

# MONEY MATTERS

no 5 | 2007

## ecd n Activities and Members

### 2007

ecd n's first year.  
Establishing a network to  
promote financial inclusion  
and well-being in Europe.



ecd n  
european consumer debt network  
www.ecdn.eu

Working for financial inclusion  
Raising public awareness  
Providing debt and money advice  
Improving debt settlement regulations  
Strengthening financial capabilities  
Guaranteeing access to financial services  
Conducting research  
Lobbying for integrated policies  
Tackling over-indebtedness  
Fighting financial exclusion

ecd n  
european consumer debt network

Some of ecd n's  
members from  
across Europe at  
their first  
general assembly  
in Brussels



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Michaela Moser, ASB Schuldnerberatungen  
ecdn network coordinator

## 2007: ecdn's first year

The activities that were organised in ecdn's first year of existence made very clear how important the existence of such a network is. Five ecdn seminars and a conference provided an opportunity for in-depth exchange on the interdependence of social and financial exclusion, helped to compare the situation of different European countries and to develop strategies to more effectively fight over-indebtedness and financial exclusion.

Despite being explicitly at the agenda of the EU Social Inclusion strategy very few member states have implemented and/or further developed measures to fight over-indebtedness within their National Action Plans on Social Inclusion. The great majority of the plans hardly mentioned the issue. No wonder thus that debt advice and consumer organisations have not been strongly involved in the developments of the plans. This certainly will have to change and it will change with the upcoming new 'round' of Strategic Reports.

Based on the experiences of colleagues from across Europe the participants of the 2007 ecdn seminars have gained better insight into the EU Social Inclusion Agenda and its potential with regards to the fight against over-indebtedness and financial exclusion. Influencing policy goals and lobbying for the necessary measures to more effectively fight over-indebtedness and financial exclusion, such as the introduction of legal debt settlement processes and debt counselling services, safeguarding better access to adequate financial services and fostering financial well-being through education and training, was only one of the challenges that were discussed during seminars and meetings. Next to this, strategies to take better advantage of the existing processes related to the Open Method of Coordination and to ensure that over-indebtedness and financial exclusion will be included in the next round of reports were exchanged and developed.

Having successfully established ecdn as a fully fleshed network - and as an international association under Belgian law - has to be seen as an important step towards becoming an increasingly influential civil society actor in the field. Despite funding insecurities with regards to the near future, the established communication structures will help to foster continuous dialogue and exchange and to keep developing more efficient strategies and stronger ways of transnational cooperation.

The growing problem of over-indebtedness needs to be counteracted by increasing efforts to influence policies on national and European level in order to strengthen the financial and social well-being of all European citizens.

Next to the ecdn team at ASB Schuldnerberatungen, who tried their best to coordinate all activities, the organisers of the five ecdn seminars and partners in the EU-project on establishing the network deserve special thanks: The Guarantee Foundation, the NIBUD, SOS - Consumer Defence Association, the Society for Promotion of Financial Education (SKEF), SFZ Mainz, GP-Forschungsgruppe and l'Observatoire du Credit et de l'Endettement, whose representatives also formed ecdn's initial management committee. ecdn's events, however, attracted many

more organisations. Some of them meanwhile joint the network as members, others are preparing their membership applications. Among the one's who are not - yet - members, but participated in ecdn activities were representatives of Schuldnerberatung Tirol from Austria, the Finish National Research Institute of Legal Policy, the German Arbeiter Wohlfahrt Bundesverband e.V., Caritas Germany, Präventionsnetzwerk Finanzkompetenz, Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband, Diakonisches Werk in Hessen und Nassau e.V., the Irish MABS, the Latvian Consumer Rights protection

center, the Warsaw School of Economics, SEFIN from Portugal, the University of Valencia and ADICAE from Spain, Citizens Advice, Debt on our Doorstep, KUC, Personal Finance Education Group/pfeg, and Fair Finance from the UK, EAPN Netherlands and the Dutch Ministry of Justice. Speakers at ecdn events included representatives from the Erste Bank Group, the Czech National Bank, the KBC Group (Post Bank), the Czech Ministries of Industry and of Finance, the Social Platform, the Worldbank and the European Commission/DG Employment and Social Affairs.

A big thank you to everyone who has contributed to developing the network



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## Kick-Off Meeting in Vienna

31 participants from 14 European countries attended the ecdn Kick-Off Meeting from 1–3 February in Vienna. Starting off the important new network by uniting the experiences, knowledge and power of experts from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden and the United Kingdom, a solid base to further developments could be laid.

The introduction was followed by presentations on the content and context of the coming year's work programme. In the afternoon working groups were run in a 'World Café Style', giving each participant the chance to participate in several groups talking about objectives and activities, membership and working structures finances and infrastructure after 2007, and starting with the preparation of the seminars on social and financial exclusion.



Participants of the ecdn kick-off at Vienna's famous Strudelhofstiege

### ITALY: Caritas Diocese Bozen-Brixen Debt Counselling

Caritas Bozen-Brixen Debt Counselling is a non-governmental organisation with an all-embracing assistance approach. Debt counselling supplies professional assistance which intervenes when people have gotten into financial difficulties or are on the verge of getting there. The essential function of debtor counselling lies in the free-of-charge advice to heavily indebted men and women that are residents of South Tyrol, whereas the objective is to secure their living and to regulate their debts. The goal is that these persons take over the responsibility for their situation and manage it wisely. Assisted by Debt Counselling, they can deal constructively with their fears and use personal resources and strength. On the subject of financial matters they can decide and act independently.

### Giorgio Calcagnini, Professor of Economics (*Individual Member*)

Giorgio Calcagnini is Professor of Economics at the University of Urbino 'Carlo Bo'.

### ICELAND: Domestic Debt Advisory Service

The Domestic Debt Advisory Service was established as a pilot project of the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1996. Today the advisory service operations are based on an agreement between the Ministry of Social Affairs, Housing Finance Fund and a couple of other local authorities and associations. It provides consultancy, at no cost, to people with serious debt payment problems. The Service shall assist people in getting an overview of their situation and help them to make payment plans, choose remedies and act as liaison in agreements with creditors, if required. The Service shall also provide comprehensive consultancy

### ecdn members

and training on domestic debt management by publishing specific pamphlets and educational material.

### GREECE: 'The Quality of Life' – EKPIZO

EKPIZO was established to protect consumer rights and improve the quality of life. Greece does not yet have national networks on over-indebtedness and financial exclusion. EKPIZO is the only organisation monitoring the issues of over-indebtedness. EKPIZO's policy areas/activities include legal, economic, financial, insurance, health, food, environment, safety and consumer education issues. It gives information/advice to the individual consumer and handles their complaints, represents consumers in several committees, takes legal actions on behalf of consumers and has significant experience in out-of-court dispute settlement. It also conducts studies and research.



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*Ingrid van Burg from the Dutch Legal Aid Board and Jan Tingen from the NVVK*

## Helsinki: Debt counselling as a way to increase social inclusion

The first ecdn seminar on social and financial exclusion took place from 26th to 28th of April 2007 in Helsinki/Finland.

At the start a short general introduction to the EU Social Inclusion process and the national reports on social inclusion and their potential for fighting over-indebtedness was given. The main inputs then came from the Finish hosts who were introducing the Finish debt advice system. The ten participants from Austria, Belgium, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal gave some information about the situation in their own countries and exchanged examples of good and bad practices. In the discussions the Finish social credit law was identified as a good practice example. It has helped to reduce the number of highly overindebted people and to prevent new problems through better financial guidance. The visit of a debt advice office in Espoo gave an interesting insight into working methods, structure and funding of a Finish debt advice service.

At the second day of the seminar the participants came up with recommendations and conclusions about the development of debt advice services in general but also with regard to ecdn activities in this area. A common definition of debt counselling was identified as a precondition for the discussion of European debt advice structures. Furthermore the interrelatedness of debt advice structures and services, legal processes and social banking was underlined. As always time for exchange and discussions was too short but the seminar certainly provided a good base for further discussions at ecdn conferences, seminars and in working groups.

### ecdn members

#### UNITED KINGDOM:

#### NIACE – National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

NIACE is a research institute and a membership-based voluntary organisation. It aims to promote adult learning: by research, advocacy, programme and resource development and support for adult learning practitioners and organisations. NIACE has a particular focus on those who have not benefited as much as they might from their time in compulsory education, which, in many instances, leads to poor levels of literacy and numeracy. It has committed

a great deal of resource and effort to Financial Education for adults, which we see as being an important element in the fight against financial and social exclusion.

#### Advice UK

AdviceUK is the largest support network for free, independent advice centres in the United Kingdom. It was formed in 1979 as the Federation of Independent Advice Centres (FIAC). The founders shared a conviction that people's rights have no meaning without the means to enforce them. They saw their own work – of providing free in-

formation and advice – as a vital contribution to helping individuals and communities in need to enforce their rights and improve their quality of life. AdviceUK holds the same conviction today, and whilst the social welfare landscape has radically altered in the past 25 years the commitment to the provision of free, independent advice has not changed. AdviceUK supports the work of its members by providing information, training and resources to assist them in their work. It represents the members' interests and those of the clients to government and lenders.



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## Mainz: A clear message on access to a bank account

The second ecdn seminar took place from 5th to 7th June 2007 in Mainz/ Germany.

After words of welcome by Prof. Dr. F. Hamburger and Prof. Dr. C.W. Hergenröder (both Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz), an open discussion about the main questions and expectations made clear that most of the participants in the Mainz seminar hoped to hear and learn from the other countries and having good exchanges among themselves. Inputs on the European Inclusion Process, the National Action Plans and the fight against over-indebtedness, as well as an overview of the situation of access to a bank account in Germany and especially in Rhineland-Palatine that was given by the in-house lawyer and ombudsman of the saving bank of Rhineland-Palatine were preparing the ground for discussion. Participants inputs made it possible to get a more European picture and look more concretely at the situation and (best) practices in the participant's countries which included Germany, Luxemburg, Ireland and Poland, Spain, UK and Austria. In addition to this the situation in France and Italy was presented by students of the Pedagogical Institute of the University of Mainz.

Reflecting on the different experiences all over Europe the seminar ended with underlining some consequences and formulating key recommendations. The necessity to build a strong European network with reliable contact persons in all countries was stressed again, as well as the importance to enforce the link between practitioners and researchers and to increase the dialogue with banks. Both a clear vision and a clear message with regard to the guaranteed access to a bank account have to be promoted by ecdn and its members on European as well as national level.



*Maria Kemmetmüller from ASB and Rafael Aliena Miralles from the Universidad de Valencia*

### ecdn members

#### **BULGARIA:** E-marketing Association

E-marketing Association incorporates persons and firms working in the field of e-marketing, e-trade and e-publishing. Its main activities include the implementation of projects aimed at electronic marketing development, development of adequate information databases, conducting marketing research, and consulting activities. The main goals are 1) to stimulate the establishment and development of electronic marketing in Bulgaria; 2) to organise technical, methodological and

informational support of its members; 3) to implement projects aimed at supporting the development of electronic marketing in Bulgaria; 4) to develop adequate information databases; 5) to organise seminars, workshops, presentations, etc. in the field of e-marketing.

#### **CZECH REPUBLIC:** SOS – Consumer Defence Association

SOS has around 3 500 members and runs branches in all regions of the Czech Republic. It is the largest and most prominent consumer organisation in the Czech Repu-

blic, which provides all consumers with basic information on their rights and advises them on steps to overcome their problems. Since 1993, SOS has published its own magazine called 'Shield of Consumer', leaflets, brochures and CD-ROMs; it runs a website 'World of Consumer' [www.spotrebitele.info](http://www.spotrebitele.info) with versions in English, French and German; it comments on draft laws and amendments to existing laws regulating consumer protection; in addition, it also supports consumer education programmes. SOS gives advice to citizens regardless of their social status.



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*Valentina Tsiamoura from EKPIZO in Greece, Ingrid van Burg from the Dutch Legal Aid Board and Gerjoke Wilmink from the NIBUD*

## Utrecht: Prevention is better than cure

The third ecdn seminar took place from 7th to 9th June 2007 in Utrecht/ The Netherlands.

Current developments, core principles and innovative ideas in the area of financial education were at the centre of this seminar that attracted experts from Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Spain and the UK. Various staff members of NIBUD with strong experiences in the areas of research and distribution of budget information and financial education gave lively insights into their work and presented their publications. A representative of the Dutch ministry of social affairs built the links between budget information and prevention work and national social policy strategies. Howard Gannaway, from the UK-based educational organisation NIACE suggested to take a closer look at the necessary frameworks to achieve sustainable financial well-being and proposed to develop more differentiated diagnostic tools as well as 'personal economics' as an academic discipline. The economic psychologist van Raaij introduced some of the systematic heuristics that can be found in the behaviour of the majority of consumers and suggested to not only use the results of behaviour economics for marketing purposes but also to plan information and education programmes for consumers.

Among the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the inputs and discussions of the seminar were the strong request for ongoing exchange and further seminars, as well as the development of definitions and curricula and the production of a European dictionary of relevant terms of concepts in several languages. Policies, both at national and European levels, should be sought to be stronger influenced with regards to giving stronger emphasis to financial education; existing instruments such as the NAPsinc should be used better to highlight issues of financial exclusion and the prevention of it. A continuous working group dealing with financial education should be established as part of ecdn.

### ecdn members

#### FINLAND: Takuu-Säätiö – Guarantee Foundation

Guarantee Foundation is a Non-Governmental Organisation funded by The Finnish Slot Machine Association. It provides guarantees for bank loans to help debtors achieve a voluntary debt settlement for their bad debts. The Foundation offers a free-of-charge telephone service, 'Debt

line', for private persons. It organises training for creditors and debt counsellors and provides a voluntary debt settlement alternative accepted by creditors. The Guarantee Foundation has introduced the social loan system in Finland. Today social loans are regulated by law. The role of the Guarantee Foundation is significant and unique in Finland. The main cooperation partners are the local debt counselling authorities.

#### ADVISE – Ltd. Attorney-at-Law

ADVISE is a Law firm, directed by Olli Pohjakallio. It provides legal advice services to over-indebted people and legal expertise to various organisations and institutions active in the field of debt advice and regulation in Finland.



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## Prague: Credit market does not give enough security

The fourth ecdn seminar took place from 21st to 23rd of June 2007 in Prague/ Czech Republic.

Representatives of the Czech Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Industry, the National Bank and the ombudsman of the ERSTE Bank Group presented the Czech credit market from diverse perspectives. After additional inputs of the participants from the Netherlands, Germany and Slovakia an intense exchange about opportunities and risks of the credit market for over-indebted and/or financially excluded people took place.

One important result of the discussion was that better consumer protection is needed in the form of legislation/regulation because the credit market does not give enough security for people who are less financially literate. The problem of so called nonbank money lenders which are little controlled and give money to over-indebted people with bad creditworthiness is regarded as a European one. Furthermore it was stressed that research about the number of over-indebted households and about the situation of people who do not have access to loans and credits are among others essential data to analyse the social situation throughout Europe. An interesting project planned by the ERSTE Bank Group as contribution to its corporate social responsibility was presented. It is about the establishment of a kind of debt service centre for people who are in debt, funded by the ERSTE Bank Group and in cooperation with consumer organisations. Getting advice will be free of charge and accessible for all people with financial problems.



David Smejkal from SOS and  
Juan Carlos Garcia from ADICAE

### ecdn members

#### FRANCE:

#### Archime'd – Association de Recherche pour un Crédit Harmonieux et d'Innovation dans la Maitrise de l'Endettement

Archime'd is a non-profit debt counselling organisation. Its aims are to 1) prevent over-indebtedness by giving information and financial education to consumers, 2) develop the awareness of credit companies and favour changes in their practices, 3) promote cooperation between social organisations and financial companies, 4) experiment with new solutions for credit seekers; promote new credit practices: neither over-indebtedness, nor financial exclusion 5) study over-indebtedness drivers. Archime'd gets in touch with credit seekers having a high risk of over-indebtedness and

makes social organisations and financial companies work together in analysing the credit seekers' situations and needs.

#### Institute National de la Consommation (NIC)

NIC is a consumer protection state agency that conducts comparative testing and economic and legal studies. Its aims are to improve the quality of products and services, and to promote advances in legislation. Communication of its findings, through its own publications and other media outlets, intends to make each individual an informed consumer. Its missions are to provide technical support for consumer associations, to produce, analyse and distribute information, studies, surveys and tests, and to implement training and

education initiatives relating to consumer questions. NIC fosters partnerships with consumer associations and governmental, non-governmental, private and public organisations.

#### CRESUS – Chambre REgionale du SUrendettement Social

CRESUS is a non-governmental Debt Counselling organisation. It coordinates activities as well as financial and legal resources in the field of over-indebtedness. It is also active in attending persons in financial trouble and gives micro credits so these persons can be part of the financial system again. CRESUS also encourages other actors to work for and with over-indebted persons. It offers information and training as well as research.



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Michaela Moser, ASB, Thomas Berghuber, SB Oberösterreich, Werner Sanio, SFZ Mainz and Michael Knobloch, IFF

## Gdansk: Legal debt settlement processes

Experiences with existing private bankruptcy proceedings and with struggling for the introduction of such processes were exchanged at the fifth ecdn seminar that took place in Gdansk from 28th to 30th of June.

Next to discussing current problems and developments the participants started to develop a 'European debt settlement matrix' in order to provide a comparative overview of existing systems.

Based on the conviction that there might be no existing single system that can be transferred from one country to another, key elements of all processes were identified and clustered according to commonalities and differences, e.g. with regards to duration and conditions of the processes.

Participants agreed to invest further work into developing the matrix more fully in the future and committed themselves to continue lobbying for the introduction or the improvement of legal debt settlement processes in their countries.

### ecdn members

#### POLAND:

##### Civil Affair Institute Foundation

The Civil Affair Institute Foundation provides information to enable Polish citizens to address issues with an impact on the general quality of life. It aims to promote civil society, independent media and sustainable development. The Institute actively pursues its goals by offering workshops, consultancy activities, publications and working to influence public authorities. Target groups are local communities, non-governmental organisations, universities, mass media, public administration, local government and business. The campaigns are conducted at both local and national level. They focus not only on education, but primarily strive for the protection of nature.

##### SKEF – Society for Promotion of Financial Education

SKEF is a non-profit association. The basic objectives and activities are: to initiate, manage and support all activities promoting financial education; to protect consum-

ers and to evaluate the quality of financial services; to manage contacts and cooperation between different sectors of society; to promote European exchange and networking; to promote and organise the voluntary sector. SKEF organises conferences and launches publications.

##### Michal Kaczmarczyk (Individual Member)

Michal Kaczmarczyk is a researcher at Gdansk University, Institute for Philosophy, Sociology and Journalism. He has published several articles on over-indebtedness as well as a book about sociological aspects of property. He also takes part in numerous research projects in the area of the sociology of law as well as multiplication of advantageous practical solutions in sociological circles.

##### SLOVAKIA: Association of Slovak Consumers

The Association of Slovak Consumers was established as a non-governmental organi-

sation, with the headquarter in Bratislava and 9 regional consumer advisory centres. The Association is the 1st consumer NGO in the former Czechoslovakia and the only Slovak consumer NGO covering with its activities the whole Slovak area. Its advisory centres are attended mostly by people from low-income social groups and pensioners, who have great daily problems caused by continually higher and higher cost for electricity, gas, water and heating. The association also organises consumer education. Annually, the Association has about 5500 consumer contacts in total.

#### PORTUGAL:

##### Centro de Arbitragem de conflitos de consumo de Lisboa

Centro de Arbitragem de conflitos de consumo is a public consumers agency providing information about consumers' rights and acting as a mediator in consumers' conflicts. The centre also functions as an arbitrating body and provides legal services.





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## Network Development

### Formal establishment of the Network

In Juni 2007 the 'European Consumer Debt Network to fight and prevent overindebtedness and to promote financial inclusion', abbreviated 'ecdn' was established as a Non-Profit International Association under Belgian law.

### Corporate Design

In spring 2007 the ecdn logo was created.

### Website: [www.ecdn.eu](http://www.ecdn.eu)

In October 2007 the ecdn website went online. It includes general information on the network and its members, a calendar of upcoming events and a data base full of studies, position papers and materials from across Europe.

### The ecdn newflash

informs ecdn members about relevant developments and activities in the network. It also includes information about recent studies, position papers and relevant political and legal developments and provides a platform for exchanging information on relevant European and national developments and projects.



### ecdn members

#### BELGIUM:

#### L'Observatoire du Crédit et de l'Endettement asbl (OCE)

OCE is a research institute, known as the regional coordinating body in the sector of over-indebtedness, but also as a training centre for the 220 debt counsellors in Wallonia. It publishes the Belgian annual report, the Walloon annual report, a debt counselling guidebook, a juridical yearbook, thematic articles, articles in specialised magazines and also organises an annual seminar. The annual publications and seminars of OCE are designed to push forward policy reforms. Mandated by the Walloon Government, those specific missions of analysing the evolution of indebtedness and continuously observing changes and trends are aimed to help political decision-makers.

#### OSIRIS – Credal Plus

Credal+ is a social credit organisation with the objectives to fight over-indebtedness through a responsible social and economic analysis of the situation of the credit customers, and to fight credit exclusion based on the low profitability of consumer credits oriented to modest/poor house-

holds. Credal+ was created to experiment with small credits for modest households. Is it possible to propose to them a financial product with good conditions? How good is reimbursement going to be? Can we improve the credit score for this public? As the project in Wallonia has been a success, it is now extending to Brussels, and contact is made to reach Flanders.

#### Réseau Financement Alternatif A.S.B.L.

RFA is a network of 70 Belgian non-profit organisations which are active in North-South relationships, education, social economy, social inclusion and human rights. It aims to develop and promote ethics and solidarity in the relationships with money in order to contribute to a more fair and human society. RFA carries out studies, informs, attempts to raise public awareness and to initiate reflection, implements debates and develops new tracks for the topic of ethical and community finance and financial exclusion. RFA also promotes the development of new financial tools and mechanisms of an ethical and solidarity nature to encourage the various economic

actors to invest in a responsible way.

#### Verbraucherschutzzentrale VSZ

VSZ is a non-profit association for consumer protection, mainly financed by public funds. The main objective is to make consumers consumption-aware and well informed within the framework of sustainability. VSZ provides objective, independent and critical information and advice to private persons; it aims to exercise consumers' rights and play a role in consumer representation.

The tasks are:

- to strive for, or intensify, cross-border cooperation in consumer affairs;
- to prevent and fight against over-indebtedness of private households;
- to give special attention to environment protection, health and social compatibility of products.

VSZ gives advice, acts as mediator and informs consumers on all consumer-relevant topics. This information will help the consumer to make the right decision on his own. It is independent from the suppliers' side and political parties, but not neutral - because consumer interests have absolute priority.



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The ecdn President Hans W. Grohs at the network's 1st general assembly.

## 1st ecdn Conference and General Assembly

### Networking for Financial Inclusion in Europe

The first ecdn Conference and General Assembly took place in Brussels from 13th to 15th December and gathered 50 ecdn members and other relevant actors in the fight against over-indebtedness and financial exclusion in Europe. Several new members have been accepted.

A panel of stakeholders with a variety of backgrounds explored the need of networking on financial inclusion in Europe from different perspectives. Liam Edwards gave insights in the beginning and the activities of the former CDN-Network and 'shared lessons' learned from the experiences of ecdn's predecessor network. Roshan di Puppò, director of the Platform of European Social NGOs encouraged ecdn's members to take a broad approach with regards to finding efficient instruments to fight over-indebtedness but also when it comes to searching for alliances and addressing policy makers at national and European level. Antoine Saint-Denis from the European Commission/DG Employment presented recent initiatives launched by the Commission, such as the study and conference on a common operational definition on over-indebtedness and a forthcoming communication on Financial Education and reminded everyone to keep lobbying for having debt-issues included in the next round of the Strategic Reports on Social Protection

### ecdn members

#### SWEDEN:

**Richard Ahlström**  
(Individual Member)

Richard Ahlström is a researcher and lecturer at the Mid Sweden University. His main research areas include debt research, especially the relationship between severe debts and health problems. At present he is responsible for a nationwide evaluation of health problems among over-indebted people in Sweden in collaboration with the Swedish Institute of Public Health (Folkhälsoinstitutet). He has also been involved in policy evaluations of debt settlement procedures in the Nordic countries under contracts from the Nordic Council of Ministers and The Swedish Consumer Agency.

#### THE NETHERLANDS:

**Volkskredietbank voor Noord-Oost Groningen**

The Volkskredietbank is a non-governmental organisation active in the area of 10 Dutch municipalities. It helps persons with debt problems through stabilising their income and expenditure. Their salary is transferred directly to a budget management account, from which regular payments such as rent etc. are paid automatically. In addition to this the customers receive weekly house-keeping money. Furthermore the VKB mediates between creditors and debtors and provides a wide range of products to help dealing with financial problems. Other objectives are prevention and coaching, for example, for clients who are not able to

manage their financial affairs because of a mental or physical incapacity.

#### Legal Aid Board 's-Hertogenbosch

The Legal Aid Board 's-Hertogenbosch is a NGO with five councils in Amsterdam, Arnhem, The Hague, Leeuwarden and 's Hertogenbosch. The Councils are charged with the implementation of the Legal Aid Act. People with legal problems who cannot afford a lawyer are eligible for funded assistance from the organisation. In addition to these main tasks, the Councils have a number of other responsibilities, such as the recognition of trustees organisations, improvement of the quality of the trustees work, research, contribution to policy development and information work.



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and Social Inclusion. Finally Thorsten Beck, who works as a senior researcher with the World Bank, presented findings of the Worldbank Research Report on 'Finance for all' a global study on exclusion from access to financial services.

In various working groups ecdn members and participants of the conference defined aims and objectives for ecdn's future work in the areas of financial education, financial services, debt advice and debt settlement procedures and research, including plans for a multilingual 'dictionary' on specialist terms, an academic summer-school, a European action day on the right to a bank account, and the production of a common framework that makes similarities and differences among debt advice and debt settlement systems across Europe better visible.

In order to manage the many activities planned for the future various working groups were set up and a so called review group, gathering one representative from each country will be established next year. A 10 members management committee with Hans W. Grohs (picture) from ASB Schuldner-beratungen, Austria as its president was elected to take responsibility for coordinating activities and to oversee the network's future development in the years to come.



*Money Matters* is the title of ecdn's publication series, providing background information and an overview of recent developments across Europe.

*Money Matters* is available for download from [www.ecdn.eu](http://www.ecdn.eu) or can be ordered from [office@ecdn.eu](mailto:office@ecdn.eu)

## ecdn members

### THE NETHERLANDS: NIBUD – National Institute for Budget Information

NIBUD is an independent foundation that gives information about household finance. Its target groups include consumers, but also professionals whose policy is to inform and/or advise households on their budget. The two main aims are to increase consumers' welfare and to prevent over-indebtedness. NIBUD initiates and conducts research and analyses research data from other sources. It supports a substantial group of assistants, advisers, executives and policy makers with information and reference figures in the household budget area. NIBUD has knowledge as well as a general overview and contact with all the actors in the field, from consumers to policy makers. It cooperates with other consumer organisations, banks, insurance companies etc.

### Nederlandse Vereniging voor Volkskrediet - NVVK

The NVVK is the trade organisation of the municipal credit banks, public and private organisations for debt settlement. The main aim is to establish responsible credit and debt settlement in the Netherlands. The NVVK is one of the points of mutual interest for the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs regarding debt settlement and one of the points of mutual interest for the Dutch Ministry of Finance regarding responsible credit.

### LUXEMBOURG: Ligue Luxembourgeoise de pre- vention et d'action Medico-Sociales

The Ligue Medico-Sociale is a major force in Luxembourg covering a broad range of services, including debt advice and preventive work on debt issues. In 2005 about 800 requests on debt issues were handled. The

Ligue also is involved in media work as well as in analysing and promoting social policies to tackle poverty and social exclusion, taking into account the interrelatedness of social and financial exclusion.

It is active in implementing the legal context that permits personal bankruptcy and has set up a unique system to help people out of debt problems by offering voluntary management of their income and coaching them to bring their budget into balance again.

### IRELAND: Liam Edwards (*Individual Member*)

From 1994 to 2006 Liam Edwards was the national Co-ordinator of MABS (Money Advice and Budgeting Service), a network of local services which addresses problems of over-indebtedness. From 1997 to 2007 he also was President of the CDN-Consumer Debt Net.



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ecdn members

**AUSTRIA:  
ASB Schuldnerberatungen GmbH**

ASB Schuldnerberatungen GmbH, a limited company, is the umbrella organisation of all officially recognised debt advice services in Austria. ASB Schuldnerberatungen GmbH acts as an interface between debt advice services and creditors as well as ministries, political decision makers and institutions, and research institutes. In addition to exchange of information, its main activities are the training of debt advisers, development of quality management, coordination of PR-work and lobbying as well as data collection and research on debt-related matters. The ASB also acts as a trustee in legal private bankruptcy proceedings.

**Schuldnerberatung Oberösterreich**

SBOÖ, the debt advice centre of Upper Austria, is an officially recognised association that offers assistance to indebted persons, families and households to help them overcome or reduce their debts or over-indebtedness. Its activities range from guidance regarding money management and consumption to representation in court in the context of personal bankruptcy proceedings. SBOÖ is also active in the field of prevention and offers numerous services in order to promote responsible approaches to consumption. Its staff of 30 employees works on behalf of the Provincial Government of Upper Austria and the Public Employment Service. It is organised as a non-profit

private law association, and its services are free of cost and confidential. SBOÖ, as well as the other nine officially recognised debt advice centres in Austria, is a member of the ASB umbrella organisation, and has a seat in ASB's advisory council.

**GERMANY:  
Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft-  
Schuldnerberatung e.V.**

BAG-SB is the independent umbrella organisation of the German debt advisers. Its members belong to many different professions, all professional groups working in the context of indebtedness or over-indebtedness are represented in the BAG-SB. Members are active, for instance, in the fields of social work, economy, legal advice, teaching, nutritional science and home economics, psychology, banking industry or administration. BAG-SB represents the unitary approach to the situation of over-indebtedness. They are not only concerned with the individual psychosocial and economic situation of over-indebted people, but also with the legal, economic, social and cultural background related to over-indebtedness.

**GP Forschungsgruppe – Institut für  
Grundlagen und Programmforschung**

GP-F is a private research institute. It has set the standards of the German discussion concerning figures, statistics, causes and theory of over-indebtedness. The objec-

tives of GP-F are research and lectures in the field of debt prevention, credit taking, over-indebtedness and debt counselling; evaluation of debt prevention and debt regulation programmes; expert advice to national bodies, the German Government, the European Commission; biographical analysis of over-indebted persons; quantitative surveys concerning financial behaviour and over-indebtedness; statistical analysis of secondary data concerning credit-taking, indebtedness and over-indebtedness.

**Institut für Finanzdienstleistungen  
- iff**

Based in Hamburg, iff is an independent, internationally oriented non-profit organisation providing research and advice in the field of sustainable financial services. The institute creates electronic data-processing programmes for providers of financial advice to consumers, it issues publications, assists with training and develops models for socially responsible loans, investments, payment methods and insurance. The institute's objective is primarily to emphasise and incorporate the interests of consumers, investors, small businesses and non-profit organisations into the relationship between consumers and financial service providers in an optimal and socially responsible manner. iff is currently running several projects with regard to fighting over-indebtedness, such as the annually published 'iff report on over-indebtedness'.