

‘Europe de l’Enfance’ considers children’s and young people’s rights

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More attention for appropriate participation by young people, more collaboration and scientific research and more resources for early childhood facilities. These topped the wish list of the experts at the youth conference ‘Europe de l’Enfance’. For three days, they focused on the new EU-strategy to promote and safeguard Children’s Rights and the various policy agendas in the area of child and youth policy and children’s rights.

At the conference in Antwerp, experts in the field of children’s and youth policy and children’s rights from various governments joined representatives of national, European and international NGOs.

They debated three important topics for the Belgian EU-presidency:

1. The European and international policy agenda in the field of children’s and youth policy and children’s rights.
2. The EU-strategy on the Rights of the Child which is slated for November 2010.
3. ‘Early childhood facilities’ (ECEC, Early Childhood Education and Care).

Policy agendas on children’s and youth policy and Children’s Rights

The participants at the conference jointly arrived at five conclusions:

- Children’s rights often overemphasise protection, youth policy often overemphasises participation. This distinction should be nuanced.
- There is a need for more scientific research in order to support the policy.
- There is a need for more collaboration between the European Union, the Council of Europe, the United Nations and also within the individual intergovernmental organisations.
- Childhood poverty cannot be solved through better support for the parents, but only through tackling the structural problems that cause poverty.
- Participation is more than consultation: children need to be involved in the policy with information that is appropriate for their age.

EU-strategy on the Rights of the Child

In anticipation of a new communication by the European Commission concerning the EU strategy on the Rights of the Child, the experts heard a report on the current state of preparations.

The experts in attendance felt it was most unfortunate that the consultation on the new strategy was not adapted for children. In addition, they also felt that the strategy should take a less protective approach and should devote more attention to participation.

The strategy should also make a clear distinction between different policy levels.

Early childhood facilities

The participants emphasised early childhood facilities, such as child care. They propose investing at least 1% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in early childhood facilities.

It is important that early childhood facilities are made accessible and are promoted for all children. However, parents must always be free to choose whether to use them or not.