poor households with children the head of household has not completed secondary school. Educational disadvantages of children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not decline but, in most cases, increase during the years they spend in school. School performance in general is closely correlated with the cultural capital of the parents. The Greek expert concludes that education seems to be a "reproductive" factor. This means that a low level of education of parents is translated into a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion for children including a higher risk of reaching only a low educational level. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, it appears that children of impoverished parents are at a much higher risk of "falling through the cracks" (leaving school, dropping out) of the educational system and at an even much higher risk of never returning to school to complete basic education or to learn a trade or skill. These factors are key determinants of falling into poverty and social exclusion. Even though Denmark, like other Scandinavian countries, has a relatively high degree of social mobility the Danish expert notes that numerous studies show that the intergenerational transmission of disadvantages does remain an issue. Especially with regards to culture and education, inequality seems to be a problem, whereas economic mobility and inequality appears to be a smaller problem today.

However, as the Romanian expert points out, the fact that a child grows up in a poor and socially excluded household does not necessarily imply that he or she will become a poor or socially excluded adult in the future. Family stability, decent housing and access to education are key factors in child welfare and, if sufficient support and opportunity are provided, family poverty and social exclusion will not necessarily be transmitted across generations.

3.6 Multi-dimensional issue

Several experts demonstrate clearly that there is a strong interconnection between income poverty and other dimensions of well-being. In other words a lack of adequate economic resources has multi-dimensional consequences. As the UK experts put it “Child poverty matters because there is a mass of evidence, reviewed recently in an HM Treasury document, that poor children have constrained lives, poorer health, worst diets, colder and more dilapidated housing conditions, higher risks of accidents and injuries, more physical abuse, more bullying and less access to childcare. They also do less well at school, and their outcomes in terms of skills and employment are worse. Recent work using data from the 1980 birth cohort survey shows that disadvantages at 22 months continue to have an impact on employment and earnings right through to later life.” In France the expert notes three problems which affect the entire poor population and have a strong impact on children and young people: housing, health and training. As much as for income poverty, available information on these three areas shows the importance of inequalities. In Finland, the expert reports there is statistical evidence of a correlation between growing up in single-parent families and greater risk to well-being, including a greater risk of dropping out of school, of leaving home early, of poorer health, of low skill and of low pay. Certainly, looking at the Bradshaw and UNICEF studies (see above) demonstrates that more often than not there are strong correlations between income poverty and other aspects of well-being such as poor health, educational disadvantage and poor housing. This is also borne out by research in the Czech Republic showing that material poverty reduces the prospects of a child’s development by limiting access to important resources such as health care, education, social relationships and community networks. However, this is not always the case. The Finnish expert points out that while international research, such as that conducted on behalf of UNICEF, shows that there is evidence to associate growing up in single-parent families with greater risk to well-being including a greater risk of dropping out of school, of leaving home early, of poorer health, of low skill and of low pay this is not the case in Finland. In Finland child poverty in single parent families can be connected to low pay, but not necessarily to such phenomena as poor health or low skills. On the other hand in Sweden the expert notes that there is evidence that children that live in households receiving social assistance are more exposed to drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, mental illness, suicidal attempts and violence. In Hungary the expert reports on research which has shown that one in five households within the lowermost third of the population lived in serious cumulative deprivation. This is nearly 6% of the entire population. While less true of households with one or two children, one in every third household with three children or more experienced cumulative labour market, income, housing, and consumption disadvantages.

Poor health

While several experts note that health outcomes have generally been improving in their countries (e.g., in Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain), they nevertheless stress that there is evidence of the close correlation between low income and poor health outcomes. The Portuguese expert points out that the health of children in poor families is affected by their family's condition even before they are born and that "Apart from these early effects on children's health, there have been other important aspects conditioning the health of poor children during their development, namely the late detection of health problems (e.g. hearing or vision problems), reducing the possibility of recovery and introducing important obstacles to children's school development and future life opportunities". The Italian expert reports that 32.5% of people with a low educational profile live in worse health conditions (e.g. with at least a seriously chronic disease) compared to 8.2% with high school or university degree. In Germany the experts note that the health status of children and youths from the lower social strata is clearly worse than that of children and youths from the higher one. One reason for this is their attitude towards health. It is also because children and youth from the lower social strata face a more dangerous life style. The Latvian expert reports that physicians find increased deterioration of health in poor families with children, especially in poor rural families with children where more frequently lingering illnesses can be observed than in poor urban families with children, because for them accessing medical aid has become more expensive due to transportation costs to the city to see specialists. Similarly the Maltese expert reports that long-term health problems are significantly more frequent among the poor and there is a higher rate of such problems among single parent households below the income poverty line. In the Netherlands the experts note a study in one province which confirms that children's health is threatened by a situation of poverty. The study shows that the children's groups at health risk are to be found among three kinds of households: single-parent families, families where both parents were born abroad, and large families. Within these kinds of households, the health threat due to poverty is three to eight times as big as in other kinds of families. In Spain the expert notes that there is evidence of geographic differences in children's health with figures pointing to strong regional differences in perinatal and neo natal deaths.

Large alcohol and drug consumption is highlighted as a serious risk to the health of poor children by some experts (Estonia, Germany) and the disadvantaged position of disabled children is also particularly highlighted by some experts (Italy, Poland).

The high risk of poor health faced by Roma children (often linked to poor housing and environmental conditions) is stressed by several experts (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain). For instance in Spain the Roma population has a number of socio-economic problems which directly affect the health of children. The expert reports that a publication by the Ministry of Health and the Fundación Secretariado Gitano highlights a range of health issues facing the Roma community. For example, infant mortality is 1.4 times higher than the national average and life expectancy is 4 to 8 years shorter. Among the most excluded Roma the figure rises to 10 years. There is a higher incidence of infectious diseases especially Hepatitis B and C as well as higher incidence of HIV/AIDS (due mainly to intravenous drug use).

A related aspect to poor health is poor diet and some experts highlight that living in poverty and social exclusion affects the children's diets (Portugal, Slovakia). For instance the Portuguese expert points out that the high level of Portuguese families living in poverty is certainly impacting on the children's diet namely in terms of food insecurity (difficult access to food for economic reasons).

Educational disadvantage

Many experts stress the link between educational disadvantage and material deprivation (Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain) and also the negative long-term effect this has on children's prospects. For instance, the Austrian expert notes that there is a strong correlation between at-risk-of-poverty and the educational level achieved. In Portugal the expert quotes evidence of very low educational attainment scores and notes that there is research which stresses the relationship between school failure and several factors: the parents' own school level (or that of those responsible for the children); the support received when doing their homework; attendance of pre-school education and kindergarten; and access/availability of school material. The higher level of education of the parents, the support received at home, attendance to pre-school education and access to school material all positively influenced the levels of school success among the 400 poor children living in poor neighbourhoods in Lisbon. Finally, the high levels of school failure among this sample of poor children were also clearly influenced by the housing conditions in which they and their families were living, namely the level of overcrowding and the precarious housing conditions of their dwellings. There is also a close relationship between early school leaving and early labour entrance among poor children in Portugal. Likewise in Greece the expert reports that being a child living in a poor household results in higher drop out rate than living in an affluent household. This also varies geographically with rural areas and certain regions having higher drop out rates. In Latvia there have been increases in children not attending school, being dismissed from school and graduating from school without a certificate and this creates a risk that in future these youths will not have any opportunity of finding a sufficiently remunerated job, thus they are exposed to the risk of poverty and exclusion from active social life. In Estonia the expert quotes research which shows that many of the children who drop out from the compulsory school attendance come from homes where there is not enough time, power, skills or will to prepare their children for school and support them in their school-work. In Spain the expert highlights research showing that those with the lowest levels of educational attainment have the highest income poverty rates and the highest persistence in income poverty rates. In Luxembourg the expert notes that it is striking that levels of school drop out are higher for pupils with a foreign nationality.

The Hungarian expert reports that young people's educations and inequalities are influenced by the region in which they live and the size of settlement; the position of Roma children is particularly highlighted. In Romania the expert highlights that although families are exempted from paying school taxes during the period of compulsory education, there are additional costs that low-income families can not afford (e.g. clothes, shoes, stationary, alternative books, transport, etc.). In many cases, poorer families cannot afford the additional expenses of their child's education and some children suffer from poor nutrition which has a negative affect on their health, development and learning abilities. Here too the position of Roma children is a key issue. The school enrolment rate for children from Roma communities is much lower than the national average and discrimination is still highly visible. Roma children also have a higher drop out rate, especially girls. Similarly in Bulgaria the expert emphasises that Roma children face severe educational disadvantage. The educational status of Roma in Bulgaria is very low and significantly worse compared to the average for the country. From 48% to 63% of the Roma, depending on different sources, have only basic education (ISCED 1) or no education compared to 16% among ethnic Bulgarians, and the Roma children have the highest percentage of school drop out. The Roma illiteracy rate is fifteen times lower than the rate for the non-Roma population. Many of the Roma children are enrolled in segregated schools. In Spain the proportion of Roma with low levels of education reflects their situation of social exclusion and which also explains the patterns of employment. The Spanish expert reports that according to a 2005 study on labour market outcomes of Roma in Spain 85% of economically active Roma have completed only primary studies or less. The percentage rises to 92% for those who have begun secondary schooling but have left are accounted for.

This contrasts with 80% of the Spanish population who have obtained at least secondary education. In Latvia too the expert stresses that Roma children are at high risk of educational disadvantage.

In addition to Roma other groups of children highlighted by experts as being at particular risk of educational disadvantage include handicapped children as well as children with special needs (Estonia, Latvia, Poland) and immigrant students (Austria, Italy, Spain). A particular concern is how the segregation of some children occurs through sending them to special schools deepens their social exclusion.

The connection between educational disadvantage and poverty and social exclusion is not always clear cut. For instance, in the Netherlands the experts report that available research on the educational opportunities of poor children shows diverging results. Some researchers underline the effect of poverty and social exclusion on school achievements, whereas others do not find this effect. Most researchers however find a relationship between income of the parents and school achievements.

Substandard housing and environment

Many experts (Austria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia) provide evidence of the link between income poverty and poor housing. It is especially notable that there is often a correlation with tenure type, with in general persons living in owner-occupied houses or flats having a lower risk of poverty than persons who rent. For instance, in Luxembourg in 2005 people renting were much more frequently at risk of poverty (25%) compared to owners (9%). In Poland bad housing conditions apply to families with numerous children and lone parents. Also the group of households, which most frequently have overdue payments of rates for housing and for gas and energy in 2005, included households of families with numerous children (21% and 12% of households respectively) and single-parent households (over 19% and almost 12% of households respectively).” In Estonia the poorer strata are over-represented in apartments with few conveniences located mainly close to the town centres, and Estonian housing policy has led to an increasing spatial segregation. In Portugal, while there have been significant improvements in housing stock and a reduction in the number of shanties in recent decades, there are still serious housing problems. Such housing conditions and the local environment impact on the child’s development. As the Portuguese expert notes: “The lack of basic infrastructures and amenities, overcrowding and lack of privacy, dual use of sleeping spaces, lack of own space for sleeping, insecure environment and spatial segregation were some of the problems identified in these studies which strongly contributed to the overall lack of well-being of poor children (e.g. health, education, behaviours)”.

In Italy too, poor housing conditions and poverty and social exclusion are closely connected. Enquires and press (newspapers and the TV channels) underline a very difficult situation for immigrant persons, ethnic minorities but also for the poorest endogenous population. This condition affects children by limiting their opportunities to improve their quality of life. In Germany housing which is affordable for the lower social strata is frequently lacking, above all in the West German conurbations and particularly for families. Very often, children and youths from poor households do not have a domestic place of retreat nor a social and ecological living environment promoting their development. In Hungary on average, families with children live under better housing conditions than the overall population. However, many poor people who have children live in substandard housing, which does not have an inside toilet or bathroom, lacks running water, does not have proper heating facilities, and/or are overcrowded. In Denmark there is evidence that housing standards affect both health standards and educational attainment, and also that ghettos reduce children’s educational and employment attainments. In

France poor children find themselves more often living in substandard housing. In Slovenia, households with children, especially lone parent households often experience housing problems. Young families also experience housing problems, especially because they can not afford to buy their own flat and they often live in small premises even if they have more than 2 children. In Romania a large proportion of the housing stock is in a poor state of repair; as this is combined with a general shortage of housing and an extreme lack of social housing, many children live thus in unacceptable conditions, leading to negative effects on their health and development.

Two issues stand out from the experts' reports in relation to accommodation. One is the cost of renting and the very high proportion of the income of poor families spent on rent and utilities. The second is the lack of public or social housing. This is particularly an issue in many of the new Member States where much of the municipal housing stock was privatised. For instance, a recent report in Latvia by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs concluded that "Families with children are the most vulnerable in the current apartment market situation. Due to their low income level these families are more frequently exposed to the risk to get behind with rent or utility payments, which are, in most part, calculated according to the floor space or the number of people living in the apartment."

The issue is not just one of accommodation but also of socio-physical segregation of residential quarters, as it means that poor children are often living in areas with a poor environment and greater risks. In the Netherlands, for instance, poor housing does not seem a major issue for children. However, as the Dutch experts point out, as far as living conditions are concerned, the focus is on problematic neighbourhoods or areas. According to this definition the proportion of children living in deprived neighbourhoods increased between 2000 and 2004 from 14.6% to 15.9%. In 2005 the percentage was 16.5%. In various countries, experts point out that the issue of being segregated in a poor physical environment is particularly intense for many Roma children (see section 3.4 above).

Several experts point out that living in a poor environment is also dangerous. For instance, in Latvia the highest number of accidents is found among the poorest segments of the society, as the poorest children live in places with high traffic intensity, in houses on the roadside with few safe places for playgrounds. In Estonia the annual number of deaths from accidents and injuries per 100,000 is very high. In Germany disadvantaged districts are frequently located in the busy city centre and at large arterial roads; life is clearly more dangerous there than in green housing districts at the periphery. Strain caused by noise, odour and dust is higher, and the possibilities to play in fresh air are considerably limited.

Family ties

Some experts highlight that the impact of other factors on the well-being of children is affected by the quality of their personal relationships and in particular the strength of family supports and ties. In this regard the Portuguese expert highlights the continuing importance of the family in south European countries and concludes that "Families continue to play an important role as informal but effective emotional and practical (economic, care support) safety net." This is borne out by the particularly high place that Italy, Greece and Portugal hold in the Bradshaw and UNICEF studies when it comes to relationships in spite of rating low on many other important indicators of child poverty and social exclusion (see Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 in Chapter 3). There is evidence also from Denmark on the importance of the family environment and indeed that children growing up in homes where the health of the parent(s) is poor (i.e. chronic or long-term physical problems or serious mental problems) live at high risk of growing up in homes with few resources and therefore less support for the children.

Evidence quoted by the Dutch experts show that poverty and social exclusion do not have the same effect on all families and all parents. A lack of finances is a serious problem in all of these families, but in some families, this is nothing more than a purely financial problem. The parents of these families can deal with the situation reasonably well, and show almost no signs of depression. These families would really be helped out with a little financial support. However, in other families, the problem is far more complex, with poverty and social exclusion being only one aspect of it. These parents are weighed down by an accumulation of setbacks and failure in life, and their poverty and social exclusion can be accompanied by sharp psychological stress and other kinds of problems. For these families, just financial support or a job offer will not be sufficient. The researchers conclude that to help these families effectively, interventions of a more drastic nature are a necessity.

Limited participation

In several countries (Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia) the national experts give evidence that children from poor households, especially single-parent families and larger families, and from jobless households participate less in cultural, sporting and recreational activities. For instance the Latvian expert notes that only some children can participate in educational, adventure sports, recreational and integration camps. In Germany research clearly reveals lower participation of poor children in activities of sports clubs and other clubs as a result of cut backs in recreational facilities; the closure of swimming pools, public libraries, library buses, holiday programmes for children and youth particularly affects children and youth from households with low income. Poor children also have lesser integration into social processes and structures. In the Netherlands too, being poor is not only a question of money, but comes together with all kinds of exclusion from participation. People with a low income spend relatively little on sports, games, holidays, and traffic and transportation. A recent study in Denmark showed that most of the poor children participating in the study feel deprived when compared to their peers – and the study reveals that they actually *do* compare themselves to their peers. Children from poor families generally have fewer options for doing the same things as their friends and classmates, when it comes to costly activities, e.g. going to the movies or on trips. Also, participation in recreational activities like sports is of limited availability to these children. In addition, some children from poor homes do not like to bring friends home due to lack of space and activities at their homes. All in all this is likely to be a social restraint for children living in poverty and social exclusion.

3.7 Data limitations

Countries with serious data gaps

While most experts identify important gaps in data and research in relation to child poverty and social exclusion, these gaps seem particularly severe in several countries. This appears to be especially the case in several of the newer Member States (Latvia, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia). For instance, the Slovak expert comments that “Several data, especially those on children’ subjective experiences and perceptions of their well-being, but also on housing conditions, are entirely missing. There is a poor cooperation between policy-makers and academic scholars on production and interpretation of relevant social data. Several official reports or documents tend to have only formal character and no practical relevance.” The Maltese expert comments that “one thing is certain: unless more systematic research is conducted (and by that I mean more than just counting; we need interpretation), writing this kind of report for Malta, and monitoring process is indeed a very difficult task.” The Slovenian expert notes that

as there is no research or analysis done on poverty and social exclusion of children, it is difficult to identify such groups

Specific information gaps

Specific gaps in data and analysis are noted by most experts. The Dutch experts note that even though children run the highest risk of growing up poor, their financial situation is not a clearly defined subject for research. Either the focus is on households (with or without children) or on children “with problems” (personal, family, neighbourhood context). Moreover, there is little research about the effects of poverty and social exclusion on child well-being in different existential fields. There is reasonable knowledge about the effects on participation, but for other fields such as health, housing etc. the evidence is poor. Similarly, in the Czech Republic the expert comments that although there has been a lot of research on families and children there are significant gaps. For example, there have been little analysis or policy assessments relating to the large percentage of children exposed to income poverty observed in the standard income surveys. The 2004 “National Report on the Family” paid little attention to the relative standard of living of families with children in their variety. The expert notes that while official documents often stress the fact that the Czech Republic is among the EU countries with the lowest at-risk-of-poverty rates, the “other reality”, i.e. the fact that the children’s specific at-risk-of-poverty rate relative to the overall population rate is the highest in the EU, was never mentioned nor analysed. The potential for comparison between the two main sources on families’ living standard - income surveys and family expenditure surveys – for such an analysis was never utilised.

An area in which many experts note the lack of data and analysis is in relation to the duration and persistence of poverty and social exclusion among children. For example the Belgian experts comment: “Nor are there any longitudinal studies that follow children in poverty over a longer period of time.” There is clearly a need for many countries to do more to examine the dynamics of child poverty. However, in some countries, such as Germany, Luxembourg and the UK, there are important examples that are available to be drawn on.

Lack of research on high risk groups

The limitations on data in relation to child poverty and social exclusion in general become even more evident when specific groups of children at high risk are taken into consideration. As the Belgian experts point out: “More detailed studies, including poverty among specific groups of children (disabled children) are not available” Similarly, the Latvian expert notes the lack of information about street children, children who do not attend school (including children up to 18 years), children who beg or live in poverty and social exclusion, children who suffer from emotional, physical or sexual violence within the family, school or society, children who are involved in prostitution, children who are in pre-trial investigation institutions or children belonging to other high-risk groups. She points out that at the present moment, the state and municipal institutions do not keep a register in the form of a database about all those so-called “problematic children”. The Italian expert highlights that there is a lack of in depth analysis on key aspects (e.g. immigrants, unaccompanied migrant children, disabled, trafficking, prostitution, violence against children, child abuse, ethnic minorities and so on), i.e. the groups at particularly high risk. He also highlights the lack of research on the links between poverty and social exclusion and sustainable development. The Maltese expert notes that the range of data necessary to fully utilise the EU social indicators is not at present available. In Spain, ethnic minority children (Roma), disabled children, and immigrant families with children are not covered by recent research on poverty and social exclusion. In France there is a lack of information on the well-being of children and young people; issues like suicide,

alcoholism and school drop out need to be documented in more depth and information to be made more widely available. In Ireland there is a lack of detailed information on poverty and social exclusion levels of immigrant children. In most countries there appears to be a lack of information on youth homelessness.

Too much focus on family/household

As noted by the Belgian experts, “Most of the available indicators take the family as unit of analysis. Hence, it is difficult to tell something about children’s characteristics and how they affect poverty.”

Similarly, the German experts report on a recent study which has clearly shown that treating the poverty of the household/the family as equivalent to the poverty of children/youths is incorrect. Although a strong correlation between poverty of the family and of the children exists, the authors provide evidence that children in non-poor life situations may in fact be deprived, whereas conversely children coming from a poor life situation may actually live in a condition of well-being. This depends on the within-household distribution and on the social and cultural capital of their parents. It should be emphasised that more information is required not only on the distribution of income within households, but more broadly on the distribution of resources in the broadest sense (food, space, holidays etc.).

Limited gender differentiation

In many countries data on child poverty and social exclusion are not sufficiently disaggregated by gender. In Italy, for instance, the expert notes detailed data on gender issues associated with child poverty and social exclusion are not available. Also, the German experts have highlighted the different impact that poverty and social exclusion can have on boys and girls. This type of information does not appear to be available for most countries. As already emphasised above (section 3.1), it should be noted that the reasons for these gender differences in income poverty when poverty is measured at household level are not immediately apparent and would merit further investigation.

Income poverty and multiple deprivations

While there is quite a lot of information on different policy domains like education, health, housing and crime, the link between this information and income poverty is not sufficiently analysed. For instance the Irish expert points out that there is little up-to-date information available in the public domain on the linkages between income poverty and multiple deprivations. While it is known that income poverty is related to educational and health problems or disadvantages, there are no recent studies in the public domain in Ireland outlining these relationships in detail, although naturally statistics are available on income and on health and educational outcomes for children.

Limited data by age

Only a minority of experts are able to provide a detailed breakdown of child poverty and social exclusion by age and generally the reasons for such variations are not sufficiently explored. This is an important area for further research, as it can contribute significantly to developing more focussed policies. In several countries this will require improving the data available on children (as the too small sample size may often partially explain the lack of research in this field).

Little data on participation

Only a few experts can provide information on the participation of children living in poverty and social exclusion in social, recreational and cultural activities. As the Italian expert notes: It is likely that the poorest children have very limited access to culture, sports and other recreational activities but very limited specific data exist. Specific samples of children at-risk-of-poverty need to be investigated to better understand if and to what degree access to culture, sport and recreational facilities exists.

Positive examples

Clearly the availability of extensive and high quality data varies widely across Member States. Some Member States such as Germany, Sweden and the UK have much extensive and varied data and analysis available to them on child poverty and social exclusion. In several countries the situation is improving. For example in Spain a Childhood Observatory (Observatorio de la Infancia) has recently been established and has produced already a very informative web-page on issues affecting children as well as all of the relevant policy documents. Ireland is in the process of launching an important new survey on child poverty and well-being. In Sweden the Swedish Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) has been supplemented by a child survey (child-SLC) which has enabled other types of well-being problems to be assessed and have shown how health problems, psychological distress and psycho-somatic symptoms are more common among economically exposed children, especially among girls. However, in general a very big gap is a lack of data that gives the perspective of children themselves on poverty and social exclusion. In Slovenia a Child Observatory has been established in the department of Social Protection Institute.

Eurostat data on poverty and social exclusion, especially EU-SILC, is a very important source and will become increasingly so. However, in a few Member States experts have drawn attention to other important national data on children which can usefully supplement EU-SILC data. One example is the UK's Households Below Average Income Series. Other illustrations, which use different ways of calculating income poverty, include two major Italian data sources: the yearly Household Budget Survey conducted by the Italian national statistical institute (which uses the monetary value of consumption expenditures) and the biennial national survey on household budgets carried out by the Bank of Italy (which sets the poverty threshold at 50% of the national median equivalent income). In Germany too, there are many different sources to ascertain (child) poverty. The most important are the Income and Consumption Survey (EVS), the Microcensus, the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), the figures of social benefit receivers, of unemployment benefit II, and also special researches with an own data basis for example the AWO/ISS – Children-poverty study. All these German sources differ in regard to the sample, the unit of investigation, the poverty threshold, the use of the old or the "modified" OECD equivalence scale etc.

3.8 Shared challenges

It is clear from the above that, while there are significant differences in the extent, intensity and nature of child poverty and social exclusion, there are also a number of recurring themes and indeed shared challenges. While they do not all apply to every Member State equally, all of them are challenges in a significant number of countries. There is a need to:

- reduce the proportion of jobless households;
- increase the work intensity of households with children and in particular increase the participation in work of women (especially single mothers);
- increase the quality of jobs available to parents of children and ensure that work pays and provides an adequate income for families with children;
- combine efforts to increase labour market participation with the provision of high quality child care and after school care;
- increase gender equality in access to employment, in levels of pay and in the sharing of caring responsibilities;
- ensure adequate income support systems for families with children both in and out of work;
- give particular attention to the position of immigrant children and children belonging to some ethnic minorities (especially Roma children), and reduce discrimination and segregation;
- strengthen efforts to reduce early school leavers and school failure so as to address the direct relation between low educational attainment and poverty and social exclusion;
- increase access to good quality and affordable housing;
- increase access to as well as availability and quality of social services, especially health care and child care services;
- increase opportunities for children to participate fully in society – including in social, cultural and sporting activities;
- provide support to vulnerable families and reduce the institutionalisation of children;
- give specific attention to the needs of children in extreme situations;
- take fully into account regional disparities and urban/rural differences, including residential segregation in local areas;
- improve the quality and depth of data and analysis.

4. Overall Policy Approaches

4.1 Political priority

It is clear from the experts' reports that the issue of child poverty and social exclusion and the development of policies to promote the inclusion of children is a growing political concern across the majority of Member States. For some this is a long-term commitment while for others it is a more recent development. However, in many countries the growing awareness of the issue has still to be translated into the development of coherent, mainstreamed and multi-dimensional strategies.

From the information provided by the experts' reports it is clear that some Member States have had long-term inclusive policies aimed at supporting all children and families which, in effect, have largely prevented child poverty and social exclusion arising and where child poverty levels are low. Nordic countries are typical examples of this group of countries.

Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Slovenia have also had a long established priority to support families with children which has promoted their social inclusion. However, in Germany, although traditionally giving strong support to families, the experts conclude that "The prevention and combating of child poverty can so far not be described as a political priority which would in fact be connected with concrete political goals and measures to take necessary steps to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background". Similarly in Slovenia, although a new Programme for Children and Youth 2006-2016 has recently been adopted the expert considers that up to now "there is no consistent and clear policy for preventing and alleviating child poverty and social exclusion in the country". On the other hand Belgium and Luxembourg, as well as having long-established policies which support families, have, in addition, more recently developed a specific focus on the issue of child poverty and social exclusion. Similarly, in the Netherlands the experts point out that the overall policy framework for preventing and alleviating child poverty and social exclusion in their country has been weak and that there has been no comprehensive policy responsibility for this issue. However, the new government has recognised this and has formulated an integrated policy approach to the problem.

A number of Member States have been concerned about and have given a high priority to specifically tackling child poverty and social exclusion, or at least the poverty and social exclusion of families with children, for a significant period. These tend to be some of the Member States with a high level of child income poverty like Ireland, Italy, Romania and the UK. For instance tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting the social inclusion of children is a major priority for Romania. The Romanian expert reports the considerable political and structural efforts made since 2001 to address the major child-related issues of the 1990s. New policies and legislation have been adopted, new institutional structures are in place and targeted action programmes are being implemented.

There are several Member States such as Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, and Portugal where national experts note that a specific focus on child and family poverty and social exclusion has more recently become a priority and in several significant policy initiatives are becoming evident. For example, in Estonia prevention and alleviation of child poverty and social exclusion are a high priority in policy making and there are clear policy objectives and targets for preventing and reducing child poverty and social exclusion. In Hungary a new National Strategy to Make Things Better for Children has been developed though this has still to be translated into concrete action and become a real strategic priority. In Bulgaria the fight against child poverty and social exclusion has developed fast in the last 7-8 years

and there have been a series of documents and government decisions seeking to protect the rights of children and improve child well-being.

However, there is still a large group of countries, either confronted with high levels of child poverty and social exclusion (Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Spain) or facing poverty risks for children only on or just below the EU average (Czech Republic and Slovakia), where experts consider that the issue has yet to become a sufficiently high political priority which is backed up by a coherent and implemented strategy. In some cases a strategy may be well elaborated in government policy documents (e.g. Slovakia) but this acknowledgement of the issue in policy documents is not accompanied by a strategy for the actual implementation of policies. Often in these countries policies remain rather piecemeal and limited, and in some case more focussed on the family and only indirectly on the child as is the case in Spain. As the Polish expert concludes “Child poverty and well-being problem is not the central focus of social policies”. In Latvia, the expert emphasises that while family policy has come on to the agenda child poverty and social exclusion have not been identified. Thus, although the Concept and the Action Plan for the implementation of the Concept “National Family Policy” for 2004-2013 have been formulated, the notion of “child poverty” as such is not found in the document and subsequently there are no specific tasks and activities for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion. The Greek expert concludes that Greece, to date, has not yet elaborated and implemented a comprehensive long-term strategy or policy or programme aiming at the eradication of adult or child poverty and social exclusion. Child poverty and social exclusion in Greece have not yet been a key priority for social policy and, thus, there are neither any specific strategies nor any specific policies to combat child poverty and social exclusion. In Malta, the expert stresses the absence of a coherently delineated holistic policy for children in any one specific document that clearly outlines what the policy objectives are, what services are available, and what routes are to be followed by those who require services. There is however, a plethora of initiatives and structures that provide different services, even if, at times independently of each other, or with very loose inter-linkages. The lack of a coherent policy described in one document with clearly defined objectives and the services available to meet these objectives is one of the major weaknesses of child-oriented policy in Malta. The lack of a high priority and a strategic approach is surprising in the case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia with the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children only on or just below the EU average (but much higher than the overall at-risk-of-poverty rate in both countries), and even more so in Greece (which is above the EU average) as well as Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Spain (where levels of child income poverty are well above the EU average).

In those Member States where a focus on child poverty and social exclusion is relatively new many experts highlight two factors as being important in encouraging this growing interest. These are, first, the impact of demographic change (falling birth rates and changing family structures) and, secondly, the impact of the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process.

Demographic change

Many Member States are experiencing a significant reduction in birth rates and facing the prospect of a declining and ageing population with rising dependency rates. Thus, not surprisingly, several experts, including those from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia and Slovakia highlight the significance of a declining birth rate and the importance this has in relation to the development of policies for children. This is closely linked to concerns about long-term social and economic sustainability. For instance, in the Czech Republic family support is certainly a priority, but its main rationale according to the national expert is to promote demographic growth and the balance among generations, not to solve child poverty and social exclusion. In Finland objectives are set to ensure the

well-being of families with children because the number of families with children has been steadily declining. At the end of 2004, the number of families with children was 592 800, which was nearly 20 000 fewer than in 2000. At the same time, changes have taken place in family structures. As noted before, the number of cohabiting families is constantly rising and the number of single-parent families grew rapidly in the 1990s. In Germany, under the guiding idea of the government that Germany needs “more children in the families and more families in society”, the federal government has identified three priorities with regard to children, youths and families for the current legislative period (2005 - 2009): supporting young parents during the family formation phase (see the Day Care Development Act and the new Parental Benefit Act), strengthening the bond between the generations (see the new federal model programme “multi-generation facilities”) and paying more attention to children “born on the dark side of life” (meaning children who grow up under difficult social and economic conditions). As the Slovak expert points out “The decrease in birth rate (reduced twice in comparison to 1970s) is noteworthy and often taken by politicians as being more dramatic than the at-risk-of-poverty rate of children.” Similarly in Latvia the expert notes that in view of the demographic situation in the country, governments have identified the improvement of support to families with children as one of the key priorities, in particular emphasizing the significance of consolidating family values in the society.

Many countries are also very conscious of the rapid demographic changes taking place in the structure of families, especially the growth of lone parent families and the declining role of the extended family. They are thus concerned to respond to these changes but also, particularly in many Southern European countries and Poland, to try and reinforce the family. According to the Polish expert, family policy programmes tend to “concentrate more on actions to promote a higher birth rate and improve the situation of Polish families, rather than on multiple aspects of the situation encountered by children.”

EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process

It is clear that the high priority being given in the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process and at recent spring European Council meetings to the issue of child poverty and social inclusion has impacted on policy thinking in a number of Member States. This is evident in the fact that most Member States made this a priority issue in the social inclusion strand of their 2006-2008 *National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion* (i.e. their *National Action Plans on social inclusion or “NAPs/inclusion”*). As the Belgian expert comments “The choice of child poverty as one of the policy priorities in the Belgian NAP/inclusion illustrates the growing influence of Europe and the Open Method of coordination on the Belgian social inclusion agenda.” Prior to this, “child poverty was not explicitly on the political agenda” and “children living in poverty were almost invisible in the Belgian social inclusion discourse”. Similarly the Polish expert comments that “Unfavourable situation of children in Poland should find a response in the strengthening of policies, to a little extent oriented on the problems of children so far. The Open Method of Coordination positively influenced the perception of problems related to poverty and the risk of children exclusion.”

4.2 Clarity of objectives and targets

While the issue of child poverty and social exclusion has become more prominent politically only some Member States have developed clear objectives and targets, though more are beginning to do so. In terms of objectives one can identify four main types that can inform strategies to tackle and prevent

child poverty and social exclusion: overall outcome objectives, objectives in relation to specific policy domains, objectives in relation to specific groups of children and process objectives.²⁰

Overall outcome objectives

The countries that most frequently set clear overall outcome objectives are those with well established or recently established political priorities on child poverty and social exclusion, in particular Belgium, Estonia, Ireland, Italy and the UK.

Objectives for specific policy domains

Some countries set objectives in relation to particular policy domains. These objectives can be *outcome* and/or *input* objectives. *Outcome* objectives include increasing female participation in employment or reducing the proportion of children living in jobless households (Belgium, UK), promoting reconciliation of work and family life (Finland), reducing the number of students leaving school early (Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands), or improving health outcomes. Examples of *input* objectives are increasing the number of crèche and day care places for children under 3 (Germany), increasing the availability of social housing, improving access to social and health services, further developing child benefit supplement to combat material poverty because of children (Germany), improving safe environments where children can grow up and develop (Finland), or giving children and young people from families with fewer opportunities the possibility to engage in leisure activities (such as sport) in a way that contributes to their personal development.

Objectives for specific groups

In some case objectives are set in relation to reducing poverty and social exclusion amongst specific groups such as Roma children, or children in institutions, or children with a disability. For instance, the Netherlands have an objective to reduce the language arrears of 'weighted students' (ethnic and native Dutch students). Lithuania has an objective to reduce the institutionalisation of children deprived of parental care and their social integration.

Process objectives

There is only limited evidence of Member States setting process objectives such as increasing the level of consultation with children or improving the coordination of services at local level. For instance, in the Netherlands there is an objective of improving the cooperation between support agencies intervening in problem families.

However, in several countries there is a lack of any clear objectives. For instance, in Latvia the national expert comments that the national policy does not define specific objectives concerning the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion,

²⁰ H. Frazer, *Lessons learned on child poverty in the European Union: why and how to tackle child poverty*, paper for UNICEF, 2006.

Lack of targets

Only a few countries have established quantified targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion. Of those that do Austria aims to reduce child income poverty from 15 to 10% in ten years. Belgium is one of the countries that has recently (2006) set clear targets for the reduction of poverty amongst children. The goal is to achieve an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 12% by 2010 as opposed to 17% in 2003 (an intermediate target of 15% has been set for 2008). Also, given that poverty amongst children living in jobless households is skyrocketing a specific target relating to reduce the proportion of children living in these households has been set, from 12.9% in 2005 to 7% by 2010.²¹ In Estonia several targets have been set for 2008 such as decrease the number of children below the relative at-risk-of-poverty line by 2% compared to 2005. In the UK the government has set clear national targets to reduce child poverty over a 20-year period and these targets are owned jointly by HM Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions. As well as the income poverty headline targets, other targets have been set for health, employment, education, social care and transport which have resonance with the child poverty and social inclusion agenda. Luxembourg sets concrete targets in specific areas: to reduce the level of young people leaving school early to 10% by 2010 and, what constitutes an important *input* target, to increase the number of child care places from 8000 in 2005 to 30000 in 2013. Greece has also set a target with regard to the reduction of the school drop out rate from 13.3% to below 10% by 2010.

4.3 Extent of mainstreaming and coordination

Mainstreaming the social inclusion of children involves the integration of objectives on the social inclusion of children into all areas and levels of policy-making and promoting this through the participation of public bodies, social partners, NGOs and other relevant actors. In this regard it is interesting to note that at the June 2005 Luxembourg Presidency Conference on *Taking Forward the EU Social Inclusion Process* a strong emphasis was placed on children mainstreaming.²² Many of the national experts' reports provide evidence that the mainstreaming of the social inclusion of children is increasing across the EU. In the countries where long-term inclusive policies favouring all children are the norm such as Finland and Sweden, it is fair to say that there is already effective mainstreaming. Many of the countries that have over the past decade or more recently prioritised child poverty and social exclusion are in the process of mainstreaming the issue and some like Ireland and the UK have developed quite elaborate arrangements. In Cyprus the national expert concludes that combating child poverty and social exclusion "is a mainstreamed objective receiving priority at national level". In Estonia arrangements for mainstreaming the issue of child poverty and well-being in national policy are taking place, particularly in the context of the NAP/inclusion. However, it is still necessary to considerably strengthen the state's coordinating and supporting role to ensure equal availability and quality of services in all regions, on the one hand, and to provide an overview on the national level of the services provided in all municipalities, on the other hand. In Italy there are good practices on mainstreaming issues associated with child poverty and social exclusion in national, regional and local policies. Significant developments have been put in place in Hungary to mainstream and coordinate efforts (see Box 4.1).

²¹ For the at-risk-of-poverty target, children are defined as individuals aged below 16. For the objective relating to jobless household, they are defined as individuals aged below 18 (i.e. standard EU definition).

²² For more information on this Conference, see: http://www.ceps.lu/eu2005_lu/default.cfm.

For a discussion on children mainstreaming see: Marlier, E., Atkinson, A.B., Cantillon, B., Nolan, B. (2007), *The EU and Social Inclusion: Facing the challenges*, The Policy Press, Bristol.

And for a more general discussion on mainstreaming see:

O'Kelly, K. (2007), *The Evaluation of Mainstreaming Social Inclusion in Europe*, Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin.

Box 4.1**Mainstreaming in Hungary**

One part of the government effort to reduce child poverty has involved concerted and priority measures to do so since it took office in 2006, appearing on multiple levels and in many sections of government operations. In the Ministry of Welfare and Labour, there is a special commissioner coordinating efforts in this area. This commissioner is also secretary of the Social Policy Commission that operates alongside the cabinet. Each of the involved ministries has a senior appointed official charged with managing “children’s issues.” There is a “Chances for Children” group operating within the Office of the Prime Minister. Reducing child poverty is a top priority target of the government platform, the development plans and of the related operative programmes. However, cooperation among the ministries and between the central and local governments still leaves much to be desired. Unless significant progress is made in this area, the complex nature and success of the Strategy will be jeopardized.

Source: Hungarian expert’s report

The picture is not always so positive. For example, in Portugal the issue of mainstreaming child poverty and well-being in national policy is still far from being achieved. The same is true for Slovakia where “mainstreaming and coordination of social inclusion programs belong to shortcomings of policy-making.” Likewise in Spain the national expert concludes that the lack of a mainstreamed approach to the issue of child poverty and well-being is as clear as a weakness of national policy making and recommends initiating a mainstreamed approach to the issue as soon as possible in Spain. The Greek expert comments that the policy measures related to the issue of child poverty and social exclusion are lacking close interaction and synergy and, thus, fall short of constituting an integrated and coordinated approach. In the Czech Republic arrangements for mainstreaming the issue of child poverty and social exclusion are complicated, according to the national expert, due to the fact that the issue is divided among the various ministries, particularly the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, which largely see it as a marginal issue within their respective resorts. The expert notes that the issue of child poverty and social exclusion could be better coordinated and focused through the planned restructuring of the MoLSA into the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family.

Improvements in arrangements to ensure a coordinated approach at all levels are evident in several countries (such as Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the UK). For instance, in the UK, since 2006, there has also been an agreement between central and local governments to coordinate their attack on child poverty and social exclusion (the Child Poverty Accord), which involves regular meetings and liaison. In Portugal, while until now the policy approach to child issues has clearly not been sufficiently multi-dimensional, nor coordinated or integrated, a first National Strategy for Childhood and Adolescence is currently being prepared with the involvement of representatives of all ministries and of the Autonomous regions: this may lead to progress in this regard. In Italy there are good practices (especially at regional and local levels) to coordinate policies and services aimed at improving child well-being and fighting child poverty and social exclusion, and there are agreement between the state and regional and local authorities. In Ireland, the policy interest and concern with children has led to significant institutional reforms (see Box 4.2). In Spain, the 2006-2008 National Strategic Childhood and Adolescence Plan (NSCAP) explicitly promotes the effective coordination of the different agents involved in the development and delivery of policies in relation to children, both at national and regional level. Until the approval of the NSCAP in June 2006, arrangements for coordinating the development and delivery of childhood policies between different levels of government were non-existent. This NSCAP is the first policy document to specifically address the need to coordinate the development and delivery of childhood policies at and between different levels of government.

Box 4.2**Institutional Reform in Ireland to address the situation of children**

An Office of Ombudsman for Children was set up in 2003. In December 2005, the government took a decision to set up the Office of the Minister for Children as part of the Department of Health and Children in order to bring greater coherence to policy-making for children. The Minister for Children attends all government Cabinet meetings and is supported by the Office of the Minister for Children especially in regard to:

- implementing the National Children's Strategy;
- implementing the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006–2010;
- developing policy and legislation on child welfare and child protection;
- implementing the *Children Act* (Government of Ireland, 2001).

The Office focuses on harmonising policy issues that affect children in areas such as early childhood care and education, youth justice, child welfare and protection, children and young people's participation, research on children and young people, and cross-cutting initiatives for children.

Source: Irish expert's report

However, in a significant number of countries there is little evidence of a systematic or coordinated approach. For instance in Malta although there are many initiatives going on that address child poverty and social exclusion, there is no one blue-print that coherently brings all these initiatives together in a way so that both the clients (in this case the children and their families) and the practitioners themselves (primarily social workers and all those involved in the delivery of care) can easily identify, in a “holistic way”, where to go for help and how to get/deliver help. In Slovakia the effect of the transfer of competences from central to lower level has not had the positive effects envisaged and has in fact meant that “coordination competences are often formal, individual levels are not coordinated and the obligations of mutual informing do not exist.” In Latvia in 2004 in order to address the problem of the lack of coordination and cooperation among institutions a Ministry for Children and Family Affairs was established to ensure better coordination of the formulation and implementation of national policies in the area of the protection of children's rights. However, in practice there is a lack of a common strategic approach to policy planning. In Germany there are a number of mechanisms and institutions to facilitate or guarantee a coordination of different governmental levels. Nevertheless, the national experts highlight that “so far, coordination between the different *Länder* and between the Federation and the *Länder* in educational questions has succeeded only partially, and this is likely to become even more difficult now. In fields sensitive for the combating of child poverty, the relationship between the *Länder* and their local authorities unfortunately reveals examples of insufficient coordination of the various levels of government as well”. In the Netherlands there is, in the view of the national experts, “a broad and in some way fragmented field of policies touching child poverty and social exclusion”. Rather similarly the Slovenian expert concludes that “there is a lack of comprehensive and integrated policy for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion. The lack of such policy does not mean that the issue is neglected or overlooked. It means that we have to take into account partial and not coordinated separate policies that are created in different governmental bodies.”

Overall the experts' reports reinforce the importance of mainstreaming the social inclusion of children in national and sub-national policy making. Those Member States who do not yet have appropriate arrangements in place would need to give attention to doing so. One thing that could significantly help to strengthen the mainstreaming and coordination of child inclusion policies is if the links between the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process and the EU Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (i.e. the streamlined economic and employment process) in relation to child poverty and social exclusion were greatly enhanced.

4.4 Universal versus targeted approaches

There is clearly a big difference between countries in the extent to which they adopt a more universal and preventative approach or a more targeted approach aimed primarily at alleviating poverty and social exclusion. In effect there is a continuum. At one end there are those countries (Finland, Luxembourg, Sweden) whose approach is essentially universalistic with just some residual targeting. They tend to have a strong awareness of the importance of ensuring the equality of all children and their families and preventing the emergence of significant inequalities. For instance Sweden has a general and comprehensive policy in order to promote child well-being. Targeting when it comes to alleviating poverty and social exclusion is largely avoided – besides social assistance housing allowance is basically the only measure that is means tested. Then there are countries where the approach is predominantly universal but with some (important) targeted elements. In the Czech Republic the expert comments that regarding the balance between a universal and preventative approach aimed at promoting the well-being of all children and a targeted approach aimed at alleviating poverty and social exclusion amongst particular groups of children at high risk, the universal and preventative approach is the solution of first resort. However, he points out that the social assistance system administered through local authorities is well targeted. In Latvia there is predominantly a universal approach to the support of families with children. In the view of the national expert “The national as well as the municipal level lack a targeted approach aimed at alleviating poverty and social exclusion amongst particular groups of children at high risk (street children, orphans, children with disabilities, drop-outs from schools etc.)” but equally there is a lack of focus on prevention. In Ireland policy tends to move between generalist and targeted approaches. Both have prevailed historically but the thrust of policy in recent years has been towards increasing the support for all families with children regardless of their income level. While welcoming this, the national expert questions whether it is a sufficient response to the relatively high level of child poverty and social exclusion that prevails in Ireland. In Spain the balance is in favour of a universal and preventative approach rather than of a targeted approach as is evident from policy documents such as the National Reform Programme and NAP/inclusion, although the approach is clearly insufficient and no research is available to know exactly the impact on children of a number of benefits and/or tax breaks received by the household. Similarly in Hungary the new strategy aims to improve the lot all children but emphasises all efforts and policies targeting children in disadvantaged situations.

In the middle there are Member States such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Poland and the UK who opt for a mix of universal and targeted policies. For instance, in Estonia the expert notes that there is a relatively good balance between a universal and preventative approach aimed at promoting the well-being of all children and a targeted approach aimed at alleviating poverty and social exclusion amongst particular groups of children at high risk. In Denmark in all relevant policy documents, in addition to universal and preventive objectives and measures, there are also those targeted at children at high risk (without parental care, disabled, in jobless households, in households with many children etc.). The expert stresses that the main policies for dealing with underprivileged children and youth have the strength of both having a strong element of universality (free schools, free healthcare etc.) and strong individual services targeted specifically at the relevant problems in particular families. The French approach combines universal policies in relation to payments to families and child care (which has encouraged higher fertility and higher female participation in work) together with a willingness to ensure economic and financial redistribution between the different social groups which clearly benefit the poorest families and also other policies which aim to protect the most vulnerable children (e.g. disabled children and children living in an environment of risks). In Italy, the law on the promotion of childhood and adolescence in 1997 pursues a preventative approach which involves promoting the well-being of all children while guaranteeing their full access to civil and social rights. However, the expert notes that subsequently “A balance between universal and targeted approaches to

fight against child poverty and to improve the well-being of all children was strengthened by integrating these issues into a more coherent system of social policies at a regional and local level". In Poland, the national expert notes that "services are dominated by the universalistic approach" and that there is "a lack of adequate response addressed to satisfy specific needs of children in difficult situation, handicapped or coming from dysfunctional families". However, she also notes that "the instruments for counteracting poverty among families with children concentrate on social transfers of a means-tested character". In any case she is quite critical of the adequacy of transfers and the weakness of services. In Greece, the national expert notes that over recent years there has been an increase in the range of services provided to children and families, irrespective of whether they are poor or non-poor. Yet, he points out that child care services are still not adequately developed. In the UK, the experts point out that though in many ways the system is targeted it has important universal aspects. For instance tax credits go right up the income distribution, and there is a fairly generous universal child benefit, free education and a National Health Service free at the point of demand. The Government describes this as "progressive universalism".

At the other extreme are countries whose approach is predominantly targeted (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia). For instance in Portugal the expert concludes that "there is an imbalance towards an increased weight of those measures that privilege a targeted approach aimed at alleviating poverty and social exclusion compared to a more universal and preventative approach". Amongst the 10 measures in the 2006-2008 NAP/inclusion defined as specific measures addressing children, only two can be described as addressed to promote the well-being of all children. The remaining eight measures are clearly addressing particular groups of children, namely children at risk, institutionalised children or children living in lone parent households. Similarly in the Cyprus NAP/inclusion 3 out of 9 measures are universal while the rest are targeted in particular on illiterate pupils and immigrants but also on other vulnerable groups such as children with special needs and pupils in rural or other disadvantaged areas. In Slovakia the commitment to diminish poverty and social exclusion and prevent its intergenerational transmission is "understood as targeted mainly to Roma communities". Though the children allowance was given back their universal nature by the Act No 600/2003, the residual approach to social policy has prevailed and the targeting has continued to be the social policy catchword and considered to be inherent principle of social policy.

It is clear that the majority of countries with a highly targeted approach tend to be countries with high levels and intensity of child poverty and social exclusion. This highlights a dilemma facing them. The extent and the intensity of the problem make it understandable that a high priority is given to alleviation policies. Nevertheless, it is true that the structural nature of the phenomenon makes it urgent to combat poverty and social exclusion under a more preventative approach. For instance, the Portuguese expert emphasises that "poverty in Portugal - its incidence, its persistence, its consequences and its impact on both children and adults – is clearly linked to structural problems of economic and social nature and can only be adequately tackled if addressed also with structural, continued and coherent policy strategies." Similarly, the UK experts suggest that achieving the ambitious goals on child poverty will require the political will and leadership to address the structural inequalities in British society (i.e. the high level of inequality in terms of wages, wealth and opportunity). Thus, given the structural nature of poverty and social exclusion it would seem important that, even in the countries with the most urgent problems, they are tackled through an approach which combines both measures aimed at preventing poverty and social exclusion and measures aimed at alleviating more extreme situations.

4.5 An increasingly multi-dimensional approach

Many Member States recognise that many different factors affect the poverty and social exclusion of children. Thus there is no one simple solution and there is a need to adopt an approach that cuts across many different policy domains.

For instance, in Denmark there is a comprehensive policy setup for dealing with children at risk and a relatively small number of children that experience severe poverty and social exclusion. In Estonia there are several strategic documents in different policy areas that are related to child poverty and social exclusion, which reveal the multidimensional approach to this problem, starting from ensuring the rights of the child and creating a safe environment for them to grow up in to the prevention and combating child trafficking, prostitution and pornography (most directly related are the Strategy for the Protection of Child Rights 2004-2008 and the NAP/inclusion of the Estonian National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008). In Ireland there is evidence of an integrated approach to the problem of child well-being, ranging across early childhood development, health, education and income support. A recognition of connectedness across domains of life and of services, and the need for an integrated approach in that regard represents significant policy learning in the Irish case given that, historically, the main thrust of the welfare state in Ireland was to provide cash benefits rather than services.

However, in several countries national experts note that the approach tends to remain rather narrow and not truly multidimensional. For instance in the UK the experts conclude that “The government’s poverty pledge was translated into income measures (and material deprivation), and this has very much tended to be what it is judged on, rather than either multidimensional poverty or social exclusion.” In Slovakia, although documents like the NAP/inclusion emphasise the necessity of multi-dimensional and comprehensive policy, in reality the national expert considers that “There is a lack of consistent multidimensional approach to the problems relating to children. Policy concerning children is subjected on the one hand to a sectoral approach and, on the other hand, it is located within the broader context of family policies.” In Cyprus health (with the exception of a measure identified in the NRSSPSI: preventive actions to combat drug risk), housing and transport services and providing social protection through tax benefits are not included in the policy agenda on child poverty and social exclusion. In Spain there is a lack of a multidimensional intervention and coordination between official authorities, social organizations and citizens.

Overall it is clear from the reports that a multi-dimensional approach is needed not only at national level but also at sub-national level, especially local level, to ensure that policies are delivered in an integrated, reinforcing and accessible way and involve a wide range of actors working together. In developing local programmes it is important that there is an emphasis on early intervention so as to support children and families at the earliest opportunity and thus contribute to breaking the recurring cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Social services can play a key role in ensuring and coordinating such provision.

4.6 Growing importance of children’s rights

There is a growing awareness in many countries of the importance of children’s rights. This is largely influenced by the impact of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In a few countries policies for children have historically been strongly informed by a children’s rights perspective. For instance, in Sweden, child policy is guided by the UNCRC, though even here the expert states that

the implementation of the child perspective could be improved, especially by listening better to children's own views. However, a focus on children's rights has not been the norm in most countries.

However, as Member States have signed up to the UNCRC, as structures have been put in place nationally (e.g. growing number of ombudsmen for children) and as NGOs, UNICEF and other bodies have increasingly promoted the UNCRC there seems to be a growing awareness of the need to assure children's rights in the context of reducing child poverty and social exclusion. In many countries initial work on promoting the rights of children and on promoting the social inclusion of children seems to have gone on in parallel but separately from work on poverty and social exclusion. In these countries there is a need for Member States to make sure that there are effective links between their own structures and policies to promote the social inclusion of children and those that they have established to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, increasingly it appears that the UNCRC process is providing evidence of and drawing attention to the issue of poverty and social exclusion amongst children and thus encouraging more countries to develop policies to promote their greater social inclusion. It is also putting increased focus on children themselves and not just on their families. For instance, in Cyprus a strategy for combating child poverty and social exclusion is currently being prepared and this is being coordinated by the Central Committee for the Monitoring of the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the view of the national expert the recognition of children's rights and the balance between the focus on family and on children in their own right in policy documents is at a satisfactory level. As is the case in several other countries also the principles of children's rights are most evident in relation to child protection. In Cyprus the Child Protection Concept provides a system for organising the protection of a child's rights and makes proposals to amend laws regulating the rights and protection of children (e.g. Family Law Act). In Austria child rights are projected to move more centre-stage within policy measures. In Bulgaria an important document was developed recently in the field of child protection – the 2006-2009 National Integrated Plan for Applying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, approved by the Council of Ministers. The Plan's main idea is to bring together all national policies, strategies and programmes targeting children, their rights and child-development conditions. The Plan comprises 34 generic and more specific documents seeking a solution to the problems of child poverty and social exclusion of children.

In France for some years the topic of the rights of the child has appeared in the field of social policies and contributed to putting the emphasis on the child as an individual in a world where the family remains dominant. In response to this emergence of the rights of the child there has been an increased emphasis on the obligations and duties of families in regard to their children. In Hungary adherence to the UNCRC is the primary target of the new government strategy on Making Life Better for Children. In Ireland, judging from the latest documents (the 2006-2008 *National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion* including the NAP/inclusion and *Towards 2016*), elements of a social rights approach as regards children can be said to be being put in place. For example, the NAP/inclusion, although not explicitly using the language of social rights and not going so far as to give children specific guarantees, places children in a societal context and sets out a series of long-term goals in regard to their welfare. This is consistent with the increasing emphasis in Ireland with developments such as the establishment of the National Children's Strategy, the appointment of an Ombudsman for Children and a political commitment to amend the constitution to better reflect the rights of the child (see Box 4.2). However, as the Irish expert concludes, "As elsewhere access to social rights, as distinct from political or civil rights, for children continues to be a challenge. Right across Europe an understanding of social rights as they might pertain to children remains under-developed." The appointment of an Ombudsman for Children since 2003 is highlighted by the Greek expert as being the main policy response for the protection and promotion of children's rights.

In Portugal the experts stress that a shift occurred from a protectionist model of intervention towards the recognition of children's rights following the ratification by Portugal of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children. This is evident in the focus on fighting child poverty and social exclusion in the 2006-2008 NAP/inclusion which is clearly informed by the recognition of children's rights. In Slovakia there is a continuous effort to improve and elaborate the legislative framework to secure children's rights and due attention is given also to the institutional framework of protecting children's rights. However the practical execution of law is made more difficult because of the lack of resources and understaffed social work, and because the sanctions for not warranted entitlements are less elaborated, vague or even missing. In Latvia the main emphasis in legislation is laid on the rights of the child. In Italy there is acknowledgement of child rights with a balanced focus on the role played by the family. In Spain although children's rights are not referenced in the National Reform Programme and NAP/inclusion, at national level the National Strategic Childhood and Adolescence Plan 2006 – 2009 (NSCAP) recognises children's rights based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and likewise, at sub-national level, most regional plans recognize children's rights in the context of the UNCRC and the Spanish Constitution. However, the national expert concludes that "Despite the recognition of child rights in the policy documents, a greater focus on children's rights should be given to improve the effectiveness in the fight against child poverty and social exclusion". Alleviating child poverty and the social exclusion of children in Romania is a national priority. Since 2003, when the National Authority for Child Protection, together with UNICEF, started drafting a law on the protection and promotion of children's rights, a lot of resources have been focused on this issue. The Romanian National Strategy for child protection and the promotion of children's rights provides the framework for mainstreaming child poverty and the social exclusion of children, establishes responsibilities for coordination and implementation, and sets policy objectives. In Slovenia the recently adopted Program for Children and Youth 2006-2016 (PCY) is based on 12 principles connected to the *Convention of the Right of the Children* (age 0-18), the *Slovene Constitution* and the *UN Declaration of Human Rights*. However, as yet there is no implementation plan and it is not yet clear how strongly it will be influenced by a rights based approach.

The implications of a rights based approach to tackling child poverty and social exclusion are not straightforward, particularly as it involves going beyond political and civil rights to considering social rights. As the Irish expert points out, this raises challenging questions for policy makers: "Does a social rights approach imply, for example, an individual right for the child to a minimum income or a place in childcare or is such a guarantee unworkable? Moreover, where is the balance to be drawn between rights to children as individuals and rights to family members (including children)? These are complex questions, which need to be worked out at national and transnational level." In the future the connection between children's rights and social inclusion policies can be assisted by strengthening the links between the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process and the process instigated by the July 2006 European Commission Communication on the Rights of the Child, and also by ensuring a common approach to the issue of indicators and data in both fields.

A growing focus on children's rights is not the case in all countries. For instance, the Belgian expert notes that children's rights and participation are a blind spot and while there are policies which support families with children "they are not explicitly inspired by children's rights. No explicit reference is made to children's rights or the UN Convention on children's rights, which was ratified by Belgium." Furthermore he notes that "it is very uncommon to discuss poverty and social exclusion from a children's perspective". In Germany the national experts note the need to "supplement the existing viewpoint on family policy at least to a stronger degree by elements of a policy of children's rights". In the Czech Republic the expert considers that the "focus on the family and on children in their own right is not very well balanced". He identifies the problem that "the issue of the rights of the child is divided among various ministries, which mostly treat it as a rather marginal issue. There is no state concept on the care for children at risk. Giving preference to the issue of the rights of the child and immediate

reform steps are required.” However, he also points out that one of the most important organs for policy development in the area of child poverty and social exclusion is the *Committee for the Rights of the Child*, a part of the *Government Council for Human Rights*. Lithuania, although it has two strategic documents that are based on multidimensional approach of UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Rights of the Child (the *Concept of State Policy on Child Welfare* and the *State Policy Strategy of Child Welfare*) ignores these documents when it comes to the NAP/inclusion process. The 2006-2008 *National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion* is limited to the child care approach that first of all is associated with “material situation”. This approach ignores other important dimensions of the child well-being (subjective well-being, children’s relationships, civic participation, risk and safety). In Luxembourg, considering the universal approach of family policy, there is more emphasis on the family than on children with their own rights. However, over the last few years efforts have been made to promote children’s rights in legislation in relation to young people. In the UK the experts conclude that the government does not tend to refer frequently to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, or to children’s rights more generally. A Children’s Commissioner has now been appointed for England, in addition to the existing Commissioner in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This appointment is increasing the profile of a children’s rights perspective on policy, although the Commissioner’s powers are relatively limited. The government’s emphasis on responsibilities is thought by some to work against the application of a children’s rights perspective, and is likely to affect children from poor backgrounds more.”

Another problem is that although some countries formally incorporate children’s rights into all relevant documents and develop an institutional framework, in many there is a lack of institutional arrangements to ensure their active implementation. Thus a key challenge for several countries will be to move beyond a formal acknowledgment of and commitment to children’s rights to a focus on their active implementation.

4.7 Synergies with various EU policy areas

It is clear from the reports of the national experts that many of the policy areas they identify which are central to overcoming child poverty and social exclusion at national and sub national levels also cut across important EU level policy areas and concerns in addition to specific EU social protection and social inclusion initiatives. For instance, the high risk of poverty and social exclusion faced by immigrant children and children from an ethnic minority background relates to EU level policies in relation to immigration and non-discrimination. This highlights the importance of children’s needs being mainstreamed in these areas and calls for the development of strong anti-discrimination policies as well as for legal action to actively combat discrimination against children of immigrants and ethnic minorities. The importance of access to employment for parents of children at risk of poverty cuts across the EU growth and jobs agenda especially the concern to increase employment rates and ensure quality employment. It relates also to the EU focus on active inclusion and brings to the fore the need to give particular attention to the position of women, single parents, parents in jobless households and parents who are immigrants or from ethnic minorities. At the same time it serves as a reminder that efforts to promote the social inclusion of parents should never be at the expense of opportunities and care for children and hence there is a need to couple active inclusion policies for parents with early childhood development policies for children. The importance of early childhood education also highlights the potential for synergies with the work of the Commission in the field of education and culture, for instance

in relation to the September 2006 Commission Communication on efficiency and equity in education which devotes specific attention to early childhood programmes²³.

Another dimension of tackling child poverty and social exclusion that also relates to current EU-level policy concerns is sustainable development. A growing concern for some experts is the increasing risk of child poverty and social exclusion due to the negative impact of current development patterns on the availability of and accessibility to natural resources. This is consistent with the emphasis in the EU current approach to sustainable development which stresses the need to promote social inclusion, especially of children, as part of an overall sustainable development strategy.

From these examples, one can conclude that eradicating child poverty and social exclusion and promoting the social inclusion of all children requires strong policies in many different policy areas at European as well as at national, regional and local levels.

²³ European Commission (2006), "Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems", Communication from the Commission, COM(2006) 481 final, Brussels.

5. Specific Policy Areas

5.1 Policy mix

Looking across Member States one can identify three recurring objectives which seem to be at the heart of the development of most policies to prevent and alleviate child poverty and social exclusion. The first is to ensure that children grow up in families with sufficient resources to meet their essential needs. The second is to make sure that children, while growing up, have access to the services and opportunities that will ensure their present and future well-being and enable them to reach their full potential. In addition many Member States are concerned to ensure the protection of children who are in vulnerable situations. The third objective, though less extensively addressed, is to promote the participation of children in social, recreational, sporting and cultural life.

While the details and emphasis varies significantly from country to country and in some countries from region to region, there are four groups of policies which are used to achieve these objectives and which recur across most Member States:

- The first group involves developing employment, tax and social protection policies so as to ensure an adequate income (which we review in section 5.2 below).
- The second group involves improving access to services, especially child care, education, health, and housing (see section 5.3).
- The third group involves developing social services and child protection services to ensure the rights of children in vulnerable situations (see section 5.4).
- The fourth, and less developed group, involves policies to promote the involvement of children in social, recreational, sporting and cultural activities (see section 5.5).

Within these different policy groupings two issues above all receive attention: increasing access to employment of parents and tackling and preventing educational disadvantage.

In developing policies two themes emerge which cut across most policy areas. These are first, the importance of early intervention and ensuring that children have a good start to their lives and secondly, the need to improve delivery of policies at local level.

5.2 An adequate income

At the heart of all Member States' approach to ensuring an adequate income is a concern to increase the opportunities of parents to earn a decent income from work. This then is supported to a greater or lesser extent by tax and social welfare policies that support families with children. The more successful Member States seem to recognise that neither employment nor income support measures on their own are sufficient. The two need to go hand in hand. For instance in Belgium employment combined with generous family policies is considered a necessary condition to keep poverty and social exclusion down for single parents. A third, but less significant dimension are policies which provide subsidised services to families and children on a low income.

5.2.1 Increasing income through employment

Two themes recur in relation to employment. The first is concerned with increasing access to employment for parents, particularly parents of children in jobless and low work intensity households. In this regard the position of women and especially lone parents is given particular attention. The second is about ensuring that income from work is sufficient, in other words about making work pay.

5.2.1.1 Increasing access of parents to employment

Reconciling work and family life

The most evident approaches are policies to increase family friendly policies and reconcile work and family life. However, countries are currently at very different levels in this regard. As the Finnish expert points out, according to the OECD report reconciling work and family is in many respects successful in Finland. Women's employment rate (66%) clearly exceeds the corresponding OECD average (55%). The OECD paid particular attention to the fact that the majority of women work full time. However, in contrast to other countries, mothers of children under three years of age tend to work less often than elsewhere.

Improving child care is seen as a critical element in increasing the participation of parents, especially women, with children (this is dealt with in section 5.3.2 below). In addition a number of other measures are common. For instance policy in the Czech Republic aims to help families to balance working and household life. Measures are to be implemented that provide more discretion for both mothers and fathers to actively decide which roles to take on as breadwinners and as parents. Parental benefit has been nearly doubled. In Bulgaria parental contribution makes it easier for parents to return to work. In Austria there is a universal child care allowance to enable parental leave. Belgium prioritises better and more generous leave conditions. Poland is developing proposals to introduce facilities in reconciliation of work and family life. In Finland the system of family leave has been developed with the aim of supporting families' possibilities for reconciling work and family life. Family leave is still prevalently used by women, even though the proportion of fathers making use of family leave has increased steadily. When developing family leave legislation, the aim has been for both parents to have equal possibilities to take part in caring for their child. A more even distribution of family leave also calls for a change of attitudes. Child care has traditionally been seen as the woman's task. Attitudes towards fathers taking family leave have not always been without their problems in the workplace, either. Sweden too has generous and long parental insurance and has implemented various measures aimed at reconciling work and family life such as: well developed and good access to child care services, maximum fee for all for child care services, attractive part-time work possibilities, etc.

Of course not every Member State is making progress in this regard. For instance, in Lithuania the national expert considers that there is a lack of measures promoting the reconciliation of work and family life such as the possibility of using a flexible working time schedule or part-time options, out-of-family childcare services. In other words there is an insufficient development of a family-friendly infrastructure.

Measures to increase employment

General policies to increase employment are seen as an important element. For instance in Belgium the overall measures to increase employment and to stimulate job-creation, especially jobs for those furthest away from the labour market are expected to contribute to the employment of both jobless households and single parents. However, as the Belgian expert points out, an increase in employment does not automatically result in less jobless households if these new jobs do not reach this group. The UK aims to manage the economy to maximise employment and to improve in-work incomes. Both have been successful in reducing child poverty and social exclusion – e.g. maximise employment with the New Deals, especially the New Deal for Lone Parents, and there is evidence that this has resulted in some lone parents entering employment that otherwise might not have done. The government has also begun to invest heavily in childcare (see below).

In some countries efforts have been made to encourage employers to give a higher priority to parents with children. For instance in Bulgaria in the National Employment Strategy the government set some employment measures for lone jobless parents and adopters of children aged 0-3. Employers who hire persons from this target group receive for up to 12 months a subsidy to supplement the workers wage. Similarly, in Slovakia various measures have been launched in the latest years to improve the position of parents with small children on the labour market. The Employment Act was recently amended and “parents after parental leave” were put on the list of disadvantaged groups. The amendment opens the possibility to cover the travel, educational and childcare expenses of jobseekers that cared for children before they enter educational programs or get a job.

Training and activation measures

In the course of developing measures to assist and encourage unemployed and inactive people into work some countries give particular attention to those raising children. In Hungary there are a number of programmes underway to promote employment for disadvantaged persons and for people raising children. Similarly Cyprus has programs for promotion of training and employability of inactive female labour force. In Austria labour market policies are projected to offer appropriate programmes to reintegrate mothers into the labour market.

5.2.1.2 Make work pay

A significant concern in several countries is that getting a job should be sufficient to lift families with children out of poverty and social exclusion. For instance in the UK the experts highlight that an important dimension of the employment-based strategy has been to improve in-work incomes to ‘make work pay’ so, for example, the minimum wage has been increased faster than average earnings. Since 1999, Child Benefit has increased substantially in real terms for the first/eldest eligible child, and further increases were announced in the 2007 Budget. In addition, Working and Child Tax Credits have been introduced at higher levels than Working Families Tax Credit. In Germany the experts report that the government is currently working on concepts with regard to minimum wages and income from gainful employment subsidised by the state (add-on wages). In several countries there has been a recent emphasis on increasing the minimum wage (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia). The Italian expert notes that the family allowances related to the number of children have been increased eliminating the income brackets that previously determined sharp reduction in benefits due to marginal increase in wages. As a combined effect of the new fiscal rates, taxation relief and family allowances, workers are expected to

receive a net increase in annual wage, for instance around € 790 if they have an income of €21,500 and have two dependent children and a partner dependent.

In reality lifting children out of poverty and social exclusion involves not just enabling one parent to work but ensuring both parents can work. For instance, as the UK experts point out, in the case of a couple with two children if one person is working “The minimum wage plus the in-work benefits are not sufficient to lift them out of poverty - unless they work more than full time, or have a second partner in employment.” This reinforces a point made by several experts, namely that minimum wage levels are often too low. For example the Portuguese experts point to the fact that “the persistence of a model that is based on a low-qualified and low-paid labour force contributes to the very high number of working poor”. The Latvian expert highlights the problem of the low minimum wage and low non taxable minimum.

5.2.2 Social protection and tax

Main trends

Four major objectives are evident from the national experts’ review of the current focus on social protection and tax policies in relation to children. First there is the aim of evening out costs to parents with children compared to adults without children. Secondly, and relatedly, there is the wish to address the decline in fertility rates and to encourage more families to have children. Thirdly, there is the aim to support more parents, and particularly women, to be able to enter employment. Fourthly, there is the objective of ensuring an adequate family income for those families with children who cannot work. Within this there are a couple of recurring themes: how best to balance universal and targeted benefits for children and how to adjust benefit payments to take account of the additional costs of older children or the number of children in a family.

Most Member States combine family benefits to all families and supplement these to some extent with means tested financial support to some families at particular risk such as complementary family allowance for low income families and single parent family support. For example, the Estonian family and child benefit system prefers the principle of universal benefits (e.g. child benefits or child care allowances). In Latvia there is a universal approach to the support of families with children at national level and an income tested approach at the level of municipalities. Italy supports every child while taking into account the composition of household (e.g. number and age of children). Benefits dependent on income have been increased in recent years (e.g. parental benefit and supplementary tax-exempt according to the number of children). In Austria income support to combat income poverty is clearly in favour of preventive measures (insurance and universal transfers). However, these programmes include specific measures for selected family forms (e.g. tax allowance for lone parent families, supplements for families with three or more children) or at least various top-ups or supplements for families with low income in general. Similarly in Belgium benefits are predominantly universal but recently the government decided to allocate single parents a supplement to the general child allowance.

Increased concern to support families with children is reflected by the fact that experts in a number of countries point to increases in the level of support. For instance, UK families with children where no one is in paid work have also benefited from improvements in child benefits and in the child element of Income Support/Child Tax Credit. Ireland has increased levels of child income support. In Germany there is further development of the child benefit supplement to combat material poverty in families with children. In Slovakia the Program Declaration of the Government 2006–2010 pledges a gradual

increase of parental contribution to ensure in a long-term horizon that the contribution would be able to compensate – at least at minimum level – for loss of the breadwinning parent's income. Poland is increasing the minimum amount of periodic allowance to families in unfavourable circumstances by 50%. The Netherlands has prioritised increases in child support. Cyprus has been increasing child benefit. In Hungary the standardization of family supports, introduced in 2006, has significantly improved access to them. Even though the family allowance was increased by 5% in 2007 it is not preventing any further decline in real value as the inflation rate is about 9%.

Several experts note a move to encourage families with children through tax reliefs for families with children (Belgium, Netherlands). Another issue also identified by a number of experts is how to address the problems associated with the (non) payment of maintenance or alimony payments (Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Slovakia).

Some critical comments by experts

Several experts highlight that there remain very wide discrepancies in the overall impact of income transfers and tax policies, a point that has already been highlighted in Figure 3.4 showing the impact of social transfers (excluding pensions) on the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children and for the overall population. For instance in the UK the experts point to evidence that extra expenditure on benefits and tax credits has benefited low-income families most, and that the UK has improved its comparative position on its efforts in favour of families with children. However, although out-of-work incomes have been improved it has not been enough to lift many children out of income poverty. This points to the fact that the effectiveness of the social protection system in lowering poverty rates is critical. They conclude that "It can be seen that the UK starts with a pre-transfer child poverty rate only 19% higher than Sweden; but after transfers, the child poverty rate in the UK is 50% higher than in Sweden. Sweden makes more effort. It spends more in making that effort; and its level of inequality is lower." Similarly the Portuguese experts point out that "the impact of social transfers continues to be clearly inefficient. (...) The main problem with social protection benefits in Portugal is not their coverage or even the diversity of benefits available but rather the low level of income they provide, the awareness of information regarding those rights and benefits and often the delay before the subsidies are in fact received, which in family contexts of very low income produces extremely negative impacts, namely on the satisfaction of the children's basic needs." The Greek expert makes reference to a recent study which compiles an assessment of the impact of financial transfers to households for the decrease of child poverty in Southern European countries. The study reveals that these transfers are very ineffective and concludes that a great number of poor households with children are not eligible for income support (as in Greece and Italy) or receive low benefits (as in Spain and Portugal).

Indeed a point made by several experts is that it is not sufficient to provide support for children but it is also necessary to have an overall system of redistribution which addresses the underlying inequalities. For instance the Portuguese experts point out that the Portuguese NAP/inclusion 2006-2008 includes measures aiming at ensuring a basic integration income (namely through the Social Insertion Income or the monetary component of family allowances which are positive measures), but go on to say that these "need to be clearly complemented with more structural reforms in the redistribution of income in the Portuguese society". Similarly the Belgian experts point to the problem of the low value of minimum income. The Irish expert points out that "the success in countering child poverty is not due to especially high child income support payments, but to the more general income support regime and to the extent to which the welfare state more broadly reconciles equity and efficiency goals and underpins a high employment rate". Referring to an OECD review of the effectiveness of policy approaches to child

poverty, published in 2007, she notes that Ireland is one of the countries in which reforms to reduce levels of family joblessness would have a significant effect on child poverty rates.²⁴

Several experts in any case point out that, whatever the particular arrangements, there is a real problem in the amount that is actually spent. Poland has a low share of social expenditure for children and families. In Romania social protection measures provide a very basic safety net for many families and their children and, in addition, there is a lack of information about entitlements. In Slovakia basic social assistance benefits are significantly lower than the risk of poverty line and have not surpassed the minimum subsistence line, which is the national indicator of income poverty. In Latvia the current benefits for families with children are low. Several also point out that trends towards increasing tax reliefs often do not benefit the poorest families.

5.2.3 Subsidised services

Many experts highlight that Member States are increasing assistance to low income families with children through subsidies. Free school meals are frequently mentioned (Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia). In Germany children and youths from families with a low income enjoy rebates or even exemptions from contributions, for example with regard to fees for the kindergarten and educational aids at school. Estonia and Slovakia provide free teaching aids and stationery. Latvia provides subsidised transport for children under 6, disabled children, orphans etc. Bulgaria has special educational oriented programmes such as the Programme Free Breakfast and a Cup of Hot Milk, the Programme for Textbooks Free of Charge and the Programme for Free Transport. In Hungary a comparatively large circle of children receives free textbooks and has access to free or low-cost meals in crèches, pre-schools, and schools. Sweden provides school tuition free of charge at all levels (including university) and school meals are free for all children during the obligatory school years.

On the other hand in some countries recent policy measures are currently increasing child-related expenses for families. For instance in Germany there is an increase of contributions by the parents for crèches and the kindergarten, cutbacks in the free supply of educational aids at schools and the introduction of tuition fees in several *Länder*.

5.3 Access to services

Improving access to services is considered throughout most experts' reports as being important to ensure the well-being and development of all children. However, a related concern is also to support the participation of parents in employment now and to increase children's future employment prospects.

5.3.1 Education

Education is one of the policy areas that are most frequently highlighted by experts as being a priority for Member States in relation to preventing and alleviating child poverty and social exclusion. Most experts would agree with the Austrian expert that "poverty risks largely depend on the educational level achieved. The higher the education, the higher the employment income – and the lower the poverty risk. Thus, enhancing the educational attainment of children is key in reducing their future poverty risks".

²⁴ Whiteford, P. and Adema, W. (2007), "What works best in reducing child poverty: A benefit or work strategy?", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 51, OECD, Paris.

Similarly the Cyprian expert concludes that “evidently, education is the main pillar through which the government attempts to resolve child poverty problems and qualitatively improve the conditions in which children are raised, since low education is one of the main characteristics of people at high poverty risk.” Likewise in Spain the expert points out that “education is the policy area relevant to child poverty and social exclusion that has been given most importance by the Spanish government. This is reflected in the fact that specific educational objectives and targets are included in the main policy documents including the National Reform Programme, the NAP/inclusion and the National Strategic Childhood and Adolescence Programme (NSCAP). It is important to note that it is the only area for which specific quantitative targets have been set.” In Hungary the expert notes that “the government has an arsenal of tools with which it plans to support disadvantaged children throughout their school careers. In addition, many NGOs are attempting to assist disadvantaged children.” And she goes on, “The goal of the “Chance for Children” flagship programme is to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty by implementing complex programmes.”

Four themes recur frequently: early education, tackling school drop outs and educational disadvantage, integrating minorities (ethnic minorities, migrants and disabled), and reducing costs and financial barriers.

Early education

The importance of early educational opportunities as being key to the future educational success of children and particularly for children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds is widely recognised and reported on by the national experts. In Hungary, the government emphasises that “very early intervention, for which we are all responsible, is necessary to interrupt the flows that reproduce poverty.” Thus, expanding the circle of crèche and alternative childcare services for this age group is one of the urgent priorities of the National Development Plan. One change in administrative policy is that district pre-schools are now mandated to admit all children from disadvantaged backgrounds over the age of 3. Rather similarly the Czech Republic plans that elementary schools in small localities will be supported and alternative programmes implemented with a view to integrating children who are disabled, socially excluded and have special needs. The number of children from socio-culturally disadvantaged backgrounds in preschools and also in preparatory classes needs to be increased. Teacher assistants will help at risk children. Likewise in Slovakia the objective of increasing the number of children educated in kindergarten is presented among the most important targets of the 2006-2008 NAP/inclusion. This is seen as especially important for Roma children as Roma language is not a teaching language. Estonia too is increasing its pre-school provision. In contrast, the national expert in Poland highlights the lack of attention given to preschool education.

It is not only in the newer Member States that attention is being given to this issue. In Portugal the national experts consider that the generalisation in recent years of pre-school education (3 to 6 years old) on a voluntary basis, complementing the family education role has been an improvement which is expected to have a positive impact on all children and particularly on poor and socially excluded children and on their improved performance after entering compulsory education. The expert refers to a few studies on child poverty and social exclusion which highlight the positive correlation that exists between having attended pre-school provision and the school success among disadvantaged children. Priority 2 of the Portuguese NAP/inclusion defines the target to “cover in pre-school education 100% of the 5 year old children and 90% of the 3 and 4 year olds, until 2009”, the achievement of which will certainly represent an important move forward in this area and should promote better opportunities for all children in terms of school achievement. Likewise in Italy pilot initiatives and an increase in quality and quantity of education services are supported for children aged 2-3 in order to better meet family needs (the so-

called “springtime-classrooms”). Belgium too aims to achieve universal participation in kindergarten and the Netherlands increases quality and reach of preschool and early schooling.

Tackling school drop outs and educational disadvantage

Many countries like Belgium, Greece and the Netherlands are putting a significant focus on tackling educational disadvantage and in particular countering school drop outs. In Austria the government believes that schools should enhance efforts to assist underachievers and impaired pupils. In Ireland there is a 5 year action plan for educational inclusion though the national expert notes that some experts point to the need to move from a school-based approach to a whole child based approach to educational disadvantage. More attention also needs to be given to the transition from primary to secondary levels. In Germany there is an extension of all day schools and a special programme, Truancy the Second Chance. In the Netherlands, the national experts emphasise the government’s support for many innovative initiatives to improve both the access and chances at the beginning, during and at the end of the school career. The Dutch experts conclude that “These measures are surely reaching the most vulnerable children.” Spain has the highest level of early school dropouts in the EU and it is well known that early school leavers are more likely to be and remain low skilled workers. Educational policies acknowledge this issue and focus on the future employability and inclusion of young people. In Portugal there is the New Opportunities Initiative aiming, among other objectives, at combating school failure and early drop out, which (as referred to before) represent important obstacles to social inclusion. In Latvia, the resolution of the school drop out problem with all its social and economic consequences has been identified as a priority in national policy planning documents. Guidelines for Life-long Learning for 2007-2013 lists the accessibility of education and life-long learning as one of the priority areas for social exclusion risk groups, in particular emphasising flexibility in providing a second chance of acquiring education in line with needs. Interestingly, a multidimensional approach and the use of team work have gradually emerged from work with children representing various social exclusion risk groups (disabled children, Roma, children with behaviour disorders etc.); this includes work with the family, envisaging the cooperation of social workers, psychologists, pedagogues and medical specialists. The Latvian expert believes that in future this approach should be implemented as routine practice but not as separate initiatives. In Hungary schools may organize talent development programmes and courses to promote the integration of students whose welfare situation and development levels need counterbalancing. Schools may access funds on per capita basis to develop talent and integrate students.

Some experts mention changes to the curriculum to make it more relevant to potential drop outs.

Integrating minorities (ethnic minorities, migrants, disabled)

A key issue identified by a significant group of experts is the need to give specific attention to the education of groups at high risk particularly ethnic minorities (especially Roma children), migrant children and children with a disability.

One aspect stressed by several experts is addressing the educational difficulties facing children with a foreign mother tongue. In the Netherlands a target has been set for the reduction of language arrears of ‘weighted students’ (ethnic minority and native Dutch students) compared with ‘non-weighted students’ by 5% in 2008. Thus intermediate classes are arranged in primary education for pupils with problems with Dutch language. In Austria projects are promoted to increase the integration of children with a foreign mother tongue. German language tutorials are made available at kindergartens for children who

do not have a sufficient command of their future teaching language. Similar programmes are available for elementary schools for children who have an insufficient understanding of the teaching language.

A second recurring theme highlighted by several experts is to end the segregation and to ensure the integration of such children as far as possible in mainstream education. In Romania the main efforts are dedicated to the integration of ethnic minorities (especially Roma) and children with disabilities into the mainstream school education. There is a strong commitment for gradual deinstitutionalisation and integration of the children with special educational needs in “mainstream” schools. Similarly, in the Czech Republic particular attention is given to increasing the number of Roma children in the main educational track and to reducing special education. Likewise the Slovak National Action Plan for Roma inclusion, *Decade of Roma Inclusion*, aims to “cut down the number of Roma children attending special elementary schools and special training facilities”. However, as the Slovak expert points out quoting the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), the Action Plan does not provide any mechanisms by which this goal should be achieved unlike other areas covered by the Action Plan for which the Plan provides either “tools” or “Instruments” to achieve the goals. The new Act No. 597/2003 on financing school facilities that came into force in January 2004 was intended as the tool for promoting the integration of Roma children. A programme of teacher assistants is intended to lessen language, spatial and other barriers to integration of disadvantaged children in mainstream elementary schools. Engaging a teacher assistant for pupils with a health or disability problem does not depend on the specific number of pupils, but on the severity of the pupils’ disability. In Hungary, government measures have been increased to prevent the segregation of Roma children and improve their chances to get access to the education system. The legal groundwork for the integrated education of children with disabilities is in place and the proportion of these children in integrated pre-schools and schools is increasing. There is now an ombudsman for educational rights.

The Italian expert reports that in Italy financial resources are dedicated to the integration of foreigner minors in schools and a specific deputy minister was nominated by the Minister of Education. A plan was established to employ nearly 150,000 teachers and nearly 20,000 technical – administrative staff with open-ended contracts between 2007 and 2009. At the same time, staff turnover and redundancy will be managed with a specific attention to increasing the number of remedial teachers for disabled pupils and students. In Belgium, combating segregation has emerged as a key objective in the Flemish community and thus schools with a relatively high number of children from cross socio-cultural barriers receive a higher operating budget and more staff.

However, for some children policy changes have worsened their situation. In Denmark the national expert points out that tightening of integration legislation resulted in an increasing number of people staying in asylums for an extensive period of time with the result that many children stay in asylums for extensive periods of time without getting proper education or the chance to participate in social or cultural activities. Articles and TV documentaries highlighting this have led the government to target specific policies to mend the problems.

Reducing costs and financial barriers

Several Member States encourage participation of poor children in education through assistance with related costs. In Austria there is means-tested support for educational expenses for all levels of education. Belgium provides a universal back to school grant. In Ireland there is means-tested assistance with school related costs and in the Netherlands a system of school grants.

5.3.2 Child care

Child care emerges from the experts' reports as a key area for addressing child poverty and social exclusion for two reasons. First, it is seen as critical to increasing the participation of parents and especially women in employment. Secondly, good quality child care is recognised as very important in the early development of children. Increasing promotion and funding of day care provision is proving a challenge in some countries, particularly those that have tended to leave caring tasks to families in the past.

In Austria, for instance, the expert highlights that a planned expansion of care facilities for both children and the elderly shall enhance reconciliation of work and family tasks. Childcare facilities should enhance efforts to prepare children for school, while schools should increase efforts to assist underachievers and impaired pupils. As she rightly states, "Necessary preconditions for full-time employment of mothers and fathers are high quality care facilities for both (very young) children and the elderly." Related to this is the need to overcome conservative attitudes to the role of women in family and the tendency for women to be caught in low paid and part-time work trap.

In Belgium there are efforts to improve access to child care with subsidised day care provisions and also tax deductibility of child care costs. In the UK there is a big expansion in child care, nursery care and a special early childhood intervention, Sure Start. In Estonia the preparations for and first concrete steps to increase child care opportunities and make it more flexible have been launched. Ireland has introduced an Early Childcare Subsidy as a cash benefit (other countries often directly provided services) and has invested in the creation of more day care places. In Germany all state levels, following a "day-care summit", have declared their consensus that until 2013 a quota of day-care offers for one third of all children under 3 has to be reached, and that as from the year 2013 they should aim to set up an act guaranteeing a legal claim on day-care for parents with children of this age. Some Länder are reducing costs of child care (but then others are increasing them). In Portugal the continuing effort to develop and consolidate the social equipment network at the level of child care centres aiming at younger aged children (0-3 years), through the implementation of the *Programme to Extend Social Equipment Network* (PARES) is welcomed by the national experts. In Denmark there is a reduction in day care charges and funds have been allocated (DKK 2 billion over 4 years) for improved quality in the day care facilities, particularly as regards supporting disadvantaged children in those facilities. The intention is to create further focus on disadvantaged children and their learning through project development in the local authority areas. The Hungarian Second National Development Plan has set expanding the circle of childcare facilities as a top priority project. A newly adopted law mandates the admission of disadvantaged children to pre-school. As mentioned previously, Sweden provides subsidised child care system and applies a maximum fee for these.

5.3.3 Housing and environment

The key policy approaches involve: ensuring rents are affordable, increasing security of tenure of families with children, improving housing quality and the physical environment, and increasing the supply of social and affordable housing.

The shortage of social housing, particularly in countries where there has been a rapid liberalisation of the labour market, such as Estonia, is recognised as putting poor families with children in a very vulnerable position. In relation to social housing Poland is prioritising the creation of social accommodation, protected flats, night shelters and dwellings for homeless (2006 Act). Estonia is

increasing the opportunity to rent a subsidised municipal rental dwelling. In Italy the 2007 financial law also created a National Fund for Social Inclusion of Immigrants, focused on social and housing difficulties, with an allocation of € 50,000,000 per year in 2007, 2008 and 2009. The fund serves also to favour a better integration of immigrant students through cultural mediators.

Policies to address homelessness of children are highlighted by just a few experts. For instance, Ireland has a Youth Homelessness Strategy. In Latvia the issues is mainly left to NGOs. Hungary has developed transitional homes for children and families to prevent homelessness in the case of eviction.

However, several experts are quite critical of their countries to adequately address housing issues affecting children. For instance, the Romanian expert stresses the lack of access to decent and affordable housing. Housing allowances do not exist and there is a severe shortage of social housing. A growing number of families simply cannot afford to keep themselves housed and family-orientated protection centres are not yet available. Slovakia is seen by the national expert as an example of “deficient housing policy or, more precisely, non-policy”. The expensive housing services (especially heating but also electricity, gas, water supplies), the price of which doubled after the deregulation in 2001-2002, have put many low income households under economic stress. In Bulgaria there seems to be no systematic policy efforts to support young families and families with dependent children in obtaining affordable accommodation of acceptable standards. Roma children, who undoubtedly suffer most from poor housing, are the only exception; but even in the case of the Roma, declared policies and strategic documents adopted by the government are put into reality at a very slow pace. In Spain there is an overall absence of specific policies aimed at ensuring access to housing for families with children. In the context of the rising violence against children among the immigrant population this is a very important aspect for the safety of children.

The Italian expert highlights a number of measures in Italy to ensure a safe and sustainable environment including the creation of a Fund for sustainable mobility and transportation and a Fund for Sustainable Development. More broadly he stresses the importance of environmental issues and their link to child poverty and social exclusion and he places these in the context of sustainable development. He highlights the need to raise awareness of an increasing risk of child poverty and social exclusion due to the negative impact of current development patterns on availability of and accessibility to natural resources. He stresses that strategies against child poverty and social exclusion need to incorporate the promotion of sustainable production and consumption to ensure services necessary for life, a healthy, safe, inclusive and cohesive society by preventing resource depletion and reducing environmental degradation for the benefit of present and future generations.

5.3.4 Health

The main approaches highlighted are improving access to health service, prevention and controlling costs as well as special attention to children from ethnic minorities and with disabilities.

In countries where there is a well developed health service with good coverage, such as Austria, then the issue is often how to cover those who are not covered by health insurance such as recipients of social assistance and migrants and their families. Poland has put a special focus on improving access for children to health services. The UK has provided more funding for health promotion in deprived areas. In Spain the overall state of child health is an issue on the policy agenda, but there is no integrated, multidimensional approach aimed at ensuring children access to health services. For example, despite the good working condition of the Spanish national health system, the national expert

notes that the health ministry does not have an action programme that focuses on the health of children and adolescents. Recently there has been a strong focus on disabled people, including children. An important challenge in Spain is the cultural and language barriers that immigrant children suffer from when they approach the health system. There is a need for an increase in specific actions to inform, facilitate and promote the access of immigrant children and their families to the public health services. In Portugal, the expert emphasises that one of the most important gaps in the provision of health care for children and young people is in the area of psychiatric and psychological care given the inadequacy between the demand for such services and the late response of the health system. In Italy a national institute has been created to fight against illness due to poverty and social exclusion and to promote health of immigrants, homeless people, travellers and those at risk of social exclusion. The tasks are: prevention, care, vocational training and research. In Hungary a child health programme called "Children, Our Common Treasure," is underway. However, there are no financial resources for the programme in the budget for 2007. In Latvia the consistently implemented inoculation programme for children is assessed by the national expert as the success of the health care policy as it ensures a high inoculation level among children for the majority of contagious diseases. However, in view of the high prevalence of alcohol abuse, drug addiction and smoking among children, the national expert considers that more attention in the health care policy should be addressed to promoting a healthy life style in various groups of children and youth. To address this problem, it is necessary to achieve a closer cooperation among ministries and various sectoral agencies to provide prevention, educational, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration activities. Prevention is especially emphasised in children's health care in Slovakia. According to the Act on Health Order children in the first year of life pass through nine preventive medical examinations in paediatric surgery where they are registered.

The problem of additional costs limiting access is one that remains to be addressed in some countries. For instance, in Romania the situation in the healthcare system is such that substantial out-of-pocket payments on behalf of patients are required to receive good quality services. This limits the access to health care for children of poor background especially in rural areas. In Latvia the availability of health care for families with children and in particular with low and average incomes, is obstructed by the widely spread practice of "payments in envelopes" when services are provided. Over the last two years this particular problem has become the focus of attention of the society and the mass media.

Children with disabilities

Some experts highlight support to children with disabilities. For instance early intervention and coordinated support for disabled children is a feature of the Polish pilot programme "Early, Multi-Specialist, Comprehensive, Coordinated and Continuous Help for Children at Risk of Being Handicapped or Handicapped, and their Families" 2005-2007. Spain has strengthened policies to promote the care and protection of disabled children. The implementation of the National Development Strategy is currently under way and the national expert considers that it represents a very important advance regarding social policies in Spain. The NAP/inclusion includes a specific measure aimed at protecting and caring for children under 3 that have serious disabilities. Throughout the objectives of the National Strategic Childhood and Adolescence Plan (NSCAP), there are measures aimed at families with minors that suffer disabilities and at disabled children themselves.

5.4 Care, protection and access to social services

There is significant attention given in several reports to the importance of developing social services so as to ensure high levels of social protection for vulnerable children. There is an emphasis in many countries on ensuring better standards, improving local coordination and increasing early intervention.

In Belgium, for instance, the development of effective local social services which can ensure integrated and coordinated support to young children and their families, the coordinating and controlling role for childcare provision and the early detection of family and financial problems is highlighted. In Germany there is a federal model programme “Social Early Warning Systems” to help children who must grow up under difficult social conditions. In the UK the emphasis on child protection in “Every Child Matters” also led to the creation of children’s services departments (combining education and children’s social services). In Estonia attention is paid to harmonising standards, to developing a service targeted at families and to preventing children going into institutions. Denmark focuses on the early identification of children and young people who need help, and on reinforced comprehensive interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral initiatives against negative intergenerational transmission in order to enable intervention when and where problems occur. There is also a reform of arrangements for children placed in care which aims to support vulnerable children and young people with special needs. The reform prioritises the interests of the child and focuses on early action, involvement of family and network in placements in care, documentation of measures and ensuring children’s rights in cases of placement in care. In Hungary the welfare act and its amendments have brought about the legal foundation and the framework for financing the essential social services but a significant portion of settlements lack the funding and/or the intent to establish the institutions and services specified by law. In Ireland there is an increased investment in services for children at risk with particular emphasis on early interventions and support for families who are experiencing difficulties and on the expansion of Family Resource Centres. In Ireland also the Office of the Minister for Children is developing an initiative to test models of best practice which promote integrated, locally-led, strategic planning for children’s services. This has a strong focus on children who are disadvantaged including children of migrant and Traveller communities. In Italy new resources have been allocated to improve co-ordination, planning and delivery of social services basically managed by regional and local authorities according to the 2000 national reform (Law N° 328/2000), while previous financial laws did not effectively support this system. However, the expert considers that a fundamental instrument (requested by Law N° 328/2000) is still missing, namely the definition of basic levels of social services to ensure fair access to civil rights for all throughout the national territory. Poland also stresses faster identification of existing threats in the family. However, the national expert considers that there is insufficient attention to developing social services particularly to satisfy specific needs of children in difficult situation, handicapped or coming from dysfunctional families and rural areas and small towns and that there is an underdevelopment of various family support services. In Bulgaria there has been the development of alternative social services for children. These efforts put forward by the government are supported to a great extent by many non-governmental organizations. For the purpose of developing such services, the regulatory framework was amended thoroughly and many new legal acts were created to govern the involvement of private licensed service providers. Social Service Complexes for Children and Families were established at the regional level. They were set up in ten big municipalities by the Bulgarian Child Welfare Reform Project conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Similarly in Latvia social work aimed at children and young people who are at risk of social pathological phenomena is recognised as the crucial prevention method. It is coordinated by the social affairs and family branches of district social services’ offices. These units cooperate with local departments of education, health care and culture as well as with police, municipalities, NGOs etc. Further improvements in legislation and its implementation are promised. The government has declared its intention to improve preventive

measures through extending the quantity of social work available to families and to increase municipality participation.

Interestingly the Dutch experts consider that one of the reasons why the level of child well-being in the Netherlands is the highest in OECD countries (according to the Innocenti Report Card 7), is due to municipal initiatives for integrating policies in different fields and for steering, stimulating and supporting the voluntary sector in this.

Deinstitutionalisation

Policies to reduce levels of institutionalisation and to develop care in the community are highlighted by several experts. For instance Romania emphasises the development of family type alternatives to institutions and the development of alternative services for children with disabilities, handicap, HIV/AIDS and specialised services for children whose parents work abroad; and it seeks to promote minimum standards in child protection. In Latvia there is a consistent approach of the state in ensuring a transition from institutional care to the development and realization of alternative services to ensure that a family-oriented environment for children can be positively valued. The decrease in the number of children in centres of social care is indicative of the development of alternative family care services. More and more often Orphans' Courts (Parish Courts) place the children who have lost parental support in foster families. At the same time it has become possible to ensure that children who have lost parental maintenance under the age of 1 are placed in foster families and not in the state financed social care centres. Thus, a child is provided with an opportunity to grow in a family-oriented environment and not in an institution. This is important for the further development of the child.

However, the situation in Bulgaria is viewed much less positively by the national expert. The reforms aimed at deinstitutionalization are progressing with extremely slow pace, hesitantly and without a clear political will and support. As the UNICEF Innocenti Social Monitor (2003) has shown, in regional terms Bulgaria has the highest rate of placement for both categories (children aged 0-17 and infants aged 0-3). The high rate of youth institutionalisation often results from over-reliance on institutional care as a response to young offenders. The majority of political circles and society in general are still not clearly aware of why the institutions should be closed and what is the harm imposed on the development of a child who lives outside the family environment. In addition there are many children accommodated in other establishments which are officially not considered institutions, such as the social and educational vocational establishments, the weekly centres for children with mental disabilities and the correctional and auxiliary boarding schools. Regarding the process of deinstitutionalisation and development of alternative services for children and families, the expert considers that Bulgaria is lagging behind Romania which, as early as in the 90s, started implementing rapid reforms for improving the child welfare by developing paid foster care and other alternative services for children and deinstitutionalized a large number of children. Work within the Roma community, where the poverty and social exclusion are most common and the number of children who have dropped out of the education system is the greatest, is particularly urgent. There are no specific services ensuring involvement of the family and building its capacity to handle poverty and social exclusion. In Portugal the very high number of institutionalised children reveals the lack of a preventive approach within the family contexts and the subsequent need to intervene by withdrawing children in order to ensure their safety.

Specialist interventions

Many specialist interventions addressing particular problems are highlighted throughout the reports. In Estonia there is a plan for combating trafficking (2006-2009). Several countries are trying to reduce juvenile crime through more preventive work and interventionism (e.g. Belgium and Estonia). Plans to address alcohol and drug addiction amongst children are mentioned quite often. Initiatives to help children suffering sexual abuse and violence are also mentioned. For example, in Spain the National Action Plan Against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents confronts the social problem of sexual exploitation of minors. This plan includes five measures that approach the phenomenon from a multidimensional perspective and target specific groups of children, such as adolescent girls forced into prostitution. The Italian expert highlights initiatives to tackle child labour whereas the Portuguese expert notes the total absence of policy measures aimed at fighting this problem in the present NAP/inclusion. In fact, only specific measures referring to the Autonomous Regions have been included and they do not directly target child labour.

5.5 Participation in social, cultural, recreational and sporting life

A key element of the social inclusion and well-being of children is that they are given opportunities to participate in the normal social, recreational, sporting and cultural activities that their peers do. The evidence as to how extensively or effectively policies in these areas achieve or even aim to ensure this is quite limited. However, a number of experts do highlight interesting initiatives in their reports.

In Italy, for instance, a National Fund for Youth Policies (created by Law No 248/2006) was financed with € 3,000,000 in 2006 and € 10,000,000 starting from 2007. Additional resources were given to the fund by the 2007 financial law: €120,000,000 each year in 2007, 2008 and 2009. The fund aims at promoting the rights of young people to have adequate education, cultural backgrounds for a better insertion in social life and employment with benefits inter alia on housing and credits to buy goods and services. The fund resources will be utilised to implement a National Youth Plan to empower young people, to reduce school drop-outs, to support networks and associations among young people, to support creativity and access to the cultural domains, while providing credits to finance study periods, vocational training and enterprise creation.

In the Netherlands the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports takes initiatives to encourage the equal opportunities for children from disadvantaged families to participate in meaningful activities on which to spend their free time, like sports and social activities. The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science occupies itself with participation in a broader sense, by its execution of the action plan 'Reach of Culture'. The Ministry facilitates municipalities and provinces in their efforts to improve the coverage of culture among youngsters with the aid of national funds. It stimulates a more intensive involvement of particular groups, such as adolescents and allochtonous people. Another project is 'Culture and School'.

In the UK the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to increase the participation of 'priority groups' (aged 16 and above) in sport and cultural activities; but other than this, and an aim of helping to reduce child obesity, its PSA targets do not appear to reflect a high priority on child poverty and social exclusion. Its target of increasing significantly the proportion of 5-16 year olds who take part in sporting activities at school – which has been met - could be seen in this way, but is not specifically couched in such terms. However, the government has just announced increased funding specifically for disadvantaged children for sport, drama and music after school as part

of its plan for 'extended schools'. In Ireland the National Children's Strategy and the latest national social partnership agreement – *Towards 2016* - contain a commitment to ensuring that children have access to play, sport and cultural and recreational activities to enrich their childhood. The Czech Republic provides grants for free time activities while in Latvia the availability of sports for children and youths and in particular for children with special needs has been identified in the Basic Guidelines on Sports Policy for the period of 2004-2009. The national expert considers that the fact that the "Guidelines for National Cultural Policy for 2006–2015: A National State" have identified the strengthening of the role of culture and cultural education in reducing social inequality and poverty as one of the areas of activity should be assessed as positive. The need to ensure the availability of culture for children and youths, in particular children with special needs, has been emphasized.

In Bulgaria the large programme called "Modernisation of the Material Facilities at Schools" was launched which will modernise the sporting facilities, renovate the educational and technical equipment and develop an accessible and safe architectural environment for the children with disabilities. For the first time during the transition period Bulgaria is making a large investment in the modernisation of the school facilities and the promotion of cultural and sports activities for the children at school.

In Slovakia the financing of non-formal and informal training through a voucher system is based on the idea that pupils are clients who (together with their parents) have a free right to choose the provider of training. Each pupil interested to attend any kind of training centres which provide leisure-time and hobbies activities receives an educational voucher of a fixed value for each school year. The voucher increases the motivation for children and their parents to participate in organized leisure-time activities. Moreover, it also increases motivation for training centres. According to this Act, school facilities' financial support is dependent on the number of pupils attending school facilities, including leisure and hobbies centres.

5.6 Exchanging good practice

The experts' examination of specific policy areas demonstrates that across Member States there is a considerable body of good practice and many examples of successful policies to promote the social inclusion of children in various fields. These provide a sound basis for an ongoing exchange of learning between Member States, involving all relevant actors. Further structuring of and encouraging such exchanges can greatly enhance the efforts of Member States, particularly where child poverty and social exclusion is a relatively new policy concern. The different strands of the new Community Action Programme, PROGRESS, can continue to play an important role in this regard. The information contained in the national experts' reports can provide a very useful source of information when developing future exchanges of learning and good practice.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

6.1 Monitoring and reporting arrangements

The situation in relation to monitoring and evaluation varies widely across Member States. In a first group of countries (Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, UK) the picture is quite positive. In Germany, for example, the reporting systems are particularly developed (see Box 6.1). However, there are always improvements that can be made. Thus, the Swedish expert comments that “the government does in many respects present a comprehensive list of monitoring tools. However, everything can be better and in this case I think that the monitoring system has a bias towards older children, while there are very few indicators related to small children.”

Box 6.1

Extensive German reporting

The voluntary welfare associations more than any other organisations contribute to a factual debate on the possibilities for policy action and for action by their own member associations. For example, studies on the consequences of poverty and on the personal coping strategies used by nursery school and primary school age children have been undertaken by the Workers Welfare Association (AWO). The German Child Protection League (*Deutscher Kinderschutzbund*) also repeatedly brings the subject of child poverty to public and political attention.

As a central subject in the reports on poverty and wealth, but also in the reports on children and youths and the family reports of the German Federation, poverty and social exclusion of children and youths constitute an important policy focus. The reporting systems are strongly developed at national level (partially also at the *Land* and municipal levels) and stimulate the analysis of the social situation of children and youths at least among the experts. For example:

- The *Tenth Report on Children and Youths* (1998) revealed high poverty risk quotas among children and youths.
- The *First Report on Poverty and Wealth* (2001) covered a Chapter on “Living conditions of families and children”.
- The *Second Report on Poverty and Wealth* (2005) analysed the poverty reduction through the improvements of the children’s benefit (*Kindergeld*) in the years 1998 to 2001.
- The *Seventh Report on Families* (2006) compared family policies in different European countries and their effectiveness also in reducing poverty; “Families in precarious living conditions”, “Relative poverty” and “Perspectives of prevention” are Chapters of the Report.

All these reports use indicators to measure poverty and different dimensions of social exclusion. As independent reports, they make recommendations on policy measures; as governmental reports (on Poverty and Wealth) they also include targets.

Finally, scientific analyses and studies are one of the reasons why there is, relatively, much empirical material available in Germany on the social situation of children and young people, including on their self-assessment and aspirations.

Source: German expert’s report

A second group of countries are those whose monitoring systems in relation to child poverty and social exclusion are less developed but seem to be in the process of making improvements (Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Romania). For instance in Lithuania the monitoring of policies for the prevention and alleviation of child poverty and exclusion is evolving. The main actor in this field is the Controller for the Protection of the Rights of the Child of the Republic of

Lithuania but a range of other actors are also involved such as the National Anti Poverty Network and the Lithuanian Parliament of School Students. In the Netherlands each objective in the NAP/inclusion is monitored and this can indeed be considered to be both a policy monitoring and a (limited) policy evaluation report concerning the situation of children and youth. However, besides this monitor, the national experts consider that there is no official national system in the Netherlands for properly monitoring the implementation and impact of policies for combating poverty and social exclusion among specific groups. Although there is no specific monitoring system of policies aimed at addressing youth poverty and well-being, the general monitoring instruments pay regular attention to specific vulnerable groups such as children. Most of these are not monitoring the policies and their impacts, but rather the situation with regard to poverty, exclusion, well-being of children and youth. In Romania monitoring the implementation and impact of policies is still at an early stage, but institutional structures and reporting obligations are in place. A Child Rights Observatory has been established and should release its first indicator-based report in mid-2007. Similarly, in Cyprus the expected Strategy for Children will be implemented by the Central Committee of the Monitoring of the Implementation of the Rights of the Child. The proposal to set up a Monitoring and Evaluation Committee at the Central Government level for monitoring the Strategy of the Children as well as the progress made towards the objectives set in the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion has been approved by the Council of Ministers. In Hungary, while improvements in monitoring are not yet visible, it is planned that the monitoring committee established under the National Strategy should continuously follow up and evaluate the implementation of tasks to eliminate child poverty and social exclusion and the outcomes of that implementation, as part of the European Union open coordination processes. The government will provide the information that the independent committee needs to conduct its evaluations and shape the indices. In Luxembourg, the Bill on Youth will create *inter alia* a Youth Observatory, whose mission will be to prepare, coordinate and initiate surveys, opinions, analyses, studies, reports on various aspects of the situation of young people in Luxembourg. The Bill also foresees a National Action Plan on Youth.

In a third group of countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain), monitoring or reporting on child poverty and social exclusion remains weak and in some of these there are major gaps in data and analysis. As the Polish expert comments “a monitoring system in the area of child poverty and well-being in Poland, which would include basic problems such as: poverty, health care, education, access to culture and leisure or housing, and the situation of children at risk is also lacking.” Similarly in Greece the expert concludes that “there is a complete lack of a coherent monitoring system to monitor progress of implementation of related measures and to evaluate their impact on child poverty.” Likewise in Portugal the experts state that “there is no monitoring system to monitor and report on the situation of children experiencing poverty in Portugal”. However, the Portuguese Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity is planning to build a national monitoring system for children’s well-being. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of Children will be the overall framework for the definition of the main areas of child well-being and will provide the conceptual framework for the selection of indicators and the collection of relevant data for the monitoring system. In Latvia, the expert highlights that there is no single, comprehensive policy for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion and therefore one obviously cannot speak about a single system for monitoring and evaluation of the policy. However, there is an increased interest and the establishment of the Committee on Coordination of the Social Inclusion Policy is an encouraging development. This Committee includes representatives from almost all ministries, as well as representatives from regional development agencies, municipalities and non-governmental organisations, the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Standing Committee on Social and Labour Affairs of the Parliament, the State Police, the Chief Order Police Board, as well as the social partners. Somewhat more positively, the Maltese expert declares that there is quite an interest to monitor and evaluate services in his country. Monitoring often takes place at the initiatives of Ministers who appreciate the need to assess services. But the expert points out that integrated monitoring, conducted by independent persons operating in independent

structures is direly missing. In the Czech Republic monitoring and reporting on child poverty and social exclusion is covered rather marginally in family policy documents. In Bulgaria while the government is becoming more and more aware of the importance of monitoring and reporting issues, the expert notes that the country is still far from an overall system for monitoring the efficiency of the different programmes and projects in the field of social inclusion and child well-being in particular. When evaluation of programmes does happen it is due more often not to the efforts of the government but to the efforts of NGOs and international organisations like UNICEF, the Save the Children Foundation UK, the Open Society Institute, the ARK Foundation, the Family “Social Polices”, the Social Activities and Practices Institute, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the Centre for Development of Democracy, etc. In Slovakia assessment and evaluation of social policies suffer profoundly from shortages of resources which lead to many negative effects such as cuts in personnel or lack of reliable data. Complex coordination of policy-making and cooperation with different stakeholders is needed to successfully meet the requirements of public policy goals, including tackling child poverty and social exclusion. In Spain, while the Childhood Observatory does important work in the area of monitoring and evaluation the issue of fighting and alleviating child poverty and social exclusion is not considered a top priority of its agenda.

Interestingly, in several countries where monitoring of child poverty and social exclusion policies, is still relatively underdeveloped some impetus has been provided in the context of monitoring the rights of children. For instance, in Bulgaria the national expert highlights the National Integrated Plan for Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 2006 – 2009 as being a positive strategic document related to child poverty and social exclusion which contains concrete indicators covering the key policies related to overcoming child poverty and social exclusion. The expert recommends that “a regular monitoring of the envisaged indicators should be exercised”. In Latvia in 2003, The Human Rights Office carried out research on “The Situation with Regard to the Rights of Children in Latvia and Measures for Improvement of the Situation” in which the situation of children in Latvia was analysed and problems related to children’s rights established. In Spain the Minor’s Defender (Defensor del Menor), whose role is to safeguard and promote children’s rights, is a key body in reporting the situation of children experiencing poverty or social exclusion. Developments in relation to the monitoring of the rights of the child have also had an impact in some countries where monitoring systems are already quite strong. For instance the Finnish expert concludes that the monitoring reports written by the Ombudsman for Children have strengthened Finland’s official monitoring system within the field of family policy and child poverty and social exclusion.

6.1.1 *Developing indicators*

A key challenge facing many countries for which child poverty and social exclusion is a new issue is to select appropriate indicators. For example the Belgian experts point out that the fact that child poverty and social exclusion are a new policy priority makes its monitoring difficult; work on a set of new, feasible and available indicators is still ongoing. They also stress the need for a broader approach to the development of indicators and suggest that several measures need to be monitored jointly, through a combined, multi-dimensional information system. The existing monitoring system does not provide this possibility. The Belgium Task-Force on indicators is therefore discussing the possibilities for a future and more extensive monitoring system.

In some Member States considerable thought has been given to the development of indicators. Two of the most interesting are France and the UK (see Boxes 6.2 and 6.3)

In Slovenia, while monitoring activities still need to be launched, the Child Observatory at the Social Protection Institute has created a set of indicators for monitoring the status of children that can be partly used for monitoring poverty and social exclusion. In the view of the national expert, while the indicators still need to be more precisely defined, “the list gives a very good ground for monitoring and further planning.” It covers demography, health, education, housing and environment, paid labour, leisure and participation, vulnerable groups, Roma children, victims of trafficking and illegal migrant children without guardians, youth delinquency, child and youth victims of violence, and children and youth with special needs. (See national expert’s report for Slovenia for more details).

Box 6.2

Indicateurs français

Au début de l’année 2007, à la demande du Premier ministre, la Direction de la Recherche, des Etudes, de l’Evaluation et de la Statistique (DREES) et l’Observatoire de la pauvreté, en lien avec le CNLE (Conseil national de lutte contre l’exclusion) ont défini un ensemble d’indicateurs qui devraient être suivis et publiés régulièrement. Parmi les principaux indicateurs retenus, plusieurs concernent plus spécifiquement les enfants et les jeunes en situation de pauvreté :

- taux de pauvreté monétaire au seuil de 60% à moins de 18 ans,
- taux de pauvreté monétaire au seuil de 60% par catégorie de ménage et nombre d’enfants,
- taux de pauvreté en conditions de vie par catégorie de ménages,
- proportion d’enfants obèses,
- proportion de logements en surpeuplement par configuration familiale,
- proportion de jeunes sortant de l’école sans qualification,
- proportion d’élèves maîtrisant les compétences de base en français et mathématiques en fin d’école primaire.

Ces indicateurs devraient figurer dans le tableau de bord de la pauvreté publié régulièrement par l’Observatoire national de la pauvreté et de l’exclusion sociale.

Source: French expert’s report

Box 6.3**UK Monitoring Indicators**

In the UK, *Opportunity for All* reports have been produced every autumn since 1999. The reports contain a detailed commentary on policy developments very similar to the NAPs/inclusion, and in addition a set of indicators covering children and young people, people of working age, older people and communities. In the 2006 report there were 24 indicators covering children and young people; these indicators include absolute and relative income poverty, persistent poverty, health, education, housing and the circumstances of special groups.

In addition to the *Opportunity for All* indicators, the Department for Education and Skills has the *Every Child Matters Child Outcomes Framework*, which has a set of targets and indicators based around five domains of child well-being:

- *Economic well-being*: having sufficient income and material comfort to be able to take advantage of opportunities.
- *Being healthy*: enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle.
- *Staying safe*: being protected from harm and neglect and growing up able to look after themselves.
- *Enjoying and achieving*: getting the most out of life and developing broad skills for adulthood.
- *Making a positive contribution*: developing the skills and attitudes to contribute to the society in which they live.

While these reflect government priorities the Outcomes Framework has not yet been used to monitor child well-being on a systematic basis - and indeed some of the indicators cannot be populated with data. There is some evidence that local authorities find the goal of 'economic well-being' hardest to know how to influence.

Source: UK expert's report

6.1.2 Data and analysis limitations

Several countries have good sources of data on child poverty and social exclusion. For example, in Sweden the availability of population based register data is uniquely rich. Much of the monitoring of social conditions is based on these registers. Denmark has a very comprehensive system for gathering information and statistics on every individual. Using the social security number as an identifier, very specific information can be obtained on the development of poverty and social exclusion. In France there is an important production of statistical data and studies on childhood, the family and poverty from numerous public organisations (the national statistical office (INSEE), the statistical services of the social ministries (esp. the DREES, Direction de la Recherche, des Etudes, de l'Evaluation et de la Statistique, social protection bodies such as the body responsible for managing child benefits (CNAF), but also from associations (Union Nationale des Associations Familiales, Fondation de l'Enfance). However, until now these sources have not been used particularly to focus on child poverty and social exclusion but they could without difficulty be used to increase the quality and quantity of available information on the theme. This highlights the issue that in some Member States, and Poland is another example, there are data available but the potential of these data is not being used to the full. In Malta the national expert considers that data collection procedures are well established and the dissemination of data by the National Statistics Office and by the different agencies themselves naturally contribute to reflection and discussion.

In several countries though, a recurring problem is the lack of data and analysis. For example the Austrian expert reports that the national statistical office stated still in 2006 that not much is known concerning the socio-economic situation of children growing up in households that are at-risk-of-poverty.

Consequently, she points out, the plans of the government to improve monitoring by independent experts depend on a prior extension of the information and data basis on children's well-being in and across Austria. There is hardly any information available on the problem of homeless youth or minor migrants, etc. Thus, the national expert recommends establishing a much broader pool of information to allow for multi-stakeholder monitoring. In Slovakia several data, especially those on children's subjective experiences and perceptions of their well-being, but also on housing conditions, are missing completely. The national expert points out that there is poor cooperation between policy-makers and academic scholars on the production and interpretation of relevant social data. Several official reports or documents tend to have only a formal character and no practical relevance.

In some countries (e.g., France, Ireland, Luxembourg) there have been important recent initiatives to strengthen data on child poverty and social exclusion. For instance Ireland is developing a new National Data Strategy to support the planning and delivery of policies and services in relation to early childhood care as well as education and school age childcare, to identify additional key areas where data is required to inform policy and, in the longer term, to evaluate both the impact of investment on the quality of life experienced by children and where specific targeting of resources is most needed. Ireland is also developing a National Longitudinal Study on Children (see Box 6.4). Similarly in France there is a project to follow a cohort of children (c. 20,000) born in 2008 which should produce really new information on the socialisation and inclusion of children. In Luxembourg, as mentioned above, a Youth Observatory is being established. In the Netherlands a National Youth Monitor is currently under construction and should be operational in the course of 2007. It is not clear so far to what extent this monitor will go beyond the collection of relevant data on youth well-being, in order to become an instrument for monitoring and evaluation – ex ante and/or ex post – of policy developments, or even a (participatory) monitoring and evaluation system.

Box 6.4

The Irish National Longitudinal Study on Children

This study will explore the lives of children in Ireland. The study is planned as a study of two specific cohorts; a birth cohort comprising a sample of at least 10,000 children and a nine year cohort comprising a sample of not less than 8,000 children. The study, due to commence this year, will include two data sweeps (at age nine months old and three years) for the birth cohort and two data sweeps for the nine year cohort (at the time of enrolment and at thirteen years). The aim of the study is to examine the factors which contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families. The study is expected to take seven years.

Source: Irish expert's report

A particular problem is often the lack of data in relation to particular groups of children at high risk. As the Polish expert points out "a lot of relevant information, which would allow to diagnose the situation of children in difficult condition, as for instance handicapped children, early school leavers, children exposed to dysfunction in the family, is missing." Similarly, the Italian expert notes that although several sources of evaluation and monitoring do exist there remains a research gap in key aspects of poverty and social exclusion (e.g. children, ethnic minorities, homeless people) which are necessary to support strategic policies and realistic targets. The Luxembourg experts stress the need to develop specific studies analysing the link between school failure, the state of health of children and juvenile delinquency on the one hand and the risk of poverty and social exclusion of children and young people on the other.

Another issue is the need to improve the collection of data at the local level. For instance the Spanish expert highlights the problem in relation to regional variations in data availability. She concludes that

from a data-gathering point of view, there are still severe deficiencies in the information available for the different regions; some regions have excellent statistical data while others have almost none. Of the 17 autonomous communities (CC.AA.) in Spain, only two (Catalonia and Andalusia) have their own childhood observatory. She suggests that the creation of a network of childhood observatories at sub-national level would help. Interestingly in Poland the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is working together with UNDP Poland on the development of tools for monitoring poverty and exclusion at the local level.

In several Member States (e.g., Czech Republic, Italy, Netherlands, UK,) experts highlight that there are, in addition to official sources, a wide range of studies by NGOs, research institutes, observatories and academics on aspects of child poverty and social exclusion which can contribute to improved monitoring. However, in some cases (e.g., Czech Republic) these are not sufficiently used or integrated into a monitoring process. As the national expert points out, in spite of a decent amount of available data on households' well-being and the country's participation in relevant international programmes, no special analytical or assessment effort has been made to address this particular problem. In the Netherlands the most comprehensive national child monitor is a private initiative, called *Kinderen in Tel*. It is sponsored by several funds, steered by interest and lobby organisations, and constructed by an independent research institute on the basis of the US model of "Kids Count". This monitor gives a mapping of child well-being in all Dutch municipalities on a restricted number of indicators, covering domains of well-being derived from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Italian expert, in noting a range of different bodies involved in relevant research, recommends the strengthening of co-ordination and collaboration between institutional bodies in order to improve research, in depth analysis on key aspects of child poverty and social exclusion while experimenting and sharing methods devoted to the impact assessment of policies on children and households.

6.2 Impact assessment

Many experts identify the need for more focus on assessing the impact of measures on child poverty and social exclusion. For instance the Belgian experts note that "the current monitoring system can be improved and a stronger linkage between the measures and their outcomes is recommendable as well. As regards indicators for child poverty, an extension of the current set is desirable". The Polish expert points to the lack of *ex ante* mechanisms for evaluating the impact of regulations on poverty, family/households or children. In Sweden the expert comments that a reliable system for evaluating the impacts of policy measures is a recognized weakness. It is very hard to judge whether a specific policy instrument really has an impact or not. This is obviously not something that is unique for Sweden. Today there is a clear effort to change this situation and the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare is leading the work towards a more evidence-based approach within social work. In the Czech Republic the "Report on the development of children's rights in the Czech Republic in 2003-2005" states that the situation, in spite of some positive steps, is not satisfactory. There is no state concept on the care for children at risk. Various measures are assessed in a rather fragmentary way, instead of complex impact assessment. In Portugal the expert notes that the indicators system designed for the NAP/inclusion has not been conceived to evaluate the impact of the policies and in the area of child poverty and social exclusion such an assessment is vital. However, she sees potential for progress if the new National Strategy for Childhood and Adolescence – which is now being designed – as well as the recently established Commission for the Promotion of Family Policies take into account the need for introducing such mechanisms since the very first stage. In Italy the expert comments that a structured poverty impact assessment does not exist. However, recently (July 2006) the national government affirmed its commitment to apply a coherent family impact assessment of sectoral policies (education, health,

housing, transport and so on). If pursued, this commitment would allow national and regional authorities to better perform and co-ordinate sectoral policies and monitor their progress and impacts on child poverty and social exclusion. In Denmark the expert considers that the extent to which legislations and policies are measured and evaluated systematically is not sufficient. Historically, too little focus has been put on making legislation and policies clearly measurable and outcome oriented, and too little focus in research has been put on documenting “what works for whom”. However, recent developments in both research communities and ministries point to an increased focus on these areas in the coming years. In Cyprus the notion of impact assessment is very new and procedures are still to be developed. In Spain there is an absence of adequate arrangements for assessing and evaluating the impact and adequacy of policies to prevent and alleviate poverty and social exclusion amongst children. The situation is similar in Greece where there is a lack of evaluation procedures and impact assessment mechanisms.

There are however some countries (such as Estonia, Germany, Ireland and the UK) where there is fairly rigorous evaluation of the impact and adequacy of policies. Clearly this is most likely to happen when clear targets are set which can be used as a basis for measuring whether policies have resulted in progress being made. For example in Germany *ex post* evaluations of the efficiency of new federal laws or amendments to laws already in force have almost become standard. For example, the supplement on child benefit has already been evaluated as has the effect in terms of preventing income poverty of the last increase in child benefit. However, on the *Land* level a systematic evaluation, before all with regard to the social services of the Child and Youth Welfare Act which remain vague in nature and extent (Code of Social Law VIII), is not as widespread. Estonia has put in place *ex ante* evaluation mechanisms briefly described in Box 6.5.

Box 6.5

Impact assessment in Estonia

In Estonia, the *ex ante* evaluation mechanisms are in place for evaluating the impact and adequacy of policies concerning the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013, but not for mainstreaming the fight against child poverty and social exclusion. The use of indicators and targets has become widely common in Estonian strategies and policy papers over recent years. The target setting and monitoring are regulated by the government regulation on strategy planning and policy-making process. Similar to all strategies and policy papers, the Strategy for the Protection of Child Rights and the 2006-2008 NAP/inclusion have passed the same targeting and measuring process. Firstly, the results (mainly statistical data and indicators) of the previous periods are analysed and conclusions are made. After that, the new priorities, objectives and targets are set according to the previous periods' results, even though the political pressure has also a big influence.

Source: Estonian expert's report

Interestingly in Finland, despite a regular monitoring system within the field of family policy and child poverty, the Finnish National Committee on the Rights of the Child is of the opinion that Finland needs a comprehensive and jointly agreed national child and family policy strategy for developing and monitoring the well-being of children and families with children. This has led to the Committee drawing up a model for the assessment of child-related consequences of society's actions and decisions which put considerable emphasis on impact assessment (see Box 6.6).

Box 6.6**Impact assessment model – Finnish National Committee on the Rights of the Child**

The direct impact on children is the main focus in the analysis. Here, the effects of the particular decision on children's health, living conditions and movement, participation and equality are all assessed. The details of the assessment vary, depending on the content of the plan or decision concerned. The following is a list of impact component factors from a general viewpoint. Assessment examines the amount, trend and quality of change.

Impact on health

- risks of accident
- air impurities (dust, smell, gases)
- noise
- quality of household water
- composition of children's food and their eating habits
- exposure to radiation

Impact on living conditions and movement

- unimpeded movement in the surroundings of the home, and on the way to school and to recreations
- amenability and health of housing and housing area
- effects of traffic arrangements on the functional structure of the housing area
- children's playtime and recreational areas
- sense of community in the housing area
- nearby places for physical recreation

Impact on involvement and participation

- opportunities for children to participate in decision-making
- risks of social exclusion of the child

Impact on equality

- regional equality of children
- social equality of children
- equality between girls and boys

Decisions made by society always have a wide variety of *indirect effects* that are often extremely difficult to assess because in any society "everything affects everything else". The indirect effects that are important and obvious in terms of children are factors related to the family and children's services.

Impact on the family's finances and on services

- families' employment situation
- families' living costs
- public and private services, such as health services, housing and recreational services, education, transport and movement, commerce
- supply, quality and availability of services: especially children's clinics, day-care and school services

Impact on the community and the area

- values, norms and behaviour
- quality of life and/or lifestyle
- security
- social relations and status of population groups
- relations between different interest groups
- local people's sense of solidarity and local identity
- stimulus and opportunities for recreation
- aesthetic quality of the area

Source: Finnish expert's report

6.3 Involvement of stakeholders

The picture in relation to involving actors in the monitoring process is quite varied. Several countries have made considerable efforts to consult with stakeholders (e.g., Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, UK,). For instance the Estonian expert concludes that “compared to other policy areas the child well-being is the area where expectations towards stakeholders are rather clearly expressed and the communication has been proactive.” In some countries, the situation is evolving. For instance in Lithuania, in addition to the Controller for the Protection of the Rights of the Child of the Republic, the National Anti Poverty Network, the Lithuanian Parliament of School Students, and LaBAS project (National Awareness Raising Actions on Social Inclusion and Social Protection) are involved. Also to advance the system of children’s rights monitoring and protection in Lithuania, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC) has started a project regarding the establishment of children’s rights protection and monitoring councils on the local level, together with the Netherlands Child Protection Board (NCPB), the Lithuanian Community Change Centre (CCC), the Association of Seniunai and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. In Luxembourg the authorities work closely in collaboration with actors at local level through agreements with associations and the financing of personnel in certain institutes and some studies. There are exchanges of information also with the social actors.

In some countries the involvement with stakeholders remains very weak. For instance in Poland there are no institutional arrangements for cooperation of different partners in the monitoring of the NAP/Inclusion. The tool developed to monitor NAP/Inclusion 2006-2008 has an administrative character and is not even accessible for the public from the web.

The lack of involvement of children themselves in monitoring processes is almost universal. The Spanish expert’s comment that “Overall, the policy framework does not give enough importance to children and young people as key stakeholders in the fight against social exclusion and poverty” is fairly representative.

6.4 Conclusions in relation to monitoring and evaluation

Overall it is clear from the national experts’ reports that a few countries have developed both effective arrangements for monitoring and evaluating policies and systematic assessments of the impact of policies; and some are in the process of doing so. However, in the majority of countries monitoring and evaluation still remains insufficient. This is in part because of weaknesses in data collection and analysis but more especially reflects a lack of clear objectives and clear quantified targets which are essential for developing effective monitoring and evaluation systems and a lack of political commitment and urgency.

To enhance their efforts in this area many Member States need to make progress on the development of non-monetary indicators which are to be combined with existing income poverty indicators to give a deeper understanding of child well-being. This will be helped by the planned development of guidelines at EU level for monitoring and evaluating which could inform the efforts of Member States at national and sub-national levels. Equally, developing a stronger framework for EU level monitoring and evaluation of progress on child poverty and social exclusion would do much to encourage progress at the national and sub-national levels. It is already clear from the experts’ reports that the increased attention being given to child poverty at EU level and in particular the increased reporting on it has contributed to a greater political momentum on child poverty within many Member States. Thus the

whole area of monitoring and evaluation of child poverty and social exclusion would be further strengthened if Member States agreed to a regular reporting schedule aimed at monitoring progress in eradicating child poverty and social exclusion in the EU across a broad range of indicators that would cover all relevant policy domains. This could inform the identification of particular challenges facing each specific Member State in relation to the social inclusion of children.

An important factor undermining many Member States' efforts to develop effective monitoring and reporting arrangements is the lack of clear objectives and quantified targets. Indeed it is apparent that many Member States could benefit from more guidance to help them to establish clearer objectives backed up by appropriate targets. In this regard one idea worth exploring further is to encourage Member States to set the goal of moving towards the performance of the three best Member State in each relevant policy domain. It is clear from the experts' reports that this would involve all Member States having to make progress in at least one domain and many in several.

In addition most Member States clearly need to do more to ensure that they have established effective arrangements for monitoring and evaluating their policies to promote the social inclusion of children. An important basis for doing this will be ensuring that there is adequate data and analysis available. Thus Member States who have not already done so should invest in strategies to fill any gaps in data collection and analysis. There are three areas in particular where many Member States need to make progress. First, more breakdowns of data are needed to differentiate between older and younger children. Secondly, the situation of children in extreme situations, such as those living in institutions or Roma children, requires better coverage. Thirdly, investment is needed to address the lack of data on the duration and persistence of child poverty and social exclusion (longitudinal/ panel data).

It is clear that in most Member States the involvement of relevant actors in monitoring and evaluation remains infrequent and there is an almost complete absence of involvement of children themselves in the process. It is thus important that all Member States should ensure that they have in place effective arrangements for the involvement of relevant actors and children themselves in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes.

The issue of monitoring and evaluation highlights the urgency of the work that is currently being undertaken by the SPC Indicators Sub-Group's *Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being* to propose a set of concrete recommendations to the SPC for a common framework for analysing and monitoring child poverty and social exclusion at EU level as well as national and sub-national levels. It also highlights the importance of strengthening arrangements for the transnational exchange of learning on effective monitoring and evaluation of policies to promote the social inclusion of children. The good examples in some countries can provide a sound basis for this.