

**Collaboration with Eurochild National Partner Networks  
Report for ENOC conference, Amsterdam September 2015**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report was commissioned by Eurochild, in agreement with Marc Dullaert, the Netherlands' Ombudsman for Children and incoming President of ENOC, in order to provide a starting point for discussion of the benefits of closer collaboration between Eurochild's National Partner Networks (NPNs) and members of ENOC.
2. The report is based on a brief literature review, a survey of NPNs and brief interviews with selected NPNs and Ombudspersons.
3. The survey was carried out in June and July 2015. Following this four NPNs were selected for closer study. A representative of each NPN was interviewed (by telephone or Skype), and in each country the Ombudsperson or a member of their staff was also interviewed briefly.
4. Fifteen of 23 NPNs responded to the survey. Information was collected on size and membership of the network and how long it had been established, the main activities and projected activities for the coming year, and the relationship with the national ENOC member. Most reported that they had regular contact with the Ombudsman and shared objectives. The majority saw no obstacles to working together, and either were happy with the present arrangement or would like to work together more closely, and suggested various ways in which this could be achieved.
5. The NPNs selected for case study were the Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights, the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children, the Network of Organisations for Children of Serbia and the Estonian Union for Child Welfare. In interviews, representatives of each NPN were asked what kind of issues they collaborated over, how to describe their respective roles, what enhances or gets in the way of collaboration (with examples) and what advice they would give to another NPN embarking on a new relationship with an Ombudsperson.
6. In general, all four NPNs said that there were no issues they were not able to collaborate over, whilst acknowledging that priorities could be different for all kinds of reasons. Rather than viewing the Ombudsperson's special position of independence as a barrier, the NPNs all saw it as an asset and an advantage.
7. The Ombudsperson's office in each of the four countries was interviewed. All were positive about their experiences of working together with NPNs, and with NGOs more generally. There was a shared understanding of the key differences in roles and responsibilities.
8. The main conclusion is that NPNs can be an invaluable source of information for Ombudspersons, bring issues to their attention and open them up to public debate, while Ombudspersons can be a source of power, influence and authority for NPNs and their member organisations, able to give demands for children's rights real force and to insist that Governments take notice.
9. Suggestions for future collaboration included: to be tolerant and open-minded, to work transparently and keep each other informed, allow space for discussion and finding solutions together (ideally through a combination of informal contact and more formal conversations), and to acknowledge the added value that each other brings to the table.

10. It is hoped that on the basis of this report, the workshop to be held at the 2015 ENOC conference will agree some specific recommendations for ENOC members and NPNs to promote more effective collaboration.

## **Introduction**

This report was commissioned by Eurochild in collaboration with Marc Dullaert, the incoming President of ENOC, in order to provide a starting point for discussion of what might be the benefits of closer collaboration between Eurochild's National Partner Networks (NPNs) and members of ENOC. The report is based on a brief literature review to supplement the author's existing knowledge of ENOC and Eurochild, a survey of NPNs and brief interviews with selected NPNs and Ombudspersons. The report is offered as a contribution to positive discussion between members of ENOC and Eurochild on the benefits of working together more closely at the national level.

I am grateful to Marc Dullaert and Jana Hainsworth (Secretary-General of Eurochild) for entrusting me with this work, to Mieke Schuurman (policy advisor for Eurochild and chair of the National Partner Network Group of Eurochild) for her invaluable assistance, to the staff of National Partner Networks who completed the survey, and above all to the staff of National Partner Networks and Ombudspersons' offices who agreed to talk to me so frankly and openly. I am humbled by the ability and willingness of so many colleagues in Europe to communicate patiently with me, a near-monoglot, in such excellent English.

## **Background**

Established in 1997, ENOC links independent institutions for children, most commonly known as Ombudsmen or Commissioners for Children, from 33 countries in Europe. There are currently 44 member institutions in total, including regional as well as national institutions. Most member institutions have been established in accordance with ENOC's criteria for independence, which are based on the Paris Principles. Those whose legislation falls short of these standards are offered associate membership. The aims and functions of independent institutions for children vary from state to state according to their precise constitution and to differences in the national context. However, all have a central focus on children's rights, particularly as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The stated aims of ENOC are: to encourage the fullest possible implementation of the CRC; to support collective lobbying for children's rights; to share information, approaches and strategies; and to promote the development of effective independent offices for children. ENOC receives financial and structural support from the Council of Europe and the European Commission. It has a small secretariat based in Strasbourg.

Eurochild was established in 2004 as a successor to the European Forum for Child Welfare. It currently has 161 members (including individuals as well as organisations) from 35 countries. Eurochild's mission is 'to promote the rights and well-being of children and young people in Europe', and its work is underpinned by the CRC. It works closely with the European Commission from which it receives core funding, but its reach extends to all countries in Europe. National Partner Networks (NPNs) were established in 2012, although some of the organisations forming NPNs have been in existence for much

longer. Their main purpose is to advocate for the rights and well-being of children and young people towards national or regional government and politicians, making the link between EU and national/regional policies for children and young people. The makeup of NPNs varies; for example, some consist only of NGOs, while others also include public authorities. There are currently 17 NPNs in 14 countries, plus 'observer NPNs' from six further countries. Of the 17, all but one (Serbia) are in EU member states, and all but three (Austria, Germany and Romania) have ENOC member institutions in their countries. Eurochild has core funding from the European Commission, and an office in Brussels.

Given the power and reach of Eurochild and its NPNs in the countries where they have been established, and the growing activity of ENOC combined with the authority of its member institutions, it is timely to look at the potential for greater cooperation between the two at the national level (and perhaps also at the European level). The need to clarify relationships and where possible build cooperation between independent children's rights institutions, with their unique position, and civil society is sharpened by the pressure on all organisations working to promote children's rights and wellbeing in conditions of austerity and an ageing population.

## **Methods and procedures**

The survey questionnaire was designed by the author of this report in collaboration with Mieke Schuurman. It was distributed by email from the Eurochild office to key contacts at the National Partner Networks, and responses were sent directly by email to the author. The survey was sent out on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2015, and responses were collected until 8<sup>th</sup> July 2015 (apart from one late response which was sent by special request in August). The survey responses were analysed manually by the author and the results are reported below.

Following receipt and initial examination of the survey returns, selection of four NPNs for closer study was made by the author of this report in collaboration with Mieke Schuurman. All four agreed to take part. A representative of each NPN was interviewed by telephone or Skype. Subsequently, in each country the Ombudsperson or a member of their staff was also interviewed briefly by telephone or Skype.

Interview notes were taken directly by the author and typed up immediately after each interview. The transcripts were sent to participants for correction, and for confirmation that participants agreed to be identified in this report. The transcripts were then analysed manually by the author and the results are reported below.

## **Survey results**

### *Basic information*

The survey questionnaire was sent to Eurochild's 23 NPNs, and 15 completed questionnaires were returned (a response rate of 65%). Not all respondents answered every question, but all answered most of the questions.<sup>1</sup>

Three of the NPNs who responded were established as networks before 1950; six were established between 1984 and 1997; three between 2000 and 2004; and two between 2011 and 2013. Most became official NPNs in 2013, one more recently with observer status.

Eight NPNs reported having 20-50 members; five had more than 100 and one has over 400. All include NGOs in membership; some also include public authorities, and some have individual membership. These differences in eligibility appear to explain most of the variation in membership.

All but two (13) NPNs reported that there was a member of ENOC operating in their country.<sup>2</sup>

### *Activities of NPNs*

Respondents reported that their networks' main activities included:

- Policy work (regular discussions with Government, Parliamentary liaison, consultation on new legislation, policy development and advice, campaigning and lobbying, monitoring implementation of CRC, advocating legal changes and implementing international standards, prevention and early detection of social problems, reporting to CRC Committee, coordination of activities with youth organizations).
- Public engagement (advocacy for children's rights, awareness raising for children and the public).
- Training and other services (helplines, legal advice, supporting parents, supporting organisations working with children, training on children's rights, CPD, capacity building).
- Research and publications (including conferences, seminars, round tables and press conferences).
- Participation (coordinating Children's Parliament, promoting children's participatory rights, public exchanges between children and young people, professionals, managers and policy makers).

Respondents also mentioned particular *themes* of their work: child protection, children with disabilities, education (including inclusive education and education of young offenders), ethnic/cultural diversity and migration, privacy, child poverty, social inclusion, child participation, alternative care, family care and deinstitutionalisation, health, child-friendly justice, violence, youth crime.

Respondents were asked about their projected activities for the coming year. Responses included many of the same or related themes: preventive work, foster care and alternative care, right to privacy, vulnerable children, child poverty, protection of children from violence, inclusive education, gender equality, child friendly justice, healthy environment, refugee children, bullying. Respondents also talked about planned activities for 2015-16 focused on institutions or processes: monitoring implementation of

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<sup>1</sup> Those who returned the survey were the NPNs in Finland, Denmark, Serbia, Belgium (Flanders), Scotland, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Austria, Croatia, Netherlands, Cyprus, France, Germany and Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> According to the ENOC website, one of the remaining two countries does actually have an Ombudsman's office, with associate membership of ENOC.

CRC, CRC reporting, Child Rights Impact Assessment, extending the network of Ombudspersons, election manifestos, information and education to public.

There were no obvious differences in the above responses from the two NPNs who reported not having an Ombudsperson to work with.

### *Relationships with Ombudspersons*

Of the 13 NPNs who reported having an Ombudsperson to work with, the majority (eight) reported both formal and informal contact on a regular basis. Three reported that contact was mainly formal, and two that it was mainly informal.

Respondents were asked 'Do you consider you have the same or similar objectives as your ENOC member?' Nearly all reported that they had identical or very similar objectives, and all reported at least some shared objectives. A few pointed out that the emphasis might be different, themes might be different and of course roles were different. One respondent said that the network focused on vulnerable children, while the Ombudsperson was concerned with all children.

Respondents were invited to give some examples of the kind of issues they would work on together with the Ombudsperson. Responses included process issues – mainstreaming children's rights, reporting to UN bodies, ratification of Optional Protocol 3 of the CRC – and thematic issues such as protection of children from violence, prevention of family separation, looked after children, disabled children, refugees, child poverty and inequality, early years services, children's rights in the media, and child-friendly justice.

Respondents were asked if there were any obstacles to their working together. The majority (10) said that there were no obstacles, except sometimes lack of time. (One added that it would be good if the Ombudsperson could involve the NPN as well as the NPN involving the Ombudsperson.) Of the other three, two suggested that the different mandates could sometimes get in the way, and one that their particular Ombudspersons were too close to Government.

Respondents were asked if they would like to work more closely together with their Ombudsperson. Of the 11 who replied, there was a nearly even split (with some ambiguity) between those who were eager for closer cooperation and those who were very happy with the current close relationship.

When invited to elaborate on what would help achieve even closer working, some respondents suggested: more consultation on priorities and more clarity on time commitments and budgets; mutual plans from the beginning of the year, common projects; more time to fine-tune messages, share working programmes and objectives; more consultation of NGOs to define and implement the working programmes of ENOC members; and finally, that both organisations have a clear understanding of each other's roles and remits and are strategic about identifying critical issues to pursue. "As an umbrella organisation, the [NPN] brings key issues to the attention of the [Ombudsperson] and it is up to them to determine whether they will take that on."

## Results of interviews

At the conclusion of the questionnaire respondents were asked if they would be willing to take part in a telephone interview if requested. Most indicated that they would. After consideration of the survey responses and what was known of the different NPNs and national contexts in relation to the overall purposes of this project, four NPNs were invited to take part in the second phase. Below we list the four NPNs and indicate some of the particular features that influenced the selection, which was intended to reflect some of the variation in circumstances across Europe.

<b>National Partner Network</b>	<b>Particular features</b>
Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights	Well established network – more recently established ombudsman
Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC)	Well established network – well established ombudsman – strong emphasis on participation
Network of Organisations for Children of Serbia	Working strongly on ENOC's theme of violence this year
Estonian Union for Child Welfare	Well established network (currently with observer status)

As indicated earlier, a representative of each NPN was interviewed by telephone or Skype. Interviews followed a flexible structure based on the following key questions: What kind of issues do you collaborate over? What kind of issues do you not collaborate over? How would you describe your respective roles? Are there other partners with whom you both work? What gets in the way of collaboration? What enhances collaboration – what practices, what elements of context? Can you give an example of really successful collaboration – what made it successful? Can you give an example of collaboration that did not work so well? Talk through it if you would – what made it problematic? What advice would you give to a new NPN embarking on a relationship with an Ombudsperson, or an established NPN embarking on a relationship with a new Ombudsperson? Anything else you would like to add? If not raised by the participant, a question would also be asked about the Ombudsperson's special position and independence, and whether this ever presented an obstacle to working together.

The following summary basically follows the sequence of the above questions.

### *Areas of collaboration*

In Cyprus collaboration focuses on different issues, depending on what comes up. Children's Week, started by the NPN in 1979, is now a joint venture with the Ombudsman. Other issues that arise from time to time include issues with individual children raised by parents, which the NPN refers on to

Ombudsman, and working together to lobby Parliamentary committees – together the organisations make a strong pressure group.

In Serbia the NPN's main priorities are child protection, inclusion, participation, and they try to collaborate with the Deputy Ombudsman for Children's Rights over all these issues. Particular priorities include: ratification of 3<sup>rd</sup> optional protocol to CRC; ban on corporal punishment; children's participation. There are joint meetings between the Deputy Ombudsman's youth panel and the NPN's children's council to jointly set priorities, which guide both institutions in their programmes. There is day-to-day contact over specific problems that children and families bring to the NPN. The corporal punishment campaign includes work with parents and the media, which the institutions have worked on together, as well as promoting legislative initiatives (currently two, relating to Family Law and the Civil Code). From the NPN's point of view corporal punishment is a difficult area to progress, and partners are needed.

In the Netherlands the NPN found that it took some time to establish a partnership following the creation of the Ombudsman's office in 2011, as the Ombudsman's first priority was to position his organisation. "He had his own agenda; we also have our agenda, and we also work with other organisations." Since then the relationship has developed. Twice a year there is a formal meeting, and the head of the NPN calls the Ombudsman on a weekly or monthly basis, to coordinate who will lead on different issues. Each organisation has its own priorities, but work together in themes such as migration, youth care and child abuse. This year was the CRC report and it was "fantastic how we worked together – each wrote their own reports but coordinated, and made a good presentation. He has a helpdesk and so do we, so we have a communication line over that."

In Estonia collaboration has been over seminars for teachers on children's rights in practice (where the NPN took the initiative and invited the Ombudsman to be involved), monitoring case studies (where the Ombudsman took the initiative and invited the NPN to be involved, as an opportunity to learn about their work), producing a magazine (led by the NPN, the Ombudsman advised on content). The NPN staff find that it is "easy to reach each other, we have each other's mobile phone numbers, it's a close relationship". Each year there is a joint meeting to plan activities, coordinate timing of conferences, etc. The NPN has a young person on the Ombudsman's youth advisory group. When the NPN has a participation project they ask the Ombudsman's advice.

In general, all four NPNs said that there were no issues they were not able to collaborate over, whilst acknowledging that priorities could be different for all kinds of reasons. Comments included "nothing is off limits – similar policy angles, no clashes", "no no-go areas" and "none really – our general aims are the same, a society where children's rights are effectively implemented".

### *Roles and partnerships*

All respondents described the respective roles of NPNs and Ombudspersons in similar ways:

- They do the monitoring of how CRC and legislation is implemented. Our role is to recognise what's happening on the ground, bring issues to Ombudsman when necessary.

- They have strict responsibilities for monitoring public institutions. We focus on policy work and implementation.
- He has a more formal position with the Parliament. We are able to lobby when things are in process, which he cannot do because he cannot be seen to be political.
- We are more active, have more freedom; they are more procedural and formal. They deal with conflict between state and child: can ask for information, retain personal data, investigative powers. We refer cases to them; we can also call on them for legal advice.

Serbia gave the example of a TV reality show where children were being subjected to abuse. The NPN complained to the regulator who failed to respond, so referred to the Ombudsman who complained to Government about the regulator. They needed the Ombudsman's recognition as someone with integrity and influence. (Even then the conclusion was not satisfactory.)

All the NPNs worked with other partners: trades unions, parents' associations; their own members; NGOs; universities and other institutions, as did the respective Ombudspersons.

Two NPNs (Serbia and Netherlands) said that nothing really gets in the way of collaboration (although Serbia noted a problem in that, following a recent reorganisation, the same Deputy Ombudsman deals with both women and children). Cyprus pointed only to lack of time on the part of the Ombudsman's office, which in their view is understaffed. Estonia suggested that the Ombudsman's office was more hierarchical, so that junior staff had to get permission from senior staff to take initiatives, and also that certain actions required prior legal analysis, for example: "They often can't respond quickly as we can."

Rather than viewing the Ombudsperson's special position of independence as a barrier, the NPNs all saw it as an asset and an advantage. Estonia valued their Ombudsperson's independence and "strong voice". Cyprus had a question about their Ombudsperson's dual role (for children and for legislation), considering that the Ombudsman for Children should be a full time appointment. In The Netherlands it was suggested that there could sometimes be tensions over different approaches to lobbying. Serbia had argued that their Deputy Ombudsman for Children needed to be better resourced because of the complexity of children's issues and their vulnerability, and supported an initiative for an independent Children's Ombudsman.

### *Ingredients of successful collaboration*

Asked what enhances collaboration, Cyprus pointed to the fact that the NPN had led the pressure for the institution to be set up from the 1990s and was therefore seen as very supportive. (That did not mean that the Ombudsman was in any sense seen as accountable to the NPN.) They also commented that there was no fixed process for raising issues; rather it was spontaneous, easy to call and raise issues and meet: "this is a small country, we have social relationships too". Serbia commented that the Deputy Ombudsman is very open, "recognises us as a network and works very readily with us. The fact that we represent many NGOs is an advantage." The Netherlands pointed to the regular discussion of joint strategic approaches, and Estonia remarked on professionalism, trust and mutual respect.

Asked for an example of really successful collaboration, all four NPNs offered strong illustrations of effective working together. Cyprus mentioned work on the Lanzarote Convention and legislation on

sexual abuse, where discussions in Parliament, joint lobbying, working together to ensure consistency and the existing relationship all helped; also adoption law, where the NPN was the only NGO to oppose private adoption, along with the Ombudsman. Serbia spoke of a very good joint campaign for ratification of the Third Optional Protocol, the campaign against corporal punishment which featured a public event that was well covered in the media, and children's recommendations for improvements to a range of services that resulted from joint discussion between the Deputy Ombudsman's youth panel and the NPN's children's council. The Netherlands referred to an issue where several hundred asylum-seeking children were facing deportation, when through close cooperation day by day on the message for politicians and the media, making sure both institutions followed the same line and the same strategy, the objective was achieved and the children were allowed to stay. Estonia mentioned the project for child rights training in the university, where the Ombudsman "helped us to think strategically", and the Movie Festival each November which includes a children's rights component on which the NPN and the Ombudsman collaborate and share publicity.

Invited to give an example of a collaboration that did not work so well, none of the NPNs could think of one.

Each participant was asked what advice they would give to an NPN embarking on a new relationship with an Ombudsperson. From Cyprus the advice was to be tolerant and open-minded, and allow space for discussion and "finding solutions together". they also suggested to try to influence the appointment if you can, to appoint someone who sees the office as inside civil society. Serbia advised to ask for a meeting to introduce their network and priorities, if possible with a proposal for action to address a specific issue. Netherlands stressed the importance of open, transparent relations, and using the added value of both partners. They also suggested a more formal dialogue several times a year. From Estonia the advice was to be open and proactive: "Organise a round table meeting, listen to each other, find common issues, find mutual things to work on, go from there. Take responsibility for doing what you say you will do. Keep each other informed – mutual respect."

### *The Ombudspersons' perspective*

Following the interviews with NPN representatives, their respective Ombudspersons were asked if they would also agree to be interviewed. All four office-holders agreed to be interviewed, and were able to make time for this (three by telephone and one using Skype). They were asked about their experiences of working with the Network, about what helps in working together, about the kind of contacts they had and the results, about implications of collaboration for the Ombudsman's independent position, and about what advice they would give to others.

All said that they had good cooperation and a positive experience. Serbia mentioned the campaign against corporal punishment, and also a recent joint meeting of their panel of young advisers with the Network's panel and the one from the commissioners for equality, which produced joint recommendations for decision-makers. The Dutch Ombudsman commended the NPN for their excellent overview of children in the Netherlands, and their work together on the theme of violence against children. "This showed that it was possible to stay independent and still work together." Estonia mentioned that they also worked separately with other NGOs, in parallel to the joint work with the NPN. "At the beginning of each year we have a meeting to plan our focus and coordinate activities for

the year.” Cyprus had found that recently they were working more with particular NGOs than with the NPN as such, and that this was also productive.

What helped was that the Ombudspersons and NPNs had the same goals, but different ‘added value’ and complementary roles. Serbia could not imagine not working well together, although the Netherlands suggested that it could sometimes be difficult if not all members of the Network agreed to follow the same line, and in those cases he would have to withdraw. Estonia said that the key was personal contacts, and also having the same basic goal, to promote children’s rights; the only occasional difficulty arose from the fact that NGOs are very project based in terms of funding, which can sometimes lead to competition. Cyprus found that working with NGOs “helps you to keep your ear to the ground.”

Serbia and the Netherlands had moved from formal to informal or ‘semi-formal’ patterns of contact, from regular meetings to issue-based contact. The Netherlands suggested that this was a good sign, that they knew each other well and had contacts at all levels of the respective organisations; although in Serbia they would perhaps have liked to re-establish more frequent contact. Estonia had moved from an emphasis on more informal contacts, to establish formal meetings to coordinate planned activities. Cyprus used a mixture of approaches, depending on what is needed.

All considered that they got better results by working together. Serbia gave the example of joint work on the issue of children begging in the streets, where they conducted research in partnership and are continuing to work together to influence policy, with a joint strategic approach. Estonia gave the example of a coalition against school bullying, which had introduced a joint programme for all ages from kindergarten to the end of high school, and the film festival where they previously worked separately and it was less effective. Cyprus said “you can’t do it by yourself! You can’t just issue your reports and wait for things to happen – it’s important to have pressure from other sectors.”

All four office-holders were very clear about the Ombudsman’s distinctive position and the difference that made, in terms of powers not held by NGOs and perceptions of independence. None had found that this constituted a barrier to close and effective collaboration. Serbia said that they had to have distance, to “be in the middle” between the sector and the public authorities: “We sometimes cannot do what they would like – we cannot push too hard, or jump in the water with them.” The Netherlands suggested that there would be problems only if you’re not clear to the outside world: “not in the shadow.” Estonia found that sometimes NGOs asked them to be co-applicants for funded projects, and they had to say no; also that they could not go too far with lobbying and stray into the political arena. “The NGOs are more free; our task is to find the balance. That is understood.” Cyprus suggested that if anything collaboration with Government was potentially more of a threat to independence, rather than with NGOs who could be supportive in helping Government to understand their obligations under the CRC.

In terms of advice to others, Serbia said that regular exchanges of information and ideas are important: an advisory body in the office or other regular meetings. The advice from the Netherlands was “don’t be afraid to cooperate with the Networks, but be clear about the different roles” – in particular, be clear with the outside world. Otherwise you miss the added value. If you don’t work together the Government and others can “divide and rule”. Estonia suggested that a first meeting should engage as many players as possible (including NGOs who are not part of the network). Cyprus advised “Don’t be afraid of them; get them close to you. Be constructive: you’re not in competition!”

## Conclusion

It is clear from the survey results that all Eurochild's National Partner Networks have a very positive attitude to their national Ombudspersons, and positive experiences of collaboration with them. It is also clear from the interviews that, in all four countries where further study was undertaken, collaboration covers a wide range of issues with no areas of exclusion. This included issues with individual children raised by parents, working together to lobby Parliamentary committees, work on issues such as violence against children (including campaigning for a ban on corporal punishment), child poverty and children's participation, migration, youth care and child abuse, joint reports to the CRC, training professionals on children's rights, publications and conferences, and joint meetings and activities of children and young people's advisory groups.

There appeared to be a clear understanding of the key differences in roles and responsibilities, which was broadly similar across all four countries and was shared with the Ombudsperson in each country. The key differences were seen to be that the Ombudsperson had a formal position with responsibility for monitoring public institutions, with powers that are often quite extensive but that go with an obligation to be seen to be above, or outside, the political arena; while NPNs focus on policy work and implementation, are in close touch with what's happening on the ground, and are more active and free to lobby and intervene in debates. Together this means that NPNs can be an invaluable source of information for Ombudspersons, can bring issues to their attention and open them up to public debate; while Ombudspersons can be a source of power, influence and authority for NPNs and their member organisations, able to give demands for children's rights real force and to insist that Governments take notice, as well as a source of legal advice. In general participants saw few barriers to effective collaboration, and rather than viewing the Ombudsperson's special position of independence as a barrier, the NPNs all saw it as an asset and an advantage.

All four countries were able to give examples of really successful collaboration (more than one in each case), and none could offer an example of a collaboration that did not work well. These positive experiences were attributed to shared objectives, mutual understanding, professionalism, relaxed and spontaneous working relationships, trust and mutual respect. The hypothetical advice that both NPNs and Ombudspersons offered to other countries reflected this: to be tolerant and open-minded, to work transparently and keep each other informed, allow space for discussion and finding solutions together (ideally through a combination of informal contact and more formal conversations from time to time), and to acknowledge the added value that each other brings to the table.

Finally, it should be noted that the in-depth research for this study was conducted with organisations in smaller countries, where networking and collaboration may sometimes be rather easier than in larger countries.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Netherlands 17 million, Serbia 7 million, Estonia 1.3 million and Cyprus 0.9 million. Six countries with ENOC members have populations of more than 35 million, but only two of those have Eurochild NPNs and only one (France) responded to this survey.

## **Addendum**

### **Discussion at ENOC conference**

The report was presented and discussed at a round-table meeting at the ENOC conference, together with brief presentations from two of the case study NPNs. There were also helpful comments from NPNs who had been working to establish Ombuds offices, and from Ombudspersons working to establish national coalitions. The report was very positively received by ENOC members, who made the following comments in group discussion:

- The value of actively promoting collaboration.
- The importance of strengthening collaboration based on particular national priorities.
- The added value offered by working with networks and coalitions, through access to coalition members and the groups with which they work.
- The need for NGOs to have funding and support to set up and run an effective network.
- The additional role of civic organisations in holding Ombuds to account and the need for Ombuds to be comfortable with this.
- The potential for closer cooperation between ENOC and Eurochild at a European level.

### **Discussion at Eurochild National Partner Network Group Meeting**

The discussion the ENOC round-table meeting was fed back to the National Partner Network Group later the same day. Members were pleased to hear of the positive response from ENOC members, and resolved to continue to strengthen links wherever possible. Specifically, NPNs would aim to organise a coordination meeting with their children's ombudsperson with the objective to have regular formal meetings at least once a year, and would seek cooperation with their children's ombudsperson on specific campaigns.

### **Recommendations for successful collaboration**

The following recommendations were drawn from the research (in particular from the comments made by participants in the case studies) and were adopted by Eurochild's NPNs at their meeting following the discussion at the ENOC conference.

- Early meetings to clarify roles and responsibilities
- Regular meetings to agree on complementary strategies, areas of joint and separate activity
- Direct communication at the top level

- Easy communication lines between staff at all levels
- Mutual respect for each others' distinctive positions
- Strategic thinking when identifying critical issues to pursue
- Clarity on time commitments and budgets for joint projects
- Taking time to fine-tune messages, share working programmes and objectives
- Linking through formal advisory group structures
- Joint working between children and young people's groups

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