



CONCEPT NOTE

Eurochild Policy Round Table on Family and Parenting Support In partnership with UNESCO

Date: Tuesday 7th May 2013, 14:00 – 17:00

Location: European Commission – Charlemagne Building (ROOM MANS), rue de la Loi 170, Brussels

Title: "*Family and parenting support in challenging times*"

Purpose of the event. Why is it important now?

Family and parenting support is not a luxury for times of plenty. Investment in all families, complemented by targeted support for the most vulnerable families at risk of exclusion, is a fundamental building block of cohesive societies. Interventions such as parent support, education, training, strengthening family and community networks and peer support can help build parents' self-esteem and skills, improve parents' long-term employability, and enhance children's well-being and development.

The event aims to promote a wider understanding at EU level of what family and parenting support is, what is really needed to support parenting, what are the lessons learned in this field and see possible ways to put those lessons into practice. The event will also address the issue of children falling behind very early in life and agree some key shared objectives.

Also in the context of the follow-up to the European Commission [Recommendation](#) on "Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage" - launched on 20 February 2013 as part of the Social Investment Package - it is expected that the round table stimulates debate on how we may be able to build more EU policy competence in this area such as by encouraging a future Commission Communication on family and parenting support.

Furthermore, the round table will be an opportunity to discuss and conceptualise the proposal for a family/parenting week at EU level in 2014, which would be a week of awareness raising activities.

In addition, the event is opportune in view of several political and economic developments in the EU:

- Well-formulated **family policies** may give European people more confidence to have the number of children they desire. They should certainly contribute to achieving greater gender equality both in the home and the work place, and better reconciliation of family and working life.
- The current **economic crisis and the austerity measures** put in place in many Members States is jeopardising the development of quality support services for children and their families just at the time when the needs of parents are increasing.
- The **negotiations on the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework** present an opportunity to ensure EU funds are allocated to family and parenting support services.
- A key element of the **recently launched Recommendation on child poverty** is a commitment to ensure that children grow up in families with adequate resources to meet their essential needs. The fight against child poverty is clearly linked to the situation of families: decent employment for parents and adequate income support as well as flexible working arrangements to enable parents to reconcile employment and family life & have enough quality time to spend with their children is crucial. However, interventions such as training, employment schemes and parenting support programmes must also be emphasised as for many parents finding a job is not an option. Family and parenting support can dramatically improve children's outcomes by improving parent's self-esteem and overall well-being. Parenting interventions should sit

alongside wider family support and be part of a comprehensive package that enhances children's rights and well-being.

- Given finance is tight, all work is focused on positive outcomes. Services and interventions need to demonstrate their effectiveness in addressing social challenges. Family policies and parent support services and programmes should be **evidence-based** and reflect best practice to build on what works. However, we should be careful not to lose sight of joint working and complementarity of practice and policies from a cross section of sectors and their inter-connectivity.
- Coface, the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union, has put together a coalition calling for **2014 to be designated European Year for Reconciling Work and Family Life**. Eurochild is involved in this coalition, bringing the child rights / child well-being perspective and promoting the vision of quality life for all.
- Also, in 2014 the United Nations is celebrating the **20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family**.

Participants

- Policy experts in family friendly policies.
- Eurochild's members working on family and parenting support. Discussions are also expected to build on the work of [Eurochild thematic working group](#) over the last 5 years of exchange and mutual learning. Eurochild's members working on family and parenting support. build on the work of [Eurochild thematic working group](#) over the last 5 years of exchange and mutual learning.
- Other actors working on family and parenting support, e.g., UNESCO, Eurofound, RAND Europe, Council of Europe, OECD, Foundations, EU networks, etc.
- Representatives from the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion).

Desired outcomes

- Call for a future European Commission Communication on family and parenting support.
- Eurochild is given concrete suggestions on whether and how to conceptualise the proposal of a Europe-wide week of awareness raising activities on family/parenting in 2014.
- Suggestions are put forward on possible ways to put lessons learned on how to promote family and parenting support in practice.
- Partnerships are strengthened between different actors working in the field of family and parenting support.
- National experts and policy makers bring back the message of the importance of investing in family and parenting support services, particularly in times of recession.
- Eurochild and its members are given lobbying tools and messages to support their work on early intervention and prevention & family and parenting support, both at national and EU level.