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Dear Readers of Families International,

This issue contains the proceeding of an International Forum, which was held during a Full Committee Meeting on May 16th to observe the International Day of Families (IDF) 2011, with the theme: 'Confronting Family Poverty and Social Exclusion', in the Vienna International Centre of the United Nations. The Message of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, dealing with family poverty and social exclusion is also included, as well as the link to a background note and further information about the theme of the IDF 2011. The text of a Statement submitted to the Forum by Renata Kaczmarek, Focal Point, United Nations Programme on the Family, Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, who through prior commitments in New York, was unable to personally attend the meeting, is also included.

The text and statistics of the presentation of a study which was carried out by a research team from the University of Graz in Austria, dealing with language and reading abilities in children with a migration background is also to be found inside.

The United Nations Programme on the Family organised an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) in New York from June 1st to 3rd which the Chairperson and Secretary of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family attended. Included in this issue is the text of the Recommendations which resulted from the meeting. A link to further information on the EGM is also available.

Information and Statements from Member Organisations of the Committee are also included. Readers of Families International, who are not members of the Committee, but who perhaps would like to inform the readers of FI with regard to their organisation, as a resource of family well-being, or share information about issues regarding families generally, are cordially welcome to submit a text to the editor at: peter.crowley@sbg.ac.at There are over three hundred members on the list of readers of FI, who are informed by email when the next issue is online.

With kind regards,

Dr. phil. Peter Crowley

(Editor)

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News from the Vienna Committee of the Family

FULL COMMITTEE MEETING
&
INTERNATIONAL FORUM

UNITED NATIONS
VIENNA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
Monday May 16th 2011

An International Forum was held during a Full Committee Meeting on May 16th to observe the International Day of Families 2011, with the theme: 'Confronting Family Poverty and Social Exclusion', in the Vienna International Centre of the United Nations. After the meeting was opened by the Chairperson of the Committee and the participants welcomed, the Message of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, dealing with family poverty and social exclusion was read out.



UNITED NATIONS

NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES
15 May 2011

Far too many families endure chronic, punishing hardship. Lacking jobs and the means to make ends meet, adults are unable to provide adequate nutrition for children, leaving them with lifelong physical and cognitive scars. Other family members can suffer neglect and deprivation. Poverty continues to claim the lives of hundreds of thousands of women each year in childbirth.

Social exclusion is often at the root of the problem. Discrimination and unequal access to social services deprive families of the opportunity to plan a better future for their children.

Certain types of families are at particular risk, including large families, single-parent families, families where the main breadwinners are unemployed or suffer from illness or disability, families with members who suffer discrimination based on sexual orientation, and families living in urban slums or rural areas. Indigenous and migrant families, as well as those living through conflict or unrest, are also on the front lines of marginalization and deprivation.

A number of governments have adopted family-focused strategies, including cash transfer programmes, child allowances, tax incentives and specific gender- and child-sensitive social protection measures. An expansion of these policies, which can improve the nutrition and educational status of children, can help end cycles of poverty that persist across generations.

On this International Day of Families, let us resolve to support families as they nurture the young, care for the old and foster strong communities built on tolerance and dignity for all.

A background note and further information, is available at:
<http://social.un.org/index/Family/InternationalObservances/InternationalDayofFamilies/2011.aspx>

STATEMENT

A Statement was submitted to the Forum by Renata Kaczmarek, Focal Point, United Nations Programme on the Family, Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, who through prior commitments in New York, was unable to personally attend the meeting.

International Day of Families, 15 May 2011
Confronting Family Poverty and Social Exclusion
International Forum, Vienna NGO Committee on the Family,
Vienna International Centre, 16 May 2011

Statement by Renata Kaczmarek, Focal Point, United Nations Programme on the Family, Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat

New York, 15 May 2011



Juehan Wu, USA

The International Day of Families has been celebrated since 1994, the International Year of the Family (IYF) itself. Over the years, the celebration of the Day, on the 15th of May every year, has helped to raise awareness of economic and social trends affecting families. The annual observances turned our attention to challenges faced by families, such as poverty, homelessness or HIV/AIDS. Recently, the effects of migration and ageing on families have been examined and several commemorations of the Day focused on families as agents and beneficiaries of development and contributors to social cohesion. Such annual observances have contributed to recognizing the importance of families in development and the need to focus on families in overall development efforts.

This year's theme of the International Day of Families: "Confronting Family Poverty and Social Exclusion" reflects the importance of family-focused strategies and programmes to do away with destitution and vulnerability. It is important to keep in mind that poverty should not be equated with a lack of income alone but is often due to the lack of access to basic social services, including health care and education. Families living in poverty not only are unable to adequately provide for their children. They are often living on the margins of societies, excluded and without a voice. Exclusion, often caused by dis-

crimination and prejudice may in fact be among the causes of poverty endured by families and individuals. That is why both poverty and social exclusion must be tackled simultaneously if we are to do away with both.

Focusing directly on families to tackle poverty and exclusion is especially important when we consider that different types of families need special assistance. For instance families with one bread-winner, those with many children or those with family members suffering from a disability may be especially vulnerable and need support.

Similarly, families may go through difficult times and require support at specific points in time, for instance at the start of family life, or when they take care of young children and older family members, often at the same time.

From a developmental perspective, most of the Millennium Development Goals, especially those focusing on poverty reduction, education of children and reduction in maternal mortality are difficult to accomplish unless the strategies aiming at their achievement focus directly on families. As most national policies and programmes have a direct and indirect impact on family well-being, they should be designed and implemented taking into account the needs of families and challenges their face.

It is reassuring to see that many Governments actively pursue family-friendly policies. In numerous developing countries family-focused social transfer programmes provide income to families as long as children attend school and undergo regular health check-ups and immunizations. Such programmes often centre on children in order to prevent the intergenerational transfer of poverty. They have been found to result in better nutrition for children, improved school attendance and reduced child labour.

Similarly, family-focused social protection programmes proved to be effective in shielding families from negative effects of economic shocks, reducing the vulnerabilities and preventing them from slipping further into poverty.

In some cases cash transfers and social protection programmes are accompanied by assistance to families in finding employment, getting access to health-care, helping with education expenses and offering subsidies for affordable housing. In fact, research shows that the very success of cash transfer and social protection programmes depends on the adequate provision of basic social services, especially for the most vulnerable families.

Report of the Secretary-General on the Follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond (A/66/62 – E/2011/4).

This year's International Day of Families celebration starts a series of Days about to focus on specific priority areas in preparations for the Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2014. Those priority areas, relating to the three pillars of social development as defined at the World Summit for Social Development, held at Copenhagen in 1995, are:

- poverty eradication: confronting family poverty and social exclusion
- full employment and decent work: ensuring work-family balance social integration: advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity.¹

It is hoped that relating the priority areas of the Social Summit to the issues of concern to families will lead to better policies focusing on the very needs of families, so necessary for development efforts to succeed.

At the international level, the preparations for the Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family will involve careful analysis of the themes mentioned above. The topics will be discussed at International Day Observances and Expert Group Meetings. Background papers by experts on the issues will be commissioned as well. The outcomes of such meetings as well as research and analysis

provided in background papers will result in concrete recommendations to Governments, private sector and civil society on policies aiming at benefiting families.

At the regional level, it is hoped that with the support of Governments, regional partners, civil society organizations and academic institutions, regional meetings can be held to focus on issues of concern to families particular to each region.

At national levels, Governments will be encouraged to review and assess their family policies and share good practices in this area. It is also expected that national events with the support of civil society will be held to emphasize the importance of focusing on families in overall development efforts.

To help with the preparations for the Twentieth Anniversary and in line with the objectives of the International Year of the Family, civil society organizations may consider focusing on:

- raising awareness of family issues
- stimulating efforts to respond to problems affecting families
- improving collaboration among national and international non-governmental organizations in support of families

Raising awareness of family issues goes beyond the observance of the International Day of Families every year. More efforts are needed to showcase the importance of family functions, including those of economic provision and building of socially integrated societies.

Stimulating of efforts to respond to problems affecting families involves increased efforts to respond to challenges faced by families. Good practices in this area should be highlighted and shared. The work of family-centered NGOs could be showcased in a publication similar to that of *Documenting Contributions of Civil Society to the Well-being of Families*, published by the Vienna Committee on the Family for the Tenth Anniversary of the IYF.

Improving collaboration among national and international civil society organizations in support of families is also needed so that family perspective in policymaking is communicated to Governments and the private sector in a coherent manner.

The Vienna NGO Committee on the Family can certainly be of assistance with the preparations for the Twentieth Anniversary of the IYF. The civil society organizations you represent play an important role helping families overcome poverty and social exclusion, ensure work-family balance and contribute to social integration. You are instrumental to carrying out community based programmes impacting family well-being. As noted above, your actions can be vital to raise awareness of the importance of focusing on family-based solutions and stimulate action by Gov-

¹ See E/CN.5/2011/L.6/Rev.1 to be adopted by ECOSOC in July 2011

ernments and the private sector to respond to challenges faced by families in Europe and beyond.

Over the years, the UN Programme on the Family has enjoyed close cooperation with the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family. I am very happy that the Committee will be well-represented at the upcoming Expert Group Meeting on Assessing Family Policies

in New York. It is a privilege to continue this fruitful cooperation in preparations for the Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

Thank you all for your efforts to improve the well-being of families around the world. The UN Programme on the Family counts on your continuing support.

PRESENTATION OF A STUDY

A presentation of a study was made by a research team from the University of Graz in Austria, dealing with language and reading abilities in children with a migration background.

The interdependence between language and reading abilities in children with German as first or second language: can supporting language acquisition prevent school failure in children with a migration background?

Barbara Gasteiger-Klicpera, Sabine Oswald, Susanne Schwab & Elfriede Ederer
University of Graz

After the critical results of the 'Programme for International Student Assessment', more commonly known as the PISA study, of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) investigation concerning the reading competence of adolescents in German-speaking European countries, an intensive process of reflection in search of specific reasons for these findings was started. The results raised important questions to all persons interested in educational achievement in the countries concerned.

MAIN RESULTS OF THE PISA INVESTIGATION

Similar to the previous assessments, PISA 2009 covered reading, mathematics and science, with the major focus on *reading literacy*. Reading literacy is defined as "an individual's capacity to: understand, use, reflect on and engage with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society" (OECD, 2010a, p. 14). Students also responded to a questionnaire, which covered central contextual variables such as linguistic and family background, reading activities or reading engagement. Additional supporting information was gathered from school authorities. 67 countries and economies including

all 34 OECD member countries, participated in the PISA 2009 assessment (OECD, 2010a).

Student performances in reading literacy

The overall results show that Korea and Finland are the highest-performing OECD countries, with mean scores of 539 and 536 points. The partner economy Shanghai-China, however, outperforms them by a significant margin, with a mean score of 556. Hong Kong-China (533), Singapore (526), Canada (524), New Zealand (521), Japan (520) and Australia (515) belong to the top-performing countries or economies in reading literacy as well. The Netherlands (508), Belgium (506), Norway (503), Estonia (501), Switzerland (501), Poland (500), Iceland (500), and Liechtenstein (499) also perform above the OECD mean score of 493, while the average scores of the United States, Sweden, Ireland, France, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Portugal as well as Germany (497) and the partner economy Chinese Taipei are close to the OECD mean (OECD, 2010b). Concerning Austria, students attain a mean score of 470 points. With that result, they achieve 23 points less than the OECD mean of 493 points. Within the OECD countries, this performance means range 31 (Schwantner & Schreiner, 2010). Mexico, the lowest performing OECD country, has a mean performance of 425. This signifies that the gap between the highest- and the lowest-performing OECD country is 114 points: the

equivalent of more than two years of formal schooling. However, the gap between the highest- and lowest-performing partner country or economy (Shanghai-China with a mean performance of 556

and Kyrgyzstan with 314 points) is even larger, with 242 score points. This equates to more than six formal school years (OECD, 2010b) (see figure 1).

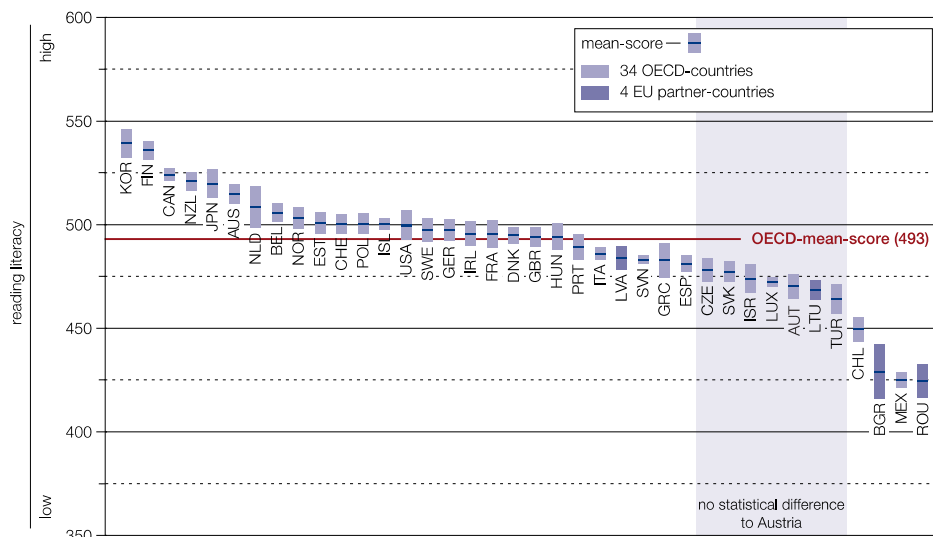


Figure 1: Student performances in reading literacy (mean scores). Source: Schwantner & Schreiner, 2010, p. 18 (translated by the authors)

With regard to *gender differences*, in the PISA 2009 reading assessment, girls outperform boys in every participating country or economy. Among the OECD countries, this gender gap averages 39 PISA score points – equivalent to almost one year of schooling. Furthermore, between 2000 and 2009, this gender gap in reading literacy did not narrow in any country or economy (OECD, 2010b).

At-risk and leading groups in reading literacy

In Pisa 2009, the difficulty range of tasks enables the description of seven levels in reading literacy: Level 1b is the lowest level, followed by level 1a, level 2, level 3 etc. up to level 6. Students performing within the range of level 1b are capable to solve tasks of this proficiency level, whereas they are not able to successfully complete tasks at higher levels. Level 6 represents tasks that place the greatest demands on reading skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students (OECD, 2010c).

Students of the highest reading competence level 5 and 6 are therefore the leading groups in reading. Students at these levels are able to retrieve the relevant information out of a text. They can critically evaluate information and build hypotheses drawing on specialized knowledge; they know how to develop a detailed understanding of a text whose content or form is unfamiliar, and they are able to understand concepts being contrary to expectations (OECD, 2010c).

As you can see in figure 2, among the OECD countries, on average, 7.6% of students attain Level 5 and 6. In Singapore, New Zealand, Finland and Shanghai-China the percentage is more than twice the OECD average. However, in 16 countries (e.g. in Romania or Mexico) less than 1% of students reach Level 5 (OECD, 2010b).

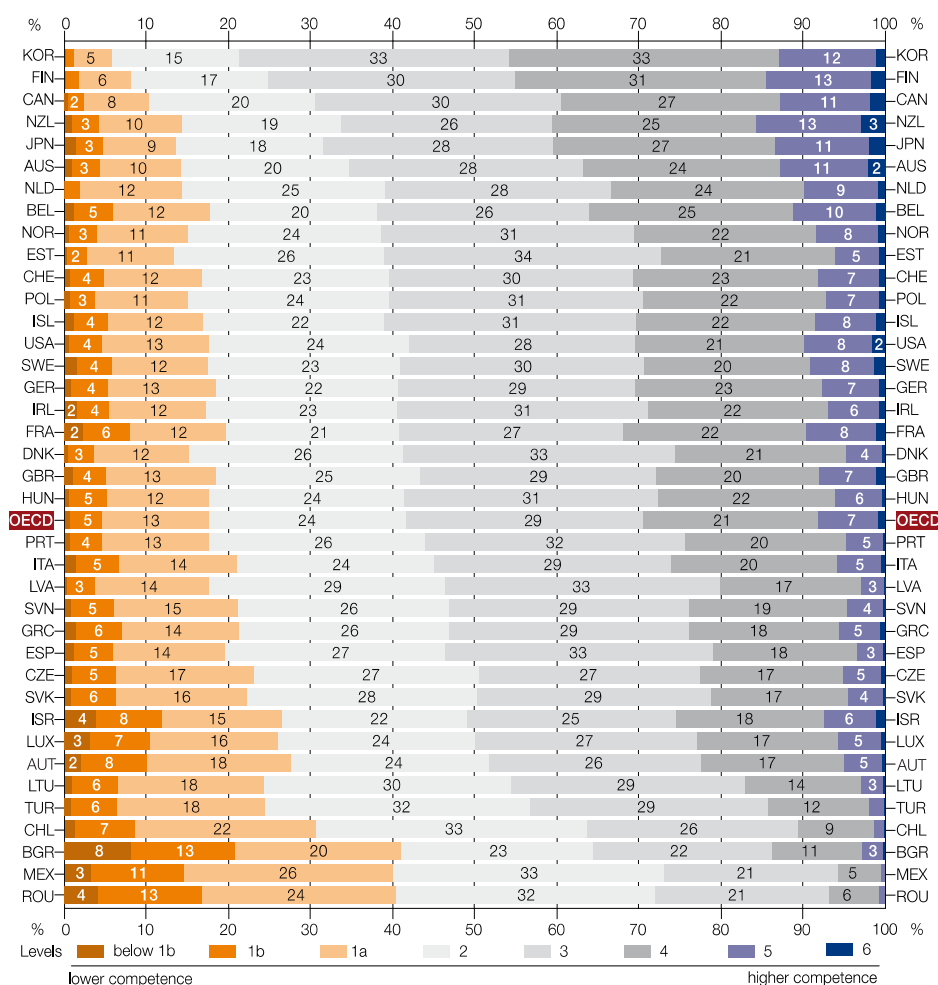


Figure 3: Percentage distribution on the reading competency levels. Source: Schwantner & Schreiner, 2010, p. 20 (adapted by the authors)

On the other side of the proficiency spectrum, on average, one out of five students (about 19%) belongs to the at-risk group in reading literacy (figure 2). Reading literacy of students of this group does not exceed level 2. “Level 2 is considered as a baseline level of proficiency, at which students begin to demonstrate the reading skills that will enable them to participate effectively and productively in life” (OECD, 2010b, p. 6). Level 1 means that simple reading tasks can be solved, e.g. the finding of separated information or the main topic of a text. Students who do not reach Level 2 have difficulties in reading comprehension which would allow them to adapt longer texts independently and comprehensively, too (OECD, 2010b, 2010c).

The proportion of students belonging to this at-risk group differs strongly across countries, from less than one in ten to the majority of students in some other countries or economies. Even in some OECD countries – including the German-speaking – tackling such low performances remains a major challenge (OECD, 2010b). Austria, for example, has almost five times as many at-risk students in compari-

son to Korea. 2 % of Austrian students show extreme low performances and do not even reach level 1b, 8% of them reach Level 1b and 18% Level 1a. In sum, 28% belong to the at-risk group in reading literacy (Schwantner & Schreiner, 2010). In some countries, this number reaches about or even more than 40% (OECD, 2010b).

Changes in students’ performance regarding reading literacy since 2000

The design of PISA enables each participating country to monitor changes in the learning outcomes over time. These changes show the success of the educational systems in developing knowledge and skills of 15-year-old students (OECD, 2010a).

Some countries and economies have indeed seen impressive improvements in their performances since 2000, sometimes representing or even exceeding the equivalent of an average school year’s progress (about 40 points). Some of these states have been catching up from relatively low performance levels, some others have been progressing further from already high levels (OECD, 2010b).

Among the OECD countries, Chile, Israel, Poland, Portugal, Korea, Hungary and Germany as well as the partner countries Peru, Albania, Indonesia, Latvia, Liechtenstein and Brazil all improved their performance in reading literacy between 2000 and 2009. Even so, the proportion of students with low reading competence in some countries, for example

in Germany, as aforementioned is still at a high level (18.5%). However, in other countries, the performance declined: in Ireland, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Australia as well as in Austria, but also in the highest-performing countries Finland, New Zealand or Canada (OECD, 2010b).

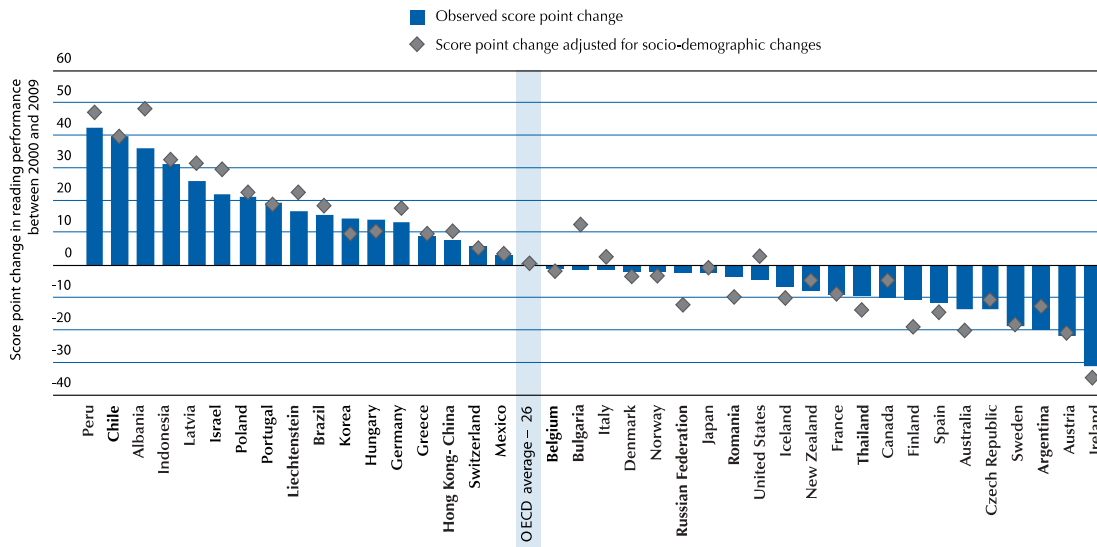


Figure 4: Changes in students' performances in reading literacy since 2000 (score point change). Source: OECD, 2010d, p. 49 (slightly modified by the authors)

In many countries, the improvements can be explained by a high reduction of the number of students below the reading competence level 2 (e.g. in Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Latvia). This signalizes progress towards greater equity in learning outcomes. In sum, OECD countries narrowed the gap in the average scores between their highest- and lowest-performing students over the past decade (OECD, 2010b).

Considering the socio-economic changes, in some countries the improvements or declines in performance would be marginal higher (see figure 3). PISA 2009 evidences that in some countries progress in reading performance could be achieved even in a relatively short time. In this context, the prosperity of a country is of minor importance. This result is also underlined by the fact that the best-performing countries in the 2009 assessment are Shanghai-China and, within the OECD, Korea – showing a GDP per capita below the OECD average. This underlines that low national income can be compatible with high educational performance. Thus two countries of similar prosperity can gain very different educational results. The improvements are therefore superficially based on differences between the educational systems, on improvements in quality and/or on an increase of resources, respectively (Baumert, 2011).

Performances in reading literacy and social background

In most countries or economies, reading ability depends considerably on the socio-economic background of the particular child's family and the correlating familial structure and features (e.g. migration background, level of formation, professional status, cultural resources, parental support, parents' engagement with their children's reading life etc.) (Baumert, Stanat & Waterman, 2006; Baumert, 2011). Among OECD countries, the link between social background and academic performance is close, especially in the German-speaking states Germany and Austria. Pisa 2009 evidences that a student from a more socio-economically advantaged background (among the top one seventh) outperforms a student from an average background by 38 score points in reading (this means an advance of about one school year). On average, 14% of the differences in the reading performance within each country are explained by differences in students' socio-economic background. However, in the majority of OECD states, the effect of the schools' economic, social and cultural status on students' performance in reading literacy outweighs the individual's socio-economic background. In some countries like Japan, Israel, Belgium or Germany, the performance

gap between two students with similar socio-economic background, one attending a school with an average socio-economic background, the other attending a school with an advantaged social background, equates, on average, to more than one year of education (OECD, 2010b).

Indeed, most of the students who perform poorly in PISA are from socio-economically disadvantaged families. Nevertheless, some peers from similar backgrounds achieve excellent results. This underlines the possibility to overcome socio-economic barriers. For example, in Canada, Finland, Japan, Korea and the partner economies Hong Kong and Shanghai-China, students tend to perform well regardless of their own socio-economic background or the attended school (OECD, 2010b). This evidences again the compatibility of low national income with high educational performance. In these countries or economies, educational systems seem to succeed in balancing the differences in the abilities of students which vary with the social background and the out-of-school possibilities of support (Baumert, 2011). Pisa 2009 reconfirms that school systems that seek to fulfil different students' needs through a high level of differentiation between institutions, grade levels and classes (e.g. an early selection based on the students' abilities, the transfer of weak or disruptive students out of school, numerous repeating of grades) have not been successful in improving their

overall results, rather they show below-average and more socially unequal performances (OECD, 2010b).

Performances in reading literacy depending on the ethnic background

Across OECD countries, there are some countries with a high gap in the performances of students with and without a migration background. Students with a migration background are one of those groups at high risk to develop reading problems in countries like Germany, Sweden, Belgium, France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and especially in Austria (figure 4). With a gap of 68 points, Austria is even one of the three OECD countries with the highest differences in reading performance between students with German as a first or second language. In Germany, this value is 49 points (Schwantner & Schneider, 2010). Children with German as a second language often grow up in educationally disadvantaged families with a lack of cultural and economic resources (Baumert et al., 2006; Baumert, 2011). But even by keeping constant the socio-economic state, this value remains relatively high among OECD countries. Therefore, poor language proficiency is discussed as one of the most important predictors for later school failure or school success in children with German as a second language (Baumert et al., 2006).

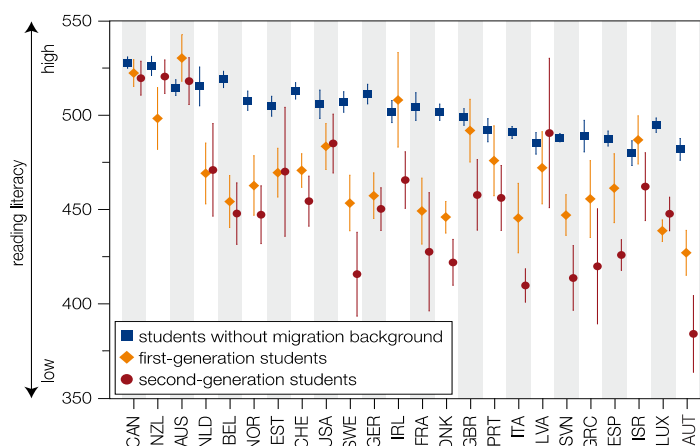


Figure 5: Performances in reading literacy depending on the ethnic background. Source: Schwantner & Schreiner, 2010, p. 44 (adapted by the authors)

As you can see in figure 4, the first-generation students – those who were born outside the country of assessment and having foreign-born parents, too – score worst. Among OECD countries, they score, on average, 52 score points below students without an immigrant background. Nevertheless, the high-performing countries New Zealand, Canada, Australia or Hong Kong, which have a high proportion of students with a migration background (20-40%), show that a high proportion of immigrant students does not inevitably lower the mean performance of the country or economy concerned (OECD, 2010b).

Despite the high number of students with low performance in reading literacy and the close interdependence with the socio-economic status as well as the social and ethnic background, it has to be considered that these facts cause further effects splaying in different areas of competence. These factors may arise in problems of transition to the labour market, in long-time disadvantages and a heightened risk for poverty – generally, in a limitation of the chances of participation. So far, the educational systems have not been very successful in reducing social disparities or in providing approximately equal opportunities for all children. Moreover, it has to be

considered that children, by the time they start school, have very different learning preconditions, depending on the social background (Baumert, 2011).

Language learning interventions in pre-school children: Evaluation of the “Sag mal was (tell me something) – Language Skills Training”

Concerning the German-speaking European countries, the deficiency in knowledge of the German language, regarding lexis (vocabulary), semantics (meaning) and grammar, is listed as one important reason for the interdependence between reading abilities and the social background (Baumert et al., 2006). As there is a strong interrelation between reading and language abilities (Snowling & Hulme, 2005), fostering of language competencies, especially in pre-school children, became an important objective. Especially for those students with a migration background, intensive and systematic contact with the German language is seen as a central factor to establish favourable preconditions for a further educational career. Also for children from unprivileged families and in precarious situations, systematic supporting efforts are indicated to provide equal opportunities for educationally disadvantaged children (Baumert, 2011).

Lately, almost every state, city and town in Germany has developed programmes to enhance children's language abilities. These programmes are financially supported by several different institutions: trusts, communities, provincial governments and federal ministries. One of the largest programmes implemented state-wide was „Sag' mal was – Language Skills Training for Pre-school Children“, funded by the Baden Württemberg-Foundation. The aim of this programme, which is carried out in day-care facilities and pre-schools, is to help children – particularly (but not exclusively) those belonging to ethnic minorities – to learn German, applying intensive training methods. The training is performed in small groups of six to twelve children for the period of one kindergarten year using different concepts and methods. The specific instructional arrangement depends on the kindergarten teachers. Most of them have attended a brief further training in language education.

The aim of the evaluation was to discover the impact of this programme to enhance language abilities in pre-school children with German as a first or second language.

The sample consisted of 1159 children, of which 864 (74.5%) showed poor language proficiency. 295 (25.5%) children formed the comparison groups. The children were selected by their kindergarten teachers for participation in the intervention programme because of linguistic deficits. The gender ratio was relatively well-balanced: 633 (54.6%) boys and 526 (45.4%) girls.

The children of the total sample showed approximately 20 different first languages including German (633), Turkish (201), and Russian (65), to refer to the most common. 467 (40.3%) of the children were monolingual; 685 children (59.1%) came from multilingual families. Lastly, in order to obtain a representative sample, the

kindergartens were spread over various regions as follows: City 348 (30%), Towns 384 (33.1%) and Countryside 427 (36.8%).

The evaluation shows that the children's competencies increased over the intervention period in all tested areas: phonological working memory, syntax and semantics. The age of the children and their starting capabilities are relevant to the progress in achievement. Younger children and children with lower starting capabilities demonstrate a greater increase.

Furthermore, results reveal a progress of language competencies in children with poor language proficiency in comparison to children with good language proficiency, irrespective of whether they were in the intervention group or not. There is no evidence for the effects of the intervention; neither for children with poor nor for children with good language abilities.

In addition, the results show a difference between competencies in mono- and multilingual children. Monolingual children had, on average, better grammatical abilities (this means a higher performance in the sentence memory; however, semantic and lexical abilities are relevant for the sentence memory, too). In contrast, multilingual children were better at applying their phonological working memory. This confirmed the assumed theory that the two tested groups are distinct from each other.

Concerning the predictors of later reading ability, results reveal that the best predictors of oral reading at the end of Year 1 are (nonverbal) intelligence and the Sentence Memory, especially for children with German as a second language. It may be that these children depend more on the verbal instruction of the teacher and therefore receptive language proficiency is more important for them. Otherwise they cannot follow the teaching instruction and have difficulties in successfully developing their reading and writing skills. For children with German as a first language, this may not be so important.

Summary and conclusions

First, we need to refer back to the critical results of the PISA investigation concerning the reading competencies. They show that, in the German-speaking countries, there are an extremely high proportion of students failing the international minimum standards at the end of compulsory education. Among OECD countries, one out of five students (about 19%) belongs to the at-risk group in reading literacy. In this context the high dependence of reading ability on the socio-economic background of the particular child's family has to be considered. These disparities are intensified by the social background of the schools. Moreover, in most OECD countries students with migration background are at high risk of developing reading problems due to their low socio-economic status but also due to their poor language proficiency in the second language (Baumert et al., 2006; Baumert, 2011; OECD, 2010b; Schwantner & Schreiner, 2010).

As there is a strong interrelation between reading and language abilities (Snowling & Hulme, 2005), fostering

language competencies, especially in pre-school children, became an important objective.

The results of the evaluation of the “Sag mal was (tell me something) – Language Skills Training for Pre-School children” show that further language training programmes should begin as early as possible and be appropriate to the children’s starting abilities. It seems necessary to focus training programmes on different aspects, depending on whether the programmes are aimed at children with German as a first versus second language. Despite that, the starting capabilities and the age of the children and, therefore, the adequacy of the linguistic input of the kindergarten teachers have to be considered. Interventions should allow an intensive and individualized approach in small groups. Language support should be embedded in daily situations and build on the individual experiences of the child. The children have to be encouraged to use frequent, extensive and complex speech. Moreover, a temporal extension of the language training surpassing one year of kindergarten is highly recommended. And as the significant difference between the achievement of the first and the second cohort show, the experience as well as the practical knowledge in enhancing language skills of the training personal is revealed to be a significant factor to positively impact the learning experience. Specific knowledge of the intercultural background of the child and a pronounced sensitivity to the parents’ concerns is required as well. In sum, an intensive qualification of the training teachers is therefore strongly required.

The results of the PISA investigation show that the language and reading abilities of a child are closely linked with the socio-economic status of the particular child’s family and the correlating familial structure and process traits (e.g. migration background, level of formation, parental support). Therefore, the importance of early support in parental home and the concept of *family literacy* must be highlighted. First, the interactions and

especially the diversity of language in the child’s family influence the verbal abilities and, consequently, literacy in a positive way. In addition, the familial learning environment has to be considered. This means both the availability of written material as well as a positive attitude towards reading. Finally, the familial social and emotional climate is regarded to be of significant relevance for language skills as well as literacy. One of the few studies in this context with underprivileged and poor families (Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001) revealed that particularly encouragement and emotional warmth influence the learning preconditions as well as the expressive language in a positive way. The influence of family literacy even remains stable considering the formal education of the mother (Klicpera, Schabmann & Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2010).

Moreover, parental reading aloud of stories to the children is of significant relevance for later reading ability: it extends the active vocabulary, understanding for language as well as understanding of text structure and composition of texts. In this context, parent-child interaction is of great importance: joined dialogs about the text, explanations or linkage with prior and own experiences have a more positive effect on language acquisition and literacy than *simple* reading aloud. In this regard, the quality of the parent-child relationship and the emotional attachment has to be taken into consideration as well (Klicpera et al., 2010).

Parental support has to be regarded as an important predictor for later educational success. With regard to children with a migration background or from educationally disadvantaged families and in precarious family situations, it needs to be pointed out that parents require information about the relevance of multilingualism and their own possibilities to support their children in language acquisition. In sum, an intensification of the cooperation with parents is urgently required.

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News from the United Nations



UNITED NATIONS

NATIONS UNIES

**Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
Division for Social Policy and Development**

Recommendations for relevant stakeholders

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting,
New York
1 – 3 June 2011**

**“Assessing family policies:
Confronting family poverty and social exclusion
&
Ensuring work-family balance**

**Convened as part of the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the
Family, 2014**

Family policy development and assessment

- ◆ Apply a family-centred perspective to policy decisions by routinely asking how families are affected by issues, in what ways they contribute to them, and whether involving families in the response would result in better solutions.
- ◆ Establish at the national level a specific agency, organization, or governmental body with official responsibility for: (a) designing, evaluating and monitoring family policies; (b) analyzing how families affect and are affected by policy; (c) promoting families as a priority for study, investment, partnership, and political action.
- ◆ Develop social policies focusing on the whole family unit rather than only on individual family members.
- ◆ Ensure that family policies are sensitive to regional and socio-cultural variations within and across nation states.
- ◆ Recognize that the achievement of Millennium Development Goals require an explicit attention to family context and content.
- ◆ Include family-focused strategies in poverty reduction and other national frameworks for development.
- ◆ Define policy aims prior to the assessment of family-focused policies.
- ◆ Collect more systematic national and local data on the implementation of family policies and indicators of family policy outcomes.
- ◆ Develop and disseminate a comprehensive and flexible set of performance measures based on these data to monitor the achievements of Member States in family policy development; increasing child- and family well-being; eradicating family poverty and ensuring work-family balance. This is crucial for the understanding and evaluation of policies and can provide important policy lessons.

- ◆ Communicate with policymakers about the value of investing in family policies by focusing on the contribution families make to society. Focusing on families is an effective and efficient means for generating productive workers and raising caring, committed citizens.
- ◆ Share knowledge and good practices about effective family programmes around the world.
- ◆ Document the effects of globalization on families and mitigate its negative impacts.

Confronting family poverty and social exclusion

- ◆ Recognize that adequate and sustainable family support programmes are indispensable tools for promoting children's development; reducing family poverty and for preventing intergenerational transfer of poverty.
- ◆ Ensure that investment in child well-being starts during the pre-natal and early years and continues through adolescence. Such a strategy potentially has high social rates of return and helps avoid more costly interventions later in life.
- ◆ Raise awareness and mobilize key actors, including donor countries and agencies to ensure a broad base of support for the implementation of home-grown social protection programmes. Such an approach tends to be more successful at mobilizing domestic political constituencies behind initiatives and programmes.
- ◆ Increase access to care and improve the health outcomes of those afflicted by HIV/AIDS, including support for home care.
- ◆ Explore and adopt effective and equitable means of delivering family-centred benefits and services.
- ◆ Design cash transfer, taxation and other programmes with the intent of enhancing long-term family economic self-sufficiency and considering diversity of needs of family members and respect for gender equality.
- ◆ Recognize that cash transfer programmes and the provision of basic services can alleviate poverty and prevent intergenerational transfer of poverty. Investments in job creation are indispensable for enhancing family empowerment, self-reliance and dignity.
- ◆ Improve access to housing, especially for young couples starting families, through tax breaks, preferential loans and other measures.

Ensuring work-family balance

- ◆ Provide early childhood education and care to enhance working parents' ability to reconcile work and family responsibilities.
- ◆ Support a wide range of family care arrangements, including home care, grandparent care and community care with decisions made by parents based on child's individual needs and a family's specific circumstances.
- ◆ Create incentives and remove regulatory obstacles for the business sector to establish parental leaves, offer child care services, introduce flexible work and part-time job opportunities, and institute other creative ways to increase work flexibility.
- ◆ Recognize the value of unpaid care work that family members provide and acknowledge the social and economic role of caregivers and domestic workers in societies through communication media strategies.
- ◆ Provide regular training to enhance entrepreneurship, boost employability, and expand social protection for vulnerable family workers.
- ◆ Offer family-focused solutions to ensure work-family balance, such as parenting skills training, marriage and healthy relationship education and family counselling services.
- ◆ Ensure a life-cycle approach to work-family balance that acknowledges the changing needs of families caring for young children, adolescents and older persons.
- ◆ Facilitate parents' return to the labour force and provide opportunities for retraining.
- ◆ Promote fathers' involvement in families, including paternal and maternal equitable participation in family duties. Set up or improve mechanisms to discourage and sanction neglect of family responsibilities.
- ◆ Facilitate sustained compliance with existing International Labour Organisation's conventions, including the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention and the Maternity Protection Convention. Encourage Governments to ratify these instruments.
- ◆ Develop or expand gender-sensitive curricula to eliminate gender stereotypes and teach girls and boys concepts of gender equality, interdependence, and mutual respect.

- ◆ Raise awareness among employers, policymakers and the public about the value of family leave for children, parents and society through media campaigns featuring research findings and use of public figures to model the use and benefit of family leave.
- ◆ Promote policies and programmes supporting migrant families and support family reunification. To prevent economic migration, promote sustainable economic growth and job creation in the countries of origin.

Civil society

- ◆ Encourage civil society organizations to increase their collaboration with the public and private sectors to form more holistic partnerships that better meet the needs of families.
- ◆ Conduct further studies highlighting good practices and effective collaborations between local, national, and transnational NGOs, Governments and private sector that support and strengthen families.

Further information is available at:

<http://social.un.org/index/Family/MeetingsEvents/EGMonAssessingFamilyPolicies.aspx>

News from Member Organisations

PRESS RELEASE

Bonn, 1st April 2011

International Day of Families 2011 “Confronting Family Poverty and Social Exclusion Home Economics Perspectives”



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Each year the International Day of Families is celebrated on 15th of May. The International Day provides an opportunity to promote awareness of issues relating to families and to increase the knowledge of the social, economic and demographic processes affecting families. The theme for 2011 has been chosen

“Confronting Family Poverty and Social Exclusion”

Working in a multi-disciplinary field of profession, Home Economists are aware of the many dimensions of poverty. Poverty not only has physical, but also psychological and social meanings to individuals, families and communities. In addition to fulfilling basic physical needs, attention also has to be paid to family life and the abilities to act as member of communities.

Faces of poverty vary and take different forms in different regions and countries around the world. Home Economists know the difference between situations of poor families and their needs in developed and developing countries and take action to improve their situation from a grassroots level.

Home Economics education is a key factor to improve the daily life skills through basic knowledge, best practices, techniques to enable families to manage their lives and acting as a members of a consumer society in the changing world. By turning the knowledge into everyday life skills, individuals, families and communities can make the best use of the scarce resources available and also add value to them in a sustainable manner.

Home Economists recognises that without income families are not able to perform their multiple functions, like providing nutrition, education and security for their children or adequately care for other family members. Home Economists support development. One main focus of development is education of income generating skills in Home Economics like food growing, conservation and marketing for women especially in developing countries.

In many countries, certain families e.g. as migrants, families with single parents, retired persons and child or elderly headed families are especially vulnerable to poverty. They are also more likely to fall into poverty during times of financial and economic crises. These groups are under a special focus of Home Economics research and best practice aimed to improve their quality of life through education in family and resource management.

Through their multisided work in different disciplines, Home Economists contribute to the alleviation of social exclusion by improving the structures of households and communities and societies. In addition they work for the empowerment of effected individuals and families to improve their own well-being.

The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) is an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) having consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC, FAO, UNESCO, UNICEF) and with the Council of Europe. The IFHE supports the eradication of poverty and the confronting of social exclusion with its international work:

- ◆ To promote the confronting of family poverty and social exclusion on all levels of society from the perspective of everyday life.
- ◆ To understand poverty as a complex phenomenon.
- ◆ To expand Home Economics education and support this thrust to further meet the challenges of poverty in the changing world.
- ◆ To influence and develop policies and public debate to promote eradication of poverty and social exclusion.
- ◆ To promote the recognition of Home Economics potentiality in the eradication of poverty and confronting of social exclusion.

Position Statements UN Millennium Development Goals 2011 and can be accessed at: www.ifhe.org

STATEMENT

Statement by Maria Helena Paes to Full Committee Meeting 16.05.2011 FPAT - Portuguese Federation of Social Institutions Connected to Prevention of Drug Addiction (Family Institution)



The Portuguese Federation of Social Institutions Connected to Prevention of Drug Addiction (Family Institution) continues to give all the support to the Institutions Affiliated mainly attending several meetings with IDT – Institute for Drugs and Drug Addiction and with Social Security in order to discuss issues related to drug support addiction and with the financial situation of the NGO's.

Recently FPAT has become a Founding Member of the Forum Alcohol and Health as a result of the creation of the National Plan for Reducing Alcohol Problems. This Forum is similar to what is being done in European Commission, and has a goal to discuss by several members issues related with the approach of these matters.

Above all, the main goal is to provide a common platform for all interested partners in the European Union, to commit themselves in a number of relevant actions with the aim to reduce the damage caused by the harmful use of alcohol.

FPAT is also organizing its VIII Meeting about "Additions, New Paradigms of Intervention", that will take place on the 29th June 2011, in Luso American Foundation for the Development, in Lisbon.

The aim of this action is to give voice to the Affiliated Institutions working in this area, as well as to all institutions that may contribute with its know-how and experience in order to provide a shared experience for the implementation of a joint work and networking. The themes are:

- Presentation of the Alcohol and Health Forum;
- New Paradigms of Intervention in the Employment Context, in Therapeutic Community, in Ambulatory;
- The Psychotherapeutic Intervention in the Different Models of Intervention;
- Aspects of the Family, Corporate and Social Responsibility, on Dependencies;
- Different Contributions to Social Integration.

Forthcoming events

1ST- 6TH AUGUST 2011

LAKE BAIKAL IN THE REPUBLIC OF BURYATIA, RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The First Russian-American Child Welfare Forum



On August 1-6 2011, the first Russian-American Child Welfare Forum (RAF) will be held on Lake Baikal in the Republic of Buryatia, Russian Federation. The Forum was initiated by Russian specialists working as part of the Child Protection Subgroup under the Bilateral Presidential Commission's Civil Society Working Group (Obama-Medvedev) which began work in October 2010.

Russian Co-Organizers of the Event:

- Government of the Republic of Buryatia
- National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPC)
- Children's Rights Commissioner for the President of the Russian Federation

American Co-Organizers of the Event:

- US Department of Justice
- Institute for Human Services
- American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC)

The Forum is being organized with the support of the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, the Children's Rights Commissioner for the President of the Russian Federation, the Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Siberian Federal District, and the Institute for Human Services (Ohio, USA).

The **goal of the Forum** is to further the development of Russian-American dialogue and partnership in resolving pressing national and international child protection-related issues.

Tasks of the Forum:

- Facilitating large-scale interdisciplinary discussion among American and Russian child protection and child welfare specialists with the goal of strengthening professional relationships, alliances and contacts between the groups
- Presenting best Russian and American practices in the prevention of child abuse and violence against children
- Comparative analysis and coordination of values and conceptual approaches to aid future joint action in the field of child protection
- Discussion on civil society participation in protecting children's rights

In the Russian Federation, officials from the executive and legislative branches of the government have been invited, in addition to children's rights commissioners from Russian Federation regions, heads of child welfare-related institutions providing services to families and children, and other persons and organizations active in child protection and child welfare activities.

FURTHER INFORMATION: www.sirotstvo.ru/baikal-forum2011/EN/

29TH - 30TH AUGUST 2011

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

Youth unemployment and joblessness: causes, consequences, responses

ADAPT and UNAM – National Autonomous University of Mexico invite professors, researchers, doctoral students, experts, practitioners and all those interested in the conference topics, from the perspectives of multiple disciplines – including

Organized by: Adapt - The Association for International and Comparative Studies in the Field of Labor Law and Industrial Relations

FURTHER INFORMATION: www.adapt.it/acm-online/Home/Eventieseminari/articolo1797.html?sezione=calendario

CONTACT NAME: Lisa Rustico, Lavinia Serrani

6TH SEPTEMBER 2011

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

Tackling Obesity in Early Childhood: Prevention, Prevention, Prevention

With a central theme of prevention and early intervention, this symposium not only focuses on the unaddressed very early years of a child's life but will also highlight the pre-conceptual years and the crucial role played by parents.

Organized by: Centre for Parliamentary Studies

FURTHER INFORMATION: <http://publicpolicyexchange.co.uk/events/BI06-PPE2.php>

CONTACT NAME: Tsvetomir Svilenov

7TH – 9TH SEPTEMBER 2011

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES

Global Youth Economic Opportunities Conference

The Global Youth Economic Opportunities Conference provides a learning platform for professionals working to increase and improve economic opportunities for young people around the world.

Organized by: Making Cents International

FURTHER INFORMATION: www.YouthEconomicOpportunities.org

CONTACT NAME: Lindsey Witmer

8TH - 9TH SEPTEMBER 2011

SUNDERLAND, UNITED KINGDOM

Child Actors/Child Stars: Juvenile Performance on Screen

This conference is the first of its kind to be focused exclusively on the work of children in and for film and television. We welcome papers that discuss particular child stars and performers and/or particular performances by children.

FURTHER INFORMATION: www.crmcs.sunderland.ac.uk/forthcoming-events/doing-womens-film-history/

CONTACT NAME: Michael Lawrence

12 SEPTEMBER 2011

GLASGOW, UNITED KINGDOM

Child Protection in Scotland

Capita's Child Protection in Scotland Conference focuses on the implementation of the new national child protection guidance which will promote and strengthen whole area working to protect vulnerable children.

Organized by: Capita Conferences

FURTHER INFORMATION: <http://bit.ly/kpuD50>

CONTACT NAME: Nezha Ranchal

17TH – 21ST SEPTEMBER 2011

TAMPERE HALL FINLAND

12th ISPCAN European Regional Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect

CONTACT: Eija.Paavilainen@uta.fi

Theme: Challenging Social Responsibilities for Child Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse and neglect are issues which challenge practitioners, decision makers and researchers as well as parents, children and communities: whose responsibility is it to react, respond and care and how should it be done? The Conference offers a multiprofessional and multidisciplinary forum for researchers, practitioners, activists and decision-makers – not forgetting children and young people themselves – to share views and experiences by arranging plenaries, workshops and informal social meeting places. The Nordic, European and global perspectives will support our joint efforts to promote the well-being and safety of children and their families globally.

Early bird fee by 30 June

EASTERN EUROPEAN TRAINING INSTITUTE - PRE-CONFERENCE EVENT SUNDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2011

This event will bring together both experts and newcomers to multidisciplinary work in Child Abuse and Neglect from within the region. The programme is being developed in consultation with ISPCAN partners in the region. Among the topics to be covered will be assessment of the abused child and family, ethical dilemmas, and forensic interviewing.

The institute registration fee includes participation in all Institute sessions, breaks and lunch

FOR MORE INFORMATION, including online registration, please see the conference website:

www.uta.fi/conference/childabuseandneglect2011

21ST - 22ND SEPTEMBER 2011

STRASBOURG, FRANCE

Formulating Better Medicines for Children' EuPFI's 3rd Annual Conference'

The European paediatric Formulation initiative (EuPFI) will convene its 3rd annual conference 'Formulating Better medicines for Children'.

Organized by: EuPFI/APV

FURTHER INFORMATION: www.apv-mainz.de/fileadmin/Pdf_Programme_Jan_2011/6386.pdf

CONTACT NAME: Smita Salunke

22ND SEPTEMBER 2011

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

Supporting parents with mental health issues and understanding the impact on their children

This conference addresses how services need to work on behalf of both parent and child in order to manage the impact on the child, whilst supporting parents with mental health issues.

Organized by: Pavilion

FURTHER INFORMATION: <http://bit.ly/qvGOGr>

CONTACT NAME: Louise Slade

22ND & 23RD SEPTEMBER 2011

LEICESTER, UNITED KINGDOM

Faculty for Children & Young People Annual Conference 2011

The conference combines presentations, workshops and discussions around the theme of 'Providing Quality in Times of Austerity'. The conference will be held at the Holiday Inn Hotel, Leicester.

Organized by: The British Psychological Society

FURTHER INFORMATION: <http://www.bps.org.uk/cyp2011>

CONTACT NAME: Mandy Hemsill

28TH – 30TH SEPTEMBER 2011

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Working Group on Communications under the Optional Protocol to the Convention

19TH SEPTEMBER – 7TH OCTOBER

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Committee on the Rights of the Child, fifty-eighth session

7TH - 8TH OCTOBER 2011

KUALA LUMPUR, WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN, MALAYSIA

Early Childhood Education Conference & Workshop 2011

The early childhood education conference aims to provide an opportunity for forum for collaboration, quality learning, hands on experience and discussion among professionals working in the area of Early Childhood Care and Education.

Organized by: Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UniRAZAK)

Deadline for abstracts/proposals: 31 July 2011

FURTHER INFORMATION: <http://www.unirazak.edu.my/ececw2011/>

CONTACT NAME: Maizatul Akhma Sa'at

19TH – 22ND OCTOBER 2011

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

7th European Congress on Violence in Clinical Psychiatry - challenges for care and treatment

The Congress deals with clinically relevant & useful interventions regarding treatment and reduction of violent inpatient behaviour and severe problem behaviour in persons with intellectual disability.

Sponsored by: Oud Consultancy / EVIPRG / WPA

FURTHER INFORMATION: http://www.oudconsultancy.nl/prague_cfa/ecvcp/invitation.html

CONTACT NAME: Mr. N.E.Oud, MNSc, N.Adm, RN

Enquiries: conference.management@freeler.nl

21ST OCTOBER 2011

KRAKOW, POLAND

Family Affairs and Gender Equality Ministers' meeting (informal)

Political Meeting

Description

The Informal Meeting of Ministers for Family and Gender Equality accompanies the expert conference on “The Mechanisms for Reconciling Professional and Family Roles for Women and for Men as a Chance to Actively Participate in the Labor Market”. The aim of the meeting is to exchange opinions on the possibility of signing the Roadmap for Reconciliation between Work, Family and Private Life for Europe 2020.

21ST - 23RD OCTOBER 2011

SINT-MICHIELSGESTEL, NETHERLANDS

Feapda congress 2011: Literacy in deaf Children

FEAPDA congresses are small-scaled (max. 120) and meant for professionals in the field of education of and care to children and young people who are hearing-impaired/deaf. There will be country presentations and four keynote lectures.

Organized by: FEAPDA / Simea

FURTHER INFORMATION: <http://www.feapdacongress2011.eu>

CONTACT NAME: Karien Coppens

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