

e-News Bulletin February 2006

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News from Eurochild

Upcoming Events

As in March 2005, Eurochild AISBL will again organise an **Event in the European Parliament with socially excluded children**. This year it will take place in early **June 2006**. The young people will present to the participants their experiences with involvement in the decision-making process in their country, whether they participate in a youth parliament or have attended a youth event at European level. More information about this event will soon be available via this e-News Bulletin or the [Eurochild website](#).

The next **Annual Conference** of Eurochild AISBL will take place on 14-16 November 2006 in Berlin. It is co-organised with Eurochild AISBL's member organisation in Germany, AGJ (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Jugendhilfe*). The title of the Conference will be: **"Non-formal and informal Learning – Key Aspects for Social Inclusion of Children and Young People"**. More information about the programme and invited speakers will soon be available in this e-News Bulletin or the [Eurochild website](#).

News from the European Institutions



White Paper on Communication Policy

After its July 2005 Action Plan and its 'Plan D' for democracy, dialogue and debate, the Commission adopted on 1 February 2006 Vice-President Wallström's [White Paper on a European](#)

[Communication Policy](#). The White Paper's ambition is to establish communication policy as "a policy in its own right". It moves away from the idea that communication is largely a "Brussels affair" and intends to focus on citizens instead of institutions - "from monologue to dialogue," as Mrs Wallström said.

The White Paper is not yet a full action plan but the start of a six-month "listening" or consultation phase

during which institutions, governments, industry, NGOs, think tanks and citizens will be able to comment on the main ideas put forward in the paper. The document states five areas for action in partnership with other institutions, governments and civil society:

- To anchor the right of information in the EU and national institutions, it proposes developing a European Charter or Code of Conduct on Communication. A [special website](#) will invite reactions from citizens on the document;
- to "empower citizens", it proposes to provide tools and instruments to improve civic education (e.g. a network of teachers, digitally connected European libraries), connect people to each other and strengthen the relationship between citizens and institutions (e.g. [minimum standards for consultation](#));
- the White Paper wants to work better with the media and focus more on new technologies such as the internet, but does not manage to define exactly how. The idea of a special EU news agency (which was in previous versions of the White Paper) has disappeared in the final version but it still talks about "upgrading Europe by Satellite" and "to explore the desirability of having an inter-institutional service operating on the basis of professional standards";
- understanding European public opinion better: a network of national experts in public opinion research and an independent Observatory for European Public Opinion are two of the ideas mentioned;
- the White Paper underlines the need to "do the job together", in partnership between EU institutions, member states, regional and local levels, political parties and civil society organisations. It is particularly weak in this chapter, not going further than some general, non-controversial recommendations.

From February to July 2006, the Commission will listen to input from stakeholders and citizens via the special White Paper consultation website. The Commission will organise a series of stakeholder debates in Brussels, focusing on each of the five action areas. A special series of Eurobarometer surveys will be launched in spring 2006 to provide input for the debate.

Child-resistant lighters

On 8 - 9 February 2006 the European Commission presented a proposal for a Decision requiring producers and importers of lighters to make their products child-resistant.

An estimated 34 to 40 people, often children, die annually in the EU due to children playing with unsafe lighters. Many more people suffer serious and permanent injuries. Considerable material damage caused by accidents with lighters is also reported every year.

Simple devices can be added to lighters to make them child-resistant, at an average cost of just 4 Euro-cents per lighter. Safety standards were

agreed on a voluntary basis within the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) in 2002, but they are not applied.

However, producers abide to similar safety requirements in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. A US study showed a 60% decrease in fires started by children after a law on child resistant lighters was passed in the United States – proving the benefits of such legislation.

However, the idea of special lighters has been opposed by several member states including Germany, France, UK, Spain, Greece and Denmark. The opposing governments, as well as producers and exporting countries, mainly China, argue there is not enough evidence to support the move. According to observers, member states are also reluctant to hammer out yet another rule, while so many other safety standards are not being enforced. With over a billion lighters sold in the EU every year, the Commission estimates that about 70% of them are not compliant with the existing health and safety requirements.

For more information, see the [website of the European Commission](#).

Promoting business spirit in Schools and Universities

On Monday 13 February 2006 the European Commission has outlined a set of recommendations aimed to enhance the role of education in creating a more entrepreneurial culture in European societies. Starting from an early age, school education should stimulate young people's awareness of entrepreneurship as options for their future, give them the means to develop basic entrepreneurial skills and help them to be more creative and self-confident in whatever they undertake. At a later stage, universities and technical institutes should integrate entrepreneurship as an important part of the curriculum, spread across different subjects, and require or encourage students to take entrepreneurship courses. This initiative forms part of the EU's Lisbon partnership for Growth and Jobs.

For more information, see the [European Commission's website](#).

30 years of European cooperation in education

EU integration goes beyond the economy, agriculture and the single currency. Thirty years ago, in 1976, education and training entered the European stage, paving the way for well-known programmes such as Erasmus, Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci.

The Council of Education Ministers has met on 23 February 2006 to mark thirty years of work at Community level. On this occasion the European Commission published a book on "***The history of European cooperation in education and training***", which highlights the fact that it was not until 20 years

after the Treaty of Rome that European cooperation in this area began, laying the foundations for a people's Europe by making a direct impact on a growing number of its citizens: tens of thousands of pupils, students and teachers from all EU countries benefited from support for mobility and for trans-national projects and cooperation networks.

For more information, see the [European Commission website](#).

European Parliament

MEPs vote on the Service Directive

On 16 February 2006 the European Parliament has adopted the landmark Services Directive (also called the Bokestein Directive), after two hours of voting on more than 400 amendments in which MEPs supported more social protection in the bill. Most of the amendments were prepared in a

compromise text filed jointly ahead of the vote by the two biggest parliamentary groups, the centre-right EPP-ED and the socialist PSE.

Under the approved version, the contentious "country of origin" principle is no longer included in the Directive. The scope of the services bill has also been slimmed down, by excluding social, health care, security and transport services, as well as temporary work agencies. However, commercial service providers in the area of education or culture, as well as companies delivering water or gas will be governed by the new law. The European Commission welcomed the vote and said it will begin work on preparing a modified proposal based on the vote in the European Parliament.

For more information on the [vote](#) and the [debate](#) on the [Directive](#), see the European Parliament's website.

★ ★ General European News ★ ★

Reduced European Birth Rate

A fertility behaviour project funded by the European Commission shows that more than half the people questioned would on average like at least two children. However, a great number of couples actually have fewer, due to worries about the future and the cost of raising children. The DIALOG project collected data from 30,000 people in 14 European countries on their attitudes and opinions concerning family numbers, fertility behaviour and demographic change. Financed with 1.5 m Euros from the 6th Framework research programme, the project provides a useful snapshot of European fertility behaviour for policy-makers at national and European level.

The European Commission will present a **Communication on Demography** in May 2006, based on the discussion launched by the Green Paper on "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations" in March 2005 (to which Eurochild has contributed a [position paper](#)) and following the [informal Summit in Hampton Court](#) in October 2005.

For more information, see the [website of the European Commission](#) or the [DIALOG project](#).

Binge drinking trend hits European Youth

Binge drinking - drinking for the sake of getting drunk - is reaching alarming levels among European teenagers, a major new study has revealed. The report, carried out by the London Institute of Alcohol Studies on behalf of the European Commission, is part of research that will underlie a Commission Communication on alcohol policy, due in the latter half of 2006. The study looked at trends across the EU.

The report explains that, while total alcohol consumption per capita in Europe is decreasing, drinking patterns among teenagers show the opposite trend. Teenagers, and in particular young girls, across the whole bloc drink large amounts of alcohol several times a month, and the average age for the first drink has fallen from 15 years for the parent generation to 11.8 years for the teenagers of today.

While southern Europeans traditionally have incorporated drinking with eating and found open drunkenness embarrassing, the current trend is that young people in the south are adopting a Northern European-type tradition of drinking with the simple intention of getting drunk. The new study, to be published later this spring, compares member states' alcohol consumption patterns and is the largest of its sort made in the EU.

For more information on the [European Alcohol Action Plan 2000-2005](#).

Spring Day in Europe 2006

Spring Day in Europe is an annual citizen-driven event project on democracy and citizenship where young people learn and make their voice heard on topical European issues. This is a campaign of debate and dialogue prepared several months in advance through pedagogical activities in the classroom and with the participation of national and European decision-makers. In order to reach out to as many schools as possible and maximise their input into the debate, Spring Day on 21 March 2006 and Europe Day on 9 May 2006 are the two highlights of the event.

Schools have access to all the tools, activities and services of the project to organise events on either

or both dates. The theme for Spring Day in Europe 2006, "Debate our Future", opens up a broad agenda of issues relevant for the young generation and at the heart of Plan D. It provides schools with the necessary political, pedagogical and technological support to implement events on European issues and achievements.

For more information, see the [Spring Day website](#).

Inclusion of Ethnic Minorities in the EU

The first meeting of a high-level group of experts analysing the social inclusion of ethnic minorities in the EU has taken place on Monday 13 February 2006. The group, established by the European Commission under its strategy for tackling discrimination, comprises 10 eminent personalities from business, local politics, civil society, the academic world and the media. It is headed by former President of the German Parliament, Rita Süßmuth. The inaugural meeting was opened by Vladimír Špidla, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

The group will focus on issues such as good practices in the integration of disadvantaged ethnic groups in the labour markets and on the promotion of pragmatic, workable concepts in this area. In its work, the group will draw on a new study launched by the Commission as well as on the experiences from existing EU programs, such as the Community initiative EQUAL. It will report back before the end of 2007 with policy recommendations on how the EU can approach the problems of social and labour market exclusion for disadvantaged minorities.

For more information on the European Commission's [framework strategy on non-discrimination and equal opportunities](#) for all, see the [Commission's website](#).

Language skills a political priority

According to a special Eurobarometer on Europeans and their languages, the number of EU citizens who can speak at least one foreign language has increased from 47% in 2001 to 56% in 2005. An increasing number of Europeans also find that language skills are useful (83%). It concludes that the situation looks promising as to the targets set for a multilingual Europe. However, the long-term policy target of "mother tongue + two foreign languages" receives cautious support from Europeans.

Half of Europeans agree with the EU's political target that everyone in the EU should be able to speak two languages in addition to their mother tongue. However, 44% oppose this objective. Currently, 28% of Europeans say they have mastered two foreign languages. Around half of Europeans (44%) know only their mother tongue. English remains the most widely spoken foreign language throughout Europe (38%) of followed by French and German (with 14% speaking each) and Spanish and Russian (6% for each).

The aims of the [Commission's multilingualism policy](#) are to encourage language learning, to promote a healthy multilingual economy and to give all EU citizens access to EU legislation in their own language.

News from EU member states

All EU workers to benefit from Irish childcare allowance

Ireland will be obliged under EU law to make an Early Childcare Allowance available to all EU citizens working in the country, as well as to children not living in Ireland. The allowance was included in the budget in December and amounts to €1,000 per year for all children under six in order to help their parents manage the high cost of childcare in Ireland. The news may be welcomed by the 166,000 workers from accession states working in Ireland. They can claim the child benefit for children living in their home country, where the benefit of €1,000 could be worth a fortune.

But the Irish opposition Fine Gail party said it was a ridiculous situation that Irish tax payers would be funding childcare for children not resident in Ireland. The costs of the allowance scheme may also have been underestimated by as much as €150 million, according to Fine Gail.

A ruling by the EU court gives employees working at least 12 hours per week the right to receive full social security in all EU member states.

Only Ireland, the UK and Sweden have accepted free movement of labour from new countries entering the EU bloc on 1 May 2004. But the other 12 'old' EU countries will decide on whether to open up their labour markets as well before 1 May this year.

A recent Irish Times newspaper poll revealed that a large majority of the Irish think there are enough or too many foreign workers in the country and a similar majority (78%) wanted to reintroduce work permits for workers from new EU member states.

[Source: EUobserver.com]

UK Policy on Refugee Children

The UK government's controversial Section 9 of the Asylum and Immigration Act policy, which can split asylum seeker children from their families, should be ditched immediately before it does further damage, claim the UK's two leading refugee charities, the Refugee Council and Refugee Action. With the Home Office deciding whether to implement Section 9 nationally and the first legal challenge to it being

heard at the High Court on 31st January, the two charities have released a comprehensive report into the 12 month pilot which highlights the misery caused by Section 9 and its complete failure to achieve its aims.

For more information, see the [Refugee Council's website](#) or [CRIN Mail News](#).

For your information, a [special news page](#) on the activities of the Committee on the Rights of the

Child has been set up on the [CRIN website](#) in partnership with the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The page provides summaries of the Committee sessions by country (these are produced by the NGO Group and are posted on the page as they become available), UN press releases, NGO press releases, information on Days of General Discussion, Decisions, and other activities of the Committee.

United Nations News

Close of the 41st session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

The Committee on the Rights of the Child concluded its forty-first session and issued its conclusions and recommendations on the situation of children in a range of selected countries, whose reports on efforts to comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child were considered during the session. The reports of 3 other states on efforts to comply with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography were also examined. The Committee further took up the reports on efforts to comply with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

The conclusions and recommendations were contained in the final report for the three-week session, which was adopted on Friday 27th January by the 18-member Committee. The Committee also adopted its report on the session and the report to the General Assembly. The Committee's next session will be held from 15 May to 2 June 2006 at the Palais Wilson in Geneva.

For more information about the 41st session of the [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), see its website.

New UN Special Representative for Children in armed conflict

Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy was appointed [Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict](#) on 7 February 2006. She succeeds Olara Otunnu, who completed his term in July 2005. Mr. Otunnu was the first person to serve as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and was appointed one year after the groundbreaking [1996 report by Graça Machel](#) focused global attention on the devastating impact of armed conflict on children.

A native of Sri Lanka, Ms. Coomaraswamy is an internationally known human rights advocate. She is currently the Chairperson of the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission and served most recently as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. The appointment comes at a critical juncture in the history of advocating for the protection of these children. In 2005 the Security

Council unanimously adopted a landmark resolution that obligates the United Nations system to establish a mechanism to monitor and report on grave violations of children's rights during war by both governments and armed groups.

7th session of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Disability Convention

The [Seventh session of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities](#) took place from 16 January to 3 February in New York. More than 400 representatives from governments and leading disability organisations from around the world attended the session. The aim of the 7th Ad Hoc Committee meeting was to conclude a draft text of the [Disability Convention](#) in order to submit it to the General Assembly for its adoption in 2006. Although the final draft is still not agreed on, considerable progress has been made. The text should be finalised at the [8th session of the Ad Hoc Committee](#), due to take place from 14-25 August 2006.

For the first time, six children and young people with disabilities addressed the Commission on 18 January, urging participants to address the exclusion and neglect of an estimated 150-200 million children with disabilities around the world. The six young people (representatives of Save the Children) from Bangladesh, China and the United Kingdom, reminded delegates that "living in a world which does not value everyone equally is to live in a world which dehumanises everyone".

The Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee has now published a [revised text of the Convention](#), based on the negotiations that took place at the 7th meeting. From the perspective of children, very real progress has been achieved at this session. The issue of whether or not a stand alone article on children with disabilities will be retained will be decided at the 8th session.

For more information on disability issues and the drafting of the convention, see [CRIN's news page](#).

For more information on child rights around the world, you can also visit the [Resources](#) website of the [Child Rights Information Network \(CRIN\)](#).

Further Reading

The Impact of Globalisation and Privatisation on Childcare

The **Bernard van Leer Foundation** has recently released a **working paper on "Globalisation and privatisation: the impact on childcare policy and practice"**. The paper concentrates on the impact of globalisation on childcare since the late 1970s, particularly in the last two decades. It looks at how views about children, parents and public services have changed as a result. In order to understand present-day views on the services provided to young children and their families, it is necessary to have some historical context. The paper therefore also investigates how childcare institutions have emerged over the history of Western Europe, with special emphasis on Belgium, before examining

their evolution in a more international context, looking at recent research from different countries.

UK annual report on poverty and social exclusion

The **UK Government** has recently released its seventh **annual report on poverty and social exclusion "Opportunity for All"**. The report provides information on a wide range of targets aimed at tackling poverty and takes stock of progress made in key areas such as child poverty. As well as outlining the UK strategy to tackle poverty and the progress in meeting targets, the report has separate chapters on women and poverty and the European dimension to reducing social exclusion.

@ @ Surfing the Web @ @

Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) launches new website

The Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) launched its new website: <http://www.crin.org>. The website has been redesigned to offer more features and interactive tools, with easy navigation, highlighting the latest information added to the site, and using new technology, such as RSS feeds. It contains a **Resources Section** (with resources such as search for publications, events, news and international treaties by keyword, topic, country or language), a **News Section** (with the latest news on child rights world-wide, to be searched by type, region and country), a **Directory of child rights organisations**, etc.

On-line Support Toolkit on Orphans and Vulnerable Children

The orphans and vulnerable children support toolkit, which has been collated by the **International HIV/AIDS Alliance** and **Family Health International**, is an electronic library of resources about support to orphans and vulnerable children, based on the understanding that there are many good approaches to supporting orphans and vulnerable children.

The toolkit systematically addresses a wide range of themes related to support for orphans and vulnerable children, for example: situation assessments, access to education, psychosocial support, children's participation, and monitoring and evaluation.

UK Schools Make Links around the Globe

Save the Children UK recently launched a web-based initiative, School Link: <http://www.school-link.org.uk>, which provides primary school children throughout the UK with fun ways of learning about the lives of children in developing countries. The project provides teachers with exciting lesson plans that help them deliver the curriculum. Through interactive games, real life stories and powerful photos the daily lives of children in countries where Save the Children is working are brought to life.

School Link also offers an opportunity for children to make a difference to one area of the world that has suffered an emergency in 2005. On Friendship Friday, 19 May 2006, participating schools will be provided with creative fundraising ideas so that they can help raise funds for Save the Children's education projects in Pakistan. They will also receive friendship fun-bands, wristbands that children can decorate with a special message to their school-link friends overseas.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

International Conference on Early Childhood Education 9-10 March, Arnhem, The Netherlands

Would you like to learn about worldwide developments and trends in early childhood education during a two-day conference by internationally recognized experts in this field? Would you like to participate in interesting

discussions with policy-makers, scientists, decision-makers and other experts in the field of early childhood education and have two days to extend your international networking? Then join us for the International Conference on Early Childhood Education on 9th and 10th March 2006!

Conference on protecting children from sexual exploitation in tourism 10 March, Berlin, Germany

The next consultative meeting of the Task Force to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Tourism will be held on 10 March 2006 in Berlin, in connection with this year's edition of the Berlin ITB - International Tourism Fair. The thematic session will focus on campaign design and implementation for the prevention of sexual exploitation of children in tourism (SECT). It will feature guidelines and practical examples of campaign actions for the prevention of SECT. During the meeting, the Task Force will also provide opportunities for participants to exhibit their respective campaign material and posters.

Eurochild event with socially excluded children early June, European Parliament, Brussels

As in March 2005, Eurochild AISBL will again organise an **Event in the European Parliament with socially excluded children**. This year it will take place on the 7 June 2006. The young people will present to the participants their experiences with involvement in the decision-making process in their country, whether they participate in a youth parliament or have attended a youth event at European level. More information about this event will soon be available via this e-News Bulletin or the [Eurochild website](#).

Seminar on children without parental care in Eastern Europe

The [International Foster Care Organisation's "East-East Network"](#) seeks to link together all those involved in the development of family-based care in the countries of Eastern Europe (CEE/CIS/Baltics). The IFCO 2006 Regional Training Seminar will be held in Bratislava in the residential conference centre established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic. It will bring together people from across the region and beyond to share and learn together in a busy programme of plenary and workshop sessions. All those interested in the development of foster care in Eastern Europe are welcome to attend - places are limited. Those interested in submitting papers for a plenary or workshop session should refer to the IFCO web site after 1 March 2006 or send an email to [Stela Grigoras](#). The submission deadline is: 14 April 2006.

Conference on Child Abuse 3-6 September 2006, York, UK

The XVIth ISPCAN International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect will take place from 3 to 6 September 2006 in the City of York in England. This Congress is being organised by the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) in collaboration with the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. The title of the Congress "*Children in a Changing World: Getting It Right*" reflects the need to ensure that research, knowledge, policies, the shape of services and practice skills address the challenges faced by those working to protect children and safeguard their welfare. This academic programme will provide an opportunity for those from all disciplines working at every stage of professional development to participate in sharing knowledge and experience and to learn from sources of expertise with highly regarded international reputations.

Seminar on Children with Disabilities – What about their Rights? 10-14 October, Sion, Switzerland

The [Institut International des Droits de l'Enfant \(IDE\)](#) is organising its next international Sion seminar on the rights of children with disabilities. The aim of the seminar is to better understand the life of children with disabilities world-wide, to find out the protection potential of the future Convention, and to promote handicap as a real richness. Issues tackled in the seminar include: the WHO definition of disability, the national and international protection tools, as well as specific issues like education and training, family, institutionalisation, participation, environment, positive and negative discrimination. IDE is launching a call for papers to any individual, NGO, State, private or public agency, and/or university, working in the field of children living with disabilities. Papers must focus on one or several of the issues addressed by the conference. Contributions will be presented during the seminar and given out to all the participants.

Conference on "Non-formal and informal Learning – Key Aspects for Social Inclusion of Children and Young People" 14-16 November, Berlin, Germany

The next **Annual Conference of Eurochild AISBL** will take place on 14-16 November 2006 in Berlin. It is co-organised with Eurochild AISBL's member organisation in Germany, AGJ ([Arbeits-gemeinschaft für Jugendhilfe](#)). The title of the Conference will be: "*Non-formal and informal Learning – Key Aspects for Social Inclusion of Children and Young People*". More information about the programme and invited speakers will soon be available in this e-News Bulletin or the [Eurochild website](#).

Please note that this list does not pretend to be exhaustive!

Sharing Information

Do you wish to share information, announce something or make a contribution to the e-News Bulletin?

Please send it to: info@eurochild.org.

Eurochild



Eurochild AISBL is a network of organisations and individuals, who are working in and across Europe to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of children and young people. Our work is based on the principles enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

At the heart of our activities lies the Child Poverty Programme.

If you would like to become a member of Eurochild AISBL, please visit our [website](#).

Editor: Jana Hainsworth - **Responsible for publication:** Anja Härtwig

Eurochild

Rue de la Concorde 53

B - 1050 Brussels

Tel: +32 (0)2 511 70 83, Fax: +32 (0)2 511 72 98

e-mail: info@eurochild.org Internet: www.eurochild.org

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