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**EDITORIAL**

**Supporting families for our future**

The 28<sup>th</sup> Conference of Ministers Responsible for Family Affairs, which will take place in Lisbon (Portugal) on 16 and 17 May 2006, is part of a tradition we can be proud of. Family policy has been on the agenda of the Council of Europe since its first conference of Ministers responsible for Family Affairs, held in Vienna in 1959. Over almost 50 years, the conferences have identified current matters of importance for families across Europe.

This conference is no exception. It will address some highly topical issues, such as “Family policies in the light of demographic changes in Europe and different patterns of family life” and “Supporting parenting in the best interests of the child”. It will also discuss a follow-up on “Reconciling working and family life”, which was the subject of the previous conference held in Protorož in 2001.

These issues are essential to families across Europe. The conference is not only intended to identify the problems, but also actions that need to be taken to deal with them in

order to support families, without interfering unduly with people’s privacy.

The importance of the family is reflected in several of our main legal instruments, like the *European Social Charter* for which “The family as a fundamental unit of society has the right to appropriate social, legal and economic protection to ensure its full development” (art. I 6). Also the *Revised Strategy for Social Cohesion* which says that “families are the place where social cohesion is first experienced and learnt and that a social cohesion strategy, while fully respecting the autonomy of the private sphere and of civil society, must seek to be supportive of families”.

Families in Europe are faced with numerous economic, social, cultural and political challenges, such as population decline and ageing, increased variety of family arrangements and the impact of new gender roles on family life and higher work participation of women.

For some, the present demographic changes signify that values of duty and responsibility have been replaced by individualism and social instability. However, one can also be more optimistic. Family forms are evolving, they are not becoming extinct! The new relationships that develop could be seen as contributing to gender equality and the democratisation of the relation between children and parents because they balance autonomy with connectedness. Even though the shape is changing there is no loss of social commitment. In one of the national reports for the Lisbon conference it is stated: “For the vast majority of people, family is and continues to be a lived reality and the way of life they opt for”.

At the *Third Council of Europe Summit* Heads of State and Government decided on a new programme “*Building a Europe for and with children*”, which was recently launched in Monaco. The two core elements of this programme are the promotion of

children’s rights and the eradication of all violence against children. Council of Europe activities are being mainstreamed in order to achieve these aims. Parents have an important role in fulfilling these goals. A report dealing with key aspects of positive parenting and a non-violent upbringing will be presented at the Ministerial Conference and a Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on “Positive Parenting” is being drafted.

The increasing number of employed women makes reconciling work and family life an imperative. The 2001 Protorož Conference, concluded that the public authorities and parties concerned should deal with these issues in a coherent manner. Policies to reconcile family and working life should include a wide range of measures and should facilitate and encourage men to take a more equal share in family responsibility. The most general action that has taken place since Protorož are efforts to put in place more kindergarden places and to facilitate parental leave not only to take care of young children but also in order to care for other family members, due to disabilities, age or sickness, and efforts to make fathers more involved in parenting.

There seems to be an increasing understanding of the fact that political principles of care are needed alongside principles of work. Care should be seen as having value in itself.

However, it is also obvious that the gap is still wide between what governments can offer and what families and children need in order to organise their everyday life in an appropriate way.

To support families in fulfilling their functions should be a topic high on the policy agenda of member states. The Lisbon ministerial conference should help parents in reconciling the demands of work and family life while giving children an opportunity to live fully their rights as individuals.



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**Newsletter: Europe is facing major demographic changes and different patterns of family life and structures appear: what do you think is currently at stake for family policies? And what is the situation in Portugal?**



The trends in the Portuguese age pyramid show profound changes: the structural tendency is one of decrease in the young population and an increase in the older strata. These trends reflect the combined effect of the fall in fertility rates (1.4% in 2004) and the steady rise in life expectancy.

The average size of families fell from 3.1 to 2.8 individuals between 1991 and 2001. In 2001 only 11.4% of families were composed of 5 or more people (in 1981 the rate was 25.1%). New family patterns are increasing, namely single parent families and families comprising just individuals. The number of single parent families, for instance, increased from 9.2% to 11.5% between 1991 and 2001.

These data show, in brief, the general evolution of families in recent years. Accordingly, the Government has implemented several measures to improve families' living conditions, in particular for those with a lower income. Namely, the sharing of childcare costs, social transfers aimed at reducing the direct children-related costs, the implementation of maternity and paternity rights, the social integration income (the Portuguese minimum income scheme) and the promotion of the family services and facilities network in close partnership with civil society (a nationwide programme of investment in services and facilities was recently launched).

Each country has its own tradition and specific family models. There is no common solution for all, but there are models that have proved more efficient than others over the years, and the trends in social protection concerning social quality and the capacity to provide families with adequate support provide clear examples.

**Newsletter: What are the main challenges concerning the support to be offered to parenting and in particular to single parents?**

We have to learn from a sharing of experiences all over Europe in relation to public support to families. In Portugal we are now evaluating the measures that have an impact on families in order to improve the quality of life of families and all their members.

Also, there are specific situations that must be taken into account. For example, single parents are generally at greater risk of poverty. This usually undermines the exercise of family rights and the fulfilment of their social responsibilities. As the fight against poverty and social exclusion is a government priority, reflected primarily in regional/spatial development policies, family support initiatives and support for people in need (children, elderly, long term unemployed, persons with disabilities), it is only natural that this priority is also present in family policies, with differentiating support levels and by directing policies to the ones most in need.

**Newsletter: What do you consider to be the main measures to be taken in order to reconcile working and family life? What, according to you, are the main achievements in Portugal since the last ministerial conference in Portorož on this theme?**

Portugal has one of the largest female employment rates in Europe, and what distinguishes it from most European countries where women

work part-time in significant numbers, is the predominance of full-time employment. This creates a very specific framework that moreover reflects a radical social and economic change in the space of no more than three or four decades.

Therefore, we have been implementing and extending a wide range of social rights and types of leave (maternity, paternity, adoption, parental and others), which are subsidised by the public social security system. Also, we are investing significantly in family services and facilities as a decisive component of family policies.

All this is designed to promote the sharing of responsibilities between mothers and fathers, the reconciliation of working and family life and more and better social quality for families.

In these areas, there are also gender issues that we cannot allow to be ignored. Let me mention briefly a specific example: bearing in mind that there are still many obstacles to the sharing of responsibilities between mothers and fathers, penalising women particularly, we have introduced paternity benefit (5 days during the first month after birth) and parental leave benefit (15 days following the maternity and paternity leave) in order to increase the involvement of fathers in family responsibilities.

More generally, we are committed to the social quality of families. Thus Portugal has also adopted flexible working arrangements to help employees take care of small children.

Nevertheless, I think that reconciling working and family life is a shared responsibility between governments and all social players: local authorities, social partners, non-governmental organisations and families. This is the kind of fundamental, structuring issue that would benefit from a strong social and political consensus where public powers and public policies are only a part of the picture.

Probably, the main role is reserved for employers and civil society. The state is willing to lead the process and to back up every step taken, but in fact families need an effective partnership in their daily lives to be able to exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities in the right conditions, and this has to include the resolute involvement of the labour market and the social organisations. This is a better and, in fact, the right way ahead towards the future.

**Newsletter: Portugal is becoming a country of immigration, are there any particular provisions to support the well-being of foreign families?**

The promotion of better life quality standards for all residents is the main goal of the Portuguese government's new social policies and this priority also includes, of course, the well-being of foreign families who are legally resident in Portugal. Citizenship should not be limited on nationality grounds and immigrants play an important role in European countries, including Portugal.

The specific needs of the most vulnerable families, in particularly those who have no income and are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, are a major concern. Therefore, immigrant families are entitled to the same protection as Portuguese nationals as long as, naturally, they meet the legal requirements to be entitled to the social security allowances.

At the same time, there is a specific government agency aimed at promoting the integration of immigrant citizens: the High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities. This allows us to develop preventive measures and to be constantly vigilant with regard to discrimination against immigrant citizens.

**Newsletter: The protection of children has been a central issue for a long time in the Council of Europe. What are your expectations concerning the new programme "building a Europe for and with children"?**



*I expect that the new coordinated programme will facilitate a more effective focus on helping all member states fully recognise the fundamental importance of building a Europe for*

*children, and thus for all our futures. This will include working with member states to achieve acceptance of the need at national level to develop a more strategic, coordinated and child centred approach to meeting the needs of all children, and progressively demonstrating how this can be done most effectively, especially from the fruits of high quality research and facilitating the exchange of best practice. A further key element could involve exchanges on how to achieve greater awareness of and a high standard of compliance with existing European and international legal instruments, especially the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which could also enable Europe to provide global leadership in this respect.*

*It is critical that this process include building a Europe (and a world) with children. I expect the programme will pioneer new and creative ways of involving children at all stages in the design, implementation and evaluation of the programme, and in demonstrating the importance and value of adopting this approach in policy development for children at national level.*

**Newsletter: What are the main areas in which you expect the Committee of Experts on Children and Families (CS-EF) to influence European family policies?**

*A key priority for the committee currently is coordinating a report on the challenges facing*

*parents in today's Europe. These challenges include the "poverty of time" to spend with their children which many parents experience in trying to balance work and family life. Too many parents also experience a "poverty of resources", which can present great difficulties in enabling them provide the supports children need for development. Greater understanding of child development, especially in early childhood, and of the pressures on parents and children in our modern world, underlines the importance of quality parenting in achieving good outcomes for children, and also on how these outcomes can be achieved without recourse to corporal punishment.*

*The report, when published later this year, should make a major contribution to a greater understanding of these challenges. It should also indicate how parents can successfully meet these challenges and how they can be supported more effectively by Government and by professionals. The committee is also working on a framework for the provision of parental guidance and support at national level based on the findings of the report.*

**Newsletter: What are the priorities today?**

*A main priority is tackling the relatively high incidence of poverty among children living in families, both in absolute terms and relative to prevailing living standards. There is much evidence to show that maternal employment is one of the key ways of combating child poverty, especially for lone parent households, predominantly headed by the mother, and for low income families with a relatively large number of children. Combating poverty of resources, however, can also result in poverty of time to be with children. A coordinated set of supports for families with children is, therefore, needed which include appropriate income support, affordable child care, access to other key basic and family friendly services, to education and training for employment, and to more family friendly employment. The Council of Europe can greatly help through facilitating research and the exchange of best practices on how good standards in achieving these goals can be achieved.*

*A key related priority should be the provision of effective support to member states in*

*developing a strategic approach to the provision of effective guidance for parents on how to meet current challenges in optimising the support for and development of their children.*

**Newsletter: According to you, why is it necessary to develop specific policies for children, beside those concerning families?**

*The key principle must be the best interests of the child. There are limits to what even the strongest and best resourced families can do to serve the best interests of their children. That applies even more in the case of families who are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, due to unemployment, lack of education, disability, illness, family breakdown, and so on. Then there is the special case of children resident in institutions and the supports they need. Education is the key service supporting child development from the earliest years.*

*A specific child perspective is also of great importance in getting the best outcomes in relation to the provision of other services including health, housing, culture, sport and in working to create a child friendly environment generally. Children are especially vulnerable to a variety of harmful influences, exploitation and abuse in our modern world, including in some cases within their own families, and specific policies and programmes are required to afford them the necessary protection. Good policy making and implementation requires that children are consulted and involved in the development of policies that affect them, which can also greatly help their development on the path to adult citizenship.*

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## FAMILY AND DEMOGRAPHY

### THE CURRENT CHALLENGES

As the bulge created in the age structure of many Western European societies by the post-war baby-boomers moves through the age pyramid, policy makers are attempting to deal with its consequences. In the 1950s and 1960s, during a period of economic reconstruction, the demand was mainly for affordable housing and adequate schooling and, subsequently, for appropriate vocational training and higher education. As economic growth turned to bust in the 1970s and 1980s, the baby-boomers were seeking employment in a stagnant labour market. The same generations were to experience the rapid development of alternative family forms, characterised by growing divorce rates, extramarital cohabitation and births, lone parenthood and reconstituted families. They were to become grandparents at a time when their daughters were increasingly likely to be economically active during the childbearing phase of their lives, and when their grandchildren were more often experiencing family breakdown and remaining longer in the family home before gaining economic independence.

The baby-boomers are now reaching retirement age. In many European societies, they can expect to spend 20 to 30 years of healthy living in old age. Because birth rates fell back to the pre-boom level, and even lower in some countries during the 1990s, the pessimistic prognosis for the coming decades is of irreversible population decline and ageing, raising questions about whether the taxes and social insurance contributions paid by the population of working age will be sufficient to fund the pensions of older inactive people, and who will provide for their health and care needs in old age.

Prompted by concerns about population decline and ageing, since the late 1990s, European and national governments have intensified their efforts to implement policies to help parents combine paid employment outside the home with family life. The objective of such policies within the European employment strategy is not to promote better parenting,

but to encourage more women with young children to become economically active, by offering accessible, affordable and better quality care provision for children, older and disabled people; maternity, paternity and parental leave, shared between parents; more flexible forms of work organisation; and social infrastructures to support households and families.

The relationship between female employment rates and birth rates is complex, as are views about the impact of mothers' paid work on children and the intervention by governments in family living arrangements. In Denmark and Sweden, relatively high female employment rates, particularly in the public sector, are found in combination with above-average birth rates, generous public provision of child care and high taxes. Employment and birth rates are low in Southern Europe, and families rely heavily on support from relatives. Other countries, most notably the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have developed part-time working arrangements, in the Netherlands through "flexisecurity", and in the United Kingdom in combination with a childcare strategy targeting low-income families, especially lone mothers. In both countries, female employment rates are above the EU15 average, as are birth rates. The Central and Eastern European countries saw female and male employment rates fall abruptly during the transition and economic restructuring of the 1990s, while public provision of childcare, housing and other services was being severely cut back. Notwithstanding

the lack of part-time work, female employment rates generally remain well above the EU15 average, and the gender employment gap is much smaller.

Families have to juggle quite complex arrangements and schedules, which are constantly changing as children and grandparents grow older, and as living and working conditions and family relationships evolve, more especially in full-time dual-earner families. Reconciliation policies may have indirect, unexpected, unwanted, and even perverse effects or outcomes. They may raise public expectations about the provision of benefits and services to levels that many governments are struggling to meet.

Policies that seek to promote the economic activity of parents may divert attention away from the best interests of children, older and disabled people, while the emphasis on childcare provision distracts attention away from other forms of caring. A growing body of evidence about the abuse of older and disabled people by family members and in care homes requires more attention to be paid to the health and social care of frail and vulnerable older people.

Many of the care jobs created in the service sector to bolster employment figures are low paid, involve short, often unsocial, hours and are mainly taken up by women, confirming their low status, reinforcing gender inequality, and making



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only a marginal contribution to social costs and taxes, thus polarising and segmenting the female labour market and devaluing mothering.

Differential take-up of leave by men and women, flexible working arrangements and individualisation of social security confirm women's homemaker role and the associated opportunity costs of mothering, increasing women's vulnerability, especially in old age.

The pressure being exerted on individuals to conform to social expectations by simultaneously being good parents and good workers may contribute to the refusal of parenthood and family responsibilities.

In the past, reconciliation policies were intended primarily to address the problems faced by couples during the phase in their lives when they are combining employment with child bearing and rearing. A life-long or life-course approach would recognise the need to spread the paid work effort and extend active working life for men and women, involving greater flexibility in employment patterns over a much larger proportion of the life course for men and women, encompassing periods with and without caring responsibilities, enabling families to adopt a sequenced or phased, rather than a time-concentrated, approach to employment and family life. Such an approach would have the potential for revaluing parenting, family life and caring activities, while enhancing intergenerational solidarity.

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This new report, an initiative of the Committee of Experts on Children and Families (CS-EF), focused on the changing nature of parenting in Europe. The report is edited by Mary Daly and contains contributions by Gilbert Berlioz, Staffan Janson, Christian Lalière, Nina Pečnik, Maj Berger Sæther and Mona Sandbaek. The report reviews and analyses the major changes affecting parenting in contemporary Europe, arising from both the legal situation and also research and practice, and identifies a series of good practice in policy responses.

The report focused on four themes:

- the legal situation and the results of sociological and other research on parenting;
- current thinking on the use of violence and corporal punishment against children;
- policy responses, especially in terms of the provision of support programmes and services for parenting and families;
- the relationship between parenting and drug-related behaviour among children and teenagers.

The main research activity involved was documentary research, especially of the results of research and legal and other opinion. The report is essentially based on the work of two working parties that were recently set up by the CS-EF. The first focuses on parenting skills for preventing and combating violence affecting children; the second focuses on parenting of children at risk of social exclusion.

This report underlines the significance of both recent changes and diversity in opinion and practice about what constitutes good parenting. The report devotes considerable attention to an analysis of the content and implications of the UNCRC, adopted in 1989 and since transposed into national legislation in all but two nation states. The Convention changed the context within which parenting is carried out and especially shifted the attention to children granting them rights as individuals. Drawing from its different contributions, the report

develops a concept of 'positive parenting' which derives from a view of parenting in the best interests of both children and parents as implied by the UNCRC.

Positive parenting is in essence parenting in the spirit of the UNCRC which means that the rights of the child are to the fore. Children's rights have to be respected by parents, in fact they have to come first. The particular rights granted by the UNCRC are as follows: the right to life and maximal survival, respect for the child's views, non-discrimination and the best interests of the child as the primary consideration. A consideration of the implications of this for parenting leads the report to identify a number of types of general behaviours from parents that foster the best interests of the child. That is, parenting should aim to be nurturing, to provide the child with structure and limits, to give recognition and acknowledgement to the child and also to empower the child. In addition, parenting should be exercised in a non-violent manner; understanding violence as taking many forms. The "how" of parenting is therefore critical.

Overall, three points are critical. The report is not advocating permissive parenting – parents need to provide their children with structure and guidance. Nor is it a one way street – parents should have expectations of their children and seek to be consistent in this respect. Secondly, the report emphasises the value of change and progression. One of the main foundations of the UNCRC is the idea of the evolving capacities of the child. Hence, parenting practices must be progressive in the sense of changing as the child gets older. Thirdly, the report emphasises that parents are not or should not be alone with their responsibilities. States parties have the responsibility to ensure that parents have access to the necessary resources and conditions to enable them to exercise their parenting role in a positive manner.

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# THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PROGRAMME "CHILDREN AND FAMILY"

The Council of Europe's activities in the Children and Families sector are based on programmes and projects launched by the Organisation to further social cohesion and address social policy issues of relevance to this field. The work as a whole is guided by the concept of the child's best interests as set out in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and goes towards the programme "Building a Europe for and with children", decided upon in the Action Plan of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe.

## **The Committee's work**

The Committee of Experts on Children and Families (CS-EF) succeeds the Forum for Children and Families.<sup>1</sup> It has terms of reference running until December 2006 to promote European co-operation and exchanges between member States on social aspects of childhood and family policies, under an active multidisciplinary approach. It conducts research work to survey the problems of parenting in Europe, encourages children and young people under 18 to participate in decisions concerning them, and ensures a wide dissemination of the results of work carried out under the Strategy for Social Cohesion with regard to policies on children and family affairs. Participation in the Committee is open to all the member States and many international bodies, as well as to the Parliamentary Assembly and other Council of Europe bodies, and to international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) enjoying participatory status with the Council of Europe.

Its work focuses on "support to parenting in the best interests of the child" and balances the needs and the rights of parents and children, these being understood as mutually supportive. Parenthood in a context of poverty and social exclusion and parents' role in preventing violence against children are two other major themes. Special attention is paid to positive parenting and its promotion, respect for the rights of the child, and abolition of corporal punishment and all other behaviour injurious to children. All these questions are addressed in a perspective of human dignity and human rights. The Committee has undertaken:

- Guidelines for positive and non-violent parenting. Following a study which analysed the challenges parents have to face nowadays, guidelines for decision-makers, parents and professionals are being developed. A draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on positive

parenting is in preparation and is directed specifically at decision-makers. The other two groups for whom the Guidelines are intended should be provided with guidelines on general topics and more specific situations, such as parenting with very young children or with adolescents, children with disabilities, lone parents and reconstituted families.

- Consultation with children and parents. In October 2005, at the invitation of the Council of Europe, 21 young people from 19 European countries came together to discuss positive parenting and approaches to a non-violent upbringing. Parents and children took an active part in this discussion, sharing their experiences and seeking solutions. They spoke frankly about the negative consequences arising when parents physically punish their children, and made it clear that the only way forward was to break this cycle of violence and to promote a culture of mutual respect between children and their parents. The results of this activity are fuelling our present work, and will be presented to the Lisbon Ministerial Conference.
- Follow-up to Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (2005) 5 to member states on the rights of children living in residential institutions. The Recommendation establishes the overall guiding principles to be applied whenever a child is placed outside the family, particularly in a residential institution, and underlines the fact that the child's human rights must be fully respected in every placement. Efforts at present are directed at promoting and following up this Recommendation, which was presented during the 2005 United Nations Day of General Discussion on Children without Parental Care, organised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Close attention was also paid to this instrument, to the rights of children placed in institutions, and to alternative solutions at the conference organised in February 2006 in Bucharest in the context of the Romanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, on the theme "Child Rights, the role of families and alternative care policies".

Great importance is attached to constantly intensified close co-operation with other international institutions, taking in the assistance schemes implemented in the Russian Federation and Ukraine, as well as with NGOs, which are consulted and participate actively in the work.

## **The Conference of European Ministers responsible for Family Affairs**

The Committee of Experts on Children and Families does not have a formal link with the Conference of Ministers to be held on 16 and 17 May 2006 in Portugal, but its work will contribute significantly to all themes of the Conference, especially that of "support to parents in the best interests of the child" coinciding with the one that drives the CS-EF programme. The Ministers will not only analyse the interim results of the intergovernmental work on parenting but will also examine how family policies have been affected by demographic changes and the new family patterns, together with measures for reconciling family and working life.

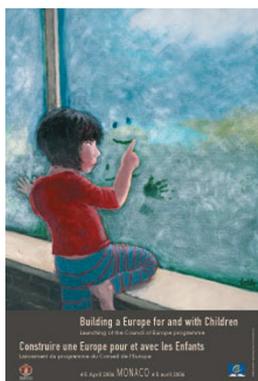
The results of the Ministerial Conference will help define the future activities in this field, probably concerning follow-up to the event as it affects the terms of reference of the new committee taking over from the CS-EF.

<sup>1</sup> *The Forum for Children and Families (CS-FORUM)* was the multidisciplinary body responsible for activities in this field from 2001 to 2004, and looked into matters such as reconciling private and working life, peri-natal psychiatry, corporal punishment in the family, children's ombudsmen, the right to education, harassment and neglect, children's participation in decision-making, institutional placement of children and day care. The Forum made many Council of Europe bodies aware of the child's fundamental rights and enhanced the Organisation's external visibility in this respect.

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**Several publications have appeared in connection with our work, some of the latest being "Eliminating corporal punishment: a human rights imperative for Europe's children", "Children in institutions: prevention and alternative care" and the Report on positive parenting, to be published in the second half of 2006.**

**A website <http://www.coe.int/childfay> presents our work and provides possibilities for forums aimed at experts, children and parents working with us, and an experimental forum accessible from outside, intended for parents.**



**Building a Europe for and with children**

**Promoting children's rights and protecting them from violence**

The Council of Europe's three-year transversal programme "Building a Europe for and with children" (DGIII), launched in Monaco on 4-5 April 2006, aims to promote children's rights and protect children from all forms of violence.

Children's rights are an essential pillar in European construction, and as Maud de Boer-Buquicchio has pointed out, no country in Europe has succeeded in giving complete protection to its children. In spite of the standards set by global and pan-European conventions, as well as by the recommendations, resolutions and decisions from Council of Europe bodies and institutions, many member states are unable to live up to their commitments in this field. In many respects, children are still perceived as "mini human beings with mini rights". The programme's ambition is to bring about a change in mentalities and to assist states to devise both global and targeted policies and strategies, which may include setting up new legislative frameworks, institutions, partnerships, funding methods, training and so forth. The ultimate aim is to translate policy into practice.

Equally important will be mainstreaming a children's rights perspective into general policymaking and investing in new legal standards to cope with recent developments in society, such as those brought on by changing migration patterns or the new technologies. The Internet, with its limitless exchange capacity, has increased the spread of child pornography, and is an area where criminal offenders have proven elusive to apprehend.

Children and young people will be consulted on all of the programmes activities. The programme will develop information resources for children of all ages enabling

them and those around them to know exactly what children's rights are and how to exercise them. This is particularly important in judicial procedures where the young are often sidelined when decisions affecting their lives are made. Determining their best interests is not the exclusive domain of adults. It is hoped that children's participation in the programme will inspire new models for local, national and pan-European children's consultation and participation processes.

The programme of action on "Children and violence", is based upon four principles (the 4 Ps) – protection of children, prevention of violence, prosecution of criminals and participation by children. Violence against children cuts across social, national and ethnic distinctions; thus the programme will focus on specific forms of violence and where they take place – at home, at school, in resident institutions, in the community, in the media or in cyberspace.

As part of a general drive to raise public awareness of children's rights, particular attention will be paid to breaking the seal of silence surrounding sensitive issues such as sexual abuse and corporal punishment. In many regions of Europe, the latter is still considered a traditionally sound method of social "education", in spite of the violation of a child's dignity it represents.



**To learn more, consult the following website: <http://www.coe.int/children> (still under construction). As the website is developed, visitors will have an overview of all of the Council of Europe's work in the field of children's rights, and related issues.**

**An innovative parallel website designed for children and young people will be also set up early 2007.**

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**European Social Charter: Family and Children's Rights**

The European Social Charter, which was adopted in 1961 and revised in 1996 (46 signatures, 38 ratifications), supplements the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) in the field of economic and social rights.

Article 16 guarantees rights for families, and Articles 7 and 17 rights for children. These rights are interpreted by the [European Committee of Social Rights](#), which clarifies their scope when considering applications lodged under a collective complaints procedure and national reports submitted under a monitoring procedure.

[Article 16](#) guarantees the family social, legal and economic protection. Social protection encompasses issues linked to housing, childcare, counselling services and the participation of associations representing families in shaping family policy. The question of housing for Roma/Gypsy families has been examined in depth in the decisions on the merits of complaints [European Roma Rights Center \(ERRC\) v. Greece](#) and [ERRC v. Italy](#).

Legal protection covers rights and duties within the couple, mediation services and the issue of domestic violence. Lastly, economic protection of the family includes family benefits, which must be of an adequate amount, and protection of vulnerable families in accordance with the principle of equal treatment.

The Committee's case-law on Article 16 is set out in the [Digest](#). The general introduction to its Conclusions 2006 and XVIII-1 (which will shortly be published on the website) contains interpretation principles relating to this article.

### Positive and non-violent parenting

The project “Supporting parenting in the best interest of the child” is the main activity of the Committee of Experts on Children and Families (CS-EF). As part of this project, the committee, together with a group of consultants and its two working parties are developing guidelines for positive parenting and a non-violent upbringing. Below are some of the key messages from the three chapters developed within the Working Party on parental skills, especially for preventing and combating violence affecting children (CS-EF Violence).

The first chapter “Towards a vision of parenting in the best interest of the child” explores what kind of messages new scientific knowledge and the UN convention on the Rights of the Child have for parents. What does it mean to be a good parent according to the UNCRC? The CRC underlines that the best interests of the child should be the basic concern of parents. In order to ensure that this is the case, parental guidance should respect the evolving capacities of the child and hear the child’s views. The child should further be free from violence, neglect and humiliating punishment. Parenting in the best interest of the child can also be summed up with the key words: **Nurture** (warmth, acceptance, involvement and support), **structure** (guidance, standards, limits and protection), **recognition** (acknowledge child’s experience and views), **empowerment** (enhance the evolving capacities of the child and its increasing sense of autonomy).

The Council of Europe considers a non-violent upbringing as a human rights issue. The Swedish example shows that it is possible to change the attitudes of the adult population.

While in the 1960s almost 90 per cent of the population held a positive view on corporal punishment, today a little above 10 per cent have the same opinion.

The chapter “A non-violent upbringing of children”, suggests alternative strategies to the use of corporal punishment, e.g. the use of distraction or positive humor, calming down the child by finding other activities, hugging the child and pointing out what is wrong. Time out and removal of privileges are also discussed. The following principles are recommended:

- corporal punishment is never an option;
- all discipline should be positive and respectful of the child’s personal integrity;
- equity and non-discrimination should be practiced;
- self-efficacy and trust should be promoted;
- rules should be few and simple, realistic and practical;
- partnership between and among children and adults should be enhanced.

Parents are responsible for providing their children with proper care, but they are also entitled to support from state parties. The third chapter from the working party on violence “Supporting Parenting in the best interest of the child” identifies the core priorities in family policy in Europe and outlines the state of play with regard to programmes and services that support parents.

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A detailed presentation of the case-law on children’s rights, as guaranteed by [Articles 7 and 17](#) of the Charter, can be found in the fact sheet “[Children’s rights under the European Social Charter](#)” and in the [Conclusions 2005](#) (Revised Charter) and XVII-2 (1961 Charter).

The issue of corporal punishment of children has been dealt with in the decisions on the merits of complaints [OMCT \(World Organisation Against Torture\) v. Greece](#), [OMCT v. Ireland](#), [OMCT v. Italy](#), [OMCT v. Portugal](#) and [OMCT v. Belgium](#) (violation of Article 17 in all five cases).

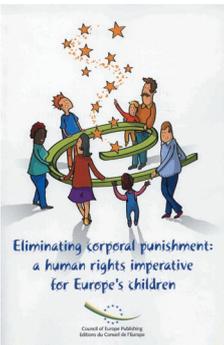
In its decision on the merits of the complaint [International Federation of Human Rights Leagues \(FIDH\) v. France](#) the Committee concluded that the country’s very restrictive rules on medical assistance for children of illegal immigrants violated Article 17.

A definition of States’ obligations regarding the education of children with autism can be found in the decision on the merits of the complaint [Autism-Europe v. France](#).

**Further information can be found on the following website:**

[http: www.coe.int/T/E/Human\\_Rights/Esc/](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Esc/)

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**Eliminating corporal punishment: a human rights imperative for Europe’s children**

**Council of Europe Publishing (2005)**

**ISBN 10: 92-871-5882-7**

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## Assistance programmes

### The reintegration of social orphans

Since 1999, the Directorate General of Social Cohesion has been organising assistance activities for the social reintegration of children at risk (children living in institutions, vagrant children and delinquent minors) in Russia and Ukraine. In 2005, seven activities on these themes were organised in Russia and one in Ukraine.

In most cases, the children have been abandoned by their parents or the children's parents have been deprived of their parental rights. In these two countries, the children are generally placed in care and gain the legal status of 'social orphan', similar to the general status of orphan (where the child's parents are deceased).

The Council of Europe's activities in this field aim firstly to help Russian and Ukrainian experts to support families

more efficiently, in order to reduce the number of social orphans, which remains high despite the improved economic situation in that part of Europe, especially in Russia. Above all, it is a question of better distributing resources to families with children and directing this support so that it reaches the most destitute, while avoiding a situation where these families become stigmatised and dependent. Often, it is a case of encouraging parents to undergo treatment for alcoholism or drug addiction, and helping them to regain confidence in themselves and relearn to communicate with their children.

Support is also provided so that the relevant people in these two countries learn and use efficient methods, taking account of good practice regarding the social reintegration of these children. In both countries, placing a child in an institution is considered a temporary solution. Generally, the aim is to place them back into a family structure. The method that currently prevails in Russia and Ukraine still consists of entrusting guardianship of the child to grand-parents

or close relatives. Much effort has been made to return the child to its 'biological' family. But in many cases that proves difficult. So there is an increasing move towards the foster homes solution, and other forms of family groupings, such as those where emphasis is placed on the upbringing of the children and where the parents who receive and bring up the children are paid for the work. But there remains one large problem: ensuring adequate training for parents who receive children and preparing children for this new structure.

According to Russian and Ukrainian experts, our activities provide methodological assistance that is both invaluable and appreciated.

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### Constructive testimonies from socially excluded families

On 22 February 2006, a meeting was held for socially excluded parents as part of the activities of the Working Party on Parenting of Children at Risk of Social Exclusion. This group was set up by the Committee of Experts on Children and Families (CS-EF) as one of its working mechanisms.

Two British parents, two French parents and a Russian couple took part in the meeting. Their background and path in life, which had in common the fact they were extremely poor and that their children had been taken into care, showed certain differences. One British parent and the French parents, one of whom could not write and the other learnt to read as an adult, came from very poor families.

Both Russian parents came from relatively well-off families and were well educated. But in the new climate in Russia, the loss of their jobs had plunged them into extreme poverty and exclusion.

All the parents had suffered from alcoholism and social isolation and had had their children placed in care. But they had managed to overcome the ordeal and regain custody of their children (except one British parent) thanks to efficient assistance. Their

attachment to their children was the main reason why these parents pulled through.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the meeting: even though they live in extreme poverty and are socially excluded, parents generally remain very attached to their children and this is one of the main reasons why they manage to extricate themselves from their situation and relearn good parenting. But they cannot do this without outside assistance. Paradoxically, these parents avoid social workers because they are afraid to see their children taken into care.

While financial assistance is a prerequisite for positive change, it is also essential to include these parents in social networks that help them to rediscover their self-respect.

In order to approach these parents, it is necessary to gain their trust and also to train professionals appropriately in this respect. The authorities must adapt their working methods to the needs of these people (who are often illiterate) so that they can enjoy their rights, especially in the field of social protection.

The parents' testimonies also raised the issue of placing children in care, which sometimes appears to be a rather hastily taken decision in the name of the child's best interests, with consequences that sometimes do not serve them.

## RECONCILING WORKING AND FAMILY LIFE FROM PORTOROŽ TO LISBON

In 2001, the Slovenian Government chose “Reconciling Working and Family Life” as the topic for the **27th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Family Affairs** (Portorož, 21-22 June 2001). On 15-16 May 2006, the Portuguese Government will be hosting in Lisbon the 28th Conference and has chosen “Changes in Parenting” as its main theme. But it was also decided to follow-up the outcomes of Portorož. All member states were therefore requested to inform the Council of Europe on this matter in their national contributions.

For this documentary analysis we can draw on information from almost half of all member states, while the national reports also include some relevant data for this exercise. Finally, additional comparative data sources were used (see References). This analysis will be presented in more detail as an introduction to the third working session at the Lisbon Conference. In short, three general observations can be made:

- Many governments and public authorities actively continued to develop policies related to the work-life balance. Most member states pay due attention to developing a “tool kit” of measures to facilitate reconciliation between work and family life, especially for families with (very) young children. Such measures are also increasingly framed as part of family policies and express an overall concern to support families.
- There continues to be considerable diversity among member states. This is well understood for various reasons. Moreover, there is no one-size-fits-all solution but a mix of policy measures tailored to current macro-economic possibilities and to individual countries’ historical and social background.
- Governments can increasingly benefit from broad comparison among European countries and from reviews of “good practices” through the programmes of intergovernmental

organisations such as the Council of Europe, the European Union, the OECD or UNICEF.

Looking ahead, it is suggested that the Council of Europe could frame the reconciliation issue within a Human Rights discourse<sup>1</sup>.

This would (a) be in line with priorities made by the Heads of State and government at the **Warsaw Summit** (May 2005), (b) reinforce the Council of Europe focus on children’s rights, as reconciliation policies also need to be developed “in the best interest of children” and (c) further equality between women and men, also by increasingly supporting fathers to become more involved in care work.

If member states were also to take a Human Rights perspective as their main line of approach, other objectives would not necessarily disappear. Justifying reconciliation policies within differing national contexts on grounds of economic development (e.g. increasing flexibility or employability rates) or of demographic challenges (e.g. low fertility rates, population ageing) can be considered legitimate but in the end only amplifies the need for tackling the reconciliation issue in a global and integrated way.

Large differences in GDP and often very different institutional and economic contexts make the challenges for the public authorities in all member states quite different as they attempt to facilitate the work-life balance for working parents. They have, however, in common the need to juggle with often conflicting perspectives of the different players involved. This remains a key political issue.

When and how women and men may experience conflict between employment and care or other “non paid work” will be affected by individual differences in identity and values, but certainly by differing structural conditions in

employment and family life. By locating various types of measures within a “total package” policy makers would also benefit from moving beyond a narrow focus on early parenthood to adopting a life course approach. This recognition should act as an incentive, rather than an obstacle, for developing a broader policy to empower people in their use of time across their life course and by recognising the many uses of time which make for a good life.

<sup>1</sup> It is worth remembering that even the European Union developed this perspective in its Charter of Fundamental Rights (Nice Summit, 2000), formalising its commitment to supporting couples in their efforts to reconcile family and professional life, without the need for justification on other grounds. This was also incorporated into the Draft Constitutional Treaty (see L. Hantrais, 2006, *From Reconciliation of Family Life and Paid Work to Work-Life Balance*, Paper prepared for the EC meeting ‘The Demographic Future of the European Union’ (mimeo)).

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### **Household over-indebtedness – A new form of exclusion and poverty**

Our contemporary societies are making intensive use of loans and credit to finance economic activity and consumption. Nevertheless, as Maud De Boer-Buquicchio pointed out in her **opening address** at the **26th Conference of European Justice Ministers** in Helsinki on the social aspects of justice, “in certain circumstances, access to credit can become too easy, and as a result many citizens risk becoming over-indebted”. Her message to all member States is clear: “don’t forsake individual lives for the sake of the economy”.

The problem in western countries evidently stems from irresponsible access to sources of financing, particularly consumer credits. However, we would be overhasty to attribute the responsibility solely to private households. Responsibilities must be shared equally among households, creditors and governments. Moreover, most studies of this issue have shown that the main causes of over-indebtedness are life’s common upheavals such as unemployment, illness, separation and divorce, etc.

The problem is configured slightly differently in eastern Europe: given that credit institutions regard this part of Europe as virgin territory, however, there are serious problems of arrears in payment of taxes and duties.

The following figures give some idea of the extent of the problem: in France and Italy, some 12 or 13% of households are having difficulty paying off their debts. Where gross indebtedness is concerned, deviations within Europe range from twice the gross available income for the Netherlands and Denmark to one third of this income for Italy, whereby the European mean is approximately equivalent to the average gross available income<sup>1</sup>. There has also been a sharp increase in outstanding debt rates in such countries as the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom (+ 120% between 1995 and 2002). It is also interesting to note that in Germany from 2004 to 2006 outstanding debt rates remained stable whereas cases of over-indebtedness increased by 46%.

Above and beyond the purely economic aspects, the over-indebtedness issue is particularly worrying in terms of its impact

on families’ lives, as illustrated by a range of personal situations, such as individuals suffering from depression and difficulties with their personal relationships in the United Kingdom<sup>2</sup>, and the example of an over-indebted French couple who attempted to murder their children<sup>3</sup>.

One of the resolutions adopted by the European Ministers of Justice (Resolution No. 1 on Seeking Legal Solutions to Debt Problems in a Credit Society) points out that the solutions to these problems should perhaps not be exclusively legal. Collective solutions should be pinpointed, ie approaches to be decided jointly by the public authorities and the community at large with an eye to preventing and/or solving the problems in accordance with the principles of social cohesion. To that end, the Council of Europe has included this subject among the priorities of the **Dialogue Platform on Ethical and Solidarity-Based Initiatives** and the agenda of the Legal Co-operation section of the Council of Europe’s Directorate General of Legal Affairs.

Examples such as the social micro loans under **Crédal** and the Belgian idea of “consumers’ schools” could be examined in further detail, as they are already being echoed in other countries, including France with its **Association Crésus**.

Household over-indebtedness is therefore a serious societal problem which must be tackled appropriately in consultation with all stakeholders in society.

<sup>1</sup> These statistics show the annual amount outstanding on debts per capita as a function of annual gross available income per capita. The data are mainly useful for a country-by-country comparison of credit consumption. In order to assess indebtedness within one specific country, it is preferable to use the ratio of amount outstanding per capita to average asset valuation.

<sup>2</sup> Mentioned by P. Ambrose and L. Cunningham in “The Ever-Increasing Circle, a pilot study of debt as an impediment to entering employment in Brighton and Hastings”, Brighton University, November 2004.

<sup>3</sup> P. Robert-Diard, «Les dérives d’un couple, du surendettement à l’infanticide» (a couple in distress: from over-indebtedness to infanticide), *Le Monde*, 20 October 2005.

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### **Commissioner for Human Rights – protecting families and the most vulnerable members of society**

*The Commissioner for Human Rights is responsible for fostering the effective observance of the human rights of every individual subject to the jurisdiction of one of the 46 Council of Europe member states. The Commissioner is an independent, impartial institution set up in 1999.*

*Thomas Hammarberg became the second Commissioner for Human Rights on 1 April 2006, succeeding Alvaro Gil-Robles.*

The work of the Commissioner for Human Rights in relation to families has focused on protecting the most vulnerable members of society, including children, migrants, victims of domestic violence, people with disabilities and members of minorities subjected to discrimination. The **Commissioner’s reports** have always emphasised the importance of developing coherent family policy that satisfies both the state’s requirements and the need to formulate future strategies in such complex areas as the rights of people with disabilities and social protection for minorities. In this connection, the Commissioner recently published a **thematic report on the human rights situation of the Roma, Sinti and Travellers in Europe**. Lastly, the Commissioner considers it essential, in the implementation of such policies, to listen to, and take into account, the views and opinions of civil society, the individuals concerned and those close to them.

The issue of family reunification in Europe clearly illustrates this need. The principle underlying it is the modern expression of the recognition of migrants’ right to family life.

The understanding, management and control of migration flows have recently emerged as growing concerns for many European governments. The practice of family reunification has consequently been seen as a means of bypassing migration policies or of importing into Europe

## Families and migration

The European Committee on Migration (CDMG) has always taken an holistic approach to migration. While in the 1970s family reunification was seen as a means of providing stability for migrant workers in the host country, the integration of such families soon became a key aspect of the integration policies developed by the Council of Europe. The report **“Diversity and Cohesion: New Challenges for the Integration of Immigrants and Minorities”**, adopted in 2000, gives particular consideration to family life by recognising its important role in promoting social cohesion. It emphasises that government action should foster the stability of immigrant families. Family reunification plans must not be unduly restrictive, and should allow the admission not just of spouses but of dependent children and family members in the ascending line too. This is reiterated in **Recommendation Rec(2002)4** of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the legal status of persons admitted for family reunification.

Particular consideration should be given to immigrant women. They sometimes face additional problems as a result of their very status as immigrant women. In some cases, the specific culture of their community militates against their involvement in society. This problem therefore compounds the obstacles they may face in the host country when it comes to being fully involved in society. Immigrant women consequently face dual discrimination – on the basis of their sex, on the one hand, and of their ethnic origin or the colour of their skin, on the other. This specific issue was addressed in a 1995 report on “Immigrant Women and Integration”, but that does not mean it is absent from the current discussions of the CDMG, which recently submitted a paper to the **Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG)** on women’s role in conflict prevention.

The CDMG is also working on the integration of migrant children and has instructed a Committee of Experts (MG-R-IE), in close co-operation with the Steering Committee for Education (CD-ED) and the Committee of Experts on Children and Families (CS-EF), to suggest guidelines relating to:

- the integration of recently arrived migrant children into the education system;

- national policies designed to give children adequate language skills at the pre-school level;
- ways of ensuring a successful transition from school to the labour market;
- the situation of migrant children living in ghettos or disadvantaged areas.

Lastly, the Council of Europe could not remain indifferent to the situation of unaccompanied migrant minors. Accordingly, the CDMG held a **conference on “Unaccompanied Minors’ Migration: Acting in the Best Interests of the Child”** in Malaga (Spain) in October 2005. It was attended by government representatives, members of parliament, independent experts and representatives of international organisations and NGOs, who discussed ways of reinforcing the protection of migrant minors in host countries. As the conference recommended that the Council of Europe continue its work in this area, the Committee of Ministers has set up an Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Unaccompanied Migrant Minors, which has been instructed to draft guidelines on policies and practices aimed at fostering “life goals” for unaccompanied minors. This group will start work at the end of April 2006.

**Further information can be found on the following website:**

[http://www.coe.int/T/E/Social\\_Cohesion/Migration/](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Social_Cohesion/Migration/)

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## Roma and Travellers and inter-generational solidarity

### **The positive aspects of their community lifestyle**

Everyone in France, and in many European countries, remembers the heat wave of summer 2003. Although France has one of the most comprehensive and efficient health systems in the world, the heat wave surprisingly led to the deaths of several thousand people in just a few weeks, mainly the elderly living alone who had lost contact with their families.

practices and traditions that are at variance with the values and practices of democratic European states.

During some of his visits, the Commissioner has observed significant restrictions on the scope for foreign workers to bring their families to their places of residence. In other countries, both legally resident foreigners and nationals face numerous administrative and legislative hurdles when they marry someone of foreign nationality living in their country of origin. In extreme cases, people are sometimes forced to choose between working life and community involvement in one country and personal and family life in another.

Although the issue of migration is a legitimate concern for European states, and each state indisputably has the right to control the number of foreign nationals settling within its boundaries, it is also important to observe the right to private and family life – as recognised by the **European Convention on Human Rights** and the **Revised European Social Charter** – of any person lawfully resident within the boundaries of the Council of Europe. Accordingly, the Commissioner’s reports have recommended, inter alia, that family reunification should not be impeded by unattainable requirements relating to income, age or social status, that the maximum age for the reunification of children should comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and that refugees should be reunited with their families in accordance with the relevant international standards.

**Further information can found on the following Website:**

[http://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/default\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/default_EN.asp)

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This tragedy highlighted the dangers and fragility of today's extremely individualistic modern societies, a dramatic contrast to the mindset and way of life of Roma communities which have a totally different set of values.

Because of their strong community relations, it is unlikely that there were any Roma victims of the heat wave. To a large extent, the Roma throughout Europe have preserved strong communal relations. Children, teenagers, parents and grand-parents all live together or at least close to each other. The meaning of the word "family" goes far beyond the nuclear family, extending to the level of the community ("vitsa" in the Romani language).

This belonging to a group also makes for solidarity, mutual help and shared responsibility, a concept encapsulated in the Romani word "phralipe" (brotherhood). Their community way of life brings protection, safety, control and guidance. It also makes it easier to pass on traditions and cultural values from one generation to another.

Nowadays, our modern individualistic societies provide little room for this communal lifestyle. But it is a lifestyle that often gives rise to tensions with the majority society. Most prejudices against Roma result from a negative image of this communal way of life. Hundreds of "Gypsy" caravans are thought to be touring around while often it is only a few. The Western media writes about massive migration waves of Roma from central and eastern Europe, but in practice the migration of Roma individuals is not in such significant numbers.

The community way of life of Roma can also bring about negative effects for Roma communities as a whole. For example, it is inconceivable that the police would wake up a whole neighbourhood when coming to arrest a person suspected of having committed a crime. When it comes to arresting a Roma however, the police have no hesitation in disturbing the whole community, including children and the elderly (as they all live together), sometimes also destroying the property (caravans, houses, etc.) of persons who are not in any way involved with the issue. It seems that the Roma – because of their community lifestyle – are perceived as a whole.

The Council of Europe and other players are confronted with a twofold task: on the one

hand they should work for the desegregation of Roma schools and the deghettoisation of Roma settlements, but at the same time they should respect the tradition of Roma who want to remain together. Some Roma even prefer living in appalling conditions as long as they can stay together with their relatives. They might refuse social housing if it means living in separate blocks of flats. A few years ago in Skopje, the UNHCR had great difficulties in persuading some Roma families, who had been living in a camp for more than five years, to move to nice private houses, because this meant that they would be separated. It is very important to understand the reasons for such apparently unreasonable decisions. It is only too easy to make incorrect conclusions based on old stereotypes. Like everyone else, Roma do not like dirt and do not want to live in poverty. They just attach high value to their traditional communal lifestyle.

Ignoring this pattern of Roma culture could lead one to conclude that Roma are desperate people who want and like to live in squalor.

*"After all, by respecting communal lifestyles where they still exist, we might be able to reduce the number of victims during the next heat wave."*

Salome Hirvaskoski, Roma and Travellers Division

Authorities should respect and accommodate historical traditions – for instance by providing large halting sites for Travellers or housing solutions that would preserve some degree of community lifestyle. Solutions to ghettoisation or segregation should be found elsewhere: not by forcibly mixing communities but by providing bridges and more contacts between various cultures and traditions in order to eliminate negative stereotypes.

**Further information concerning the Council of Europe activities specific to Roma and Travellers is available on the following website:**

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default_EN.asp)

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### **Upholding the rights of children: the Assembly takes up the cause**

The Parliamentary Assembly has never lost sight of children's rights, but it first viewed children's issues as a major concern in the 1990s. In 1996 the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee set up a Sub-Committee on Children.

The Sub-Committee members are committed to fostering a genuine children's culture in the member states. Since 1996, more than twenty reports on children and their rights have been presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), mainly by the Social Affairs Committee.

The Parliamentary Assembly has always considered it a fundamental duty to make children's rights a political priority, and that was the main objective of the Assembly's first major text entirely devoted to children: **Recommendation 1286 (1996)** on a European strategy for children. This text, which was drafted with the help of Unicef and world famous experts on children's rights, was in some respects based on the former strategy for promoting the rights and status of women.

A few years later, in an effort to ensure that this issue was not simply a matter of wishful thinking left to the goodwill of member states, and to give it more weight, PACE adopted a further recommendation, proposing the same ideas under what it hoped was a more appealing title: Building a twenty-first century society with and for children: follow-up to the European strategy for children (**Recommendation 1551 (2002)**). Initially, efforts to get member states to turn these proposals into concrete undertakings led nowhere.

Nevertheless, many states have gradually introduced some of the

**Ensuring rights and promoting community living of children with disabilities**

*Follow-up to the Council of Europe Conference "Human Rights–Disability–Children: Towards international instruments for disability rights – the special case of disabled children"*

*Strasbourg, 8 - 9 November 2004*

Children in general, but in particular children with disabilities, need more than care and protection; they also need to be recognised as holders of human rights. In line with the principles and values underpinning legal instruments drawn up by the **European Convention on Human Rights** and the **revised European Social Charter**, as well as the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**, the Council of Europe organised the Conference "Human Rights – Disability – Children: Towards international instruments for disability rights – the special case of disabled children" in November 2004.

The conclusions of this Conference, underlining the growing international consensus that institutional forms of service provision are not compatible with the exercise of children's rights and the fact that even children with severe disabilities would benefit more from living within the family and in the community, contributed directly to the process of drafting the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan (2006-2015), which was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 5 April 2006.

The overarching conclusions will urge member states to:

- promote a shift from the medical to the rights-based approach;
- address the rights of people with disabilities, including those of children to live within the family and to actively participate in the community;
- ensure a legal framework in line with principles of non-discrimination, independent living, positive action and access to social rights and community-based, integrated services and support

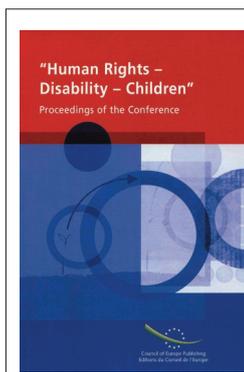
However, as deinstitutionalisation is an extremely complex issue and countries are at different stages in replacing institutional segregated care, one of the major points in the follow-up of the Conference was to establish a multidisciplinary Ad Hoc group of experts to develop recommendations and guidelines to promote community living of children with disabilities, and to help families take care of their disabled children at home in order to avoid institutionalisation.

To ensure that children with disabilities and their representatives are appropriately involved in the ongoing work, a hearing was held on 8 March 2006, during which four European non-governmental organisations of and for people with disabilities contributed and expressed their strong support to the work.

In September 2006, the Ad Hoc group of experts will submit its report to its superior body, containing a comparative study which takes stock of the current situation in Council of Europe member states and proposes recommendations and guidelines to promote community living for children with disabilities.

Hopefully, this will inspire member states not only to promote policies aiming at full citizenship and participation of people with disabilities in general, but, in particular, to ensure that the rights and needs of families of children with disabilities are given the importance they deserve, and that these needs are carefully assessed so that support measures can be provided to enable children with disabilities to reach their maximum potential within family and society.

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**Conference «Human Rights – Disability – Children: Towards international instrument for disability rights – The special case of disabled children» Proceedings (2006)**

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measures proposed. And now, ten years later, the European Union appears to be drawing on these recommendations in its current discussion papers on children.

What did the Assembly advocate? First and foremost, of course, that member states should ratify existing conventions recognising children's rights, especially the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** and the relevant Council of Europe conventions. Member states were then expected to put these declarations of principle into practice.

Each state was required to adopt proactive local and national childhood policies which would regard the best interests of the child as a guiding principle at all times and anticipate situations instead of trying to deal with emergencies or problems that were already entrenched.

The systematic collection of information, in particular reliable, detailed (by age and gender) and comparable statistics, was seen as a way of improving the representation of children and identifying children's needs and the issues requiring priority political action.

The approach to childhood policies had to be comprehensive, coherent and co-ordinated. Multidisciplinary discussion and decision-making bodies had to be set up at all levels, especially in ministries.

Setting up an Ombudsman for Children and, at policy-making level, introducing practices such as "child impact statements" were suggested as ways of identifying the real interests and needs of children.

The many proposals put forward included guaranteeing, through explicit recognition in constitutional texts or domestic law, the civil and political rights of children as well as their

**Partnership between Health Promoting Schools and parents for the benefit of their children**

Health Promoting Schools are committed to examining all aspects of a school's environment. A health promoting school understands the importance of investing in health to raise levels of pupil achievement. However, the health and well-being of children and young people are the responsibility of a network of partners that includes staff, pupils and parents.

Parents have an enormous influence upon the health and well-being of their children. This influence is particularly evident within the family setting where sound parental advice and guidance alongside good example play an important role in forming the attitude of young people towards healthy living and healthy behaviour.

Pupils whose parents play an active role in supporting their general education, health and well-being have a better chance of achieving their full personal, social and educational potential.

When parents work in partnership with schools in relation to health promotion, the pupils:

- are given clear messages that they are valued as individuals and that their health and well-being are important to both their parents and the school;
- feel that they are supported in their efforts to develop and maintain a healthy life style;
- learn that good health involves working in partnership with a range of different people.

When parents work in partnership with schools in relation to health promotion they not only receive advice and support in promoting the health and well-being of their children, but also gain satisfaction from making a contribution to the life and work of the school.

The Council of Europe has been working on these issues in co-operation with the World Health Organisation (WHO)

and the European Commission since 1991, when the **European Network of Health Promoting Schools (ENHPS)** was established.

The ENHPS takes a holistic approach to health promotion: it is an approach which enables inter alia the introduction of fundamental changes to school education. Many schools, which previously adhered to a more traditionally hierarchical "top-down" system of management are moving to a more open and participatory management style, in which staff, pupils and parents have real opportunities to affect decision-making. This generates a greater degree of democracy in the classroom which in turn contributes to building healthy and responsible young European citizens.

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**Pompidou Group: Involving family in drug prevention**

Parents and families are increasingly identified as key factors in reducing drug related risks and developing protective factors. Effective drug prevention programmes should aim at improving the communication between parents and young people during different periods of childhood and adolescence. Since 2002, the **Drug Prevention Support Network for Parents and Professionals** programme of the Pompidou Group targets rural communities and distant cities in Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Kurgan and Hanti-Mansiisk regions of the Russian Federation. The programme is aiming to develop the role and strengthen the capacities of parents and prevention professionals. It provides a basis for effective networking involving the exchange of good practice and the development of skills in the field of drug prevention.

Different methods of prevention work in different socio-economic contexts

economic, social and cultural rights; informing children and their parents of their rights; informing them about the remedies available to them if their fundamental rights were violated; and specific training in children's rights for all those working with children.

Some of the other proposals in this text are of particular interest today, ie teaching children how to act as responsible citizens, encouraging them to take an interest in public affairs and reconsidering the age at which young people can vote.

The proposals set out in the European Strategy for Children also included promoting education to prevent racism, political and religious intolerance and violence, and promoting ways for children to learn tolerance and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

However, PACE believed that what it said about children's rights had to be consistent in order to be credible. What it asked member states to do in support of children should apply not only in Europe but also elsewhere: member states should put children at the heart of policies for development aid to non-European countries and not hesitate to make compliance with children's rights a condition for granting technical and financial assistance.

**Further information can found on the following website:**

<http://assembly.coe.int>

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should be implemented. Three pilot projects focus on the development of internet-based prevention resource centres, setting up self-help groups of parents and introducing innovative methods of outreach work as well as school-based substance abuse prevention concept of life skills development.

All components of the programme were proved to be among the most effective prevention methods in many countries but are rather innovative for the Russian Federation.

The purpose of self-help groups is to learn coping strategies and boundary setting in order to reduce emotional stress in the family with drug dependant members. This is particularly relevant to contexts of the remote regions where there are few or no treatment or rehabilitation services available.

Through coaching and practice in the life skills programme the young people learn how to deal with peers and media pressure to engage in alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. They also learn how to overcome shyness, communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings, initiate and carry out conversations, handle social requests, utilise both verbal and nonverbal assertiveness skills to make or refuse requests, and recognise that they have choices other than aggression or passivity when faced with tough situations.

For 2 years, over 20 prevention professionals from the Russian Federation participated in the development of training materials along with their colleagues from Finland, Norway and the United Kingdom. As the feedback from participants in the programme shows, it is a key factor in its success because the programme is adapted to the realities of prevention work in the Russian Federation.

As a result of the programme, over 200 volunteers and professionals underwent training and an additional 300 persons will be trained in 2006. A number of manuals and guidelines on organisation of self-help groups, life skills development, outreach work and implementation of modern technology to drug prevention were prepared and are available both as paper and electronic publications. This will help to replicate the programme in other regions of the Russian Federation and elsewhere.

**Further information can be found on following website:**

[http://www.coe.int/T/DG3/Pompidou/Activities/prevention\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/DG3/Pompidou/Activities/prevention_en.asp)

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**Some comments from experts participating in the programme on the importance of involving parents and families in prevention work which were given during a recent meeting in Paris on 10-11 April 2006.**

**Richard Ives (United Kingdom)** - *Involving parents in prevention work is an important but difficult task. They spend more time than anyone else with their children and they are motivated because they worry about drugs. But they lack experience and do not have the necessary information about drugs and youth culture.*

**Arne Andresen (Norway)** - *Today, when youth styles and culture change so rapidly, parents feel as if they do not understand their children. But nevertheless, parents remain important role models for their children. Self-*

*help groups of parents help to empower them and improve communication with their children. Self-help groups do not solve the problem of drug abuse in the family but they help parents to learn how to live with the problem less stressfully. This creates a basis for better family life.*

**Olga Fedorova (Russian Federation)** - *In most cases, parents are not involved in drug prevention until a problem emerges in their own family. Quite often, parents have negative attitudes towards prevention simply because they do not have the necessary information. Parents prefer to shift responsibility to school and social systems for the well-being of their children as far as drug problems are concerned. That is why it is important to involve parents at the earlier stages in prevention work, provide them with adequate information and empower them in their parental role.*



## The European Union and the demographic challenges

### Focus on children and families

Under the auspices of the Austrian presidency of the European Union, a high-level conference entitled "Demographic Challenges – Family Needs Partnership" was held in Vienna from 2 to 4 February 2006. The main themes were partnership within the family and the role of fathers, and partnership with the business sector as a prerequisite for reconciling family and working life. The impact of mobility on the compatibility of family and working life was also discussed.

Conference participants included: Vladimir Spidla, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Lena Hallengren, Swedish Minister for Pre-School Education, Youth Affairs and Adult Learning, Leila Kostiainen, Finnish State Secretary for Social Affairs and Health, Gerry Sutcliffe, British Under Secretary of State for Employment Relations and Consumer Affairs, and more than 300 international experts.

The main message conveyed by Ursula Haubner, Austrian Federal Minister for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection and chair of the conference, was: "Focus on the value of children and families in Europe: children and families are prerequisites for securing the future, economic growth and social cohesion of Europe". Having given figures illustrating the alarming situation in Europe, Ms Haubner warned of the risks and suggested the following three priorities:

- focusing on the importance of children and families in society;



- securing a balance, and thereby solidarity, between generations; and
- creating new transitions between different life stages (education and training, employment, retirement).

In her opening address, she also stated that the conclusions of the Vienna conference would flow into an ongoing process addressing the impact of an ageing European population on social and economic development, which was a matter of great concern.

In July 2005, the European Commission published a Green Paper entitled “Confronting Demographic Change: a New Solidarity between the Generations”, thereby launching a debate in the 25 member states with a view to overcoming these new challenges and implementing reform measures. The informal meeting of heads of state and government held at Hampton Court in October 2005 also considered this issue. Following on from the Vienna conference, the European Commission plans to organise a demographic forum, and has announced that it will consult employers’ organisations and trade unions regarding the compatibility of family and working life.

**For further information on the Austrian presidency of the European Union, please visit the following website:**

<http://www.eu2006.bmsg.gv.at/eu2006/index.php>

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**The Council of Europe (CoE) and United Nations bodies working in the field of Children’s Rights - in particular the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and UNICEF – are strengthening their cooperation. Representatives on both sides are invited to attend meetings, such as those of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and those of the Council of Europe Committee on Children and Families (CS-EF).**

“We are determined to effectively promote the rights of the child and to fully comply with the obligations of the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child” stated the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, at their 3rd Summit in Warsaw in 2005. All forty-six Council of Europe member states are now parties to the Convention. The Council of Europe itself is mainstreaming the rights of the child through all its activities as well as actively promoting them as a complement to its own main legal instruments dealing with human rights and social rights and cohesion. The Organisation is particularly involved in the UN study on violence against children, and jointly organised the regional consultation on “Stop the violence against children – Act now!” which took place in Ljubljana last year. On this occasion it was stressed that violence in institutions must stop and that the institutionalisation of children should be avoided in the first place.

In the same year the UNCRC Day of General Discussion focused on “Children without parental care” in which Council of Europe representatives presented its work in this field, particularly for the protection of the rights of children living in institutions and the need to find alternative valuable solutions. This is a topic of common deep concern and where there is an urgent need for appropriate action. Particular emphasis was put on the Council of Europe Recommendation **Rec (2005) 5** of the Committee of Ministers to member states on “the Rights of children living in residential institutions”. Taking the concluding recommendations of the UNCRC Day, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomed the

Council of Europe text and recommended, among other issues, that:

- the international community, including States parties, United Nations agencies and bodies as well as relevant regional organisations, international and national non-governmental organisations, academic institutions and international professional organisations, organise an expert meeting in order to prepare a set of international standards for the protection and alternative care of children without parental care which the UN General Assembly should consider and adopt in 2006;
- the standards should have a multi-track approach, i.e. to regulate the separation as well as placement into out-of-home care and to standardise it. The transition from the out-of-home care back to the family or into society should also be regulated. At the same time measures should be sought on how to prevent placement and institutionalisation. In this respect, the committee underlined the need to hold consultations with children and their parents throughout the process.

The partnership and the complementarity between the Council of Europe and UNICEF is a long standing one and is active also in this particular field where the feasibility of a joint pilot project on “Children without parental care” in the framework of the CoE Assistance Programme is currently being evaluated.

**For further information on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocols, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and its work please visit the following website:**

<http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/index.htm>

**Contact:** Committee on the Rights of the Child, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNOG-OHCHR, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, Fax: +41 22 917 90 22

### Norway:

#### Progress in family policy

In recent decades, Norwegian policies have focused on and invested in building an appropriate framework and flexible provisions for families. New reforms are still in progress taking into account different patterns of family life and new challenges in the light of demographic, socio-economic and cultural changes both in our country and in Europe as a whole. The core issues and main concern in all European countries are the current population trends, i.e. low fertility and aging of the population, and their consequences in the labour market. In spite of Norway's excellent ranking in three key areas (a high fertility rate, at the top of European statistics for female workforce participation and the increasing involvement of men in child care) we still have to develop further instruments to meet the following challenges: paving the way for a higher fertility rate, increasing the number of people in employment and ensuring that people stay in employment longer.

To achieve this, the policy must also pay great attention to developing instruments for good parenting and securing an appropriate upbringing for children. Family policy based on a holistic and integrated approach combined with gender equality mainstreaming is an essential key to higher fertility, workforce participation and secure family life.

Norway has excellent government schemes, which are policy instruments designed to combine work and care. The following are some of the instruments, measures and examples of family policy:

*Day care institutions* are a precondition for full reconciliation between paid work and family life. The goal is full coverage in 2006.

A *Cash Benefit Scheme* is granted for children resident in Norway between the age of one and three if the child is not in a day-care institution receiving a public grant. The purpose is to make it possible for families to choose whether to stay at home with children after the first year, to use day-care institutions or a combination of both.

Flexible *paid and unpaid parental leave*, extension of parental leave, paid leave to stay at home with sick children are all important

measures to secure good parenting and upbringing of children.

Combined with *flexible working hours*, the right to shorter working time is also a basis for a higher female labour force participation rate. Many women work part-time. It is not possible to take advantage of the workforce potential of women unless men take their share of child care.

*Equal parenting* is the key to gender equality in the labour market. The parental benefit period is 43 weeks with 100% pay or 53 weeks with 80% pay. Five weeks of the parental leave period are reserved for the father. These five weeks are not normally transferable to the mother, and if the father does not use them, they are lost. The father's quota will be further extended.

To *strengthen parenthood*, a new programme entitled "Getting on well as partners" (*Godt samliv*) has been launched by the Government to couples having their first child. With the arrival of their first child most couples face a new situation and have to deal with a variety of challenges and expectations. The purpose is to strengthen their relationship and prevent the couple from breaking up. The programme is free of charge and the aim is to implement this programme in all municipalities in Norway. To date Norway has established 64 counselling agencies spread all over the country. *The Family Counselling Service* is a low-threshold, state financed, legally-based service, particularly aimed at adults with family relational problems.

**More information is available on the Ministry of Children and Equality website:**

[www.odin.no](http://www.odin.no)

**Under the heading "Questions and feed back" your questions will be passed on to the relevant expert who will reply.**

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### INGOs' contribution to family policy in Europe

Family policy has always been a special sphere, the preserve of the national or regional level, for states' very future could hinge upon it. We are well aware of the significance and impact of decisions to encourage or discourage policies such as those relating to the birth rate, and of their potential implications in terms of the age pyramid, workforce management planning and, therefore, the part-financing of social protection and other pension schemes. Civil society and national NGOs in particular hardly ever used to be approached, except when they issued warnings, often on behalf of the least well-off; they sometimes called for specific measures for the latter, although these were seen as compensatory social assistance and were not really part of a family policy strategy.

Over the last ten years, several factors have helped to reposition INGOs as partners in the development of family policy. Firstly, states no longer have a monopoly when it comes to understanding the situation on the ground or, in other words, what people experience on a day-to-day basis; they rely increasingly on information and advice from the voluntary sector. Secondly, the Council of Europe has assigned INGOs a specific role by considering them to be one of the four pillars of the Organisation, able to help provide the necessary clarification with a view to envisaging, planning and developing well thought-out policies – particularly in the social field – that will shape Europe's future.

They are thereby making a steadfast contribution to the various projects under way, such as: "Children and Violence", "Fighting Severe Poverty in Towns" and "Children, Families and the Elderly", particularly the strands relating to *changes in parenting* and "Building a Europe for and with

### Romania:

#### An International Conference on Children's Rights Bucharest, 2-3 February 2006

One year after the new legislation concerning the children's rights protection and promotion came into force, under the aegis of the Romanian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers at the Council of Europe, the National Authority for Children's Rights Protection took the initiative of organising, early February 2006, an International Conference on "Children's Rights, the family's role and policies of alternative care – evolution, trends and challenges in Europe". The conference's main objective was to contribute to the exchanges of experiences and good practices at the European level, with respect to the rights of the child as well as to raising the awareness of the progress made by Romania in this field.

The conference was honoured by the presence of Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and attended by members from the European Parliament, Romanian ministers and secretaries of state, ambassadors and officials of the competent ministries from Council of Europe member countries as well as by eminent international experts in the field of children's rights. A total number of 325 participants attended the conference.

The presentations during the main sessions showed the international and European instruments concerning the protection of children's rights and the need for development of international standards in this respect, as well as the national experiences of Romania, Bulgaria and Norway.

The children and young people were the protagonists of some special moments such as the awarding ceremony of the National Essays Competition on children's rights, the presentation of a documentary film showing the progress

made in the area of residential care in Romania and a pantomime show inspired by the children's rights issues.

Besides the plenary sessions, working groups were organized to debate on family support policies in the European countries, the role of the state in preventing and regulating family separation, children in institutions and other types of care outside homes.

The conference ended with the adoption of "The Bucharest Recommendations", which represent the participants' message to the member states of the Council of Europe. The following issues were highlighted:

- involving children, youth, families and civil society in policies development and decision-making;
- maximising the help provided to parents in order to prevent separation;
- developing and diversifying the services provided in community to address the specific needs of its members;
- maintaining contact between the child and her/his parents and providing support for the parents during the separation period;
- respecting standards and adequate monitoring of all cases.

These recommendations, together with the new legislative package concerning the protection and promotion of children's rights which came into force in 2005, will represent a useful working tool for the Romanian experts and authorities.

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*Children*". All of these new challenges show that it is now necessary to envisage a European society as part of a comprehensive vision, but one that is nevertheless able to incorporate diversity; INGOs have a good understanding of the latter, thanks to the vast networks and specialists available to them, and thus a crucial role to play in furthering the Organisation's goals.

Their vital contribution to the work being undertaken in Europe is evident from numerous examples of activities that have made it possible to influence family policies from the outset and are thus part and parcel of the constructive complementarity sought in the strategies implemented.

However, the need to balance voluntary involvement, the relative availability it entails and the expectations of European institutions in terms of solutions that often require time and adequate resources is still a major problem. For example, when a representative of the Conference of INGOs is appointed to take part in a project, this necessitates the involvement of a network from which opinions or examples will be sought, sorted, analysed and organised with a view to contributing to the activity under way and meeting practical needs.

It is thanks to such a procedure, and out of a concern to uphold the interests of children and their families, that an amendment was proposed to draft Recommendation Rec (2005) 5 of the Committee of Ministers on the rights of children living in residential institutions.

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### Iceland:

#### “Under one roof”

#### *Towards the best interest of the child in cases of child sexual abuse*

The key to uncovering child sexual abuse – to successfully prosecute the offender and most importantly to provide the child with the necessary treatment and support – is the child’s disclosure. Research has shown that medical evidence exists in less than one out of every ten cases and furthermore, it is conclusive in only half of those. Witnesses other than the child victim her/himself rarely exist. Thus, in absence of other evidence, the child’s story often represents the only source of information on which the whole case rests. Failure to appreciate this fact not only can jeopardize the judicial procedure but also subject the child to repetitive interviews with serious traumatic consequences for the child victim.

In most European states the responsibility in dealing with child sexual abuse is divided between a number of agencies: the Child Protection and/or the Social Services, the Health Professions, Law enforcement, Prosecution and finally the Courts. In order to fulfil their roles, all these different agencies need to examine the child victim’s account. Consequently it is commonplace that children are subjected to repeated interviews by different professionals at many locations – a condition that research findings have showed to result in re-victimization of the child that can even be more painful for the child than the original abuse.

In line with article 3.1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Iceland reorganised the work procedures in child sexual abuse cases in 1998.

Instead of the child having to adapt to the needs of the different agencies of societies, the needs of the child were defined as “a primary consideration”. With the overt aim of preventing repetitive interviews, a child friendly setting, the “Children’s House”, was created – an environment designed to make the child feel secure and comfortable.

The core of the Children’s House is the joint investigative interview of the child victim, executed by a trained professional interviewer under the formal authority of a Court Judge and observed by representatives of the different agencies assisted by a closed circuit television. The interview is videotaped for multiple purposes, including medical examination and therapeutic services that are also provided in the Children’s House. The goal is to ensure a professional criminal investigation and “due process” for the suspect without compromising the principle of the best interest of the child.

The Children’s House Iceland has been identified by the International Save the Children Alliance as a “best practice” model in Europe in 2002.

The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) will present the Children’s House with the “Multidisciplinary Team Award” for 2006 at their International Congress in York (UK) the coming September.

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### International Federation for Parent Education (IFPE)

The International Federation for Parent Education, founded by André Isambert in 1964, is made up of associations (parenting associations, national or independent organisations, research institutes) and individuals (teachers, educators, doctors, psychologists, researchers) throughout the world who wish to help families cope better with their educational role, *inter alia* by studying the problems families face and pooling experience.

The IFPE is an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) without any political, racial or denominational connections. As well as with the Council of Europe, it maintains working and cultural relationships with UNESCO, ECOSOC, UNICEF and the International Francophone Organisation. It has had its headquarters in France since it was set up (as a non-profit organisation under the French law of 1901).

The IFPE organises international conferences and congresses serving as genuine forums for discussion and contact. Recent themes include “Globalisation and Migration: Uprooted Youth” (Rabat, Morocco, 1997), “Parents and Children in Today’s Societies: Families’ Strengths and Weaknesses” (Sèvres, France, 2001) and “Building our Common Future Together: a Unique Endeavour for a Plural Society” (Montreal, Canada, 2005).

Its latest international congress was held in London from 23 to 25 March 2006, on the theme “The Developing Relationship between Parent and Child in Europe and Across the World: Reality and Prospects”. This meeting was organised by “Parenting UK” and attended by IFPE members from various countries (Algeria, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Canada, France, Iran, Israel, Tunisia, Thailand and the USA) as well as partners in the “Leonardo” project, which the IFPE also supports

### Germany:

#### Family policy in the Bavarian state

Due to the federal structure of the German state, family policies are devised not only by the federal government and the municipalities, but also, to a large extent, by the federal states themselves. The policy of the Bavarian government is to support all families, regardless of their family circumstances. A broad spectrum of benefits is on offer, ranging from the protection of unborn life right through to supporting families caring for their elderly dependents at home. The policies also address families with special needs, like single parents or families in precarious economic situations.

The state child-rearing allowance (“*Landeserziehungsgeld*”) constitutes one of the most important benefits provided by the Bavarian state. Bavaria is one of the few federal states that grant this allowance during the child’s third year of age, irrespective of the parents’ income. The monthly support for the first child is 200 euros, for the second, 250 euros, and 350 euros is provided from the third child onwards. Its duration is fixed at six months for the first child, increasing to one year for any additional child. Provision of these kinds of family benefits illustrates the special support given to parents bringing up small children in Bavaria.

Bavarian family policy emphasises parents’ freedom of choice regarding the balance between work and family life. Parents, in particular mothers, should be able to decide for themselves whether they wish to care for their children at home or whether they would like to (re)enter the labour market and thereby rely on public child care. For achieving this goal, Bavarian family policy is currently promoting the extension of and quality assurance for child care facilities. The

“Overall Concept for Child Care, Education and Bringing-up Children and Youth” makes provision for safeguarding parents’ freedom of choice. Thus, the Bavarian state has set the course for covering the demand in child care by the year 2006. Gradually a global care network for children and youth, ranging from infant care to youth services, is being fully established in Bavaria.

Changing family patterns (single parents, consensual unions, etc.) and the increasing number of parents who feel overwhelmed by their everyday parental tasks, have led the Bavarian state to set up programs to educate its parents. In 2000, the Bavarian parliament passed a resolution to further develop novel concepts for family education. These resolutions are currently being reflected in family research projects that investigate the demand for and the acceptance of family education as well as several model projects in family education.

Finally, a distinctive feature of family policy in the Bavarian state should be noted: this state funds two family-related research institutes, the **State Institute for Family Research at the University of Bamberg** and the **State Institute for Early Childhood Education in Munich**. The aim of both institutes is to generate basic knowledge in their fields and to feed it into the political decision-making process. Both institutes also monitor and evaluate model projects.

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(representatives from Poland, Romania, Belgium and the United Kingdom). Presentations, conferences and workshops provided an opportunity to discuss:

- the exercise of parenting today, in the case of children at risk of social exclusion;
- a legal perspective on the evolving child-parent relationship in the light of the International Convention and the European Convention on the Exercise of Children’s Rights;
- fathering in difficult situations, such as on coming home from prison;
- the findings of a parenting survey in Romania;
- the role of parenting associations;
- refocusing educational psychology to support parents.

Other presentations relating to Moscow, Guatemala, Iran, Mexico, Jamaica and Tunisia gave rise to very rewarding discussions.

All of these presentations will be brought together in the proceedings of the international congress. The attendance and participation of young people enriched the discussions considerably. The active participation of a Council of Europe representative was much appreciated.

From 1964 to 2006, the IFPE has closely monitored the development of parent-child relationships in a world that has undergone a great deal of change.

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