

# Child poverty conference - 26 November 2009

## Round table Discussion: David Stanton Chair Indicators Sub Group

First let me take this opportunity to say how much I admire the Tarkis Report on Child Poverty that we have discussed today. It is thorough and balanced: no fact on child poverty is left unmentioned.

I have been asked to look forward and I start with a resolution of the EU Council on combating child poverty:

“The European Council asks the Member States to take necessary measures to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background.” *Presidency Conclusions – 23/24 March 2006*<sup>1</sup>

It is late 2009 and we need to note that we have no clear data to tell us if progress has been made to achieve this aspiration.

What is the likelihood of making progress in combating child poverty? I want to look at 4 specific areas where we should ask if this is where reductions in child poverty will be made.

- **Data and indicators:** Do we need more indicators and more data? I very much doubt if more indicators will have any effect on the poverty of any child in Europe. But there is one area where many speakers have underlined a big gap – children in institutional care. There is no data at an EU level. I think it would be wrong to wait for the perfect strictly comparable data set and we should not let the ideal be the enemy of the good enough. I have a concrete suggestion. The Roman Catholic Church has run many institutions for children in many if not all countries. I hope they keep records of what they do.
- **Transfers from Higher taxes on the Upper end of the Income distribution:** I doubt if this would generate enough income to make a difference unless it was a means of achieving a higher levels of tax across a much wider range of income. But with public sector deficits running at very high levels and public debt at unprecedented peace time levels, it is unrealistic to expect this to make a significant contribution over the next decade
- **Recovery from the recession:** The recovery will help many especially the new Member States who have been blown off course by this economic crisis. The need to study Nordic Countries and Slovenia and Cyprus to

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/89013.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/89013.pdf)

learn positive lessons but at the same time should understand why countries like Ireland and the United Kingdom can have very high average incomes high employment rates but also high levels child poverty.

- **Household formation:** We have had one very prominent factor that has appeared again and again in the factors associated with Child Poverty – lone parent households and the high likelihood of their being jobless households. We heard of Finland where the child poverty rate has increased 3 fold in a very short period and with it there has been a concomitant growth in the proportion of children in a lone parent household. We have not asked why there has been this growth: nor whether the very policies designed to combat child poverty are themselves contributing to the growth in lone parent households and therefore to child poverty. Unless we can find acceptable policies that increase the chances of children being brought up in two parent households no Member State is going to make a significant impact on reducing the numbers. If our sensibilities prevent us from tackling this issue, we will be condemned for leaving child poverty unchanged with only the rhetoric left to show we discussed the problem.

David Stanton