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Peer Review: Early Intervention and prevention in family support

Leading children's experts from across Europe met in Belfast last week to participate in a high level seminar on improving the quality of life of children and young people. The three day seminar on *Early Intervention and Prevention in Family Support* was organised by Eurochild in the context of its thematic working group on family and parenting support and inspired by the EC model of peer reviewing the social protection and inclusion strategy. Four member organisations participated in the review - Children in Northern Ireland, which hosted the event, National Network for Children, Bulgaria, Nobody's Children Foundation, Poland and Action for Children, Wales, UK. They each presented examples of inspiring practice that were selected from twelve case studies included in Eurochild's *Compendium of Inspiring Practice* to be launched at the [Think Parents](#) conference at The Hague, 10-11 October 2012. Two pan-European organisations - Eurofound and the Council of Europe - and a representative from the University of Dortmund, Germany, contributed as 'stakeholders'. A representative from the European Commission, Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion also participated. An Independent Expert in family support steered the debate and will provide a collective report of countries reviewed, including a recommended framework for evaluating good practice that will justify its promotion at EU and national levels. The review was attended by Government representatives from the Czech Republic who wish to invest in preventive services for families as part of the reform of their child care system

The event also provided the host country with an opportunity to showcase Northern Ireland as an 'Early Intervention' region and the opening session, supported by Ministers and senior officials from the Northern Ireland Administration, was devoted to this. In his opening speech, Minister Jonathan Bell said "There is a lot of expertise in the room and we couldn't be dealing with more important issues...An event such as this highlights the importance of European countries working together, a principle acknowledged at the highest level in Northern Ireland...". Minister Bell has specific responsibility for children in Northern Ireland and takes a special interest in children's welfare, especially those most vulnerable. He stressed the importance of having the right policies, structures and funds in place to address identified needs.

Eurochild's Secretary General, Jana Hainsworth, said "Family and parenting support can dramatically improve children's outcomes by improving parent's confidence and overall well-being. It's important that policies and practice in family support build on what works and we constantly look to improve through evidence base and learning. This is at the heart of social innovation. We believe that events such as this are an important opportunity to share experience and bring new ideas. It will also provide evidence to back-up our push for better family support services."

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