

# FOCUS ON CHILDREN & FAMILIES



Strasbourg, 1 December 2003

**CS-Forum Participation (2003) 7 rev**  
**ENGLISH ONLY**

**Working Group on  
"Children, Democracy and Participation in Society"**

**3<sup>rd</sup> meeting**

**28 – 29 October 2003**

**Palais de l'Europe  
Strasbourg**

## **MEETING REPORT**

*Document prepared by the Secretariat  
Directorate General III – Social Cohesion  
Social Policy Department*

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The third meeting of the Working Group on Children, Democracy and Participation in Society took place on 28 – 29 October 2003 in Strasbourg. The meeting was opened by the Secretariat, who underlined the two main purposes of the meeting: first, to decide on how to proceed with the finalisation and distribution of the final products of the Working Group; and, second, to prepare a report to the sixth meeting of the Forum for Children and Families.

2. The Secretariat welcomed Dr KRANZL-NAGL, the Working Group's consultant from the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna, to the meeting.

3. The agenda was revised and adopted as shown in Appendix I to this report. The Working Group raised the question of policy recommendations, which had originally been listed as a separate agenda item, and decided to focus on the practical policy recommendations contained in the final products. The list of participants appears in Appendix II.

4. In opening this part of the meeting, Mrs KOWALCZYK-KEDZIORA, Secretary to the Working Group, stressed the formal link between the Working Group and the Forum, noting the overall priority of presenting products of quality to the Forum. She announced the planned debate on the right and access to education. She drew the Working Group's attention to the terms of reference, indicating that the Forum needs to explain its deliberate choices on the focus of its work.

5. Mrs KOWALCZYK-KEDZIORA informed the Working Group of recent developments in the field: there has been an increasing trend to focus on studies of family policy, rather than on children's individual rights. She stated that as of 2004 there will be more emphasis on the role of the child within the family. Thus, any evident limits or problems in studying such topics should be shared with the Forum. Mr FROSSARD further informed the Working Group that a Council of Europe conference on youth participation and sport will take place in 2004.

6. Mrs Mechthilde FUHRER, Administrator, Division on education for democratic citizenship and human rights education, updated the Working Group on the status of her programme. She stated that the programme is now in its second phase and that there a draft study on the participation of pupils has been completed. She recalled that 2003 has been named the Year of European Citizenship, and that links between related activities and the Working Group should be maximised.

7. The Secretariat drew the Working Group's attention to Recommendation (2002) 12 of the Committee of Ministers on education for democratic citizenship, and to two recent Council of Europe draft documents: *All-European Study on Policies for Education for Democratic Citizenship*, and *Synthesis of EDC Policies in Europe and the school - a democratic learning community: the all-European study on pupils' participation in school*.

## II. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY VISITS AND OVERALL CONCLUSIONS: DISCUSSION OF OVERALL REPORT

8. Mrs KOWALCZYK-KEDZIORA opened the discussion of the working documents CS-Forum Participation (2003) 4 and 5, by asking Working Group members to share their impressions on the study visits. Mrs VESTBY stated that the trips were essential for gathering information. Moreover, each trip had the added value of enhancing the status of the project, resulting in media attention in some cases. Ms MIKALOUSKAITE commented on the excellent organisation of the visits, and the usefulness of such field experience. However, she noted that there were some difficulties in the United Kingdom, due to initial mistrust. Ms TODOROVA referred to organisational problems. Mr ISMAYILOV affirmed that the study visits were indispensable for the preparation of the overall report. He emphasised the positive impact of the Council of Europe's recognition of the projects, which enhanced children's motivation to participate. Mr FROSSARD pointed out that the selection of countries with a national language that was spoken by a Working Group member was an advantage; the language factor facilitated access to both neutral and critical information. Ms NUNES DE ALMEIDA observed children's ability to provide high-quality information. Dr KRANZL-NAGL noted that the Working Group collected large amounts of information.

9. Mrs KOWALCZYK-KEDZIORA summarised the most important recommendations from the study visits:

- Trust of people is essential
- Visitors must show interest
- Visitors should interact with people at the project
- Projects require stable funding

The Secretariat acknowledged the work of the Working Group members. The Chair underlined the unique contribution of the members and the consultants.

10. The Group agreed to give more attention to the Council of Europe in the text, particularly to Committee of Ministers recommendations, the Revised European Social Charter and the Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights. In addition, the Group concurred that more information on central and eastern Europe should be included.

11. The Group further agreed to integrate more information on the ages of the children discussed, references to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and direct quotations from children.

12. The Group agreed that the key to the successful participation of children is that they were comfortable and happy.

13. Pursuant to agreements at the second meeting, members will send reports on study visits to local co-ordinators in all countries visited in order to check the factual content. The Working Group agreed to a final change: the title of the overall report would be rewritten as, "Children's participation in schools and local communities: It works!"

### **III. DRAFT FINAL PRODUCT OF THE WORKING GROUP: LEAFLET**

14. The Working Group agreed that the leaflet would be produced in English, French and Russian. The Working Group decided to change the title of the leaflet is to: “Children’s participation in schools and local communities: How to make it work!”

15. Ms GUIDIKOVA, Administrator for Integrated Projects in the Private Office of the Secretary General, introduced herself to the Working Group. She stated that a compendium of good practices was under preparation, within the framework of the Integrated Project on Making democratic institutions work. She indicated preference for neutral language in public information materials, clarifying that ambiguous terminology should be avoided.

16. Ms GUIDIKOVA, in referring to the Integrated Projects on Responses to violence in democratic societies in everyday life, suggested that the active involvement of children was one way to prevent violence in schools. The Working Group agreed that more attention should be given to the interrelated issues of security, solidarity and community, which reflect member states’ priorities.

17. The Group took note of the fact that the leaflet was essentially based on the study visits, rather than scholarly literature. Members agreed to not incorporate further information from the compilation of 68 projects (CS-Forum Participation (2002) 4), recalling that many of the projects were not relevant to participation.

18. The Group agreed to include more information on residential care.

19. The Working Group discussed the remaining questions of layout and photos. The format for the leaflet would be A5 or smaller. Feedback from national coordinators and Working Group members would be used in selecting photos. The Secretariat is to provide relevant web site links, with due attention to providing details of long-term value, i.e. avoiding “dead links”.

### **IV. FAMILY**

20. The Working Group concluded that CS-Forum Participation (2003) 2 would be ready for dissemination, on the basis of the following rationale: first, the document is mainly bibliographical in value; second, its distribution should be unrestricted; and, third, it should confront the facts of the Working Group’s experience of the difficulty of exploring family aspects of participation.

### **V. SELECTION OF DOCUMENTS AND POSSIBLE DISSEMINATION OF THE WORKING GROUP’S FINDINGS AND WRITTEN MATERIALS**

21. The Working Group agreed to include the Internet as part of the dissemination strategy, and agreed that pending approval by the Forum that the following documents would be distributed at the same time: CS-Forum Participation (2003) 2, CS-Forum Participation (2003) 5 and CS-Forum Participation (2003) 6. The Working Group approved the following distribution list:

1. Council of Europe member states
2. Council of Europe Information Offices
3. the 68 institutions that responded to the call
4. all youth participants in the Forum, 2001-2003
5. ad-hoc distribution by Working Group members

## **VI. STRATEGY FOR PRESENTATION OF WORKING GROUP'S FINDINGS AND ACHIEVEMENTS TO THE FORUM ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

22. Working Group members present at the Forum will summarise their findings on the importance of the participation of children, incorporating the direct involvement of the youth participants.

23. The Secretary noted that in addition to the debate, a possible theatrical performance was planned. The Working Group welcomed this idea, stating that it could facilitate a positive atmosphere, with the condition that participation would be voluntary.

24. Noting the inconsistent representation of the Working Group at the Forum in the past, it was agreed to increase representation to the next meeting of the Forum with awareness of time and money constraints.

## **VII. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

25. No items were raised.

## AGENDA

- I. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the draft agenda
- II. Findings of the study visits and overall conclusions: discussion of overall report
- III. Draft final product of the Working Group: leaflet
- IV. Family
- V. Selection of documents and possible dissemination of the Working Group's findings and written materials
- VI. Strategy for presentation of Working Group's findings and achievements to the Forum on Children and Families
- VII. Any other business

APPENDIX II

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*(Apologised)*

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