Can the EU live up to the expectations of its child citizens?

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Abstract
There has been increasing interest in children's rights from the EU, seen in the Commission's 2006 Communication (COM(367) Final 2006), the Treaty of Lisbon 2009 and the Commission's 2011 Communication An EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child (COM(2011) 60 final). The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union Article 24(1), states that children 'may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity.' The time is therefore ripe to address the views of children towards the EU, in the expectation that the EU may be ready to take them into consideration. In research in two EU Member States, fifty-five children aged 5 to 13 – in groups of refugee, minority ethnic, looked after, gypsy traveller, disabled and young caring children – developed claims for citizenship. This article looks at examples of the groups' claims in the context of EU policy, to explore what the EU could do to live up to the expectations of these young citizens.

Keywords
children's citizenship; European Union; social justice; UNCRC

Introduction
The European Union's focus on children's rights has increased significantly since 2006 (Stalford and Drywood, 2009) when the Commission published a Communication, Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (COM(367) Final 2006),1 outlining proposals for the development of an EU children's rights strategy. The commitment to protecting children's rights has since been reinforced by the Treaty of Lisbon (Stalford and Schuurman, 2011) and reiterated in An EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child (COM(2011) 60 final).2 The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which was given Treaty Level status by the Treaty of Lisbon, states in Article 24(1) that children 'may express their

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1) Hereafter called the 2006 Communication.
2) Hereafter called the 2011 Agenda.
views freely’ and the 2011 Agenda draws on this article to emphasise that children have a right to be heard in relation to matters that affect them (COM(2011) 60 final:13).

The EU has been concerned with young people’s citizenship since the 1970s (Keating, 2009), but to date there is very little research on children’s citizenship in the EU, even though a whole range of EU policies affect children living within and outside the EU (Ruxton, 2005, COM(2006) 367 final), including measures targeted at particular minority groups and experiences such as Roma (Roth and Moisa, 2011) and children experiencing asylum seeking (Drywood, 2011). The time is therefore ripe to explore children’s claims for citizenship in the context of the EU, in the hope that the EU might be ready to take children’s views into consideration. To that end, this article explores the expressions of rights, responsibilities, participation, respect and membership developed by children aged under 13 years, meeting in six research groups as gypsy travellers, young carers, looked after, minority ethnic, refugee and disabled children, who participated in a research project entitled Children, Citizenship and Europe.¹

The article is organised in four Sections. Section One outlines theoretical literature and relevant EU policy on children’s lived citizenship. Section Two introduces the research project on which this article is based. Section Three gives an overview of the kind of citizenship that the children’s research groups wanted, and the extent to which their citizenship claims and targets for change are relevant to the EU. Section Four discusses these findings and argues that, if one works from children’s citizenship claims to look at the tiers of government which impact on these, one sees some ways in which the EU might act to give reality to children’s demands. The article concludes with some recommendations on turning the EU Agenda’s commitment to participation into a reality which is more inclusive of, and responsive to the demands of, younger children.

1. Context: children, citizenship and Europe

Citizenship is a contested concept, containing the common elements of identity/membership, rights, responsibilities/duties, participation and status but with the specific content of these disputed in different political theories (Delanty, 2000; ¹The names Refugee, Gypsy Travellers, Young Carers and Disabled Children are used because the children used these terms and/or discussed these experiences with pride. The terms ‘Looked After Group’ and ‘Minority Ethnic Group’ are used, in the absence of any clear description of common identity on the part of the children, to ascribe an identity to the group, but not to the children in it. The Refugee group members had not been granted legal refugee status at the start of the research and were in a process of asylum seeking. During the research some group members’ statuses changed.
Lister, 2007). Children have historically been excluded from citizenship on the basis of assumed incompetence and incompleteness (Cockburn, 1998) but this exclusion has been challenged by authors who argue that children’s citizenship can be claimed on the basis that they live the experience of citizenship, as social actors and holders of rights and responsibilities in spaces such as communities, groups, schools and families (e.g. Jans, 2004; Cockburn, 2007; Lister, 2007). This claim to citizenship acknowledges children’s contributions to social good and provides an alternative to the welfare model of childhood (Neale, 2004).

Whilst citizenship is claimed for children, some authors note the need to avoid the exclusionary tendencies of citizenship (Moosa-Mitha, 2005), tendencies which in Europe are expressed for example in immigration policies that encourage ‘a perception of Europe as a ‘fortress’” (Dolejslova, 2009:10), so excluding many young people living in the EU from citizenship. To cater for differences between children as well as differences between adults and children, a more inclusive and differentiated analysis of children’s citizenship is the necessary next step (Lister, 2007).

A more inclusive and differentiated analysis of citizenship is enabled if citizenship is understood not just as a status conferred by governmental institutions, but as a set of juridical, political, economic and cultural practices which shape the flow of resources to persons and social groups (Turner, 1993) and as a lived experience (Lister, 2007). This is cosmopolitan citizenship not of a nation-state (Delanty, 2000) but lived through practices in layers of ‘collectivities’ and ‘intermediate spaces’ (Cockburn, 2007:10), institutional and relational spaces (Roche, 1999), where citizenship rights may become universal human rights, not always binding in legal terms, but influencing norms, discourses and goals (Soysal, 1994). A cosmopolitan ‘lived citizenship’ approach that allows for plural identities (Singh, 2009) is particularly appropriate for developing definitions of young people’s citizenship in Europe (Dolejsiova, 2009), and can be developed by starting from the views of citizens themselves (Gaventa, 2002), including the perspectives of marginalised children and young people (Moosa-Mitha, 2005).

The EU is a particularly relevant layer at which to consider aspects of children’s citizenship, because through juridical and policy practices, such as treaties, case law and education and youth initiatives, the EU affects aspects of children and young people’s experience of both formal citizenship and lived citizenship (Dolejsiova, 2009).

Formal citizenship of the EU, expressed in Article 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (C 115/56 EN OJ 9.5.2008), conveys specific social, economic and political entitlements on EU internal migrants, including children, with a view to developing the EU internal market (Ackers and Stalford, 2004; Stalford, 2008). For the majority of children living in the EU, the relevance of this formal citizenship status may be limited, since it concerns only the small minority of children who have citizenship of EU Member States
and who then migrate within the EU (Stalford, 2008). Some other legal provisions of the EU may have relevance to lived citizenship. For example, a common theme in literature on children’s citizenship is that children are not respected and ‘therefore do not enjoy genuine equality of status as citizens’ (Lister, 2007), EU provisions on equality are therefore relevant to children (Stalford, 2005). Article 19 of the TFEU, for example, confers equality of a kind by prohibiting discrimination, including discrimination on grounds of age, and there are a number of EU directives and initiatives focused on non-discrimination (Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000, OJ L 180/22, 19.7.2000; Directive 2000/78 of 27 November 2000, OJ L 303/16, 2.12.2000; the European Year of Opportunities for All).

EU texts addressed directly at participation and responsibility aspects of children’s lived citizenship are located in the fields of education and youth. EU citizenship education initiatives in the 1970s to 1990s concentrated on generating feelings of European membership and identity, then shifted to focus on education for democratic citizenship, young people’s responsibilities to develop European civic virtues, social participation and, more recently, promoting key competencies and reducing early school leaving (Keating, 2009; COM 2006/962/EC; COM(2008) 425 final). The EU launched its first initiative on youth work, Youth for Europe, in 1989, which has been followed by a series of programmes. The current programme is Youth in Action, which runs until 2013. This programme is targeted at young people aged 15-28, with some flexibility to include those aged 13 to 30 (Decision No 1719/2006/EC) and is designed to fund and promote active citizenship, encouraging youth exchanges, voluntary service, youth-led initiatives and participation forums (European Commission, 2007). Young people’s participation within the EU is provided for in a number of mechanisms such as the European Youth Forum, Youth Parliament and Youth Summits and The White Paper on a New Impetus For Youth (COM(2001) 681 final) which introduced the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in youth policy. This OMC includes a process for young people’s involvement and has subsequently been strengthened with the Commission establishing a framework for ‘structured dialogue’, recognising ‘the role and place of youth organisations and young people’ in policy making (Čzerwińska, 2009). The European youth forums, with the exception of the Y.E.S. Forum, tend to involve well-educated young people aged 15-30 (Stalford and Drywood, 2009), but recent youth policy (COM(2009) 200 final) proposes further routes for participation of marginalised young people, adding support for ‘e-democracy’ to engage with non-organised youth. The extent to which these initiatives actually result in young people’s

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4) A process introduced by the Lisbon Strategy 2000, in which policy remains the responsibility of Member States, under the principle of subsidiarity, but Member States define and evaluate common objectives and learn from each other how to best reach these objectives, through dissemination of best practice and benchmarking.
voices being effectively taken into account in EU decisions is unclear, particularly in relation to young people seeking asylum (Drywood, 2011).

In addition to participation, youth policies addressed to young people aged 13-30 focus on responsibilities of education, employment and social inclusion (COM(2005) 206 final; COM(2009) 200 final), with current policies giving particular attention to young people's potential as a human capital resource for the EU economy. The EU 2020 Strategy flagship initiative Youth on the Move includes, for example, statements such as ‘Europe’s future prosperity depends on its young people’ (COM(2010) 477 final:1). EU interest in youth can therefore be connected with concern for young people's contribution to developing a sustainable knowledge-based economy. This concern with capacity for future economic contributions is also evident in policies on education of younger children (COM(2008) 425 final; COM(2011) 66 final) and children’s early education and care and primary and secondary education have become a focus of aims to ensure children are equipped with key competencies, which will again be coordinated across Member States through the education OMC.

In the last five years there have been developments of a further kind in children’s human rights in the EU, as described in the introduction to this issue (also Stalford and Schuurman, 2011). The 2006 Communication recognised that a whole range of EU policies and directives affect children, including in the areas of asylum and migration, health safety and welfare, poverty and social exclusion, child labour, civil justice and family matters, environment, non-discrimination and violence against children (European Commission SEC(2006)889). The 2006 Communication also acknowledges that certain children face particular problems, including children living in poverty, those who cannot live with their parents, Roma children, minorities facing racism, immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, children who work, children who are disabled and children who experience violence, trafficking and exploitation. The 2006 Communication proposed action; for example, committing the EU to mainstreaming, the consideration of children’s rights in relation to all EU policies (COM(2006) 367 final). This was followed in 2007 by establishing child poverty as a thematic priority of the Social OMC, although, as with the OMCs on Education and Youth, exploring EU initiatives on child poverty may reveal these are motivated more by concern for enhancing children's future inclusion in economic activity than for promoting children's current welfare and rights (Stalford and Drywood, 2009). The 2011 Agenda states ‘it is now the time to move up a gear on the rights of the child’ (COM(2011) 60 final:3). The practical measures proposed to change gear include again mainstreaming ensuring all internal and external EU policies and actions are ‘fully compatible with the principles and provisions of the CRC and other international instruments’ (COM(2011) 60 final:8), including respect for the provisions of EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European
Union (COM(2011) 60 final:14). There are also commitments in the 2011 Agenda to using children’s rights indicators for evidence-based policy making and to designing, implementing and monitoring the EU’s policies that directly or indirectly affect children ‘taking into account the principle of the best interests of the child enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the UNCRC’ (COM(2011) 60 final:3). Implementation of the 2011 Agenda and application of the Charter will also be reviewed.

In addition to mainstreaming, monitoring and reviewing children’s rights and attention to child poverty, the 2006 Communication committed to a strategy to develop children’s participation, potentially including those under 13. The EU Parliament Resolution on the 2006 Communication (2007/2093(INI)) noted the importance of giving even very young children the absolute right to communicate their views and the 2011 Agenda repeats the commitment to participation, stating ‘that children must be given a chance to voice their opinions and participate in the making of decisions that affect them’ (COM(2011) 60 final:13).

The EU initiatives noted above clearly address children and young people’s rights, responsibilities and participation. The question remains to what extent the EU initiatives affecting citizenship are in line with what children and young people would want, as there is a lack of data reflecting the views of children on the EU (Stalford and Drywood, 2009: 2011). The question of what children aged under 13 want from lived citizenship in the EU is particularly important, since there are some age-based distinctions in EU documents. There is greater provision for older young people who are reaching the point of paid economic activity, notably around access to participation opportunities, whereas for children under the age of 13 participation remains largely rhetoric. The EU Forum for the Rights of the Child was set up following the 2006 Communication to ‘contribute to the design and monitoring of EU actions and act as an arena for exchange of good practice’ and to ‘include all the relevant stakeholders’ including children (COM(2006) 367:8), but mechanisms for children’s effective participation in this Forum have still not been put into place. The 2006 Communication committed to formally including children in ‘all consultations and actions related to their rights and needs’; however, the qualitative Eurobarometer consultation (2010) which the 2011 Agenda cites as ‘starting steps towards listening to children’, includes only young people aged 15-17. There are also age-based distinctions about children’s responsibilities. The 2006 Communication suggests that children gain new responsibilities on reaching teenage years, and the White Paper on a New Impetus for Youth notes that young people sometimes have competing responsibilities of being a student, fulfilling family responsibilities and having or seeking a job (COM(2001) 681 final:11); but younger children too sometimes have competing responsibilities, and acknowledging this is an essential part of recognising them as citizens (Neale, 2004; Lister, 2007).
It is therefore necessary to question whether EU policies take account of younger children and give opportunities for the citizenship rights, responsibilities, status, participation and membership to which they aspire. Existing research with children under 13 does not address these questions. The UK National Youth Survey (Olle, 2002) does, however, show that the EU is ‘very or quite important’ to some 9-14 year olds, although it is ‘not at all important’ to others. With the development of the EU children’s rights strategy, in addition to the qualitative consultation noted above, some Eurobarometer surveys (2008, 2009) have been conducted on behalf of the Commission, on children’s awareness of their rights, but the young people involved are again in the 15-18 age range. One piece of research, which included younger children, is the Save the Children (Feinstein and Haldorsson, 2007) consultation on the 2006 Communication. The findings listed ‘violence against children in its different manifestations and settings as the single most important issue to address’ (Feinstein and Haldorsson, 2007: 11). The authors caution however that respondents may have been influenced by examples the researchers integrated into the questionnaire, since children responding to the questionnaire may have ranked these suggestions rather than thinking of ‘own’ important issues. This approach may have been due to many factors, for instance short timescales or the wish to link children’s concerns to policy area where the EU already acts and to make the questionnaire more accessible. Longer timescales allow a more participatory perspective; this article suggests working with children to identify concerns in their lived experience and then identifying the relevance of, impact on and possibilities for change in EU actions on these issues.

2. The Children, Citizenship and Europe project

The Children, Citizenship and Europe project was funded by the University of Central Lancashire as a doctoral studentship, with the aims of researching experiences and aspirations for citizenship with children aged under 13 years and working from these to explore the implications for children’s lived citizenship in the EU. The fieldwork took place from May 2008 until November 2009, carried out directly by the researcher, Cath Larkins, and fifty-five children meeting in six children’s research groups. These were already established groups, meeting for educational, leisure or residential purposes. In some cases host agencies donated additional staff time to provide children with assistance in some of the research activities.

The fieldwork took place in two countries, Wales and France, a choice guided by the need to draw on understandings in at least two EU Member States but limited by the particular language competencies, and budget, of the researcher.
In Wales, the groups were invited to participate with the help of Save the Children, Barnardos and a local authority, and in France through independent voluntary organisations. Given the tendency for citizenship to be defined in exclusionary ways (Moosa-Mitha, 2005), for young people’s identification with Europe to vary with the material circumstances of childhood (Grundy and Jamieson, 2007) and for their definitions of citizenship to vary according to whether or not they are ‘outsiders’ (Lister et al. 2003), specific groups were targeted to ensure the inclusion of marginalised children, defined as those most likely to face the particular problems highlighted in the 2006 Communication. Groups were therefore recruited in areas experiencing poverty: in fact, in regions with the lowest GDP per capita in the UK and mainland France, with some groups recruited in districts with among the highest rates of adult unemployment within these regions. Some problems mentioned in the 2006 Communication were not directly targeted in group recruitment, namely experiences of violence, trafficking and exploitation, although some children in the groups had some of these experiences. Young carers were taken as a particular example of children who work, although caring cannot merely be considered as work (Aldridge, 2008). Choice of groups was limited by the availability of established groups and influenced by the possibility of connecting to ongoing participatory initiatives. For example, the Young Carer group was targeted as a peer-led participatory project and had a history of participatory work with the researcher within their local authority. The other example of this was The Gypsy Traveller group, based in one of the schools working with Save the Children Wales to develop Gypsy and Traveller children and young people’s participation.

In Wales the groups were Disabled Children, Gypsy Travellers, and Young Carers. In France they were Refugee, Looked After and Minority Ethnic groups. Group size varied between four and sixteen members, the smallest being the Disabled Children group and the largest being the Young Carers group. The children were aged 5-13. 51% of them lived in Wales and 49% in France. 65% were girls and 35% were boys.

Initial information and invitations to participate were given to children by host organizations; all groups approached expressed an interest in participating. Children were given further information and either parental consent or assent forms, depending on advice from host organisations. Signed valid consent (Alderson, 2005; Morrow, 2005), was gained from the children by the researcher following further opportunities for information exchange at the first meeting;

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5) See note 3 above for an explanation of the names of the six groups.
6) Consent forms enabled parents or carers actively to consent, requiring them to return a form consenting to their child being given the opportunity to participate. Assent forms required active dissent, requiring the return of a form only if parents or carers wished for their child to NOT participate.
freedom to withdraw from participation was assured by the host organisations making other activities available at the same time as the research sessions were held. During the research process confidentiality was limited by the child protection procedures of the host organisations. The research group members chose their own pseudonyms, or asked the researcher to choose a name for them.

Each group usually met for five sessions to participate in the research. Although 55 children participated in the project, some children only participated in only some of the research activities. Each group was given initial concrete and contextualised questions related to citizenship (Osler and Starkey, 2006). These were generative words and themes derived from previous research with children and young people, aimed at enabling children to reflect and act on their own experience (Freire, 1973). Children were given examples of a range of methods and resources with which to select and construct activities suited to their preferred means of expression (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Hill, 2006). The groups started by talking about rights, responsibilities, participation, respect and change in the places where they were meeting. The activities co-created to facilitate these discussions were: video interviewing, peer video interviewing and drama; mapping, drawing, modelling and collage; group discussion supported by board games and participatory focus group techniques; video and photo tours of play/home/school settings.

At every session the groups reviewed the data they had already generated to consider further rights, responsibilities, participation, respect and change they experienced or aspired to. This process was facilitated by making the research data available to the group in a variety of forms and lengths including full transcripts, summary cards, videos and photographs. In the fourth and fifth sessions, during the data review, half of the group members also reflected on whether the citizenship claims they had generated should also be citizenship experiences for others. This initially involved creating maps and distributing claims to rights, responsibilities, respect and participation to other geographical areas; during the research this process evolved to include discussions of non-geographical allocation of citizenship. During the final sessions research groups decided the content of action research reports and videos, which were then used by four of the groups to lobby for the changes they sought.

After the fieldwork, the researcher undertook a second grounded theory analysis of all the groups’ data, looking for common themes and processes (Kelle, 2005; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Resources did not permit children to be included in this process. A third step of critical realist theory building followed (Bhaskar, 1998; Porter, 2002), which involved looking for causal relationships between the actual conditions of children’s experiences and aspirations and the structural mechanisms that affect these. This third analysis drew on the children’s research groups’ data together with academic literature and EU policy documents.
3. Findings

This Section discusses the findings from the Children, Citizenship and Europe project in terms of the citizenship claims and contributions proposed by the children’s research groups, how they considered membership of citizenship should be accorded and where the groups’ experiences of citizenship are located.

Citizenship claims

The children’s research groups developed a total of 400 claims for rights, responsibilities, participation, respect and change. Every group generated citizenship claims that can be grouped under eight themes of education, play and leisure, family life, basic standard of living, safety, caring, association and participation, as illustrated by examples in Table 1. If we consider these claims in the light of existing frameworks for rights, all are clearly tied to the CRC, which is one of the standards by which the 2011 Agenda states that EU actions are to be judged.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship Themes</th>
<th>Related UNCRC Articles</th>
<th>Examples of codes linked to these themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>28 &amp; 29</td>
<td>DC: Teachers show respect by being nice to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play and leisure</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>GT: The responsibility to play with my sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family life</td>
<td>9,10</td>
<td>LA: The right to have family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic standard of living</td>
<td>27 &amp; 26</td>
<td>GT: Should be allowed to live without rats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Preamble, 19</td>
<td>Ref: The right to not be hit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Preamble, 3, 6</td>
<td>LA: It’s important to have friends, friendship and love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>ME: Have to not fall out (with people in the group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>12, 13</td>
<td>DC: Want to change to be able to decide to go to dinner early at school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to these eight common themes, some groups also discussed themes that were not mentioned by others, but which can again be linked to the UNCRC. Discrimination and cultural differences (CRC Articles 2 and 30) were mentioned most by the Gypsy Traveller group, who spent an entire session discussing this theme, and occasionally by members of the Minority Ethnic, Disabled Children and Young Carer groups. The Minority Ethnic group never talked about personal experience of racism or recognition of cultural differences, but rather about age discrimination they faced at school. Both the Young Carer and Disabled Children groups referred to special help for disabled children (UNCRC Article 23) and both the Looked After and Minority Ethnic groups talked about good alternative home life (UNCRC Articles 20 and 25). Special
help for refugees (UNCRC Article 22) was only mentioned by the Refugee group themselves. Two groups raised the issue of protection from exploitative paid and unpaid work (related to UNCRC Articles 12, 32 and 36), in that two children expressed a wish for better conditions in work which they had been told it was their responsibility to do, and two wanted choice over whether to work. The data suggest that education can also be interpreted as work; on this basis all the groups can be seen as asking for more choice at work. Protection at work can, therefore, be understood as a issue of choice about and conditions at work.

The research data also contained themes that are less directly related to the UNCRC, although these can be linked to Article 12 as concerning ‘matters that affect’ children, and also relate to EU activity. For example, there were political discussions of who should be national President, of how countries should relate to each other and of ending wars. Although these were discussions focused on national layers, with the development of an EU President and competence in foreign policy these are now areas in which the EU operates. In addition, some groups discussed the use of public and private space, such as caring for the environment and freedom of movement at local levels: for example, wanting the right to move beyond the boundaries of school or of a refugee reception centre. Freedom of movement is a right associated with formal EU citizenship in the case of the children’s research group members’ citizenship claims; however, freedom of movement was not requested to enable migration for work between Member States of the EU, but to enable movement between the more local spaces of their lived experience, facilitating their rights to a home suited to their needs, and to play.

Starting from the groups’ discussions of respect and then looking across the groups’ claims to rights, responsibilities, participation and change, it is also possible to distinguish a framework of civic virtues which, as noted in the context section above, are the subject of EU education policy. Despite differences in the children’s experiences, all the research groups claimed, and expressed, helpfulness, politeness, friendliness, fairness, and attitudes supporting degrees of relational autonomy. The citizenship claims regarding civic virtues were not for these to be taught to children, but rather that civic virtues should be expressed by adults and by institutions, as well as by children.

Citizenship contributions

In relation to each citizenship claim described above, research group members described how their actions at times contributed to the achievement of the citizenship they claimed. This observation is crucial when using UNCRC rights to categorise citizenship themes, because although the UNCRC recognises children’s agency (and is couched in terms of rights) it can tend to cast children as passive recipients rather than as actors (Archard, 2004). Children’s contributions can be seen for example in research groups’ descriptions of responsibilities of the
theme of Caring, contributing to survival and development at home. This related to physical and emotional care for other children and adults, family members and neighbours. The fullest descriptions of caring responsibilities came, unsurprisingly, from the Young Carer group (in particular from two children under 11). Some also talked about feeling stressed by the dual responsibilities of caring and education. As well as their own contributions, group members cited the need for contributions of resources that would help reduce their dual responsibilities, such recognition from school of the caring work they are doing and social services help with cooking and cleaning.

Taking a second example of children’s actions contributing to the achievement of citizenship claims, the Refugee group members discussed influencing the achievement of their claim for special support for adult and child refugees. The group members, including even the youngest, helped each other and their parents by translating for those whose French was not yet fluent and by sharing information. The children also described how staff provided supportive relationships. The ideal homes that some of the group created were populated with centre workers as well as their families and friends, and two group members drew a worker’s name in a heart on the blackboard in the room we were using. The resources that contribute to the achievement of special help for refugees, then, include children’s actions but also the actions of staff when they demonstrate friendliness (one of the civic virtues common to all six research groups).

As suggested in Section One, and in contrast to perceptions of children’s responsibilities implied in some EU documents (COM 2001, COM 2006), this research confirms that children under 13 can also juggle competing responsibilities and that children’s responsibilities vary according to circumstances and resources as well as to age. In line with the theme of children’s claims to choice about, and better conditions at, work, children in this research were asking for recognition of their contributions, for more choice about the contributions they make and for the contribution of resources from others.

Citizenship membership

At the fourth or fifth research session of each group, half the research group members participated in an exercise designed to enable them to think about whether their citizenship claims should be limited to their own group or shared with other children and adults in other parts of the world; that is to say, who should be given membership of the citizenship they had defined? The exercise used maps with which the groups were already familiar, or schematic collage maps created by group members and populated by known people and places. Due to their own prior knowledge gained at school, different group members had different understandings of the European continent and the EU; all groups were offered additional explanation. The results enable us to explore the extent to which the groups
displayed cosmopolitan or differentiated understandings of citizenship and the basis for these, and so have implications for the EU children’s rights agenda.

The children’s research groups rarely limited membership of their citizenship to EU or European level, and the only limit that all the research groups used was ‘The World’. Indeed, all except the Looked After group gave membership of at least half their citizenship claims to everyone in the world, whereas only two groups limited any rights and responsibilities to an EU or European level. These were the ‘Responsibility to help each other’ given to EU Member States and three rights associated with play given to children living on the European continent. The fact that only two children limited any aspect of citizenship to the EU or Europe suggests that there is very little support from these children for citizenship membership limited to a European level. The one child who gave the responsibility of mutual help to EU Member States was a member of the Minority Ethnic group, and this was the group with the clearest pre-existing knowledge of the EU, with one member being able to name all 27 Member States and their capital cities.

Similarly, claims to rights, responsibilities, participation and respect were given to children living within specific nation states on only four occasions and to children living in certain localities only twice. Discussion of these limitations showed that decisions at times reflected conceptions of needs related to certain places. For example, when the Refugee group discussed where children should have the right not to be hit, they initially gave this right to children in specific countries, where they thought being hit was likely to be more common, although their later discussions implied that the ‘right not to be hit’ should apply to all children in the world. In other cases when lived citizenship claims were distributed to non-global locations, connection to place seemed to be related to experience of contact with people from a given locality or country, either directly or through TV and the Internet. The groups’ usual cosmopolitan allocation of citizenship membership to all of humanity was therefore occasionally influenced by personal connection or perceptions of specific needs.

Despite my lead in suggesting types of place (localities, countries and collections of countries) and scales of distance for the map-making exercise, some children, particularly in the Looked After and Refugee groups, developed other categories of membership that informed their allocation of citizenship. These led to differentiated understandings of citizenship membership where rights and responsibilities were at times given to people according to age based capacity, gender, choice, obligation and absence and presence of resources. For example, two girls in the Young Carer group thought girls should have the right not to be called names by boys, and three groups suggested that having rights and responsibilities were consequences of having resources or that rights should be targeted at those who need resources. This former instance is illustrated by a Disabled Children group member who gave herself the responsibility to look
after herself once she has the resource of knowledge on how to cook, and the latter by members of the Gypsy Traveller group who gave the right ‘to live without rats’ to people living on Gypsy and Traveller sites, based on their experience of this being where the resource of a healthy rat-free environment was absent. Indeed, the Young Carer group’s targeting of rights according to gender and the Refugee group giving rights not to be hit to certain countries could also be viewed as giving rights on the basis of the absence of attitude resources.

The use of aspects of differentiation was sometimes subject to differences of opinions within and between groups. In the Refugee group, two girls aged six and seven at times disputed the judgements of the 13 year old boy about the capacity and interests of girls and younger children. Some Refugee group members thought that doing homework should be a matter of choice and interest; the Looked After group members thought it was an obligation.

The children’s research groups’ recurring ‘cosmopolitan’ allocation of citizenship to members of humanity, differentiated by perceptions of capacity, gender, obligation, choice, absence and presence of resources, has three implications for the EU. Citizenship for humanity echoes the 2011 Agenda commitment to protecting and promoting children’s rights in external as well as internal actions, and underlines the importance of the ‘EU Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child’ EU Council 2007 in external affairs. Targeting rights to compensate for absences of resources, and responsibilities to flow from holding resources, suggest that the EU, as a holder of cultural and economic resources, should target its contributions particularly to the achievement of the rights of those who experience absences of resources. This may tie in with the EU’s work on child poverty and social inclusion. Disputes over perceptions of capacity and obligation reinforce the need to question EU assumptions concerning these.

Citizenship locations

The children’s research groups started by discussing concrete experience in the spaces of their lived experience. Most of the groups’ discussions unsurprisingly reflected the spaces the researcher introduced at the beginning of the research: the group settings, homes, schools and communities. These spaces are wider than may at first be apparent as, while the institutions of home and school may be central and shared places of different groups’ citizenship experience which are relatively constant, for members of the Refugee, Gypsy Traveller and Looked After groups in particular, the physical location of home and school can be fluid.

7) This is of course only a partial picture of where rat infestation can be a problem; during the course of this research the researcher, who is not of Gypsy or Traveller origin, also experienced a rat infestation of her home!
and stretch across counties, across nations and across the borders of the EU into the rest of Europe.

Distant locations where groups did not have personal experience were less discussed: even though each group was asked to think about rights, respect, responsibilities and participation in Europe and the world. Members of four groups discussed citizenship claims at a global level. Only the Minority Ethnic group talked about citizenship at an EU level. Groups which discussed the EU and global concerns, such as pollution, had previously discussed these matters at school. Members of some groups also talked about locations that had not been suggested, sometimes relating to indirect experience: Africa, television and the internet. For example, a Minority Ethnic group claim for ‘The right to have parents’ was generated from a relational space, where children were expressing concern about a friend from Africa who had been adopted and was not able to see her birth parents. The Refugee group discussion of ‘the right to have heating in houses’ was informed by a conversation on Skype. Children, then, live citizenship in the spaces of media and educational discourse and in (actual and virtual) interpersonal spaces of peer relationships, reflecting the importance of discursive space to citizenship (Delanty, 2000; Cockburn, 2005, 2010). These specific examples also reflect the significance of the EU, which has roles in regulating these spaces of television content (e.g. Directive 89/552/EEC, OJ L 298/23, 3.10.1989; Council Recommendation 98/560/EC, OJ L 270/48, 7.10.1998; Garde, 2011), safe internet use (e.g. Decision No 854/2005/EC, OJ L 149/1, 11.6.05; Savirimuthu, 2011) and international adoption (e.g. European Parliament Resolution TA(2011)0013).

As well as discussion revealing the spaces of lived citizenship, during the course of the research some children’s research group members also enacted citizenship through using their research findings to lobby for action. Sometimes this took place in local spaces. For example, the Young Carer report was used to lobby for a homework pass scheme in schools, and the Minority Ethnic group report was presented to the homework club management committee who then sent workers on children’s rights training and committed more resources to play. Some groups also lived citizenship in actions in wider arenas. The Gypsy Traveller group gave their report to a young Gypsy Traveller representative who then presented it to an MEP; their concerns have also been fed into a Welsh Assembly consultation on a new policy for Gypsy Travellers and an Internet based network of forums for Gypsy Traveller children in Wales (www.TravellingAhead.org.uk). The Young Carer group presented the findings of their research at the International Forum for Child Welfare conference in Cardiff in September 2008. The Refugee group did not want to use their report or video with anyone personally, but asked the researcher to lobby anyone who could do anything to help them. These examples may provide models for younger children’s participation in the European Union and are reviewed in the Conclusion.
4. Discussion: how can the EU live up to the expectations of citizen children?

The findings of this research suggest that the EU is indeed highly relevant to children’s lives. Although only one group associated a citizenship claim directly with the EU (the responsibilities of Member States to help each other), the data produced by all the groups related directly to established EU areas of activity.

Research group members’ use of ‘membership of the world’ as the basis for distributing their citizenship claims, together with the many links between the themes of their discussion and the content of the UNCRC, supports the argument that the UNCRC may provide a point of departure for children’s citizenship in the EU (Stalford and Drywood, 2009). This suggests that one way in which the EU might live up to children’s expectations would be to fulfil its commitment to mainstreaming the UNCRC in all internal and external actions. The research groups’ data show how the UNCRC can be related to different children’s specific circumstances, informing how it is possible to apply a universal principle in local and individual circumstances of a specific place and time. For example, in the theme of Education, all the groups talked about having responsibilities to work or to help the teacher, all spoke of wanting some increase in decision-making and all talked of things they should have within education. In addition, the Young Carer group asked for recognition from teachers of their caring responsibilities, while the Gypsy Traveller group asked for the replacement of broken equipment and the availability of suitable further education courses. Citizenship described in this way, which includes claims to responsibilities, respect and participation as well as rights, can be described as lived citizenship claims. Which groups talked about which citizenship theme tended to reflect concerns that arose from some of the personal experiences that might be expected from members of their group. Children’s perspectives can therefore inform what practices allow the citizenship they claim to be achieved in specific situations, in this example by naming what resources needed to be targeted where in order to achieve education suited to their needs and personalities. However, in generating a shared understanding of citizenship there is also value in talking to children with a range of different experiences. Dialogue with children thereby provides the means of achieving what has been described as a necessary ‘differentiated universalism’ in children’s citizenship (Moosa-Mitha, 2005), based on children’s own claims to individual and cultural differences.

However, restricting children’s citizenship claims to the UNCRC may limit the way in which children’s discussions are seen. An alternative approach would be to ‘begin with children’s everyday lives rather than international instruments’ (Invernizzi, 2008; Hanson and Poretti, 2010). This may be particularly important in the EU as the research group members (in common with many adults) rarely associate their lived experience with the EU. Looking for example at the theme of Basic Standard of Living, groups identified how the people around
them influenced the achievement of this citizenship claim, but rarely related this to political institution levels. Where links with institutions did occur, this related to pre-existing knowledge and current discourse. For example, a Minority Ethnic group member, who said that she would like to change the President so that he would give more money to people who did not have any, made this comment a few months after the Presidential elections. Members of the Gypsy Traveller group, who discussed presenting their action targets to their mayor, the Welsh Assembly and the Queen, had information about older Gypsy Traveller young people’s involvement in a rolling process of participation and lobbying. This demonstrates how children’s political awareness can develop according to experience and opportunities, and that children may need more information on what issues to address to the EU before they spontaneously make such links.

A participatory foundation to researching children’s priorities for EU actions enables knowledge about the impact of political institutions to be developed and led by children’s interests and concerns, by starting from lived citizenship claims and working outwards to identify the institutional layers that have an impact, including the EU. By adopting a critical realist approach to exploring qualitative data, moving between layers of knowledge about a problem (Porter, 2002), it is possible to move from the children’s claims to knowledge about wider structures and governmental tiers which can affect their lived citizenship. This approach would enable problems to be identified by children themselves and for children and others to identify whether the EU has an influence and what may need to change. Although the children’s research group members did not generally limit citizenship to Europe, children could thereby nonetheless claim citizenship of the EU on the basis that their lives are profoundly affected by it (Fraser, 2007). This argument is illustrated below with reference to three of the children’s research groups’ targets for change.

Taking first the example of the Minority Ethnic group’s target of ‘give more money to people who don’t have it… to buy bread’, the EU has developed significant initiatives in this area, such as the OMC aimed at reducing child poverty and social exclusion, cited in Section One, and the Common Agriculture Policy which affects the quality and availability of food. Although there have been modest reductions in child poverty in some countries and both social transfers and target setting are useful tools, child poverty is also affected by adult unemployment, low income levels and job insecurity; ‘the real impact of the Social OMC on the eradication of child poverty and social exclusion is still too limited’ (Eurochild, 2009). Child poverty is also affected by European economic integration, since this has an effect on job security and pay levels, which may have the opposite effect to social cohesion policies (Lindstrom, 2010) For instance, European Court of Justice interpretations of economic integration regulations, such as ECJ decisions on the Service Directive (e.g. the Laval and Viking cases), established ‘the primacy of single market principles over the right to uphold more
robust social protections’ leading to downward pressures on wages (Lindstrom, 2010). To take a second example, Member States’ government spending is restricted to 3 percent of GDP by the Growth and Stability Pact (TFEU 126), in order to promote a stable financial environment, and this can lead to cuts in public services with consequences for children.

Whilst it is difficult to disentangle the effects of the EU, the IMF and global capitalism, the consequences may be seen in Ireland where the government committed to significant spending cuts in order to meet this budget criteria and receive a loan from the EU and IMF. The subsequent budget, according to Barnardos Ireland (2011), ‘pushed children and families already living in disadvantage to the brink’ with children experiencing cuts to family social welfare payments and ‘frontline services that they rely on such as Special Needs Assistants and Speech and Language Therapists’. As child poverty is affected by parental income and unemployment and by restrictions on government spending, alongside the child poverty work advanced through the Social OMC, mainstreaming children’s right to a basic standard of living would also mean considering the short and long term impact on children of EU policies directed at labour market liberalisation and reducing budget deficits. In this way children’s claims for citizenship, when combined with knowledge of macro-economic influence, can indicate how additional spheres of EU activity are relevant to children’s rights.

Taking a second example, Refugee Group members made claims for citizenship under the theme Special help for refugees. This included the lived citizenship claim for friendliness between refugees and the staff whose role it is to support them. Working from this claim outwards to other tiers that affect their experience, friendliness does not appear to be on the agenda. The EU strategy outlined in the Action Plan on the Stockholm Programme (COM(2010) 171) professes the values of respect and solidarity, and commits the EU to the promise that ‘Solidarity will be at the heart of our asylum and resettlement policy’ (COM(2010) 171:7); and the controversial ‘returns’ directive (Directive 2008/115/EC, OJ L 348/98, 24.12.2008) makes provision for considering the best interests of the child (Article 5(a)). However, children’s lived experience of the asylum seeking process reveals a history of ‘a shocking but little heeded impact on minors which causes incalculable harm to children’ (Fekete, 2007), a policy that only provides a minimal guarantee that children’s welfare will be protected within the asylum-seeking process ‘indicative of a preoccupation with the fight against illegal immigration, at the expense of upholding children’s rights’ (Drywood, 2010), and a concern that despite commitments to ‘mainstreaming’ the future needs of children and young people may be overlooked in the forming of the Common European Asylum System by 2012 (Drywood, 2011).

The Refugee group also claimed more liberty, specifically ‘Change things at the reception centre, for the children and the families, so that they are not shut in here. So they can go where they want to.’ They wanted to be able to move beyond
the centre, to have a home and to have more choice in the locations where they settled on receiving refugee status. The importance of this claim was reflected in the majority of our sessions being spent discussing their future homes. Focussing on EU level influence, it is significant that whilst it is largely accepted that housing children in detention centres and reception facilities is harmful to them (Crawley and Lester, 2005), the EU asylum-seeking legislation consistently stops short of banning this, allowing special provision within these settings (Stalford and Drywood, 2009). In order to live up to the expectation of these citizen children, as well as friendliness from staff and in policies, the containment of refugee children in detention and reception centres should be prohibited. It is clear that the EU cannot oblige workers to be friendly, but EU policy contributes to constructing the norms or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1980) of ‘what is to be done’ in the field of asylum seeking. Prohibiting the detention of minors and forcible return to unsafe third countries could, for instance, contribute towards potentially friendlier attitudes by changing norms about the treatment of asylum-seeking children as well as by granting them the liberty they claimed. In this way children’s claims for citizenship can indicate what needs to change within a sphere of EU activity that has already been associated with the children’s rights agenda.

Taking a final example, some Young Carer group targets for change related to their caring contributions ‘to change the caring they were doing’ and ‘for more help with caring’. In education they also requested that their caring roles be recognised in terms of extra time for the homework and revision they have to do. Comments from group members also show how resources and recognition could ease their dual caring/education responsibility and enable time for play and association. The EU impact on resources was noted early in relation to child poverty, budget deficits and consequent cuts to public services, which may impact upon the help available from local government sources to support young carers. Focussing on recognition, as argued in the previous paragraph, the EU can have a role in affecting the norms of a field like asylum seeking, where they have considerable influence on ‘what is to be done’. With young carers the link is less obvious, but may still be there. Point 114 of the European Parliament’s Resolution (2007/2093 (INI)) acknowledges that some children are carers and suggests they should have targeted support. A first step to achieving the Young Carers’ claims for recognition of their responsibilities of caring could mean making the acknowledgement contained in the Parliament’s Resolution explicit in the EU 2020 initiative. This initiative, which has the main focus of ensuring young people contribute to the economy, should include further acknowledgement that children and young people do currently contribute to social good, whether this be through the paid or unpaid economy, through attending education or through actions of caring.

A second step towards achieving the citizenship the Young Carers and other group members claimed would be to provide them with more choice in
education and caring. Although EU competence does not extend to regulating national education policies, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights does address education, and the Commission’s Communication (COM(2011) 66 final) of 17th February 2011 proposes that Early Childhood Education and Care policies should be coordinated through the OMC process. Looking at the Charter first, Article 14 gives the right to education, the ‘possibility to receive free compulsory education’ and ‘the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions’. The only reference to decision-making in Article 14 seems to be for parents. EU action on promoting children’s choice in Education could therefore entail making more explicit the link between this Article 14 and Article 24 of the Charter, which gives children the right to express views and have these taken into account and to extend Article 14 to make it more in line with Article 29 of the UNCRC which facilitates some element of choice by promoting education which caters to ‘The development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential’. In the absence of such additions, Article 14 of the Charter appears to be more a statement of children’s responsibilities to attend compulsory education, and the rights for parents and States to choose the content of this.

Turning to the Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), the Commission makes a link between early childhood education and workers’ economic contribution (in relation both to parents’ engagement in current employment and to future work competencies of children):

ECEC has a crucial role to play in laying the foundations for improved competences of future EU citizens, enabling us to meet the medium- and long-term challenge, and to create a more skilled workforce capable of contributing and adjusting to technological change as set out in the flagship ‘Agenda for new skills and jobs’ (COM(2011) 66 final:2).

The danger is that with the perception of children as ‘future combatants in global economic competition, someone who must ensure the prosperity of the country’ (Alliance for Childhood European Network, 2010: 9), the curriculum for children’s early education will be about instilling in children the competencies the EU needs for a successful economy, rather than providing children with environments in which they can direct their own learning and play, whether that be at home or in institutional environments. Indeed the Communication proposes a curriculum which should ‘extend beyond cognitive learning, and encompass socialisation and a range of non-cognitive aspects’ (COM(2011) 66 final: 6) but which never mentions children’s play. It is to be hoped therefore that cooperation of Member States through the OMC in this field leads to common policies not based on theories of socialisation, but which acknowledge and resource children’s agency in learning.
If the EU is wedded to an economic view of childhood, an alternative approach towards achieving a citizenship that lives up to children’s expectations could be to amend Articles 27-31 of the Charter, to apply these workers’ rights to children. Rather than Article 32 prohibiting all but limited youth employment, rights to information and consultation, collective bargaining and action, protection in the event of unjustified dismissal, and fair working conditions would then be given to children at home and at school, who contribute to social welfare through caring and education. Children’s contributions in education and caring could also be protected by the Working Time Directive (Directive 2003/88/EC, OJ L 299/9, 18.11.2003), which would guarantee 11 hours’ rest a day, limit their average working week to 48 hours and provide a minimum 4 weeks’ paid vacation a year. Whether children want these sorts of workers’ rights from an EU Charter is of course another question, best answered by children themselves, but in order to answer that question children need information on the sorts of EU interventions that are possible.

**Conclusion: towards developing children’s participation in the EU**

The children’s research group experiences and aspirations for citizenship show how children with different experiences provide differentiated understandings of how to achieve the citizenship they aspire to in their particular lived contexts. Their experiences and aspirations also show how schools, homes and the intimate spaces of peer relationship in which children live citizenship are ‘porous’ (Holloway and Valentine, 2000) to global influence (Plummer, 2003). Although children rarely have the information to make links between children’s lived citizenship claims and EU policy, their citizenship claims can be related to issues of EU competence by working outwards from these to identify the ways in which the EU has had, and could have, an impact. This process may enable a reframing of children’s claims for justice, so that children might be enabled to claim justice from the EU on the basis of it being a social structure that affects them (Fraser, 2007). This may be a more meaningful approach to children’s citizenship or participation in the EU than listing the EU measures that focus on children and asking children to prioritise these.

Taking this approach of working outwards from children’s concerns confirms that the UNCRC provides a good point of departure for connecting children’s concerns to the EU children’s rights agenda (Stalford and Drywood, 2009), as there is considerable overlap between the research groups’ citizenship claims and the content of the UNCRC. It is also necessary to work outwards from children’s concerns to pinpoint EU mechanisms and potential changes in these in relation to areas where children are not mentioned, including macroeconomic policies.
Working with children to identify their concerns, to inform them of possible EU impact on these, and to call for EU actions to enhance their citizenship, would require greater opportunities for children’s participation than are currently provided in the EU, and also longer timescales. This article noted four avenues for children’s participation that arose during this project and the surrounding participation initiatives to which the project linked. These may provide models for ways of influencing decisions and affecting change at supra-national levels.

1. Children passed their ideas on to local representatives in national structures or advocates, who then lobbied through direct contact with MEPs, decision makers and academics.
2. Children fed their views into consultations by governments through participatory research led by young people.
3. Children presented their views directly to international audiences.
4. Children shared their views through on-line forums and videos.

Learning from these experiences, children’s participation at EU level could be enhanced through developing opportunities for actual and virtual interpersonal relationships across national borders, ensuring funding for such activities, and embedding these in local and rolling participatory initiatives aimed at achieving impact. It is significant that these are exactly the kinds of provisions already made by the EU for young people over the age of 13, in the Youth in Action programme.

The blanket age-based exclusion of children under 13 from existing funding opportunities is not justified. This research shows that children’s capacity and interest in maintaining relationships and taking action across national boundaries are related to experience, opportunities and resources, not to age. Rather than limiting the Youth in Europe funding for EU participation to those aged over 13, similar funding could be made available to children aged under 13. Such suggestions are not new: for example, response to the Agenda consultation (Eurochild, 2010; European Youth Forum, 2010) included examples of how participation of children as young as six has been put in place. The question arises, therefore, whether the 2011 Agenda’s lack of specific mechanisms to facilitate children’s participation relates to lack of commitment, rather than a lack of ideas on how to proceed.

A second question about the EU commitment to meaningful participation could also be asked. To be meaningful, in the sense of achieving influence, children’s participation in the EU would have to be linked into mechanisms for change and accountability. In order to live up to the expectations of these EU citizens, the EU should therefore start from the issues that children identify in their lives, go on to identify those EU mechanisms which have a negative impact and/or which could have a positive impact on them, ask children which of the possible
changes they would recommend, and finally ensure that these views influenced EU policy-making.

Currently, the opportunities for children to link into mechanisms for change and accountability in the EU are limited. The 2011 Agenda does not commit to children and young people’s participation in monitoring the agenda, nor establish an EU legal system in which children can seek redress for children’s rights violations. Although the 2011 Agenda states EU action should be ‘exemplary’ in ensuring respect for the UNCRC and that ‘the standards and principles of the UNCRC must continue to guide EU policies and actions that have an impact on the rights of the child’ (p.3), it only proposes monitoring EU policies ‘taking into account the principle of the best interests of the child enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the UNCRC’ (p.3); and ‘mechanisms to monitor the conformity of draft legislative actions with the Charter’ (p.5). Given the breadth of the children’s research groups’ claims for citizenship, it is essential that the EU avoid monitoring based principally on the Charter, which is a much reduced statement of children’s rights when compared with the UNCRC, or prioritising the principle of best interests over other key principles of the UNCRC, such as non-discrimination and participation. Unless children’s best interests are based on conceptions of childhood that recognise and respect children’s actual contributions towards social welfare, and judgements about children’s best interests shaped by children’s own views, there is a risk that EU definitions of children’s best interests will be based on promoting their capacity as human capital for economic production, not their current rights.

Further steps may also be necessary to enable children to monitor and claim their rights through effective reporting mechanisms. This could include an EU Commissioner for children, with power to act, the accession of the EU to the CRC (see Thomas et al., 2011) and feeding children’s views into definitions of what mainstreaming should mean (see Drywood, 2011). It could also include using the common civic virtues proposed by all the groups, namely friendliness, fairness, helpfulness, politeness and attitudes supporting degrees of relational autonomy, as an additional normative guide to policy making. Finally, alternative Charter articles related to children’s rights could be developed with the participation of children across the EU, and beyond.

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