

A close-up photograph of a woman holding a newborn baby. The woman is wearing a dark grey t-shirt and has a ring on her finger. The baby is wearing a white diaper and is looking towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

PEER LEARNING ACTIVITIES REVIEW 2017



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION



ISSA
Peer
Learning
Activities



*Ukraine's first lady Maryna Poroshenko
meets teachers at the event
held by the ISSA member
Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation*

2017 PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY FACTS AT A GLANCE

In 2017, representatives of 38 member organizations from 22 countries attended 10 Peer Learning Activities organized by the ISSA members.

Introduction

As a learning community, ISSA stands for the empowerment of those who work with and for the youngest members of society. The Peer Learning Activities (PLAs), aim at strengthening the capacity of ISSA's members to support quality and equity in services for young children, and the professionalism of those who work in these services.

ISSA's member organizations have a diverse theoretical expertise in various areas of Early Childhood Development as well as practical experience in project implementation, advocacy or organizational development. This diversity enhances knowledge transfer across sectors and borders, among clusters of individual members when exploring new initiatives or enriching existing programs in their countries.

Every year ISSA members benefit from **PLAs to build their capacity and deepen their knowledge of noteworthy practices**. Feedback from members attests that this is among the most valued benefits of their membership in ISSA.

In 2017, representatives of 38 member organizations from 22 countries attended 10 PLAs organized by other ISSA members. We are happy to share with you this review which will give you a concise description of the activities carried out.

The review shows that PLAs are a positive opportunity for the ISSA members to exchange experiences, to better understand other countries' approach to early childhood education and care services and to enable innovations to navigate across countries.

All Peer Learning Activities are financially supported by ISSA with financial or in-kind contributions from members. If you would like to participate, [consider joining as a member of ISSA](#).

If you would like to learn more about PLAs, contact us at membership@issa.nl.



ISSA Peer Learning Activities



PLAs 2017 were attended by member organizations from 22 countries.

| | | |
|------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Albania | Kosovo | Slovakia |
| Azerbaijan | Macedonia | Slovenia |
| Belarus | Netherlands | Tajikistan |
| Belgium | Pakistan | Turkey |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | Poland | Ukraine |
| Bulgaria | Romania | United Kingdom |
| Croatia | Russia | |
| Czech Republic | Serbia | |

“ It was a powerful experience, to define key elements of success in our network. It reminded us, where our roots are. ”

—Mateja Rezek, *Open Academy Step by Step, Slovenia*

“ We are convinced of the importance of peer learning and broadening visions by international exchange. ”

—Frank Gobel, *Foundation of Quality in Childcare, the Netherlands*



NUMBERS

- 10 participants
- 4 countries (Slovakia, Ukraine, Serbia, Netherlands)

Skola dokoran – Wide Open School n. o.

KOSICE, SLOVAKIA | DECEMBER 8–11

The main objective of the PLA was to share positive examples and noteworthy practices on topics such as:

- Empowering children and parents through civil and social competences development to become change-agents for themselves and for their communities
- Promoting Roma inclusion through supporting Roma parents and children to access community pre-school, kindergarten and early primary services and provision
- Improving cooperation between the Roma community and other institutions of formal education.

Wide Open School, Slovakia hosted a workshop about the AFLATOT program, developed by ISSA member Aflatoun of the Netherlands, about financial and social education, democratic values and active citizenship for toddlers.

The participants also visited a Kindergarten in Kosice. All 111 children who attend this pre-school are Roma and 50 parents work there as support workers.

The AFLATOT program was presented as a baseline for social inclusion in preschool settings. Participants improved their understanding of cross-national cooperation between practitioners working with Romani children.

PARTNERING MEMBERS





“Proper inclusive policies in Ukraine need to ensure that all children have access to quality education. This means that the general education and the inclusive education reforms, which are interconnected, should both ensure that teachers promote inclusion and diversity in their classrooms.”

—Yevhen Bystriytsky,
Executive Director of the
International Renaissance
Foundation

Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation

KIEV, UKRAINE | NOVEMBER 30–DECEMBER 2

This PLA consisted of a one day conference for Romani Early Years Network (REYN) members. The 52 participants represented Roma NGOs and activists, ISSA members, education experts, practitioners, national and regional governments. It was combined with a two day conference with the title: *“Inclusion for all: education policy and practice, from birth to adulthood”*. This conference focused on the definition of inclusion and discussed topics such as integration of vulnerable groups and early childhood development and policy development. One of the main results of the event is the introduction of updated pedagogical approaches for working with socially vulnerable groups of children, especially with Romani children. The event was organized in partnership with the Roma Program Initiative (International Renaissance Foundation), Open Society Foundations (OSF) and other stakeholders.

Five different schools invited all visitors to share the experience of parents’ involvement to promote inclusive environment, and the role of local/municipal governments in supporting and promoting inclusive education.

PARTNERING MEMBERS



ROMANI
EARLY YEARS
NETWORK



“ We were happy to find the Step by Step Centre for Education and Professional Development, Romania, as a co-organizing partner so we could bring together, with the support of ISSA, directors of childcare provisions from five countries in Bucharest. ”

—Frank Gobel,
Project Officer of BKK

BKK Bureau Kwaliteit Kinderopvang / Foundation of Quality in Childcare

UTRECHT, THE NETHERLANDS

together with

Step by Step Centre for Education and Professional Development

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA | NOVEMBER 14–15

This peer learning workshop was built on the experiences of a pilot course for 30 directors of childcare organized by **BKK** in the Netherlands. The goal was to offer directors of childcare provisions from various countries the possibility to learn from each other and discuss questions in the area of the strategic value of pedagogical quality. During the two days the attendees also visited three childcare facilities in Bucharest, discussing pedagogical quality with the teachers and directors of those centers. The group of participants consisted of 12 (managing) directors of childcare provisions and 4 professionals responsible for pedagogical quality in their organizations.

PARTNERING MEMBERS





“ It was a powerful experience to define key elements of success of our network. It reminded us about our roots. It was a great combination: the Croatian and Slovenian expertise complemented each other. It was a great PLA! ”

—Mateja Rezek,
Open Academy Step by Step,
Slovenia

Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education

LJUBLJANA AND GROSUPLJE, SLOVENIA | SEPTEMBER 27–28

Numbers: attendees from 5 countries: Macedonia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Romania and Switzerland

Ten colleagues from the **Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education in Slovenia** organized a two day meeting together with 16 colleagues from Croatia. The main topics for this PLA were: improving the network of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professionals and institutions in Slovenia and developing a network of preschools/primary schools and professionals in Croatia. The meeting included study visits to Slovenian preschools and the Educational Research Institute and exchange of practice among Slovenian and Croatian researchers and professionals. It gave ISSA members an opportunity to reflect on the changed structure of the Slovenian network, to build strategies on how to empower coordinators of learning communities within preschools and primary schools, and to receive feedback from kindergartens and primary schools. For the Croatian participants, the experience from the Slovenian Network helped to make a plan and a structure for the network they will establish in Croatia.

PARTNERING MEMBERS





“ I am excited to share the practices that I apply on a daily basis with children. I hope many new educators will learn new skills from this. ”

—Shkëndije Maxhuni,
Educator, QSE SOS Kindergarten,
Pristina

Educational and Social Center SOS Kindergarten (ESC SOS KG)

PRISTINA, KOSOVO | MAY 2017–APRIL 2018

Together with Kosovo Education Center, Step by Step Albania and Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo, ESC SOS KG is developing a manual of noteworthy practices for the implementation of ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy in ten preschools in Kosovo and two preschools in Albania.

Currently, there is a lack of manuals on quality and a need for examples on how to work according to contemporary pedagogical standards in Kosovo and Albania. These four ISSA member organizations got together to create such materials. The manual will serve educators, parents and children to enhance the quality of education.

The last phase of this PLA will be finalized in 2018.

PARTNERING MEMBERS



Balkan Sunflowers
Volunteers for Social Reconstruction



Qendra për Arsim e Kosovës
Kosova Education Center



“Of the services offered by Step by Step Czech Republic I like Wanda the most. It seems to me that it can effectively solve key issues in our pedagogical team.”

—Jana Schierlová,
Teacher in basic school Trutnov,
Czech Republic

Step by Step Czech Republic together with Artevelde University–Belgium and Centre for Innovation in the Early Years (VBJK)

GHENT, BELGIUM | SEPTEMBER 2017–FEBRUARY 2018

This PLA contributed to a larger project which focuses on the reflective method “Wanda” and provided support to professionals working in the ECEC field in the Czech Republic. It builds on the previous multi-year collaboration with Artevelde University College, VBJK and ISSA. The project aims to improve the competences of the practitioners, brings new forms of community services for families, institutions of formal and informal education. “Wanda” is a method for supporting educators within Professional Learning Communities. With the support of a facilitator, members of these communities are able to reflect on their professional practice. During this PLA, a new group of facilitators were trained to better meet the needs of ECEC professionals. An exchange will take place to map the most critical issues in ECEC in both Belgium and Czech Republic. The whole project will last 4 years and will include 15 preschools and 8 elementary schools.

The last phase of this PLA will be finalized in 2018.

PARTNERING MEMBERS





NUMBERS

- 8 professionals from Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, the Netherlands and Serbia came together to learn and discuss about the toolkit “Child rearing without violence in Early Childhood”.

International Child Development Initiatives ICDI

LEIDEN, THE NETHERLANDS | JUNE 22–23

ICDI hosted this PLA to discuss childrearing practices and the availability and implementation of parenting services in the Balkan region of Europe. Eight representatives of ISSA members from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, the Netherlands and Serbia came together to dive into the discourse around raising children in families and communities where violence is still the norm.

Participants working in pairs gave feedback on different aspects of the toolkit “*Child rearing without violence in Early Childhood*” and on its content to discuss whether a tool like this can be applied in their contexts. The event also included a study visit to the Centre for Children and Families in The Hague (the Netherlands), where participants met the children’s services coordinator, the children’s nurse and two family coaches.

This was a great opportunity to exchange experiences on family support work and to better understand the Dutch approach to child protection. New directions for intervention and community development were identified, striving for a better quality of life for young children and their families in East and South-Eastern Europe.

PARTNERING MEMBERS



International Child
Development Initiatives



Sardes

UTRECHT, THE NETHERLANDS | NOVEMBER 20–21

together with the

Neohumanist Education Association–Romania

Sardes and the Neohumanist Education Association organized this PLA about the role of yoga and meditation techniques in young children's development of Self-Regulation. The starting point is 'The Little Captain', developed by Sardes as a professional development package that helps preschool teachers to stimulate children's Executive Function (EF) and Self-Regulation (SR). Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions and switch between multiple tasks successfully. Children need this set of skills to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals and control impulses. Ten participants, from Croatia, Serbia, Turkey, the Netherlands and the UK, explored the value of yoga and meditation exercises and games in the process of acquiring EF and SR.

“When working with preschool teachers on EF, we find that many teachers ‘think in activities’. They have a rich repertoire of activities, but sometimes forget for which purpose they do a particular activity. We therefore teach them to put the emphasis on goals, and not so much on activities.”

—Dr Jeroen Aarssen,
Project Manager, Sardes

PARTNERING MEMBERS





“ It is very funny to visit shops and banks. Before that I did not understand what my mum did there, now I even can help her! ”

—Lera, 6 years old

“ Financial literacy is not paid sufficient attention in the state preschool education curriculum, but children require such knowledge. This project has filled this gap. ”

—Olga, Teacher

Belarusian League of Parents and Teachers Krok za Krokam

VOLKOVYSK, BELARUS

and

Comenius Foundation

VASILKOW, POLAND | BETWEEN JUNE AND OCTOBER

The PLA on financial literacy in early childhood development (ECD) was a cooperation between the **Belarusian League of Parents and Teachers “Krok za Krokam”** and the **Comenius Foundation** from Poland. It addressed the lack of economic education in Belarus and aims to create an opportunity to build financial literacy from an early age. Sixteen teachers/animators and five staff members of Krok za Krokam were trained on the topic. In October 2017, a “Fair of Creative Ideas” was organized in Minsk to present the best examples of work by Belarusian participants in the project. The participants have set up lessons for children age 5–6 and a booklet of noteworthy practices was prepared. Altogether, this PLA reached 320 children and 700 members of the local community and government.

PARTNERING MEMBERS





VBJK, EXPOO and Kind & Gezin

GHENT, BELGIUM | OCTOBER 3

Three Belgian organizations hosted in cooperation with ISSA a pre-conference workshop titled “*Integrated services in the early years – towards an international platform for exchange*” at the ISSA 2017 Conference in Ghent.

The main topic of the preconference was: *Integrated working among organizations working with and for families*. This is a hot topic, both for policy makers, researchers as well as for practitioners.

The session focused on accessibility. What’s the added value of working in an integrated way in order to strengthen accessibility? What are inspiring practices in the different countries?

Almost 70 participants subscribed to the preconference PLA, which included visits to various centers such as a daycare center and family centers. The aim of the study visits was to inspire and to stimulate the exchange of expertise.

Additionally, the participants got inspired by international peers: examples from Finland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Canada were shared.

PARTNERING MEMBERS



vbjk
Centre for Innovation
in the Early Years
Centre d'Innovation de
la Petite Enfance



“Integrated services is a key success factor for child protection and raising of child’s potential.”

—Conference participant

“National networks is the best way to build foundations of the integrated support.”

—Conference participant



ISSA is an international learning community powered by the leading early childhood experts in Europe and Central Asia. ISSA unites and supports professionals and partners to deliver high quality early years services equitably.

ISSA – International Step by Step Association

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