

MEDIA RELEASE
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CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND JOINS CALLS FOR EUROPEAN UNION TO SHOW LEADERSHIP ON EARLY YEARS SERVICES

European child policy experts meeting in Brussels today are urging the European Commission to take a stronger lead on developing early years services, to help eliminate child poverty and improve services for all young children.

A meeting in Brussels today chaired by Children in Scotland's chief executive Bronwen Cohen is expected to call on the European Commission to ensure member states take a wider approach to the provision of services for children.

Cohen will stress the variety of purposes that services can offer, providing not only care for parents in paid employment but also offering stimulating, safe environments which can encourage learning and healthy lifestyles, strengthen social inclusion and develop an understanding of citizenship.

Delegates are expected to call on the European Union to widen the Barcelona targets (see notes) beyond the labour market to include all children and Families. The targets were set in 2002 and called on member states to provide more services for parents in paid employment.

Bronwen Cohen said: "A Scottish Government report just out finds that child poverty could be costing Scotland up to ¾ billion pounds, but the report also acknowledges that breaking the poverty cycle could result in 'incalculable long-term benefits'.

"Scotland has the opportunity to develop a new strategy for support for the early years that could break this cycle. The Scottish Government could be a trail blazer in the vital area of early years services. Its early years framework could ensure that services are delivered in a genuinely holistic way for children, following the recommendations of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and

Development's (OECD) Starting Strong II report and taking into account forthcoming recommendations by Unicef (Report Card 8).

"But Scotland shouldn't have to go it alone, which is why we are calling on the European Commission to help take the lead."

The event "Improving the well-being of young children in Europe: the role of early years services" is hosted by Scottish Labour MEP Catherine Stihler and organised by Eurochild in association with Unicef.

Catherine Stihler MEP said: "We need practical and sustainable goals and solutions in order to tackle child poverty at a Scottish, UK and Europe-wide level. This event will ensure an information exchange that is necessary in order to implement and change EU legislation to ensure it is as effective as possible."

Eva Jespersen, chief, Monitoring Social and Economic Policies, Unicef Innocenti Research Centre and John Bennett, John Bennett, Consultant on Unicef Innocenti Research Centre and co-author of the OECD report 'Starting Strong II' will both be speaking at the seminar in advance of the publication of Unicef Report Card 8 in May.

Later this week on April 10, 2008, Children in Europe will be launching a policy paper, 'Young children and their services: developing a European approach', which will recommend a more integrated and child-centred approach to early childhood education and care across Europe.

Children in Scotland is a founder member of Children in Europe and publishes the English language issue of the Children in Europe magazine.

For more information, and a copy of a briefing paper issued at the meeting, or the Children in Europe policy paper contact Sarah Burton: tel 0131 222 2411 email sburton@childreninscotland.org.uk

Notes for editors:

1. The Eurochild event, taking place at the European Parliament on Tuesday, 8th April, at 12 noon, will be chaired Chief Executive of Children Scotland, Bronwen Cohen, who is also the Chair of the Eurochild Early Years Thematic Working Group. The event is hosted by Catherine Stihler MEP.

2. The Barcelona targets: In March 2002, the Barcelona European Council acknowledged the importance of childcare in terms of growth and equal opportunities, calling on EU member states to "remove disincentives to female

labour force participation and strive, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 per cent of children between three years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33 per cent of children under three years of age”.

The Eurochild event will discuss how these targets now need revision. Extract from Eurochild briefing paper:

“Since the agreement of the Barcelona targets, developments both within member states and at an EU level now point to the need for a wider approach to be taken to this policy area. In fact, the Barcelona targets overlook many of the essential (qualitative) elements of sound early childhood policy, for example:

- The need to regard young children as citizens with rights to protection, infant health care, and early education and care services;
- The need to provide a social context in which early childhood services can be effective;
- The need to adopt an inclusive concept of services, in particular from pre-natal to 3 years;
- The need to engage parents in all aspects of rearing their children;
- The need to give attention to the training, pay and working conditions of staff, particularly in the childcare sector... “

3. Children in Europe is a magazine for everyone working with and for children from 0-10 and those interested in children’s issues. It is published simultaneously in 12 languages by a network of national magazines from across Europe. It aims to provide a forum for ideas, practice and information and contribute to the development of policy and practice at European and national levels. It is published in the UK by Children in Scotland with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Picture this, issue 14 of Children in Europe, was published on 17 March.

4. Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisation and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provision are of the best possible quality and able to meet the demands of a diverse society. For further information visit

www.childreninScotland.org.uk