

# IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD IN EUROPE



Alliance for Childhood  
European Network Group



## VISION

# EUROPEAN SOCIETIES PLACING THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD IN THE CENTRE OF ALL THEIR ACTIVITIES AND THOROUGHLY ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF THEIR DECISIONS ON CHILDREN

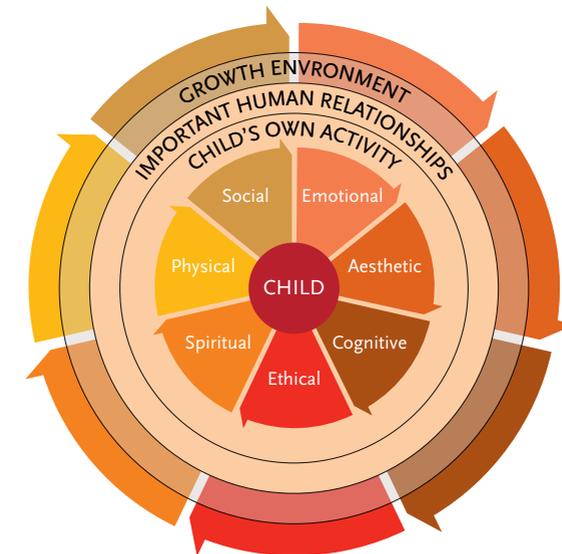
## OUR APPROACH

The quality of childhood has many domains. The Alliance for Childhood European Network Group (AFC-ENG) aims to develop an approach that encompasses the whole child and his or her living environment. Where children are concerned, policy making and policy implementation by governmental and other agencies often take place in silos and in a compartmentalized way. If societies improved the quality of childhood this would be beneficial for both the children and the societies in which they live.

In Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) it is stated that *“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”* The same article defines *“the best interests of the child”* as the child’s well-being, and the means of supporting well-being as through protection and care: *“State Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being”* (CRC Art. 3). A child refers to everyone below the age of eighteen.

Within the holistic view of childhood it is possible to distinguish physical, social, emotional, aesthetic, cognitive, ethical and spiritual dimensions in children’s development and well-being. High quality well-being is a result of good, or at least satisfactory, well-being in every dimension:

- physical well-being (e.g. the experience of subjective health and the ability to act),
- social well-being (e.g. the experience of being accepted by others and a sense of belonging),
- emotional well-being (e.g. the experience of self-acceptance and reciprocal affection for others),
- cognitive well-being (e.g. the experience of interest and curiosity in new matters and satisfaction in problem solving),
- aesthetic well-being (e.g. the experience of beauty in nature and in one’s own and others’ creative achievements),
- ethical well-being (e.g. the experience of goodness and what is just, and a will to act accordingly),
- spiritual well-being (e.g. the experience of the meaningfulness of life).



The Growth Model: the dimensions of and conditions for children’s well-being. Source: Pulkkinen & Fadjuoff (2018). See: [www.allianceforchildhood.eu/our\\_approach](http://www.allianceforchildhood.eu/our_approach)

The core of the Growth Model is the child with his/her internal endowments and developmental processes, such as the development of self-regulation, and the image of the child that people hold. Policies with regard to children that policy makers and stakeholders develop, and the way that they are implemented are based upon the image of the child that they hold. It is therefore vital to be aware of what this image is.

Within the AFC-ENG the image of the child that we hold is as follows:

- Children are endowed with inner potential to grow, learn and communicate and to participate in their own way and with their own integrity, and rights and responsibilities within society.
- The child is an agent of his/her own life in relation to others. The child is not an object to be pushed around and modelled into shape by adults.
- Adults who are sensitive to children's needs are there to help them unfold their uniqueness.
- The quality of children's relationships with adults and other children affects their growth as human beings in either a positive or negative way.
- Children are co-creators of our world and transform it.
- Human development is a process of unfolding an individual's uniqueness in which mutually interacting biological, psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, and societal factors interplay.

The quality of childhood has no fixed definition because living contexts are different. In general a good quality of childhood refers to conditions that promote the child's positive development and well-being. The conditions for children's development and well-being in each dimension of the model include:

- the child's own activity and participation
- important human relationships in which the child is seen and listened to as an individual
- a whole growth environment that includes the child's protection and care from the micro-system to the macro-system.

All these elements appear in the child's life circles, which include:

- home and family
- early education and care outside the home
- school and work
- play and cultural experiences
- community (including neighbourhood, spiritual contexts, religious affiliations, ethnic dimensions and voluntary activities)
- societal services (social, health etc.)
- cultural-societal settings (gender, migration, conflict etc.)
- ecological environment
- digital environment.

For instance, in a school children develop and flourish in those areas in which they can successfully participate in activities supported by people who see and hear the child as an individual. In the school environment many aspects can either promote or extinguish children's development and well-being such as school buildings and other material conditions, school legislation and curriculum, quality of teaching, school traditions, ethos and size.

Individuals with well-being form well-being communities that in turn form a well-being society.

## OUR MISSION

- To increase the respect for childhood as a basis for human development and to create awareness of the needs of all children.
- To develop and inspire ideas for solutions to those problems which could endanger the good quality of childhood.
- To provide a platform for contacts, inspiration, exchange, peer learning, encouragement and dialogue among policy makers, decision makers, researchers, practitioners, parents and all people that have an influence on children's lives.

## THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD EUROPEAN NETWORK GROUP & WORKING GROUP ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The Alliance for Childhood European Network Group (AFC-ENG) was set up in 2006 by Michiel Matthes and Christopher Clouder. In that same year the AFC-ENG set up the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood at the European Parliament (QoC) together with the Austrian Member of the European Parliament, Karin Resetarits.

The AFC-ENG serves the purposes of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Foundation, registered in Brussels under number 880102675. This foundation functions as the legal entity of the AFC-ENG. The AFC-ENG has partners (organizations and individuals) from over 15 European countries. The AFC-ENG has a Council of six members from different countries to support the Chairman in the establishment of the mission.

The AFC-ENG is a member of Eurochild, the EU Alliance for Investing in Children, the Child's Rights Action Group of NGOs in Brussels (CRAG) and the European Policy Centre (EPC), and a partner in the International Council of the Alliance for Childhood and of the Learning for Well-being Community.

## OUR METHODS

### MEETINGS

To hold meetings of partners of the AFC-ENG twice a year to discuss its activities and share new insights and initiatives regarding the quality of childhood. The partners also brief each other on their activities in their own organizations and countries and in this way exchange ideas and practices in relation to the mission of the AFC-ENG.

### EXPERT (QOC) TALKS ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

To regularly hold expert talks in the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood at the European Parliament (QoC Talks). Since December 2006 the Working Group has held six QoC Talks every year in the European Parliament in Brussels – 72 sessions in all as at the beginning of 2019. Currently the Working Group is planning to host three to four QoC Talks per year. So far some thirty MEPs from different parties have hosted these sessions. The AFC-ENG dispatches the invitation for the expert talks to 1,800 people worldwide and also in this way conveys its mission to interested network partners. Since 2014 the Learning for Well-being Foundation, which is a partner of AFC-ENG, has hosted a more informal discussion session after the parliamentary presentation.

### BOOKS

To publish books on expert talks and invited papers; the AFC-ENG has published seven volumes during the period 2010 to 2018. Volumes 1 to 4 were published with ECSWE (European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education), and volumes 5 to 7 with the Learning for Well-being Foundation.

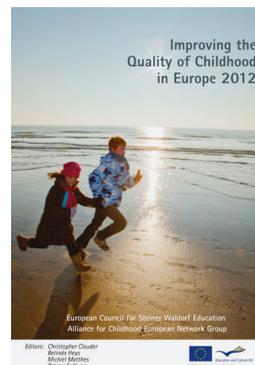
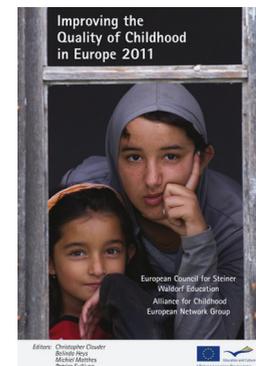
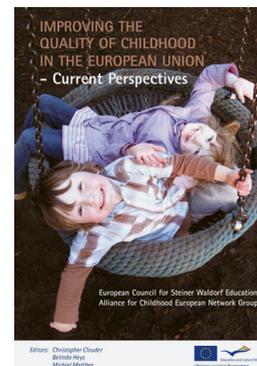
### COLLABORATION

To collaborate with organizations who share the same vision and goals as the AFC-ENG.

### STIMULATE COOPERATION

To stimulate cooperation among the partners of the AFC-ENG for the benefit of children. We were pleased therefore that in December 2014 an (official) Intergroup on Children's Rights was established by Members of the European Parliament.

## OUR BOOKS



All chapters are available for download: [www.allianceforchildhood.eu/publications](http://www.allianceforchildhood.eu/publications) and the volumes can be ordered (€ 20 each) from the office of the AFC-ENG (for contact details see the back page of this brochure).

# THEMES COVERED BY THE EXPERT (QOC) TALKS ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (2006-2019)

## GENERAL FRAMEWORKS

- A vision on children and childhood
- The Rights of the Child
- Ombudsmen for children
- Learning for Well-being
- European Academy for complementary pedagogy
- Elham Palestine: an example of a multi-sector national partnership
- Quality of childhood, Romanian migrant workers
- Quality of childhood and the present economic downturn
- Measures for improving the quality of childhood
- Prosperity without growth
- Janusz Korczak and his lessons for the quality of childhood

## EARLY EDUCATION

- Improving the early childhood educational systems
- Early childhood services
- Early childhood education and care systems
- Young children and their services
- The pros and cons of OECD's International Early Learning Study (IELS)

## EDUCATION, CREATIVITY AND CULTURE

- Improving education with systemic changes
- The PISA study and lessons learned
- Resilience and creativity in education
- Social and emotional education
- Literacy: reflection
- Literacy: graphogame
- A new pedagogical approach in education
- Role of measurement and evaluation in good education
- Rich educational and cultural programmes for all children
- Innovation in education: Improving learning and well-being
- Art education promotes the development of the child and society
- The new educational curriculum in Finland
- Well-being and involvement as key indicators for the quality of educational settings
- The importance of art in childhood

## HEALTH

- Mental health situation of children and young people
- Toxic childhood syndrome
- Preterm births
- Physical development and later learning
- Well-being indicators
- Health assets
- Primary health care for children in Europe
- New discoveries in the field of brain science and their contribution to healthy childhood

## DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

- Positive human development
- Key competences of children and adolescents
- Screen media
- Digital environment
- Multiple intelligence in the knowledge-based society
- Media literacy or media addiction? Good governance for healthy childhood
- Adolescence as a sensitive period for learning and socio-emotional engagement

## ADOLESCENTS AND SOCIETY

- Changes in adolescent development
- Youth employment
- Alcohol drinking
- Early school leaving prevention: Inclusive systems across education, health and social sectors
- The effect of the great recession on Southern European children and adolescents' wellbeing

## SOCIAL RELATIONS

- Child-adult relationships in families and school
- Attachment
- Affection and a baby's brain
- Child rearing: to help children to reach their unique potential
- Parents' partnership stability and quality
- Children's networks and neighborhood
- City Councils for children
- Successful integration of refugee and immigrant children
- Empowering parents
- Quality of childhood and Roma children
- Children with imprisoned parents: How to support them

## FAMILY STUDIES AND POLICIES

- Developing a research agenda for families and family policies
- The proposed research agenda for families and family policies
- Family enrichment courses
- Parental leave policies

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- The city for children
- The child in the city
- The physical environment of the child
- Children and their connection with nature

## CURRENT TRENDS AND THREATS

- Commercialization of childhood
- Genetically modified 'designer babies'

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## IMPACT OF THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD EUROPEAN NETWORK GROUP ON EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

The AFC-ENG provides a space for reflection about the way that children are brought up in our societies, about the habits and practices that diminish the Quality of Childhood, and about ways in which it could be improved. In this domain a large group of experts and pioneers – from many European countries and beyond have been brought together, and a vast body of knowledge has been gathered and made available to policy makers, practitioners, politicians and the public at large. These activities have also had an impact on the partners of the AFC-ENG, and through them on the societies of which they are a part and countries in which they are based. The work of the AFC-ENG has been recognized by invitations to serve as an NGO partner in many EU-funded research projects and in the Working Group on Early Childhood of the European Commission.

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## FINANCES OF THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD EUROPEAN NETWORK GROUP

The AFC-ENG is an organization that is run mostly by activists and unpaid volunteers, and for this reason costs are kept low. The AFC-ENG is supported by the Alliance for Childhood European Network Foundation. The activities of the AFC-ENG have also been financed by contributions from the partners, individuals and organizations, in particular the Learning for Well-being Foundation. Furthermore, some donations were received from Community Playthings (2008), the Jean Monnet Programme of the European Commission (2009-2012, together with ECSWE), the Rabobank Foundation (2009), the Bernard van Leer Foundation (2011), and the IONA Foundation (2019).

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## BECOME A PARTNER, DONOR OR SPONSOR OF THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD EUROPEAN NETWORK GROUP

### CRITERIA FOR PARTNERSHIP

Adherence to the mission of the AFC-ENG and a commitment to promote (together with one's own organization or activity) the goal of improving the quality of childhood, the well-being of children and the rights of the child as specified in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### FEE STRUCTURE

As determined by the turnover of the partner organization for the year before last:

Turnover < € 100,000 .....	Fee € 500 per year
Turnover € 100,000 – € 500,000 .....	Fee € 1,000 per year
Turnover > € 500,000 .....	Fee € 2,000 per year
Personal partnership .....	Fee € 50 per year

An application for partnership can be sent to the Council via the Chairman (see back page). The AFC-ENG welcomes new partners, whether organizations or individuals.

### SPONSORSHIP

Donations from individuals and companies that adhere to the criteria for partnership are very welcome.

### DUTCH ANBI STATUS

The Alliance for Childhood European Network Foundation has been granted ANBI-status in the Netherlands. ANBI stands for Algemeen Nut Beogende Instelling, or an organization that works for the general well-being of society. Its fiscal identification number is 825565492. Donations to the Alliance are therefore tax deductible in the Netherlands.

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# CONTACT US



**Alliance for Childhood**  
European Network Group

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## BANK ACCOUNT

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