

Central Asia and the Caucuses, where expanding access and diversifying programmes available is necessary both to reach more children and to meet local needs.

Our current work in Europe focuses on monitoring and accountability of groups that are often excluded from quality ECD, that is, migrants, minorities, and marginalised populations. We are working on

a policy analysis of ECD for Roma children and a review of the placement of children with disabilities into special education or mainstream education.

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REGIONAL REPORT: INTERNATIONAL STEP BY STEP ASSOCIATION

Report: International Step by Step Association

The International Step by Step Association (ISSA) is a membership organisation that connects professionals and organisations working in the field of early childhood development and education. ISSA promotes and emphasises equal access to quality education and care for all children, especially in the early years of their lives. Established in the Netherlands in 1999, ISSA's network now stretches across the globe from Central and Eastern Europe to Central Asia, Asia, and the Americas.

While ISSA offers general membership and information sharing to all interested individuals and organisations, its core members are the thirty NGOs, located primarily in Central Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, that implement the Step by Step Programme initiated by the Open Society Institute (OSI) in 1994. Within this network, ISSA supports a wide array of programmes that collectively provide a comprehensive set of educational services, as well as advocacy tools to positively influence policy reform for children and their families. ISSA receives generous financial support from OSI,

and over the years it has developed close cooperation with OSI in several programme areas.

As a partner of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, ISSA is committed to the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals. ISSA's own principles, based on democratic values, child-centred approaches to teaching, parental and community involvement in children's development and education, and a commitment to diversity and inclusion, are closely aligned with the Consultative Group's 4 Cornerstones to Secure a Strong Foundation for Young Children.

Cornerstone 1: Start at the beginning

ISSA'S Early Childhood Education (ECE) Programmes

ISSA is firmly committed to improving care and educational services for young children in its core membership countries. Activities are targeted and implemented both inside the formal educational sector, in schools and institutions, and outside the formal system in cooperation with local

communities. ISSA's member organisations provide training to caregivers, teachers, school administrators, parents, educational authorities, and other representatives of the community at local, regional, and national levels.

Quality Early Education Programme

Through its Quality Early Education Programme, ISSA provides professional development support to educators working in infant/toddler programmes, preschools, and kindergartens through training, mentoring, and the development of educational resources that stress developmentally appropriate practice, holistic child development, and active family participation. In recent years, ISSA Pedagogical Standards have been introduced. The Standards are a network-developed tool, based on principles of child-centred teaching, which define quality in teaching practices and the classroom environment. They offer a unique approach and an integrated set of materials to support teachers' self-assessment, mentoring, assessment, and certification within the network.

The Standards are available for adaptation and implementation in new contexts.

Disability and Education for Social Justice Programmes

ISSA programmes pay special attention to children from ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, and children living in remote areas or in poverty. To promote access to quality education, ISSA has developed its Education for Social Justice Programme, which provides training to a variety of target audiences in social justice, multicultural, and bilingual education. The Disability Programme, developed and managed in cooperation with OSI, focuses on the inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. The Disability Programme enhances teachers' professional capacity and advocates for the rights of children with disabilities and their families. Several ISSA projects on inclusion have received EU funding.

Parent and Community-Based Programmes

Recognising that many children are not involved in formal preschool education, ISSA, together with OSI, has developed the Parent and Community-Based ECD Programme. This programme offers user-friendly materials, activities for parents and children, and modules for facilitators from the local community to support families in their effort to promote their children's development and education. Uniquely, it integrates child development, early stimulation, and parenting information into prenatal, early health, and education services.

Cornerstone 2: Get ready for success

Supporting access to preschool education

Many ISSA network members have been active in providing access to and

advocating for preschool programmes for children from ethnic minorities (with an emphasis on the Romani minority), children with disabilities, and children living in remote areas or in poverty. As a result of ISSA members' participation in OSI's Roma Education Initiative, over two thousand Romani children, who otherwise would not have had the opportunity, gained access to preschool programmes. ISSA and OSI continue to work closely together on developing and implementing programmes that emphasise equal access for all.

ISSA, OSI, the UNICEF Regional Office (CEE/CIS), and the Institute of Education in London jointly organised a study tour to the UK in November 2007. Participants included governmental representatives, UNICEF education officers, and representatives of ISSA's core members. The tour was intended to strengthen country level capacity to advocate for, plan, and implement quality programmes for young children, especially those pertaining to children's readiness for entering primary school.

Cornerstone 3: Improve primary school quality

Promoting quality through pedagogical standards

ISSA and its members continue to build upon the success of OSI's Step by Step Programme in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Professional development programmes and primary school level methodology have been recognised and included in the official list of services by several ministries of education in the region. As with the preschool/kindergarten programmes, in implementing the Step by Step primary school programme, ISSA is guided by the belief in child-centred, interactive pedagogy that promotes active participation, critical thinking, and life-long learning habits and skills from an

early age. ISSA Pedagogical Standards help ensure quality and focus on teachers' ability to implement well planned, developmentally appropriate, reflective practice; demonstrate respect for diversity; and promote meaningful family participation.

Cornerstone 4: Including early childhood in policies

ISSA'S advocacy agenda

ISSA campaigns for effective policies and forges links with government agencies and international organisations to ensure that successful approaches and programmes have policy impact or become mainstreamed. In October 2006, ISSA, the Roma Education Fund (REF), and the European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA) jointly submitted an amicus brief to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in reference to the case D.H. and others v. the Czech Republic. This brief emphasised that appropriate and effective assessment practices need to include the use of multiple tests/pieces of evidence, contributions from multiple perspectives and disciplines, and the taking into account of children's developmental, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity.

One of ISSA's main functions, building capacity among its members, including the capacity to effectively advocate for including early childhood in policies, has been realised through a partnership with the World Forum Foundation (WFF). ISSA supports the participation of eight representatives of its core members in the WFF's Global Leaders for Young Children Programme, which aims to improve life chances for young children by developing early childhood leaders.

ISSA uses its annual conference and other events to promote its advocacy agenda. ISSA hosted the 2007 EECERA Conference, "Exploring Vygotsky's

Ideas: Crossing Borders," in Prague from August 29 to September 1, 2007. The event provided a rare opportunity for researchers and practitioners from East and West to engage in a dialogue exploring convergences and divergences in the understanding and application of Vygotsky's work to policy, research, and practice today. The 2008 ISSA Conference, "Active

Citizenship: Democratic Practices in Education," organised jointly with the WFF, will explore the understanding of democracy in the early years and will underline the importance of advocacy for democratic practices in ECE. Panels will look at what the promotion of democracy means for practice and for advocacy/policy, highlighting global and regional advocacy priorities. The

2008 Conference is scheduled for October 9-12, 2008 in Budapest.

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REGIONAL REPORT: ADEA WORKING GROUP ON ECD

Report: ADEA Working Group on ECD

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa's Working Group on ECD (WGECD/ ADEA), established in 1993, has been operational as a network since 1997. Its aim is to influence policy around the development of the young child and thereby contribute to expanding and improving sustainable and appropriate ECD provision in Africa. Its overall objective is to work as a catalyst and facilitator in the Sub-Saharan Africa region to promote a coherent and coordinated response to the challenges facing ECD in that part of the world.

Much progress has been made overall in Africa since 1997. Several African countries have developed ECD policies and implemented a number of effective programmes with donor and international support. With the increasing realisation that cost-effective ECD interventions can reduce the long-term costs of not investing in ECD, there is a challenge to continue to work towards increasing access to quality ECD interventions, especially by the most vulnerable.

The 2007 Global Monitoring Report, *Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education* (summarised

in this issue of *The Coordinators' Notebook*), highlighted the fact that millions of children in Sub-Saharan Africa still lack access to the care programmes, basic immunisation, clean water, adequate food, and early stimulation that are needed for their survival, growth, and development.

In response, the WGECD/ADEA has developed, with its members and partners, a Regional Framework/Plan of Action for 2006-10. The Work Plan's main strategies include:

- Advocacy at the political level, including heads of state, regional political bodies in the US, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)
- A regional communication strategy
- Networking and partnership building
- Capacity building
- National policy support

In conjunction with this approach the 2008 Work Plan will be structured around the Consultative Group's 4 Cornerstones to Secure a Strong Foundation for Young Children:

(1) Start at the beginning; (2) Get ready for success; (3) Improve primary school quality; and (4) Include early childhood in policies. In the past few years, the Working Group has focused mainly on Cornerstone 4, supporting countries in the process of elaborating national policies and policy frameworks.¹ However, other work undertaken by the Working Group in past years can also be articulated in terms of the 4 Cornerstones.

Cornerstone 1: Start at the beginning

Cornerstone 1 calls for a focus on parenting programmes and integrated services. The Working Group's Regional Framework, Strategy 4.1 includes support for parental education and functional adult literacy programmes, "ensuring ECD contents and messages."

Cornerstone 2: Get ready for success

Cornerstone 2 calls for access to at least two years of ECD services prior to formal school entry for the most disadvantaged. In relation to the Sub-Saharan Africa context, this cornerstone is translated in the Regional Framework's Strategy 4.5